Dreams of Flight: Young Dalit Women and Middle-Class Culture in Punjab

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Abstract

Much of the work on lower caste communities asserts continuities in caste moralities and disadvantages, despite other forms of economic and social upliftment. Mobility is commonly conceptualized as the attainment of tangible outcomes and caste emerges as the main axis for lower caste negotiations with mobility. In contrast, the present study attempts to move beyond objective measures of mobility and explores the operation of mobility as an ideal and aspiration for modern spaces outside the village. In particular, this study examines the ways in which young women from a predominantly Ad-dharmi (upwardly mobile Dalit group in Punjab that have historically worked with leather) village in the Doaba region of Punjab create belonging and access to middle class culture and mobility.

Based on ethnographic data, collected over eleven months I seek to answer: How do young women from upwardly mobile Dalit families construct and negotiate access to middle classness? The study finds young women's transition to middle classness is defined by their interaction with migration, education, consumption and marriage. Young women pursue different ideas of middle classness, based on their family's economic positioning and culture. Their claims to middle class status and spaces outside the village is based on their negotiations with gender norms and cultural expectations tied to the rural and urban space. In producing mobile and respectable identities, young women give rise to new constructions of appropriate femininity and demonstrate the cultural transitions involved in mobility. At a discursive level, young women associate stereotypes attached to their caste identity with lower class and lower caste others. Thus, caste identity becomes subsumed and channelled towards the project of class mobility in discourse but caste continues to be reproduced through marriage practices.

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Glossary

Chamar: translates to someone who works with chamri or animal hide. It is a derogatory term used to refer to a lower-caste group whose hereditary occupation is the snaring of animal skins and hides and doing tanning and leatherwork

Jankari: translates to information. It was often used to refer to levels of awareness rather than formal education.

Suit: a type of traditional Indian clothing for women. It consists of a tunic (kameez) and a pair of loose pants (salwar) with a dupatta or stole.

Tehsil: an administrative unit above the village, town or city and subordinate to the district.

Sarpanch: the head of the village.

Bahar: translates to outside. This term was often used to refer the Western world, specifically North America and Europe, where people aspired to move to.

Sudhar: translates to improvement but was used to refer to development

Bade jagah: translates to big places and was used to refer to the higher status countries that people aspired to migrate to in Europe and North America.

Pakka: translates to permanent. This term referred to the permanent resident status of migrants.

Kacha: this term is used in many different ways depending on the context. In the context of houses, it refers to less stable or temporary housing structures built with mud and organic material. In terms of migration, it refers to migrants with temporary status in their country of migration. In the realm of food, it refers to raw or undercooked food.

Pucca: translates to permanent and refers to stable or permanent housing structures built with brick, concrete, clay tiles and metal.

MNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It refers to a 2005 Act that guarantees 100 days of unskilled manual work in rural areas.

Dera: a space of religious worship that arises around a religious guru or figurehead and exists outside of mainstream religion.

Ravidass Jayanti: celebration of Guru Ravidass' birthday

Amrit Bani: religious book of the Ravidassias. It contains the hymns and teachings of Guru Ravidass.

Adi-Granth: religious book of the Sikhs. It contains hymns by various Sikh gurus.

Dera Ballan: a central institution of the Ravidassia movement in Punjab. Its full form is Dera Sachkhand Ballan.

Jaggo: A ceremony which usually takes places on the eve of a wedding. During this ceremony, the maternal aunts of both the bride and the bridegroom carry a brass vessel on their head and are accompanied by other women as they form a procession and walk around their neighbourhood. While this is a wedding ritual, it is also a part of the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations in villages and in Benares.

NRI: Non-Resident Indian. A person of Indian origin who is working and living in another country but retains links with India. While in Chaheru people referred to migrants as those who had come from bahar or outside, at the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations in Benares, the term NRI was used to identify migrants.

Gurpurab: also called Guru Nanak Jayanti, it is a celebration of the birth of the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak.

Panji peer: refers to the shrine of five saints

Naam daan: translates to baptism

Dera Sacha Sauda: an alternative religious movement that is centred around the figure of Gurmeet Ram Rahim

IELTS: International English Language Testing System that measures English speaking and writing. It is necessary to apply for universities in the UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand

Mahaul: translates to surrounding environment

Padhe likhe: refers to a person with formal education but in Chaheru it is also used to refer to someone with higher levels of awareness and exposure to urban spaces.

Padhe likhe nahi hain: translates to not educated and is often used to refer to illiteracy or low levels of literacy.

SC: Scheduled Castes. Lower castes are also categorised as Scheduled Castes in government discourse. This term was often used by the villagers to refer to themselves.

BC: Backward Castes. This term refers to castes that have been socially and economically disadvantaged. They are also called Other Backward Castes or OBC.

Kashi: the Hindi term for Benares

Sevadhars: refers to volunteers

Maharajji: the spiritual head of Dera Ballan

Mela: An entertainment event or religious festival that is usually held outdoors.

Ambedkar Jayanti: celebration of Dr. B.R Ambedkar’s birthday

Dhol: a cylindrical wooden drum that is common in many regional cultures across India but is often associated with Punjabi celebrations in North India.

Pathi: translates to priest

Patwari: a government official who maintains records of land ownership in the local area.

Bahut kharaab: translates to very bad

Tokoing: translates to reprimanding

Kharaab mahaul: translates to bad environment

Ghoonghat: the use of a scarf or piece of cloth by some married Hindu, Jain and Sikh women in the Indian subcontinent to cover their heads and faces.

Free: young women in the village often identified themselves as free, which meant they were available and not engaged in any productive work.

Kattar chamar: translates to strict and proud chamar

BCA: Bachelor in Computer Application

Bhindi: lady finger

Arbi: taro root

Sabzi: cooked vegetable stew

Namkeen: savoury snacks

Pind: village

Resit: to give an exam again if you have failed in the previous attempt

Taiyyar hona: translates to getting ready

Chulha: refers to a small earthen or brick stove, which uses cow dung or coal as fuel.

Parantha: unleavened flat bread fried on a griddle

Maki roti: flat corn bread

Garam masala: translates to hot spices. It is a blend of whole ground spices like cumin, coriander, clove, mace, cinnamon and cardamom.

Paneer: a type of fresh, soft cheese made by curdling milk with lemon juice.

Raita: a yoghurt dip flavoured with spices and finely chopped raw vegetables

Paneer chilli: also called chilli paneer. It is a spicy paneer dish made with a mix of Indian spices and Chinese sauces.

Hakka Chinese: refers to the Indianised version of Chinese food

Bhabhi: brother's wife

Pativrata: translates to devoted wife

Bindi: a small decorative mark worn in the middle of the forehead, mostly by Hindu women.

Rishta: translates to proposed marriage alliance

Family Stories

These are brief biographies of the young women and their families that I will be extensively discussing in the thesis.

Somika's Family

Somika is 24 years old and is the daughter of Balveer, a government bank clerk and a well-known member of the community. Somika's mother, Latika is a housewife. Somika has completed her master's degree from Kamla Nehru College, a reputed girls' college in Jalandhar, and is studying to sit for competitive exams for government posts. She also gives tuitions to children in the evenings. Both her younger brothers, who are twins, go to Ramgharia College. The house that Somika resides in in Chaheru belongs to her maternal grandmother. The family moved to Chaheru when Somika was in school, to take care of her ailing grandmother.

Gunita's Family

Gunita is 19 years old and is studying in Ramgharia College for a bachelor's degree in Computer Application. Gunita's belongs to a migrant house, as her father has been a migrant in the Gulf for the last ten years. Her older brother, who has not even completed his high school education, also migrated to the Gulf three years ago to join his father. Gunita's brother has not been working for the last year and a half and this has upset the family's finances as Gunita's father has had to support his son and has been unable to send sufficient money home. In a bid to manage household expenses, Babita, Gunita's mother, has taken loans from one of the richer families in the village and is also working at the house of a Jat migrant family in the city. Gunita's older sister, Trisha, completed her education till grade 12 and got married to a tailor in a village near Jalandhar two years ago. Gunita is the first member in her family to be pursuing an undergraduate degree.

Reshma and Sunita's Family

Reshma and Sunita are sisters, who live in a joint family with their parents and uncle, Balwinder and his wife Bandeep. Their house is often referred to as the "doctor's house" in the

village. This is because their cousin brother, Balwinder's older son who now lives in Delhi is a doctor. He is married to a dentist. Balwinder's younger son has done mechanical engineering and works at Samsung in Delhi. He is married to a girl who works at a senior post in a bank. Both the sons were sent to Ludhiana for their higher education.

Balwinder, the eldest of three brothers is now retired but he used to work for the Indian army as an assistant engineer. He is a strong proponent of education and takes a lot of interest in reading and collecting interesting facts and information about Punjab. The youngest of the three brother lives in Bombay and works as a manager at Hindustan Petroleum Limited. Sunita and Reshma's father, Rawinder is the middle brother and works as a vegetable vendor.

Rawinder's eldest daughter, Seeta, has completed grade 12 and is married to a Gulf migrant. Reshma is the second oldest daughter and is 21 years old. She has completed her BA and currently teaches at a nearby school, S. K. Putri Pathsala. The youngest daughter, Sunita, is 19 years old and completing her B. Com from Ramgharia College. Both Reshma and Sunita give tuitions to the village children. In contrast to their brother who was sent to Ludhiana for his studies on the basis of Balwinder's financial support, Reshma and Sunita completed their education in Phagwara at Ramgharia College.

Kavita's Family

Kavita is a 23 year old girl who belongs to a migrant family. Her father was a bank clerk and passed away six years ago. Interestingly, in Kavita's family, the migrant members are not male but female—her elder sisters and maternal grandmother. Like many other girls in the village, Kavita has obtained various educational qualifications with the objective of migrating. Kavita tells me she that she is a trained beautician and caregiver and that she undertook courses in these fields with the hope that the skills thus acquired will enable her to land a job in Canada. Kavita has also completed her masters in History from Ramgharia College and wants to do a bachelor's degree in education in Canada.

As Kavita waits to migrate, she gives tuitions to young children and does stitching work for her neighbours and her sisters. Kanta, Kavita's mother, has three older daughters, all of whom are married. The eldest daughter is in the United Kingdom , while the second daughter moved to Italy to join her husband towards the end of my fieldwork., Kavita often refers to her elder

sisters as the UK sister and the Italy sister. She only takes the name of the youngest of her three elder sisters, Meeta, and is closer to her. Meeta has only completed grade 12 and her husband works as a driver in Chandigarh.

Kanta also has two sons. When I arrived, I was told that the elder son works in Bangalore while the younger son is receiving training in cooking to be able to go to Canada and assist in his uncle's restaurant. Throughout my time in the village, the more well-settled families in the community often raised doubts about Kanta's sons' whereabouts. The rumour was that the elder son was serving time in jail and the younger son was part of a group of drug addicts in the village.

Nina's Family

Nina is a 25 year old married young woman, who belongs to a well-placed, educated middle-class family from urban Phagwara. Nina's father is a police officer and her mother is a housewife, who has bachelor's degree in education. At the time of my fieldwork, Nina had just married into a middle-class family in Chaheru that ran one of the most prosperous milk businesses in the village. Nina's husband, Bikram, holds a bachelor's degree and a diploma in computer science from Lovely Professional University (LPU). Nina has completed her MBA from the reputed Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar.

Sonia's Family

Sonia is a 26 year old girl who has been married for the last three years and also has a one one-year-old daughter. Sonia's father, Kulwinder owns one of the most popular grocery stores in Chaheru and runs it with his wife and middle son. Sonia has completed her MA from Ramgharia College and was teaching at LPU for some time before her marriage. Sonia's husband is eight years older than her and works in Italy. Right after their marriage, Sonia stayed with her husband for a month and a half, after which her husband left for Italy. Thereafter, he kept coming back every few months. But he has not come back for the last two years and has never met his daughter.

Sonia has three brothers. The eldest brother is handicapped and is often at home while the youngest brother is pursuing his BA at Ramgharia College. The middle brother, who also helps

out at the grocery store, harbours a strong ambition to migrate and has been trying to do the same for the last three-four years.

Malika's Family

Malika is a 22 year old girl that belongs to a well-to-do migrant family. Her father has been a migrant in Muscat for twenty-five years. Malika has completed her B. Com degree from Kamla Nehru College in Jalandhar. At the time of my fieldwork, she was completing her M. Com at Ramgharia College. As part of her master's degree, she was pursuing an internship in Chandigarh. I met her when she came to the village for a short break. Unlike other young women from middle-class families who are unable to travel to Jalandhar for education or employment, Malika is allowed to live in Chandigarh.

Malika's younger sister, Gopi is 18 years old and after completing grade 12 sat for entrance examinations for various medical schools after that. She also took IELTS. When I first meet her, Gopi told me that she plans to apply for nursing programs abroad because there are a lot of jobs available for nurses there and the pay is very good as well. In my second visit to the field site, I found out that Gopi's parents have disallowed her from migrating independently. So, she has joined a hospitality course in LPU and plans to do her internship in Singapore.

Rajini's Family

Rajini is a 23-year-old girl, who has recently completed her MA in Hindi from Lyallpur Khalsa College, a girls college in Jalandhar. For the last few years she has secured the third rank for herself at the college and university level. On various occasions, Rajini told me that she does not want to migrate and often discussed possibilities of local employment. While Rajini was interested in studying political science, she began an MA in Hindi because she found out through her primary schoolteacher that there is a shortage of Hindi teachers in government schools and it will increase her employability.

Rajini's father is illiterate and runs a profitable cement business. Rajini has two brothers both of whom have done vocational training courses and assist their father with his business. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Rajini's older brother was getting very restless and told his father that he wants to migrate and the family was discussing the costs and logistics of sending

their son away. After my fieldwork, I found out that Rajini has secured a teaching job at Sant Sarwann Dass Model School, a reputed school that is five minutes away from Chaheru.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Over a cup of sweet, milky tea, I chat with Kavita about her experience of living in a predominantly lower caste[1] village in Punjab. We discuss clothing, movies and food as well as her plans and hopes for the future. She asks me about my marriage, PhD and life in the UK and Canada. Her tone is excited and hopeful. Kavita is dressed in a *suit* and her movements inside and outside the village space are defined by the norms of appropriate femininity. But in her aspirations to create belonging to modern, urban spaces outside the village, Kavita is not so different from the young women in Delhi and Mumbai. In her everyday discourses and actions, Kavita is engaged in managing the transition from the backward village space to 'modern' spaces in urban India and abroad. This thesis attempts to uncover Kavita's and similarly located young women's process of social and cultural transition as they attempt to lay claim to a middle-class status and to spaces outside the village.

This thesis is located in the lives and experiences of young women, between the ages of 18 and 26[2], who belong to upwardly mobile Ad-dharmi or Chamar[3] families in Chaheru. The hereditary occupation of the Chamars consists of the snaring of animal skins and hides, tanning and leatherwork. The Chamars of the Doaba region[4] of Punjab chose to become Ad-dharmis under the influence of the Ad-dharm[5] (first faith) movement led by Mangoo Ram in the 1920s.

[1] The caste system is a defining feature of social and labour relations in rural India. While there are fewer upper caste groups, the majority of the caste groups fall within the lower caste realm, which can be further differentiated into Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Castes (OBC or BC). Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Adivasis refer to India's aboriginal population that falls outside the caste system, but they are often couched together with Scheduled Castes in policy and government speak under the banner of SC&ST. These two groups are the benefactors of affirmative action and government programs due to their historically marginalised status (Chakravarti, 2003).

[2] The exception is one young woman Reema as she is 35 years old.

[3] In this study, the Chamars in Chaheru are referred to as Ad-dharmis and Dalits because 'Chamar' is seen as a derogatory term and respondents self-identified as Ad-dharmi. The term 'Chamar' translates to someone who works with *chamri* or animal hide.

[4] It is the region of Punjab which has the highest number of out-migrants.

[5] The Ad-Dharm movement dates back to the early 20th century when various communal forces like the Arya Samaj, Christian church and the Ahmaddiya movement were actively wooing the Scheduled Caste population so as to be able to establish a larger base. At this time, Mangoo Ram, a Chamar Punjabi who, upon his return from America, became troubled with the continuity in caste discrimination, founded the Ad-Dharm movement. He decided to create a distinct Dalit identity to render it unsusceptible to poaching. At its onset, the Ad-Dharm movement faced physical opposition from both the Hindus and Sikhs and was only welcomed by the British (Ram, 2004).

This movement, the first of its kind in Punjab, was a Dalit[6] movement for religious recognition. It allowed the Chamars to register their religion as Ad-dharmi in the 1931 Census[7] (Judge & Bal, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2009). This was the first milestone in the Ad-dharmis' long history of political and religious assertion.

Chaheru is a predominantly Ad-dharmi village which is located at a distance of 5 km from Phagwara city. The village's location in the Doaba region of Punjab and its close proximity to the city implies that ideas of urbanity and especially of migration circulate and acquire prominence in the village space. Concurrently, mobility or movement away from the village towards Western spaces abroad or urban spaces in India becomes the main paradigm for the young women to etch middle-class identities within the village space. While the heightened discourse on mobility does not always translate into mobility outcomes, it shapes the young women's subjectivity, positionality and interactions within the village space. This thesis has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it seeks to deconstruct this notion of mobility and its operation at the level of imaginaries, discourses and practices. Secondly, it examines the interactions between the notions of mobility and middle-classness, especially as they operate in the spheres of education, consumption and marriage. It emerges that the young women's project of etching respectable and upwardly mobile identities is not only about claiming proximity to spaces outside the village, but it is also about defining their position as belonging to the respectable middle class within the village space.

In its first part, this chapter lays out the contextual, methodological and conceptual framework of the study. In the second part, the interactions between caste, class and gender in the context of class mobility in Dalit communities will be examined to delineate an appropriate approach for the study of mobility and middle-classness in Chaheru. In its third part, this chapter lays out a rubric for understanding the middle-class community in Chaheru. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the thesis.

[6] The term Dalit is a political form of self-identification for people who have traditionally been deemed untouchable and are legally termed as Scheduled Castes. A subset of the Dalit population also self identifies as Harijans and generally, these diverse identifications among the Scheduled Castes refer to divergent political ideologies. While the Dalits are seen to have adopted Ambedkar's discourse on caste, the Harijans are assumed to identify with Gandhi's views (Chakravarti, 2003). In this thesis, I use the word Dalit as it implies a more politicised reading of the young women's social and cultural negotiations. In referring to themselves, the respondents use the term Ad-dharmi and SC.

[7] Despite the hardships, the Ad-dharmis were able to register Ad-Dharm as a separate religion in the 1931 Census. This move was later reversed in 1932, when, with the signing of the Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi, the Ad-Dharmis, given their SC status, were classified as Hindus. This categorisation was conceded to so as not to lose the benefits of reservation (Ram, 2004)

1.2 Context

The Doaba region of Punjab has not only the highest proportion of Dalit population within Punjab, but it also has a more pronounced Dalit mobility. The assertion of Dalit autonomy reflects in Dalits' economic and social mobility. At the economic level, Dalits in Punjab have undergone an occupational shift towards non-agricultural work. This shift will be further discussed in Section 2.3 but it can be linked to the advent of the Green Revolution in the 1970s, which coincided with a transition to mechanised agriculture, availability of cheaper migrant labour and a withdrawal of Dalits from agricultural labour.

Dalits sought to consolidate their economic position through non-farm work and emigration abroad. Currently, less than 10 per cent of Dalits[8] in Punjab work for Jat Sikhs[9]. Dalits have entered fields that are associated with business and artisan castes and have also gained employment in government jobs through affirmative action policies. As of 2012, the Punjab government was employing 200,000 SCs and OBCs. Evidently, Dalits in Punjab have experienced greater mobility than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Among Punjab's Dalit communities, the Ad-dharmis are the most numerous and have fared better in education, employment and other indicators of development (Jodhka, 2002; Judge & Bal, 2009; Ram, 2009; Singh et al., 2012).

The economic mobility of Punjabi Ad-dharmis is complimented by religious and social assertions of the Chamar identity. Specifically, a religious and political movement that is associated with the emerging narrative of Chamar pride is the Ravidassia movement. This movement, detailed in Section 2.5 , has its antecedents in the Ad-Dharm movement of the 1920s. It emphasises an exclusive Ad-dharmi religious identity, separate spaces of worship and, more recently, a distinctive religious text. At its inception, this movement was seen as being within the fold of Sikhism and as opposing the Hindu caste system. But over the years it has evolved a stronger separatist and exclusionary manifesto. Contemporarily, it is perceived as a tool for confronting the social and political dominance of the Jats in the region (Behl, 2010; Judge & Bal, 2009; Ram, 2009; Sharma, 2012).

[8] Dalits are also categorised as Scheduled Castes in government discourse. While Punjab has 37 Scheduled Castes, 92 percent of the Scheduled Caste population is comprised only of ten castes—Mazhabis, Ramdasia, Ad-dharmi, Balmiki, Bazigar, Dumana, Megh, Sansi, Julaha and Dhanak (Judge & Bal, 2009).
[9] Jats are an upper caste group in Punjab that exercise significant economic and political clout.

The notion of Ad-dharmi mobility also reverberates in aspects of popular culture like songs and slogans that celebrate the Chamar identity. A young singer, Ginni Mahi, who has sung songs about Ambedkar, Guru Ravidass and the Chamar culture, is very popular in the community. In one of her recent songs about the "Dangerous Chamar", the video showcases Chamar men flexing their muscles[10]. This image of the strong and dangerous Chamar men mirrors the construct of Jat men, who are often positioned as exhibiting hypermasculinity (Gill, 2016). While the gendered aspects of such identity projects merit a more expansive discussion that cannot be presently undertaken, these images challenge ideas of lower-caste passivity and weakness.

Wealthy Chamars have also taken to reclaiming their lower-caste identity by displaying slogans like 'putri Chamara di' or 'putar Chamara da', which translate to proud daughter or proud son of Chamars, respectively. Such slogans appropriate the discourse on Jat pride, which is pervasive in Punjabi movies and songs (Gill, 2016). These assertions of Chamar identity serve as an affront to Jat dominance, often relying on tropes that are deployed by the predominantly upper caste music and movie industry in Punjab. They can also be linked to the community's increasing prosperity due to migration. The migrant Chamar is an important funder of religious and social projects that are directed towards fostering the Ad-dharmi identity, as will be elaborated in the Appendix.

This context of Ad-dharmi assertion and mobility provides an important backdrop for interpreting young women's negotiations around migration, education, consumption and marriage. It situates the young women's move towards middle-classness and mobility as emblematic of the community's larger shift towards class mobility. The framework of Dalit mobility in Punjab purports that class mobility coincides with stronger assertions of caste identity. However, in Chaheru, the move towards class mobility is accompanied by a discursive decline and reorientation of caste identity towards the class project. In order to unravel the linkages between caste and class mobility in Chaheru, Section 1.6 of this chapter will examine the literature on lower-caste mobility.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gc4wh3YczJw

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is based on an eleven-month long ethnographic study, which involved spending extended periods of time and even residing in the homes of upwardly mobile families in Chaheru. The main findings of this study pertain to the operation of mobility imaginaries, young women's varied constructions of middle-classness, the cultural tensions induced by mobility, a decline of caste in the young women's narratives as well as, the reproduction of caste through marriage practices. These findings can be prefaced with regard to my own positionality as a researcher and the spaces and situations in which the young women were accessed.

At the onset of this study, I had planned to probe into the experiences of differently located families. While I was able to speak with different families, given my positionality as an educated upper caste migrant, I was able to build a better rapport with the middle-class families in Chaheru. Within these families, it was the young women who were more receptive to my presence since I symbolised many of their aspirations around education and migration. Thus, the focus on young women from upwardly mobile families evolved through the respondents' responses and interactions with me. Although this focus on young women enabled me to develop rich insights into the gendered aspects of middle-classness, it prevented an engagement with religion and caste politics, the two areas these young women were less involved with. My positionality as a caste outsider also had the negative effect of invoking the suspicion of community members and thereby, shaping my more conservative approach to data collection.

Additionally, most interactions with the young women took place within their households. This allowed me to observe the ways in which these young women's everyday activities and narratives were entangled with more complex negotiations around culture, class and gender. But this method also posed ethical dilemmas and restricted the type of information about their lives that I was able to gather as locating the research within their homes and the village meant that inter-caste dynamics and enactments of mobility could not be observed. Thus, the findings around caste and mobility practices have to read as conditional and limited.

1.4 Mobility and Middle-Classness

In their aspirations for mobility and adoption of high-status global cultures, young women can be seen to be invoking ideas of development and modernity. In this context, the global refers to Western and urban cultures located outside the village space. In capturing a similar shift towards 'global' cultures and ideas of progress and development, a number of academic works have used the concept of modernity[11] (for example see Appadurai, 1999; Ciotti, 2010; Gardner & Osella, 2003; Osella & Osella, 2000). Some of these works point to the ways in which the global gets reconstituted in the local and gives rise to a multiplicity of cultural and social practices (Sivaramakrishnan & Agrawal, 2003; Weiss, 2002).

The concept of modernity has also been used to examine the strides towards social mobility among lower caste populations. For example, Ciotti (2010) asserts that the Chamars in Manupur, a village in eastern Uttar Pradesh are engaging in retro-modernity. Retro-modernity is constructed at the periphery of normative modernity because lower caste communities lack the purchasing power to fully engage in consumption and claim the modern identities that are imbibed by the upper castes (Ciotti, 2010).

In the case of Chaheru, young women's project of social mobility is not only about establishing their affinity to high-status cultures outside the village. In addition, they are also embroiled in a more comprehensive process of establishing a distinctive positioning and identity within the village space. In their negotiations with migration, education and consumption, the young women in Chaheru are attempting to claim middle-classness. This middle-class ethos becomes defined as one that facilitates movement outside the village, an enhancement in status and the ability to spend and consume. It is also marked by the balancing act that these young women perform between the inappropriate and the appropriate, the immoral and the respectable and especially, between rurality and urbanity. They position themselves vis-à-vis these opposing orientations based on their aspirations as well as their family's mobility plans, gender norms and economic positioning

[11] In these works, the concept of modernity is used to define a deterriorialized and hyper mobile world where the boundaries between the local and the global are increasingly blurred (Appadurai, 1996; Blunt, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Salazar, 2018; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Previous work on middle-class culture speaks to this very project of fashioning an in-between identity (Liechty, 2003). In his seminal work on the Nepali middle class, Liechty (2003) asserts that the Nepali middle class occupies a cultural space that can be described as ". . . separated both from the 'vulgar' lives of the national elite, whose distinction lies in their emulation of a foreign modernism, and from a lower class trapped in equally vulgar lifestyles of 'tradition' and poverty . . ." (Liechty, 2003, p. 67). In Chaheru, the elite are not a pervasive reference point and generally young women claim a higher and morally appropriate position in the village's social hierarchy by separating themselves from the lower classes. Thus, the middle-class culture in Chaheru is actively shaped by these young women's 'balancing act' and social distancing.

1.5 Gendered Middle-Class Culture

In Chaheru, the production of a middle-class status emerges as the enterprise of young women. This coincides with Osella's observation that among the Izhavas[12] in Kerala, while the women are engaged in status production work, the men are involved in generating wealth (Chopra, 2011; Osella & Osella, 2000; Papanek, 1979). Osella and Osella (2000) assert that labour is gendered and while the primary focus of young men's labour is the accumulation of wealth, young women are expected to pursue reputation. In order to maintain a respectable position, Izhava women withdraw from manual labour and either pursue high-status professional employment or they stay at home. When Izhava women choose to work, it is in an occupation that is indisputably respectable such as school teaching, where the benefits are high enough to outweigh possible prestige loss. Women who do lowly paid manual work do so due to financial constraints and thereby, struggle to assert respectability (Benei, 2010; Chanana, 1993; Osella & Osella, 2000).

In Chaheru, most of the young women I spoke to were currently pursuing education as a means to assert status and claim proximity to urban modernity. After completing their education, these young women aimed to secure 'respectable' jobs which were not too far from their homes, did not involve long working hours and were preferably government jobs. But given the high level of competition, such jobs are difficult to secure. In the absence of respectable employment opportunities, therefore, most of these young women ended up giving tuitions or doing

[12] Is a Dalit caste group in Kerala.

stitching work from home since these were seen as being more respectable than doing lowly paid private work while they waited to migrate through marriage[13] or secure respectable jobs. When women sought jobs, like the Izhava women, teaching jobs were preferred because these were seen as conducive to them fulfilling their domestic duties (Chanana, 1993; Osella & Osella, 2000). Also, despite the young women's discourse on their future plans, which largely revolved around education and employment, in actuality, their mobility or movement away from the village hinged much more on their marriage. However, despite the inevitability of marriage, it did not feature as prominently in the young women's narratives. This lack of discourse on marriage can be better understood with regard to the young women's particular construction of their present selves and their future plans and will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.3. However, it is important to note that higher levels of education made these young women more suitable candidates for marriage to a well-settled migrant from UK, Europe or North America. It is, in fact, common to find young women with MA degrees married to well-settled migrants who have only passed grade 10. The discourses on marriage were mostly initiated by parents who were interested in finding migrant grooms for their educated daughters.

Moreover, similar to the young Izhava men, the young men in Chaheru did not take education seriously as they did not believe that a degree would enable them to secure employment. Instead, most of them were planning their migration. Even in cases where men from secure middle-class families were pursuing education, it was attached to the motive of generating wealth rather than fostering respectability and status. In fact, in borrowing from Osella and Osella (2000)'s description of Izhava young men, the young men in Chaheru can be described as being ". . . keen to show themselves living up to the community's mobility ideal and impatient to become part of the consuming classes, the source of wealth, while not irrelevant, is of lesser importance than the amount . . ." (p. 47). Thus, for the young men, the aim was an accumulation of wealth rather than gaining respectable employment.

The distinctive roles played by men and women in furthering the social positioning of their families indicates that along with converting wealth into status through practices of education

[13] The most commonly accepted method for women to migrate was through marriage. This was seen as the most respectable way for women to migrate. In some cases, if you women had close extended family abroad, they also tried to migrate through work visas i.e. caregiver visa. There was only one family where young women had migrated for work to a country where they did not have relatives. In the same family, the younger sister of this girl was planning to migrate through fraudulent marriage or independently for study. This family did not enjoy a good reputation and were looked down upon for being desperate to migrate at any cost.

and consumption, young women are also at the forefront of defining Chaheru's middle-class culture (Chopra, 2011). In order to unravel the young women's construction of middle-class culture, it is useful to probe their interactions with notions of mobility, appropriateness and cultural orientation. The study of mobility and middle-classness in Chaheru necessitates a recognition of the interactions between gender, caste and class dynamics. Such an approach allows one to comment on the impact of class mobility on caste identities and gender norms in an upwardly mobile Dalit community. This approach will be developed in the next section.

1.6 Caste, Class and Gender

1.6.1 Caste Mobility

In examining the social and economic upliftment of lower caste populations, a common framework that has been deployed is that of caste mobility[14]. Two pathways have been identified for lower caste mobility: Sanskritisation and Westernisation (Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1956). Sanskritisation is the process by which a low caste Hindu changes his/her customs, rituals, ideology and way of life to reflect that of an upper-caste[15] Hindu. Typically, when lower caste groups acquire wealth, they follow this up by Sanskritising their lifestyle and instating a higher caste status. Thus, Sanskritisation is able to resolve the inconsistency between newly acquired wealth and a low ritual rank status (Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1956). Mobility associated with Sanskritisation, however, only leads to positional changes within the caste system. As one caste moves up and another one comes down, all of this takes place within a stable hierarchal order. The caste system itself remains unchanged (Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1956).

[14] There are two main schools of thought that discuss caste mobility. The first view, which has been characterised as the book view of caste, focuses on the continuities with the past and the scriptural tradition. It constructs caste in terms of how it is defined by scriptures and utilizes this view to understand the everyday dynamics of caste, at the expense of the discontinuities that are becoming more salient. The book view homogenises and generalises the operation of caste across India. In contrast to the book view which states that the position of each caste in the hierarchy is fixed, the 'field view' of caste allows for some kind of mobility, with a few castes moving up or down but overall the system remaining stable. The field view of caste emphasises that caste derives from its material correlates rather than predefined categories of social reality (Beteille, 1991, Srinivas, 1956). Beteille (1991) proposes that caste be understood through the lens of material interests and fluid power equations so that the dominant and subordinate castes are not perceived as fixated in the current power distribution91). This thesis employs the field view of caste.

[15] These changes made by a previously lower caste group in their lifestyle and mannerisms are followed by a claim to a higher position within the caste hierarchy. This claim is made over a period of time, a generation or two before the 'arrival' is conceded. Sanskritisation generally results in upward mobility for the caste in question, but mobility may also occur without Sanskritisation and vice versa (Srinivas, 1956).

In contrast to Sanskritisation, which can be conceived as presenting a continuity in tradition, Westernisation marks a move towards modernity. The practice of Westernisation can be traced back to the colonial period when the upper castes acquainted themselves with Western education and customs as a way to access mobility. This gave rise to a new secular order in which the British and the Kshatriyas were at the top, followed by the Brahmins and the remaining caste groups, with the Brahmins also acting as interlocutors between the British and the rest of the population. As the economic mobility of the upper castes coincided with their adoption of Western culture, the lower castes took on traditional practices and customs that were being discarded by the upper castes. Thus, it appears that the Westernisation of the upper castes went hand in hand with the Sanskritisation of the lower castes, although, over time, the lower castes also invested in forging access to Western education and the opportunities it provided (Ambedkar, 1971; Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1956).

While the rubric for caste mobility relayed by Srinivas (1956) and Beteille (1991) captures key social transitions in lower caste communities, it does not always map onto manifestations of caste mobility. More contemporary work on the subject points out that class identity has emerged as a crucial if not more important signifier of mobility. For example, in her work on Chamars from Manupur, Ciotti (2010) found that the Chamars assert their modernity by mobilising idioms, practices and distinctions of the original Indian middle class, which is predominantly upper caste and rose in the 19th century through interactions with the colonial forces (p. 36).

In addition to referencing an upper caste middle-class identity, the Chamars from Manupur also draw on the 'imagined community' of Dalit leaders and movements (Ciotti, 2010, p. 11). More importantly, Ciotti (2010) does not see these processes as reminiscent of Sanskritisation. She asserts that the community's ideas about education, science and progress, free labour, women's reforms and respectable domesticity convey greater cultural, social and political complexity than the mere replication of upper caste norms (Ciotti, 2010, p.12). Thus, while caste identity continues to be important in the political sphere, in other spheres of sociality, the Chamars are oriented towards emulating middle-classness.

Similarly, in the context of Chaheru, political and religious discourses, which the older community members are more engaged with, are wrapped up in the language of caste. But the young women's own negotiations are less reliant on the ideas of caste. Their negotiations are

premised on carving an upwardly mobile identity which is distinct from the position occupied by the lower and upper classes. This process of class differentiation is especially important given the village's dominant culture of migration and, concurrently, the strong distinctions between the migrants who 'have made it' and those who are 'left behind'. Invariably, the young women I observed and spoke to within the village space were 'left behind'. They appeared anxious and impatient to lay claim to mobility through practices of education and consumption and imaginaries of moving away. In this process of defining their positioning, caste identity becomes subsumed and channelled towards the larger class project. Despite the discursive de-emphasis on caste, these young women inadvertently reproduce caste through marriage, which is usually arranged with caste compatriots. Endogamy in marriage coexists with the parents' more open outlook towards inter-caste alliances in pre-marital relationships, as will be elaborated in Section 8.2. Although these rarely evolve beyond romantic relationships. These shifting dynamics around class and caste propel the question, is caste identity still relevant to the young women's mobility plans and negotiations? In attempting to unravel the young women's simultaneous interactions with caste, class and gender, it is useful to draw on the larger literature on lower caste mobility.

1.6.2 Caste Identity in Projects of Class Mobility

In speaking about the interactions between caste and class, one of the main questions that this literature grapples with is whether class mobility allows lower caste populations to override caste discrimination and disadvantages or not. There are two strands in the existing literature on the subject. One strand emphasises continuities in caste disparities, despite other forms of economic upliftment in the lower caste communities (for example see Deshpande, 2011; Deshpande & Newman, 2007; Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2008; Osella & Osella, 2000; Still, 2011; Still, 2014; Thorat, 2002; Thorat & Newman, 2007; Walker, 2008). In much of this literature, caste appears as the main axis of lower caste negotiations with mobility and development. Another less prominent strand of the literature identifies the shift towards class rather than caste mobility among the lower caste populations (for example see Beteille, 1992; Beteille, 1996; Fuller, 1996; Ram, 1988; Sheth, 1999). This work purports the receding importance of caste in the mobility projects of lower caste groups and indicates the transition to 'new middle-class' identities. The construct of the 'new middle class' is particularly useful in unravelling the interactions between caste and class identities in Chaheru. Each of these strands of the literature on lower caste mobility will be examined below.

It is widely acknowledged that there have been some improvements in the standing of Dalits. Since the 1980s, they have been pursuing higher levels of education, government employment and non-agricultural work and/or migration. Despite these developments, a number of scholars contend that capitalist growth and liberalisation have not led to a dismantling of caste discrimination (for example see Deshpande, 2011; Deshpande & Newman, 2007; Thorat, 2002; Thorat & Newman, 2007; Walker, 2008). In the absence of requisite capital and affirmative policy to facilitate access to opportunities in the private sector, Dalits continue to face discrimination and marginalisation. Still (2014) asserts that the Dalits' low position in the traditional caste hierarchy finds its equivalent in the neoliberal economy. She says that while ". . . Dalits may no longer have to manually remove human faeces, they tend to be the ones who work in sewage works . . ." (p. 18).

Heyer (2014) asserts that while the instruments of subordination may differ in an urban setting, the outcome is very similar. For instance, in urban areas, explicit practices around untouchability and discrimination are reduced. But the lack of social networks, relevant skills and experience make it difficult for Dalits to attain high-status urban employment. Heyer (2014) insists that the relative position of Dalits vis-à-vis the upper castes explains their continuing marginalisation. While there have been improvements in Dalit education, these have not been commensurate with the strides made by the upper castes. Both Heyer (2014) and Still (2014) point out that the mobility of Dalits in the neoliberal economy is not dependent on merely acquiring certain qualifications. It is also about mobilising social networks and demonstrating one's ". . . educated-ness and refinement through demeanour, way of talking, fluency in English, 'exposure', confidence, dress, body language and even attitudes . . ." (Still, 2014, p. 15). These mannerisms and exposure are acquired at expensive private schools and are an important aspect of the upper caste middle-class identity. These forms of distinction that lead to economic success are mostly out of reach for the Dalits. This 'lack'[16] of cultural capital and promising social networks are also articulated as roadblocks by the young women in Chaheru and appear as continuities in lower caste disadvantages.

[16] In everyday speak, when upwardly mobile young women slip into behaviours and discourses they deem backward, they playfully refer to themselves as 'Chamar'. For instance, on one occasion, the mostly soft-spoken Kavita was fighting and talking loudly with her brother. After talking to him, she immediately turned to me and said, "You must think Chamars are so loud." While across the village people referred to themselves as Ad-dharmis, the self-identification as Chamar in moments where they slip into less sophisticated mannerisms reflects the constant awareness of their lack stemming from caste positioning.

Another strand of the literature points to the changing and declining expression of caste identity among the upwardly mobile lower caste communities. Waghmore (2013) contends that under the conditions of neoliberalism, the purity/pollution dictum and caste-based exclusion take different forms. As previously marginalised communities undergo urbanisation and middle-class formation, different moralities of caste come to the fore. The notion of modernity becomes subsumed under the ideal of purity. Thus, demonstrating purity becomes tantamount to expressing one's modern credentials. While acquiring purity within the traditional caste system entailed mimicking the upper caste, Waghmore (2013) says that under neoliberalism, the existence of specific caste identities stands questioned. Identity is devoid of caste history and instead, is directed towards claiming purity and 'civility'. Waghmore (2013) contends that civility is not simply about depicting politeness and respect for liberal institutions and diversity. It also involves integrating community identity with ideas of modernity. In fact, in the postcolonial context, caste movements often attempted to lay claim to this idea of civility. Similarly, in the current context, caste is not simply a source of inequality, it also merges with ideas of state and civil society and operates as a resource for mobilisation. Thus, Waghmore (2013) points out that caste does not decline, but is reconstructed and deployed in projects of Dalit social mobility.

Naudet (2008) points out that the social mobility of Dalits is linked to their social obligation to ". . . pay back to their caste community . . ." (p. 414). This imperative to pay back is fulfilled in different ways. It could include talking about one's individual success in terms of the collective identity, pursuing education-based mobility that is congruent with family views[17] or maintaining links with the group of origin by relaying financial assistance to close relatives. Regardless of its manifestation, this need to pay back implies the continuing importance of caste identity for upwardly mobile Dalits. Both Waghmore (2013) and Naudet (2008) purport that while the idiom of caste identity may have changed under conditions of urbanisation and modernity, caste identity itself continues to be linked to the economic mobility of the lower castes.

The interactions between caste identity and class mobility in Chaheru mirror some of the findings related by Waghmore (2013) and Naudet (2008). Young women in Chaheru, especially those from educated and secure middle-class families, reference ideas of caste

[17] The idea that one must pursue education-based mobility is also aligned with the Dalit construct of mobility articulated by Ambedkar, as he often talked about social mobility through education, agitation and organisation (Ambedkar, 1971).

identity to establish their separation from the lower caste and lower class other. Thus, caste identity becomes a part of the class differentiation process. However, while Waghmore (2013) and Naudet (2008) discuss the rearticulation of caste identity, they do not purport its decline. In contrast, the young women's narratives reflect the decreasing importance of caste in their everyday navigations around mobility. This can be better understood through the construct of the 'new middle class', which will be explored below.

1.6.3 The New Middle Class

The 'new middle class' refers to the middle-class identity that is accessible to and actively imbibed by lower caste groups. This concept of a middle-class identity is more diverse and fluid than the upper caste-oriented middle-class identity that prevailed at the time of independence. While this new middle-class identity is more inclusive and does not exclude people on the basis of their birth, it has a stronger focus on consumption rather than on the criteria of occupation, revenue and education that has historically been used to define the middle class (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008). The new middle-class identity also coincides with the privileging of class over caste or other ethnocentric identities. This can partially be explained by the vulnerable position of the new middle class, as they have historically belonged to marginalised groups and do not have the social and cultural capital commensurate with their economic position (Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2003).

Thus, they find themselves in an uncertain position as they grapple with meeting the expectations of consumption, education and professional employment imposed by a middle-class identity (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Donner & De Neve, 2011; Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008; Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2003). In resolving the anxiety around legitimising their claim to a higher class status, the notion of caste appears to recede to the background. Beteille[18] (1992, 1996) and Sheth (1999) state that caste continues to survive in the form of kinship relations and belonging to a community. But it does not exist in various forms of rituality that bind it to a fixed status, occupation and specific rules of commensality

[18] Beteille (1996) adds that despite the overall decline of caste identity, some aspects of the caste system such as caste morality may persist. Caste morality entails some obligations that an individual has towards the caste they were born in. This obligation is mostly seen as pertaining to the spheres of occupation and marriage. Sheth (1999) questions the contemporary importance of caste morality and says that inter-caste marriages are increasingly common. He says marriages are decided upon by matching education, profession and wealth. While he acknowledges that statistically, these marriages may be fewer in number, the trend that they represent is important.

and endogamy. Caste identity is generally expressed either in cultural terms or via the route of political consciousness.

Moreover, in the project of fashioning middle-class identities, class differentiation within lower caste communities has become important. While in the past, differences in wealth and status among families belonging to the same caste were expressed "often apologetically" at weddings and funerals, they now emerge as strong assertions of power and status (Sheth, 1999, p. 2504). Contemporarily, households belonging to a single caste group are highly differentiated. This variance with regard to occupation, education, income level and lifestyle has led lower caste families to align outside their caste with different socio-economic networks and groups (Beteille, 1992; Beteille, 1996; Sheth, 1999).

In one of the earliest empirical works on the new middle class, Ram (1988) discusses the experiences of Dalit employees in Kanpur's state government administrative offices. Ram (1988) sought to quantitatively measure the extent to which an improved class status affected the Dalits' status within the caste hierarchy and the congruity between caste and class status. A majority of the respondents (77 per cent) placed themselves in the middle class while a minority identified as lower (17.5 per cent) and upper (5.5 per cent) class. The respondents' identification of their middle-class status was not linked to their family's economic position or their own job level (Ram, 1988).

A majority (87.5 per cent) of the respondents also reported changes in their status within the caste hierarchy. They mentioned a rise in family status, increase in consciousness, better interaction with non-Dalits and reception of respect, especially in cities. Most respondents found that acquaintances largely interacted with them on the basis of their socio-economic status[19]. It was found that those who had a better position in the office were more likely to perceive a change in their caste status (Ram, 1988).

Thus, Ram (1988) identifies that class mobility can facilitate an upward shift in caste status. Moreover, he posits the emergence of a new middle-class identity among the lower castes, which is premised on acquiring social status through economic achievements and improved

[19] There was a high and significant correlation between the socio-economic status of the respondents' families and their interactions with acquaintances such as attending ceremonies and taking meals or refreshments at their houses. But the respondents preferred to stay outside rather than enter the kitchens of their acquaintances (Ram, 1988).

interaction with non-Dalits. The new middle class is not concerned with its rank within the caste hierarchy. Ram (1988) asserts that for upwardly mobile lower castes, the adoption of Sanskritisation is seen as futile as it often places the lower castes in conflict with the referent group. Instead, the upwardly mobile lower castes are more likely to either associate with their own caste identity (ethnocentrism) or not identify with any caste identity at all (contra-identification). The most common trend among middle-class Dalits is to 'pass' their caste identity and associate more closely with their class identity. Thus, the new middle-class identity imbibed by the lower castes involves moving beyond identification at the caste level and reiterating the primacy of class (Ram, 1988). This construct of the new middle class resonates with the young women's discourses around caste and class in Chaheru.

1.6.4 Caste and Class in Chaheru

It is undeniable that their caste position has a strong bearing on the educational and employment opportunities that the young women of Chaheru are able to access, as well as the type and extent of class mobility they are able to experience (Judge and Bal, 2009; Pimpley, 1976). Moreover, it also impacts the type of marriage they partake in. While Dalit parents appear open to the possibility of inter-caste alliances, especially to Jat migrant boys, the young women's romantic relationships with upper caste boys does not usually translate into marriage. Thus, they generally end up marrying within their caste and especially for educated young women, parents seek out well-settled migrant men to facilitate the young women's economic and social mobility.

Despite caste continuities in marriage and the continuing ramifications of historical disadvantages in education and employment, at the level of everyday discourse, the main consideration among the upwardly mobile young women in Chaheru was competing with caste compatriots within the village. As mentioned in Section 1.6.1, the anxiety about being 'left behind' translated into increasing competition among the young women over proximity to migration, education and consumption. Additionally, the absence of caste discourses among the young women can also be explained as a side effect of the village's caste homogeneity. This meant that interactions with the upper castes, especially for the young women, were

limited to the realm of school and college[20]. Moreover, I mostly observed the young women within the village space where class was a more salient source of differentiation.

Unlike the Dalits described by Naudet (2008), the young women in Chaheru are not interested in maintaining linkages with their caste identity. This is a cause for concern among some of the lower class middle-aged men in the community. These men draw upon a dehistoricised and abstract construct of caste discrimination to bolster their political claims. Also, professionally employed men from middle-class families engage in discussions about the problems and inadequacies within the lower caste community. In contrast, the young women are actively trying to move away from the village space and the caste backwardness it symbolises. While the young women engage in caste endogamous marriages which serve as their primary route to mobility, their plans around social mobility are not defined in terms of their caste identity. This will be discussed in further detail in Sections 5.3 and 8.4.2 . Much like the upper castes described by Naudet (2008)[21], the young women's mobility plans and practices reflect the influence of various sources such as their parents' ethos, circulating ideologies of gender and status as well as their own preferences. Thus, in addition to caste identity, it is important to probe the articulation of gender norms in the context of class mobility among Dalit families.

1.6.5 Dalit Patriarchy

As Dalit families transition into class mobility, gendered roles and expectations as well as spaces for women's autonomy are being transformed simultaneously. Historically, while Dalit women endured disadvantages associated with their class and caste, they had greater control over their own sexuality and mobility than upper caste women did (Kapadia, 1995). However, as Dalit women now move towards an urbanised and upwardly mobile identity, they are experiencing lower control over their physical mobility, their earnings and their sexuality. There are two main transitions that upwardly mobile Dalit women are experiencing—removal from low-status work and a subsequent entry into high-status employment, and seclusion within the home. These shifts in the Dalit women's gender roles can be linked to the

[20] Although given that the young women attended schools and colleges in the vicinity of Phagwara, which had a high proportion of Dalits, they mostly grew up around caste compatriots.

[21] Naudet (2008) asserts that while Dalits draw upon a predetermined template of mobility which derives from their caste identity, the upper castes have a more unique ethos of mobility. An upper caste's construct of mobility draws on various sources such as their family culture, ideas of success and achievement that circulate in society as well as their own experiences and interpretations (p. 431).

community's move to emulate the gender norms of the wealthy, urban upper castes (Kapadia, 1995; Still, 2017).

Both Kapadia (1995) and Still (2017) insist that the transition to class mobility does not symbolise an emulation of upper caste values and the process of Sanskritisation (Kapadia, 1995; Srinivas, 1956; Still, 2017). Rather, it is an emulation of upper-class behaviour. This often entails adopting more conservative norms around women's behaviour, which uphold the value of female seclusion[22]. Still (2017) terms this process of appropriating and adapting upper caste patriarchy as the "Dalitisation of patriarchy" (p. 190). This process of selective adaptation involves rejecting most aspects of upper caste lifestyles, customs and religion and only adopting the upper caste focus on female respectability. Thus, Dalits overlook most upper caste norms and selectively draw on ideas of female honour and leverage it towards their own goals of status and mobility.

An adherence to notions of honour and protection of female sexuality restricts the choices and autonomy of Dalit women[23]. Honour can be understood as a predominantly male pursuit that is occupied with the control of the female body and its movement. It prescribes norms of appropriate female behaviour and is oriented towards safeguarding women's modesty (Still, 2017). While this construct of honour is tied to a loss in personal autonomy, it also opens up new and different avenues for Dalit women to negotiate autonomy and status. It spurs a shift in their identity within the household from being economically productive members to the producers of status and respectability (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2017). This modification in the Dalit women's household role also coincides with their withdrawal from lowly valued agricultural and manual work.

Admittedly, this entails the seclusion of the Dalit women, but at the same time, it also allows them to claim a higher class status. Even in Chaheru, young women from upwardly mobile families withdrew from less respectable forms of work, while their older counterparts stopped doing manual work altogether. Largely, as will be discussed in Section 4.5.3 women seek to

[22] Regardless of this process of emulation, urbanised behaviours may encode very different cultural values for lower class Dalit women than their upper caste counterparts (Still, 2017). In fact, the cultural meanings that Dalit women assign to urban and rural behaviours will be discussed in this thesis.

[23] While Dalit women find manual work gruelling, it also allows them to set themselves apart from women of other castes, who do not work outside their homes. Their ability to engage with paid work allows the Dalit women to negotiate lower dowries at the time of marriage and have more choice about when and whom to marry. In contrast to women of other castes, they are also able to engage in sexual acts before marriage. The ability to earn money, however meagre it might be, also allows Dalit women to escape abusive husbands (Heyer, 2014).

maintain their elevated positionality and status, even if it means a reduction in their personal autonomy[24] (Basu, 1996; Chen, 1983; Kabeer, 1997; Kabeer, 1999). Given the history of Dalit women's work, the character of the Dalit housewife is viewed with ambivalence; the life of the woman stuck indoors is both envied and desired (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2017)

In addition to reinstating female honour and facilitating women's withdrawal from low-status work, Dalit class mobility is also tied to the reproduction of the urbanised family. This entails that Dalit women selectively engage with more respectable forms of employment. While the Dalit women's transition to high-status professional employment has allowed them to access new spaces of autonomy, it has also been accompanied by a greater degree of male surveillance (Anandhi, 2007; Anandhi, Jeyaranjan & Krishnan, 2002; Kapadia, 1995). Moreover, even as they exercise greater surveillance, Dalit men continue to flout their end of the bargain by failing to sustain employment.

Evidently, the linkages between class mobility and Dalit women's autonomy are not so clear-cut. A number of research studies have found a negative link between a Dalit family's mobility and the autonomy of its women (for example see Anandhi et al., 2002; Anandhi, 1995; Anandhi, 2017; Gorringe, 2017; Govinda, 2017; Heyer, 2014; Kapadia, 1995; Kapadia, 2010, Still, 2010; Still, 2017). These studies assert that under conditions of class mobility, Dalit patriarchy is reconstituted. But they also point to new contexts and social formations against which Dalit women negotiate autonomy. In order to explore the altered and adaptive nature of Dalit women's autonomy, it is useful to explore Anandhi's (2017) work on the mobility experiences of lower caste Adidravidar women residing in a semi-urban village close to Chennai city.

Anandhi (2017) asserts that despite the negative ramifications of female employment that Adidravidar women had to cope with, their employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) offers these women unique opportunities for assertions of autonomy. Since MNREGA is organised by the government, it is free of caste control and mostly comprises of married middle-aged women. It provides a forum for the women to challenge and collectivise around issues of caste and gender discrimination.

[24] Still (2017) asserts that in marrying up, young Dalit women are looking forward to withdrawing from agricultural labour and living more comfortable lives within their marital homes.

Participation in MNREGA also allows the women to enhance their status within their families. They can combine their 'respectable' work with other income generating activities and increase the income of their household. Women themselves perceive MNREGA work as fulfilling because it allows them to work independently. Thus, Anandhi (2017) concludes that Dalit women's autonomy does not lie in radically opposing caste and patriarchy but in working within its confines and etching autonomy through subversive action and discourse. This viewpoint on socially constrained autonomy will be further developed and used in this thesis.

Evidently, class mobility among Dalit families is associated with both women's increasing seclusion, which is linked with ideas of honour, and the increasing uptake of employment, which is tied to the urban family model. This is a pattern that reverberates in Chaheru, as young women vie for high-status employment or migration. In the absence of these opportunities, they prefer working within their homes and pursuing education rather than engaging in low-status work outside. Thus, in the absence of desired mobility outcomes, the young women's agency can be gleaned from their everyday negotiations within their homes and village.

This marks a departure from much of the work on social mobility that locates mobility in concrete outcomes like high-status employment or marriage to a migrant (Benei, 2010; Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). While it is important to acknowledge the sources of 'real mobility', this thesis delves into the processual aspects of mobility. Thus, while young women's mobility outcomes, particularly in terms of marriage, are discussed, as it serves as the main route for their mobility, the focus is on their navigations around mobility.

1.7 The Middle Classes in Chaheru

In defining the framework for middle-class identity in Chaheru, occupation and proximity to migration serve as important signifiers of a family's consumption, its access to educational facilities and type of household structure. However, there is not always a correlation between a family's economic well-being and its occupation. For instance, among self-employed families, there is a significant variation as there are families that are able to spend well and those that are only making ends meet. Similarly, among migrant families, there is a difference between those whose male members have migrated to the Gulf and those who have migrated to Europe. Thus, instead of assuming a one-to-one correlation between occupation and economic status, it is more useful to examine the discourses and practices that families utilise

to identify themselves as distinct from other families. In using these families' own discourse of class identity as a point of departure, this section seeks to establish some objective contours of the middle class and develop a rubric of class positioning based on migration and employment.

Migrant families that have a male member working in the Gulf or Europe live in permanent housing structures that are well equipped with amenities like Western toilets, fans and coolers. Some of these houses do not have a private motor and are reliant on the village tank for water supply. These families often have a motorbike and are able to afford private schooling for their children. Among these migrant families, those with a family member in Europe are economically better off and invest in commercial land. They live in larger, well-equipped houses with a private motor and are able to afford expensive private education for their children. Some of these families also own a car. Both these types of migrant families can be seen as occupying a middling position in the village.

Entire families that are settled abroad in Europe or North America mostly build large houses for themselves in Chaheru. These houses resemble housing in North America in terms of their layout, facilities and interior decor. It is customary for these houses to have a water tank at the top of the house in the shape of a bird or an airplane to denote its migrant owners. When these families visit the village, they enjoy the attention of less well-to-do villagers, who curry favour with them in the hopes of facilitating their own migration. There are three such migrant families in Chaheru and they are seen as being the village elite.

In terms of the parameter of employment, families that are labouring in the local economy live in semi-permanent housing structures that are built of temporary materials, have Indian toilets, small kitchens and no private motor. The children of these families mostly attend either a government school or low cost private schools. These families form the village's lower class. Among self-employed families, there are varying levels of economic resources, depending on the type of self-employment. Families that own a small shop in the village or drive their own autorickshaw live in dilapidated housing and their children study in government schools. These families are closer to the lower class rung of the village. Families that run large tractor, milk or cement businesses live in large and well-equipped houses. Their children have access to good quality, expensive private education. These families can be seen as belonging to the village's middle class.

There are three or four families in Chaheru where the father is or has been employed in government service. These families reside in well-equipped houses with a running motor and their children are being educated in more expensive private institutions. But these families are considered as occupying a different position from the well-to-do migrant households. Thus, they lay claim to a slightly different middle-class culture, as will be elaborated below.In comparison to other middle-class families, they are more focused on their children's education and access to professional employment.

Based on the typology of different class groups in Chaheru, it is possible to see the middle class as a diverse group composed of migrant families (both with family members in the Gulf and in Europe), professionally employed families and well-to-do self-employed families. These families are referred to as migrant, educated and self-employed families respectively. This group varies not only in its choice of occupation, but also in the ways in which the families negotiate the middle-class requirements of consumption and distinction. The middle class in Chaheru can be understood as comprising of mainly two distinct cultural ethos: migrant and educated. Migrant and educated families do not just differ in their mobility plans, with the latter being more focused on professional employment in the local economy, they also imbibe distinct ways of understanding their social position and those of others within the community. Importantly, as will be elaborated in the various chapters, these two types of middle-class families establish their relative position and status through different types of class practices.

Both types of middle-class families pursue the education of young women as far as is affordable. However, for migrant families, the education of women in itself is not a source of distinction. Rather, the building of large urban houses, hosting grand weddings and investments in property are communicated as markers of status. In contrast, educated families invoke the construct of *jankari* or awareness and exposure to urban cultures with regard to education, fashion and food since it allows them to establish proximity to the cultured and urban middle class. Self-employed families can be seen as occupying an in-between cultural space. Similar to the migrant families, they also value explicit markers of wealth like large houses and lavish celebrations of social events like weddings. While in most self-employed families the parents are illiterate, they facilitate the higher education of their children at prestigious institutes. Thus, self-employed families bring together the perspectives shared by educated and migrant families and simultaneously engage with migration and education as pathways to mobility.

Another dimension of middle-class culture is the level of security with which families can claim the middle-class status. Evidently, upwardly mobile families in Chaheru were embroiled in the process of acquiring the ability to emulate 'appropriate' class practices. But their level of cultural competence was dependent on their economic resources. Less secure families lacked the economic means to reliably perform middle-class consumption. Consequently, they resorted to selective class practices that communicated a public image of middle-class consumption whilst lowering consumption in the private realm. The ways in which less secure middle-class families claim middle-classness will be further detailed in Section 7.4.2.

Most educated families tend to be securely middle class, but there is greater variance among migrant and self-employed families. Many migrant families, especially those with family members in the Gulf countries, exercise an insecure claim to middle-classness due to uncertain remittances. Self-employed families also have varying levels of economic resources. It is only those families with well-established businesses that are able to securely claim middle-classness. Thus, taken together, the middle-class cultures occupied and claimed by secure and insecure middle-class families belonging to different occupations, whilst sharing a commitment to the respectable middle, diverge in negotiations with migration, education and consumption.

While this rubric identifies the larger metrics of middle-class identity in Chaheru, the young women do not passively emulate and perform the template of middle-class culture. Rather, the boundaries and dynamics of middle-class culture are actively defined by the young women in their everyday negotiations with the ideas of appropriate femininity, rurality and urbanity. Consequently, there are various constructions of middle-classness that emerge in Chaheru based on a family's economic positioning and culture as well as, its young women's education level and proximity to migration.

Each of these notions of middle-classness also entails a specific navigation around rurality, urbanity, caste identity and femininity. For instance, Nina, who belongs to a securely placed, migrant middle-class family, seeks to reclaim her caste identity through the religious route. In contrast, Somika belongs to an educated and secure middle-class family and seeks to 'pass' her caste identity. Both these young women adopt a more urbanised construct of appropriate femininity and middle-classness. Gunita, who belongs to a less secure, migrant middle-class

family, attempts to balance her aspirations for mobility with her family's economic position and rural gender norms. She references a more rural construct of appropriate femininity than Nina and Somika do. Also, caste does not feature as a praxis of mobility or identity in her everyday discourses. Thus, young women reveal diverse middle-class identities and interactions with notions of caste, culture and gender. These will be discussed in each of the chapters on mobility, education, consumption and marriage.

1.8 Overview of the Thesis

At its outset, in Chapter 2, this thesis lays the geographical, economic and social context against which the young women's claim to middle-classness can be understood and interpreted. Thereafter, Chapter 3 presents the process of selecting a field site and collecting data. Moreover, the consonance between my positionality as a researcher and the limitations in data collection and analysis have been elaborated in this chapter. Chapter 4 attempts to relay the conceptual framework used for analysis. Specifically, it outlines the constructs of mobility, educational mobility, appropriate femininity, constrained agency and cultural styles. These constructs are then deployed in each of the empirical chapters to make sense of the ways in which the young women navigate migration, education and consumption. Thus, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide an overview of the field site, the process of data collection and the conceptual tools that will be utilised in interpreting the data. This provides the foundation that is then built upon and expanded in each of the data chapters. These data chapters work within the framework posited in the abovementioned chapters to capture the process of class formation.

Chapter 5 describes the prevailing mobility imaginaries and the ways in which they are reproduced. The mobility imaginary suggests that the physical and cultural movement away from the village towards urbane and/or Western spaces is a linear cultural transition. However, as the young women negotiate moving away, they seek to integrate aspects of the rural culture into the new spaces they have moved to.

Chapter 6 highlights the different ways in which young women from insecure migrant families and secure educated families utilise education and its concomitant access to urban culture to fashion middle-class identities. The young women from secure educated families construct their educated middle-class identities as being tied to higher levels of awareness, cultural sophistication, female mobility and sexual autonomy. Among the young women from less

secure migrant families, education emerges as a site of flexibility and negotiation. In these families, young women's access to education hinges on their ability to balance the expectations of appropriate femininity with the demands of urban modernity.

Chapter 7 examines the consumption practices of the young women in the spheres of fashion and food. This chapter reveals that the young women's consumption choices are characterised by a cultural balancing between rural and urban styles as well as cultural transitions to urbanity. Young women from less secure middle-class families depict modest fashion choices, which allow them to access urbanity while maintaining adherence to rural gender norms. Young women from more secure middle-class families resort to bold and urban forms of fashion to lay claim to greater cultural sophistication and urbanised middle-class identities. In food cultures, there is a marked difference between educated and other middle-class families. Educated families imbibe diverse urban food traditions and modern cooking styles, while other middle-class families are more comfortably placed in rural food traditions. The diversity and adaptability of the young women's consumption practices reveals that they are able to wield commodities to access those aspects of urban culture that are most important for them.

In Chapter 8, this thesis examines marriage as a route to mobility, at the level of discourse and practice. While marriage was rarely discussed by the young women, their limited discourse reveals the risks of marrying migrants and suggests marriage is often conceived as part of young women's individual mobility plans. Parental discourses, on the other hand, were much more focused on the logistics of arranging hypergamous marriages for their educated daughters. In commenting on marriage and mobility, this chapter draws on the experiences of migrant wives who have been left behind to point out the sites of immobility and negotiation in the trajectory of marriage based mobility.

In Chapter 9, the thesis concludes by reviewing its main findings and contributions. It discusses the cultural transitions involved in moving away from the village space and the dissonance between mobility imaginaries and the experiences of the young women who are left behind in the village space. It also overviews the multiple constructs of middle-classness that emerge in the young women's differential navigations around education, consumption, appropriate femininity and caste identity. This thesis proposes that the mobility paradigm is a useful construct to examine strides towards class mobility among lower caste communities. Additionally, it serves to nuance the construct of Dalit women and contribute to the sparse

literature on Dalit women in Punjab. In conclusion, this chapter reiterates the continuities of caste and class disadvantages in the young women's trajectories of mobility. It comments on the uncertainties and challenges that the young women face in attaining mobility outcomes and etching their moving away.

2 Dalits in Punjab

2.1 Introduction

In examining the navigations of young women around migration, education and consumption, it is important to relay the context against which their interactions can be read and understood. Importantly, the young women's imperative to move away from the village or their use of education and migration to etch upwardly mobile identities cannot be seen as a decontextualised phenomenon. It is rooted, instead, in an evolving narrative of Dalit mobility in Punjab. This narrative perceives migration and movement abroad as well as education and professional employment as two distinct pathways to class mobility. While migration occupies primacy in the mobility imaginaries of the young men and women, education, especially of the young women, continues to operate as an important marker of middle-class status and respectability.

In addition, it is important to preface young women's interactions within the village with regard to larger social and political shifts in the context of Chaheru, Phagwara and Kapurthala district. Previous literature on the Dalit population in Punjab relates that strides in the spheres of employment, politics, religion, migration and education are strongly linked to Dalit mobility. Importantly, along with economic mobility, Ad-dharmi mobility is also associated with higher levels of political participation and the advent of social and religious movements for autonomy (Judge & Bal, 2009; Saberwal, 1976[25]). While politics and religion do not come forth in the young women's narratives, they are important sites of Dalit mobility in Punjab. In fact, the contemporary literature on the Ad-dharmis emphasises that the Ravidassi movement is an important symbol of caste mobility and serves as an affront to Jat dominance (Jodhka, 2004; Jodhka, 2009; Ram, 2004; Ram, 2009).

Thus, this chapter ties the larger literature on Dalits in Punjab to the young women's navigations around education, consumption and marriage. It attempts to develop a critical and nuanced reading of the context, which explains the emergence of mobility and middle-

[25] Saberwal (1976) focuses on male mobility primarily through the experiences of industrial entrepreneurs from three different lower caste groups—the Balmikis, Ad-Dharmis and Ramgharias. His findings pertain to different patterns of mobility among these three groups, which point to distinct processes in transitioning from a caste society to a more open society. Judge and Bal (2009) aimed at evaluating the shifting status of Dalits with regard to education, occupation, empowerment, entrepreneurship and emigration.

classness among the young women in Chaheru. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the geography, history and socio-demographic context of Chaheru and the second part of the chapter delves into its social and political context.

2.2 Locating Chaheru

2.2.1 Punjab

The field site is located in the state of Punjab, which is situated in North India and is the country's most prosperous state with the lowest poverty levels. While Punjab's levels of prosperity can be explained as a legacy of the Green Revolution, various studies have suggested the state's economic decline since the 1980s. The economic decline of Punjab is associated with the slowdown of its agricultural sector, low rates of industrial development and inability to attract investment. Punjab is also known as occupying the position of the being the most prosperous and indebted state in the country (World Bank, 2004). This contradictory nature of Punjab also characterizes its record on gender indicators, as will be elaborated in Section 2.4.

Among all the Indian states, Punjab has the highest proportion of Dalit population. It was pegged at 28.9 per cent in 2001 and went up to 31.94 per cent in 2011 (Census, 2001; Census, 2011). A common narrative around caste in Punjab is that while having the largest proportion of Dalits, the caste hierarchy in Punjab is weaker than in other states. Sharma (2012) attributes this to the presence of various reformist religions such as Islam, Sikhism and Christianity in the state that dislodged caste hierarchies and constructed an opposition to Brahmanical orthodoxy. Nevertheless, others such as Ram (2009) have pinpointed the divergent manifestations of caste discrimination in Punjab rather than its decline. He asserts that caste takes on material and political dimensions rather than overtones of purity-pollution principles. Ram (2009) points to the rampant landlessness among the Dalits and the close to complete monopolisation of agricultural land by the upper castes as a case in point. The Doaba region of Punjab, where the field site is located, has the highest proportion of Dalit population within Punjab and also a more pronounced Dalit mobility, wherein very few Dalits still work as attached labour (Jodhka, 2002). This context of Dalit mobility is important in interpreting the young women's claims and navigations around class mobility. The next two sections relay the historical and demographic context of Kapurthala district and the economic and political shifts in Phagwara.

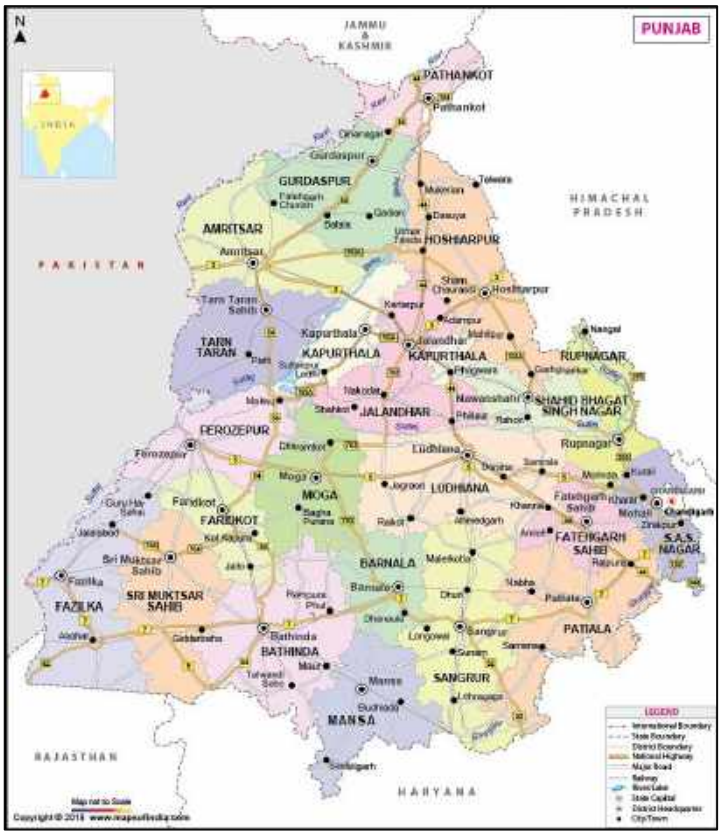

Figure 1.0: This is a district-wise map of Punjab. The north-eastern part of the state comprises the Doaba region and includes the districts of Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Nawanshahr and Kapurthala.

2.2.2 Kapurthala District

The study is located in the village of Chaheru in Phagwara, which is a part of Kapurthala district. Kapurthala district is in the Doaba region of Punjab and is split into two parts that are bound by the Beas and Sutlej rivers. Kapurthala *tehsil* and Sultanpur Lodhi tehsil form one part and Phagwara tehsil forms the second part of the district. Jalandhar surrounds Phagwara tehsil on all sides except in the north-east where Phagwara connects to Hoshiarpur (Gazetteer of Kapurthala, 1981).

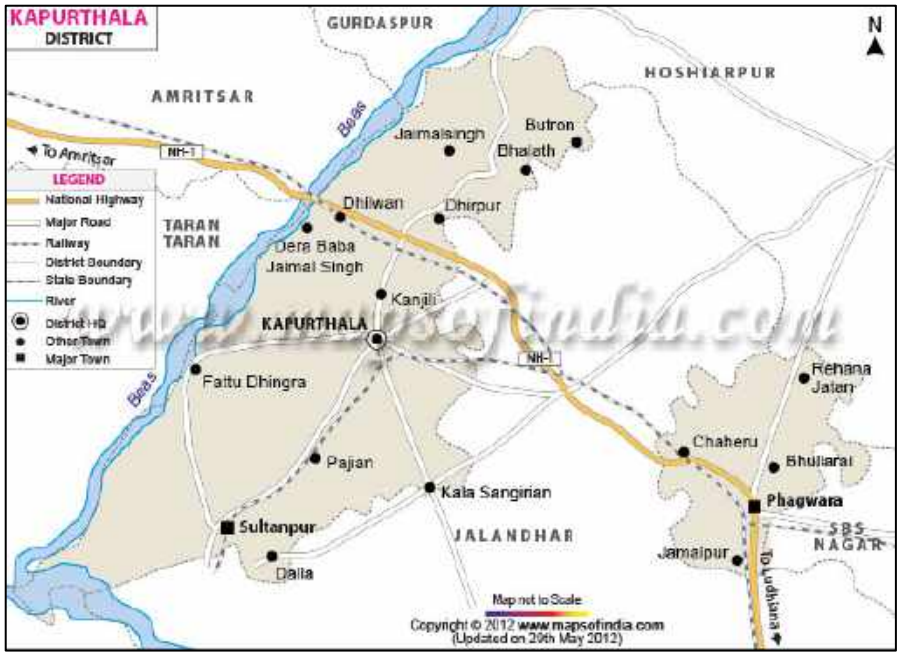

Figure 2.0: Map of Kapurthala district. This map shows that Kapurthala district is split into two non-continuous parts. Jalandhar separates Kapurthala tehsil and Sultanpur Lodhi tehsil from Phagwara[26].

Prior to the partition of India in 1947, Kapurthala was a princely state ruled by the Ahluwalia family, which traced its origin to the ruling house of Jaisalmer, as Rana Kapur, an immigrant from Jaisalmer, founded Kapurthala in the eleventh century. At this time, Kapurthala district consisted of five tehsils. Kapurthala, Sultanpur Lodhi and Phagwara were made subdivisions in 1965, 1970 and 1958 respectively. According to the 1981 Census, Kapurthala had a population of 5,45,249. 80.9 per cent of the district's population was born in Punjab while 17 per cent hailed from Pakistan. The remaining 2.1 per cent of the population was from other states of India such as Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir, or from other countries. Those hailing from Pakistan were people who had migrated during the time of Partition. Those born in other countries were the children of Punjabis who had gone abroad in their youth and had now come back or sent their children to Punjab. The migrants from Pakistan settled in Kapurthala and Sultanpur Lodhi while Phagwara mostly housed the original inhabitants of the area.

In 1981, Hindus comprised 38.02 per cent of the population in Kapurthala district, while the Sikhs were a numerical majority at 61.26 per cent. The number of Muslims was negligible at 0.20 per cent and this number has remained consistent since 1951. The Hindu castes in Kapurthala comprised of the Brahmans, Khatris, Aroras, Suds, Banias and Dalits. The

[26] In this map, Chaheru is the name of a town in Phagwara and does not refer to the village studied in this thesis.

proportion of Sikhs in Kapurthala was greater than their presence in Jalandhar (44.90 percent) and Punjab state (60.22 per cent). The main Sikh community in Kapurthala was the Jat community. Other Sikh communities included the Sainis, Kambohs, Khatris and Aroras. Dalits were found both among the Hindus and the Sikhs and in 1981, they formed 26.99 per cent of the total population. The Dalit presence in Kapurthala was similar to their state level population. Jalandhar district had a higher Dalit presence at 36.28 per cent. Among the Dalit castes in the district, the most numerous were the Ad-Dharmis, Balmikis and Chamars (Gazetteer of Kapurthala, 1981).

2.2.3 Phagwara

Phagwara is a well-connected industrial town that is located 23 km to the south-east of Jalandhar city and was historically a part of Jalandhar district until it was merged with Kapurthala district. Phagwara acquired importance towards the end of the nineteenth century as it developed into an important market town (Census, 1961; Census, 1971; Census, 1991). It was well known for its cotton textile manufacturing. It also housed a sugar mill, a starch mill and various units that manufactured engineering goods, automobile parts, brass utensils, sewing machines, agricultural tools and machine parts. Contemporarily, while some of these industries still exist, it is better known as an NRI town, given that a large majority of Punjabi NRIs hail from Phagwara (Census, 1991; Census, 2001; Census, 2011; Saberwal, 1976).

Phagwara has the highest number of road routes in the district. In 1971, in terms of amenities, the town had open service drains. Tube wells and hand pumps were the main sources of water supply. The supply of piped water was also underway by this time. Ninety per cent of the houses in the town were electrified, but there was a shortage of power for industrial units (Census, 1971). In 1991, it was found that compared to other areas in the district, Phagwara had the highest number of educational, medical, post and telegraph, market and *pucca* road facilities. In terms of the uptake of these facilities, the rural population in Phagwara had the highest usage of medical, pucca roads and post and telegraph facilities. While the educational uptake wasn't the highest in the district[27], it was still high at 97.67 per cent (Census, 1991). The education and literacy levels in Phagwara will be discussed in Section 2.7.

[27] The rural population in Nadala block had the highest usage of educational facilities at 98.26 per cent.

Historically, Phagwara has had a large Dalit population. In 1991, rural Phagwara had the highest Dalit population in the area at 25.64 per cent (Census, 1991). By 2011, this number had increased to 49.59 per cent. The steady increase in Phagwara's Dalit population also translates to the greater political representation and the growing power of the Scheduled Castes in the area (Census, 2011). In fact, both Phagwara and its corresponding Lok Sabha constituency are reserved for Dalits. This means that the state and central level political representatives from Phagwara have to be Dalits[28]. This scope for political representation is an important aspect of Dalit mobility in the area and facilitates a politically charged atmosphere in the village[29].

2.2.4 Chaheru

Chaheru is a rural settlement located at a distance of 5 km from Phagwara city. It is a predominantly Ad-dharmi settlement, barring a few OBC families from Bihar, a Brahmin family that recently moved into the area and a Jat family that resides at the outskirts of the village. Chaheru is part of a larger revenue village, Jindwa, which also has upper caste settlements. Jindwa first appeared in government records in 1961. In 1961, Jindwa village had 132 households with a total population of 770, out of which 413 or 53.63 per cent were Dalits (Census, 1961). In 2011, Jindwa village had 371 households and a total population of 1797, out of which 1148 or 63.88 per cent were Dalits (Census, 2011). Contemporarily, since Chaheru itself has 275 households and a total population of 1529, Chaheru appears to be the most densely populated settlement of Jindwa (village records, 2016).

As discussed in Section 3.4.6, while it was not possible to access the relevant historical records, Chaheru's history was reconstructed through the oral histories relayed by older community members from Chaheru and the adjoining upper caste settlement. These narratives revealed that Chaheru began to be populated post partition, as people began trickling in from different parts of Punjab and Pakistan. Villagers recount that in the 1950s, there were only two or three families in Chaheru and they all belonged to the Jhalle clan. Over the years, people from other clans also came to the village, often in search of economic opportunities. The village has two main clans now, Rattu and Jhalle, and some families from the Chahal, Virdi, Heer, Bains, Leer,

[28] http://www.elections.in/punjab/assembly-constituencies/phagwara.html

[29] Middle-aged men in the village were often aligned with different political parties and there seemed to be an air of secrecy around this as the men did not want others in the village to know about their political involvements. People in Chaheru were also quick to attach political motivations to the actions of the panchayat and the members of the management committee of the village.

Jakhu and Basanpal clans [30]. The first inhabitants of the village were the ancestors of a large Jhalle family. The present generation of this family consists of five brothers, their children and grandchildren. The brothers, now in their late 60s and 70s, migrated to the Gulf countries in the 1970s and worked and lived there for over 20 years. The brothers recount that when they were young, the entire family (all the married brothers with their wives and young children and the parents) lived together in a mud house. They used to tend to animals and draw water from a well inside their house. Currently, each of the brothers has a separate house built with permanent materials. The aesthetics and facilities of these houses vary based on the affluence of the family.

This Jhalle family came from a neighbouring village and in recounting the reasons for moving to this village, one of the brothers says,

> *In our village, we were told by the Jats not to take the water from their well, so we built a well in our house . . . our great grandfather's mother's brother, who did leather work at that time, did it just to spite the Jats. He used to say that since the Jats have a problem with us because we do unclean work and are dirty, we will actually do that work.* (March 30 2017)

While it was unclear whether the family actually moved to Chaheru because of the behaviour of the Jats in their ancestral village, most families alluded either to a history of upper caste discrimination or a lack of economic opportunities as the reason for moving to Chaheru or the Phagwara area. Moreover, the retelling of the Jhalle family story reflects the image of a self-sufficient and assertive lower caste community that was not reliant on the upper castes. In fact, families across the settlement denied having ever worked on Jat lands as agricultural labour, although the Jats in the upper caste settlement of the village insist that up until 25 years ago, Dalits did work on their lands so as to get fodder for their animals.

The Jhalle family story also mirrors the trajectory of the village's development. A turning point in the economic activities of the villagers came in the 1970s, when migration from the village to the Gulf countries began. Villagers see the advent of this migration to the Gulf and the Western countries as having brought *sudhar* or development to the village. Concurrently, the construction of migration as the main pathway to social mobility is pervasive and shapes social

[30] These clan names refer to family names or last names. A clan refers to a smaller subgroup of the main caste group. All the above-mentioned clan names are known as Ad-dharmi last names.

relations and norms in the village. At the level of popular conception and self-reporting, people in the village often claim that currently 70 per cent of the village has at least one family member living and working abroad. However, the *sarpanch* provides an informal tally[31] of only 31 households or 11.27 per cent of households having family members living abroad. Additionally, three families from the village are based abroad permanently. The first generation of migrants who had left in the 1970s had mainly gone to the Gulf countries. Presently, migration to *bade jagah*, which translates to big places and refers to migration to Europe or North America, is a preoccupation among young men. Often, upon their return from Gulf countries young men apply to go to big countries and then await such migration opportunities.

Villagers recount that in the 1960s, the settlement consisted of ten households, which were mostly *kacha* or temporary housing structures made of mud and had no walkways or roads. Since the 1970s, migrant money has transformed the settlement into a semi-urban space replete with shops, proper pathways and pucca or permanent housing structures. The 1971 Census indicates that at that time, Chaheru was electrified and connected by a pucca road. It housed a primary school and had access to hand pump water, well water and tube well water. Chaheru did not have medical amenities within the village, but it was only a short distance away from the main city hospital[32] (Census, 1971). The villagers also report that a proper road to the village was built around 2007.

Currently, Chaheru houses a primary school and a middle school that were established in 1985[33] and 1999 respectively. The villagers felt that since it was mostly Dalit children who attended the government schools, it did not make sense for their children to have to travel to the neighbouring upper caste settlement to attend middle school. Thus, they initiated the construction of the middle school in Chaheru, with one migrant family donating a single room in the school. In 1999, this settlement also set up its own panchayat based on the administrative mandate that a separate panchayat could be set up for every 200 households. At this time, the settlement was also renamed to a Punjabi term that translates to new settlement. While these shifts in the settlement were not articulated as instances of caste assertion by the villagers, they reflect the development of a distinct Dalit community and mirror the historical autonomy

[31] I sat with the sarpanch with the village voter list open before us. This list has pictures of all the heads of households in the village and that is how the sarpanch gave me the informal tally of migrant households in the village.
[32] Currently, the village also has a village doctor who runs a clinic in the village.
[33] Although the 1971 Census shows that there was a primary school in Chaheru, it was possible that while the money had been allocated in 1971, the primary school was only built by 1985.

acquired by the Ad-dharmis, especially in the Doaba region of Punjab.

Despite infrastructural developments, there are still persisting problems in Chaheru around water access and sewage. Families that are not well off and that do not own a motor[34] have to rely on the government water supply stored in tanks atop their houses. Since the larger water tank that stores the government water supply is located in an adjoining village rather than within Chaheru and most families do not own a motor, villagers have to cope with unreliable water supply. At the peak of summer, there are times when there is no water supply for many days. During such times, people manage their daily water requirements by taking water from their better off neighbours who own a motor. Also, the settlement has an open sewer and all the water from the sewer drains into a pond that is adjacent to the common land used by the villagers for growing crops and drying cow dung. While the current MLA has allocated funds to establish an underground sewer system, the work, while being underway, is not yet complete.

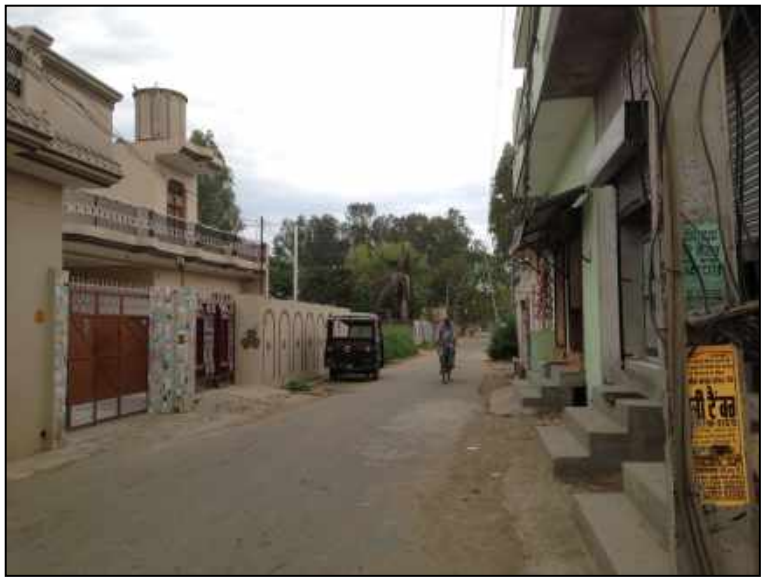

Figure 3.0: This is the main street of the village. On the right side are some shops that include a beauty parlour, a grocery shop and a store space that was a clothing shop for some time. On the left is the house of a migrant family that lives in the UK.

2.3 Economic Activities in Chaheru

A historical examination of the employment patterns in Jindwa reveals a shift away from agriculture to more diversified economic activities.

[34] It costs INR 50,000 to have a motor fixed in a house in Chaheru. A motor pumps groundwater to the surface and allows people to have personal access to water.

Jindwa	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Main Workers (Industry)
1961	94	13	40
1991	1	11	71
2011	87	1	504

Source: Census, 1961; Census, 1991 and Census, 2011.
Table 1.0: This table shows some of the male employment patterns in Jindwa between 1961 and 2011.

This table shows that between 1961 and 2011, the number of main workers in industry rose. The number of cultivators fluctuates and dips from 94 in 1961 to 1 in 1991 and then rises again to 87 in 2011. In 1961, the high incidence of cultivators is at odds with the self-reporting of most Ad-dharmis in Chaheru that they have historically been landless. However, given that there were only 234 Scheduled Caste men in Jindwa, most of the cultivators may have been upper castes. Additionally, in 1961, there appears to have been a greater focus on agriculture as an economic activity, as 45.92 per cent of the working population was involved with it (Census, 1961).

In 1991, there was a shift in the working pattern of Jindwa's population and the number of agricultural labourers declined to 11. Among the industrial main workers, most of them (93) worked in manufacturing, processing, services and repairs (Census, 1991). In 2011, only 17 per cent of Jindwa's workers were involved in agricultural work (Census, 2011).

At the Phagwara level, the 2011 Census reveals a clearer shift towards non-agricultural work. In 2011, among the Dalits in Phagwara, there were 17,543 male workers and 2,816 female workers. The breakdown of the Dalit population in terms of employment was: 16,777 main workers, 1,148 cultivators, 1,647 agricultural labourers and 890 household industry workers. Thus, 13.72 per cent of the population was involved in agricultural work. This is a decline from 1991, when 32.09 per cent of the Dalit population in Phagwara was engaged in agricultural work (Census, 2011). The shift in economic activities in Jindwa and Phagwara reflects the larger trend towards non-agricultural work among the Dalits in the Doaba region of Punjab.

Contemporarily, most Ad-dharmi families in Chaheru are landless[35] and they have moved away

[35] Some people especially return migrants, own commercial land that they use to set up shops. Some migrants also use small plots of land to plant vegetables. No one reports owning agricultural land.

from agricultural work. Instead, they engage in a wide range of economic activities with varying levels of success. As discussed in Section 1.7, some families have been able to set up larger profitable businesses[36] that deal with furniture, milk, cement or tractors. Others are running smaller businesses such as a grocery store in the village, a catering service or driving an auto-rickshaw. As mentioned in Section 1.7, there are only a few families that are or have been professionally employed. Most of the young men do labour work, either locally or abroad. Some of them are even in supervisory positions. Presently, while none of the men work as agricultural labourers for Jat farmers, some of the women, in order to supplement their family's income, work in the houses of Jat migrant families outside the vicinity of the village. Also, older women from poorer households do MNREGA[37] work in the village.

Figure 4.0: These stores are located at the beginning of the village and are owned by the villagers. Heer Mobile sells mobile phones and recharge packs or coupons. MoneyGram is a service for sending and receiving money from abroad. These stores are also spaces where the young and middle-aged men socialise in the evenings.

[36] Saberwal (1976) and Judge and Bal (2009) note the increasing uptake of entrepreneurial activities by the Ad-dharmis, in comparison to other lower caste groups. In their study, Judge and Bal (2009) found that in Jalandhar, a majority of the lower caste entrepreneurs are Ad-Dharmis. Most of their entrepreneurial activities in Jalandhar pertain to their traditional occupation and involve businesses that deal with raw hides, tanning of leather and snaring of skins. In Amritsar, they were involved in shoe-making activities. In the context of Phagwara, the Ad-dharmis have either moved away from their traditional occupations of leather work and weaving or become traders in traditional caste products of cloth and leather as well as automobiles, tractors, diesel pumps, etc., which, Saberwal (1976) argues, are also becoming caste products. Interestingly, in comparison to the Balmikis who have generally followed their traditional occupation, the Ad-dharmis have moved into new occupations through apprenticeships. They have relied on kin and family links, non-kin links, political intervention and multi-caste organisations to make the transition to non-caste-based familial skills.

[37] In Chaheru, work under the MNREGA scheme has become a devalued and gendered form of labour that only women engage in. Interestingly, while men did not do this work, it was supervised by the sarpanch's brother.

Figure 5.0: Older women from poorer households carrying out MNREGA work. This particular project involved rebuilding the roof of the village gurdwara.

2.4 Gender

In contemporary gender discourse of India, Punjab is often understood through the prism of sex-selection because it has acquired the national reputation of being one of the states with the lowest sex ratios in India. In 2011, the sex ratio of Punjab was 895 girls for every 1,000 boys. This is a minor improvement from 876 girls per 1,000 boys in 2001 (Census, 2001; Census, 2011; NFHS, 2016). This continuing context of a preference for the male child and sex-selection is at odds with Punjab's better performance in other indicators of female status such as high female literacy, low child mortality, high contraceptive use, high rate of institutional delivery and later age marriage (Behl, 2010; Judge & Bal, 2009; Sharma, 2012). The 2015-2016 National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reveals that in Kapurthala, the sex ratio at birth for children born in the last five years is 776. This is significantly lower than the state average and coexists alongside an 87.1 per cent female literacy rate, which almost equals the male literacy rate at 87.3 per cent. In Kapurthala, only 6.7 per cent of the women marry before the age of 18 and most get married after they turn 21. There was a small proportion of women (1.6 per cent), aged 15-19 years, who were either already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey. The rate of institutional delivery is high at 91.2 per cent (NFHS, 2016).

At the state level, in 2011, the mean age of marriage for women in Punjab was 22.4 as opposed to 21.2 at the all India level. Also, the gap between male and female literacy rates has reduced

from 11.9 per cent in 2001 to 9.7 per cent in 2011. The enrolment of girls in primary classes has also increased from 77.38 and 64.57 per cent to 108.3 per cent (age group 6-11 years) and 91.7 per cent (age group 14-18 years), respectively. In 2012-2013, the dropout rate for girls was 1.56 per cent at the primary and (-)0.15 per cent at the upper primary level. This compares with the corresponding figures for boys which were 1.75 and 0.13 per cent respectively (Economic and Statistical Organization, 2012). In their study on the impact of education on SC women's development, Sharma and Aggarwal (2004) note that between 1971 and 1991, there was a greater increase in the literacy rates among SC women than their male counterparts. The low literacy districts such as Bhatinda, Faridkot and Sangrur experienced a higher increase in literacy rates than the high literacy districts of Hoshiarpur, Rupnagar and Jallandhar.

Taken together, it appears that in Punjab, and more specifically in Kapurthala, women are faring better in literacy, education, institutional delivery and age at marriage. However, in addition to the continuing issue of sex-selection[38], women in Punjab also have a lower workforce participation at 13.9 per cent, in contrast to the national average of 25.5 per cent. Additionally, in 2011, women only consisted of 25.83 per cent of government employees, which is one fourth of the employees working in the government and semi-government sector (Economic and Statistical Organization, 2012)

Some of these patterns also reverberated in Chaheru. For instance, most young women in Chaheru pursued education till grade 12 and those from upwardly mobile families also completed their BA and MA degrees. Young women, especially from upwardly mobile families, also got married much later, between the ages of 21 and 25. Moreover, these young women were often the first in their families to be pursuing higher levels of education and they appeared to enjoy greater physical and cultural mobility than the previous generations of Punjabi Ad-dharmi women.

The previous generation of women, who are currently between 50 to 70 years of age, reported being subject to stricter gender norms. They recount that they had to draw *ghoonghat* or cover their faces and were often unable to see where they were going. This made it difficult for them to fetch water from the well. In better off families, the work of getting food for the cattle was performed by the mother-in-law, as the daughter-in-law was not allowed to go out to the fields. Other women from less wealthy households talk about how physically strenuous it was for

[38] Over the years, the sex ratio at birth is also improving constantly in the state. It increased from 754 in 2001 to 852 in 2011.

them to manage the cattle, work in the fields and take care of the household. Historically, Dalit women always worked outside the home, often performing devalued agricultural labour and their physical mobility not being as restricted as that of the upper caste women. But as discussed in Section 1.6.5 placing restrictions on women's physical mobility, among upwardly mobile Dalits is an important way of enforcing respectability. In fact, even in the contemporary context, while young women from Chaheru could leave the village to attend educational institutes or go shopping in the market, they were not supposed to be walking within the village. Young and old women alike emphasised that they do not roam around in the village and remain within their homes. Young women wandering around in the village were seen to be of loose character and older women doing the same were seen as belonging to low status families. Thus, despite the strides that young women have made in terms of negotiating access to education and urban environments, they are still expected to perform respectability. Moreover, echoing the patterns of female employment in Punjab and Kapurthala, in Chaheru young women's educational outcomes rarely translate to respectable and secure forms of employment.

In Chaheru, while there were no explicit discussions on the preference for a male child, sons occupied a distinct position in the household. Even as the young women pursued higher levels of education and performed their roles as dutiful daughters and the young men fell into drug habits as they waited for the right migration opportunity, the latter occupied a higher position in the household. They exercised authority in the household, dictated decisions about food and household purchases and often had their whims accommodated, albeit grudgingly. It was common to hear of young unemployed men asking their mothers for money to support their personal, and often drug related expenses and the mothers obliging. In contrast, the expenses of the young women were more closely monitored. They rarely took money for personal expenses and were not expected to make regular monetary demands outside of their schooling expenses or clothes for select events such as graduation or weddings.

Even though a number of young men failed to fulfil their gendered responsibility of providing for the household, their mothers did not haul them up for this. Even family concerns around young men's drug addiction were either not voiced at all or, when expressed, were worded carefully so as not to incite a negative response from the sons. Unless sons were publicly disrespectful, their mothers talked about them fondly and highlighted their positive traits. In addition to the elevated position of sons within the family, the preference for a male child was

evident in the village shrine where most people prayed for a boy[39]. Moreover, in some families where there were no grandsons and only granddaughters, using male pronouns to refer to a granddaughter and dressing her in male clothes appeared to counter the disappointment of not having a grandson. Thus, patterns of gender mobility in Chaheru echoed those in Kapurthala. While young women in Chaheru were making strides in acquiring greater physical mobility and education, it did not necessarily translate into employment. Also, the preference for a male child and gendered ideas of respectability remained a reality.

2.5 Religion and Politics

Given the political opportunities in Chaheru and the history of the Ad-dharmi movement, politics emerges as a natural pathway for acquiring social prestige. However, as explained in Section 3.5, given my positionality in Chaheru, I was not able to access much information on people's political strategies or involvements. What I uncovered was that at the level of general discourse, middle-class families associated politics with a lack of *jankari* and backwardness. In addition, as pointed out by Saberwal (1976), politics was associated with divisiveness and middle-aged men in Chaheru often linked the absence of communal unity to varying political affiliations and lower education levels amongst the community. The underlying assumption of this discourse was that if the people were more educated, it would lead to less political divisions and more informed political decisions.

This discourse around politics is at odds with the involvement of middle-class middle-aged men in village and electoral politics. Often, these men were part of organisational committees that managed religious sites in the village and were aligned with either the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (Congress) or the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)[40]. But in conversations with me, they refuted any political involvement and did not reveal their political affiliations[41].This may also indicate the shifting role of politics, wherein it is no longer a community level discourse but is tied, instead, to the individual political aspirations of

[39] In the village shrine, people placed different objects to connote their wish and what they prayed for. The flowerpot symbolised the wish for a son and it was the most numerous item in the shrine.
[40] The BJP and the Congress are the two major national parties in India. The Congress party is associated with India's freedom struggle and was India's first national party. It occupies a centre-left position in Indian politics. The BJP is the current ruling party and occupies a centre-right position in Indian politics. BSP is the third largest national party in India. It was created to represent the voice and concerns of the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes
[41] In fact, in many cases, people denied political involvement, but then I would find them at a political event or alongside the representative of a political party. The resistance to revealing their political interests and affiliations can be linked to their suspicions of my objectives as well as a political strategy hinging on not revealing political alignment to other community members.

middle-aged men. Saberwal (1976) contends that as people acquire greater levels of education and differentiation by occupation, their interests diverge and caste solidarity at the political level becomes less important. Avenues and networks which spread beyond caste become available and relevant.

This appears to be the case in Chaheru, as people's political interests are not defined by their caste identity. Others have noted that while Dalit parties like the BSP have had limited success in Punjab [42], Dalit politics has shifted to the sphere of religion and various *Deras* and saints have proliferated around the idea of an Ad-dharmi or Chamar identity (Judge and Bal, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2010). Thus, it may be more useful to examine religious practice and discourse to glean Dalit political navigations.

One of the most influential religious movements to emerge out of Punjab in the contemporary period is the Ravidassia movement. This religious movement is linked to a stronger assertion of the Ad-dharmi identity, the building of Deras or spaces of religious worship and the consolidation of religious rituals. This contemporary focus on establishing a distinctive religious Dalit identity can be traced back to the Ad-dharm movement, which began in Punjab in the 1920s.

This movement strove to override the stigma of untouchability and secure equal rights for lower castes by instilling social and cultural awakening amongst them. Alongside demands for political inclusion, the Ad-Dharm movement also sought to distinguish itself from Hinduism and Sikhism and provide a ". . . theological podium to sustain and reinforce the new Dalit identity . . ." (Ram, 2004, p. 331). In fact, The Ad-Dharm movement changed its name to the Ravidas Mandal in 1946 and propagated the religious Ravidassi[43] identity[44] (Ram, 2004; Jodhka, 2004; Jodhka, 2009). Over time, the Ravidassias evolved into a religious movement,

[42] The BSP began its activities in earnest in Punjab in the late 1990s, but it was unable to garner significant political representation (Judge & Bal, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2010). Interestingly, at the time of my fieldwork, while a BJP MLA was in power, many times when the people were faced with problems like not getting the allotted fee reduction for SCs in college, they went to see the local representative of the BSP party. Thus, despite its lack of electoral success, the BSP seemed to occupy an important spot in village politics.

[43] Guru Ravidas was born in 1450 AD in an 'untouchable' caste and over time, he came to be known as a saint. He talked about an alternative society and protested against Brahmanical control. The Ravidassi religious identity operated independently of the Ad-Dharm movement, but was bolstered by it and post 1946, there was a coming together of the two movements (Ram, 2004).

[44] Contemporarily, there appears to be a distinction between those who ascribe to the Ad-Dharmi identity versus the Ravidassia identity. Ad-Dharmi signifies a caste group within the ambit of Sikhism whereas Ravidassia implies the adoption of a distinct religious identity. This distinction has been corroborated on the basis of previous research and Census caste categories.

which is exclusive to the Ad-dharmis and involves the set-up of a distinctive religion[45]. Within India, a central institution of the movement is the Dera Sachkhand Ballan (henceforth, referred to as Dera Ballan) near Jalandhar. But the Ravidassia movement is widespread across other parts of North India as well, like Delhi and Benares. In fact, since Guru Ravidass was born in Benares, the city houses the most revered Ravidass temple that is visited by devotees every year at the time of Ravidass Jayanti or the celebration of Guru Ravidass' birthday

The Ravidassia movement reinforces caste consciousness since it involves the building of Deras. Additionally, it is seen as an affront to mainstream Sikhism and has been associated with a spurt in caste tensions[46] (Ram, 2009; Singh et al., 2012). Caste tensions have been noted especially over the control of religious spaces[47]. In the context of Chaheru, as will be detailed below, the clashes between Sikhs and Ad-dharmis are largely seen as consequences of an increasingly separatist Ravidassia identity and its politics. Although there were demands by some people to place the *Amrit Bani* in the village gurdwara, most people in Chaheru were against Dera Ballan's move to establish a distinct religious text post the incident of 2009. They criticised the current separatist orientation of the Ravidassia movement, as they perceived Sikhism as a part of their cultural ethos[48]. In recounting this connection, Sonia's father, Kulwinder says, "Sikhism is the tree and we are its branches . . .". This references the linkages to Sikhism that the Ad-dharmis experience. Generally, their grievances are targeted towards the Jats, who are seen to be hijacking the religion rather than Sikhism itself.

[45] This movement has been spearheaded by Ad-dharmis residing abroad. Notably, Ravidassia Deras have been set up in various cities in Australia, the UK, Scotland, Canada, Fiji, New Zealand, the USA, Italy, France, Netherlands and Spain.

[46] The clash between Sikhism and the Ravidassia movement has become heightened post 2009 when Ramanad Dass, the leader of Dera Ballan, was murdered by Sikh men in Vienna's Ravidass temple. Prior to 2009, the Ravidassia movement used the Sikh religious text, called the *Adi-Granth*, as it contained the hymns of Guru Ravidas. Post 2009, the movement attempted to institutionalise its distinction from Sikhism by creating a separate religious book called the *Amrit Bani*, which exclusively contains the teachings of Guru Ravidas. This move is continually contested as gurdwaras, which initially housed the Adi-Granth, are unwilling to remove it and replace it with the Amrit Bani.

[47] Jodhka (2004) pinpoints that the Ad-Dharmis insistence on being included in the gurdwara committee was not merely an assertion of Dalit identity but rather, a claim for inclusion within the Sikh community. Thus, the caste clashes do not merely operate at the level of caste identity but reflect a deeper conflict among Dalits about the relationship they seek to forge with the upper caste Sikhs and with Sikhism. It poses the question about whether Ad-dharmis seek incorporation or complete autonomy from Sikhism. Judge & Bal (2009) purport that the Dalit middle class is no longer interested in assimilating into the upper caste fold and is making claims for equal participation. These conflicts reflect a transitional stage in which upwardly mobile Ad-dharmis and upper caste Sikhs are engaged in a tussle for power and control.

[48] At the time of my fieldwork, in October 2015, there were a series of incidents in different parts of Punjab where the Adi-Granth was desecrated. While later on it was revealed that there were Sikh men involved in these incidents, within the community, the circulating rumour was that this was the work of Dalit miscreants. These incidents lead to massive protests by Sikh institutions and for a period of two to three weeks, the fear of violent protests made travelling within Punjab difficult. At this time, there were many conversations within the community about the incident. Most people concurred that while the Jats historically looked down on them, this situation was changing and while Jat ownership of Sikhism can be challenged, they (the Ad-dharmis) are not opposed to Sikhism itself. Much later it emerged that all the parties involved in the desecration were Sikh and some were even *pathis* or priests in Sikh gurdwaras.

While most people in Chaheu respect the Dera Ballan for fostering the distinct caste identity of the Ad-dharmis, they also perceive its current form as being elitist and separatist. This is discussed in the Appendix. More importantly, the Ravidassia identity, while being seen as an overarching communal identity, is not adopted by all Ad-dharmis as a religious identity. Villagers celebrate Ravidass Jayanti as a cultural event which involves not only some religious rituals, but also festivities and cultural activities like *jaggo* and singing of songs about Dalit pride. Thus, contrary to the overlap between the Ravidassia and Ad-dharmi identity posited in much of the literature on the Ravidassia movement, in Chaheru, the community self-identifies as Ad-dharmi (for example see Jodhka, 2004; Jodhka, 2009; Ram, 2004; Ram, 2009). In their religious beliefs, middle-class families display a wide variety of beliefs. While some middle-class families align with the religious Ravidassia identity, others follow more multi-caste or upper caste religious movements. This is detailed in the Appendix.

2.6 Migration

2.6.1 Migration in Punjab

In the contemporary imagination of Punjab, migration is seen as synonymous with Punjabi culture. A celebratory narrative of migration is pervasive in Punjabi popular culture[49], state discourse[50] and everyday parlance in Punjabi villages and towns. A stroll on the streets of Jalandhar or Phagwara reveals a proliferation of visa agencies and institutes that advertise *IELTS* classes. Young women from rural areas migrate to these cities to be able to enrol in IELTS classes and successfully take the IELTS test. Additionally, young men and women try different routes to secure migration such as sponsorship through relatives and marriage to *pakka* migrants.

Migration from Punjab dates back to the colonial period, beginning from 1849, Sikhs were inducted into the Indian army and taken to different countries under the British empire. The soldiers, when they returned, narrated fascinating stories about foreign lands and encouraged

[49] Punjabi songs and movies also purport an image of the successful, independent, wealthy and powerful migrant.
[50] Beginning from the 1990s, there has been a concerted move to attract foreign investment by stroking the sentiments of migrants and finding terms to describe their relationship with India. From 1996 onwards, the Punjab government started creating institutional channels to engage migrants in the development of Punjab. With the advent of the BJP national government in the 2014 general election, public discourse has been preoccupied with assuaging the Indian diaspora. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been avidly positioning India as a prime destination for foreign investment and constructing NRIs as development partners (Kaur, 2015; Rajan & Varghese, 2010; Tatla, 1999; Tatla, 2009).

other young men to migrate to other British colonies. Post the Second World War, in the 1950s, Sikhs from rural Punjab migrated to the UK in large numbers. These were mostly male migrants seeking better financial opportunities abroad. At that time, Canada and the US also had more open immigration policies. While Punjab's migration culture has a long history, in the present context, this "craze to go abroad" can be understood through contemporary socio-political realities (Bhawra, 2013 p. 1)

In the early 1980s, as agricultural productivity and incomes began dwindling, agrarian protests coincided with the political unrest and persecution that followed Operation Blue Star[51] (Chopra, 2011; Gill, 2005; Gill, 2009; Singh, Singh & Ghuman, 2007). This coinciding of economic and political turmoil conspired to create social uncertainty and led to the exodus of young men from Punjab. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the "sending away of young men . . . especially 'battle-aged' men was a veiled way of resisting, critiquing and responding to the emerging violence . . ." (Chopra, 2011, p. 7). Currently, migration has become increasingly linked to livelihood strategies as Punjab reels under the effects of a stagnant agricultural economy, low rates of industrialisation, male unemployment and diminishing public services (Chopra, 2011; Gill, 2005; Gill, 2009; Singh, Singh & Ghuman, 2007; World Bank, 2004). In addition, the active operation of agents, chain migration through family members or relatives and the unwillingness to take up menial jobs within India are other factors that also propel migration. Moreover, migration has become an important symbol of status, wealth and mobility (Bhawra, 2012). It is such cultural discourses and meaning making attached to migration that this thesis is interested in exploring.

Most early migrants from the Doaba region of Punjab were young and single[52] Jat men. These men belonged to rural areas and were either illiterate or had a low educational background. They generally took up unskilled or semi-skilled occupations in the new countries they migrated to. For instance, in North America, they were involved in railroad construction and lumber mills. By the first decade of the twentieth century, they were being employed in agricultural farms as a replacement for the existing Japanese and Chinese farm workers. Britain also recruited workers from Punjab to join its industrial workforce. Over time, those migrating

[51] In June 1984, India's Prime Minister at the time, Indira Gandhi, ordered a raid at the Golden Temple in Amritsar to capture a popular separatist leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was seeking refuge at the holy site. This operation and its aftermath in the form of persecution of Sikhs and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 were widely condemned and perceived as a violation of Sikh religious sentiments by the global Sikh community (Chopra, 2011; Fair, 2005).
[52] Those who were married travelled without their wives and children.

from India also consisted of qualified professional workers, but the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from rural Punjab continues (Kapuria & Birwal, 2017).

Another phase of international migration, particularly relevant in the context of Chaheru, is that to the Gulf countries. In the mid-1970s, the rise in oil prices and the resulting infrastructural development opened up opportunities for men to migrate to the Gulf countries as unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. Gulf migration was a particularly popular avenue of migration for Dalit Punjabis, as opposed to the Jats (Judge & Bal, 2009; Kapuria & Birwal, 2017). In fact, currently in Chaheru, younger men take their migration to the Gulf for granted, as something that they will easily be able to attain due to its lower costs. Instead, their sights are set on migrating to bigger countries and competing with the level of affluence and status depicted by the Jats.

The contemporary trend of migration from Punjab is that of continued migration to the Gulf countries and to the traditional migrant destinations like the US, the UK, Canada and Australia along with migration to a large number of countries in southern and eastern Europe (Kapuria & Birwal, 2017). In fact, since 1990, Italy has become a popular migrant destination for Punjabi men. Based on the number of nationality verifications of irregular migrants, it appears that out of a total of 28,319 nationality verifications done between 2005 and 2011, 81.41 per cent pertained to the EU, out of which 33.71 per cent were from Italy. This is an indicator of the increasing popularity of Italy as a migrant destination (Sahai & Lum, 2013). In fact, a number of the young men who had migrated to the EU from Chaheru, were working in the dairy industry in Italy.

In order to ascertain the level of Punjabi migration, it is useful to look at different sources of data. According to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, 804,878 emigration clearances were granted in 2014. This was an increase of 163,522 from 2010. Since emigration clearances are only required for migration to the Gulf countries under certain categories, it only provides a partial view of migration. While according to this source of data, Punjab does not appear to be a significant contributor to the pool of Gulf migrants, its share has increased from 4.8 per cent to 6 per cent between 2010 and 2014 respectively (Kapuria & Birwal, 2017). In addition, one can glean the size of the Punjabi diaspora in different countries. In Canada, 568,375 Canadians reported Punjabi as their mother tongue[53]. Another measure of migration to the EU

[53] https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/punjabi-among-top-three-immigrant-languages-in-canada/story-mSpOPf0BCPBKFAJYUpBQ7

can be derived from the number of criminal cases registered around irregular migration. There were altogether 6,000 criminal cases pertaining to irregular migration that were registered in the state of Punjab during a 10-year period., from 2002 to 2011. Four of the most affected districts were Kapurthala (615), Hoshiarpur (584), Jalandhar Commissionerate (540) and Jalandhar Rural (532) (Bhawra, 2013). While there is no separate data on Dalit migration, the next section will draw on contemporary migration trends in Chaheru as well as historical works on Punjabi migration to etch the larger patterns of Dalit migration.

2.6.2 Dalit Migration

In Dalit communities such as the one in Chaheru, migration is even more valued because it is seen to be crucial in allowing lower castes groups to attain economic mobility and override caste stigma. In the Indian context, the first Dalit migrations were those of indentured labour to Fiji (Kumar, 2004). Most of this migration took place from Madras and Calcutta. In Punjab, with the exception of Judge and Bal (2009)'s study, which will be discussed shortly, there are no studies that focus solely on the migration of Punjabi Dalits.

However, Kessinger (1974) and Juergensmeyer (2010), in their works on the history of a Punjabi village and the Ad-dharm movement in Punjab respectively, convey that some Dalit families were migrating from the Doaba region of Punjab in the 19th century. Also, in his work on Punjabi migration to New Zealand, McLeod (1986) finds that there were a significant number of Chamars who migrated between 1912 and 1939 and their numbers were second only to the Jats. However, it wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that migration to the Gulf countries, North America and Europe became accessible for Dalit populations. Judge and Bal (2009) find that among the lower caste emigrants, the Ad-dharmis form an overwhelming majority. They link the higher propensity of the Ad-dharmis to engage with migration, more so than any other Dalit groups in Punjab, to the rise of the leather trade in the 19th century which led to an improvement in the economic conditions of the Ad-dharmis and allowed them to migrate.

Importantly, in reflecting upon the process of migration for the Ad-dharmis in the early 20th century, Judge and Bal (2009) point out the role of better placed upper caste friends or employers in facilitating this movement. They suggest that the Jats' imperative to migrate abroad for greater prosperity influenced the Chamars to do the same and that their relationship

with their Jat landlords facilitated this movement. For instance, in recounting the factors that led to the migration of Mangoo Ram, the founder of the Ad-dharm movement, Juergensmeyer (2010) mentions that in 1909, many upper caste farmers from Hoshiarpur had gone to the US. Those who had not been able to go were talking about it and ". . . America was in the air . . ." (p. 284).

Influenced by this environment of mobility and adventure, Mangoo Ram appears to have convinced his father that it would be good for their economic prospects if he went abroad. Once in the United States, he worked for former landlords from his village for a few years before transitioning to other types of work. Thus, the initial wave of Dalit emigrants, especially to the Western countries, were inspired and aided by their upper caste landlords, even when they were abroad (Judge and Bal, 2009). Judge and Bal (2009) also explain that the Jat landlords and the lower castes that worked for them had a durable bond that involved family relations. Thus, when the Jat farmers migrated, they took along a number of Dalit boys with them.

In Chaheru, migration is aided by well settled migrants who are either caste compatriots from the village or upper caste employers from the city in whose homes some of the women from the village work. Those who are left behind or who have not been able to migrate often curry favour with migrant relatives, employers and neighbours in an effort to access opportunities for migration. In fact, the paid and unpaid work that they perform for the well-placed migrant families is characterised by an implicit promise of migration. This especially comes forth in the case of Meeta, who stays with Reshmo[54] whenever the latter is visiting the village. Meeta cooks for Reshmo and takes care of her house for a few weeks. This support appears premised on an understanding that it will lead to a migration opportunity opening up for Meeta. She often talks to Reshmo about the troubles she is having with her father-in-law and about her desire to move away by migrating to the US. In response, Reshmo assures her that she will facilitate her migration.

In addition to maintaining good interpersonal relations with those higher up in the social hierarchy, Judge and Bal (2009) also point to other factors that facilitate Dalit migration. For instance, in 1952, the posting of the first Dalit gazette officer in Punjab made passports more

[54] Reshmo is an older woman in her mid-fifties who resides in the US with her husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. They illegally migrated to the US 20 years ago. Reshmo comes to visit the village every year for a couple of months. She owns two properties in and around the village. In her absence, the sarpanch and his wife clean her house and maintain the plots. Earlier, another less well-to-do family in the village used to do the same work

readily available for Dalits. They estimate that this officer aided the migration of 500 Dalits each year until the end of his tenure.

Despite the role of personal networks and institutional actors in facilitating Dalit migration, it is often presented as a story of personal mobility. In reflecting on this sentiment, Kumar (2004) relates that Dalit mobility is perceived as being essential to breaking down stereotypes about the Dalits being ". . . dirty, drunkard, devoid of any merit, beast of burden . . ." (p. 115). In fact, in Chaheru, post the 1970s, when migration, especially to the Gulf countries, became more commonplace, the community appears to have undergone an economic and cultural transformation. This migration associated wealth and development was a source of pride for the villagers because it reflected an independent trajectory of Dalit mobility that was not reliant either on state support or on affirmative action.

However, Judge and Bal (2009) are wary about equating the economic mobility attained through migration with Dalit families' enduring social status and prestige. Specifically, they find that while at the level of discourse and popular culture, migration is seen as the gateway for a better life and prosperity, the link between migration and its social consequences is ambivalent. Judge and Bal (2009) assert that most Dalit migrants are only able to engage in short-term migration to the Gulf countries. As a result, upon their return, unless they invest wisely, they lose their economic prosperity. They then seek to migrate again by borrowing money.

In fact, this a pattern that reverberates in Chaheru as migration is often associated with tying oneself up in a cycle of debt. Initially, in order to migrate, families have to take loans. Among most families, given the costs of migrating to a European country, male members try to migrate to the Gulf first. Upon migration to the Gulf countries, often due to their own expenses and periods of low work, male migrants are unable to remit sufficient money back to their families. Their families then have to take loans for larger expenses like weddings and medical emergencies. This economic insecurity among migrant families comes forth in the case of Gunita's family, as will be elaborated in Chapter 7.

When migrants return home, if they are older, they attempt to set up a business. But if they are younger, they may take on another loan to be able to migrate to 'bigger' Western countries. Thus, as mentioned by Judge and Bal (2009), this cycle continues until male family members

are either no longer able to get visas or are too old to be able to migrate. Admittedly, while migration is associated with ideas of mobility, in application it is fraught with challenges around economic insecurity and increased indebtedness.

This thesis is less concerned with the mechanics of migration and more so with the ways in which it is interpreted and understood among upwardly mobile families in Chaheru. It is important to note that in Chaheru while migration does not necessarily translate into enduring assertions of economic mobility, it is associated with a spike in the wealth and consumption capacity of families. It allows families to build larger and more modern houses, which symbolise their economic status even when they are struggling to meet their everyday expenses. In fact, as will be elaborated with respect to Gunita's family in Chapter 7, even in the absence of a reliable source of income, migrant families continue to maintain a public veneer of wealth. Thus, despite the uncertainties and immobilities inherent in migration, this thesis seeks to explore the ways in which it has become a part of the mobility imaginaries and culture of middle-classness in Chaheru. This is explored in Chapter 5.

2.7 Education

2.7.1 Education and Dalit Mobility

The literature on Dalits and education suggests that education has historically been perceived as a crucial aspect of individual mobility and social development. The lure of education for development has been linked to its potential to allow marginalised groups to attain achieved status and overcome their ascribed status or identities[55] (Chanana, 1993; Ciotti, 2006; Judge & Bal, 2009). However, both historical and contemporary works on Dalit education in Punjab have shown that education, as a site of social mobility, is available only to a minority of better placed Dalits (Judge & Bal, 2009; Pimpley, 1976). In fact, even in Chaheru, it was only a small number of upwardly mobile families that were able to pursue education. Most lower-class families sent their children to government or low-cost private schools and did not perceive education as being important to their children's future success. These families planned on

[55] The imperative to make education accessible for lower caste populations can be traced back to the postcolonial period in India. At the state level, the education of Dalits was seen as being crucial to their upliftment and was facilitated through institutional mechanisms. Reservations for Dalits in government services was first instated in 1943 and the post-matric scholarship scheme for Scheduled Castes and Tribes was set up in 1948-49 (Chanana, 1993). Education was deemed necessary to enable Dalits to move away from traditional occupations that were seen as polluting and mobilise for a higher status (Judge & Bal, 2009).

sending their male children to the Gulf and educating their female children till grade 12 before marrying them off. Thus, education emerges as a tenable site of mobility only for those families that have acquired enough economic resources through migration, business and employment. These families also attempt to claim proximity to middle-class culture and education is an important element of establishing their positionality.

Given the centrality of migration, education, as a route to mobility, was not prioritised by all well off families. Among the upwardly mobile families, based on a family's occupational culture and economic positioning, there were varying levels of interest in education as a site of mobility. Less educated migrant and self-employed families were ambivalent about the value of education. In these families, the male children and the older female children were educated till grade 10 or 12. It was only the younger women in these families who were able to access higher levels of education. Thus, even when education was being pursued, there was a small minority of the upwardly mobile population that was pursuing higher levels of education (Judge & Bal, 2009; Pimpley, 1976). In Chaheru, a focus on higher education for both male and female children as well as discussions about the value of education were concentrated in families where the fathers were professionally employed in government jobs. In these educated families, education was the basis for social distinction and a claim to middle-class status. These distinctive interactions with education as a site of mobility based on one's occupational and family culture will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Even when young women were able to attain undergraduate and postgraduate education, it did not coincide with commensurate occupational opportunities opening up for them[56]. Judge and Bal (2009), in their work on social change in rural and urban Dalit communities in Jalandhar and Amritsar, point out that despite generational advances[57] in education, the educational attainments themselves have not been significant enough to propel occupational changes. They note that less than 5 per cent of the Dalits in urban areas and less than 1 per cent in rural areas have a postgraduate degree or are trained in professional courses (Judge and Bal, 2009). Similarly, Ghuman, Singh and Brar (2006) relay the historical pattern around uptake of higher

[56] Judge and Bal (2009) note that the literacy rate for Scheduled Caste populations in Punjab has shown an improvement from 41.09 per cent in 1991 to 56.22 per cent in 2001 and 64.81 per cent in 2011. But the occupational mobility of Dalits is restricted due to their socioeconomic position and historical disadvantage (Judge & Bal, 2009).

[57] Judge and Bal (2009) assert that while 3.12 per cent of the rural respondents and 10 per cent of the urban respondents completed high school, only 0.63 per cent and 3.75 per cent of their fathers had completed the same level of education. Also, while only 25.81 per cent of the respondents were illiterate, 73.19 per cent of their fathers were illiterate. The mothers of the respondents are mostly illiterate, with only 13.44 per cent being literate or having education above matriculation levels (Judge & Bal, 2009).

education by Dalits. They note that in 1981-82, among the total number of students in graduate, postgraduate and professional institutes and universities, 8.86 per cent were Dalit. In 1991-92, this proportion increased to 11.55 per cent. It then declined to 10.23 per cent in 2001-02 and 10.25 per cent in 2005-06. Among all the students enrolled in universities across Punjab, in 2005-06, only 4.96 per cent were from rural areas and Dalits constituted 14.60 per cent of these rural students (Ghuman et al., 2006).

Thus, despite demonstrating an increase in literacy or basic education, Dalit students are not pursing undergraduate and postgraduate education in high numbers. In explaining this trend, Judge and Bal (2009) suggest that the perception of education as a route to social mobility is losing its appeal[58]. It was only in Hoshiarpur district that the value of education was widely recognised by the Dalits, as the percentage of educated and literate Dalits was highest in this district (Judge and Bal, 2009). Also, the reduced uptake of higher education among the Dalits can be linked to continuities in social and economic disadvantages. As noted above, it was only a small minority of Dalit families in Chaheru that were able to afford higher education and even good quality basic education for their children. Further, in the case of female children, as will be elaborated in Chapter 6, notions of female respectability also prevented parents from allowing their daughters to travel longer distances to pursue educational and employment opportunities.

2.7.2 Literacy

As mentioned above, literacy levels and basic educational attainments have improved amongst Dalit populations over time. Since older Census data does not have caste wise data on literacy, data on rural Phagwara will be used to extrapolate levels of Dalit literacy and illiteracy. In 1961, the female literacy rate was 20.09 per cent in Kapurthala district. At this time, among the rural areas in Kapurthala district, there were 21,731 Ad-dharmis with 11,704 men and 10,027 women. Most men (74 per cent) and women (96.88 per cent) were illiterate[59]. The 1961

[58] In contrast, Saberwal (1976) points to the continuing importance of education even among families where the children are the first generation to attain undergraduate and postgraduate education. Their parents have barely completed high school and there is an absence of family traditions of scholarship. However, instead of this fostering a cynicism about education, parents in these families place their faith in the likely rewards of education. They are also critical about their cultural milieu and don't believe it is conducive to their children's development. Thus, a number of lower castes would prefer that the government run special schools that will distance and insulate the children from their homes and neighbourhoods. The debilitating impact of the village's *mahaul* or environment on the children's development was also pointed out by parents in Chaheru.

[59] 1,626 men are only literate, 1,216 have completed primary schooling and 193 have completed matriculation and above. In contrast, 235 women are literate, 78 have completed primary schooling and none had completed beyond matriculation (Census, 1961)

Census notes that the Scheduled and Other Backward Castes, especially in the rural areas, were not enthusiastic about education. But the provision of free and compulsory primary education had a positive impact (Census, 1961).

In 1981, the literacy rate for Kapurthala district was 44.85 per cent with male literacy at 50.77 per cent and female literacy at 38.27 per cent (Census, 1981). In 1991, the literacy rate of the district continued its upward ascent. Rural Phagwara reported the highest literacy rate among the rural areas of the district at 64.59 per cent. It also had the highest female literacy rate at 56.69 per cent (Census, 1991).

In 2011, the literacy rate had increased to 70.72 per cent. The literacy levels in rural Phagwara and Jindwa are higher than the district average, at 72.63 and 72.90 per cent respectively (Census, 2011). At the district, town and village levels, a greater proportion of men are literate as compared to the women. At all three levels, the literacy rate amongst men and women was approximately 54 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. Thus, while the male literacy rate has only gone up by 4 points since 1981, the women's literacy rate has markedly improved (Census, 2011).

	Total population	**Total literate population**	**Literacy**	
			Men	Women
Kapurthala district	815,168	576,567	316,254	260,313
Rural Phagwara	125,094	90,855	49,426	41,429
Jindwa	1,797	1,310	719	591

Source: Kapurthala Census, 2011
Table 2.0: A breakdown of the literacy levels in Kapurthala district, rural Phagwara and Jindwa. The total population category excludes children between the ages of 0 and 6.

	Total SC population	**Total literate population**	**Literate**		**Total illiterate population**	**Illiterate**	
			Men	Women		Men	Women
Kapurthala district	276,707	173,936	97,411	76,525	102,771	46,490	56,281
Rural Phagwara	62,029	43,970	24,209	19,761	18,059	7,779	10,280

Source: Kapurthala Census, 2011
Table 3.0: A breakdown of the literacy and illiteracy levels among the Dalits in Kapurthala district and rural Phagwara. The total population category excludes children between the ages of 0 and 6. The data on Dalit literacy was not available for the village.

In examining literacy rates at the district and town levels, it becomes apparent that there is a difference between the Dalit and non-Dalit population. In comparison to the general population of Kapurthala district, which has a literacy level of 70.72 per cent, the literacy rate amongst the Dalits in the district is 62.86 per cent. Similarly, while the literacy level of rural Phagwara is 72.63 per cent, the literacy level of the Dalits in rural Phagwara is 70.89 per cent (Census, 2011). Thus, when compared to the literacy levels in the general population, the literacy levels among the Dalits appears only slightly lower.

This data indicates that Dalit literacy has improved greatly over time and is only slightly lower than the literacy levels of the general population. Further, female literacy among Dalits has increased and is similar at the district and town levels. Among the Dalits in Kapurthala district, male literacy was 56 per cent and female literacy was 44 per cent. In rural Phagwara, among the Dalits, male literacy was 55.06 per cent and female literacy was 44.94 per cent (Census, 2011). Moreover, in their study on the impact of education on Dalit women's development, Sharma and Aggarwal (2004) note that between 1971 and 1991, there was a greater increase in the literacy rates of Dalit women than their male counterparts. The low literacy districts such as Bhatinda, Faridkot and Sangrur experienced a higher increase in literacy rates than the high literacy districts such as Hoshiarpur, Rupnagar and Jallandhar did (Sharma and Aggarwal, 2004). Taken together, these findings indicate a rise in Dalit literacy and female literacy.

These findings reverberate in Chaheru as well, and even though not all parents could afford higher education, almost all children were completing their basic education. Moreover, as pointed out in Section 1.5, in Chaheru, education appeared as a gendered pursuit. It was mostly young women who were pursuing higher levels of education. Most young women only completed their education till grade 12. A minority of these young women, whose families were in a financial position to support their higher education, coupled their plans for migration with the pursuit of higher education and, in some cases, employment in the local economy. Also, some young men from secure middle-class families were pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate education.

Typically, boys only completed their education till grade 10 and then they mostly sought to migrate. Also, the generation of young men who had already migrated for labour jobs had varying levels of education, but none of them were illiterate. Some of them were educated till grade 5 or 6 and others till grade 10. A number of middle-aged and older community members defined themselves as, "*padhe likhe nahi hain*", which translates to we are not educated. But there was a wide variation in the levels of their formal education. While most could not read or write, a number of people who self-identified as uneducated or illiterate had basic writing and reading skills. Others had studied till grade 5 or 6 and were literate. Thus, in some cases, when older respondents used the term *padhe likhe*, it did not refer to formal education alone but also to their exposure to and awareness of the urban milieu.

2.7.3 Educational Institutes

The improvement in the literacy levels in Kapurthala and Phagwara coincided with the emergence of educational facilities in the region. In 1961, Kapurthala had a higher literacy rate (29.4 per cent) than the entire state of Punjab did (24.2 per cent). This was attributed to the foundation for education that had been laid by Raja Randhir Singh, who, in 1856, founded a school in the district and introduced modern education to Kapurthala[60] (Census, 1961). This school continued to be run as a high school till 1896 and was then elevated to the status of an

[60] The education imparted at this institute was secular. Religious education was provided at gurdwaras, mosques and dharmshalas. The language of instruction in schools was Urdu and Sanskrit. Gurmukhi and Persian were only taught up to the primary standard (Census, 1961; Census, 1991; Gazetteer of Kapurthala, 1981).

Intermediate Arts College by Raja Jagatjit Singh. It is currently known as the Nawab Jassa Singh Ahluwalia Government College (NJSA) (Census, 1961; Census, 1991; Gazetteer of Kapurthala, 1981).

In the post-independence era, the educational facilities expanded. Girls' primary schools, where they were taught embroidery, needlework and weaving, were introduced in Kapurthala, Phagwara and Sultanpur. A primary driver of education in the district was the Ramgharia community in Phagwara. The philanthropist, Shri Mohan Singh, started the Ramgharia Primary School in 1929. He eventually established more than a dozen institutions in Phagwara and its neighbouring villages such as the Ramgharia Arts and Science College, the Ramgharia Training College and the Ramgharia Polytechnic (Census, 1961; Census, 1991).

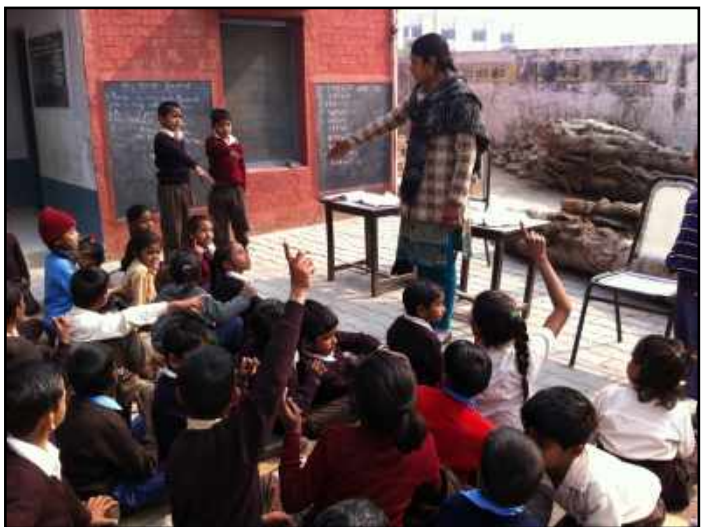

Figure 6.0: This is a picture of the government primary school in Chaheru. Here, the teacher is calling the students to come forward and recite the poems that they have learned in class.

In the contemporary context of education in Chaheru, there are a number of educational institutes that the villagers can choose from. Most young girls from financially stable families attend S.D. Putri Pathshala, a semi-government girls' school that is at a walking distance of 10 minutes from the village and which has a nominal fee. S.D. Putri Pathshala also has classes for boys till grade 4, after which most boys are transferred to the adjacent government school for boys. Some of the boys attend St. Soldiers, a CBSE[61] school in the locality that does not enjoy a good reputation. Poorer families send their children to the government schools in the village

[61] CBSE is the certification that establishes schools as operating under the Central Board of Secondary Education guidelines in India. Schools that are certified follow the nationally mandated India wide curriculum.

till grade 8, and later, to either of these schools. The village has a primary school that houses children till grade 4 and a secondary school that is for children from grades 5 to 8. For the 2016-2017 academic year, the secondary school had a total enrolment of 52 children.

Year	**Caste**	**Boys**	**Girls**	
2013-2014	SC	16	31	
	BC	0	2	
	General caste	3	3	
		19	36	Total
2014- 2015	SC	23	31	
	BC	2	2	
	General caste	4	3	
		29	36	Total
2015-2016	SC	25	31	
	BC	2	2	
	General caste	1	1	
		28	34	Total
2016-2017	SC	18	25	
	BC	4	3	
	General caste	1	1	
		23	29	Total

Source: Government school records accessed in 2016.
Table 4.0: A breakdown of the caste wise enrolment in the secondary school in Chaheru between the years 2013-2016. SC refers to Scheduled Caste and BC refers to Backward Caste.

The enrolment pattern of the secondary school between 2013 and 2016 shows a decline in enrolments between 2015 and 2016, from 62 to 52 children. Also, throughout the three years,

there are more girls than boys who were enrolled. The number of SC students has been consistently high, with the BC and general caste students forming a minority.

Another school that the villagers send their children to is Sant Sarwan Dass Model School (SSDMS), which is a private school run by Dera Ballan. SSDMS began in 2004 and is five minutes away from the village. This school has an explicit purpose to support the educational advancement of Dalit students. Thus, 70 per cent of the school's seats are reserved for Dalit students. As part of its admission criteria for the lower grades, children are allotted points for being Dalit.

While the school is set up to facilitate educational mobility for the Dalits, it also strives to portray itself as a secular school that is accessible to everyone. In fact, a number of general caste families also send their children to SSDMS due its costs being lower than other CBSE schools in the area. In 2015-2016, SSDMS had a total of 1,265 students of which the majority (1,126) were Dalits. There were 91 general caste and 47 backward caste students. The caste wise proportion of students has been similar between 2009 and 2016. However, between 2009 and 2016 the proportion of Dalit students has increased from 81.67 per cent to 89 per cent and the proportion of general caste students has declined from 12.37 per cent to 7.19 per cent (SSDMS records, 2016).

In Chaheru, SSDMS is largely accessible to the middle-class families and to those families that have at least one family member living and working abroad. There are a total of 30 children from Chaheru who attend the school (SSDMS records, 2016). Among those who send their children to SSDMS, some villagers find the school alluring due to its religious aspects, while others claim it offers good and affordable education in English and for the remaining, both factors play a role. But most villagers who were not able to send their children to the school lament that its fee is too high. They contend that while initially the Dera Ballan people had promised that they would reduce the fees for "people from their own community", they have not done that. Thus, for most people in the village, SSDMS remained inaccessible.

Figure 7.0: These pictures are from SSDMS. On the left is a picture of the students congregated at the end of their annual sports day. On the right is a picture of students receiving valedictorian awards on the annual day function, which is similar to a prom.

For undergraduate and postgraduate education, while some girls from the village attend reputed colleges in Jalandhar such as the Lyallpur Khalsa College or Kamla Nehru College, most young people from the village attend Ramgharia College[62]. In Chaheru, Ramgharia is perceived as a 'safe' and reasonable choice for education as it provides fee waivers and reductions for Dalit students. However, the general perception among some villagers and teachers within Ramgharia is that it does not provide high quality education. It tends to attract Dalit students from surrounding villages who are just looking to complete their degrees and migrate thereafter. In commenting on the educational attainments among Dalit students at Ramgharia College, Mr. Raj Kumar, a professor of History at the college states, "At the BA level, less than 10 per cent of the students succeed in getting degrees and that too, in second division." He adds that as a result of their low educational attainments, Dalit students are not able to secure employment in the private sector and government jobs are shrinking.

Although in Chaheru there were more young women than men pursuing higher education, the student breakdown at Ramgharia College indicates that more young men than women were enrolled in the college. In 2016-2017, out of a total of 885 students, 466 or 52.7 per cent were Dalits. Among the Dalit students, 242 were boys and 224 were girls. This distribution remained similar between 2014 and 2017. While there were more Dalit boys than girls enrolled in Ramgharia College, girls comprised roughly 45.38 per cent of the Dalit population across the

[62] Ramgharia College dates back to 1929 when it was established by the Ramgharia Educational Council. The council established the Ramgharia College, the Ramgharia College of Education, the Ramgharia Polytechnic, G.N.B.L. Ramgharia College for Women and a number of high schools (Gazetteer of Kapurthala, 1981)

three years. Thus, while Dalit girls are not dominating enrolment, the gap between Dalit male and female students is not wide.

Figure 8.0: These are pictures of two Ramgharia Colleges. On the left is a picture of the entrance to the Ramgharia Arts College and on the right is a picture of the Ramgharia Engineering College.

Another university that is close to the village but is not well respected by the villagers is Lovely Professional University (LPU). It is located between Phagwara and Jalandhar and is a 20-minute bus ride from the village. LPU is a semi-residential university that was founded in 2005 and attracts students from across India. It boasts of world-class facilities for sports and academics and has links with universities in the USA, the UK, Germany, Australia, Canada, Singapore, Brazil and Poland among others. In addition to various eating joints, the LPU campus has a mall that encompasses a hotel, a bowling alley, a gym and a few departmental stores[63]. Lovely Professional University, while declining to provide official figures, claims that out of a total of 28,000 students, 8,500 are from Punjab and approximately 10 per cent of the Punjabi students are Dalits.

Among the villagers, LPU is perceived as an elite and ill-reputed place where students engage in undesirable activities such as consuming drugs and alcohol and forming romantic liaisons. There are only two youngsters from the village who attend LPU.

The young women I mainly interacted with for the purpose of this thesis have the following educational qualifications:

Name	**Age**	**Qualification and Institute**	**Marital Status**
Kavita	23	MA from Ramgharia College	Unmarried
Malika	22	MA from Ramgharia College	Unmarried
Somika	24	MA from Kamla Nehru College	Unmarried

[63] https://www.lpu.in

Gunita	19	Completing BCom from Ramgharia College	Unmarried
Nina	25	MBA from Guru Nanak Dev University	Married
Rajini	23	MA from Lyallpur Khalsa College	Unmarried
Reshma	21	BA from Ramgharia College	Unmarried
Sunita	19	Completing BCom from Ramgharia College	Unmarried
Sonia	26	MA from Ramgharia College	Married
Reema	35	MA	Married
Gopi	18	Enrolled at Hospitality Course from Lovely Professional University	Unmarried
Seema	24	B.Ed. from Lovely Professional University	Unmarried

Table 5.0: Educational qualifications of the young women who participated in the study.

Figure 9.0: These are pictures of Lovely Professional University. On the top left is an aerial view of the campus. On the top right is a picture of the library and on the bottom left is a picture of the campus gym and sports centre.

The rise in Dalit literacy, the emergence of various educational institutions within a short distance from the village and the increasing uptake of educational opportunities indicates the continuing value of education. Even though Dalits lag behind in accessing higher levels of education and even though when they do pursue education it does not lead to commensurate employment opportunities, education emerges as an important marker of middle-classness. As

will be elaborated in the data chapters, even when education does not lead to desirable post-education trajectories, it is valued due to the mobility and the access to urban culture that it offers.

2.8 Conclusion

In situating the young women's navigations around mobility and middle-class culture, it is important to see them steeped in the context of politics, religion, gender, migration and education. It emerges that these are not just spheres of Dalit mobility that have been identified by previous works, they also map onto constructions of middle-class identity in Chaheru (Judge and Bal, 2009; Saberwal, 1976). Specifically, despite Chaheru's ubiquitous culture of migration, it does not always lead to enduring forms of economic mobility. This has also been noted by Judge and Bal (2009). But this chapter notes that despite the mismatch between the discourse and reality of migration, it is often perceived as a source of Dalit mobility (Kumar, 2004). Moreover, in the short-term, wealth accrued through migration allows households to engage in forms of consumption that facilitate an enhancement in their status. This is particularly important, given that this thesis is interested in the narratives and meanings of migration in Chaheru.

In making sense of the gendered pursuit of education in Chaheru, it was useful to examine the data on literacy and educational attainment in the context of Punjab, Kapurthala and Phagwara. This data indicates that the expansion of educational sites and young women's move towards higher education in Chaheru reflect the larger shift towards literacy and higher education among Dalit populations in Punjab. However, as noted by other studies as well, the young women who are able to attain higher levels of education are a minority even among the upwardly mobile families in Chaheru. Moreover, their educational attainments do not translate to high-status employment opportunities and ideas of gendered respectability persist and define young women's access to educational and employment opportunities (Judge and Bal, 2009; Pimpley, 1976).

The long history of social and religious movements for Dalit autonomy in Punjab reveal an important site for political power. The context of increased political participation among Ad-dharmis and the increasingly separatist orientation of the Ravidassi movement form the

backdrop, against which the young women's negotiations with education, consumption, migration and marriage can be understood.

Taken together, this chapter highlights that the young women in Chaheru are operating in a rich and complex context where politics, religion, migration and education occupy primacy. Chaheru often appears as a rapidly transitioning space where the sense of mobility or wanting to move away from the village space is palpable. Thus, in locating the young women's everyday imaginaries, practice and discourse around mobility and middle-classness, this context will be continually drawn upon.

3 Navigating Suspicions: Ethnography in a Dalit Village

3.1 Introduction

Throughout the train ride to Kashi[64], Reshmo and especially Meeta, were quite withdrawn and engaged in very limited interactions with me. When other people on the train asked them about my presence on the journey, they were evasive in their replies and appeared to want to distance themselves from me[65]. Given this rather strained interaction, although I was travelling with them, having bought our tickets together, I decided to not stay with them in Benares. Instead, I stayed with Nina, her husband and her mother. On the train ride back, I was again sitting with Meeta and Reshmo and over the course of the journey, I realised that they were angry with me. They made fun of how I had missed the speeches made by some political candidates and appeared upset over the fact that I had not spent much time in the temple. While in Benares, Meeta had called me to ask whether I would like to join them in visiting the local tourist spots and split the money for the trip. But I had to refuse, owing to my commitments with Nina's family. During the train ride, when I tried to talk to them about their local sightseeing experience, Meeta said to me, "*We did not go, so we can't tell you how it was…*" (24 February 2016) This show of hostility and this deliberate act of distancing themselves were also imbibed by other passengers in the train compartment who began avoiding talking to me.

In addition to their anger over my not having given them company in Benares, during this strained interaction, Meeta and Reshmo also express their resentment at my failure to comply with certain rituals and norms they deem important. Given that later Reshmo told Kavita that "*I had disrespected their Maharajji*" (25 March 2017) it is likely that they read my lack of

[64] Kashi is a more religiously apt term to refer to Benares and it was used by the villagers extensively. I will be using the term interchangeably with Benares. The trip to Benares was undertaken by the villagers to participate in the annual celebration of Guru Ravidass' birthday at his birthplace in Benares, where a large temple has been built in his honour. While people from different parts of India attend these celebrations in Benares, in Punjab, Dera Ballan organises a special train to ferry devotees to the site. This annual trip is commonly understood as a pilgrimage that devotees must undertake at least once in their lifetime. I took this train journey with some members of the village like Reshmo, Meeta, Bikram and Nina.

[65] Initially, I had mentioned to Reshmo that I might stay with her, but Meeta and her distant attitude throughout the journey was indicative of the fact that perhaps they did not want me around. I had also begun to feel uncomfortable in their presence. While Meeta made some effort to talk to me and include me in their conversations, Reshmo did not talk to me at all. There were points in time during our train journey, when Meeta too, got angry with me for various things such as not waking up at the right time or taking too long to come back to the compartment after I had gone to meet someone else in another compartment. It seems that the façade of politeness and concern that Meeta had maintained in the village dissolved and her frustrations with me became more apparent. Part of her frustrations could have been fuelled by having to come on the trip only to provide some company to Reshmo. In fact, she had been trying to get Kavita to come along as well, but Kavita had refused. Earlier conversations with Meeta had revealed that she was hoping Reshmo would help her migrate to America, so, her 'taking care' of Reshmo while she was in the village was likely an investment in her migration strategy.

participation in certain rituals like waking up at 5 am and spending most of the day in the temple and attending political speeches as a flouting of the accepted religious norms[66]. Also, my decision to stay with a couple, instead of them, in Maharajji's *haveli*, is seen as immoral because Reshmo mentions this to Kavita later and says that it was odd that I had stayed with a newlywed couple[67].

In addition to perpetuating norms of religious respectability and conformity, Meeta and Reshmo engage in a 'calling out' of my inappropriate behaviour in the company of other Ravidassia followers in the train. This serves to pronounce my identity as an outsider[68] and curtails my interactions with our fellow passengers. This instance was more unpleasant than other interactions that I had had within the village, where people were sometimes suspicious and hostile towards me. But it points to a reoccurring struggle that I experienced during my fieldwork: navigating my status as an outsider to the community. In fact, the first few months of my fieldwork were spent attempting to gain the trust of community members.

The experience of combating the suspicions and aspersions of community members has also been noted by others (for example see Dua, 1979; Heering, 2013; Palriwala, 2005). In her work with a lower-caste slum community in Jalandhar, Dua (1979) was trying to simultaneously access upper-caste and lower-caste respondents. This served to enhance the suspicions she was subject to from both sides. In fact, based on a similar experience in the past[69], I actively avoided following this method and chose to focus exclusively on the lower castes.

[66] The reprimanding that I received from Reshmo and Meeta for 'missing' certain events that they consider important for partaking in the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations, is in contrast to the way in which I am introduced to the celebrations by Nina's family. While Nina's mother continues to attend the various events that are part of the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations, she does not expect her daughter, her son-in-law and me to follow suit. She only insists that we make it to certain crucial events but is flexible about the amount of time we spend on these activities. Often, she wakes up really early in the morning to attend the religious rituals and we only join her much later. Nina's mother also attempts to educate and explain the various rituals associated with the event to me.

[67] Despite multiple clarifications that I had in fact shared a room with the couple and Nina's mother, Reshmo continues to say that I had stayed with the couple.

[68] I was the only upper caste in a train that was ferrying lower-caste supporters of a radical caste-based movement. In this environment of heightened caste solidarity, I had to be careful about how I was saying things so as not to invite accusations of casteism. In fact, the hostility displayed by Meeta and Reshmo translated to other people in the compartment also withdrawing from me. On the way back to Punjab, it was only the *sevadhars* who continued to talk to me. In fact, even when the train reached Jalandhar very late in the night and I asked some of the older men for a ride, they refused saying they were going in a different direction. Thus, while on the train ride to Benares there had been a palpable excitement in the air and my caste identity had not been highlighted, on the way back, Meeta's exchange with me made people more suspicious and aware of my caste identity and even when I tried to talk to them and get their contact information, they were hesitant to give it to me.

[69] In conducting fieldwork on gender and land rights in Bihar, I had attempted to access Brahmin and OBC settlements within the same village. This proved detrimental to building rapport and trust with either of these communities, as each of them was suspicious about my proximity to the other community.

While in the above-mentioned situation, my outsider status was linked mainly to my upper-caste identity, within the village, I was also deemed an outsider due to my positionality as an educated, upper-caste woman who was flouting the norms of respectability associated with young women. In fact, female ethnographers working in rural sites have similarly encountered challenges in navigating the norms of appropriate femininity whilst endearing themselves to the community (for example see Chopra, 2004; Dua, 1979; Palriwala, 2005). Additionally, it has been noted that previously marginalised communities that are transitioning to class mobility are more suspicious of outsiders due to their insecure claims to their newly acquired status (for example see Gupta, 2006). This heightened sense of suspicion among the Ad-dharmi community can be contextualised with regard to the social and political dynamics of the community, as will be discussed in Section 3.5.1. Nevertheless, it had an enduring effect on my interactions with the participants and on my consequent decisions about methodology and data collection.

This chapter details the process and challenges of carrying forth an ethnographic study with upwardly mobile families in a predominantly Ad-dharmi village in the Doaba region of Punjab. In its first part, the process of locating and accessing a field site will be discussed. The research's focus on the experiences and identity formation processes of the young women in their homes and the village space is an important aspect of the methodology and will be detailed in the second part of the chapter. The third part of this chapter explains the methodological choices in this research vis-à-vis previous work on social mobility. The fourth part of this chapter details the type of data that has been gathered. The distinctive aspect of this study is its ability to relay rich and layered ethnographic data about the young women's lives within the village space. While this limits the study's ability to speak to the young women's actual navigation of mobility, it delves into the plan-making, imagining and discursive constructs of mobility. Thus, while this study is centred on the young women's lives in the village, it also attempts to triangulate and contextualise findings by speaking with community activists, representatives of Ad-dharmi and Dalit organisations, and politicians and government officials located outside the village. There is also an attempt to partake in community events and trips with the young women and their families outside the village space. Data is gathered at the level of the individual, family, village community and the larger community of Dalit Punjabis outside the vicinity of the village. The last part of this chapter discusses how my positionality shaped my access to and interactions with the community as well as ethical considerations of this work.

3.2 Locating a Field Site

This study was conducted over 11 months. My first field visit was from September 2015 to June 2016. Thereafter, I revisited the field site for a month, in March 2017. At its onset, this study was concerned with exploring the ways in which the Ad-dharmis interact with and understand the Ravidassia movement and Dera Ballan through the ambit of migrant funding and involvement. I set out to explore a school established by Dera Ballan as a migrant project[70] and the community located around the school to examine their interactions with and their understanding of the school. In order to gain access to the Ravidassia community and the Dera Ballan school, it was important that I visit Dera Ballan. In these initial stages, I was also considering various options for field sites and I even thought about living in the Dera for some time and accessing the villages around the Dera.

However, my interactions with people within Dera Ballan revealed a one-dimensional narrative that emphasised their religious devotion. They talked about the greatness of their Maharajji and their personal equations with him. Further, given the hierarchal operation of the Dera, most people's conversations with me centred on 'educating' me about the history of Dalit oppression and the successes of the Ravidassia movement. It seemed that it would be difficult to move past this institutional discourse and learn about the personal narratives within the space of the religious site[71]. Moreover, as a caste outsider, upon uncovering my upper-caste identity, the social distance between me and the informants became explicit. It reflected in an almost immediate pulling back and suspicion on their part about my exact whereabouts and intentions. This suspicion about my motivations also came forth in the village setting, as will be elaborated in Section 3.5.1. However, in dealing with authority figures and community members within a caste-based religious institution, the hierarchal and political underpinnings of the institution meant that there was very limited space for manoeuvring and negotiation.

[70] The concept of a migrant project emerges from the literature on diaspora philanthropy, which discusses the financial contributions and involvements of migrants in development projects in Punjab, especially facilitated through religious and community-based organizations (Singh et al., 2012)

[71] The problem of operating within the Dera space was likely compounded for me because it was a space in which I felt uncomfortable. As with most religious spaces, it was highly ritualised and required that I partake in religious activities to communicate my commitment to the religious teachings. In fact, often when I asked people about life as an Ad-dharmi, I was directed to the Amrit Bani (the text of the Ravidassias) to learn about Guru Ravidass. Also, people would often 'check' my knowledge of the Ravidassias by asking if I had read the Amrit Bani or not. Additionally, within the religious space, the Amrit Bani and stories about Guru Ravidass served as a default response for informants when answering queries about their experiences of being Ad-dharmi. This served to reorient the gaze away from them and towards the institutional narrative.

Thus, I decided that instead of spending some time in the Dera and its surrounding villages, I would locate myself within a village space near the Dera Ballan school. When I went to visit the school affiliated with Dera Ballan, I asked about villages around the vicinity of the school that had a large Ad-dharmi population. It was some of the women who worked as the cleaning staff at SSDMS, who led me to Chaheru[72]. In the village, I sought permission for being in the community and interacting with its members by speaking to the sarpanch and introducing my study. Over time, I uncovered that the community in Chaheru relates to SSDMS not as a migrant project, but as a symbol of educational mobility. Also, in contrast to the primacy of religious identity and discourse within the Dera, in the community, there was a stronger narrative on mobility. The primacy of a Ravidassia religious identity gave way to a more variegated narrative of religion and the aspiration for moving away from the village space.

In addition to a shift in focus from religious identity to constructions of mobility, the move to the village space also coincided with a shift in approach as I was able to move away from a more formal interview format. Instead, I found ways of embedding myself within the community space to become a more comfortable and familiar intrusion in people's everyday routines. More importantly, within the village space, people were living their everyday lives rather than partaking in specific events and they could not draw on a readymade narrative to explain their lives. Thus, their everyday social interactions, struggles and narratives on mobility and status could be uncovered more easily from within the village space. In addition to the ways in which people spoke about their lives and experiences, I was also able to capture what they did. This approach to fieldwork will be discussed below.

[72] At the end of the school day, I walked with one of these women to Chaheru. She was a lower-class woman who lived in a rundown house made of temporary material and she appeared embarrassed to invite me in. She informed me that her house was in a very dilapidated condition and that her husband was an alcoholic, which was why they were very poor. When I asked her about the rest of the community, she told me that she did not know enough about other people but she introduced me to an older woman, Karindo. Karindo was in her late 60s and worked as the *anganwadi* helper or rural childcare worker in the village child care centre. Over time, I found out that despite her lower-class positioning, Karindo was well respected within the community and was often allotted responsibilities that were traditionally given to a village elder. For instance, on the occasion of a wedding within the village, she was given the task of going to numerous houses in the village and inviting people for the wedding. It was Karindo who told me about the community and also introduced me to the sarpanch.

3.3 Methodological Approach

3.3.1 Young Women at Home

My fieldwork consisted of spending time talking to and observing thirty families in Chaheru, of which an inordinate time was spent with ten upwardly mobile families. Within each of these families, it was the young women in the house who were my first and usually most reliable point of contact. They were often the ones who made the most effort to talk to me and invite me into their homes. Often, when revisiting their homes, I would say that I have come to meet the young women in the house[73]. The proximity to young women derives from my own positionality as a young and recently married woman, which made these young women a more natural entry point to the different families in the village. Also, given that I was not as fluent in spoken Punjabi, I found the younger women easier to speak to as they all spoke fluent Hindi. I also spoke extensively to the older women and men in these households. But in some cases, where the older women and men were less educated, they spoke in a more rustic dialect of Punjabi which I could not always understand[74]. In these families, the young women, and sometimes even the young men, served as useful intermediaries.

Given that my most detailed interactions in Chaheru were with young women, it is not surprising that my research became focused on the experiences of young women from upwardly mobile families. Spending time in the homes of these families, especially while I was living there, allowed me to partake in their everyday routines and practices within the space of their homes. I drank tea with these families, ate meals with them, watched television together and even assisted them in doing household chores[75]. In these domestic spaces, I was able to observe the minute details and variations in the young women's everyday activities such as dressing up for college, cleaning the house, messaging on the phone, watching and discussing a favourite television show, preparing for exams and doing English exercises after dinner. As I observed and participated in these everyday activities, the young women's more complex negotiations with ideas of urbanity, rurality, mobility and femininity came to the fore.

[73] Sometimes, if the young women were much younger i.e. school-going or still pursuing their undergraduate degrees, I would forge a stronger bond with their mothers.
[74] My lack of language fluency in Punjabi was less of a problem in educated middle-class families where middle-aged women were more educated and fluent in Hindi.
[75] While I was not expected to perform household chores, I routinely helped with doing the dishes and cleaning up. Sometimes, I also cooked, especially in the homes where I was staying.

Often, over time, even a casual conversation with these young women, carried out within the comfort of their homes, was more revealing and intimate as they felt relaxed and were willing to share their personal narratives. This allowed me a privileged access to their personal world, which, as will be discussed later, also posed ethical challenges. Thus, the home served as ". . . an affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions . . ." (Blunt, 2005, p. 506). In using their homes as the site of my study, I was able to garner access to the more personal[76] and everyday negotiations that the young women carried out with migration, education and consumption.

As I chose to observe and understand the young women on the basis of their interactions within the household[77], this method limited my ability to comment on how these young women operate outside the realm of the household and the village. Whenever the opportunity arose, I undertook trips and outings with the young women which took us outside the village space. But these trips provided only a limited view of their interactions outside the village. Most of my interpretations of the young women's navigations around mobility, therefore, are derived from the time I spent with them in the village space.

A central theme of my conversations with the young women was about moving away from the village space. It is possible that outside the village, when these young women are in the spaces they aspire to be in, they align themselves differently with gender norms and cultures of rurality and urbanity. Nevertheless, it was particularly valuable to locate their interactions with mobility in their homes. It allowed me to observes their families, which were a central dynamic of the young women's negotiations with middle-classness and mobility. In fact, other works have also noted the importance of the family in processes of cultural reproduction and transition (Benei, 2010; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997; Beteille, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990).

In Chaheru, the young women's plans around mobility are usually nestled within the culture and economic positioning of their families. Also, as the young women chart a cultural shift to middle-classness, they are not just facilitating their individual mobility, but also their family's ascension to a middle-class status. The family operates as an important mediator of the type of middle-class identity that the young women claim. Thus, observing the young women within

[76] Often, these conversations were carried out as we lay on the bed, talking about our lives in general, as friends often do. As will be detailed in Section 3.7, the line between my role as a friend and as a researcher often felt blurred in these moments.
[77] I undertook a number of trips to spaces outside the village to observe the young women and their families in these spaces. This enabled me to develop a more holistic sense of the young women's navigations around social mobility.

the space of their homes and families allows one to capture their convergence and divergence from the family milieu.

3.3.2 Studying Social Mobility

In locating itself in the home and family, this study tackles a more lived, subjective and interpersonal aspect of social mobility. It marks a departure from much of the work on social mobility, which either utilises the survey method or focuses on social mobility in public spaces. Survey-based social mobility research has often been critiqued for its focus on decontextualised individual actors and measurable or quantifiable aspects of mobility (Benei, 2010; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). In contrast, the present study focusses on an exploration of the "qualitative stuff of social mobility" (Benei, 2010, p. 200) by situating the family as the context of analysis and by delving into the subjective negotiations, aspirations and experiences of mobility.[78]

Also, previous qualitative work on social mobility in India, and in particular in Punjab, examines assertions of mobility in public sites (for example see Jeffrey et al., 2008; Judge & Bal, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2010; Nisbett, 2007; Osella & Osella, 2000; Ram, 1988; Ram, 2009; Saberwal, 1976; Saavala, 2003; Saavala, 2006). It often gleans Dalit mobility through interactions in religious spaces, educational institutions, offices, community events and streets. This previous body of work captures a particular rhetoric of social mobility that is publicly projected and visible. The present study, in contrast, strives to turn the gaze inwards to discuss how social mobility is conceived and constructed within the homes and daily routines of the young women. This builds on similar research that has engaged with the everydayness of social and cultural transitions among Dalit communities (for example see Ciotti, 2010; Still, 2011).

This approach attempts to understand the young women's navigations around social mobility at the level of imaginaries, discourses and domestic practices. It entails gathering information about what people say they do, what they actually do and what they say they are supposed to do (Malinowski, 1922). This method is able to address some of the limitations of the survey method, as it does not assume what people say in an interview to be representative of what they

[78] In attempting to overcome the limitations of the survey method, Bertaux and Thompson (1997) and Benei (2010) propose studying social mobility through case studies and family histories respectively. This method facilitates an understanding of the various family level dynamics like gender roles and generational transmission of ambitions and skills that shape individual decisions around social mobility. While this method enables one to get at the subjective aspects of social mobility and is squarely positioned in the context of the family, it solely relies on the narratives of mobility, which can perpetuate more 'appropriate' or ideal versions of events.

actually do. Also, unlike the case study and family history approach, it does not rely solely on people's narratives since these are likely to reproduce more 'appropriate' or ideal versions of events. Collecting information about the young women's practices, discourses and notions of 'appropriate' practice enables one to map the disparity and congruence between practice and discourse and reveals sources of social continuity and disjuncture.

This open-ended approach to the study of social mobility relies on the idea that young women are agentive actors nestled in their social, cultural and historical context. Additionally, as detailed in Section 4.5.3, the young women's agency is located in their everyday acts of negotiation, which allow them to balance their parents' concerns with their own aspirations for urban modernity. This is a view of agency that does not characterise all the existing qualitative work on social mobility.

Often, qualitative work on social mobility employs a contextualised view of agency but can serve to overstate the role of one's social positioning over and above individual agency. For instance, Bourdieu (1990) conceives an individual's class through their family's economic, social and cultural capital[79], which shapes their *habitus*[80] and negotiations with the world. Class then emerges as a durable and embodied aspect of social reality, which can be mapped onto people's behaviours and activities across fields. This view of class limits our ability to understand the ways in which people contest social hierarchies and sources of historical disadvantage to lay claim to new spaces or processes of social mobility.

The importance of everyday forms of agency becomes especially apparent when analysing class practices of lower-caste communities. If one were to examine Dalit communities from Bourdieu (1990)'s perspective, it would be difficult to isolate forms of resistance and change. The present study, in its methodology and approach, can be located more closely with works which illustrate that an enactment of agency does not necessitate a radical upheaval or departure from prevailing social norms (for example see Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mahmood, 2006; Nyamjoh, 2002; Scott, 1985; Willis, 1977[81]). For instance, Kabeer (1999)

[79] Social capital refers to a family's connections and networks which accrue as a result of one's class positioning. Cultural capital refers to commodities or forms of behaviour that lend one distinction in social situations (Bourdieu, 1990).
[80] Habitus refers to the deeply embedded habits, skills and dispositions we possess due to our life experiences. This embodied ways of being appears as an autonomic response rather than a learned or culturally developed habit (Bourdieu, 1990)
[81] Willis (1977) shows how boys from working-class families in England, in their interactions in secondary school, engage in subversive and rebellious behaviour like "having a laff" and "wagging off" (p. 11- 47).

and Kandiyoti (1988) assert that women can negotiate access to sites of autonomy while maintaining their status within the community and family. Thus, an ethnographic approach to the study of social mobility is engaged in everyday forms of agency, which are socially constrained and defined. This approach constructs the young women as agentive actors embroiled in various processes of meaning making and negotiation that may both reproduce and subvert social hierarchies.

3.4 Data

3.4.1 In the Home

As discussed in Section 1.7, the families in Chaheru were all differently placed in terms of their occupations and economic positioning. Given that my research was focused on constructions and experiences of mobility, I began to orient my time in the field towards those families where this discourse was stronger and where it also translated to actions around moving away. Inadvertently, these families were those that were more well-to-do and occupied a middling position within the community. The elite families consisted of migrant families that had moved abroad with their entire families. While there was some interaction with these families, this was significantly limited by their lack of presence in the village and their resistance in engaging with me when they were there, as will be elaborated in Section 3.6. In contrast, lower-class families, while aspiring for mobility, were severely limited in pursuing plans for migration, high-status employment and higher education due to their economic constraints. Also, middling families were keener to engage with me. The research process relied on the participants' self-selection into the project, wherein it was their willingness to engage with me that determined whether or not I could interact with them. Consequently, these were also the families that I was able to interact with more extensively[82].

My interactions with the families in Chaheru consisted of spending unstructured time in their homes and engaging in conversations with them. The topics of these conversations were determined by the research participants themselves. I would, at times, steer our conversations into directions that revealed their ideas about the Dalit community, caste discrimination, class

[82] In fact, I faced the greatest resistance from elite and lower-class families for whom my upper-caste identity was a greater source of distancing and separation than it was for their middle-class counterparts. This will be discussed in Section 3.6.

status, migration and education. Also, during these conversations, I would sometimes pose questions that were related to uncovering their perceptions of present lives, future plans and everyday struggles.

As I interacted with these families in their homes, I also observed the ways in which they went about their daily routines. I was able to note the mannerisms they adopted when interacting with people within the village space and with other family members. On some occasions, when went on shopping trips with the young women in Phagwara city or accompanied them for a visit to an educational institute in Jalandhar, I had the opportunity to observe their behaviour in modern spaces outside the village. These observations were crucial in enabling me to understand the spectrum of class practices around education, fashion and food.

3.4.2 In the Village

Most of the fieldwork is situated in the homes of the participants because there were no public spaces within the village that could easily be accessed by me. There were some places where the older men of the village congregated and played cards, but these spaces were on the outskirts of Chaheru. Within the village, it was around the main grocery store that a group of young men sat and socialised after it got dark. However, both these spaces were all male spaces that I could not access, given my positioning as a young woman.

Also, there were various committees in the village, including the gurdwara committee, the panji peer committee and the school committee, which met regularly to discuss organisational and logistical issues pertaining to the maintenance of these spaces. But despite multiple requests to partake in these meetings and the village panchayat meetings, I was actively excluded. This could have been because most people did not want to reveal their political alignments and discussions to me. In fact, as mentioned in Section 2.5, people in the village denied any involvement in political parties and bodies. My exclusion from village politics may also have been facilitated by a politically charged climate, where maintaining political advantage relied on concealing one's political affiliations. Moreover, my status as an upper-caste outsider may have further prevented the villagers from trusting me with such important information.

Thus, there were limited spaces in the village where I could partake in conversations. Sometimes, if the older members of the family that runs the most frequented grocery store in

the village were around, I would sit and chat with them as they attended to their customers. Often, other community members would come by and also chat with the owners and me. Thus, the grocery store, especially due its central location, provided a useful vantage point to engage with different community members. When the opportunity arose, I also attempted to partake in community celebrations and trips with different people from the village.

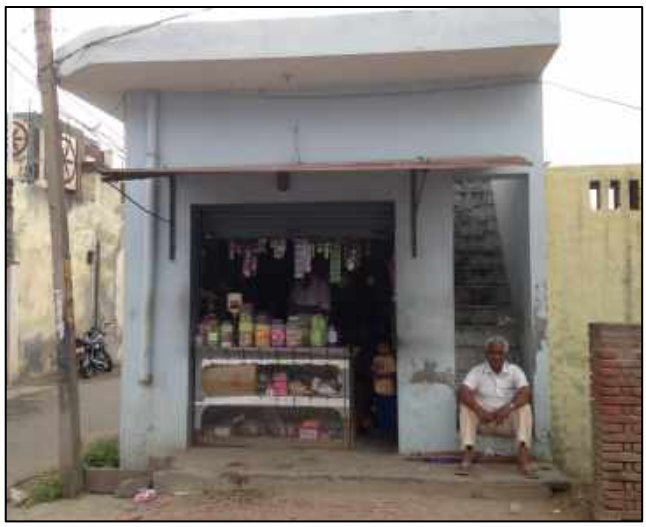

Figure 10.0: This is the most frequented grocery store in the village. It is owned by Sonia's father, Kulwinder.

Within the village space, I partook in certain events like the celebration of Ravidass Jayanti, the *mela* or fair that is held at the panji peer every year and Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations. At these events, a more community level narrative of caste and identity came forth. I was also able to observe the ways in which differently located families partake in these events. Additionally, I accompanied members of the village on trips to Benares and to a Ravidass temple in Himachal Pradesh[83]. In going with the people from the village to spaces outside the village, it was possible to see a shift in their narratives and behaviours. This transition was especially marked in the case of Nina while we were on a trip to attend the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations in Benares and will be discussed in Section 3.6.3.

[83] The MLA of Phagwara at the time of field work, Som Parkash sent a free bus to ferry people from the village to the site of the temple. When we reached the temple, it emerged that the man was giving a speech there and wanted to ensure a higher turnout.

Figure 11.0: In the picture on the left, women are congregated in the village gurdwara for the last day of Ravidass Jayanti celebrations. The men are sitting on the other side. The picture on the right shows the *pathi*, who conducts the religious service. He is sitting behind the decorative canopy that contains the guru granth. In front of him lie the donations that the people have made. At the end of the event, the names of the contributors and their occupations are read out. Most of the larger donations are from migrant families.

3.4.3 The Schools

I made regular visits to the village's primary and middle school and to SSDMS, the Dera Ballan school, which is located close to the village. I also briefly visited the government high schools in the area that the children from the village usually attended. This allowed me to get a sense of the differences between the Dera Ballan school and the government schools in the vicinity.

In order to get access to the village middle school and the Dera Ballan school, I had to seek permission from the district education office in Kapurthala and the school secretary at Dera Ballan[84] respectively. While the village middle school[85] remained suspicious of my motives even towards the end of my fieldwork, the primary school in the village was more welcoming of my presence. The teachers here had been working in the school for the last twenty years, and they took time to explain to me their perspectives on education within the community.

[84] At the Dera Ballan school, I was initially asked to submit the questions that I wanted to ask the teachers and was told by the school administration that they would get the questions answered by the teachers. I had to then explain that it was important that I speak to the teachers myself while supplying them with the questionnaire I intended to broadly use. I also had to assure them that I did not have any intention of evaluating the school, and that I only wanted to understand the perceptions of the teachers and the parents who send their children to the school. Eventually, after going through the questionnaire, interacting with me, and being told that it was the village of Chaheru that was the primary site of study, I was finally granted permission to walk around the school premises and talk to the teachers.

[85] At the village middle school, despite many explanations about the purpose of my study and my presence, they continued to presume that I was carrying out some kind of governmental checking on the functioning of the school. While initially they let me into the school, I soon found out that they had asked the children to not talk to me if I asked them any questions. Also, if I stopped by their classes, the children and the teachers became conscious and focused on demonstrating their ability to efficiently run the classes.

The amount of time I spent on seeking permission to access the middle school, acquainted me with the history of skirmishes that had taken place between the school and village. In the past, one of the teachers at the school had accused the sarpanch of mixing up the MNREGA records and adding his relatives to the roster, although they were not actually doing the work. There was another incident where due to two teachers having an affair with each other, the village school committee had to step in and fire both the teachers. Part of the middle school's suspicion about my presence may have been because of my proximity to the villagers and this history of conflict that existed between them and the village.

The daily visits to the schools helped in bringing structure to my day and subverting the suspicions I was subject to within the village. Specifically, I was able to tell the families in whose homes I was residing at that point in time that I was planning to go to the school. This allowed the families to perceive my purpose for being in the village as linked to my interest in the schools and not just in the village space, thereby lending my presence more credibility. On most days, I would visit the school and then visit some of the families in the village. These visits to the families appeared as social visits because they were spaced out and engaged in casually, without setting any prior appointments, although I did check in with the young women about their general availability as they were the ones who I would primarily 'visit'.

In addition, the school visits were defined by my broader objective to understand the workings of these institutions and their importance in the community. Initially, in visiting the government schools within the village, I wanted to understand whether the emergence of the Dera Ballan school had altered the type and number of students who attended the government schools. In interacting with the teachers, I also wanted to learn about the history of educational attitudes in the community. I spent a lot of time at the Dera Ballan school, therefore, in talking to the teachers about their views on education, caste issues and the institute itself.

At the level of religious discourse, the Dera Ballan school was identified as a school for the Ad-dharmi community. But in practice, it appealed to a more mixed student base. The teachers were mostly upper caste and the student population, while predominantly SC, also consisted of a significant number of upper-caste children, as is discussed in Section 2.7.3. The school positioned itself as an SC school to the Ad-dharmi community, but it also sought approval and acceptance by a wider upper-caste community and positioned itself as a low-cost CBSE school to the general caste population. Thus, it appeared to be attracting students from emerging

middle-class families, across different caste groups. These families could not afford elite and expensive institutes but still wanted their children to have good quality English medium education.

In the final analysis, the operation and discourse of the school does not emerge as significant because it is the young women and their navigations that become more important. However, the insights derived about the school lead one to ascertain that it is only a minority of better off families from Chaheru who are able to send their children to the Dera Ballan school. For these families, the school is primarily valued because it provides affordable and higher quality English education. Thus, many secure middle-class families are willing to go to quite some lengths to ensure the admission of their children in the school[86]. At both the Dera Ballan school and the government schools within the village, I gathered data about enrolment by year, gender and caste. Some of this data is discussed in Section 2.7.3.

In attempting to talk to the teachers in the Dera Ballan school, I usually hung around the staffroom as they would congregate there in between classes when they had some free time or during their lunch break. I sought to understand their experience of teaching in the school by engaging in casual conversations with them about their day and about the specifics of the subject they taught. In building a rapport with them, I also engaged in conversations about their families and future plans. Interestingly, a number of them were actively and openly preparing for exams to access government school teaching. While some of the teachers had been with SSDMS since its inception, most had joined later. It seemed that the teachers stuck around in the Dera Ballan school until a better opportunity arose, in a more reputed private school in the city or in a government school.

Learning more about the lives of these teachers also enabled me to grasp other things happening in the area, outside the vicinity of the village. With some of the teachers who took a greater interest in speaking to me, I also sat in in some of their classes to get a sense of the student-teacher interactions. This allowed me to interact with some of the students and learn more about

[86] The school told me that every year, they are flooded with admission requests and that people use various methods, like references and even threats, to get their children admitted to the school. There was an incident where a journalist apparently threatened the school that he would publish negative things about the school if they didn't grant admission to his relative's child. Also, parents in Chaheru, while they complain about the oversights of the school, continued to 'put up' with it. It also served as a place where many young women from the village who were looking for teaching jobs, aspired to work at. Its reputation as being better off than many other schools near the village made it an important locus point for families that were aiming to move up the social ladder.

their aspirations for the future. In my limited interactions, a number of patterns that I had uncovered in the village regarding the young women's orientation towards education and the young men's propensity to migrate were reproduced. I also undertook a trip to Dera Ballan with mostly upper-caste teachers on a day which coincided with a festival that involved people visiting their ancestral villages. The fact that these teachers were compelled to partake in a school trip on a day off and that too to a religious site whose teachings they did not follow, troubled many of them. It revealed the underlying tensions about the school's position as both a Ravidassia school and caste neutral space.

3.4.4 Trips

During trips outside the village space, I was able to partake in and observe conversations among differently placed Ad-dharmi community members about the issues that confront the community. This allowed me to develop a more holistic view of the Punjabi Dalit community outside the confines of the village. A particularly enriching experience was the train ride to and fro from Benares. In my train compartment, apart from Meeta, Reshmo and me, there were some young men who were *sevadhars* or volunteers for Dera Ballan, a businessman from Jalandhar and a government employee and his wife. In their conversations with each other over the course of the seventeen-hour train ride, various issues from the use of drugs in the community to the lack of communal solidarity were raised. Some of the people opined that there was a lack of solidarity and unity among the Dalits because they go to different places of worship. There were also discussions about how the mobility of the Dalits is curtailed by not having the right government. The rampant drug addiction problem was seen as a conspiracy by an upper-caste government to wipe out an entire generation of Dalits. The government employee pointed out that even when jobs are available, young Dalit men do not want to work. Thus, being a participant and an observer during this train ride enabled me to learn about the larger narratives within the Ad-dharmi community and the dynamics of the Ravidassia movement. While a number of these findings do not feature prominently in the data chapters, they provided the context against which the occurrences within the village space were interpreted.

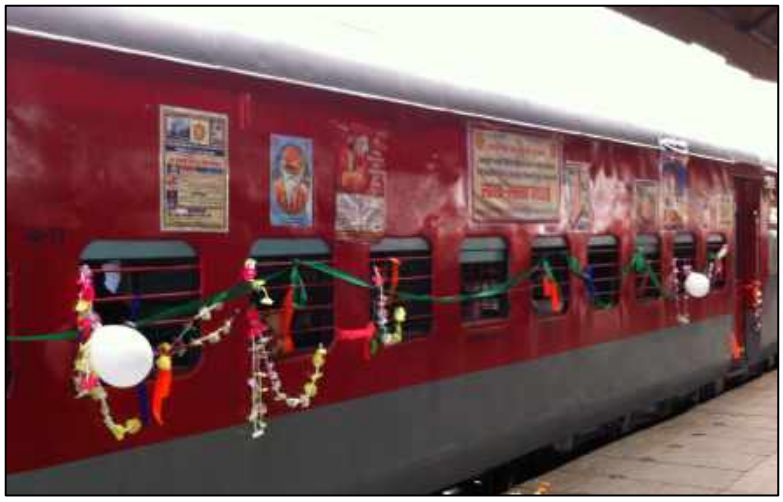

Figure 12.0: The train to Benares was decorated with pictures and messages related to Guru Ravidass and Ambedkar. On the way to Benares, whenever the train pulled into a station, we were greeted by people playing *dhols* and dancing on the platform. Even within the train, there was a very celebratory and jovial atmosphere.

3.4.5 Institutions outside the Village

Outside the village space, I engaged with various Dalit institutes and informants across Jalandhar and Phagwara. These interactions enabled me to better place my observations within the social dynamics and shifts that were occurring inside the Dalit community in the Doaba region. Specifically, in visiting community leaders and organisations like the Ambedkar Bhavan in Jalandhar and the Ravidass Institute for Education in Phagwara, I uncovered different political and social orientations around Ad-dharmi mobility. This has also been noted by Juergensmeyer (2009) in his seminal work on the Ad-dharmi community. This situated the Ravidassia religious movement as one of the many movements for caste pride and upliftment.

I also visited the Ambedkar Bhavan library and a socialist institute that has been built on the legacy of the Ghadr[87] Party to access some lesser-known material on Dalits and especially Dalit women in Punjab. In attending various events at these institutes, I was able to meet other people who work on issues of the Punjabi Dalit community. A Phagwara politician who is involved with the local BSP party, asserted that the issue of drug addiction and the lack of education are preventing the Dalit community from achieving its potential. He also mentioned that the drug addiction problem was one that had been created by the upper-castes, as they purposely supplied drugs to lower-caste villagers to prevent them from advancing. This theory was a widely peddled one, especially among the lower-class villagers. While most of my interactions

[87] The Ghadr Party was a movement started by Sikhs living abroad, especially in the United States and Canada. It aimed at securing India's independence from the British (Puri, 2000).

with the community leaders and activists were in the form of interviews rather than casual everyday conversations, they provided an alternative lens for understanding the context and socio-political dynamics of Chaheru.

The local municipality office, the block development offices and the district education offices were places I visited to gather Census data, information on educational attainment in the district, uptake of the MNREGA program and the number of BPL[88] cardholders in Chaheru. I also conversed with the government officials at these sites to gain their perspectives on the contemporary situation of governance and Dalit mobility in Punjab.

A general consensus among both upper- and lower-caste government officials is that Punjab's lower-caste population, despite making strides in economic standing, continues to take advantage of government schemes. In Punjab, according to the Atta Dal scheme that was launched in 2007, all BPL cardholders get grains and pulses at a subsidised rate[89]. While I could not ascertain the exact number of villagers making use of this scheme in Chaheru, it was evident that when the trucks with cheaper grains and pulses came by the village, almost all of my middle-class informants would stand in line to collect their share. While a reliable estimate of the number of BPL cardholders in the village could not be derived, the general view was that most families have BPL cards, even when they don't meet the criteria. In fact, some of these families were elite migrant families that did not even live in the village. Thus, despite the middle-class informants' claims of charting an independent mobility paradigm that is not reliant on state support, they continue to utilise government aid.

3.4.6 Oral History

I visited the *patwari*, who is in charge of maintaining the land records of the area, multiple times to gather information about the landholding patterns in the region. But he refused to divulge any information and only told me, in rather broad terms, that the people residing in Chaheru all came from different villages. In the absence of documentation about landholding patterns, I reconstructed the community's past by drawing on oral histories relayed to me by

[88] BPL stands for Below Poverty Line and is an economic parameter that is used by the government to identify those families that are in greater need of economic assistance.
[89] https://www.quora.com/What-is-Atta-Dal-scheme-that-Punjab-government-has-introduced

differently positioned community members. I also met prominent upper-caste landholders in the adjoining settlement to understand the history of the community from their perspectives.

This allowed me to develop a narrative of the community's history that was punctuated by shifting caste relations and marked transitions in occupational choices. In fact, the method of gathering oral histories, especially among marginalised communities, has been seen to be particularly useful in addressing historical oppression. The process of oral history allows Dalits to author their own history and corrects the power imbalances and hierarchies that are implicit in official historical accounts. It also offers different perspectives on history that would not be available otherwise (Heering, 2013).

In Chaheru, a reliance on oral histories produces some differing narratives. As recounted in Section 2.2.4, most Dalit families in the village either deny or overlook the community's past as agricultural labour for Jat farmers. In contrast, the upper-caste farmers emphasise the history of Dalits having been agricultural labour on their lands. They concede, however, that things have markedly changed in the last 20-30 years as the lower castes have begun to migrate and seek other forms of employment. Additionally, none of the Dalit community members recount being involved with leatherwork and claim that their ancestors were associated with leatherwork over three generations ago. This distancing from a history of low status and polluting occupations reflects the community's imperative to reconstruct their history in ways that align with their present objectives of claiming status and mobility.

3.5 Positionality

3.5.1 Navigating Suspicions

At the onset of my fieldwork, I was subject to a battery of questions, like how did your husband allow you to come by yourself? Are you really married? What proof do you have that you are a Canadian citizen? Are you writing a book only about our village? Why are you not going to other villages? These questions reflected the suspicions and doubts that the villagers harboured about my presence in their midst because my presence in the village did not fit in with their view of appropriate gender norms and migrant behaviour. My ability to operate independently in a 'backward' space made it difficult for them to categorise me as a 'respectable' married woman. They could not reconcile the idea of a married woman being 'allowed' to stay in a

village, away from her husband and family. Also, given the prevailing mobility imaginary and aspiration for migration, they could not understand why someone from Canada would want to come back and live in a village like theirs. The uncertainty about my positioning as a migrant is also linked to the construct of a typical migrant that is circulated and normalised within the village space. Often, in their dressing and grooming practices, migrants try to mark their distinction from the village space and those who have been 'left behind'. For example, despite the fact that Reshmo has been told about the frequency of chain snatching[90], whenever she is in the village, she continues to wear heavy gold jewellery not only within the village but even on the trip to Benares. Her adornment of expensive jewellery allows Reshmo to hold herself above the rules that apply to those 'left behind' and mark her position as a wealthy migrant.

In contrast, in my dressing and behaviour, I did not fulfil the conditions of a migrant. I often dressed down in less expensive and sometimes even in faded kurtas and *churidars* so as not to stand out in the village space. I also wore vermillion in my hair parting, a *bindi* on my forehead and bangles on my wrists, all the traditional symbols that married Hindu women wear to mark their marital status. I did this to ward off any unwanted sexual advances and attention, although I maintained an open and friendly demeanour otherwise. This contrast between my clothing and the expectation of what a migrant looks like was pointed out by Reshmo when I was visiting her in her house in the village one day. On this particular occasion, Reshmo rebuked me for wearing a faded kurta and a churidar that was torn. When I told her that I had just ripped the churidar, she said that she had noticed it the day before as well. She then said to me, "*You are from Canada. It does not look good if you dress like this. You should dress well*." (25 January 2016) Her comment suggests that my lack of expensive clothing prevented me from fulfilling the conditions of a migrant. Thus, the villagers were unable to place me in the familiar categories of 'migrant' and 'married woman' and this enhanced their discomfort. It also explains their drawing upon other explanations for my presence in the village.

Over time, I uncovered that there were different theories circulating in the village about my identity. At one point in time, it was even suspected that I might be a Pakistani spy[91]. Some people also thought that I might be a thief, as there had been stories doing the rounds of young women posing as surveyors to enter houses in the village in order to steal. These theories reflect

[90] A common way of stealing gold necklaces in north India, where the thief sneaks up from behind and 'snatches' the necklace you are wearing.
[91] This might have been due to the terrorist attack in Gurdaspur district, Punjab in July 2015.

the difficulty that the villagers had in placing me within familiar categories and they also speak of the high levels of insecurity within a community that is actively transitioning and attempting to claim class mobility.

Another concern within the community in the early months of my fieldwork was that their village was being singled out for the study. I was repeatedly asked why I was not going to any other villages and only focusing on Chaheru[92]. In order to assuage some of their concerns, I would often tell the villagers that I had been to Dera Ballan and had received permission from the Maharajji[93] to work on the Ravidassi community. Although I eventually found out that most of the villagers are not followers of Dera Ballan, it served as a familiar and respected reference point. Irrespective of their religious beliefs, the villagers unanimously valued Dera Ballan for imbuing the Ad-dharmi identity with recognition and respect.

In introducing my study to potential participants, I would mention that I had been to Dera Ballan and that I was interested in finding out more about the Ad-dharmi community. To convey to these participants that my study had a broader focus base than just the families in the village, I also mentioned that I would be visiting the school in the village as well as the school affiliated with Dera Ballan. Moreover, given the low levels of education in the village, while I did tell the people that I am doing a PhD, since most people were unfamiliar with what this meant, I explained my work as writing a book on the village. I also told them that I am studying in a university that is in the UK and I have lived in Canada. This introduction was oriented towards conveying my positionality as an educated migrant and establishing my credibility in the village space. It also attempted to address some of the community's concerns about my motivations and intentions.

The concerns about my identity and objectives were more enhanced in the case of some lower-class families. Their suspicions evolved to the extent that the ensuing interactions with them became unpleasant[94]. For instance, a middle-aged man, Kishor who had illegally migrated to

[92] I explained to the villagers that it had taken me a long time to meet different families in the village and get them to talk to me and that it would be very difficult to repeat the entire process again in a new village. Also, at one point, when I said that the other settlement was an upper-caste settlement and that Chaheru was a lower-caste village, and my movement between the two could make people in both the villages suspicious, the sarpanch's wife responded by saying that there was no longer any problem between the lower-castes and upper-castes.

[93] The reference to Dera Ballan is especially important because I did not have any other channel for entry into the community. I was not introduced to the community by an interlocutor or an informant. Instead, the process was led by my own ability to forge connections.

[94] In one case, I visited the house of a family where the elder son drove an auto-rickshaw while his wife ran a small corner store that was not doing too well. The younger son was involved in supervising construction work and his wife ran the only

the US twenty years ago, asked me whether I had any proof of my Canadian citizenship. When I said that I do not carry my passport with me all the time, he badgered me to produce some other document to prove my Canadian citizenship. In response, I showed him a letter from my university explaining that I am enrolled as a PhD student, my student ID from the university and my health card from Canada. I also let him know that I could get him a photocopy of my passport, if needed. However, his interrogation continued as he told me that anyone could produce fake copies of these documents[95]. He then proceeded to warn me that I should not be walking around in the village as it was not safe. This show of hostility appeared to be a scare tactic aimed at keeping me away from his family. While I attempted to approach the family at another time, their disinterested response, along with this unpleasant exchange, indicated to me that they did not want to participate in the study. Thus, I perceived such shows of hostility and disinterest as a family's withdrawal of consent from interaction and participation in the study[96].

While other lower-class families were less explicit and politer in expressing their suspicions, they also raised questions about why, as an upper-caste, was I interested in a lower-caste village. Elite migrant families, while primarily settled abroad, were mostly unavailable even when they were in the village. If I did manage to get some time with them, they were similarly suspicious of my presence and did not want to engage with me. The only elite migrant with whom I had some interaction was Reshmo. As mentioned earlier, however, it was a rather strained interaction that was punctuated by her 'looking down' at me and by her mistrust of me. It seemed that for both lower-class and elite migrant families, my upper-caste identity and their inability to place me within the familiar categories of 'migrant' and 'married young woman' was discomforting. In fact, some older women questioned whether I was actually married or not, and even after I showed them pictures of my wedding, they were not convinced.

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beauty parlour in the village. When I visited their house, while their mother was nice to me and asked me about what I was doing, the younger son was clearly suspicious of my presence. He said to me, "*You know that drug addiction is very common in this community and you never know if someone has put drugs in your food and given it to you, what will you do then*?" (19 October 2015) He said this just as I was sipping the tea that his mother had handed to me. This immediately put me on my guard and I was left wondering whether there was actually something in my tea or not. When I tried to tell him that I had grown up in Canada where some people used drugs and that it wasn't such a unique experience for me, he said I did not look Canadian. While the motive behind these scare tactics was unclear, given that he was deeply suspicious of my presence, it was likely that he did not want me to visit his family again. Later on, his wife asked me whether I had felt bad about what her husband had said and she told me, by way of explanation, that he often said weird things but that he did not harbour any ill-intentions. However, given that I was placing implicit trust in people when visiting their homes, I did not feel comfortable visiting this particular family again.

[95] The scepticism regarding formal documentation can be explained by the preponderance of fake documentation for migration purposes in Punjab.

[96] Given the hostility I faced, I stayed away from this house for some time. When I did go back again with Kavita (she was their neighbour and a distant relative), Kishor was not home, so I was able to speak the young women and their mother. But they too, were not keen to talk to me. They also took to ignoring me at community events. I was only able to speak a little bit with Sameera, Kishor's youngest daughter and that too at Kavita's house.

In contrast, most middle-class families, while being initially more hesitant of my presence, were not as explicitly suspicious. They seemed to place more value on my education and exposure to spaces abroad and were also less concerned about my upper-caste identity. They saw my presence as an opportunity to display their middle-class credentials, i.e. education, exposure to urban spaces, migrant relatives and consumption. Their ability to overlook or be less concerned with my caste identity may have stemmed from their own desire to pass caste, as is detailed in Section 6.3.4 While these families also asked me a number of questions about my work and what I was planning to do, they were more curious rather than being suspicious. Their greater interest in my life may have been guided by their own plans for advancement and mobility, which hinged more strongly on education and migration. In some ways, for the young women from these families, I came to stand in as an aspirational figure, someone who they saw as an educated and independent migrant. Thus, my positionality allowed me to build a rapport and establish comfortable relationships with middle-class families as opposed to lower-class and elite families, who were unable to relate to me in the same way.

However, I did have a number of warm and pleasant interactions with lower-class families and some elite migrants as well. But their levels of exposure to spaces outside the village and their overall positionality in the class hierarchy may explain their higher levels of suspicion and disengagement. Given their class disadvantage, it is possible that the lower-class villagers had more negative interactions with the upper-caste Punjabis and consequently, were more resentful and suspicious of my presence. Also, middle-class professionally employed or migrant men were exposed to urban spaces outside the village and had more experience of interacting with diverse populations. In contrast, their lower-class counterparts were less exposed and also held on to caste politics more closely. Elite migrant families tended to be more oriented towards the Ravidassia movement, which perpetuated an exclusionary caste identity. While they were not involved in local caste politics, their alignment with a politicised religious movement that actively talked about upper-caste Hindus and Sikhs in derogatory terms may have bolstered their resentment towards an upper-caste researcher. Moreover, young women from middle-class families may have hoped to learn something from me about urban mannerisms and migration. But lower-class and elite villagers were not in a position to benefit from my presence. While lower-class villagers were not in a situation to pursue mobility, elite migrants had already attained mobility and were more concerned with maintaining their distinctive position in the village space.

Admittedly, my positionality played out differently among lower-class, middle-class and elite families and translated to different types and extents of interactions. Given the receptive response from middle-class families and the study's focus on navigations of mobility, my research became oriented towards uncovering the navigations of middle-class families around migration, education and consumption. Moreover, my positionality also shaped the data I was able to collect. While my positionality imposed limitations on my research process, it also opened up avenues for engagement that would not have been available to a different researcher.

3.6 Limitations

3.6.1 Data Collection

A consequence of my positionality as a young woman in a rural context was the limited access that I had to the young men in Chaheru. Generally, barring Nina's husband, Kulwinder's younger son and a return migrant from the Gulf, most of the young men in the village avoided speaking to me. Their resistance to engaging with me appeared to reflect cultural norms around communicating respectability by refraining from interactions with the opposite sex. Also, in cases where I was able to engage in extended conversations with young men, I was careful to manage these interactions so as not to appear 'too' friendly. For example, I would only visit Kulwinder's son at the grocery store for a short time and throughout our interaction, I would maintain a more closed body language to prevent any sexual advances. Other female researchers working in diverse rural contexts in India have also noted that their research methods are guided by their concerns for safeguarding themselves against sexual advances and different forms of sexual harassment (for example see Chopra, 2004; Dua, 1979; Palriwala, 2005). Despite these precautions, I was subject to an unpleasant voyeuristic incident in Benares, while taking a shower in the communal bathrooms.

Evidently, my positionality operated to restrict access to young men. But as a young woman, my non-threatening position and affinity with the young women allowed me to access the homes of the different families I interacted with. While a male researcher would have enjoyed better access to the young men, it is unlikely that he would have been able to situate himself within their homes. In contrast, I was able to gain access to more intimate interpersonal

negotiations and family dynamics. While this access was negotiated over a period of time[97], it allowed me to interact with young women, older women and older men.

My positionality as a suspect outsider also had an impact on the research methods I was able to implement. At the onset of the research, I had planned to conduct a survey across all the households in the village to collect basic socio-demographic information. This, along with ethnographic data, would have allowed me to make more confident assertions about the migration, education and employment patterns in the village. However, after designing the questionnaire and planning to use it towards the end of my fieldwork when people were more trusting of me, I decided to not go ahead with it. Given that even after many months in the field site, I was continually faced with the challenge of renegotiating access and building credibility, I thought that the survey would not be well received.

It was only after my second field visit, when I was warmly received by the community and invited back, that I thought I could consider running a survey in the future. But in order to convince the people to give their personal information in a formalised format, it would be important to tie the survey to their everyday concerns and problems. Thus, an argument would have to be made about how the survey results could benefit the community. But within the objectives of the present research, where such an argument could not be made, running a survey posed the risk of antagonising the community.

The community's level of mistrust also shaped my decision to not record our interactions. I collected data through conversations and participant observations and documented everything through field notes that I wrote at the end of each day. It was only in rare cases, when I was conducting more formal interviews with activists or institutional actors, that I recorded the interactions, with prior consent. The exclusive reliance on field notes meant that sometimes, the exact words and phrases that people used to describe things could not be recalled. However,

[97] Given the high level of suspicion, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I ran into some logistical problems. While people would invite me over to their house for tea, even if it was lunch time, they did not offer any food to me. Initially, I took to carrying bananas to sustain myself through the day. But this became increasingly difficult and it began to limit the time I could spend in the village. Eventually, I decided to work out an arrangement where I could pay a family in the village and go to their house for lunch every day. I also thought that this might be a stepping-stone to establishing a space for myself within the village. When I spoke to Kavita and her mother, Kanta, regarding this arrangement, they agreed to it and I began having my lunches in their home. This plan worked out well. Over the course of our daily lunches, as I spent more time with them, I established a relationship with both Kavita and Kanta. Then, I began spending a couple of nights at their home every week. I compensated them with money and small gifts. After a couple of months, Kanta talked to me about finding an alternative accommodation within the village. Eventually, I was introduced to Babita through Kanta and I stayed in Babita's house for the remaining duration of my fieldwork period and also when I returned to Chaheru for a second time the following year.

for the most part, I was able to create detailed field notes and recall most of what had been said and done by the people I interacted with during the day.

3.6.2 Renegotiating Access

Another aspect of navigating around my 'outsider' position was that making myself relevant and accepted within the community was an ongoing process. After I had been in the village for six months and had visited the families multiple times, people started asking me how long I intended to stay in the village. It then became clear to me that I needed to find another avenue to be involved in the community. Given the importance attached to attaining fluency in English and the compromised access that the village children had to English language training within the schools they attended, I thought I could run English classes for them in the village itself. After a tedious process of negotiating access to a space[98], I began English classes for the children at the village gurdwara. It was mostly young children from lower-class families who attended these weekly classes.

A number of villagers, including Babita, were sceptical of the classes and told me that I will not be able to handle the children, as they are *bahut kharaab*, meaning very bad. This assertion about the children being very bad reflects a common moral narrative in the village, which deems the lower-class villagers as immoral and backward. This anxiety about managing lower-class others also manifested in the village school's response. The school's emphasis on formalisation and procedures is at odds with the ethos of the village space and suggests the anxiety around managing a 'wayward' lower-class populace.

Despite the initial misgivings about the children's behaviour and my ability to manage them[99], once the classes had been up and running for a few weeks, people became appreciative of my

[98] Initially, I approached the village school about the possibility of hosting these classes on its premises during the weekend. The school, however, expressed resistance and told the panchayat to ask me to get signatures from all the parents confirming that neither the school nor I were going to be responsible for the children during these classes. The demand for this level of formalisation within a village set up was surprising. One of the panchayat members then explained to me that it was because I didn't know the community well enough and that if something went wrong, they would create an issue. Later on, I sat down with the school principal and explained to her that the classes I had proposed were not an institutional exercise but just something that I wanted to do to give back to the community. The principal then said that they were concerned that if they gave over the keys to the school, things may get stolen as this had apparently happened in the past. Finally, I spoke to the head of the gurdwara committee and asked him if I could use the gurdwara space and he agreed. The classes were then announced over the village loudspeaker by the gurdwara pathi and I began holding weekly English classes in the gurdwara space.

[99] I was also told that my Western techniques of teaching would not work on these children as they needed someone who was tough and could discipline them. The implication was that I was 'too soft' to manage these ill-mannered children. In fact, since I was living in Babita's house, she felt more responsible about me and was concerned that something untoward might happen during these classes and that she would be blamed for it.

efforts. Often during classes, politically involved members of the community would drop by to see what was happening and they all seemed pleased with the progress of the children. Since I had started these classes around the time of the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations in the village, some of the children came up with the idea that we should do something during the event. It appeared that these weekly classes had provided the children with a valuable community space where they could interact, share ideas and explore their creativity. In fact, they were all bursting with ideas and with some guidance from me, they wrote, directed and performed plays on various issues afflicting the community.

In addition to allowing me to make a contribution to the community, these English classes provided another avenue for me to engage with the community. It often became a discussion point and allowed the community members to see me as meaningfully engaging with their village. More importantly, it allowed me to renegotiate an extended period of stay in the village space.

3.6.3 Implications of Methodology

Admittedly, since this thesis is located in the homes of the young women and is largely confined to the village space, it is able to capture the interactions between larger cultural paradigms and the young women's everyday practices and discourses. However, the focus on the village space also limits this thesis' ability to comment on the young women's active pursuit of mobility outside the village space, at educational institutes, sites of urban leisure or during trips to different cities. Wherever possible, I undertook trips outside the village with the young women. Some of these trips, such as those to Jalandhar and Benares, are discussed throughout the thesis. These trips often revealed new dimensions of the young women's negotiations around mobility. In the case of Nina, during the trip to Benares, different ideas of caste and class status came to the fore.

Within the village space, Nina presented her middle-class identity in opposition to rurality. She rebuked villagers, including her in-laws, for wearing gaudy clothes, eating oily food and lacking cultural sophistication and education. Here, Nina constructs her middle-classness based on her fluency in urban culture, leisure and food. However, on the trip to Benares, as the social referents change and Nina is no longer at her in-laws' house in the village and markers between the local Ad-dharmi population and the Punjabi counterparts become more relevant, she draws

on her Punjabi Chamar identity to claim social positioning. At the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations in Benares, Nina's caste identity becomes more central to the ways in which she interacts and expresses herself[100]. She often emphasises the adherence to certain religious rituals around eating, praying and moving about during the religious event.

The example of Nina reveals that while in the village, the issue of caste recedes to the background, but during a caste specific religious event, displaying pride in one's Chamarness emerges as an important marker of middle-classness. These different findings on the relevance of caste identity across contexts pinpoints the limitation of the thesis' methodology. While the present work captures the resonance of mobility in the young women's everyday lives, it is limited in working within a caste homogenous space and observing the young women mostly within the village and in their homes. It is possible that in caste heterogeneous spaces, away from their families and homes, these young women operate on different ideas of mobility, caste and class.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The nature of my data collection process was very personal as I was spending extended periods of time in people's homes and with their families. This type of research enabled me to access rich ethnographic data, but it also produced a deep ethical dilemma. While all the informants were well aware that I was writing a book about the village and that my exchanges with them were part of it, this was not something that they always seemed to have in mind. Often, when the young women were telling me personal details about their family dynamics and romantic relationships, they did not appear to be conscious that what they were telling me would show up in the book. In these moments, they were able to confide in me because they saw me as a friend. My personal relationships with the informants, especially the young women, many of whom I am still in touch with, was crucial to my ability to continue finding acceptance within the village space and interacting with them about their lives in the village.

[100] In one instance, during our trip to Benares, as Nina and I are standing in line to use the communal shower, we begin talking to another girl who is also standing in the queue. At one point in our conversation, she asks if Nina and I are sisters. Nina immediately responds by saying that we are not related and begins to explain that I am from a different caste and that I am here because I am doing my PhD. The girl gets confused with all these details and asks Nina whether she herself is an SC or not? To this, Nina replies that she is a *kattar* Chamar, which roughly translates to strict and proud Chamar.

My relationships with most participants were personal and the lines between my roles as a researcher and a friend were often blurred. In most cases, I tried to transition between these two roles based on the type of interaction I was having and how the participants perceived me in these interactions. When I was talking to them about the status of things in the village and about their future plans, aspirations and challenges, I was more oriented towards my role as a researcher. Correspondingly, the participants responded to me by giving me more weighed answers. At other times, when they were talking to me about their personal stories, I believe that we were relating to each other as friends. However, the lines were not always so distinct. In some instances, especially when the young women were relating personal stories that were relevant to the ideas of mobility, I found myself responding and analysing their words as both a researcher and a friend. In these instances, my two roles seemed congealed into one.

I have managed this ethical dilemma in the analysis stage in different ways. Firstly, I have refrained from citing personal stories unless they are essential and in service of a larger point that is being made. Even in these cases, I have reduced my retelling to small snippets to provide context without going into too much detail. Secondly, I have changed the names of the settlement, the village and the informants and assigned them with pseudonyms. Despite these efforts, I am aware that if someone from the village were to read my thesis, they would be able to identify the family I am speaking about. With this in mind, I have attempted to put forth an empathetic reading of my informants and present them as multifaceted individuals with complex and nuanced interactions with their social world.

3.8 Conclusion

My positionality as an educated and upper-caste woman, and more specifically as an ‘outsider’, shaped the ways in which the community interpreted me and thereby, determined the data that I was able to access. The suspicion I was continually subject to, meant that I had to modify my research methods to assuage the concerns of the community and not invite further objections. At a basic level, this meant adapting ways of collecting data. At the onset of the research, my objective was to also expand the base of this study to include the upper-caste settlement as well as run a survey across Chaheru. But these efforts were abandoned for the purpose of etching acceptance for myself in Chaheru, which proved to be a rather long and arduous task. Moreover, I had to continually find ways of engaging with the community to retain their consent and trust on an ongoing basis.

Specifically, my positionality as an upper-caste, educated migrant made me relatable to the middle-class families in Chaheru. The young women in these families were especially interested in talking to me due to their own aspirations around education and migration. Consequently, my thesis evolved to discuss the role played by these young women in defining and reproducing middle-class culture in a predominantly Ad-dharmi village. During the data collection stage, I had thought that I would also talk about family level interactions with education, religion and politics. But upon returning from the field, I found out that I had the most detailed data on the young women's negotiations with mobility. Admittedly, this focus on young women allows me to comment on the construction of middle-class culture from the perspective of gender and class. But it also limits the discussion on religion and caste politics, as these are two areas that the young women did not engage with much.

In addition, this research is located in a predominantly Ad-dharmi village and is limited in its ability to comment on inter-caste relations and mobility navigations outside the space of the village. While I spoke to people about their interactions with the upper-castes, I was not able to observe these interactions. One way of gleaning the varied attitudes towards the upper-castes was to analyse how different families treated me. The openness of educated middle-class families towards me mirrors their desire to suppress their lower-caste identity and instead, draw upon class mobility as a marker of status. In contrast, caste emerges as a stronger metric of identity among the lower-class families in the sphere of politics and among elite migrant families in the sphere of religion. Also, I observed the young women primarily within the village space and this limits the ability of this study to comment on how mobility is navigated in real time. It is possible that observing these young women across different contexts such as educational or religious sites can elicit varying orientations towards urbanity, rurality and caste identity. In fact, this comes forth in the case of Nina. In Benares her identity as a 'Chamar' comes to the fore and becomes more salient. Moreover, Dalit activists in Phagwara and Jalandhar repeatedly pointed out that sites of higher education are rife with casteism. Thus, it is possible that observing these young women in educational spaces can reveal heightened caste tensions and discrimination.

While this research provides a limited view of middle-class formation in an Ad-dharmi community, it serves to contribute to the scant literature on Dalit Punjabi women. Moreover, it provides a rich account of how young women in a historically marginalised community are

redefining the construct of middle-class culture and leading their family's transition to middle-classness. Finally, this work relays an alternative lens for understanding lower-caste communities in Punjab. It shifts the gaze from understanding lower-caste communities as being marked with poverty and high levels of drug addiction and crime, to evolving communities where 'dutiful' daughters are engaged in the work of status production.

4 Conceptualising Mobile Identities in the Village

4.1 Introduction

In Chaheru, young women's negotiations with migration, education, consumption and marriage can be conceptualised through the overarching notion of mobility. In much of the work around mobility, it emerges not only as a physical movement, but also as an economic, social and cultural 'moving up' of people (Gardner & Osella, 2003; Salazar, 2018). In the context of Chaheru, mobility is understood as the physical and cultural movement away from the village space. This movement is about accessing urban and Western cultures outside the confines of the village and it hinges on the young women's access to opportunities for high-status employment, education and migration through marriage[101]. Thus, the young women's construction of middle-class culture is tied to their navigations around this movement away from the village.

In observing the young women within the village space, their discourses, imaginaries and practices appear to be directed at accessing this mobility and the concomitant middle-class identity. Given the strong culture of migration, migration emerges as the most aspired pathway to mobility. But forging access to migration and even high-status employment is an arduous and unpredictable process that is dependent on various factors aligning themselves in favour of the young women. As will be discussed in Section 8.5, even marriage to well-settled migrants did not necessarily facilitate the movement of young women. Thus, migration and employment related mobility are often imagined and discussed, but rarely attained. In the absence of these mobility outcomes, education and consumption become the most accessible and resilient signifiers of mobility and middle-class culture. In fact, as soon as an upwardly mobile family is able to accrue some wealth, they invest it in the education of their daughters and convert their wealth into status through consumption.

While engaging with education, the young women are able to access modern urban spaces outside the village. Similarly, in consuming fashion and food, the young women draw upon these spaces outside the village as reference points around which they can navigate their cultural orientations towards urbanity and rurality. Thus, both education and consumption

[101] Generally, young women's migration was tied to their marriage to a well-settled migrant, which could facilitate theirown migration.

allow the young women to develop a knowledge of and a familiarity with modern urban cultures. They use this know-how and this access to carve out mobile identities within the village space that have varying orientations towards rurality, urbanity and femininity. These mobile identities occupy an in-between space that is distinct from the cultural ethos of the lower and upper classes. Thus, within the village space, claims for mobility emerge as middle-class identities that can be understood through the lens of waiting, appropriate femininity, constrained agency, everyday resistance and cultural styles.

The first part of this chapter deconstructs the idea of mobility and examines the literature on mobility imaginaries and on waiting and immobility. An engagement with this literature allows one to conceive the young women's waiting for mobility as a productive activity. During this period of waiting and coping with feelings of immobility, these young women use their access to education and consumption to claim a middle-class positioning in the village space.

In its second part, this chapter probes the literature on educational mobility through the lens of caste, class and gender. This work indicates that the young women's navigations around education are nestled in family plans. The young women assign different meanings to education, based on their family positioning and middle-class culture.

In its third part, this chapter conceptualises middle-class femininity through an engagement with the ideas of appropriate femininity, Dalit women's autonomy and agency. This part introduces the construct of constrained agency and everyday resistance, which are useful in understanding the young women's negotiations with familial expectations.

In its last part, this chapter engages with the literature on consumption, especially as it relates to the 'new middle class'. This allows one to examine the moral, cultural and agentive aspects of the young women's negotiations with fashion and food. In conclusion, this chapter relays the fluidity and variability of the young women's negotiations with mobility and middle-classness.

4.2 Mobility

In attempting to unravel the prevailing construct of mobility in Chaheru, it is useful to examine the way in which mobility is constructed. Mobility refers to the idea that one's social world is

in a state of flux, where not only people but also cultures, objects, media, information and ideas circulate across space and time (Appadurai, 1996; Blunt, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Salazar, 2018; Sheller & Urry, 2006). This construct of mobility echoes ideas of modernity and globalisation that similarly reference increasing deterritorialisation, time-space compression and nomadism. Moreover, the mobilities paradigm, as coined by Sheller and Urry (2006)[102], emphasises a fluid view of spaces which does not presume that a particular space will invariably coincide with a particular social process. This framework allows one to delineate the way in which the global and the local are constructed and mutually constituted (Sivaramakrishnan & Agrawal, 2003).

In taking from the mobilities paradigm, instead of invariably seeing the village as a site of immobility and spaces outside the village as sites of mobility, the present work attends to the discourses and practices which produce mobility and immobility across different sites (Sheller & Urry, 2006). While the young women seek to move away from the village to experience mobility, they are also able to access some aspects of mobility within the village space itself through education and consumption. Also, as will be detailed in Section 5.4, moving away from the village does not necessitate mobility since it introduces challenges of cultural transition and new sites of immobility. Moreover, as will be discussed in Section 8.5, the experience of migrant wives who have been left behind points to the fallacy of mobility imaginaries, which presume that marriage to a migrant will facilitate mobility. Thus, an examination of the young women's everyday discourses and practices around middle-classness reveals that mobility and immobility are complementary processes (Salazar, 2010).

4.2.1 Mobility Imaginaries

In Chaheru, the idea of mobility, and more specifically of moving away from the village space, is an important preoccupation among the young men and women. Given the paucity of opportunities for migration and employment, this moving away is often an imaginative process for the young women as it relies on specific constructions and imaginaries of the village and

[102] Sheller and Urry (2006)'s mobilities paradigm is one of the first efforts to develop the concept of mobility. Sheller and Urry (2006) attempted to combat the assumptions of sedentarism in many works of social science, which tend to view stability, meaning and place through the lens of normality. The dominant narrative in social science works does not align with the contemporary reality of interconnectivity where ". . . all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an island . . ." (p. 209).

of *bahar* or spaces outside the village. These spaces outside the village, the Western spaces abroad and the urban spaces within India, are aspirational and modern spaces that are imbued with different characteristics which will be discussed in Section 5.2.

The importance of migration and moving away to spaces 'abroad' can be linked to the strong culture of migration in Chaheru. Despite the lure of urbanity, migration emerges as the main paradigm for imagining the eventual moving away from the village. In comparison to employment and further education, it also signals a more permanent movement away from the village. The embeddedness of migration as a mobility imaginary can be seen as emerging from a larger culture of migration. The term 'culture of migration', coined by Kandel and Massey (2002), refers to the preponderance of ideas and practices that celebrate migration. In a culture of migration, non-migrants observe migrants they are related to and emulate their behaviour. Kandel and Massey (2002) focus on the perpetuation of migration culture through migrant networks and suggest that those who have relatives living/ working abroad are more motivated to migrate. Ali (2007) adds that even those who do not have relatives abroad have an equal desire to migrate due to the larger culture of migration.

In the context of Chaheru, Ali's (2007) argument pans out as people appear invested and engaged in the larger culture of migration even when they are not actively pursuing migration and regardless of whether they have relatives living abroad or not. In fact, among the educated middle-class families, even contestations of the idea that migration necessarily translates into economic and social mobility were constructed in opposition to the prevailing mobility imaginary. Thus, in a very visceral sense, migration becomes a shared culture that people participate in and experience in different ways. However, despite the persistence of the migration-as-mobility imaginary, young women, especially those from educated and/or secure middle-class families, also seek opportunities for employment. This serves as an alternative mobility imaginary around movement to urban spaces. These constructs of mobility become a part of the social and cultural discourse of Chaheru and shape the processes of social differentiation, interaction and othering.

Anthropological works on migration draw on the construct of mobility imaginaries to understand the non-economic motivations for migration (for example see De Neve, 2003; Gardner & Osella, 2003; Mills, 1997; Salazar, 2010; Salazar, 2011). They point out that imaginaries of urban and Western spaces are what propel movement to these places. Salazar

(2011) notes that for Tanzanians, the European continent is a list of countries associated with characteristics like high levels of development, wealth, social security and political power. This notion of the 'cosmopolitan West' represents a utopian fantasy which is actively aspired to (p. 588). Similarly, Mills (1997) points out that young women's migration from rural to urban Thailand is not just about material goals but also about their aspiration for certain subjectivities. Part of what draws these young rural women into the city is the implicit suggestion that there "they can at once be beautiful, modern, and mobile . . ." (p. 43). In many settings where migration is linked to the ideal of masculinity and is central to the process of social becoming for young men, the dream of migration "…works as a kind of opium (and) reality is no longer confronted . . ." (Salazar, 2011, p. 587). Young men are willing to accept long-term unemployment or underemployment as they anticipate and wait for an opportunity to go abroad (Salazar, 2011). Thus, mobility imaginaries are not an abstract vision of the future but are ingrained in the day-to-day activities and interactions of people.

Mobility imaginaries also reflect the ways in which the global becomes accommodated in and adapted to the local. A number of works on mobility imaginaries have pointed out that these imaginaries rely on reductive categories which echo the ideas of the local and the global (Favero, 2005; Ferguson, 1999). Salazar (2010), in his work on migration and tourism, points to the dichotomous imaginaries that construct the local as being geographically bound, immobile and strongly rooted in local culture. In contrast, tourists possess the cosmopolitan capital which facilitates their social and physical mobility. However, Weiss (2002) asserts that instead of reifying the local and the global through imaginative practice locality is situated and reconfigured to recognise and incorporate the global[103]. Thus, while the ideal types of local and global are an important part of the imaginary, through practice, they are reconfigured and an integrative discourse which draws on elements of the local and the global emerges (p. 94). The imaginary then appears as ". . . a form of negotiation between (locally situated) individuals and globally defined fields of possibility . . ." (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31).

In elucidating the linkages between imaginaries and practice, Salazar (2010) relates how tourism imaginaries are reproduced and reconstructed by tourist guides, who occupy the

[103] Weiss (2002) elaborates on the construction of thug realism as a masculine fantasy performed by young men through discourses and practices around the barbershop in Tanzania. He analyses the physical and discursive elements of the barbershops to delineate the reproduction of an imaginary that allows young men to recreate and adapt to the global in the local. The imaginary of thug realism and the barbershops brings the global to the local in ways that allow the young men to etch belonging to an aspirational identity within the local context.

liminal space between the tourists and the locals. At a discursive level, tourist guides reinforce tourism imaginaries by projecting themselves as being akin to the immobile local. While the tourist guides are well-versed with global popular culture and technologies, they do not reveal this in their interactions with the tourists. During village tours, tourist guides reinforce the mythical and unchanging notion of rural life rather than projecting rural life as it is currently lived and experienced. However, while reinforcing the tourism imaginary at a discursive level, in practice, tourist guides trouble and blur the binary between immobile local guides and mobile tourists. Salazar (2010) asserts that simultaneous proximity and distancing from dominant imaginaries allows the tourist guide to renegotiate a favourable position vis-à-vis the tourist. While the content of the imaginary is unchallenged, the tourist guide varies his/her proximity to the imaginary to alter his/her positioning.

In the case of Chaheru, the reiteration and subversion of mobility imaginaries emerges in the ways in which the young women negotiate their period of waiting and immobility in the village. As will be elaborated in Chapter 5, at the level of general discourse, the young women often reinforce the dichotomous constructs of the mobile migrant/ immobile local and the modern urban/ backward rural. However, as they negotiate the complicated process of moving away from the village space, they attempt to reclaim notions of locality. Also, young women from less secure middle-class families are invested in balancing the local with the global in their practices around education and consumption. This 'balancing' allows them to challenge traditional social boundaries and engage in the process of defining middle-class culture. The ways in which the local and the global are redefined and navigated in cultural terms will be discussed in each of the data chapters.

4.2.2. Waiting and (Im)mobility

Despite the prevailing migration as mobility imaginary in Chaheru, it did not materialise for a majority of the population. Also, the young women were limited in their ability to attain high-status employment due to limitations around female mobility, continuities in historical disadvantages and the difficulty in passing government exams. As the young women 'waited' for opportunities of mobility, they felt 'left behind' and immobile. In coping with this sense of immobility, the young women made plans for the future and engaged in different types of work either within or close to the village space. In order to unravel the ways in which these young

women construct their work and identity during this period, it is useful to draw from the larger literature on 'waiting' and '*timepass*'[104].

The construct of waiting as a productive in-between phase has been used to talk about the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees, urban slum dwellers and the rural poor (for example see Appadurai, 2002; Conlon, 2007; Corbridge et al., 2005; Stepputat, 1992; Wong, 1991). In this literature, "waiting through spaces of mobility" emerges as a common form of immobility (Conlon, 2011, p. 253). While waiting appears to be a state of stasis or immobility, Gasparini (1995) mentions that long-term waiting creates a sense of stability and allows for the creation of new social roles and identities (p. 36). Periods of waiting act as a preparation for transitioning into a high-status role and allow the actor to go through a new socialisation process (Glaser & Strauss, 1968, 1971). In seeing waiting as a purposive process, it is possible to reconceptualise waiting as allowing for the formation of new subjectivities and social relations (Bissel, 2007).

A number of works document young men's experience of 'chronic waiting' (Jeffrey et al., 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Jónsson, 2008; Weiss, 2002). This is linked to the disjuncture between the increasing uptake of formal education and the declining opportunities for secure salaried work in developing countries (Bajaj, 2012; Cross, 2009; Deuchar, 2014a, 2014b; Jeffrey et al., 2004a; Jeffrey, 2010; Kölbel, 2013; Little & Sabates, 2008). Much of this work points at the young men's waiting as a period of activity in which they redefine their identity (Jeffrey et al., 2004a; Jeffrey et al., 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Jónsson, 2008; Weiss, 2002). Jeffrey et al. (2008), in their seminal work on underemployed and unemployed young men in Uttar Pradesh (UP), propose that waiting is a productive period for young men. In this period, young men engage in 'timepass' or pass time by hanging around with friends in public areas, chatting and drinking tea. This allows these unemployed or underemployed young men in UP to assign purpose and meaning to an elongated waiting period as well as, to cope with the feeling of being left out. Young men also perceive timepass as allowing them to develop special skills and knowledge (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 473-475).

Specifically, the young men felt that timepass allowed them to learn more about urban life and straddle multiple worlds. They could move between their rural homes and the small towns in

[104] The killing or passing of time by hanging around with friends

western UP and the modern world associated with the West and Delhi (Jeffrey et al., 2004a; Jeffrey et al., 2008; Jeffrey, 2010). Thus, timepass does not emerge as a passive activity, but as one which allows the youth to forge new cultural identities and feelings of social worth. As the bearers of cultural fluency, the young men looked upon themselves as intelligent observers of urban life. They were able to distinguish themselves from the illiterate urban poor, whom they perceived as wasting time, and the upper class, who were seen to be engaging in wasteful leisure activities. Thus, the discourse of timepass also allowed the young men to position themselves as belonging to the respectable middle class (Jeffery, 2010, p. 473-477).

Young women in rural Punjab cannot engage in similar forms of public sociality as it is considered inappropriate for them to hang out, except in certain public spaces and then too, only for a short time duration. Thus, in Chaheru, young women carry forth their waiting within the domestic sphere by engaging in various forms of work and training that equip them with transferrable skills. They construct activities, hopes and plans around their impending mobility. In this context, while waiting involves intermittent feelings of immobility, the period of waiting becomes defined by purposive preparation to migrate or work. In reflecting upon the experience of waiting as an active exercise, it is possible to see the young women left behind in Chaheru in an in-between state, where they are actively reworking their resources and social identities to attain status within the community, even in the absence of 'real' mobility.

4.3 Educational Mobility

As mentioned earlier, compared to migration and high-status employment, education is a more readily available pathway for the young women to access modern urban spaces. The literature on Dalit mobility also suggests that the increased uptake of education and government employment by Dalits has facilitated their economic and social mobility (Chalam, 2007; Ciotti, 2006; Kapur, Prasad, Pritchett & Babu, 2010; Still, 2011). While issues like high dropout rates, low levels of female enrolment, exclusion of children from very poor families, low quality education and discrimination within schools persist, Dalit literacy increased in the 1980s and the 1990s (Chalam, 2007; Ghuman et al., 2006; Judge & Bal, 2009; Kapur et al., 2010; Pimpley, 1976; Still, 2011).

Development discourse has also highlighted the importance of education. It emphasises that education and its accompanying certifications can be seen as 'mobile capital' that can be

utilised towards the end of attaining social mobility (Corbett, 2007, p. 29; Osella & Osella, 2000). For instance, Sen (1999) perceives education as instrumental in attaining gainful employment. The lure of education for development has been linked to its potential to allow marginalised groups to attain achieved status and overcome ascribed status or identities (Ciotti, 2006). Contemporarily, education, especially for girls, is prioritised by international donor agencies due to its influence on enhancing democracy and lowering fertility and mortality rates (Chopra & Jeffery, 2005; Kumar, 1994).

While this discourse on the merits of education is widely reproduced through development interventions, a number of anthropological works have revealed that the link between education and development is not so straightforward (Chopra, 2011; Froerer, 2012; Froerer & Portisch, 2012; Rao, 2010a, 2010b; Still, 2011). As previously mentioned, in the context of decreasing job opportunities, despite obtaining formal education, young men are unable to secure employment (Bajaj, 2012; Cross, 2009; Deuchar, 2014a, 2014b; Jeffrey et al., 2004a; Jeffrey, 2010; Kölbel, 2013; Little & Sabates, 2008). Jeffrey et al., (2008) discuss the ways in which Dalit men cope with this disjuncture by adopting educated identities as a source of social distinction in the face of unemployed and underemployment.

Although there has been less work on educated young women, it pinpoints the importance of family decisions and plans in shaping the meanings of women's education in marginalised communities. Young women's interactions with education are shaped by ideas of female respectability, family status and class (Chopra, 2011; Froerer, 2012; Froerer & Portisch, 2012; Rao, 2010b; Still, 2011; Vijayakumar, 2013). For instance, Still (2011) examines the connections between education, marriage and honour in an upwardly mobile Dalit community in rural Andhra Pradesh. She asserts that the education of women is not pursued with the goal of facilitating female mobility. Rather, it is valued as a resource that aids their marriage into middle-class families, thereby enhancing the class status of their natal families. Still (2001) asserts that upon marriage into the Dalit middle classes, while they are spared the grind of agricultural labour, Dalit women are directed towards status production work. They are expected to uphold family respectability by curtailing movement outside the house and by expressing modesty in language, clothing and demeanour (Still, 2011). Thus, the family's class mobility becomes tied to the education and reduced mobility of the young women.

In her work on migration and militancy, Chopra (2011) deconstructs patterns around education among Jat families in a village near Jalandhar, Punjab, in 1982-83. In the family of a Jat landowner, Chopra identifies the greater investment in the girl's education that makes her more privileged than the sons as an unusual choice, one which can be explained by the family's plans around migration and education. Specifically, the girl's enrolment in a prestigious school that inculcates more 'modern' grooming habits and ensures greater fluency in English was conducive to preparing her to marry an NRI and migrate. The girl was to then serve as a conduit for the migration of her younger brother, whom she was expected to sponsor. The elder son's minimal education and concurrent initiation into agricultural work was aligned with his role as the inheritor and guardian of the ancestral property (Chopra, 2011, p. 51-64). Thus, both Still (2011) and Chopra (2011) demonstrate that the meaning ascribed to women's education is continually shifting and is shaped by considerations around status, class identity and family plans.

In addition, other work on this subject has pointed out the complex aspects of young women's negotiations with education. Froerer(2012) highlights the 'course correction' that young women do to their educational aspirations in the face of parental resistance or institutional barriers. Froerer(2012) finds that in an Adivasi community in Chhattisgarh, education for girls was only valued up till grade 5. Beyond this, schooling was seen as an impediment to their marriage. In fact, young girls continued to perform household chores so as to be able to continue accessing education. In contrast to parental views on education, the girls themselves harboured ambitions of attaining higher levels of education (at least grade 12) and becoming teachers, nursery workers or healthcare workers. These aspirations were defined by the desire to escape devalued agricultural labour rather than accessing consumer goods or social mobility.

Over time, as their schooling was stopped after they reached grade 5, the girls reconciled their aspirations with the shift in their situation by adopting their parents' view. Instead of lamenting their failed plans, the girls reoriented their energies into consolidating their domestic skills in preparation for their married lives. They then reflected upon their education as having been the optimal amount as it ensured that they had basic literacy and also gave them value in the marriage market. The meaning of schooling also evolved as ". . . it no longer represented the possibility of becoming a teacher or securing a brighter future outside of the village; instead, it was considered to be a worthwhile endeavour through which a respectable marriage proposal could be secured . . ." (Froerer, 2012, p. 350). Froerer (2012) explains parental views and the

shift in the young girls' future plans with respect to limited livelihood and mobility choices, which made it pragmatic for the young women to invest in obtaining a good matrimonial match. The girls who continued their schooling held on to the aspirations of employment for much longer. These girls also acquired greater bargaining powers than their peers and were able to negotiate greater autonomy over future plans. For example, while Chandrabati, one of the girls who acquired education till grade 12, was unable to become a teacher, she was able to delay her marriage by enrolling in a tailoring course.

Froerer (2012), like Still (2011) and Chopra (2011), points to the importance of parental plans in shaping the young women's educational attainments. Additionally, she highlights the adaptability that these young women demonstrated in shifting their future plans to align with those of their parents in the face of limited employment opportunities. This flexibility and adaptability of the young women in navigating expectations of traditional femininity, whilst maintaining access to opportunities for advancement, have also been noted by others (for example see Radhakrishnan, 2008; Vijayakumar, 2013). Moreover, Froerer (2012) briefly points to the differential position enjoyed by the more educated young women in the village. This idea is further developed by Ciotti (2010) in her work on the Chamars residing in the village of Manupur in eastern UP.

Ciotti (2010) discusses the ways in which upwardly mobile and city educated Chamar women[105] were carving a distinctive social identity for themselves even in the absence of employment opportunities in Manupur. They perceived education as imbuing them with civilising qualities, cultural resources and an opportunity to attain economic self-sufficiency. More importantly, education also allowed the young women to distance themselves from the lower-class other and to engage in middle-class formation. Young Chamar women defined themselves and their position vis-à-vis lower-class others through the construct of education (p. 239-242). This work echoes some of the findings of Jeffrey et al. (2008)'s research on underemployed and unemployed young men in UP.

Jeffrey et al. (2008) reiterate that even in the absence of employment opportunities, lower-caste men continued to utilise their educated identities to establish their status vis-à-vis other community members. Educated young men reinvest in the construct of education as progress

[105] These were mostly urban women who had been married to government employees in rural areas.

and distinguish themselves from those considered illiterate. These distinctions between themselves and those considered illiterate were based on everyday mannerisms and discourse. The educated young men saw themselves as having sophisticated speech in contrast to the blunt, uncouth and rude way in which the illiterate men spoke (p. 64-70). They defined the clothes and the accessories they sported as being "smart, fashionable and modern . . ." (Jeffrey et al., 2008, p. 67). This was set in opposition to the gaudy or excessively modern fashion choices of the illiterate young men. Thus, education becomes a powerful tool used by the young men to set the discourse about themselves and the others as well as, to establish their own cultural fluency, modernity and development.

In examining the ways in which education is pursued in Chaheru, this thesis will mainly focus on the young women's narratives and practices. As mentioned above, parental expectations around marriage, femininity and status are important in shaping the young women's education preferences. Thus, in Chapter 6, parental views and expectations are seen as the backdrop or context of young women's navigations. Additionally, this chapter looks at the diverse meanings attached to education and the ways in which education becomes mobilised amongst differently located young women as they lay claim to ideas of middle-class culture. Importantly, young women in Chaheru are not gravitating towards a single construct of education related mobility. Instead, education is drawn upon differently by young women based on their family positioning and culture in order to fashion respectable middle-class identities.

Along with the usage of education as a source of social distinction, the adaptability and flexibility referenced by Froerer (2012), Radhakrishnan (2008) and Vijayakumar (2013), are an important aspect of education practice and discourse in Chaheru. The young women's ability to adapt their preferences to balance divergent expectations, points to their socially constrained autonomy, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Negotiating Middle-Class Femininity

In their negotiations with migration, education and consumption, young women do not exercise individualistic claims to autonomy. Instead, they operate within the confines of their economic positioning and familial culture and exhibit a form of negotiated or constrained autonomy. While adhering to the requirements imposed by parents and rural norms, they also attempt to fulfil their aspirations around accessing urban and Western cultures. Thus, young women,

especially those from less secure middle-class families, take to balancing not only between rural and urban norms, but also between familial expectations and their own aspirations for mobility.

In order to uncover the basis of young women's negotiations, it is useful to draw on the idea of appropriate femininity, which delimits the expectations of normative behaviour from young women. Additionally, constrained agency and Dalit women's autonomy are drawn upon to delve into everyday forms of Dalit women's agency, subversion and balancing.

4.4.1 Appropriate Femininity

In navigating mobility, young women in Chaheru can be seen to be engaged in a balancing act between the gendered expectations and demands of the 'traditional' rural and the 'modern' urban spaces respectively. In similarly explaining the experiences of middle-class women as they negotiate the distinctive demands of modernity and tradition, Radhakrishnan (2008), Gilberston (2014) and Liechty (2003) have used the constructs of balance, respectability, appropriateness and suitability.

In examining 'the global Indian identity' among female IT workers in Bangalore and the Silicon Valley, Radhakrishnan (2008) finds that this identity is premised on a femininity that creates a 'balance' between progress and sacrifice. This balance is achieved through the everyday practices of female IT workers, who do not place their individuality and success in the workplace over and above their family. The pursuit of work-related success persists only so long as it supports the well-being of the family. Additionally, within the domestic space, women garner greater negotiating power and respect due to their professional achievements. Importantly, Radhakrishnan (2008) points to a new construction of respectable femininity, which hinges on the successful balance between work and home.

This is in contrast to earlier models of ideal womanhood, which were premised on the domestic role of women. Notably, Skeggs' (1997) construct of respectable femininity was developed to capture the gendered construction of class identity among working-class women in north-west England. The moral woman was understood with respect to her "role as wife and mother, the control of her sexuality, provision of care and protection, ability to educate the children and capacity for the general surveillance of working-class men . . ." (Skeggs, 1997, p. 5). According

to Skeggs (1997), in nineteenth century England, middle-class identity was constructed vis-à-vis the morality of women. Similarly, in the context of Punjab, Malhotra (2002) examines gender, caste and religious identities in colonial Punjab. She discusses how the notion of the *pativrata* or devoted wife was developed in nineteenth century Punjab by the upper castes to create a middle-class identity. The *pativrata* wife was supposed to symbolise and facilitate the ideal middle-class family, wherein the wife was subservient to the husband, the joint family was sacrosanct and interactions with the lower castes were reduced and diverted to spaces outside the house. While these older constructs of respectability capture the fundamental linkages between class and gender identities, they do not apply to the contemporary reality of urban and urbanising parts of India where women's morality is no longer assessed solely through their domestic roles and sexuality.

In contrast to the older models of the moral woman, which only assigned a high value to housewives, Radhakrishnan (2008) asserts that presently in urban India, value is also accorded to a woman's professional employment. High status professional employment not only enhances a woman's position and respect within the household, it also includes her in the paradigm of globalising India. However, the benefits of professional employment do not accrue to all professionally employed women. For instance, women working in call centres are considered less respectable in the urban middle-class milieu because they are not seen as educated and family oriented and are, thereby, considered incapable of fulfilling the conditions of Indian middle-class womanhood. In contrast, the high-status work of female IT professionals lends them a valuable form of cultural capital, which, along with a careful balancing of family and work life, allows them to lay claim to middle-class respectability (Radhakrishnan, 2008). In Chaheru, young women have not been able to attain access to high-status employment. However, in the absence of such high-status employment opportunities, the presence of higher education operates as a marker of respectable femininity. The usage of female education to assert middle-class status has also been noted in other lower-caste communities (for example see Ciotti, 2010; Still, 2011).

In Chaheru, ideas of appropriate femininity shift based on a family's middle-class culture and economic positioning. Young women like Malika, Nina and Somika, who are from secure middle-class families, are more confident in emulating urban fashions. They are less concerned about depicting modesty in clothing and public behaviour. In contrast, young women like Kavita and Gunita, who are from aspiring middle-class families, are more careful and anxious

about not deviating from the norms of rural respectability. Therefore, among young women in Chaheru, the moral framework that guides their decisions around clothing, education and public behaviour is not fixed. However, regardless of the ideal being emulated, the balancing act that women perform in managing the divergent expectations of rurality and urbanity and the etching of a respectable space between the elite and the lower class remains consistent.

In order to capture the varied processes of defining and emulating middle-class morality in Chaheru, the construct of 'appropriate' put forth by Gilberston (2014) is useful, as it captures the fluidity of gender norms and does not impose the limiting uniformity implied by the notion of respectable femininity. Gilbertson (2014) asserts the variation in practices of appropriate femininity across different contexts and amongst women from different sections of the middle-class. She also notes that secure middle-class families reference a different idea of appropriate femininity than that used by their less secure counterparts. Her work will be drawn upon in each of the data chapters to deconstruct appropriate mobility, education and consumption across different types of middle-class families. The construct of respectable femininity will not be discarded in this thesis. Instead, it will be explored and brought in when it is relevant, especially in relation to less secure middle-class women's musings about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Appropriateness is constructed as an umbrella concept and respectability is one of the parameters on which appropriate behaviour is defined.

4.4.2 Dalit Women's Autonomy

Young women's negotiations around appropriate femininity reflect their exercise of agency or autonomy. In order to understand their autonomy, it is useful to preface it with regard to their Dalit identity as well as the social and familial factors that constrain and shape their choices. It is particularly important to delineate young women's negotiations with regard to their Dalit identity because it serves as a corrective to the dominant image of Dalit women as passive

beings who are invariably victimised by their caste and gender[106]. Reductive images[107] of Dalit women, which focus on an unmediated and uniform Dalit experience, come to stand in for the more complex reality of their social existence. The discourse on Dalit women remains fixated on their 'Dalitness' and this prevents a holistic examination of their lives (Ciotti, 2010; Ciotti, 2017; Guru, 1995; Rao, 2003; Rege, 1998). In expressing her critique of this approach, Ciotti (2017) asks, "How do we speak of the kind of other difference whose presence . . . cannot be indexed solely under the rubrics of marginalization, exploitation and violence?" (p. 87)

As expressed by Ciotti (2017), at the heart of the discussion on Dalit women's autonomy is the question about how Dalit women can be reconceptualised to talk about their agency? There are mainly two feminist viewpoints that have attempted to address this question. Guru (1995) points out that Dalit women argue for a distinctive discourse that recognises the triple burdens of caste, class and patriarchal domination within the Dalit community. He further iterates that it is important that we consider the Dalit women's own telling of their stories and histories as more authentic and reliable than the narratives of upper caste others who are talking on their behalf. Rege (1998) posits the Dalit feminist standpoint, which is rooted in the lives of Dalit women. It places emphasis on individual experiences that can be contextualised with regard to power relations of caste, class and gender. This viewpoint recognises that the category of 'Dalit women' is not a homogenous category and that the experiences of Dalit women are diverse and contradictory. While privileging the Dalit voice, this perspective recognises that non-Dalit feminists can reinvent themselves as Dalit feminists (Rege, 1998).

In taking this idea of reimagining Dalit women forward, Ciotti (2017) reiterates the importance of viewing Dalit women as non-victims and subjects of political participation. In her work with Dalit political activists in Lucknow, Ciotti (2017) examines the ways in which Dalit women have channelled their disadvantageous conditions towards agentive practices and positive identities. She focuses on upwardly mobile women because it is thought that the study of non-

[106] The literature on Dalit women's autonomy has pointed out the silencing and underrepresentation of Dalit women in feminist discourses and politics. Feminist discourse has not been able to draw linkages between caste hierarchies and patriarchies and develop a feminist politics centred on Dalit women (Rege, 1998). Similarly, in the political sphere, Dalit women were excluded from the socio-political outfits of the 1970s and 1980s. In these organisations, Dalit women were reduced to token inclusions. It was only in the Dalit Panther movement and the Leftist Women's Front that Dalit women were better included, but they remained entrenched in the role of the mother and the victimised sexual being. Also, both the parties did not address the issue of Brahmanism. For the Dalit Panthers, caste was conflated with class and for the Leftist Women's Front, notions of sisterhood took precedence. This resulted in classical exclusion as Dalit identity become associated with Dalit men and the Dalit women's experiences were identified with the middle-class and upper-caste women. This overlooked the specificity of the Dalit women's experiences and reduced them to mere victims (Rege, 1998).

[107] In popular discourse, Dalit women are painted as "coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males . . ." (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 127)

victims in the Dalit community will yield counter-intuitive insights. Ciotti (2017) contends that class emerges as the key aspect of Dalit women's political agency. The Dalit women construct complex and varied narratives of their Dalit identity and for many of them their Dalit identity is disempowering. Moreover, the involvement of women in political activities is aided by their presence in an urban setting and by the support of their husbands and other male family members.

Thus, through her work, Ciotti (2017) relays an analytical and conceptual roadmap for recovering Dalit women's agency by shifting the focus away from solely talking about caste, to talking about the wide array of social practices and identities that Dalit women are implicated in. Ciotti (2017) is neither countering nor denying the evidence on the marginalisation and exploitation of Dalit women. But by moving the gaze away from the homogenous category of Dalit women, she is able to talk about other aspects of their experiences. This is the perspective that will be adopted and further developed in the thesis.

4.4.3 Agency

While attending to Dalit women's agency, it is important to contextualise their negotiations with migration, education, consumption and marriage with respect to their social identities and relations. In Chaheru, two important mediators of the young women's construct of mobility and middle-class culture are their family's culture and its economic positioning. Thus, in analysing their agency, the young women will be perceived as social actors embedded in and informed by their collective identity and relationships (for example see Benei, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988; Nyamjoh, 2002). Moreover, the notion of constrained and everyday forms of agency will be developed to capture Dalit women's navigations.

While classical work on agency presumes a decontextualized individual actor, work on agency in the developing world highlights that individual freedom to pursue goals exists within a socially determined framework (for example see Benei, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988; Nyamjoh, 2002). Actors pursue social relations and collective interests along with individual creativity and self-fulfilment (Nyamnjoh, 2002, p. 2). Within the context of the household, Kabeer (1999) asserts that people's needs, interests and choices are shaped by individual histories as well as by the material and social contexts of their everyday realities. As women engage in decision-making within the household, they do not usually seek to upturn existing

power relations. Instead, they often employ bargaining, negotiation, manipulation and processes of reflection and analysis to negotiate greater autonomy within the existing power dynamics. Such practices reveal the informal decision-making agency that women exercise. Often, as has also been revealed from other work in the South Asian context, women negotiate private forms of empowerment. This allows them to retain their status and positioning in the household, while influencing decision-making within the family (Basu, 1996; Chen, 1983; Kabeer, 1997; Kabeer, 1999). Such negotiations don't challenge or upturn pre-existing social hierarchies, but they also cannot be dismissed as instances of false consciousness. Instead, they should be perceived as a reflection of women's agency that is shaped and constrained by various cultural and social dynamics.

This notion of constrained and informal agency has also been developed by Kandiyoti (1988) with respect to women's negotiations with patriarchy. She argues that women negotiate and strategize within a set of restraints that she terms "patriarchal bargain". The patriarchal bargain defines the prevailing gender ideology, which shifts based on variations of class, caste and ethnicity. For example, classic patriarchy entails patriotically extended households and young women being given away in marriage at a young age to households headed by their father-in-law. In such households, young women are subordinate not only to the men, but also to the older women such as their mother-in-law. Under the conditions of classic patriarchy, women largely accommodate to the system and instead of openly resisting it, they adopt interpersonal strategies that allow them to engage in decision-making by manipulating the affections of their sons and husbands. These forms of individual negotiation do not alter the structure but allow the women to enhance their autonomy (Kandiyoti, 1988). Thus, taken together, the above-mentioned works emphasise the importance of structure or social systems in shaping the ways in which agency is exercised. Moreover, Kabeer (1999) and Kandiyoti (1988) point to forms of agency that are more strategic and that allow women to retain their status, whilst resisting patriarchal control.

In order to better conceptualise these notions of informal agency and the ways in which they manifest in Chaheru, it is useful to draw on Mahmood (2006)'s work on agency. Mahmood(2006) conceptualises agency as not necessarily implying a resistance to the prevailing social order and relations of dominance, but rather, as a capacity for action, which has to be understood within the "discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment . . ." (Mahmood, 2006, p.42). Mahmood (2006) also proposes, ". .

viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms . . .” (Mahmood, 2006, p. 42). In applying Mahmood (2006)’s construct of agency to the young women in Chaheru, it is possible to glean young women’s everyday negotiations around mobility as acts of agency. The young women’s navigations around education and consumption are not oriented at upturning prevailing social norms and are carried out within the confines of what is appropriate and defined by their families. However, the ways in which these young women occupy their normative positions demonstrates an active process of negotiation. The young women’s autonomy can be located in the balancing act they perform between their aspirations for physical and cultural mobility and their family’s concerns about status and respectability.

4.5 Consumption

An important prism for understanding the young women’s formation of middle-class identities is consumption. The performance of consumption allows previously lower-class and lower-caste groups to transition to higher-class identities (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Donner & De Neve, 2011; Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008). As mentioned earlier, in the absence of movement away from the village, consumption practices are also a way for the young women to take on mobile identities within the village space. The focus on consumption among the new middle class can be traced back to the post-liberalisation phase in India. During this period, the criteria of occupation, revenue and education became less important and the middle-class identity became more linked to the social imaginary and depiction of consumption[108] (Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008). This transition indicated an opening up of the middle-class identity as people were no longer excluded on the basis of birth and historical sources of disadvantage such as caste. But even this more open middle-class identity had certain conditions of entry. Membership in the new middle class was premised upon modern consumption, English education, employment in non-traditional occupations, higher incomes, ownership of some economic assets and the self-consciousness of belonging to the middle class (Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008).

[108] At the time of independence, being a part of the middle class was predicated on having access to English education and professional education. During the colonial period, the middle class was an exclusive group of bureaucrats that served as interlocutors between the British officials and their Indian subjects. In the post-liberalisation phase, the basis of middle-class identity shifted to a more consumption-based identification (Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008).

The use of consumption to mark their distinction from the lower classes is especially important for the new middle class, given its insecure and recent claim to middle-classness (Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2003). For previously lower-caste or lower-class groups, consumption becomes an important symbol of their affinity with good taste and style and sets them apart from the lower classes (Sheth, 1999, p. 2509). Moreover, as emerges in Chaheru, depicting consumption convincingly is not simply about accessing material goods. Rather, it is about acquiring the cultural fluency, imagination and subjectivity to perform class identity (Appadurai, 1986; Baviskar & Ray, 2011).

Among lower-caste groups transitioning to middle-classness, young men and women are usually the first generation and, in some cases, the only members of their families undergoing this transition. They are not equipped, therefore, with generationally passed down knowledge about using high-status goods. Thus, depicting fluent consumption becomes complicated for them. In fact, a major source of differentiation among the young women in Chaheru is their ability to convincingly imbibe middle-class consumption (Appadurai, 1986). Also, the ideal of consumption that the young women seek to emulate shifts basis their exposure to urban culture, affinity to rural and urban cultural norms and the security with which their families claim a middle-class status. Thus, the young women's use of consumption is linked to ideas of culture and morality and signifies an exertion of their autonomy and negotiation. Further, in analysing the performance of consumption in Chaheru, it is useful to probe the objectives as well as the moral and cultural basis of middle-class consumption.

4.5.1 Morality of Consumption

Similar to other aspects of middle-class culture, consumption is also approached and understood through the lens of morality (Appadurai, 1986; Kapur et al., 2010; Liechty, 2003; Miller, 1995). Moral discourses are used to legitimise or critique middle-class consumption, thereby defining the 'appropriate' type and extent of consumption people should engage in. In his seminal work on the Nepali middle class, Liechty (2003) asserts that consumerism is one of the most important cultural processes through which an emerging middle class constructs its socio-cultural identity. He asserts that among the emerging Nepali middle class, the consumption of consumer goods is mediated through the lens of appropriateness and suitability. Admittedly, while middle-class suitability is a vague construct, Liechty (2003)

asserts that it begins with the notion of moderation and in-betweenness. In different arenas of consumption, what is deemed appropriate for the middle class is defined as distinct from lower- and upper-class practices. For instance, fashion moderation was defined by not participating in too many domains of stylisation. It was considered suitable to pick one or two domains of fashion to focus on such as hairstyles or accessories. But beyond that, one enters the ambit of vulgarity (Liechty, 2003, p. 74).

The middle-class women in Nepal constructed their lower-class counterparts who do 'too much' fashion as immoral and associated with prostitution. Liechty (2003) recounts that his middle-class respondents repeatedly told him stories of women who turned to prostitution to satisfy their desire for material goods. He identifies this as a morality tale that reveals the anxiety of the middle-class respondents about the world of consumer goods and its ability to lure young women into immoral actions (p. 76-78). A similar anxiety and morality regarding consumption emerged in Chaheru, where the young women were careful to distance themselves from elite forms of consumption that were associated with immoral behaviours like using drugs and the consumption of alcohol. For instance, Somika, while adorning urban fashions with greater ease, did not wear short skirts or revealing clothes that were associated with immorality in the rural space. Also, while migration was an actively aspired to ideal which was linked with increasing consumption and wealth, the left behind wives of migrants were critiqued for engaging in 'too much' consumption. The connotations and determinations of 'moral' consumption in Chaheru will be explored in Chapter 7.

The use of morality discourse to delimit the scope of consumption also emerges in more securely placed middle-class populations. Upadhya (2008) and Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) pinpoint that while IT professionals have a comfortable lifestyle and are able to spend more freely on eating out, purchasing a house and wearing branded clothing, they are not ostentatious in their consumption habits. While they spend well on furnishing their homes with the latest gadgets and furniture, they do not depict the flashy style that is typical of the nouveau riche business families in Delhi and Mumbai. In fact, even though they wear branded clothes, they are not fashionable in their clothing choices. Men and women wear simple clothes like jeans and shirts and salwar kameez respectively (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2007; Upadhya, 2008). The restrained and thought out consumption of the IT professionals is constructed as more respectable than the frivolous and irresponsible consumption of the young call centre crowd. The IT professionals perceive themselves as responsible consumers who direct their money to

fulfilling traditional middle-class goals like purchasing a house, creating economic security and investing in their children's education (Upadhya, 2008). Thus, the morality surrounding consumption is not only about the amount of consumption but also the type of consumption.

In Chaheru, ideas of respectability and appropriateness are drawn upon by the young women to engage in the selective uptake of consumption. Liechty (2003) explains that the morality surrounding consumption is reminiscent of the middle-class tendency to simultaneously embrace and distance itself from the global consumer culture that offers "a status-enhancing modernity but one tinged with immorality . . ." (Liechty, 2003, p. 79). The tales of suitability and moderation allow the middle class to claim moral consumerism, while outsourcing the negative and immoral aspects of consumerism to those above and below them (Liechty, 2003, p. 79-80). In examining the young women's consumption in Chaheru, it is useful to draw on the construct of 'appropriateness' not only to unravel the negotiation of gender norms but also the ideal of consumption that is linked to a 'respectable' middle-class identity.

4.5.2 Consumption and Autonomy

Despite the continuities in moral and cultural concerns surrounding consumption across contexts, there isn't a single blueprint for the ideal consumption practice. A tendency in the consumption literature has been to examine consumption in the Third World as representing the adoption of modernity and global ideals. These works focus on defining and categorising consumption practices based on the narrow categories of modernity/tradition and local/global. However, this reduction of Third World consumption to a simple case of emulation or imitation overlooks the consumers' agency in deciphering their preferred consumption as well as the various purposes of consumption (Friedman, 1990; Gell, 1986; Miller, 1995; Wilk, 1990; Wilk,1999). Instead, Wilk (1990) proposes that it is more productive to examine the ideological and economic constraints on consumption as well as the sources of autonomy and innovation in consumption practices.

In Chaheru, the young women's consumption practices depict the simultaneity of conformity and play. In comparison to education and marriage practices that are more explicitly nestled in family plans, consumption emerges as a sphere for the young women to engage in more individualistic claims to status. Their practices of consumption, whilst limited by familial constraints, also reveal personal aspirations for accessing spaces and cultures outside the

village. Thus, consumption is often perceived as an imaginative and creative process, which allows one to not only define their current position, but also make plans for the future and aspire for something (Gell, 1986; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999). However, the type of consumption pursued and whether or not it conforms to the prevailing norms depends on one's social, economic and cultural context. In Chaheru, the young women's consumption practices are shaped by their family's occupational culture and economic positioning[109].

Previous work has also found that consumption practices are defined by whether one exercises a secure or insecure claim to middle-class status. Among more securely placed middle-class respondents, there is greater competence and comfort around depicting forms of elite consumption (Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2003; Saavala, 2006). Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) pinpoint that for IT professionals, while consumption in the areas of home and education is important, their educational qualifications and professional employment are their 'primary currency'.

Also, female IT professionals are usually dressed in modest and unfashionable clothes and do not depict any anxiety about fitting into the ideal of middle-classness. These female IT professionals are seen as occupying a secure middle-class status. Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) compare their experiences with less secure middle-class women in Delhi, who, upon obtaining a job in a multinational, were worried about dressing poorly to work. Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) surmise that the anxiety of less secure middle-class women was linked to their precarious class position and their desire to assert a middle-class status. This distinction in consumption practices between those who are securely middle class and those who are trying to illustrate their middle-class credentials is important, as it points to different types of middle-class cultures (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2007). This distinction also plays out in Chaheru, where less secure migrant families are more reliant on consumption practices to relay their claim to middle-class status. In contrast, educated and more secure middle-class families were not as focused on consumption. They used their education, cultural sophistication and greater exposure to urban culture as distinguishing factors.

[109] Previous work has pointed out that in many cases, consumption practices can serve to reiterate the prevailing social hierarchies. In the context of Muria, a tribal community in Bastar, Gell (1986) finds that the richer community members gravitate towards prestige consumption. The items they aspire to own, like clothing and jewellery, are associated with non-Muria groups. These items are not sought because of inter-village competition but because villagers are attempting to live up to a collective image. Thus, consumption becomes directed towards conformity and not originality or individuality. Gell (1986) identifies this type of consumption as "dull, unimaginative consumerism, which only reiterates class the class habitus . . ." and he distinguishes this from "adventurous consumerism . . . which struggles against the limits of the known world . . ." (Gell, 1986 p. 115).

Thus, in examining the young women's consumption practices in Chaheru, it is important to recognise that a family's specific claim to middle-class culture can significantly shape the type of consumption that becomes relevant and important for the young women. But at the same time, the young women also exercise choices around food and clothing in a creative and careful way to communicate affinities with urbanity, rurality and aspirations for mobility. In Chapter 7, there is an effort to engage with everyday idioms and performances of consumption to unravel the interactions between consumption and the young women's larger project to etch a socially respectable and mobile identity.

4.5.3 Consumption and Culture

There is a propensity in anthropological literature to see Western ideas and goods as homogenising and dominating forces that render the local irrelevant. This prevents an engagement with the local conditions and interactions that produce a variety of consumption practices and discourses (Gell, 1986; Miller, 1995; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999). A number of works, whilst conceding that people are not converging around a homogenous globalised identity, point to the salience of notions of tradition/modernity and global/local in people's navigations of cultural transitions (Favero, 2005; Ferguson, 1999; Sivaramakrishnan & Agrawal, 2003; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999).

The idiom of the seductive and powerful outer world versus the authentic and marginalised inner or local world is embedded in the day-to-day discussions and actions of people in the developing world (Wilk, 1990). Consumption then becomes a manifestation of the negotiations people undertake to bridge the gap between the old and new, home and away and immobility and mobility. Thus, not only do consumption practices pertain to claims around status, morality and class identity, they are also about the cultural and social transitions that people are coping with. The next part of this section examines the ways in which the cultural aspects of consumption are interpreted and navigated across different contexts.

Wilk (1999) and Donner (2011) surmise that people's food consumption reflects their orientations towards Western and local cultures. Specifically, through consuming foods that

integrate foreign and local elements[110], well-placed Belizians are able to mobilise their knowledge about the world and "transform abstract images, words, and names into the familiar appliances of life in Belize . . ." (Wilk, 1999, p. 247). Donner (2011) also finds that in middle-class Bengali families, the balancing between local and modern cultures was carried forth through the women's moderation of their food preferences. Historically, in the post-independence period, traditional Bengali home cooked meals, which comprise of fish, dal, rice and vegetables, served as the bedrock of the Bengali middle-class family. It symbolised the importance of women's domestic labour and traditional lifestyles. In this context, eating out was considered transgressive. In the post-liberalisation phase, food options and eating out[111] became more available and commonplace. Middle-class women attempted to reconcile the modernity symbolised by outside food with traditional food preferences by abstaining from eating non-vegetarian food. They made non-vegetarian and Western foods at home to satiate the preferences of their children, especially their sons. They also controlled the cooking process so that they were not utilising pre-made or ready-made items as well as kitchen devices that would reduce labour (Donner, 2011).

In their consumption practices and discourses, IT workers attempt to manage the tensions that exist between the traditional middle-class values of family and the new consumerist middle-class lifestyle. Respondents construct the narrative of a core or inner world of culture, tradition and values that is untarnished or maintained despite the outer world of materialism and modernity. The core values that the respondents perceive as resilient have often to do with family values like giving respect to elders and religious traditions and rituals (Upadhya, 2008). While the emerging middle-class identity maintains a modern public persona that is aligned with globalisation, it privately prioritises the reproduction of Indian values through practices and rituals at the family level.

Taken together, these works indicate that the tension between cultural polarities, often constructed as local and global or tradition and modernity, lies at the heart of negotiations around consumption. In each of the above-mentioned contexts, this tussle is managed differently. Wilk (1999) suggests that cultural development is a fluid and continually

[110] Wilk (1999) asserts three different possibilities for development in Belize, which coincide with varying orientations towards global and local cultures. While two scenarios involve the primacy of local ethnic and rural cultures, the third scenario renders local ethnic cultures subservient to foreign goods. Thus, Wilk (1999) surmises that there are different interactions that can occur between the local and the global and the process of cultural development cannot be presumed.

[111] Eating out denoted globalisation and Westernisation and changing food habits were seen as problematic due to their effect on family and gender relations (Donner, 2011).

negotiated process that is carried forth differently by more affluent families and their poorer and less exposed counterparts. In contrast, Donner (2011) and Upadhya (2008) delineate a cultural negotiation in which there is a 'balancing' between the expectations of tradition and modernity. They both point out the reclaiming of a traditional core in the face of modern consumerism. In both these works, the 'traditional' family emerges as an important player as it buffers and mediates the impact of modernity. These works, especially those of Donner (2011) and Upadhya (2008), suggest that while consumption practices often reflect the interactions between different cultural influences, the 'balance' is struck by moving between the cultural worlds.

In examining the practices around consumption in Chaheru, a number of these themes reverberate. Young women in Chaheru often find themselves confronted with two different cultural worlds: the traditional rurality located in their village and the urban modernity that is located in spaces outside the village. In navigating these distinctive spaces, depending on their family positioning and culture, young women attempt to harness either an affinity with one of the cultural worlds or a fluency in moving between the cultural spaces. These orientations towards the rural and the urban are directed at managing the tensions induced by acclimatising oneself to a less familiar modern culture that is located outside the village space. As noted by Donner (2011) and Upadhya (2008), family culture and exposure emerge as strong mediators of young women's consumption patterns.

In taking from this exposition, an examination on middle-class consumption in Chaheru will locate the young women as individual actors embedded in their family cultures. In consuming fashion and food, the young women are not only establishing their middle-class credentials, they are also navigating the cultural transition from the rural to the urban. In order to capture the cultural negotiations that underlie the consumption practices of the young women in Chaheru, it is useful to draw on the concept of cultural styles proposed by Ferguson (1999). Ferguson (1999)'s construct of cultural styles enables an examination of the performative and cultural aspects of consumption. Especially, given that the young women's navigations around consumption are at the level of performance, this construct is particularly useful. Ferguson (1999) defines cultural styles as referring to accomplished performances that signify cultural categories. Cultural styles cannot be seen as totalising modes of culture but rather, they form one axis of social significance than be cross cut by other such axes. For instance, stylistics of

masculinity and femininity take different forms based on other factors such as class or sexuality. (Ferguson, 1999, p. 83-98).

Acquiring and successfully performing a cultural style is not situational or accidental. It is an intentional and innovative act of self-fashioning, which is delimited by certain social and economic compulsions. It relies on drawing upon various forms of internalised and acquired skills and knowledge and translating these into an easy performance. Ferguson asserts, "cultural style is a kind of skilled social action you do with your body, often with little conscious elaboration or awareness . . ." (Ferguson, 1999, p. 98). The ease with which cultural styles are performed cannot be adopted, it has to be achieved.

In discussing the cultural styles of the Zambian Copperbelt workers, Ferguson (1999) identifies two cultural styles: localism and cosmopolitanism. Localism signifies an attachment to rural allies and lifestyle. Cosmopolitanism implies an affinity to urban lifestyles and behaviour. Given the social and economic investments required in cultivating a style, Ferguson (1999) says that usually people specialise in one or the other style. In Chaheru, the two distinctive styles are urbanity and rurality. These cultural styles can be further understood with regard to the young women's mobility imaginaries and construction of the village and spaces outside the village, as will be elaborated in Section 5.2.

In contrast to the tendency of style specialisation posited by Ferguson (1999), in Chaheru, the young women exhibit more fluid orientations towards rurality and urbanity. Young women like Somika, who were from educated and secure families, were more likely to emulate a greater breadth of urban styles with ease. In contrast, young women like Gunita, who were from aspiring middle-class families, selectively emulated 'safe' urban styles whilst holding onto some rural styles. In fact, this ability to 'balance' between the styles and depict cultural flexibility is what allows them to claim a middle-class identity. Moreover, outside the realm of consumption, as discussed in Section 5.4, when the young women attempt to move away to spaces outside the village, there is an attempt to integrate the rural in their plans and practices of mobility. Thus, it is difficult to neatly categorise the young women as rural or urban because depending upon their exposure to urban styles, financial resources and family culture, they imbibe both styles to varying degrees. The young women's complex interactions with cultural discourse and performance are discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7.

4.6 Conclusion

In the context of Chaheru, the young women's everyday navigations around mobility and middle-classness can be unravelled through the constructs of mobility imaginaries, appropriate femininity, everyday resistance and cultural styles. Taken together, these constructs enable an understanding of how these young women establish mobile identities in the village space while imagining movement away from the village and coping with immobility. Evidently, the young women's aspirations and class interests are directed towards mobility and claiming an in-between space that is distinct from the lower and upper classes. But they are not converging around a single ideal of mobility and middle-classness. In fact, despite the dominance of the migration-as-mobility imaginary, the young women depict an immense breadth and variability in their social positioning and future plans. Their family positioning and culture shape their ideas of appropriate femininity, mobility and cultural orientation, thereby producing multiple ideas of mobility and middle-classness.

Across the spheres of mobility, education and consumption, the family emerges as an important and reoccurring site of negotiation. Young women's moving away and consumption practices are characterised by a larger cultural navigation between the traditional rural and modern urban ethos. The family emerges as a moderator of these cultural negotiations to either ensure the shift towards urbanity or continuity in local rural styles. Moreover, in the absence of high-status employment and migration opportunities, education serves as the young women's main conduit to aspirational and modern cultures outside the village space. Their access to education is determined by their family's affordability, attitude towards female mobility and determination of 'appropriate' educational institutes.

Given the familial involvement in the young women's access to mobility and construction of middle-class identity, it is useful to draw on the notion of constrained and situated agency. This idea of agency as contextual, allows one to engage with the ways in which the young women negotiate autonomy by 'balancing' their aspirations for urban modernity with the expectations of their families. Moreover, the idea that agency does not necessitate a radical upturning of gender norms allows one to glean autonomy in the young women's everyday navigations around appropriate femininity, rurality and urbanity. This notion of autonomy also rectifies the reductive narrative of Dalit women and serves to position them as agentive actors involved in complex negotiations around class, status, gender and caste.

Evidently, while the young women are unable to ensure ‘real mobility’ or tangible mobility outcomes, their everyday navigations around education and consumption reveal their ability to restructure their periods of immobility. As young women wait for mobility in the village space and cope with feelings of being ‘left behind’, they are able to claim middle-class and mobile identities through their plan making, educational access and consumption.

5 Planning for Mobility

5.1 Introduction

> *My friend who has studied in Delhi speaks English very well. She got a posting in the Saffron School English Department as head immediately. Her husband did not want her to work, but she insisted . . . Even to apply to places like LPU and SSDMS you need English. When you apply to CBSE schools, they don't hire teachers who have studied in government schools. They only accept people who have studied in private schools.* (13 May 2016)

In this excerpt, Rajini highlights the importance of English education, private schools and supportive family members in ensuring mobility. This sort of reflection and awareness about the particular skill set and educational background that one requires to access high quality private employment and to experience mobility was not usually articulated by most other young women in the village. At times, they pointed out that their lower caste status has made them more susceptible to discrimination and reduced their chances of obtaining employment. But on other occasions, this same lower caste status was also seen to imbue them with advantages due to reservation. Often, in thinking about job opportunities, as also emerges in Rajini's narrative, working as a teacher at SSDMS appeared to be an attractive opportunity. Despite its allure, SSDMS was often critiqued for not fulfilling its promise of facilitating the mobility of the community. Many young women complained that SSDMS practiced favouritism in the recruitment of teachers. However, while these fluctuating discourses delve into some of the structural challenges of obtaining mobility, they did not usually extend to a critical evaluation of one's position and standing.

On this rare occasion, Rajini reflects on the gap between her aspirations and the reality of her position. She locates the sources of her disadvantage vis-à-vis her friend in her government schooling and the consequent lack of fluency in English. In contrast to Rajini's reflections, most young women's narratives about movement away from the village are primarily fixated on the impending mobility and they fail to engage with the complexities of this transition. They purport a linear transition from the rural to the urban and often overlook the structural

constraints and lived realities of this transition. For instance, the young women's mobility imaginaries are about moving away from the village through education, migration and employment and the pathway of marriage migration is conspicuously absent from their imaginaries. This is surprising, especially so because marriage is the most acceptable and common way for these young women to move away from the village. Similarly, when the young women propose to pursue employment in different cities, they rarely factor in the opposition they will encounter from their families about moving so far away from the village.

This chapter attempts to interrogate the discrepancies between the imaginaries and realities of mobility. In its first part, this chapter investigates the young women's mobility imaginaries around migration and urban modernity. In its second part, it discusses the selective narrative and the imaginary of mobility that are utilised by the young women. In the third part, this chapter draws on the experiences of Malika to discuss the incongruence between the imaginary and lived reality of mobility.

5.2 Young Women's Mobility Imaginaries

Given the strong migration culture in Chaheru, migration emerges as the main paradigm for imagining moving away. In comparison to employment and further education, it also signals a more permanent movement away from the village. The previous generation of migrants who left the village in the 1970s spent 20-25 years of their lives in the Middle East to ensure the economic security of their families. For instance, Suresh[112], a 60-year-old return migrant, perceives his migration as a hardship that he undertook for the betterment of his family. He takes pride in the fact that his migration allowed him to improve his family's financial situation. Suresh's experience of migration and his assessment of the purpose of migration is at odds with his daughter-in-law's desire to migrate despite having all the economic comforts[113] at home.

[112] Suresh is one of the many men who left Chaheru in the 1970s and 1980s. After spending 20-25 years of his life away from his family, working as a labourer in the Gulf countries, Suresh has returned to spend his post-retirement life in the village. After Suresh returned home, he bought land for two shops, built the family house and now he earns INR 10,000-15,000 sitting at home. He also has some land for growing vegetables and rears buffaloes for milk, so he surmises he is doing well.

[113] Suresh recounts that his younger son and daughter-in-law were supposed to migrate, given that she had done her IELTS. But this did not work out because the agent to whom they had handed over the money turned out to be a fraud. He says, "*Now she (the daughter-in-law) keeps saying let me do my BA or do IELTS again. But I tell her to just sit at home . . . when you have everything at home, what is the point of going out*?" (12 March 2016). The daughter-in-law often looks sullen and expresses 'stuckness' at not being able to work or migrate. This divergence in Suresh and his daughter-in-law's view of migration reveals a shift in the discourses and practices of migration.

In the contemporary context of Chaheru, migration is not guided by economic need but rather by the aspirations around consumption and status. Young women from most middle-class families seek migration as it allows them to forge access not only to wealth, but also to urban and Western lifestyles, mannerisms and cultures. Despite the persistence of the migration-as-mobility imaginary, young women, especially from educated and/or more secure middle-class families, also seek opportunities for employment[114] and further education. Thus, there are two dominant imaginaries about *bahar* or spaces outside the village, which pertain to migration and urban modernity.

Most of the young women discussed in this thesis have completed their education and are 'waiting' for opportunities of migration[115], employment or further education to emerge. These opportunities, while not delinked from instrumental gains, are also about accessing spaces and cultures outside the village. As they wait, these young women contrast their lives with those of young women who have migrant husbands or who have migrated, and they are continually combatting the feeling of being 'left behind'. Thus, the preoccupation with moving away from the village space dominates these young women's mobility imaginaries. Given the paucity of opportunities for migration and employment, this moving away was often an imaginative process for the young women. It relied on specific constructions and imaginaries of the village and *bahar*.

5.2.1 Migration

In relating their plans for the future, young women often talked about the lifestyles and the degree of independence they can access through migration. For instance, while explaining her reasons behind wanting to migrate, Malika refers to her aspiration for wearing certain types of clothes. She says, ". . . *the thing is, here I cannot wear the clothes* (refers to short clothes and sleeveless tops) *I enjoy wearing* . . .". (22 May 2016) Similarly, Kavita and Gunita talked about the West as a place where they can work and be independent. These images of the West as a space of westernised fashion, greater female mobility, consumerism and independence are

[114]After completing their education, the young women aimed to secure 'respectable' jobs that were not too far from their homes, did not involve long working hours and were preferably government jobs. In fact, most women ended up either giving tuitions or doing stitching work from home since these were seen as being more respectable than doing lowly paid private work, as they waited to migrate through marriage or secure respectable government jobs. Among government jobs, teaching jobs were preferred because these were seen as being conducive to the young women fulfilling their domestic duties.

[115] While migration through marriage was the most respectable and commonly pursued route, women often referred to the desire to migrate abroad as being distinct from marriage. It appeared as their own desire rather than one mediated through the requirements of marriage.

derived from the ways in which visiting migrants carry themselves, young women's interactions with visiting migrants and images of the male and female migrant perpetuated by Punjabi movies and songs.

Often, when migrants visited the village, they adorned themselves with expensive items like gold jewellery in the case of older women. Younger male migrants wore branded Western clothes like shorts and T-shirts and expensive accessories like watches and sneakers. These items allowed them to mark themselves as distinctive within the local space and establish their positioning as those who have been able to move away. In fact, Reshmo, a well-established migrant from the US, tells me, ". . . *look at their lives here . . . there are so many problems, at least we have been able to move away from this* . . .". (30 January 2016) The 'this' that Reshmo refers to is the backward village space from which she seeks to mark her separation. In addition to marking themselves through consumption, migrant actors also engaged in other behaviours that allowed them to be seen as distinctive from the local space.

Reshmo lives in the largest house in the village. This house, in its interiors and furnishings, resembles suburban homes in North America. The house is, in itself, a stark reminder of Reshmo's status as the richest and most well-established migrant in the village. Moreover, when she is visiting the village, Reshmo conducts herself in a way that invites the patronage and envy of the villagers alike. Generally, migrant families residing in the village did not mix with the other villagers and held themselves apart from the rest. In contrast, Reshmo, when visiting the village, made an effort to visit people and socialise. Every afternoon, women from the village would usually come and visit her in her home. They often sought her advice in resolving family matters. Also, when residing in the village, Reshmo sought the assistance of Kavita and her family, whom she is distantly related to, to ensure that her stay was comfortable. She mostly had her meals at Kavita's place and Meeta stayed with Reshmo for almost a month. During her stay, Meeta managed the cooking and the upkeep of Reshmo's place. She and Reshmo often gossiped and planned Reshmo's garment shopping within the earshot of poorer villagers like the sarpnach's wife, who would be cleaning the house as they talked.

Figure 13.0: In this picture, the blue house with the large figure of a bird on the top is Reshmo's house.

Meeta stayed with Reshmo for a few weeks and when she left, Reshmo called her own sister to come and stay with her in Chaheru. While seeking the assistance of Kavita's family, Reshmo often exerted her power by actively critiquing the food that came from their home, doing minimal household chores and enlisting Meeta to accompany her for the Ravidass Jayanti celebration in Benares. In response, Meeta often attended to Reshmo's demands[116] and Kavita and Kanta did not talk badly about her. In the presence of neighbours, Kavita and Kanta were careful to point out that when Reshmo comes all her food comes from this house and it is not a big deal because they have to cook anyway. They claim that Reshmo also does so much for them and it feels "*khalli khalli"* or empty when she is gone. Such assertions allowed Kavita and Kanta to convey their close relationship to Reshmo, an important migrant in Chaheru, to their neighbours

Despite the domineering behaviour of visiting migrants, relatives and friends remaining in Chaheru were careful to attend to migrant demands to maintain favourable relationships with migrants. In fact, even in the larger community, most families were accepting of the fact that elite migrants hold themselves above everyone else and tend to be arrogant. It was perceived as par for the course and people did not expect visiting migrants from Europe or North America

[116] While Meeta complained about the privileging of the migrant within her household, she also seemed to engage in similar behavior vis-à-vis Reshmo. When Reshmo is visiting, Meeta comes down from Chandigarh to stay with her. Meeta does all the housework and puts up with the demands placed by her. While not partaking in household responsibilities, Reshmo would reprimand Meeta for things like not bringing the right green chilly. In response Meeta would almost apologetically explain that she did not see the ones Reshmo kept aside. It is likely that Meeta's willingness to put up with Reshmo's behavior stems from the implicit promise that Reshmo will help take her husband and her to the US. In fact, Meeta did tell me that they are hoping to migrate and Reshmo's daughter is helping them. However, towards the end of my fieldwork Kavita told me that Reshmo makes Meeta do a lot of work and she is afraid that if she goes to the US with Reshmo even there she will be running around. So now the Italy sister has said she will help her.

to behave any differently. Additionally, when criticism of migrants was levied, it was done carefully and in a subdued manner.

In contrast to Meeta who appeared more willing to put up with Reshmo's demands, Kavita was more critical of the way in which migrants conducted themselves. But Kavita only critiques Reshmo for being too domineering and making Meeta do all the housework when we are away from the earshot of neighbours. Even her telling of the controlling behaviour of her sisters and grandmother occurs towards the end of my visit[117]. This will be elaborated below, in section 5.3. In telling me about them she is careful to not say too much but simply points out the lopsided power dynamic between the migrant and those left behind. Also, despite her critique Kavita was happy to receive a Hollister[118] sweatshirt from Reshmo. In fact, migrants often gifted expensive items of a foreign make to their family members in the village. These gifts allowed the recipients to claim a proximity to migrant status.

In most people's accounts, it did not matter that Reshmo and her husband had migrated to the US illegally. However, a number of the more secure middle-class families in the village discussed Reshmo's rude and uncultured behaviour. Reshma and Sunita[119] explain that before she became a migrant, Reshmo used to live in the village and her family was very poor: ". . *the kids were raised just like that . . . all her interest and energy were spent on fighting with people . . . she would abuse profusely and along with her, her daughter would do it too!*" (28 May 2016) In their descriptions of Reshmo, she comes across as a crude, uncultured and insensitive woman. However, these narratives were rare and the immorality attributed to Reshmo did not prevent her from exercising an important position in the community. Thus, in planning to migrate, young women are not only seeking to access the consumerism and freedom associated with the West, they also seek to cultivate migrant status and behaviour.

Given that most young women were avid consumers of Punjabi songs and movies, it is important to probe the ways in which Punjabi media reiterates similar messages around migration. Most young women consume popular, upbeat Punjabi songs which revolve around the themes of drinking, heartbreak, romance and consumerism and reinforce the image of the

[117] Kavita recounts that her brother-in-law, who lives in Italy sent 50 pounds for her but her sister took away 30 pounds and only gave her 20 pounds.
[118] A North American brand of casual clothing.
[119] They mention that when Reshmo was looking for a bride for her son, she was so picky that she would ask the girls to walk and rejected 23-24 girls. Even her son used to get embarrassed and would ask her to stop but she wouldn't listen. They also cite an instance where the son, fed up with his own mother, lied to Reshmo about his travel plans to delay her return home.

macho, upper caste Punjabi man. The videos of these songs often feature young men in expensive branded clothes in foreign locations with the obligatory white woman or with a fair-skinned Punjabi woman. These women always appear sophisticated and rich. The men are usually trying to woo them with gifts and a show of their own wealth. One of the new songs, labelled "Prada" (like the brand), has the following lyrics:

Haan akhan utte tere aa parada sajjna
Asi time chakde aa dhadda sajjna.
Kaali range wichon rehna belly taad da
Thonu chehra disda ni sada sajjna.
Tere pishe saak shad aayin chaali
Gori jatti ghumme Bentley ch kaali,
Prada akhon laah ke dekh lai.

This translates to:

You are wearing Prada beloved
And I wait for you to come by.
From your black Range Rover you keep looking at other girls' waists
You don't pay any attention to me.
Because of you I have refused 40 marriage proposals.
White Jat girls roams around in a black Bentley.
Remove your Prada sunglasses and have a look.

This song, while sung by a male singer, plays out the narrative of an attractive girl seeking the attention of a rich Prada-wearing boy. In this song, the boy's positionality as a desirable partner is quickly established through his Prada sunglasses, his clothes and the Range Rover. The girl is also positioned as being desirable because of her good looks, fair skin (in fact, she appears to be Caucasian) and wealth. Thus, this song, much like other popular Punjabi songs that have come out over the last few years, ties high-status consumption and wealth with being located in a foreign country and with increased attractiveness.

In another song, titled "Jimmy Choo Choo" (reminiscent of the brand Jimmy Choo), the narrative, set in a college abroad, talks of a boy who drops something on a girl's Jimmy Choos in college. In the song, the boy tells her, "I will buy you shoes worth 40 lakhs if you give me a hug . . . the way that you wear Prada glasses . . . if you want a blank cheque baby, write my name on your body . . .". At the end of the song, he gifts the girl a new pair of the same Jimmy Choo shoes that had gotten spoiled and she finally seems pleased and goes to give him a hug. Initially the boy withdraws, thinking that the girl is only giving him a hug because of the shoes.

But then, when she leaves the shoes, he hugs her back. The audience also sees that she has written the boy's name on her arm. Thus, as in the previous song, romance and consumerism seem intricately woven together. Despite the veneer of 'real' love that plays out towards the end of this song, most of the song is taken over by projections of wealth and status which play out in a foreign location.

Similarly, a number of popular Punjabi movies released in the last ten years such as Jatt and Juliet, Carry on Jatta, Love Punjab, Sardarji and Aa Gaye Munde UK De (Boys from the UK have come) reinforce the ideal of migration. While young women are less avid consumers of Punjabi movies due to their limited access to movie theatres[120], many of them are up to speed on recent movie releases. In these movies, migration is set up as the normative backdrop against which larger conflicts of romance and family drama play out. In a number of these movies, the rural male protagonist travels to a Western country and there he encounters a young Punjabi woman who has been exposed to Western culture and who is more sophisticated than him. Often, the woman speaks fluent English and is well acculturated to the Western cultural context. In contrast, the male protagonist aims to exist in the Western cultural space on his own terms. The Punjabi man wears his rustic identity and his lack of fluency in English with pride and uses his jovial attitude and rural style to make a place for himself. This seemingly seamless integration of the rustic Punjabi man, which doesn't involve significant adaptation or shifts in his behaviour, points to migration as a smooth and normative process.

Moreover, the migration process is associated with different gendered norms. While the young women are supposed to imbibe urban behaviours and refinement, the young men are expected to reproduce rural forms of masculinity. This construction of migration reverberates in Chaheru as well. The young men do not see a contradiction between their rural selves and their migration to a Western country. In contrast, the young women who aspire to migrate perceive the emulation of urban modernity as an important stepping-stone to migration. Thus, the images of migration that circulate in popular culture also map themselves onto the young women's imaginaries of migration. Migration is often tied to increasing consumerism, acquiring the ability to afford expensive and high-status brands, adopting Western clothing, finding employment and gaining independence. Interestingly, many of the correlates of migration also coincide with the imaginaries of urban modernity, as will be discussed below.

[120] Only young women from secure middle-class families were able to go to the movie theatre with their families to watch the latest Punjabi movies.

5.2.2 Urban Modernity

In constructing the urban space, women's own navigations within the urban space through education and employment provided them with a basis for constructing the imaginary of urban modernity. The local urban space was often associated with urban leisure activities such as going to the mall, shopping, watching movies, wearing fashionable and stylish clothes and engaging in more open interactions with members of the opposite sex. Most of the young women's social interactions occurred within the urban space and in their everyday narratives about education and consumption, urbanity operated as an important reference point. As discussed in Section 7.3, in their choices around clothing, young women selectively drew on aspects of urban fashion that they found appropriate to emulate. Also, young women's experience of education was inextricably linked to accessing urban spaces and culture. For instance, in talking about her experiences around education, Gunita rarely mentions her teachers or the coursework she did and instead, talks about the time she spent with her friends. She recounts going to the new eating joint in town for a friend's birthday and ordering a pizza, which she says was really tasty. On another day, she explains that her shoes are dirty because she and her friends have been playing a game where they have to throw dirt on each other's shoes. While Gunita talks about her friends, it becomes evident that it's a mixed gender group. She also mentions a boy from a rich migrant family who is pursuing her. Thus, for Gunita, education encompassed a wide range of experiences including access to urban food and socialising with young men in a less restrictive context. Other young women, in discussing their college experiences, also talked about upcoming college trips and visits to malls in Jalandhar with friends.

As it emerged in the discourses of the educated middle-class families mentioned in Section 6.3, the urban space was also seen as reflecting greater levels of awareness, exposure to different regional cultures within India, education and cultural sophistication[121]. In fact, the educated middle-class identity was much more invested in mobilising the idiom of urbanity to lay claim to a more refined middle-classness than that of migrant families. In educated middle- class families, the mobility imaginary was conceived in opposition to migration. Among such

[121] In fact, across different families, middle-aged women who had been raised in the city lay claim to higher levels of cultural refinement which they believe they have 'brought to the village'.

families, migration itself was deemed a desperate enterprise for uneducated people. In general, educated families, while affirming the higher economic positioning of migrants, looked down upon migrant families for lacking education, awareness and culture. They opined that the migration of male members does not truly help or uplift their families because it does not facilitate an increase in the family's levels of awareness and its exposure to different cultures. Consequently, at the discursive level, young women from educated families reiterated the urban imaginary and planned to access urban culture through education and employment.

While the urban space was more accessible (than the West) and was frequented by the young women, their interactions were limited by ideas of appropriateness, material resources and the requirement of returning to the backward village space. Moreover, young women's ability to emulate urban modernity was an important criterion for forging middle class identities, as also emerges in Punjabi movies and songs mentioned above. In fact, the young women were actively attempting to expand the scope of engagement with urban modernity. In Section 6.4, Preeti and Suman's trip to Jalandhar demonstrates a desire to etch belonging to urban spaces that are further removed from the backward village space and are more proximate to an urbanised middle-class identity. Also, Somika's aspirations for government employment reveal a desire to forge entry into the urban middle classes that are delinked from the backward village space. Evidently, as will also be discussed in reference to Malika's experience below, while young women sought to expand access to urban modernity, among other factors they were limited by internalised constructions of rural appropriateness. Thus, while the urban space was physically accessible to the young women, the cultural and social aspects of urban modernity that they sought to claim and retain remained elusive. Consequently, urban modernity operated at the level of imaginary.

5.2.3. Looking Down

An essential aspect of the moving away imaginary is the devaluation or 'looking down' upon the village as an immoral space with a deteriorating environment. This 'looking down' was supported by repeated discussions, especially among the middle-class respondents, about the immoral and violent lower-class male behaviour that rendered the village an unsafe space. In fact, this discourse was also perpetuated by local politicians and upper castes outsides, who often talked about the village as a dangerous place. In relating to the village in similar ways, the young women managed their interactions in public spaces within the village in such a

manner that they were almost never found walking or standing in the village. Their existence within the village was tied to their homes and the village itself operated as a passive background while they went about their everyday business.

Young women, especially those from families aspiring to be middle class[122], spent hours on end messaging on their phones or engaged in domestic chores within the household, almost never stepping out except to attend an educational institute or to visit relatives. When they had to go from their homes to the closest auto-rickshaw or on the rare occasion when they had to visit someone within the village, the young women walked quickly and purposively. They did not even stop to talk to anyone, almost as if they didn't want to be seen within the village. This urgency and anxiety in their movements within the village suggests that the awareness of being seen and observed within the village space made the young women uncomfortable and that they, therefore, actively tried to avoid such situations. Additionally, the curtailment of young women's movements within the village is tied to ideas of female respectability, as will be elaborated in Section 7.3. However, the idea of female honour is class-centric and the young women's consciousness about moving around in the village space is linked to the space's association with lower class men. If the village space was perceived as imbibing middle-class culture, it would not have elicited the same kind of curtailment of the young women's movements (Gilbertson, 2014).

Another aspect of the young women's 'looking down' upon the village was their construction of the work they did within the village space. Often, when young women who had completed their education and were waiting for either a migration or employment opportunity to materialise, were asked about what they were doing, they said they were '*free*'. However, despite this self-identification as being free or available for work, these young women were actually involved in various kinds of work within the domestic sphere such as stitching clothes, giving tuitions to the village children and working as beauticians. They often spoke of their paid work within the household as subject to the exploitation and whims of neighbours who did not pay them enough money for their work. Also, with respect to giving tuitions, the young women pointed out the lack of knowledge and skills among the government school children. Thus, there was a sense that the work they did within the home and the village was low-status work that did not yield commensurate income and respect. More importantly, this type of work

[122] Young women from more secure middle-class families were more willing and able to go out for shopping trips to the local market (in the city) and were more at ease with going to a neighbour's house within the village.

was something they did while they were in a transitional stage and were waiting for opportunities to arise. The characterisation of one's work within the village economy as not valuable serves to reinforce the narrative of activities conducted within the village space, much like the village itself, as unworthy.

5.3 Plan Making: Autonomy and Mobility

The young women's mobility imaginaries hinged on a narrow construct of the local urban space, the local village space and the Western space. These imaginaries created an ideal but they did not engage with the social/cultural transitions and structural limitations entailed in moving away from the rural space. In fact, young women's narratives around their mobility plans selectively drew on those aspects of their lives which they felt they could exercise control over and overlooked those structural constraints that restricted their plans. These imaginaries and plan making are an important part of young women's narratives as they wait for mobility in the village space. In order to understand the ways in which these young women construct their identity and work as they 'wait' to move away from the village space, it is useful to draw on the literature on 'timepass' and 'waiting'. As discussed in Section 4.3, the construct of 'timepass' has often been used to understand the experiences of educated and underemployed young men in developing countries (Jeffrey et al., 2004a, Jeffrey et al., 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Jónsson, 2008; Weiss, 2002). As pointed out by Jeffrey et al. (2008), in the absence of concrete mobility outcomes, young men engage in 'timepass' or hang out with their friends and draw on their educated identities to establish distinction within the local space.

Similarly, in the absence of tangible mobility outcomes, the young women in Chaheru can be seen using practices and discourses around education, consumption and mobility imaginaries to construct mobile and middle-class identities within the village space. Importantly, this framework of timepass and waiting allows one to perceive these young women as being productively engaged in fashioning new identities and social roles as they wait for certain opportunities (Bissel, 2007; Gasparini, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1968).) While they wait, these young women demonstrate the simultaneity of mobility and immobility as despite remaining in the village space and being immobile, they are able to etch mobile identities through education and consumption. Moreover, plan making emerges as an important way for the young women to claim a more independent and mobile self.

In contrast to the lived experiences of mobility, young women's plans around education, employment and migration reveal an image of unhindered autonomy. Across different middle-class families, young women portrayed themselves as moving freely across urban spaces, engaging in open interaction with friends and members of the opposite sex and pursuing higher education and employment. These discourses were selectively constructed as the young women drew on those aspects of their life that reinforce their ability to move away from the village. In this paradigm of self-authored mobility and autonomy, the actual experiences and challenges of mobility are camouflaged. This image of mobility, which is premised on fulfilling certain conditions of urban modernity, stands out in contrast to the more socially negotiated and determined experiences of mobility.

The reliance on selective telling and the emphasis on mobility outcomes and autonomy emerges strongly in Kavita's narrative. Throughout the duration of this research, Kavita kept insisting that she was waiting to hear back about her migration status and that if things did not work out, she would either get a job or continue with her studies. In her initial telling, Kavita implied that apart from the uncertainty in the process of migration, there were no additional pressures acting upon her choices and decisions and that she could exercise free choice. It was only over time that the preferences of her family members and its impact on her decisions became clear. She revealed the control exercised by her migrant relatives in determining her access to opportunities for employment, education and migration. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Kavita recounted that a few months earlier, she had gotten an offer to work in a bank in Chandigarh. But she was not allowed to work there because her maternal grandmother, who lives in Canada, said that there was no one in Chandigarh to take care of her even though Kavita's older sister, Meeta, lives in Chandigarh with her husband. Kavita's grandmother wants her to either come abroad through the 'nanny visa'[123] and work in Canada and be independent or get married. She refuses to sponsor or support Kavita's PhD studies in India. On another day, Kavita told me that her sister who lives in Italy was pressurising her to get married. She said that when the 'Italy sister'[124] had come visiting during the previous week, Kavita's marriage had been the topic of discussion. Kavita's mother, Kanta had refused, saying she didn't want to get Kavita married for the next two years but her sister had insisted, which led to a family argument that ended with the 'Italy sister' leaving. These later revelations expose the ways in which Kavita's ability to pursue opportunities for employment, education

[123] This was the term used by Kavita to refer to the caregiver visa.
[124] This is the term that Kavita uses to refer to her sister that lives in Italy.

and migration are closely defined by her migrant relatives. In explaining this power that is exercised by these migrant relatives, Kavita says, "*You don't get it, over here people who live abroad and who have more money make the decisions in the family . . . in our house, the Italy sister makes the decisions . . .*" (31 October 2015)

Evidently, migrant relatives and their opinions about appropriate life choices are important in shaping the young women's plans and their access to opportunities. Even in the absence of migrant relatives, other family members are crucial in determining their future course of action. For instance, at the beginning of my fieldwork, Gunita and Rajini revealed that they make regular plans with their friends for 'outings'. Over time, it emerged that these plans often involved going somewhere to eat during college hours or, in rare cases, going on field trips that were organised by the college. As they were not allowed to make independent plans with their friends outside of college hours. Similarly, in the case of Kavita, she was unable to pursue employment outside of Phagwara not only because her migrant relatives did not think it was 'appropriate', but also because her older brother would not allow her to travel to another city for work. However, in constructing her future plans, Kavita does not consider these restrictions around her mobility and continues to insist on local employment. In fact, she repeatedly reiterated that she was going to talk to her brother about getting a job in Jalandhar. This narrative persisted despite evidence to the contrary.

Moreover, in the young women's plans for the future, education and employment became highlighted as they reflected individualised axis of mobility, but marriage, while being the most tenable way of moving away from the village, was not discussed. The absence of marriage in the narratives of the young women can be understood with regard to their emphasis on fulfilling the conditions of urban modernity and their lack of control over marriage decisions. In order to demonstrate their proximity to urban modernity, young women drew on experiences and plans of urban leisure, education, employment and romantic relationships. In addition to allowing for a demonstration of urban modernity, these spheres can also be seen as allowing the young women the space to manoeuvre and negotiate. In contrast, marriage was an eventuality over which the young women exercised less control. It is possible that since I mostly interacted with young unmarried women for whom marriage was still a few years away, discussions on the subject were less relevant for them. However, as will be discussed in Section 8.5, even in discussions with young married women, while problems with in-laws and husbands

emerged, mobility continued to be discussed in individual terms and with regard to their own movement and employment abroad.

In interrogating the young women's interactions with mobility, at the level of imaginary and practice, it is useful to draw on Mahmood(2006)'s notion of agency. In applying Mahmood (2006)'s construct of agency to the young women in Chaheru, multiple dynamics of their agency emerge. At a discursive level, young women's aspiration for individualised and unconstrained forms of mobility can be read as a form of subversion of the prevailing norms, in its refusal to engage with their reality of negotiated physical movement to urban spaces and Western countries. Moreover, at the level of practice, young women can be seen to be conforming to the social norms set by their families even as, they seek to retain their access to education and employment opportunities. Their autonomy can be located in the balancing act they perform between their aspirations for physical and cultural mobility and their family's concerns.

This thesis seeks to unravel and analyse this process of balancing and negotiation that the young women engage in.This chapter specifically deals with the ways in which young women's negotiation with mobility diverges from their mobility imaginaries and plan making. It emerges that across life stages and family positioning, young women from upwardly mobile families seek belonging to a mobility imaginary that is premised on ideas of individual autonomy and mobility. However, in actuality, as young women negotiate their movement away from the village through education or marriage, they have to encounter various restrictions and challenges. This chapter seeks to interrogate the discrepancies between the young women's narratives and imaginaries, which purport a view of unobstructed autonomy or agency, and the lived experiences of undergoing mobility transitions.

5.4 Being Mobile

5.4.1 Moving Away from the Rural

In contrast to the young women's imaginaries and plans around movement, in practice, in transitioning away from the rural space, as also comes forth in Kavita's later revelations, young women are confronted with various restrictions. Young women express doubts and difficulties in moving away by detaching themselves from the local rural culture. While at a discursive

level most of the young women seem actively invested in moving away from the village, the uncertainties of the process and young women's own orientations towards rural culture make mobility a less straightforward enterprise. This tension between the desire to move away and simultaneously retain rural culture can be seen in both Kavita and Malika's stories.

In Kavita's case, she wants to be independent, but is not convinced that she needs to mark a movement away from the village space and establish her subjectivity in opposition to rurality. As Kavita copes with an elongated waiting period, her discourses around mobility undergo a shift from wanting to migrate to remaining in the village. This fluctuation in her discourse along with her uptake of more rural consumption practices and mannerisms reveal Kavita's difficulties with the transition to urbanity and westernisation. This difficulty can also be interpreted as Kavita's way of distancing herself from the prevailing mobility imaginary.

In contrast to other educated young women in the community who attempt to showcase their exposure to urban culture in their clothing, demeanour, consumption and their movement within the village, Kavita appears to embrace rural styles with greater ease and willingness. As will be elaborated in the other data chapters, young women from middle-class families limit their movement within the village and look forward to planning trips to the city, engaging in urban leisure activities and adorning more urban clothes outside the space of the village.

In contrast, Kavita's everyday behaviours reflect rural styles of talking, gesticulating and working. These mannerisms appear detached from the objective of demonstrating proximity to urban spaces. Often, when she is working around the house, Kavita is hunched on both her knees and her hands move fastidiously like the hands of an older rural woman who is practiced in this style of work. Also, in her style of talking, Kavita appears polite rather than polished and urbane. The only time Kavita slips into an urban style is when she goes shopping to the local market with her sisters or with me. On these occasions, she dresses herself in a pair of jeans and a top.

Kavita follows a very defined and set daily routine. She does not like to attend religious or community events and says she prefers to stay at home. Her daily routine is set up around her domestic duties and paid work. The only break in Kavita's daily schedule is her Thursday visit

to the panji peer[125]. Also, while Kavita has a boyfriend, she only checks her phone and responds to messages once or twice in the entire day[126]. On the rare occasion when her sisters are visiting and her brother-in-law is also around, she accompanies her sisters on family outings.

While other young women do not walk around the village at all, Kavita walks across the village space more freely, be it to fetch milk, visit the local shrine or, sometimes, to pick and drop me. These movements within the village, while being limited, are something the other middle-class young women do not engage with at all. At the most, they visit a neighbour. Kavita's choices around appropriate behaviour may have been shaped by both her introvert nature and by a perceived need to take on responsibility in the household, given her mother's declining health and her younger brother's non-participation. However, these activities serve to position Kavita in rather peculiar ways within the community. Often, other educated young women in the community express surprise over Kavita's educational qualifications and do not evaluate her as having the same social positioning as them.

Kavita's detachment from all projections of mobility also place her in contrast to her mother, Kanta. While Kanta lacks the economic resources of more secure migrant families, she displays a preference for claiming proximity to Western migrant lifestyles in her grooming and upkeep of the house. Kanta draws on the exposure and cultural knowledge derived from her urban upbringing and migrant relatives to fashion a more culturally sophisticated identity. Kanta's house was one of the only houses in the village to have toilet paper and mosquito repellent, which, she explained, was a consequence of frequent interactions with migrant relatives.

Evidently, Kanta uses her migrant connections to strategically position her family. But, despite being one of the most educated girls in the village, Kavita does not utilise her educated identity as a source of distinction. Thus, in spite of her discursive commitments to mobility, in practice, Kavita does not appear invested in the social process of marking herself as upwardly mobile either through education or migration. Kavita's interactions with mobility reveal that the simplistic mobility imaginary does not map onto the more complex negotiations enacted by the young women. This also comes through in the experiences of other young women such as Malika, who are from more secure middle-class families and are in the midst of claiming belonging to urban spaces outside the village.

[125] Kavita also keeps a fast every Thursday and displays a strong faith in the panji peer.
[126] This is in stark contrast to the young women from other middle-class families, who are incessantly on their phones.

5.4.2 Performing Education Mobility

Malika depicts an exceptional trajectory as she is the only girl in the village who has been able to travel as far as Chandigarh to pursue her educational and employment goals. Malika belongs to a secure, migrant middle-class family and her father has been a migrant in Muscat for 25 years. Malika has completed her BCom degree from Kamla Nehru College[127] and at the time of my fieldwork, she was completing her MCom degree from Ramgharia College. While young women from less secure middle-class families actively negotiate access to education close to their homes, Malika has been allowed to go and live in Chandigarh to further her educational training and exposure. Unlike other young women who have to navigate more restrictive gender norms, Malika also appears to have the permission to chart independent movement away from the village and she harbours a strong aspiration for marking such a movement. She and her younger sister maintain a more westernised appearance and are often seen wearing jeans and sleeveless tops in the village space. Malika and her sister also construct Western countries as the ideal spaces for accessing 'better' employment opportunities[128] and lifestyles.

However, in contrast to her desire to move away, in discussing her experience of moving to and living in Chandigarh, Malika expressed that it had not been a positive experience so far because of the fall out with her childhood friends[129]. The disagreement with her friends began when Malika became concerned by the leisure activities of the young men in the adjoining hostel rooms. Her concerns led to her telling her friends not to stand and look at the boys, "*as there were all boys staying around them . . .*" (29 March 2017) Her friends apparently got annoyed with her for *tokoing* or reprimanding them. Consequently, they began making fun of her and distanced themselves from her. In expressing her anxiety Malika says, "*They were all Chandigarh university boys and they smoke and drink . . . there are beer bottles on the windowsill . . . they drink so much . . . anything can happen . . .*" (29 March 2017)

In evaluating the behaviour of the young men in Chandigarh, Malika draws upon rural ideas of

[127] This is a reputed girls' college in Jalandhar. There are a couple of young women from the village who attend this college.
[128] Malika's younger sister, Gopi, is critical of the inconsistencies and corruption in the Indian system, which make it difficult to secure seats in medical colleges or get good jobs. Gopi plans to apply for nursing programs abroad because she says there are a lot of jobs for nurses and the pay there is very good. She tells me that nurses in India only get INR 20,000-30,000 but they make a lot more abroad. She questions whether it is worth spending money on education in India when one can't even get a good job.
[129] Malika went to the same school as them but these friends were not from the village.

appropriateness. Her concerns are similar to the general perception that the people in Chaheru have of LPU[130] as being a place where young men and women engage in immoral activities like drinking, doing drugs and dating. Malika uses these notions of middle-class morality circulating in the rural space to evaluate the space in Chandigarh. Despite being away from the village, Malika espouses the moral anxieties and concerns about Chandigarh that are emblematic of rural orientations about urban and elite spaces such as LPU. This particular instance points to Malika's discomfort with patterns of male socialisation and interaction prevalent in urban spaces.

Furthermore, while Malika did not approve of the male-female interactions in Chandigarh, she also did not want to attend a place like Ramgharia College, which she saw as offering substandard education. She only conceded to it because she did not want to go to LPU due to its immoral *mahaul* or environment. Also, she was able to get a fee waiver at Ramgharia College due to her SC status and this waiver meant that her education at Ramgharia was practically free. Thus, while she 'looks down' upon Ramgharia College, Malika also did not want to attend LPU, which she deemed as inappropriate.

Admittedly, Malika's simultaneous 'looking down' upon LPU, Chandigarh and Ramgharia College may strike one as confusing and contradictory. But it mirrors the ambivalence that the young women encounter as they transition from rural to urban spaces and manage the cultural shifts that are tied to moving away. While Malika seeks to move away from backward spaces like Ramgharia College and claim a belonging to established institutes in Chandigarh, she does not ascribe to the urban mores in these spaces. Thus, her struggle is to create acceptance for her rural gender norms while forging a belonging to urban spaces. Across different types of middle-class families, while movement away from the village space is actively aspired to, it also introduces a conflict between distinct cultural ethos and their requirements. While the young women seek to create belonging to urban areas, they also want to retain aspects of the local and rural in these new mobile spaces.

[130] In addition to concerns about morality, young men and women express class-based concerns about attending LPU. They cite that middle-class children from rural areas are routinely bullied in LPU not only because they hold onto middle-class morality, but also because they lack commodities like expensive phones and laptops. Furthermore, given that most young men and women in Chaheru have grown up attending schools that cater to a predominantly rural population, they cite difficulties in interacting and socialising with the student population in LPU that is mostly non-Punjabi, urban and metropolitan in its outlook. While Malika cites concerns around morality, these cannot be disentangled from other norms around consumption, fashion, socialising and gender that are imposed by urbane and elite educational institutes.

5.5 Conclusion

Young women's interactions with mobility reveal a higher level of complexity and variability than that captured in their mobility imaginaries. While their mobility imaginaries purport a linear transition from rurality to urbanity (both Indian and Western), the young women's experiences of mobility reveal a higher degree of heterogeneity. In addition to the operation of restrictions around education and employment opportunities, the young women are often also grappling with the cultural transitions invoked by mobility. This reveals that there is a disjuncture between the mobility imaginary and the everyday navigations around mobility. Despite this, the mobility imaginary, especially the one around migration, persists. In the context of a strong culture of migration, the mobility imaginary acquires a life of its own and operates as an ideal. Even those who do not seek to migrate construct their mobility plans in opposition to the overarching imaginary of migration (Ali, 2007; Salazar, 2010; Salazar, 2011). The mobility imaginary is based on reductive ideas of the migrant, those left behind, the village space and the urban and Western spaces outside the village. These imaginaries are based on interactions with visiting migrants, urban spaces in Phagwara and media images and narratives. The underlying assumption is that the physical movement to and the interaction with urban and/or Western spaces will enable one to claim a belonging to mobility.

Significantly, in articulating their personal experiences around mobility, the young women express an interest in bringing in and retaining the rural whilst creating belonging to 'mobile' spaces. More specifically, Kavita's distancing from projections of mobility and her simultaneous uptake of rurality as well as Malika's discomfort with urban mores indicate the emergence of alternative visions of mobility. These alternative visions of mobility are not identified as such by the community. But the young women's personal practices and discourses around mobility reveal a desire to reimagine mobility as reflecting cultural interaction rather than a sharp shift from rurality to urbanity. In fact, anthropological work on mobility imaginaries, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, has also suggested that imaginative practices can negotiate cultural oppositions and integrate the global in the local (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31; Bhabha, 1994; Weiss, 2002).

In addition, young women's personal meditations around moving away from the village reveal their attempt to negotiate mobility whilst retaining alignment to rural norms. This highlights the 'balancing act' that the young women perform in their interactions with the various sites of

mobility. Moreover, it points out the need for understanding mobility as a process defined by cultural integration and flux. In fact, Malika decides to remain in Chandigarh and live as a paying guest in someone's house instead of living in the hostel. This reflects her desire to etch belonging to urban spaces but on her own terms and in an environment that she is comfortable with. Kavita remains in the village and continues to explore mobility through plan making and imaginaries. This notion of cultural orientation and transition involved in mobility projects is a reoccurring theme. It even comes forth in the young women's interactions with education and consumption. The cultural basis of mobility and its implications for understanding the young women's imperative to move away from the village space will be discussed in Section 9.3.3.

6 Education as Mobility

6.1 Introduction

> *When I visited the Kingfisher Training Institute*[131] *with Gunita and Suman, I found the girls and boys there conversing with each other. While the boys were wearing formal shirts and pants with a tie, the girls were wearing short skirts and blazers (similar in style and cut to the uniforms worn by air hostesses). As she watched them intently, Gunita appeared fascinated with their interactions and appearances and asked me if the people around were all students. As Gunita and Suman observed the behaviour of the young men and women around us, they also began to temper their expectations. There was a transition in what they were saying about the institute. From expressing an unqualified optimism and excitement about the place, they began to talk about and consider other options.* (4 April 2016)

These are my observations from a trip that I undertook with Gunita, Suman, Suresh, who is Suman's father, and their common friend to an training institute in Jalandhar. Gunita belongs to a less secure migrant family in the village and her father has been in the Middle East for the last 10 years. Suman is the daughter of a vegetable vendor, Suresh, who was originally from Bihar but has been living in Chaheru for many years now. Prior to this trip, Gunita and Suman had never been to Jalandhar and they appeared excited at the prospect of visiting the city. They dressed in jeans and tops for the trip, clothes that they would usually wear to college. The impetus of this trip came from a conversation I had with Gunita and Suman where Gunita explained that Suman had gotten calls from colleges in Jalandhar and Chandigarh , inviting her to join them and that she was trying to figure out a good place from where she could do her BCA course, instead of joining Ramgharia College. Gunita then went on to say that she would also look for an alternative because she was finding the BCA course very hard and wanted to explore other options such as doing a beautician course, to acquire skills that would be useful

[131] Gunita and Suman assumed that this was a college where they could pursue their bachelor's degrees. But it was a training institute that offered diploma courses in tourism and hospitality.

if she wanted to migrate in the future. While they knew little about educational institutes outside Phagwara, both Suman and Gunita seemed keen to explore the opportunities offered by the educational institutes in Jalandhar.

In many ways, this was reminiscent of similar conversations that I had with the young women in the village, who were actively planning ways to claim mobility by accessing spaces and cultures outside the village. But as detailed in Section 1.5, there are uncertainties and long delays in employment and migration opportunities actually materialising. Thus, education becomes a more accessible pathway for the young women to access urban culture and establish mobile identities within the village space. However, unlike other such conversations with the young women, which remained at the level of plan making and discussion, this interaction evolved into a concrete plan of visiting the educational institute in Jalandhar.

This trip, largely orchestrated by Gunita and Suman and acceded to by their parents, demonstrates the young women's strong will to 'become' mobile. It reflects their efforts to expand their construct of mobility, despite considerable financial and cultural limitations. However, it is important to note that the strides these young women have made towards accessing education and its related mobility have been actively facilitated by their parents. In fact, Suman's father has been involved in the whole endeavour from the very beginning[132].The first time I met Suresh at Gunita's house, he expressed that he had also been actively researching educational opportunities for Suman. Moreover, his presence during the trip was important in lending it credibility[133]. Suresh displayed a willingness to travel a considerable distance, not just physically but also culturally, from a village to a city to facilitate his daughter's education.

[132] The day I met Suman for the first time in Gunita's house and they asked me to help them to visit Jalandhar, her father, Suresh also came over to the house. I learnt then that Suresh works as a vegetable vendor and has been living in Punjab for the last 20-25 years. He has three children, with the two youngest boys still in school. The second eldest child, an academically bright boy, attends a special school in Jalandhar where children who secured more than 80 per cent in grade 10 are given free education. He is now studying in Chandigarh as part of this school's program. Suman is the oldest child and is just passing out of school. Suresh is worried about her future. He told us about the educational choices of his children and his own role in their education after he found out that his daughter had approached me for assistance without seeking his permission. In this conversation, he portrayed his son as being self-reliant and successful whereas Suman, in his opinion, was not as independent, forcing him to take on a bigger role in her educational choices. On a different occasion, he also expressed the greater concern that one has for a girl child and the need to protect them more. Suresh's varying justifications for his greater involvement in the education of his daughter, from his daughter's dependency to the greater need to protect a girl child, reiterates the construction of women's education as a 'risky' and uncertain venture that is undertaken with a view towards future returns (Chopra, 2011).

[133] The young girls would not be allowed to go with me alone. In fact, at a later date, when they want to go with me to watch a movie, their parents object to us going alone.

Largely, young women's plans and practices around education are nestled in family considerations around affordability, appropriate spaces for education and family plans for mobility. The importance of parental views in the young women's navigations around education comes forth in their physical presence and participation in young women's meaning making processes around education. In fact, even when parents do not explicitly relay their views, they are present in the conversations and their consent is implicit in young women's education plans. The first part of this chapter will engage with parental discourses on young women's education. It draws on the parental perspectives of Rita (Seema's mother) and Balwinder and his wife, Bandeep

In its second part, this chapter will attempt to present the young women's diverse navigations around education by primarily drawing on the experiences of two women, Somika and Gunita, who are located in different middle-class families. Somika is from an educated and secure middle-class family and her pursuit of education is directed at establishing her differentiation from lower class, lower caste villagers. This process of differentiation allows her to assert her proximity to the urban middle class. Gunita belongs to a less secure middle-class family and her interactions with education depict the gap that exists between her aspirations and her economic and social reality. She copes with this incongruence by drawing on flexible preferences. In the first section of the second part, this chapter situates educated middle-class families and draws on the example of Somika. It elaborates that young women from educated and secure middle-class families perceive education as a tool which allows them to establish an elevated positioning in the village and curate urban middle-class identities. The second section follows Gunita and Suman's trip to Jalandhar to unravel their struggles in accessing more elite forms of education. Gunita's use of flexible preferences to ensure access to education and its related urban modernity is also discussed. This chapter draws on ideas of mobility, education and everyday forms of agency to explore the ways in which differently located young women interact with and utilise education towards the goals of mobility and urban modernity.

6.2 Parental Attitudes towards Education

Generally, parental interventions in their daughters' education were limited to bearing the costs and dealing with the logistics. When they did discuss their daughters' futures, parents emphasised marriage rather than local employment or further education. This was in contrast to the ways in which the young women articulated their future, in which marriage played a

minimal role. This gap between the young women's future aspirations and their parental views is elaborated in Chapter 8. In addition to this, parental interventions in their daughters' education involved calculations and evaluations of the appropriate type and level of education. These determinations were centred on ideas of marriage, respectability and the risks imposed by 'too much' education. This section engages with parental discourses on the young women's education to etch the defined boundaries of their negotiations with education. Importantly, the young women's negotiations with education are based on the ideas of acceptability set by their parents.

6.2.1. Choice of Educational Institute

Often, parents articulated their concerns about the costs of education and not wanting to send their daughters too far from the village for education. The choice that most parents made to send their children to Ramgharia College was determined by an implicit cost-benefit analysis. Ramgharia College was seen as appropriate because it was not too far from the village and because it represented a cultural environment that was closer to the rural middle-class ethos. For secure middle-class families, sending their daughters to more reputed and urbanised educational institutes was seen as desirable because they were attempting to establish their modern credentials. Thus, they were more willing to allow their daughters to travel longer distances and attend places like LPU as it allowed them to accrue social and cultural capital. The ways in which educated and secure middle-class families utilised education to cultivate educated middle-class identities will be elaborated in Section 6.3. Evidently, the evaluations of appropriate education differed among families based on their economic resources and positioning. The narratives of Rita and Balwinder and his wife demonstrates the different evaluations and determinations that are attached to the education of young women based on family positioning.

Seema comes from a secure, middle-class migrant family. Her father has been in the UK for the last 10 years while her mother, Rita stayed behind in the village, raising their four children. Seema is the youngest daughter and has completed her BA from a college in Jalandhar and her B.Ed. from LPU. She was the only girl from the village, who I came across, who has attended LPU, although at the end of my fieldwork, I found that another young woman, Gopi, had also enrolled in LPU for a hospitality course and that as part of her training, she would be going to Singapore . Seema's elder brother is working for an insurance company and her younger

brother is doing an undergraduate science degree from a college in Jalandhar. Seema's older sister had scored well in the IELTS exam and facilitated her own migration, along with the migration of her husband, to Australia. Rita tells me that while her daughter in Australia speaks English well, Seema's English is not good and she asks me if I could teach her English. Rita adds, "*She (Seema) wanted to go for English classes, but her brother could not pick and drop her to Phagwara*" (12 March 2016). When I ask why Seema couldn't go to Phagwara herself, Rita just nods and says, "*I'm sure you can understand it is not okay.*" (12 March 2016) The restriction placed on Seema's physical mobility and travel to Phagwara for English classes despite her being allowed to attend LPU, an institute that is not considered appropriate by most villagers, appears contradictory. This paradox can be explained by the value that an education from LPU may hold for someone like Seema, who, like her elder sister, hopes to migrate to a Western country. While LPU may be seen as inappropriate and elite by the villagers, it offers exposure to a multi-ethnic and urban environment along with access to modern facilities, an English education and urban gender norms. Given its orientation towards urban modernity and upper-class morality, LPU is a more natural stepping-stone to becoming a migrant. In fact, even Bikram, who also belongs to a secure middle-class family and harbours ambitions to be a migrant, talks about LPU in a similar vein, as a place offering exposure to a cosmopolitan urban space. Thus, much like Bikram's family, it appears that Seema's family views an education from LPU as a necessary investment and risk that will equip Seema with the skill set and social capital that will prepare her for being a migrant in a Western country. While they facilitated Seema's access to higher quality formal education, they could not justify the additional transgression entailed in going for English classes alone[134]. Seema's case demonstrates that investments in young women's education and the risks it poses are carefully evaluated and each family, based on its economic resources and ideas of respectability, determines how much education the young women could pursue. Among secure middle-class families, there was greater permissibility around young women travelling longer distances for education, but the extent to which the young women were allowed to travel and the location they travelled to were actively determined by their parents.

[134] It is possible that Seema was dropped by her brother to LPU, but since he could not drop her for the English classes, she was not allowed to enroll in these classes.

6.2.2. The Risk of 'Too much Education'

Another concern around young women's education was the risk of educating them 'too much'. This concern was most clearly expressed by Balwinder when he spoke about arranging the marriage of his niece, Reshma. Balwinder, a retired assistant engineer from the military lives with his younger brother, Rawinder's family. Balwinder expresses strong beliefs about the importance of education and the role of government teachers and schools[135]. He takes a lot of interest in reading and collecting interesting facts and information about Punjab. He tells me he has taught himself English by reading newspapers and repeatedly reading the same words. Balwinder's enthusiasm for education reflects in the level of education attained by his sons, one of whom is a doctor and the other a mechanical engineer. Balwindr has also supported the educational endeavours of Rawinder's children. Rawinder's daughters, Reshma and Sunits were educated in Phagwara at Ramgharia college and his son was sent to Ludhiana for studying engineering on the basis of Balwinder's support.

Despite the strong stance that Balwinder maintains on education, when talking about Reshma, both he and his wife, Bandeep, do not discuss her future employment or education prospects. Rather, they elaborate on the trouble they are having in trying to arrange Reshma's marriage. Balwinder says,

> *. . . One shouldn't educate girls too much, because then it's hard to get them married . . . we are finding it difficult to get Reshma married. Boys are not that educated and the boy's families ask for a big house and dowry. We are very honest with them and tell them what we have and what we don't . . .* (3 March 2016)

Bandeep adds,

> *. . . For Seeta* (Reshma's older sister), *we found a match through relatives. Her husband worked in Qatar for 20 years. He has come back now as his contract ended, but he is thinking of going back. Her* (Seeta's husband's) *family has a good carpentry work here so that is also a good thing. There is also talk of them establishing a business here. The boy* (Seeta's husband*) is in the process of finding a job . . . The older girl is married now and these girls will also get married in 1-2 years[136]...Reshma works very hard and even gives tuitions and gets a little money so it's okay.* (3 March 2016)

[135] While Balwinder emphasises the importance of education, he is particularly troubled by the lack of effort expended by government schoolteachers and points out that government schools do have the capacity to produce well-educated children. In contrast to other middle-class community members who viewed government schools negatively, Balwinder and other educated families whose members were employed in government jobs talked about the need to reform the government school system.

[136] Bandeep says all of this in a resigned tone, implying that they will be relieved of their duties when the girls get married

In this excerpt, Bandeep discusses education without a concomitant high-status job and rise in income as a source of liability, especially in the marriage market. In contrast, young women, who as will be discussed in section 8.4.2 see education as a site of flexibility that offers them more options for marriage. In addressing the difficulties of finding a husband for Reshma, Balwinder and Bandeep bring up the example of her older and less educated sister, Seeta. Seeta's migrant husband who has worked abroad for two decades and now has the social capital to set up a business in Punjab is considered ideal. In contrast to Seeta is Reshma, who is better educated and is even making a *little* money from giving tuitions but is hard to marry off. Finding a boy for Reshma is deemed challenging because Dalit boys are typically not as educated and those that are demand large dowries. Thus, educating daughters 'too much' appears to enforce a cost on the family. 'Too much' education, along with the inability to pay large dowries, reduces the marketability of the young women in the marriage market. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8. Also, due to underemployment, educated young women do not bring in substantial incomes even when there is some employment.

This cost-benefit analysis that is attached to the young women's education is one that is mediated by the particular circumstances of each family. In Seema's case, the education from LPU was a risk because it could bring disrepute to the family, but it was undertaken with the probability of greater returns accruing in the future. In Balwinder's family, Reshma's education was conceived as a disadvantage because they did not have the financial means to pay large dowries. But in a family like Kavita's, her education was pursued with the objective of making her more marketable for marriage with a migrant. Determinations of the right amount and type of education change across families, but the uncertainties entailed in the education of young women deem it a risky venture that is undertaken with a view to the future.

In elucidating the evaluations around education, Chopra (2011) says, ". . . formal education is sought but it is also evaluated along a sliding scale of 'sufficient' or 'too much', an abstraction that is not numerically fixed but is conceptually debated within the family or community . . ." (p. 54). Similarly, Still (2011)'s ethnographic work on a Dalit community in Andhra Pradesh illustrates that women's education is perceived as a 'risky venture'. Still (2011) says that while parents invest in a girl's education to enhance her value in the marriage market and facilitate an upward move for the family, it also opens up the possibility of premarital affairs and loss of honour and prestige for the family. Thus, the education of girls is approached with caution. In Chaheru, while premarital relationships are not brought up as a risk factor, young women's

education is evaluated in terms of mobility strategies. If families have the economic resources to ensure that its young women are marriage to well-settled migrants, then education is pursued. But in cases like Reshma's, where the family lacks the resources to ensure that level of mobility, 'too much' education becomes an issue.

Young women's discussions around education diverge from the parental concerns around marriage but reflect a concurrence with parental plans for mobility. The next part of this chapter explores Somika and Gunita's navigations with education. In drawing on the experiences of two differently located young women, this part is also able to engage with the ways in which the young women's distinctive positionings influences their interactions with education.

6.3 Educated Middle-Class Identities

In Chaheru, there was an absence of a cross cutting discourse on education. Unlike the dominant paradigm of migration, which featured in the people's everyday discourses and practices, discussions on education were concentrated in educated middle-class homes. In these homes, education was seen as a way to carve a separate and elevated identity in comparison to other middle-class families. The notion of education was not merely about the level of formal education attained as most middle-aged men who had secured government employment had only completed their education till grade 10 or 12. But their position, albeit being junior within the government service they worked in, facilitated an exposure to urban spaces outside the village where there was greater caste heterogeneity and cultural diversity. They communicated this exposure as a form of cultural sophistication, which they linked to higher levels of *jankari* or awareness.

Generally, the use of education to establish a higher status within the village was engaged in by middle-aged men from educated middle-class families. But young women, usually from secure and educated middle-class families, used education and its concomitant cultural sophistication to distinguish themselves from their lower-class counterparts. The use of educational identities and experiences to mark social positioning is well documented (for example see Ciotti, 2010; Jeffrey et al., 2004a, 2008). In their seminal work, Jeffrey et al. (2008) reiterate that even in the absence of employment opportunities, lower caste men continue to utilise their educated identities to establish their status vis-à-vis other community members. Similarly, Ciotti (2010), in her work on the Manupur Chamars, discusses the ways

in which upwardly mobile and urban educated young women are carving a distinctive social identity for themselves even in the absence of employment opportunities[137].

Ciotti (2010) asserts that even though a majority of the young women are unable to pursue a college degree and do not find employment outside their homes, they do not think of their education as being useless. Education allows them to acquire knowledge, which is a cultural capital that will stay with them throughout their lives. It allows them to attain economic self-sufficiency and take on other skills like sewing. Their education is beneficial for the whole family, as it allows them to appropriately nurture and educate the children in the family. Moreover, education allows the young women to distance themselves from the lower class other and engage in middle-class formation (p. 239-242). Thus, Ciotti (2010) indicates that despite the absence of promising employment opportunities, education continues to be important to the ways in which the young women define themselves and their positions vis-à-vis the lower-class others in the community.

Similarly, in Chaheru, the young women's post-education trajectories are uncertain. It is difficult for them to secure respectable employment or to migrate. In many cases, instead of doing low-status private work, the young women opt to work from home. In the absence of migration[138] or secure government jobs, the young women's education operates as an important marker of middle-class femininity[139] and identity. For parents, the importance of education is located in its instrumental value for marriage migration[140]. In contrast, while the young women

[137] In Manupur, the education of young women, often till grade 12, was pursued with the aim of facilitating their marriage to government employees. These were mostly urban young women who were married into rural areas. In some cases, their husbands allowed them to pursue further education and employment. While the young women initially took on household chores, there was an understanding that in the future, they would be able to pursue their educational interests (Ciotti, 2010).

[138] The most commonly accepted method for the young women to migrate was through marriage. In some cases, if women had close extended family abroad, they also tried to migrate through work visas, i.e., the caregiver visa. There was only one family in Chaheru where the young woman had migrated for work to a country where the family did not have any relatives. In the same family, the younger sister of this girl was planning to migrate either through a fraudulent marriage or independently for studying further. This family did not enjoy a good reputation in the village and were looked down upon for being desperate to migrate at any cost.

[139] As discussed in Section 4.5.1, idealised femininity is no longer about women being relegated to the domestic sphere and fulfilling the roles of a devoted wife and mother (Ciotti, 2010; Malhotra, 2002; Skeggs, 1997; Still, 2011). Rather, it involves women's active participation in the public sphere through the attainment of respectable professional employment (Radhakrishnan, 2008). In the absence of high-status employment, in Chaheru, education operates as a marker of middle-class femininity.

[140] Most parents, given their illiteracy or low levels of education, did not comment on the utility and future implications of their children's educational choices. Their everyday concerns and interventions were limited to the cost of education, the reputation of the educational institute their daughters attended and the young women's involvement in the domestic sphere. When they spoke about the future, especially the mothers, they emphasised on arranging marriages for these educated young women. In migrant middle-class families, from the parental perspective, the objective of educating the young women is to prepare them to marry a migrant. This education can take different forms. While one aspect is attaining higher levels of formal education such as a postgraduate degree, another aspect is giving the IELTS exam. In less secure and middle-class educated families, despite the larger discourse of education and employment, parents do not discuss the possible employment

were concerned with directing their education towards the goals of employment and migration, it was also seen as an important tool for developing cultural knowledge and know-how. Education allowed the young women to access urban spaces, develop familiarity with urban cultural mores, emulate aspects of the urban middle class and position themselves as the cultured middle class. This section specifically examines the ways in which the young women draw upon their educational identity and ability to place educational pursuits over concerns about female respectability in order to lay claim to a more cultured and liberal middle-class identity.

6.3.1 Education as Distinction

Somika has completed her MA from a college in Jalandhar and is studying to sit for competitive exams for government posts. She also gives tuitions to children in the evenings. In other households in the village, young women often have a formal relationship with their fathers and are careful to conduct themselves in a demure way before them. In contrast, in Somika's household, the environment is relatively open and egalitarian and Somika talks freely in the presence of her father, Balveer. In fact, she even feels comfortable enough to interject when her father is talking to me. Like other secure and educated middle-class families in Chaheru, both Somika and Balveer draw upon education as a source of exceptionalism, which allows them to establish their cultural superiority over and above their less educated counterparts in the village.

Somika often expresses frustration at the low levels of education in the village and says (based on her experiences giving tuitions) that the children from private schools still know what is going on around them, but that the children from government schools don't even know what a test format is. Many of my discussions with Somika centre on the lack of female education in the village. Like other educated young women in the village who are 'waiting' for opportunities of migration or employment to materialise, Somika often complains about the lack of mobility in her career trajectory and says that it is difficult for her to sit at home for so long and not do anything. But other upwardly mobile young women in the village engage in the even less active process of plan-making as they 'wait'. In contrast, Somika copes with her immobility in more

opportunities for the young women following their education and are instead, focused on their marriage. There is a selective intervention in those aspects of the young women's educational experiences that are linked to the fulfilment of gender roles.

proactive ways and seeks opportunities for training and advancement. During my fieldwork period, she prepared and sat for the entrance exams for the Life Insurance Corporation of India and some government banks[141]. Moreover, unlike the young women from less secure middle-class families, who face greater restrictions around their mobility, Somika[142] receives support from her parents to pursue opportunities that may require her to travel further away from the village. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Somika began attending coaching classes for competitive government exams at the Ravidass Institute for Education in Phagwara. When representatives from the institute came to talk to the people in the village about the kind of coaching they offered, they held a meeting at Somika's house. Somika laments that while many girls had shown up to find out about the classes, none of them are actually coming for the classes because perhaps they think it is too far away from the village.[143] She says,

> *. . . the girls here don't know there is special coaching for competitive exams like the bank exam . . . even the other girl who went with me* (she is from a poorer family in the village) *didn't know . . . even I have been raised here and have had the same education, yet I know these things . . . if you have to do something you have to do it regardless of how hot it is*[144] *. . . I have to sit for a banking exam, for the position of a clerk . . . I've been trying for the last 5-6 years, but I am confident I will get through* (13 May 2016).

In this excerpt, Somika presents herself as a well-informed and confident girl who will not be held back by restrictions and excuses in the pursuit of her educational and employment goals. This sets Somika apart from the "vernacular" young woman who is bound by rural traditions and norms (Ciotti, 2010, p. 218). Balveer, who is also present during my conversation with Somika, adds, "*When they* (people from the organisation) *came to talk, we decided that we would go, regardless of who went and who didn't.*" (14 May 2016) Somika and Balveer's comments reiterate their ability and willingness to pursue educational objectives and not be constrained by ideas circulating in the village about preventing young girls from travelling long distances to pursue their educational goals. They assert their separation from the lower-class villagers, who are uninformed and caught up in regressive gender ideals. Thus, Somika and Balveer's discourse about their liberal attitude towards female mobility is inextricably linked to their view of the other villagers. Their open-minded nature emerges vis-à-vis the

[141] Somika says that she has sat for these exams multiple times before. She also plans to prepare and sit for the Indian Railways entrance exams.
[142] In contrast to Gunita, who goes to Jalandhar for the first time as the result of our trip to an educational institute, Somika has been to Jalandhar many times to visit her relatives who live there.
[143] The classes are being held in Phagwara town
[144] This is in reference to Kavita's reason for not going for the classes because it is too hot

construction of the backward and unexposed villager and operates as an important marker of their status as an educated middle-class family.

6.3.2. Emulating Urban Middle-Class Identities

Somika's construction of an open-minded and cultured middle-class identity is also linked to other aspects of her social identity and interactions. Education operates as an overarching construct that becomes linked to various behaviours that allow the young women to establish proximity to urban spaces and cultures. In fact, given that a number of young women from educated and secure middle-class families in Chaheru had close links with urban spaces, this appears as a natural extension of their aspirations for mobility. Unlike the young women from less secure middle-class families, they already had regular contact with the urban milieu[145]. In her work, Ciotti (2010) also asserts that upwardly mobile young women are not simply emulating upper caste norms, but instead, are attempting to appropriate the 'modern' that is linked to the city space while distancing themselves from the village (p. 220).

The emulation of urban middle-class identities by educated middle-class families has to be viewed with regard to their distinctive household environments and discursive appeals to the ideas of female mobility and sexuality. As will be discussed in Section 7.4, less secure middle-class families interacted more widely with people in the village and were more reliant on the support and patronage of neighbours. In contrast, secure and educated middle-class families were more selective about whom they chose to engage with. They usually interacted only with equally placed families and served as distant patrons to poorer families in the immediate locality[146]. While this can also be linked to their more secure economic status, it translated into a home environment with a distinct cultural ethos. In these households, there was more open communication between family members, there was preparation and knowledge of different types of regional foods and a greater engagement in social interactions that were independent

[145] Somika has relatives in Jalandhar and often visits the city. Also, Balveer's government employment entails exposure to diverse urban cultures.

[146] Middle-aged women from secure and educated middle-class families often mentioned that they did not interact with people in the village. These women largely remained indoors and took pride in their isolation from the village space. They also talked about the difficulties in securing domestic help. They complained that while women from poorer families in the village travelled to the city to work in people's houses, they were unwilling to work at their homes in the village. Thus, while men from these households continued to be involved in village politics, the middle-aged women from these families used their relegation in the domestic sphere to assert their separation from the lower-class villagers. These families appeared to occupy a distinctive and elevated cultural space within the village.

of the rural space[147]. In many ways, these households appeared to exist outside the cultural space of the village.

In these households, at a discursive level, ideas of female mobility and autonomy were championed and there was some permissibility attached to premarital romantic relationships. This contradicts the assumption that under conditions of class mobility, Dalit patriarchy entails an uptake of upper caste norms around the control of female movement and the retreat of women into the domestic space (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2017). Admittedly, other middle-class families adhere to this emerging notion of Dalit patriarchy, as highlighted in Section 1.6.5, to varying degrees. However, educated and secure middle-class families appear to diverge from this construct of female respectability. In these families, there is an increasing value that is attached to young women's ability to travel independently and attain employment. In fact, their 'modernity' and high-status employment are perceived as important metrics of middle-class identities across other contexts as well (for example see Ciotti, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2008). Thus, among the young women from educated and secure middle-class families, the idea of a modern woman who adorns urban fashions and mannerisms and is actively pursuing her educational and employment goals operates as an ideal. As mentioned above, the young women perceive themselves as 'go-getters' and as overriding restrictions of mobility that confine the ambitions and actions of other village women. However, even young women from these families were confined by ideas of 'appropriateness', familial responsibilities[148], urban middle-class moralities and family restriction. Thus, in claiming educatedness, the young women are not merely talking about their individual trajectories of mobility, they are also actively curating a distinctive version of appropriate femininity and middle-classness.

The educated middle-class identity that the young women create is bound up in notions of cultural distinction, the ability to transverse the village space and access idioms of urban middle-classness. The discourse around female mobility and sexuality is important in marking the young women's affinity to more urbanised gender norms as well as establishing their

[147] While these families maintained some linkages with the rural area, they also appeared socially independent. They had extensive interactions with relatives, who visited them from outside the village. For example, Somika had regular interactions with her poorer next-door neighbours whose son she also taught tuitions. She was very close to this family and often confided in the boy's mother. But their house was also constantly bustling with relatives from the city.

[148] Towards the end of my fieldwork Somika had started working at a private company in Jalandhar. But when there was a death in her family, she left her job to be able to attend to all the visitors who were coming over to her house to express their condolence. Thus, despite claims of female mobility, it is implicit that this mobility is conditional on being able to fulfil one's responsibilities at home. This harkens back to Radhakrishnan's (2008) idea of the modern woman who straddles both work and home.

cultured and modern identities within the village space. The young women also draw on ideas of caste identity to mark their separation from the 'backward' village space. Thus, education operates as an overarching construct that references a repertoire of mannerisms, attitudes and discourses that allow young women from educated families to etch urban middle-class identities.

6.3.3 Attitude to Premarital Relationships

Across different middle-class families, a contradiction to the prevailing idea of female respectability and mobility was the perceptible casualness regarding young women forming romantic relationships. Especially among the educated and secure middle-class families, there was an almost hands-off approach towards the premarital relationships of young men and women. This permissibility of premarital relationships also extended to romantic relationships with upper caste young men. In everyday conversations, middle-aged men reflected that they did not have a problem with the young women forming romantic relationships with upper caste men. Instead, they specified that their objection was to upper caste men impregnating lower caste women and then deserting them. The sarpanch pointed out, ". . . *if an upper caste girl marries into a lower caste home, she will improve the culture of that home . . . interactions between different castes are important for vikas (development) . . .*" (20 November 2015) Thus, inter-caste alliances, especially between upper caste women and lower caste men, were seen as desirable. Such alliances were seen as facilitating cultural exchange and allowed subsequent generations of lower caste families to learn and emulate the superior cultural characteristics of the upper castes. Thus, the openness to female sexuality, while linked to the history of lower caste women's sexual autonomy, also reflects a desire to integrate into high-status cultures (Kapadia, 1995; Still, 2017). The construct of mobility then is not only about attaining class status, but also establishing more 'evolved' cultures through cultural interactions with the upper castes. Although, as will be discussed in Section 8.2, despite the discursive openness to female sexuality and inter-caste alliances, most marriages in the village were arranged and endogamous.

Across different middle-class families, while the young women were not allowed to date openly, their private activities, be it over their cell phones or outside the village space, were

not constantly monitored by their parents[149]. The young women were expected to maintain a veneer of modesty and respectability within the village space. But there was a lot of flexibility and space for them to pursue relationships[150]. In secure and educated middle-class families, the young women seemed to have more leeway to explore such relationships as their parents were not overtly concerned about romantic relationships, as long as they did not unfold in the view of the community. Somika expresses that her father has an objection to her relationship with a boy because the boy in question is from the same village as they are[151]. But Somika continues to meet her boyfriend and her father knows this. While Somika is concerned that her father will not allow her to marry this boy, she is able to meet him because these meetings are not visible to her father or the other villagers. Often, educational institutes and city markets served as good meeting spots for young couples[152].

This permissibility around young women's romantic relationships, especially in educated and secure middle-class families, can be linked to the parental abetted shift to more urban notions of middle-classness. In her work on the suburban middle classes of Hyderabad, Gilbertson (2014) talks about the emergence of a culture of premarital relationships among the urban middle class in Hyderabad. She relates that this is not simply about the relaxing of sexual restrictions, but a youth consumer culture in which "dating" and certain types of male-female interactions are seen as being fashionable. Thus, having boyfriends and being more comfortable with this idea becomes a way to appear modern and progressive. Similarly, in Chaheru, the young women's premarital relationships can be seen as being a part of their larger mobility project, where establishing interactions with the opposite sex denote a comfort with urban middle-class mores. This allows the young women to assert their separation from lower class women who are bound by regressive gender norms. Thus, engaging in premarital relationships is not only an assertion of female autonomy, but, and more importantly so, it also

[149] In fact, in many cases, it was the young women's older brothers, rather than their parents, who became an enforcer of gender norms, especially when it came to interactions outside the village space.

[150] In Kavita's household, while she does not belong to a secure and educated middle-class family, her mother did not disapprove of her relationship with a Jat boy who is living in Canada. Kavita often referred to the boy as her friend and discussed his predicaments in front of her mother, who was aware of his interest in marrying Kavita. She also pointed out that the boy spoke more to her mother than her. This demonstrated the boy's good intentions and imbued the relationship with respectability. In her mother's presence, Kavita was careful about channelling the conversations towards the boy's struggles in Canada and her own sympathy for him as a friend rather than drawing attention towards their romance. In fact, when her mother was out of earshot, Kavita confided in me about the romantic aspects of their relationship such as the promise of marriage and the boy's continuing reassurances to her that he wanted to marry only her. Thus, by selectively withholding information about the more romantic aspects of her relationship, Kavita was able to elicit her mother's tacit approval of the relationship.

[151] Men and women from the same village being in a romantic relationship was seen as incestuous and highly discouraged. Although, as will be discussed in Chapter 8 such relationships did exist.

[152] There was a new café that had opened next to Ramgharia College and it quickly became a popular meeting joint for college couples. In fact, the café had even set up a separate section downstairs to give these couples some privacy.

allows the young women to claim proximity to urbanity and emulate an urbanised construct of middle-classness.

6.3.4. Passing Caste

In claiming a more liberal and urbanised middle-class identity, the young women also sought to bypass the stigma that was associated with their lower caste status. This aspiration was most commonly expressed in discussions about the village space. In one of our initial meetings, Somika says to me,

> *. . . don't tell anyone, this village has a very bad reputation for drugs, so when we moved here (*this is their maternal grandmother's home*), our father said that he doesn't want us to make friends with people from the village. So I don't have any friends in the village with whom I travel to and from the institute. My brothers were also told to not play with other kids.* (23 October 2015)

Somika's parents' concern about social interactions in the village translated to Somika's brothers only spending time with sons of another family. By way of explanation, Somika says, ". . . *they are from a good family, like ours* . . ."[153] (23 October 2015) This categorisation of some people as belonging to a good family while others are deemed immoral reflects valuations about class and caste. The label of 'good families' is reserved for similarly placed, secure middle-class families and the site of pollution and immorality is moved to the lower-class villagers. This illustrates the efforts of secure middle-class families to carve for themselves a middle-class identity that is dissociated from the stigma that is attached to the lower castes.

A common narrative among middle-class families about their separation from the lower caste identity is premised on their construction of the village space. The village is imbued with negative characteristics and is seen as lacking awareness, literacy and cultural sophistication and is considered to be mired in vulgarity, poverty and drugs. These are stereotypes that are often used to describe Dalit populations. In a bid to disentangle themselves from the immoral village space, middle-class families assign negative stereotypes associated with Dalits to the village space and to the lower-class villagers. Especially among educated and secure middle-class families, there is a stronger imperative to reinforce the immorality and backwardness of

[153] Somika only socialises with her neighbours and does not have any friends in the village. In contrast, young women from less secure families in the village have friends who they have grown up with and who they may meet occasionally.

the lower-class villagers and construct their own separation from them. Somika and her family also see their separation from the village in caste terms and associate their middle-class identity with their ability to 'pass' as upper caste people.

Balveer takes pride in the fact that most of his friends are not SC. In fact, his best friend was a Jat man, who has now passed away. Also, he recounts that in one of the grocery shops that he used to frequent, his account was listed under the name Panditji[154]. When he corrected the shopkeeper and revealed his caste identity, the shopkeeper was surprised. Balveer attributes his ability to overcome his SC status to his open interactions with people from other castes[155] and to his grooming[156], both of which were facilitated by his education and employment. Similarly, Somika also talks about how most of her friends in college were not SC and how people would often comment that she didn't look or dress like an SC. Thus, the ability to 'pass' as an upper caste person and being able to dissociate from one's lower caste background takes precedence in the narratives of secure middle-class families. Moreover, among educated families, this is often associated with higher levels of education and cultural sophistication, which are seen to parallel those of the upper castes. Unlike less secure middle-class families that sometimes recount the lacks and disadvantages they are subject to due to being lower caste, more educated and secure middle-class families seek to establish parity with the upper castes. This also indicates the ways in which educated and secure middle-class families are further along in their mobility trajectory.

Somika and her father see education not simply as opening up avenues for mobility, but as fundamentally shaping their levels of cultural sophistication, grooming and open-mindedness. Along with these acquired attributes, they draw on ideas of female mobility and autonomy, the village space and their caste identity to dissociate themselves from the lower-caste and lower-class other and construct an urbanised middle-classness. Like the permissibility attached to premarital romantic relationships, caste identity is instrumentalised and subsumed in the class project of producing urbanised middle-class identities.

Contrary to Waghmore (2013)'s contention about a revision in caste consciousness that propels the shift from purity/pollution to modernity and civility, in Chaheru, one finds a coexistence of

[154] A term that is used to refer to upper caste Brahmins.
[155] Balveer says that he initiated the culture of people from different castes eating their lunch together at his workplace.
[156] Balveer credits his well-kept appearance as the reason why the police have never stopped him.

both understandings. While the construct of mobility is the dominant paradigm for claiming and forming middle-class identities, the notion of caste and its concomitant purity/pollution dictum is drawn upon by the young women to distance themselves from the site of pollution. Among more secure and educated middle-class families, the site of pollution or the immoral Dalit identity is moved from the self to the lower class and lower caste other[157]. Thus, secure and educated middle-class families can be seen to be forging a more advanced and stronger claim to class mobility, which is not just invested in defining distinctions in class terms, but also in dissociating from caste stigma. In these families, education does not just pertain to the young women's mobility pathway, it encompasses a larger form of identity formation that is oriented towards the urban and is more neatly positioned away from the village.

6.4 Limitations of Educational Mobility

Somika's experience is defined by parental support and encouragement to pursue educated distinction. She uses her education and its association with ideas of female mobility and autonomy, urbanity and caste identity to carve an urbanised middle-class identity. In contrast, young women from less secure middle-class families are more focused on navigating access to education. For these young women, educational access is not a given but it has to be actively negotiated by balancing the expectations enforced by their parents with the demands of urban modernity. As mentioned earlier, Gunita and Suman's trip to Jalandhar is an attempt on their part to redefine the type of education they can access. It does not lead to any tangible outcomes, especially given that Gunita's access to even a site like Ramgharia College is tenuous due to her family's economic positioning[158]. But it symbolises their effort to push the boundaries of appropriateness and explore the potential of an education in Jalandhar. In visiting new educational sites, the young women's imperative is not only to access higher quality education, but also partake in higher status urban cultures.

During the trip Jalandhar, Suresh, who was otherwise quite outspoken in the village as he talked about his children's education and issues like caste politics, withdraws to a corner and does not partake in planning the trip at all. He leaves it up to me to coordinate this trip to Jalandhar.

[157] In less secure middle-class families, while there is also a separation from the lower class other, the site of pollution still remains with the self. The ideas of backwardness, illiteracy and lack of cultural sophistication and grooming remain internalised. For example, Kavita did not have the same level of confidence in her pursuit of education and employment goals as that one gleaned in Somika. She also made references to her 'Chamarness', as an internalised sense of her inferiority and caste stigma.

[158] When Gunita's academic performance in college declined and she had to pay extra to resit the exams, her mother told her that she would remove her from college if she were to resit any more exams.

Upon arriving at the Kingfisher Training Institute, we are greeted by a run-down building that is located in central Jalandhar. After taking the elevator to the office of the institute, we find ourselves in a swanky air-conditioned room where the receptionist greets us in English and asks us to wait to see the staff. In the meantime, she hands each of the girls a form to complete. We sit on comfortable sofas and wait our turn as the girls fill the forms with a little bit of assistance from me. The girls are quiet and keep to themselves as they go through the form, briefly talking to each other to clarify some questions on the form. In contrast to their excited demeanour when they had left the village, the girls seem more conscious and shy in the office. Gunita, who is sitting next to me, displays some excitement and curiosity as she watches some of the students coming out from their classes.

Gunita's fascination appears to be centred around the Western clothing worn by the young men and women in the institute and their interactions with each other[159]. For Gunita and other young women from less secure middle-class families, education in itself is not a source of status. Rather, the pathway to urban culture that it paves is what is valued[160]. As has been discussed at length in Section 5.2.2 beyond its linkage with instrumental goals, education serves a crucial function for young women. It allows them the opportunity to access modern spaces outside the village where they are able to operate more autonomously and gain exposure to a different culture. Often, young women discuss their educational experience in terms of upcoming college trips or visits to malls in Jalandhar with friends. Especially, for young women from less secure middle-class families, the social experience of education often takes precedence over the content of their education.

In addition to perceiving education as an opportunity for accessing urban culture, in their interactions with education, the young women also harness the notion of flexibility. Often, despite not gaining easy access to local employment post the completion of their degrees, young women uphold education as a site of flexibility. They see education as opening up various options for marriage, as is discussed in section 8.4.2. Also, as young women negotiate their desire to access urban modernity whilst acceding to the restrictions imposed by their families, they draw on flexible and adaptive preferences. During the trip to Jalandhar the young women adopt flexible preferences not only to manage the gap between familial expectations

[159] Gunita also expresses surprise and fascination when she sees young women driving in Jalandhar.
[160] Unlike young women from secure middle-class families who perceive education as a route to inculcating cultural sophistication and urban middle-class identities, young women from less secure families see education as facilitating access to urban modernity, but not necessarily to urbanised identities.

and their aspirations, but also to ensure that their claim to middle-classness is maintained. The young women's flexibility appears as a form of everyday agency that also reveals their negotiations around educational mobility.

6.4.1. Education and Flexibility

At the Kingfisher Training Institute in Jalandhar, we met two recruiters, a young man and a woman, who asked the girls a few questions about their educational background, before bringing the whole discussion to an end. We left the office after this 15-minute meeting. As we came out of the institute, the young women and Suresh looked shocked and saddened. They expressed anger and disbelief at the high fees (INR 125,000) that the institute charged and over the fact that there were no fee waivers for SC students. They almost looked insulted. The ensuing conversation focussed on the costs of education and did not expand into a discussion about the courses being offered at the institute. Also, there was a perceptible shift in the tone and position adopted by Gunita. Earlier, while seated in the office, Gunita had raised concerns about whether the institute would be really beneficial for a BCA degree or not and the expenses that she would have to incur in travelling between Jalandhar and Phagwara for classes. But her tone had been positive and flexible at that point. This shift in her viewpoint and tone from being hopeful and aspirational to becoming pragmatic and despondent is marked. Suman, on the other hand, appeared more flexible than Gunita and we even talked about going to Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) in Jalandhar. Suman expressed an interest in this proposition, but she did not adopt a strong position like Gunita, who refused to go. Suresh seemed uncertain at first, but finally, he also refused to go to GNDU[161].

The transition among the young women from being hopeful to appearing let down and disappointed can be understood as arising from the challenge that the institute posed to their construction of middle-class identity. Within the context of the village, Gunita's well-equipped house, her migrant family members and her access to higher education place her within the middle-class, albeit less securely. But the institution's imposition of a high fee structure served as an explicit reminder of her inability to partake in the urban culture represented by the institute and her tenuous claim to middle-classness. In addition to the high financial costs, being

[161] I had initially suggested we visit GNDU in an effort to encourage them to make the most out of their trip to Jalandhar. I had also proposed that it would allow them gain exposure to other educational institutes in the city.

within the institute also reiterated a sense of cultural exclusion. A similar reaction is also directed towards other elite institutes in the vicinity that the villagers have a stronger opinion on[162].

The Kingfisher Training institute demonstrates communication in fluent English, open interactions between the young men and women and the uptake of Westernized clothing. This elite and westernised culture is desirable for the young women, but it is too distant from the village space. The institute lacks referents of the lower-class and lower-caste other that the young women use to define their middle-class identity in the village space. In the absence of these referents, the young women become the lower-class other and this induces a sense of disorientation (Saavala, 2006). This sense of disorientation spills over to other aspects of the trip and impacts the young women's decision to not visit any other educational institutes in Jalandhar.

Saavala (2006) explains a similar response among lower-caste middle-class respondents who visited an elite amusement park in Hyderabad. Initially, the respondents were excited about visiting the place. But upon reaching, they moved around restlessly and hesitated to trespass on open areas in the complex as they were unaccustomed to empty spaces. They only appeared engaged and excited when they were filming themselves to create evidence of them having visited the place. Saavala (2006) found that the class characteristics of the place, wherein there was an absence of familiar social coordinates, gave rise to discomfort. Specifically, the absence of the lower class other reinforced anxiety in the respondents about their own social positioning. Since the middle-class identity is premised on negation and on setting up one's status in opposition to the lower class other, the absence of the lower class or the poor fractured the basis of their middle-class identity. It also gave rise to new fractions such as the newcomer, the more established middle class and the elite. In many ways, the discomfort expressed by Gunita, more than Suman, can be seen as arising from a class displacement, wherein there are no lower-class others against which she can construct her middle-classness. This brings to the fore her own insecure claim to middle-classness and the realisation that she does not belong to the class culture that she glimpses in the institute.

[162] In the popular imagination of the villagers, LPU is not just a place marked by drug use and loose gender norms, but also one characterised by elite or upper-class norms. Thus, the aversion towards LPU stems from the class morality and norms that it represents. This concern is expressed not only by the parents, but also by the young women who mention the ragging and exclusion of middle-class children at LPU. Thus, in addition to financial considerations, there is a 'looking down' on elite institutions as they are seen as exclusionary spaces that imbibe a culture that is antithetical to the middle-class milieu occupied by less secure families in the village.

Upon encountering the requirement of the higher-class positioning enforced by the institute, the young women respond by correcting and adapting their expressed preferences. Instead of articulating potential strategies for accessing this institute or other colleges in Jalandhar, they insisted upon the utility of attending Ramgharia College. This is most pronounced in the case of Gunita, who seems almost panic-stricken when we exit the building. She repeatedly says, "*No, it's all right. Ramgharia is fine . . .*" and wants to return to Phagwara. Gunita highlights the suitability of Ramgharia College when she says, "*If one has to do a BCA, Ramgharia is fine. Why do we need to come all the way here?*" Gunita further attempts to legitimise her response by drawing on Suresh's preferences. She says, "*Her father* (Suresh) *has already said no. So it doesn't look good if we keep asking (to go to GNDU)*." (4 April 2016) In fact, Suresh had only refused mildly at one point and it is Gunita who refused, almost vehemently so, to go to any other institute in Jalandhar. The shift in Gunita's expressed preferences and the way she brings in Suresh to further justify the shift reflects the importance of demonstrating congruence with parental expectations as well as the malleability of the young women's aspirations.

Others have also described this flexibility in the young women's aspirations and preferences in their pursuit of class mobility (Forerer, 2012; Vijayakumar, 2013). Vijayakumar (2013) interviewed young women workers in a business-process outsourcing (BPO) centre two hours outside of Bangalore. She asserts that the young women's aspirations depict a flexibility and an openness that allows them to steer these aspirations either towards fulfilling the gendered expectations that are attached to rural middle-class domesticity or towards maintaining the autonomy of modern working women. Importantly, this flexibility allows them to straddle and negotiate diverse expectations as well as assert their distinction from rural middle-class housewives and immoral urban working women (Vijayakumar, 2013). Others like Froerer (2012) have also noted the propensity of young women, in the face of obstacles to higher education, to modify their expectations and invest in marriage as an alternative trajectory of mobility. Both Vijayakumar (2013) and Froerer (2012) show that this flexibility allows the young women to negotiate a pragmatic mobility that is acceptable to their families and communities.

The shift in Gunita and Suman's preferences can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it allows the young women to align with parental considerations around the economic and moral costs of studying in an elite institution. Moreover, it depicts the young women's own limitations in

accessing and emulating urban cultures. In fact, as highlighted in Section 5.4, the young women often express a keenness to partake in urban elite cultures. But at the level of practice, they align themselves more closely with choices that allow them to experience mobility while still retaining some alignment with parental expectations and rural mores. When Gunita and Suman shift their preferences to match those of Suresh, they adopt a position that is aligned with the expectations of middle-class morality. Moreover, the panic in Gunita's tone as we exited the institute in Jalandhar may have been a response to the institute's reinforcement of her social disadvantages. But it also reflects the need to highlight Ramgharia College as an appropriate choice for education. In fact, given the economic situation in Gunita's household and her disappointing academic performance, even her access to Ramgharia College is precarious. Thus, Gunita's frequent positioning of Ramgharia is important because it establishes Ramgharia as an affordable and appropriate choice. From the perspective of the young women, Ramgharia College is a good choice because it allows them to access urban modernity without overriding the norms of respectability laid out by their parents. Further, given that Ramgharia College mostly attracts rural students, it is a more culturally familiar space for the young women.

However, this presents the question that if the young women were satisfied in attending Ramgharia College in the first place, then why did they go all the way to Jalandhar to see another institute? The impetus of the trip, which came from the young women themselves and was supported by Suresh, demonstrates the young women's aspiration to explore elite spaces for education, as they represent Westernised urban cultures that they aspire to. But upon encountering the actual space, the young women realise that they cannot afford to study at the institute. Also, their positionality as the emergent middle-class that is still caught up in rural mores becomes evident and makes them feel marginalised within the institute. Importantly, within such elite spaces, the young women become the lower-class other and they are no longer able to claim the respectable middle. Thus, the young women's flexible preferences do not just allow them to align with parental expectations, but they also help them reclaim spaces like Ramgharia College, which allow them to access an urban culture but does not position them as class outsiders. Importantly, Ramgharia College allows young women from less secure middle-class families to construct middle-class subjectivities that elevate their social position whilst retaining their orientation towards the rural. However, the decision to explore an elite institute in Jalandhar relates the desire, albeit premature, to push the boundaries of appropriateness and etch pathways to more urbane middle-class cultures.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to engage with both parental concerns and frameworks of educational mobility as well as the young women's narratives and practices around education. It emerges that while parents draw on a cost-benefit analysis to determine the type and level of education that is appropriate, the young women are concerned with different negotiations. While they align with the rubric of acceptability and mobility that is set forth by their parents, they also put forth distinctive negotiations of their own. Specifically, the young women draw on education in different ways depending on the kind of middle-class family they belong to. Young women from educated and secure middle-class families are attempting to delineate urban middle-class identities by claiming education as an overarching identity. In these families, education becomes tied to ideas of awareness, female mobility and autonomy, cultural sophistication and overcoming lower caste stigma. Thus, the young women's educated identities become linked to a larger gamut of ideas and behaviours that set them apart from the lower-class villagers and that also establish their proximity to the urban middle-class. In their interactions with education, the young women from educated and secure middle-class families are seen to be occupying a more upwardly mobile and culturally distinctive space within the village.

In contrast, the young women from less secure middle-class families are in the more primary stages of deciphering and accessing appropriate educational institutes. Gunita and Suman's trip to Jalandhar, while demonstrating the ambition for urban modernity that exists among the young women, also reveals the sense of class disorientation that is induced by elite institutes. In responding to this disorientation, the young women adopt flexible preferences. This allows them to meet parental expectations and reclaim the rural culture that aligns with their construct of middle-classness. This invocation of flexibility and balancing is also found in the young women's navigations around consumption, as is noted in Section 7.3.2. It allows the young women to straddle the expectations of different cultural worlds and maintain linkages to each of them. Especially in the case of young women from less secure middle-class families, it allows them to partake in rural cultures that are instrumental in etching their middle-class positionality.

The differences between young women from educated and secure middle-class families and those from less secure middle-class families also emerge in the different meanings they ascribe to education. Young women from educated and secure middle-class families value education in itself and link it to their attitudes towards female autonomy and caste. Importantly, they perceive their education and class mobility as allowing them to pass the stigma that is associated with their lower caste identity. In contrast, the young women from less secure middle-class families perceive education as a resource that will enable them to access urban modernity. They are less concerned with emulating educated middle-class identities or passing as upper castes.

Consequently, parental role and positionality in secure and less secure middle-class families also diverges. In secure middle-class families, parents actively support and encourage the educational endeavours of the young women, even if it means young women travelling longer distances. The parents draw upon education as a source of cultural sophistication and distinction. In less secure middle-class families, parents are more concerned about the instrumental linkages of education with marriage as well as, the affordability and accessibility of educational institutes. They see education as being valuable in so far as it enables them to secure the future of their daughters, but they are not invested in cultivating educated identities.

These divergent parental attitudes towards education coincide with the young women's varying educational practices. Among secure middle-class families, young women are able to travel to educational institutes that are farther away and also potentially participate in more elite urban cultures. This is facilitated by their parents' implicit valuation of female mobility. Among young women from less secure families, choices around education are defined by a balancing act. They seek to retain access to urban culture and education whilst aligning with parental expectations and rural norms of appropriateness. Thus, the education of young women across different middle-class families does not appear as an assertion of individual autonomy but one that is nestled in their family's economic positioning and middle-class culture.

The interactions of both types of middle-class young women reveal the limitations of the middle-classness that is being claimed. While the young women from more secure middle-class families feel limited by their lower-caste identity and attempt to override it, the young women from less secure families are limited by their insecure claims to middle-classness. In both cases, the young women appear to be actively confronting and challenging their

limitations. They utilise education as a resource and channel it towards their goals and negotiations of mobility. Across different types of middle-class families, education allows young women to claim a belonging to high status and urban spaces outside the village.

7 Performing Mobility in the Village

7.1 Introduction

One day, when I visit Nina's marital home, I find that she is visiting her mother[163]. I stay and chat with Nina's husband, Bikram, and her sister-in-law, Anu. I help her sister-in-law prepare dinner and she asks me to stay for the meal. Later in the evening, Bikram goes to pick up Nina from her mother's house[164]. At dinner time, although it is her sister-in law who has made the food, Nina dutifully fetches the food from the kitchen and also brings out a cooling yoghurt drink for her husband and his brother. She gets her own food a little later. As she is serving the food and eating, Nina mentions a few times that the food looks oily. Anu clarifies that apart from being oily, the salt and the chilli in the food are all fine. In response, Nina says yes. As everyone continues eating, the discussion becomes focused on the *sabzis* or vegetable dishes in front of us. Nina says that here (i.e. at her in-laws place) they overcook the vegetables. Anu explains that among the Punjabis in the village, if you don't cook the vegetables so much, they will say it is *kacha* or uncooked. Nina says that she likes to keep the vegetables crispy and not overcook them so much. She had once made *bhindi* that way, but everyone had said that it was kacha. So she cooked it for a longer time, until the seeds separated from the vegetable and it became, in Nina's opinion, rather odd. Anu then tells me that they fry bhindi and *arbi* and that they don't put ginger and garlic in the food because Bikram doesn't like it. Nina says her husband will like today's sabzi because he likes very oily food.

This casual conversation around food demonstrates a larger conflict between different consumption styles and their underlying cultural and moral basis. In this conversation, Anu is instating a distinct rural cooking style, which is simplistic in its use of spices and emphasises 'cooking' the vegetables well. This style sounds similar to the cooking styles adopted by the less educated and less secure middle-class families. Nina, on the other hand, presents her cooking style as being more modern and health conscious in its focus on not using too much oil and not overcooking the vegetables as well as embracing different spices and flavours. Nina's cooking style aligned with her more urbane outlook and family background.

[163] This had happened many times in the past as well, when I went to Nina's marital home and was told that she was at her mother's. In fact, Nina tells me that during peak summers, she mostly stays at her mother's house because they have an air conditioner.

[164] When Nina arrives, she is surprised to see me there and seems almost taken aback that I had been in the house in her absence.

While at the surface level, this conversation is about different styles of consumption, it also reflects competing narratives of mobility and status. Anu reiterates the importance of rural cooking methods whilst also aspiring for migration and movement away from the village. She is seeking mobility even as she is holding onto rural traditions. In contrast, Nina asserts the importance of more 'evolved' and urban methods of cooking and locates mobility in the Western and urban space. Her construct of mobility hinges on her ability to mark a separation from the rural space. Thus, the young women's consumption and its alignment with rural and urban cultures is reflective of their larger negotiations with mobility and middle-class status.

Evidently, different mobility pathways and orientations towards rurality and urbanity also underlie the young women's negotiations with education and migration. But in the young women's consumption practices, these cultural orientations are bound up in different moralities and ideas of appropriate femininity. Also, while education and mobility practices are explicitly nestled in family plans, consumption emerges as a sphere where the young women engage in more individualistic claims to status. The young women's consumption practices in the spheres of fashion and food, while prefaced and limited by family culture and economic positioning, reflect their own processes of self-making. This chapter attempts to engage with the young women's consumption practices around fashion and food in order to unravel their proximity to rurality and urbanity as well as their claims to mobility and middle-classness.

7.2 Conceptualising Young Women's Consumption

The young women's choices around fashion and food, while oriented towards their own negotiations around class and gender, are defined by ideas of 'appropriateness' that derive from the economic positioning and culture of their families. As was also discussed with regard to their educational practices, young women from less secure families take to 'balancing' between rural and urban cultures in their consumption practices, while those from more secure families mark a move away from the rural and are keen to embrace urban consumption and culture. The level of security with which a family could claim middle-classness shaped its ideas of female sexuality and consequently, appropriate fashion choices. Also, the occupational culture of families, as will be elaborated shortly, translated into different attitudes towards consumption. This was especially pertinent in defining the food cultures exhibited by families. Generally, educated middle-class families were more likely to exhibit diversified eating habits, which reflected their exposure to non-Punjabi cultures and spaces. In contrast, many migrant and self-

employed middle-class families were limited in their exposure to non-rural cultures and thus, despite economic gains, they continued to use rural cooking techniques and styles.

While young women's consumption practices align with the parameters set by their family's middle-class positioning, it also reflects their own repertoire of behaviours, habits and ways of being in the world. Young women's navigations, especially around fashion and food, reveal their personal aspirations for accessing spaces and cultures outside the village. Thus, consumption is often perceived as an imaginative and creative process, which allows the young women to not only define their current position, but also make plans for the future (Gell, 1986; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999). Despite family influences, the young women exercise choices around food and clothing in a creative and careful way to communicate their affinities with urbanity, rurality and aspirations for mobility. In this chapter, an effort has been made to engage with the everyday idioms and performances of consumption to unravel the interaction of consumption with the young women's larger project to etch a socially respectable mobile identity.

In attending to the everydayness of the young women's fashion and food practices, consumption emerges as an active process of self-making and embodiment (Liechty, 2003; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999). In articulating the importance of commodities for the middle class, Liechty (2003) states, "The attraction of consumer materialism for the middle class is not simply material; it is not simply about having something distinctive but about doing and being something distinctive . . ." (p. 110). Thus, the young women's consumption practices are not merely about the purchase of prized commodities, as the presence or lack of a commodity in isolation does not denote status. Instead, young women's array of discourses and practices around the uptake of particular clothes and foods communicates their social and cultural positioning.

In examining the ways in which young women from different middle-class families engage with consumption, this chapter does not conceive their class identity through discrete acts of consumption. Instead, it probes the class practices or the gamut of behaviours that are deployed by the young women in their interactions with fashion and food. In addition to facilitating their claims to respectability and status, these interactions are centred on the young women's balancing of the divergent cultures of rurality and urbanity. This chapters attempts to unravel the ways in which young women from different types of middle-class families engage with

fashion and food through the prism of appropriate femininity and cultural styles.

Each section of this chapter provides an overview of the family being discussed, specifically their middle-class culture and economic position. Given the importance of the culture and positionality of their families in shaping the young women's class performances, this serves as the background against which the young women's consumption practices can be interpreted. The discussion centres on the experiences of Nina, who belongs to a secure, self-employed middle-class family, and Gunita, who belongs to an insecure, migrant middle-class family. In addition to their placement in two different middle-class cultures, these two young women also occupy different positions. Nina is negotiating a higher status in her in-laws' house on the basis of her education, awareness and proximity to urban modernity. In contrast, Gunita is grappling with her family's insecure claims to a middle-class status. She is forging access to urban spaces and culture by demonstrating an adherence to rural gender norms through clothing and physical movement.

In examining the class practices of these differently positioned young women, their cultural orientation and the morality of class performance emerge as strong signifiers of middle-classness. The first part of this chapter probes the idea of 'appropriate' consumption by drawing on ideas of middle-class moderation, appropriate femininity and cultural orientation. The second part of the chapter overviews the connections between middle-class culture and consumption patterns among different middle-class families. The third part analyses the food and fashion practices of young women from different middle-class families.

7.2.1 Appropriate Consumption

In Chaheru, consumption is defined through the prism of appropriateness and cultural orientation. Appropriateness is a vague construct that refers to ideas of middle-class moderation and morality (Dickey, 2012; Liechty, 2003). The ability to depict 'appropriate' consumption sets the middle class apart from the rich, who acquire excessively, and the poor, who are unable to consume. In depicting 'appropriate' consumption, the young women in Chaheru attempt to align with familial constructs of appropriate femininity and middle-classness. Cultural orientation refers to the cultural underpinnings of consumption practices, which reflect the mobility pathways and the middle-class identities that the young women are attempting to chart.

In attempting to deconstruct this idea of appropriate femininity vis-à-vis the young women's consumption of fashion, it is useful to draw on Dickey (2012) and Liechty (2003)'s work. Dickey (2012), in her work on the city of Madurai in southern India, elaborates that middle-class consumption aligns with ideas of plainness and decency. The idea of decency is explained through its opposition. For instance, in the realm of fashion, unironed, torn and unwashed clothes are seen as unpresentable and indecent. Middle-class men and women, therefore, expend effort in ensuring that their everyday clothing is presentable, neatly arranged and modest. Dickey (2012) mentions that these concerns about cleanliness and civility have historically been associated with upper-caste cultures. But contemporarily, upper-caste stereotypes about the lower castes as being ill-kept, irrational and uncontrolled are invoked by the upper and middle classes when they talk about the poor[165].

Similar to Dickey (2012)'s notion of 'decency', Liechty (2003) relates that the uses and meanings of consumer goods are mediated through the lens of middle-class suitability. This notion of appropriateness is concerned with demonstrating middle-class restraint and moderation. He cites that in the context of fashion, this moderation is established by not participating in too many domains of stylisation. Thus, suitable fashion is not determined by income, but by taste, as it entails the knowledge and know-how of what is fashionable.

Similarly, in Chaheru, the young women do not passively consume fashion. Rather, they attempt to demonstrate this cultivated and embodied knowledge of fashion. Moreover, the young women moderate their fashion choices around the notions of 'neatness', modesty and selective stylisation to ensure adherence to ideas of middle-class respectability and appropriate femininity. The construct of appropriate femininity varies across middle-class families and shapes the young women's choices around mobility, clothing and grooming. The ways in which a middle-class family's economic positioning and culture shape the construct of appropriate femininity that young women evoke in their fashion choices will be discussed in Section 7.3.

Another dimension of consumption is defining one's cultural orientation and aspired mobility pathway through consumption choices. In Chaheru, middle-class consumption is often about

[165] This is another example of how ideas associated with caste identity become subsumed and mobilised towards the project of class differentiation.

navigating the cultural polarities of local/global or traditional/modern (Gell, 1986; Miller, 1995; Wilk, 1990; Wilk, 1999). In consuming food and fashion, the young women are not only establishing their middle-class credentials, they are also navigating around complex cultural transitions from the rural to the urban. The young women often find themselves confronted with two different cultural worlds, the traditional rurality that is located in their village and the urban modernity that is located in spaces outside the village. In navigating these distinctive spaces, depending on their family positioning and culture, the young women attempt to harness an affinity with the urban world and/or a fluency in moving between the rural and the urban spaces.

In order to capture the cultural underpinnings of the young women's consumption practices, it is useful to draw on the concept of cultural styles proposed by Ferguson (1999), as it enables an examination of the performative and cultural aspects of consumption. Given that the young women in Chaheru do not articulate a discourse about consumption but are engaged in the performance of it, this construct is particularly useful. The young women's orientations towards the urban or the balancing of the rural and the urban are aimed at managing the tensions induced by acclimatising oneself to a less familiar modern culture that is located outside the village space.

Taken together, the definition of appropriate consumption is tied to ideas of middle-class moderation, appropriate femininity and cultural orientation, which shift based on the middle-class culture and economic positioning of families. The next section lays forth the linkages between a family's middle-class culture and its consumption patterns.

7.2.2 Attitudes towards Consumption

Different types of middle-class families tend to prioritise divergent consumption practices. A major distinction appears to exist between migrant and educated families. In this comparative, secure self-employed families appear closer to migrant families due to their aspiration to emulate more explicit indicators of wealth. But unlike migrant families, they also value education and its concomitant exposure and awareness, although not to the same extent as educated families. Thus, in some ways, self-employed families can be seen to be an amalgamation of the consumption practices of migrant and educated families.

Migrant families adopt consumption in a bid to claim higher status, even when they do not have the requisite monetary resources. In fact, keeping up the veneer of increased consumption and wealth is crucial for migrant families in order to maintain their position within the community. This image of migrant families as being economically secure and able to spend is one that is perpetuated by other families in the village, including other middle-class families. The normalisation of this image creates pressure on migrant families to 'appear' to be consuming. In many cases, while not receiving sufficient money through remittances, migrant families keep up the appearance of wealth through public displays of wealth at weddings, by maintaining large and opulent houses that rival those found in urban areas, by purchasing modern household amenities[166] and by adorning fashionable clothes. Often, this meant that migrant families had to cut back on other expenses which pertained to activities that occurred within the privacy of their homes, like eating, watching television and maintaining household appliances. The interactions of migrant families with consumption will be elaborated through the experiences of Gunita's family in Section 7.4.2

In contrast, educated middle-class families found themselves in a difficult position. On the one hand, they were critical of the increasing focus on materialism and consumption, a social shift that they linked to migration and its ill-gotten wealth. On the other hand, they felt they were unable to compete in this new social system as they did not have the same kind of wealth. A significant aspect of the educated middle-class families' notion of consumption is the construct of the migrant. As highlighted in Section 5.2.1, the migrant[167] was evoked as an arrogant, interfering and morally corrupt community member. In fact, migration itself was deemed as a desperate enterprise for uneducated people. In general, secure and educated families looked down upon migrant families because they lacked education, awareness and culture. However,

[166] In terms of household amenities, one of the sources of division among middle-class households was whether or not they owned a motor that would allow them to access fresh groundwater. The households which owned a motor were able to access higher quality water and were not dependent on the state's water supply which was unreliable. Those secure and aspiring middle-class families that did not have a motor in their own homes were reliant on their neighbours to supply them with water for cooking and cleaning. While a number of the poorer families were also dependent on others for water, for middle-class families, this dependence was a source of shame. It immediately placed them in a subservient relationship to their neighbours, who might be better off, and this was deeply resented. In fact, a number of middle-class households that did not have a motor when I began my fieldwork, had arranged to have one set up during the year that I spent in Chaheru. When I returned to the village for a second visit, I also found that some of the households had upgraded other household amenities. For instance, there were only a few secure middle-class families in the village that had a water filtration device in their homes and initially, when I visited Kavita's home, they did not have one. In fact, when I stayed with them, Kavita's mother, Kanta, often seemed offended that I would not drink the unfiltered water in their house. When I explained to her about the sensitivity of my stomach and the risk of contracting water borne diseases, Kanta told me that the water in the village was very nice. However, on my second visit to the field, I uncovered that they had purchased a water filtration device, apparently from the money that the daughter living in the UK had sent, and when I went to visit them, Kavita seemed pleased and proud to serve me filtered water.

[167] One particular migrant who was repeatedly referenced in conversations about migrants was Reshmo. Since she had the largest house in the village, in popular imagination, regardless of the actual amount of her wealth, Reshmo was seen as the village's wealthiest and most well-established migrant.

in different conversations, they also affirmed the higher economic positioning of migrant families. Thus, what the educated families appeared to be struggling with was the fact that in the new local economy, which was increasingly becoming premised on consumerism and 'showing-off', their social capital, which was education, was losing its value. Educated middle-class families appeared to be operating on the fear that they would lose their place in the social hierarchy and they, therefore, felt pressurised to engage in consumption. While they were not necessarily able to build large and ostentatious houses to rival those belonging to the migrants, they acquired knowledge and know-how about fashion and food. An engagement across these spheres allowed these educated middle-class families to claim a proximity to greater cultural sophistication and awareness. This will be elaborated with respect to Somika's navigations with consumption in Section 7.3.4.

Evidently, educated and migrant middle-class families had different interactions with consumption. They used and interpreted consumption differently to further their public image and status. While educated families attempted to engage more closely with investments in education and acquiring urban styles, migrant families were more focused on public forms of consumption and on emulating 'appropriate' behaviour. However, some secure middle-class families managed to simultaneously reproduce education and migration related status and wealth. These families, while sharing many of the assumptions and perspectives of educated middle-class families, had more economic means and were able to engage in public displays of consumption like migrant families. This came forth in Nina's consumption practices, which will be discussed in Section 7.4.1. Thus, the ways in which middle-class families engaged with consumption derived from an interaction between their economic security and their occupational culture. The difference between migrant and educated families was less prominent as compared to the difference between secure and insecure middle-class families. In elucidating how different middle-class cultures and positionalities play out in the realm of consumption, it is useful to draw a comparative between insecure and secure middle-class families with different occupational cultures. In this chapter, the class practices of young women from secure educated families, insecure migrant families and secure self-employed families will be detailed.

7.3 Navigating Mobility: Fashion and Food

Fashion and food, the two spheres of everyday consumption for young women in Chaheru, have also emerged as enduring sites of middle-class youth consumption across diverse field sites (for example see Dickey, 2012; Donner, 2011; Liechty, 2003; Osella & Osella, 1999; Wilk, 1999). At a cursory level, both these spheres can be seen as individualised, transient and disconnected from ideas of family prestige. Osella and Osella (1999) [168] assert that items that are used to decorate or improve the self are not as relevant or as engaged with the larger mobility of the home or the family. In contrast, long-term mobility strategies require investments in goods and services that allow for developing durable prestige. This enhances the life chances and opportunities of the future generations and constructs the reputation of not just the cash-earning person, but also of the entire household unit. Admittedly, the young women's practices around fashion and food are not undertaken with a view to long-term gains and prestige. But they are a part of the young women's everyday interactions in the village space and are connected to ideas of family mobility and status. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, these spheres of consumption, apart from being aligned with familial expectations, also allow the young women to access their own aspirations for mobility.

Fashion is a sphere were the young women are able to exercise greater levels of autonomy, as it manifests at an individual level. While the young women's fashion choices operate within the confines of appropriateness, they are able to take on urban styles that assert their affinity to urban modernity without bypassing the restrictions imposed by their families. Young women from different middle-class families draw on fashion as a tool to explicitly balance and meet different cultural demands. The next part of this chapter discusses the construction of fashion in Chaheru. It asserts that fashion is part of a larger gamut of grooming practices that allow the young women to cultivate 'cultured' identities. Thereafter, this chapter compares the fashion choices and physical mobilities of young women from insecure migrant families and those from secure educated families.

[168] Osella and Osella (1999) assert that for the Izhavas, different types of consumption are tied to different life stages. While the youth are expected to have a focus on transient and short-term consumption, over time, they are supposed to develop a more mature outlook and an orientation towards duration and permanency in their consumption. Among the Izhavas, these two types of consumption were also emblematic of class distinctions. While the lower-class Izhavas could consume transient fashion styles and outfits, it was only the middle-class Izhavas who could engage in long-term consumption through investments in land and property as well as in their children's high-quality education and healthcare.

While fashion practices echo family orientations even though they play out at the individual level, food is a class performance that is negotiated within the domestic sphere. Donner (2011)'s work on food practices within middle-class Bengali families highlights the domestic space as a key site for consumption, where family values, gender roles and middle-class identities reinforce and inform each other. Also, as with fashion, the consumption of food is an avenue for managing different cultural influences. Wilk (1999) points out that the incorporation of foreign food in Belize points to an increasing fluency around foreign cultures. Among differently located families in Belize, the varying levels of foreign and local food consumption are reflective of their cultural and social identities. Thus, in examining food consumption, it is useful to attend to the underlying cultural basis of food choices. The last part of this chapter discusses the way in which food consumption is mobilised in a secure self-employed middle-class family and in an insecure, migrant middle-class family. Moreover, while the focus of this part is on the young women, given that food is domestically negotiated, household food practices of different middle-class families are also discussed.

7.3.1 Being Fashionable

In one of the earliest interactions with Kavita and her family, her mother, Kanta, took to telling me, ". . . *my daughters don't walk around in the village to get groceries. . . when they go out, you should see how modern they dress in jeans and top* . . ." (17 October 2015) As we talk, at one point, she is about to scoop out some *namkeen* (savoury snack) using her hand, but then she asks Kavita to bring a spoon instead. When I tell her that it is all right, Kanta says that they have a lot of NRI relatives coming to stay with them. In fact, they even have mosquito repellent in the room and toilet paper, things that I hadn't come across in any of the other houses.

In middle-class families, young women's fashion choices, much like their style of serving food and their personal hygiene practices, communicate their family's openness towards ideas of urban modernity as well as their exposure to these ideas. In Kavita's family, given the high number of migrant relatives, ideas of urbanity, modernity and appropriateness are defined in relation to how these migrant relatives behave and talk. This is not the only source of information about high-status practices that Kavita's family has access to. Kanta says that she is from Jalandhar and "*has brought the city to the pind* (village)." (5 December 2015) In fact, in a number of households where the older women belonged to urban areas, they point out that

they have brought urban practices to the rural area[169]. Manifestations of this urbanity become apparent in their upkeep of their homes, the priority and efforts accorded to their children's education, the type of food served, the kind of clothes and toys used by their children and the talking styles and mannerisms of their family members. Taken together, these seemingly disparate practices across different domains represent a more cohesive way of being. Thus, fashion can be seen as part of a larger repertoire of grooming practices both related to the individual and the household that were usually identified with more sophisticated and 'cultured' behaviour.

While a number of less secure middle-class households were unable to replicate the array of grooming practices, fashion was more accessible. Even young women from less secure families were able to emulate and access aspects of urban modernity through fashion. Young women from more secure middle-class families took a keen interest in fashion along with other individual grooming practices. Across different middle-class families, young women were socialised to speak softly, not use swear words, maintain a tidy appearance and good personal hygiene. This socialisation allowed the young women to distance themselves from some of the negative stereotypes that were attached to the lower-class Chamars such as having poor personal hygiene, lacking etiquette and talking loudly or using profanity[170]. Thus, along with demonstrating a proximity to urban culture, grooming and fashion practices were oriented towards maintaining a well-mannered and 'neat' appearance. This allowed the young women to convey a respectable and cultured self that was distant from the image of the poor Chamar and more compatible with a middle-class positioning.

The young women in Chaheru used fashion to emulate different constructions of appropriate femininity. Young women from insecure families were focused on balancing rural norms with an orientation towards the urban and the modern while young women from secure families strove to mark their separation from the rural. Across different types of middle-class families, young women were focused on maintaining a 'neat' and clean appearance. Regardless of their

[169] In examining the young women's interactions with fashion and grooming, it becomes evident that it is not simply the occupation or education level of the father that mediates this interaction. It is also the mother's education level and exposure to urbanity that shapes the young women's consumption practices. In households with educated urban mothers, the young women, who may not be as educated or exposed to urban cultures themselves, pick up some of the urban mannerisms and the orientation towards urbanity from their mothers.

[170] There are times when younger and middle-aged women would catch themselves depicting behaviour such as speaking loudly, which reinforces caste stereotypes. Then, as if to pre-empt my thoughts, they would say that they are behaving like Chamars. Such comments imply the continuity in caste consciousness, which is also linked to ideas of class identity. Since it is only the poor Chamars who can engage in indecent public behaviour and personify their caste identity.

different interactions with fashion, this was deemed to be a necessary aspect of middle-class respectability. In contrast, the young women from poorer families did not exercise a similarly careful focus on their outward appearance[171].

These differences in how fashion is taken up by differently located young women is reminiscent of the negotiations with class and femininity that their families engage in. In order to unravel the linkages between the young women's fashion choices and the middle-class culture emulated by their families, it is useful to look at the cases of differently positioned young women. The positionality of the young women derives not only from the type of middle-class family they belong to, but also from their own education levels and exposure to urban cultures. Within a single household, young women had varying levels of fluency with urban and rural cultures, which, along with the family's economic positioning, impacted the type of consumption that was defined as appropriate for them. The next section examines the fashion practices of two differently located young women, Gunita and Somika. Drawing on the experiences of these two differently located young women allows one to unravel the variance in fashion practices and constructs of appropriateness.

7.3.2 Balancing

In order to explore Gunita's fashion practices, it is important to contextualise her fashion choices with regard to her family's economic positioning and her own position and cultural orientation within the household. Gunita lives in a large permanent house that resembles urban Indian homes with its tiled kitchen, large and well-upholstered rooms and Western toilet. Her family's ownership of such a large and well-equipped home derives from her father being a migrant in the Gulf for the last decade. Her brother, until recently was also working in the Gulf. Their migrant remittances have been crucial in setting up Gunita's quintessential migrant house[172]. During the time of my fieldwork, the family was experiencing an economic downturn.

[171] Unlike middle-class young women who mostly maintained a neat appearance even while at home, lower-class young women did not always look well kept. Moreover, when they did dress up to go out to visit a relative or to attend some classes, their sense of fashion was limited not only by affordability, but also by their knowledge of fashion. These young women did not wear Western attire and stuck to the traditional salwar kameez. Even in their grooming practices, they adopted older fashion trends like using bold make-up and wearing heavy jewellery. Also, while the young women from poorer families did not routinely dress up within the village space, they did not distinguish between village and non-village spaces in defining their fashion choices. During festival celebrations within the village, they would dress up and actively partake in the events. Middle-class young women, on the other hand, did not generally partake in community events and in case they did, they did not 'dress up' for such events.

[172] Migrant households sought to instate their status by building large houses that marked their higher positioning in the community. A number of community members corroborated that post migration, the first thing that people strive to do is build a large, pucca house.

Gunita's brother had not been working for the last year and a half and this had upset the family's finances since Gunita's father had to support his son, and was, therefore, unable to send sufficient money back home. Like many migrant families that reportedly saw a spike in income right after migration, followed by a downward spiral due to periods of unemployment, Gunita's family was grappling with economic struggles and an insecure claim to middle-classness.

Despite maintaining some outward signs of higher status such as a large house and Gunita's enrolment in college, the household economy was actually fraught with challenges. Even Gunita's access to education was fragile. Others have also noted that the volatile position occupied by the middle-class is characterised by a continual process of claiming and maintaining one's place through consumption and moral leveraging (Dickey, 2012; Gilbertson, 2014). Liechty (2003) points out that the anxiety of the middle class is not so much about outdoing or outcompeting one another. Instead, it is simply about not being excluded and about retaining membership in the middle-class. Gunita and her family can similarly be seen to be embroiled in the process of upholding their precarious claim to middle-classness.

While Gunita's family had an insecure claim to middle-classness and were less exposed to urban cultures, she enjoyed a distinctive position within her household. As she had access to education and to the exposure to modernised urban cultures that is associated with education, Gunita's positionality of being able to independently access spaces outside the village through education was in stark contrast to the experience of her older sister, which was more reminiscent of lower-class women in the village. Gunita's elder sister, Trisha, completed her education till grade twelve and got married to a tailor in a village near Jalandhar two years ago. Trisha occupies a space that is more common among girls in the village as she does not harbour any ambitions to seek employment and has situated herself more clearly within the domestic sphere. Among other things, the differences between Gunita and Trisha come through in their choices around leisure activities ,[173] grooming and fashion choices. For instance, while Gunita is particular about using a branded face wash, her sister, like her mother, uses normal soap to wash her face. Also, while Gunita is careful to dress neatly in Western wear like pyjamas and

[173] Most of Gunita's time at home is spent messaging her friends on the phone. Trisha, on the other hand, is more involved in the domestic sphere, both in terms of doing housework and partaking in conversations and activities with the rest of the family. If she has free time, Trisha usually watches television with the rest of the family.

tops even while she is at home, her sister mostly dawns loose tops and salwars when at home (she is also pregnant at this time).

The difference between Gunita and Trisha is best encapsulated by the notion of cultural orientation. While Trisha is more comfortably situated in the rural context and does not aspire to be a part of urban spaces, Gunita is actively negotiating access to urban styles. Thus, within her household, Gunita becomes marked as distinctive in both her access to urban spaces and in her aspiration to engage in urban class practices. This comes through in the ways in which her mother, Babita copes with and responds to her uptake of urban forms of social interaction[174]. When at home, Gunita often takes to continually messaging her friends. Gunita's behaviour is deemed acceptable because she is not calling people to talk to them and is, thereby, not flouting any norms of appropriateness. Additionally, given the imbalance within families regarding exposure to urban cultures, generally, 'appropriate' urbane practices that are seen as representing a higher and more sophisticated culture, are not critiqued. But Gunita's access to urban culture and her elevated position within the household are premised on her ability to perform rural respectability in her fashion choices and movements within the village space.

7.3.3 The Simple Look

Despite the valuation of appropriate urban cultural practices within Gunita's household, her access to urban spaces is negotiated and premised on her ability to 'balance' and uphold rural norms. The balancing act that Gunita enacts between urbanity and rurality emerges most prominently in her clothing and movement within the village space. On a typical weekday, as Gunita gets ready to attend college, she takes a lot of time and care to choose her clothes and hairdo. She often tells me, "*I do not like to put on too much make-up . . . I like the simple look.*" (8 February 2016) She is particular about how she styles her hair every day and will often ask me which style is looking better. In contrast to the traditionally dressed lower-class women in

[174] When Gunita is not briefly attending to the rare guest who may have come to visit them, she is mostly on the phone, messaging her friends. She presents this as a viable alternative to talking to them on the phone, which is seen as inappropriate. Gunita's activity of constantly engaging with the phone, which detaches her from everyday family interactions such as watching television while eating and discussing the television shows afterwards, passes as an unobtrusive and passive activity that her mother never comments on. Instead, Babita points out other aspects of Gunita's behaviour that strike her as problematic. Babita is often annoyed with Gunita for not taking more responsibility in the house and complains that Gunita is too quiet unlike her elder sister who is more social and involved. Babita also emphasises that Gunita should gain knowledge about household tasks and should also learn cooking. This selective reprehending is puzzling because it overlooks the underlying behaviour that predates Gunita's lack of involvement in the domestic sphere. It renders Gunita's engagement with her phone as normative and upholds the importance of young women's involvement and fluency in the domestic sphere.

the village, Gunita wears Western clothes but carefully calibrates how she wears these clothes and sets her hair and make-up.

Gilbertson (2014) recounts a similar anxiety among her respondents in Hyderabad over trivial matters of styling such as whether they should braid their hair or leave a shorter strand of hair loose in the front. Gilbertson (2014) asserts that their anxiety around adjustments in fashion derives from the fear that they might be seen as being "too fast" or as trying to "show off" in attempting to emulate upper-class trends (p. 144). Liechty (2003) mentions another way in which these adjustments around fashion occur. Generally, young women pick one or two domains of stylisation, as participating in too many of such domains would mean entering the purview of upper-class arrogance and vulgarity. While the young women in Chaheru are similarly concerned about the connotations of their fashion choices, they define these concerns in terms of appropriateness and sexual morality.

For young women from insecure middle-class families, a major concern in 'dressing up' was being appropriately dressed for the occasion. This meant that on an everyday basis, when they got ready to attend college, they dressed 'simply' and did not apply much make-up besides some lip gloss. They generally wore loose tops with either half sleeves or full sleeves, along with a pair of tights or jeans. They never left their hair open and it was mostly arranged either in a ponytail or a braid. They tried to maintain a neat appearance, which was not sexualised. Their clothes were never revealing and their choices around accessories, hair and make-up were minimalistic and subdued. In many ways, the reference to dressing 'simply' also communicated the young women's explicit desire to appear desexualised and respectable. However, while remaining 'simple' in college, they also sought to demonstrate their knowledge and know-how of what is appropriate in different spaces. At weddings or college functions, for example, the same young women would excitedly dress up in formal clothes. When Gunita attended weddings or farewell functions at her college, she dressed up in nicer Indian outfits that had been stitched especially for the occasion and wore heavy make-up and jewellery. While she still never wore sleeveless tops or gowns, she varied her choices based on the context.

In addition to mediating her fashion choices on the basis of the event she had to attend, Gunita also attempted to separate herself from backward villagers. For Gunita and her family, as for

other aspiring middle-class families in the village, Bihari families[175] were seen as the poor counterparts. While many of these families were not labouring and ran small business, they were associated with backward behaviour like wearing torn clothes, not maintaining good personal hygiene and having a frugal lifestyle. In her fashion choices, Gunita's focus on having a 'neat' and well put together appearance, which drew on urban styles, allowed her to mark her separation from the lower-class Biharis. Thus, Gunita attempted to claim middle-classness through her acquired and cultivated sense of fashion (Liechty, 2003, p.110). She was able to use her fashion sense to mark her distance from the lower-class other, align with rural morality as well as maintain flexible fashion preferences based on the context. This moderation and adaptation of fashion choices allows young women to lay claim to a respectable in-betweenness, where they are able to accrue status by taking on some aspects of urban modernity while maintaining an orientation towards the rural.

Another way in which the young women balanced rural and urban cultures was through their movement and behaviour within the village space. As mentioned in Section 5.2.3, middle-class families imbued the village space with negative characteristics like backwardness and immorality. In order to maintain their separation from the lower-class and lower-caste other, young women from less secure middle-class families were especially careful to reduce their visibility within the village space[176]. They were generally not found walking around in the village or participating in community events. In fact, even their fashion was demarked for spaces outside the village. Within the village, these young women strove to pass by unnoticed and felt that 'dressing up' within the village space subjected them to unwanted attention. When Gunita had to walk through the village to get to an auto-rickshaw or on the rare event when she had to visit someone, she walked quickly to prevent herself from being seen[177]. Also, Gunita and her sister did not stand on the terrace of their house because this was seen as indicative of

[175] In contrast to the Punjabi focus on show off and consumerism, Bihari families were seen to have a simpler and more frugal lifestyle. While they also had large houses and ran their own businesses, they continued to be perceived as backward. On one occasion, despite Gunita and her family's low opinion of the Biharis and their ability to consume, they were taken aback when the children of the neighbouring Bihari family came over and showed Gunita their new phone. This phone was expensive and superior to the phone that Gunita was using. After they left, Gunita and Babita exclaimed that the Bihari family lived poorly, but they saved money and bought expensive things. The ability of the Bihari family to consume more than them or even maintain a decent appearance was explained with respect to the individual attributes of that particular family. But the image of poor and backward Biharis persists.

[176] In fact, even young girls who were still attending school and who belonged to aspiring middle-class families were instructed to not roam around in the village.

[177] On one such occasion, when Gunita had to go to Rajini's house, she asked me to accompany her because she did not want to walk through the village alone. When we were walking together, she appeared very conscious and walked quickly with her eyes downcast.

young women inviting the sexual attention of young men and was, thereby, considered immoral.

Gilbertson (2014), in her work on the Hyderabadi middle class, also finds that young women manage their physical engagement with public spaces by adopting a demure body language. She suggests that the adoption of a closed body language acts as a barrier between young women and potential threats to their and their families' honour (p. 135). Similarly, in Chaheru, it was not just that it was inappropriate for Gunita to be seen walking around in the village, but her presence in the village appeared associated with feelings of consciousness and shame.

The same young women operated independently in the college and in its surrounding areas. In fact, the young women's *taiyyar hona* or dressing up was directed towards spaces outside the village, such as the college, religious events, visits to relatives and weddings. Gilbertson (2014) makes a similar point about the contextual construct of appropriate female movement. She cites that in settings where there is an absence of lower-class men, norms around female movement are more flexible. But in spaces where lower-class men dominate, there the norms around female clothing and movement become stricter. Given the construct of the village as a space rife with the immoral and unsafe activities of lower-class men, the movement of middle-class women within the village space was not seen as being respectable[178]. Thus, for young women from aspiring middle-class families, while there was a definitive move to embrace urban culture, this was a selective and mediated project. It involved following rural norms around appropriate clothing and behaviour within the village. The ability to relay this moderation and 'balancing' between the rural and the urban in their mobility, fashion and grooming choices allowed the young women from insecure families to construct middle-class identities despite their family's economic insecurities.

[178] This became particularly clear in the case of a younger girl, Rohini, who was only in grade 10 and who often found herself in an awkward position, where she would initially volunteer to accompany me to the neighbourhood grocery shop or to Babita's house. But then she would have to withdraw the offer as soon as she realised that her father would strongly object to her walking around in the village. Even when I hosted English classes in the village, despite a number of girls showing interest in the idea, none of the girls from the middle-class families in the village actually turned up for the classes because it would be dishonourable for them to partake in a village level public activity. Thus, from a young age, for girls belonging to middle-class families, the idea of female honour became tied to their physical movement.

7.3.4 Emulating Urban Modernity

In contrast, young women from secure middle-class families were concerned with a different negotiation. Specifically, in drawing on the case of Somika, her consumption practices were not geared towards an alignment with rural norms. As related in Section 6.3, Somika belongs to an educated and secure middle-class family and her parents, especially her father is well exposed to urban norms. Unlike insecure middle-class families that were more concerned with demonstrating an adherence to rural norms, Somika and her family were attempting to establish distance from the rural space and lay stronger claims to urban modernity. This became apparent in different aspects of Somika and her family's consumption practices, including food, fashion, grooming and mobility.

Like their less secure counterparts, young women from secure middle-class families also managed their movement in the village space, although they were not bound by rural mores to the same extent. While they were also careful to not be found walking around in the village, they engaged in more purposeful behaviour in the village space. For instance, Somika and her mother were part of a group of women who went for evening walks in the outskirts of the village[179]. Somika also attended community events that could be seen as being more cultured by virtue of their subdued and educational imperative. For instance, she attended the religious ceremony held at the gurdwara on the occasion of Ravidass Jayanti and also came to watch the plays performed on the event of Ambedkar Jayanti. While the young women from secure middle-class families were not as constricted by rural gender norms, they also did not take to flouting these norms. Thus, they did not routinely walk around the village space but partook in modern and purposeful activities in the village such as evening walks and educational or religious community events.

Concurrently, young women from secure middle-class families do not carefully calibrate their fashion choices to confer with rural norms. Rather, they are concerned with using fashion to demarcate themselves as being distinct from the village space and closer to urbanity, while not emulating immoral elite fashions. They are more comfortable taking on urban fashions than their less secure counterparts, but they do so within the bounds of what is considered appropriate within the rural setting. For instance, Somika would wear sleeveless tops only

[179] Unlike Gunita, who thought that standing on her terrace was an immoral activity, Somika expressed that she often went up to the terrace of her house to get fresh air.

when going out for a movie or for her coaching classes. But she would not wear short skirts or revealing clothes, which were associated with morally loose elite women. Somika was also more conscious about her personal grooming and often visited the beauty parlour in the village for waxing and threading[180]. When Somika got ready to go for her coaching classes, she would use perfume and apply a bit of make-up such as eyeliner, blush and lip gloss. She also accessorised her attire with earrings and necklaces.

In contrast to Gunita, who maintained a subdued and minimalistic appearance without make-up and accessories and hoped to pass by unnoticed, Somika adopted a more bold and sexualised appearance. Thus, Somika's fashion choices were shaped by her need to assert her distinction from the backward rural space and align with the construct of urban middle-classness, as has also been discussed in Section 6.3. While she was careful to not flout rural norms of respectability and mark her separation from immodest elite fashions, Somika also did not align with the notion of 'appropriate' fashion and grooming as defined by Gunita. In fact, Somika's fashion and conduct appear not only as a defiance of 'regressive' rural norms, but also as a way to set herself as distinct from the rural space. Also, like Gunita's class performance, which reflects a reconciliation of her aspiration for urbanity with her family's orientation towards rurality, Somika's class performance is also aligned with her family's stronger orientation towards urban modernity.

Evidently, for young women, fashion is an important tool for self-fashioning. It allows them to lay claim to cultural identities based not just on affordability, but also on the positioning and outlook of their families. Across different middle-class families, fashion serves as a shorthand for establishing and claiming social position. For instance, young women who wear sleeveless tops within the village (something that most other young women did not bring up even as a possibility) are marked as being more educated, urbane and open-minded than the others. Thus, while it is harder to exhibit one's level of education or awareness, emulating aspects of urban fashion allows the young women to communicate more easily to others their elevated social positioning within the community. Similarly, when young women from aspiring middle-class families maintain a subdued and neat daily appearance, it allows them to communicate adherence to rural norms of femininity and respectability. Thus, fashion is a powerful tool that

[180] In a conversation about grooming with Babita, I learn that neither she, nor her daughters ever get any waxing done. Babita says it is good to be natural. Thus, the idea of waxing or hair removal is alien to them and seems to fall outside their worldview.

is actively mediated and shaped by the young women to lay claim to middle-class status and communicate their association with rural and urban cultures.

7.4 Food and Middle-Class Culture

In the interaction between Nina and Anu discussed in Section 7.1, ideas about 'appropriate' cooking methods are emblematic of their varying levels of comfort and fluency with rurality and urbanity. These cultural orientations are linked to the young women's own positionality and exposure as well as, the middle-class culture and economic positioning of their families. Unlike fashion choices, which are informed more by the level of security with which a family can claim a middle-class identity, food choices and preferences are shaped mostly by the occupational culture of middle-class families. Nina's positionality was that of a young married woman who came from an urbanised and educated family. This meant that she was claiming a different type of consumption and middle-class identity than her sister-in-law, Anu, who belonged to a rural and self-employed middle-class family. Additionally, economic positioning was important in defining a family's orientation towards vegetarianism. Thus, in unravelling the food consumption practices of the young women, it is important to examine the middle-class culture and economic positioning of their households. This section provides an overview of the linkages between food consumption and middle-class culture and positioning.

Among migrant and self-employed middle-class families, despite aspirations of mobility and movement away from the village, there was continued reliance on rural cooking methods and eating styles. These families generally maintained a *chulha* that used cow dung as fuel and was used especially in the winter months for the preparation of *paranthas* and *makki rotis*. A rural orientation towards cooking also meant that the food that was prepared was more basic and frugal. Vegetables were cooked simply with just salt, chilli powder and turmeric. Other spices like coriander powder and *garam masala* were not used because these were considered to impede digestion. Also, the layout of each meal was minimalistic and only a single vegetable dish was cooked each day[181].

[181] Mostly, when people wake up in the morning, they have tea with biscuits and *namkeen,* a savoury snack. Between 10-11am, they have a meal of roti and sabzi or paranthas, which comprised their breakfast and lunch. Then, at around 8 pm, the family would congregate to eat dinner. In between breakfast and dinner, people usually had tea at around 5 pm.

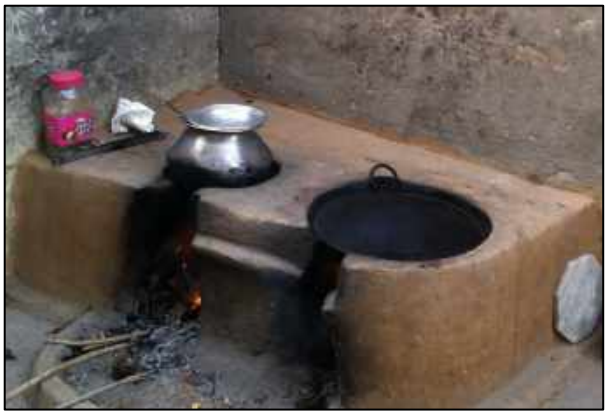

Figure 14.0: This is the chulha that is typically used by migrant and self-employed families to cook, especially in the winters.

The food that these families ate followed a regular routine and it was only on a special occasion, like a married daughter coming home for a visit, that it deviated from this pattern. On these occasions, if the family was non-vegetarian, they would prepare a chicken curry, while vegetarian households would prepare a special vegetarian dish like *paneer*. But these occasions were rare. The younger members of these families would vary their meals by eating Western food like pizzas and burgers outside with their friends, although this was more common for the young men than it was for the young women. Young women sometimes got their brothers to bring home some food from outside or they would eat *Maggi*[182] at home.

Educated middle-class families, given their access to urban cultures, incorporated more diverse and urban eating habits. While they were just as unlikely to eat out, they would cook different types of vegetarian snacks that represented the range of North Indian cuisine. They also used a wider variety of spices in their cooking. In fact, their food resembled what could be found in the homes of Punjabis in cities like Chandigarh and Delhi. Also, a typical lunch or dinner meal incorporated more than one dish and was accompanied by side dishes like *raita* (yoghurt flavoured with spices) and salad. Middle-class families with more varied and urban food habits also perceived themselves as more cultured than less educated villagers. In asserting the link between eating habits and cultural exposure, Balwinder's wife, Bandeep says that unlike other villagers, they have travelled extensively across India and their food habits are reflective of this.

The linkage between food habits and economic positioning came forth in the orientation of

[182] A popular Indian version of instant noodles. It is avidly consumed by young men and women in urban India.

middle-class families towards vegetarianism. As a corollary of their religious affiliation to various Deras, a number of secure middle-class families followed vegetarianism[183]. This orientation towards vegetarianism harkens back to upper-caste ideas of maintaining caste purity through food practices (Srinivas, 1956). However, among secure middle-class families in Chaheru, vegetarianism relates to cultivating religious respectability[184]. Less secure middle-class or poorer families did not generally eat non-vegetarian food, but on special occasions, they cooked chicken. However, they were conscious about this and did not want other villagers, especially other middle-class families, to find out. The eating of meat was associated with being more backward and closer to one's 'Chamarness'. The underlying assumption was that the upper castes[185] and the respectable middle-class people within the village did not eat meat. Thus, while non-vegetarianism was tied to ideas of caste impurity, its relevance within the community pertained to communicating one's status and respectability. Consumption of vegetarian food was not directed towards appeasing the upper castes and proving one's status as ex-untouchables or proper Hindus to them. Instead, in Chaheru, vegetarianism in secure middle-class families emerged much like the selective uptake of upper-caste rituals, as a way for middle-class families to invoke auspiciousness and elevate their social position in the eyes of caste compatriots (Saavala, 2003).

Generally, families tended to depict a single food culture that mapped onto their positionality and the middle-class culture they were attempting to emulate. However, in some families such as Nina's, a daughter-in-law represented a different middle-class culture. In these families, the larger clash between the consumption preferences and cultural orientations of differently located villagers played out within the household. This will be discussed in the next section, with reference to Nina's interactions in her marital household.

[183] The women in these household followed vegetarianism more strictly than the men did. In fact, the men would often go out and eat chicken.
[184] Saavala (2003) emphasises the importance of auspicious rituals for aspiring middle-class families. Specifically, the concept of auspiciousness allows the lower castes to construct social respectability and reinterpret hierarchy outside the caste-ridden construct of purity/pollution and establish a positive self-image. Similarly, in Chaheru, religious practices, including those around food, often reference the idea of respectability. It is often the more secure middle-class families that are able to undertake trips to the religious shrines or Deras and maintain adherence to religious principles in their everyday practices, including those related to food. Thus, like other religious rituals, food practices emerge as a site for the assertion of respectable religious identity. An adherence to religious norms around food allows families to assert their respectability and claim a higher social positioning vis-à-vis other families in the village.
[185] People often assumed that I did not eat meat and were surprised to learn that I did.

7.4.1 Negotiating Status through Food

This section contrasts the ways in which food consumption is directed towards goals of middle-class status production in two different households. In Nina's marital household, food consumption indicates differing orientations towards rurality, urbanity and middle-class status. Also, as a daughter-in-law from a more urbane and educated middle-class family, Nina uses her differential food consumption to consolidate an elevated positioning within her marital household. In Gunita's household, food becomes a commodity that is circulated to demonstrate one's ability to engage in middle-class consumption. Given that ideas of appropriate food are developed and negotiated within the domestic sphere, this section draws on interactions around food in these two households, which represent two different middle-class ethos—a secure, self-employed middle-class household and a less secure, migrant middle-class household. This section firstly provides an overview of Nina and her family background as well as the economic and social background of her in-laws. It then delves into the ways in which Nina uses food to establish her cultural sophistication. The second part discusses the ways in which food consumption is mobilised in Gunita's household.

In unravelling the contrasting cooking styles between Nina and her sister-in-law, Anu, it useful to draw on the rural/urban divide between Nina's marital and natal homes respectively. Nina is a well-educated girl, who has been raised in Phagwara city and who belongs to a well-established and educated middle-class family from the city. Nina's father is a police officer[186] and her mother is a housewife, who has completed her bachelor's degree in education. They live in a large house in Phagwara, which has all the luxuries that are common in urban households like air conditioning, a washing machine, a car and a microwave. While Nina's husband, Bikram, is educated and has completed his bachelor's degree and a diploma in computer science from LPU, he is not as educated as Nina, who has completed her MBA from the reputed Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar.

The difference between Nina and Bikram extends beyond their educational qualifications to their distinctive family cultures. In contrast to her urban natal home, Nina's marital home is a

[186] Since Nina's father holds a secure government job, albeit one that is at a lower level, within the local context, he is considered to be well employed. In fact, most Dalit men in government employment are located in the lower rungs, but their government employment still allows them to claim status and respect within the community.

large double-storey house that parallels some of the houses set up by migrant families[187]. While this is a large house by rural standards, it doesn't have all the amenities that an urban home does. In fact, the household still utilises a rural method for heating water and Nina's father-in-law still makes baskets at home for the storage of fruits and vegetable. Also, Nina's in-laws are illiterate and have always stayed in a rural setup. In the past, her father-in-law used to do small labour jobs. At one point in time, he even worked as a tailor, but for the last 24-26 years, he has been working in his milk business and owing to the success of this business, he has been able to buy the plot of land that the family currently resides on.

Figure 15.0: This is the contraption that is used in Bikram's house to heat water using organic waste. Bikram and his family show it to me with quite a bit of pride.

The divergence between Nina's natal and marital homes can also be understood through their alignment with different ideas and cultures of middle-classness. Bikram's family has shifted from being a poor labouring family to a well-to-do family with its own flourishing business. They are seen as being securely middle-class within the village due to their wealth, their large house and their ability to educate their children at premiere institutes like SSDMS and later, LPU. In contrast, Nina's family can be seen as being more similar to the educated[188] and secure middle-class families in Chaheru, who derive status through their claim to greater levels of awareness, cultural sophistication and urbanity. In fact, Nina's family is better placed than the established middle-class families in the village as they have a large urban house and as both

[187] The village community did not see the surge in the family's wealth positively. A number of villagers accused Bikram's father of selling adulterated milk. Also, when Bikram's grandmother passed away, Reshmo accused the family of not taking proper care of her while she was alive. Thus, much like migrant wealth, Bikram's family's wealth was also seen as immoral.
[188] The men who held government jobs in the village were not necessarily well-educated. In fact, most of them had only passed grade 10. But at the time when they had acquired these government jobs, they were considered to be well-educated. This is a relative benchmark that is based on the low levels of literacy in the Dalit community.

her parents are well-educated. Also, while her marital household made considerable investments in the education of their sons, their daughters were educated in cheaper government schools nearby.

As elaborated in Sections 6.3 and 7.3.4, openness towards female mobility is an important component of fashioning educated and secure middle-class identities. Thus, while Nina's marital family is securely middle class, they have not been able to encapsulate ideas of urban modernity to the same extent. Moreover, in contrast to most of the middle-class families in Chaheru, who have only sent their daughters as far as Jalandhar for higher education[189], Nina and her sister were able to live and study in a different city in Punjab. Thus, given Nina's higher exposure to education as well as a more modern and urbanised family environment, she occupies a distinctive and elevated position within the rural social hierarchy and her martial household[190]. Consequently, in her interactions with food, Nina's negotiations pertain to establishing her distinction within the household and her separation from the village space. Nina's marked orientation towards urbanity comes to the fore during everyday discussions about food.

Given the environment in Nina's natal home, her preference for urban foods and cooking styles comes forth in her marital home as well. Nina does not have access to modern technology such as ovens and microwaves and to certain amenities like olive oil, protein bars and healthy Patanjali[191] snacks in her rural marital home. But she tries to transfer some aspects of urban cooking to her marital home. She uses a more sophisticated chopper[192], which allows her to cut vegetables with greater ease, and introduces urban dishes to the household. Notably, one of the

[189] Malika is an exception to this norm as she has been able to go to Chandigarh for her education and her sister also plans to travel abroad to Singapore for her placement.

[190] Nina appears to occupy a privileged position in her marital household as she is able to 'get by' without fulfilling all the expectations of a typical daughter-in-law. Nina frequently visits her natal home. In the summers, she takes to residing there for longer periods because she says that her marital home in the village gets too hot in the summers and its better in her parents' house as they have an air conditioner. This is not common within the village where women usually visit their natal homes on special occasions only. Also, when I visit Nina's in-laws in her absence, her mother-in-law calls her "Nina madam", referencing her airs and high-class preferences such as travelling by car and waking up late. Her sister-in-law, Anu, recounts that while she had hoped that once she had a *bhabhi* who would take over the household chores, she would be free to do other things, this has not happened as Nina is not well versed with household chores. Nina's everyday routine, as related by Anu, consists of doing some amount of housework and watching movies late into the night and waking up late the next day. While it is typical of in-laws to complain about their daughters-in-law, Nina's interactions within the household also suggest that her easy access to urban luxuries and propensity for not taking over the household chores are aided by her elevated status in the marital home.

[191] This is an ayurvedic brand that has become very popular among the urban middle classes across India.

[192] Anu introduced me to a relatively expensive device that Nina's mother had purchased for Nina. This device allows Nina to chop vegetables more easily. Anu informs me that the actual cost of the device is INR 1,000, but Nina's mother bought it for INR 400 only. This is the same device that Kanta had seen on the TV and I told her that I would try and locate one for her. Thus, this device is not purely instrumental, it also has some prestige value attached to it.

dishes that becomes popular among her in-laws is paneer chilli, which she prepares using a Chinese spice mix called Ching's (a popular brand in cities). This is a quintessentially urban dish, which is found in stalls and eateries serving *Hakka* Chinese[193] food in larger cities like Delhi and Chandigarh. In addition to introducing new urban dishes to the household, Nina also serves as a conduit to urban culture and mannerisms for her more rural in-laws.

In Nina's martial household, her sister-in-law, Anu, and brother-in-law, Dev, are more amenable receptors for urban culture as they, along with her husband, are still trying to claim some proximity to urban modernity. But they are more comfortably positioned in the rural than Nina. For instance, Dev had initially started his undergraduate degree at LPU, but he said he did not like LPU. When he related his experience, Nina laughed and said, "*You must be the first person to switch from LPU to Ramgharia.*" (22 November 2015) Dev elaborated that he found the absence of Punjabis and LPU's open environment discomforting, so he switched to Ramgharia College, where he feels more comfortable. Often, young men and women in the village purported Ramgharia College as a comfortable choice because it was closer to the village environment that they were used to. Also, Anu has only completed grade 12 and has had only a limited exposure to urban culture. When asked about her future plans, she related her desire to migrate. Most recently, I learned that she has gotten married to a businessman from Hoshiarpur, which is close to the village. Despite her rural orientation in food and fashion preferences, Anu was keen to interact with and learn about urban culture and Nina served as a valuable conduit in this context.

Thus, Nina's presence gave Bikram's siblings, who were more comfortably positioned in the rural space, the opportunity to gain some exposure to urbanity. Nina often planned trips with Bikram's siblings to engage in urban leisure activities like going for movies together or going to Haveli[194]. Nina also brings her sister-in-law Western clothes when she goes for shopping trips. On one such occasion, when Nina bought Anu a dress that sits below her knees, Anu was concerned about how she could wear such a dress. Nina then pointed out that she could wear the dress with a pair of tights. Thus, despite their differential cultural leanings, Nina is seen as having valued access to urbanity[195]. In fact, even when Nina's sister-in-law disagreed with her

[193] Hakka Chinese is a colloquial term that is often used to reference Indianised Chinese food.
[194] Haveli is a famous restaurant in Jalandhar which is popular as a family outing spot. It is a big event when a rural family decides to visit Haveli and they often go to great lengths to dress well for the occasion. Nina, for instances, wore a gown when they went to Haveli.
[195] In addition to her proximity to urban cultures, Nina also leveraged her religiosity to claim higher levels of 'development' and cultural sophistication than her rural in-laws.

on the appropriate cooking style, she was still seeking her approval. This importance that is accorded to a family member with urban exposure, especially in a household where this access is highly skewed, was also noted in Gunita's family.

In this context, Anu and Nina's discussion on food is about the primacy and status that should be accorded to urban culture and to urbanised middle-class identities. Anu's comments reflect her bid to reiterate the importance of rurality. Despite her ambitions for migration and movement away from the village, Anu does not perceive her transition as embracing of all urban norms. She seeks to retain her preferences for rural food. This conflicts with Nina's conception of middle-classness and mobility, which strives to mark a break from rurality. Anu's insistence on rural cooking styles also serves to question the basis of Nina's elevated status within the household. Thus, food consumption emerges as a fertile ground for contesting and claiming status, both within the household and vis-à-vis the larger village community.

7.4.2 Food as Commodity

In contrast to disagreements about the cultural underpinnings and status of food within more secure middle-class families, among the less secure middle-class families, personal consumption of food was limited. Migrant middle-class families especially prioritised public consumptions of wealth and food. In examining the interactions of less secure and migrant middle-class families with food, it is useful to draw on Gunita's household. While the analysis is more focused on Babita's interactions with food since she is the one who is solely responsible for cooking, it is reflective of the household's food culture.

In making food for the household, Babita attempted to cut back on the purchase of food items and her preparation of the food was simple and rustic. She would often bring back items like rice, flour, potatoes and spinach from her Jat employer. Other times, Babita would cook vegetables that she grew in a small plot of land that she used to tend for some people who have now moved away from the village. She rarely purchased vegetables or grocery items.

Babita's cutting back on private consumption was in contrast with her outward displays of material wealth at her daughter's marriage and in the fulfilment of other rituals, such as giving gifts to her daughter's in-laws and bearing all the expenses for her daughter's pregnancy and prenatal care. Dickey (2012) and Saavala (2001) relate that among middle-class families,

performing religious rituals and celebrating such events as first birthdays and wedding is important. The performance of such rituals demonstrated the family's financial ability to carry out the ritual and also their knowledge of the current trends in food, fashion and entertainment[196]. Due to the primacy attached to social displays of wealth and consumption, Babita's division of household expenses was oriented at sustaining those expenses that enhanced her family's public prestige. Concurrently, she cut down on expenses that occurred within the privacy of her home. This calibration and adjustment of outward appearances allowed Babita to demonstrate a certain standard of living.

The orientation of insecure migrant families towards carefully managing outward appearances, while limiting private consumption, also extended to their food consumption. In this context, food, as a source of consumption, becomes relevant only when it can be publicly displayed. Babita utilised food as a commodity that was to be passed on or exchanged in return for goodwill. Often, if she received extra food from the gurdwara or from someone's house, she would send it to those who were not as well off. On many occasions, when something special had been cooked at home, like chicken curry, or when I had purchased burgers and pizza for the family, she would serve it generously to Rajini's brother, often leaving nothing for herself. Rajini's[197] family never reciprocated in the same capacity, but they would sometimes send something that they had cooked at home over to Babita.

This practice suggests that it is not merely the personal consumption of food but its display and circulation that is important. Given Babita's limited access to luxurious food items, by choosing to serve this food to families that she deems higher in the social hierarchy, she is able to display her ability to purchase and prepare expensive food. Despite lacking the economic means to consistently consume expensive food, Babita was able to utilise the circulation of food to maintain a public image of wealth. Babita's circulation of food allowed her to carry out her social obligations in the village and maintain a respectable position within the community.

[196] In fact, Babita and other middle-class families in the village often referenced video recordings and professionally made wedding albums to display their fluent engagements with public rituals. Weddings albums were often pulled out when a visitor arrived, and they served as a quick way to communicate one's ability to engage with high-status consumption.

[197] It was mostly Babita who would visit Rajini's family. Whenever she complained that they never came to her house, Rajini's mother would say that they were really busy and that they don't like to walk around in the village. The underlying assumption of these exchanges was that since Rajini's mother occupied a higher position than Babita, it was not 'appropriate' for her to walk through the village space. Also, on her visits, Babita would take to helping Rajini's mother with household chores like folding clothes. There were also a number of other women who would come to visit Rajini's mother. The family appeared to exercise some clout in the community and a number of women came to Rajini's mother to discuss household matters. Rajini's father ran his own tractor business and they had a house similar to Babita's. In contrast to Babita, however, Rajini's family exercised a more secure middle-class claim.

Thus, depending upon the family's economic and social positioning and the ways in which different family members respond to their position, food becomes utilised to different ends. In the case of secure middle-class families, food becomes a way of addressing cultural conflicts within the household. These conflicts are emblematic of different ideas of middle-classness. While Nina perceives her class identity in terms of her sophisticated and urban cooking styles, her sister-in-law attempts to claim and legitimise her rural cooking. In insecure middle-class families, food is devalued within the private realm, but it acquires importance when it becomes a public commodity. It is then shared and distributed to communicate one's middle-class status to more secure middle-class families. Across these different middle-class families, food emerges as a negotiated act of consumption that is tied more to the household dynamics than it is to fashion, which appears as an individualistic expression of status.

7.5 Conclusion

In navigating fashion and food, young women across different types of middle-class families attempt to emulate 'appropriate' consumption based on their cultural orientation, ideas of middle-class moderation and the construct of appropriate femininity. A family's middle-class culture and economic positioning shapes its ideas of moderation and appropriateness and thereby, informs the consumption practices of the young women. In the realm of fashion, the security of a family's middle-class identity is more important in shaping the young women's fashion choices. Food culture is influenced more by the family's occupational culture. Young women from less secure middle-class families depict modest and 'balanced' fashion choices, which allow them to maintain respectability within the rural setting and access urbanity. In contrast, young women from more secure middle-class families resort to more bold and urban fashion choices to lay claim to greater cultural sophistication and distinction from the village space. In food cultures, a marked difference was noted between educated middle-class families that imbibe diverse urban food traditions and modern cooking styles and other middle-class families (self-employed and migrant) that were more comfortably placed in rural food traditions. In addition, less secure middle-class families relate to food consumption as a public rather than private enterprise.

While the young women's consumption operates within the restrictions set forth by their family, especially in the realm of fashion young women vary their consumption choices based

on their own aspirations for mobility. For instance, Gunita's consumption is guided by the imperative to demonstrate alignment with rural norms. In responding to this requirement for modesty, Gunita varies her clothes and stylisation in different ways. She chooses those clothes and grooming styles that correspond with her own ideas of appropriate urban fashions. Similarly, while Nina enjoys an elevated and urbane position in her marital household, she brings up particular types of urban cooking methods that are important for her understanding of the distinctions between rural and urban. Thus, even within the confines of familial constructs of appropriateness, young women imbibe those consumption practices that align with their exposure and their understanding of rurality and urbanity.

Moreover, the young women's varying alignments with rurality and urbanity also depict the type of middle-class identity and mobility they want to claim. Gunita's balancing of rural and urban mores in her fashion choices reflects her desire to claim belonging to spaces outside the village whilst holding onto rural norms around mobility and clothing. In contrast, Somika, who belongs to a secure and educated middle-class family, attempts to mark her separation from the rural space and establish proximity to the urban space. In fact, even within a single household, young women can have different cultural orientations and competing conceptions of middle-classness. This is apparent in the case of Gunita and her sister, Trisha, as well as Nina and her sister-in-law, Anu. While these varying notions of middle-classness correspond with different ideas of appropriate femininity and mobility, they converge in occupying a moral middle that is distinct from those above and below.

Taken together, young women across different middle-class families demonstrate the ability to moderate and adapt their consumption practices to align with familial concerns and their own ideas of mobility. This reveals that they are able to wield commodities to garner a higher social positioning and better access to those aspects of urban culture that are most important for them. The fluency in manoeuvring commodities allows these young women to attain cultural competence or the internalised ability to emulate appropriate behaviours and narratives vis-à-vis commodities (Appadurai, 1986). This cultural competence is an important resource that enables the young women to lay claim to spaces and cultures outside the village.

8 Marriage and Mobility

8.1 Introduction

As pointed out in Section 5.3 marriage is absent in the plans and aspirations of the young women in Chaheru. However, in practice, marriage was the most viable way for young women to move away from the village. This chapter examines the narratives and practices around marriage to ascertain its importance in young women's mobility. The young women and their parents express very different concerns around marriage as a route to mobility. Given the preponderance of the mobility imaginary around migration, for most parents, the ideal match for their educated daughters was a well-settled migrant from either Western Europe or North America. The premise of such alliances was that marriage to a well-settled migrant would facilitate the physical and social mobility of their daughters along with the class mobility of the family. In contrast, the young women were less forthcoming about the desired attributes of their marriage partner and discussed marriage with a view to their independent mobility plans.

The practices around marriage mark a departure from the mobility imaginaries around marriage migration. In practice, a number of young women, who were married to migrants, remained in the village and attempted to negotiate access to remittances and physical mobility as they waited for their own migration. Moreover, in contrast to the discursive permissibility that was attached to premarital relationships, most marriages were arranged and caste endogamous. Thus, instead of facilitating transition and change, marriage served to reproduce existing social norms around gender and caste.

In its first part, this chapter provides an overview of marriage dynamics in Chaheru with respect to caste and migration. In its second part, marriage discourses of parents and young women are examined. In its last part, this chapter uses the concept of agency to probe the experiences of left behind wives.

8.2 Marriage and Caste

In contrast to the dynamics of young women's premarital relationships, where there was parental permissibility around inter-caste relationships, marriage was mostly aligned with caste divisions. In fact, across India, marriage is the primary mechanism by which caste reproduces itself (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015) and generally, marriages tend to be caste endogamous. It has been pointed out that despite the mingling and interaction of different caste groups in the spheres of education and employment, it is often through marriage that caste boundaries are reinforced (Beteille, 1996; Fuller, 1996; Ram, 1988; Sheth, 1999). In fact, previous literature on rural India points out that in rural North India, caste endogamous marriages are the norm, as inter-caste marriages and elopements that transgress norms of endogamy are often punished with violence and honour killings (Chakravarti, 2003; Chowdhry, 2007; Kaur, 2010). Alliances that tend to evoke the strongest sanctions are those between upper caste women and Dalit men. In her work on cross-regional marriages in a village in western Uttar Pradesh, Chaudhry (2019) found that there were several cases of premarital relationships, including those across caste, that she was told would not culminate in marriage.

Despite the endurance of caste, others have highlighted that the increasing propensity of inter-caste marriages, especially in urban areas points to the dilution of caste (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015; De Neve, 2016; Fruzzetti, 2013; Sheth,1999). A 2004 Indian National Election[198] study found that out of 27,000 respondents, 67 per cent approved of a ban on inter-caste marriage. This number fell to 47 per cent in urban areas. In the period between 1970 and 2015, a study of over 1,000 matrimonial listings revealed that the interest in within-caste marriages had decreased over time[199]. In India, the intermarriage rate is 11 per cent, with Punjab having the highest intermarriage rate at 19.90 per cent (National Family Health Survey, 2006). Dhanda (2012) points out that inter-caste marriages in Punjab are a silent revolution that signals the breakdown of traditional caste hierarchies. Based on her interaction with runaway couples, court records on runaway marriages and data from the Arya Samaj Mandir she concludes that annually 984 Dalits marry non-Dalits in Punjab. Like Sheth (1999) and Ahuja and Ostermann (2015), Dhanda (2012) points outs that the rate of inter-caste marriage, regardless of high or

[198] This data was provided by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, India (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015).
[199] This data was collected by Susan L. Ostermann, and her colleague Nafisa Akbar. It is referred to as the Akbar-Ostermann Dataset (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015).

low it is indicates an important shift in caste consciousness. In fact, Ahuja and Ostermann (2015) note that while the number of inter-caste marriages have not necessarily risen, there is an openness to such alliances, especially among the upwardly mobile or upper-class lower castes. They assert that instead of only measuring the outcome, which is inter-caste marriage, one should focus on interest in intermarriage, captured by positive response to an out of caste profile, as they believe it is a better indicator of social distance.

A scenario in which inter-caste marriages find acceptance is in the case of cross-regional marriages. Such marriages are often the result of compulsions. For the bride's family, this may be an inability to provide a dowry, while for the groom's family, it could a skewed sex ratio and the resultant shortage of marriageable young women. These marriages transgress regional boundaries and are often inter-caste and inter-religious, but they do not necessarily lead to the breakdown of caste hierarchies (Chaudhry, 2019; Kaur, 2012). In fact, in rural North India along with cross-regional marriages, there is a persistence of honour killing. This coexistence of honour killings and cross-regional marriages is called the "endogamy paradox" (Abraham, 2014; Kaur, 2004).

In Chaheru, despite the discursive permissibility attached to premarital inter-caste relationships, marital alliances were largely arranged and were within the caste group. The inter-caste and transgressive premarital relationships of the young women did not translate into marriage. Often, the marriages of the young women were arranged with respect to concerns of status and mobility. Given the prevalence of migration as the main pathway of mobility, marriages were tied to strategies and plans of migration and parents often sought well-settled migrants for their educated daughters.

8.3 Marriage and Migration

Most marriages in Chaheru were based on family considerations and the young women exercised only a limited control over the process. For instance, Sonia's marriage was arranged to a migrant who was eight years older than her, and in discussing this decision, she said, "*I had said mujhe bahar jaana hain* (or I want to migrate), *but I never said I want to marry someone eight years older than me*." (25 November 2015) Similarly, while Kavita's elder sisters are married to migrant men, her younger sister, Meeta, is married to a driver who lives in Chandigarh. There were many murmurings in the village about why and how this alliance

had been decided, especially given that Meeta, according to her mother, is the prettiest among her four daughters. Meeta herself said that while her husband is very nice, she is not sure why her marriage had not been arranged to a migrant as had been done in the case of her older sisters. Often, there was also an incongruence between parental preferences and the kind of grooms that the young women deemed acceptable. For instance, Rajini often mentioned the risks involved in marrying a migrant and expressed her desire to marry someone with a government job instead. In contrast, her mother would tell me to arrange Rajni's marriage with a migrant. In arranging the marital alliances of their daughters, parents also considered its implications for their remaining children. In the case of Rajini and Sonia, the keenness of their parents to arrange their marriages to migrants appeared to be guided by the desire to not only ensure their settlement and family mobility but also facilitate the migration of their unemployed brothers. Thus, the arrangement of marriage emerges as an unpredictable process guided by multiple interests wherein the preferences of the young women become less crucial.

Generally, the young women's marriages were arranged[200] within the caste group and to families that were higher in the social hierarchy. In these arranged and hypergamous marriages, a family's position in the social hierarchy was not only defined by its economic positioning, but also by its educational levels and ability to migrate. For instance, Nina's marriage to Bikram demonstrated that hypergamy was not always so straightforward because this was an alliance with a family that was lower than her own family in terms of its economic positioning. But her marriage was most likely premised on Bikram's education level and his propensity for migration. Nina is a well-educated city girl who married a village boy, and in explaining her unconventional alliance, she had once said, "*You know that the levels of education in the community, especially among the young men, are very low . . .*" (23 February 2016). Later, her mother-in-law explained that there had been no 'give and take' or dowry at the wedding and that the parents had decided that they would spend that money to ensure the migration of the children. Soon after the end of my fieldwork, Nina was successful in migrating to New Zealand, where she got a work visa and her husband got an education visa. The ability and propensity to migrate operated as an independent criterion for marriage alliances and sometimes they subverted the conventional metrics of hypergamous and arranged marriages. Usually, for their

[200] A popular discourse around marriages in India pertains to the distinction drawn between love and arranged marriage. While in the context of Chaheru, these terms were not used as all marriages were assumed to be arranged, unless it was specified by the people involved or by others as part of community gossip. Arranged marriages are those were the alliances have been arranged by the parents based on the more practical considerations around the boy's employment, economic status and the family environment. In love marriages, the young people found their own partners through dating.

educated daughters, parents sought men who were either permanent migrants in a 'big' country or men who had a high chance of migrating. It was common for the young women to be better educated and from economically better off families than their husbands. In these families, while the men had only completed education till grade 10 or below, their wives held BA and MA degrees. Such marriages were seen as desirable for the men because it allowed them to have wives who would be able to raise and groom their children well. Also, for the families of educated young women, marrying their daughters to well-settled migrants often meant they would have to pay a higher dowry, although it allowed the family to attain class mobility. The young women themselves benefit from such alliances because they are able to create an opportunity for their own migration. However, as we will see below in Section 8.5 , not all cases of marriage to migrants facilitates the young women's own mobility. Another variant of marriage for migration, albeit less common, was the case of educated young women with 'good IELTS score' being sought after by families which are willing to overlook dowry for the opportunity to migrate[201].

An exception to arranged and hypergamous marriages were love marriages, but these were often discussed with respect to lower-class families only. Non-hypergamous love marriages were a site of class differentiation in the village. There was a greater acceptance of love marriages among lower class families[202]. While love marriages were also prevalent among middle-class families, they were not discussed in these terms and were presented as arranged marriages[203]. The post-marriage discourse on 'respectable' marriage in middle-class families contradicts the pre-marriage talk of relationships and romantic love among young women. Thus, love marriages came to be located in the lower-class strata. The few young women who were known to be in love marriages all belonged to the lower class and they did not enjoy a good reputation within the community. Middle-class families gossiped about these young

[201] In cases where the young women were able to facilitate migration for themselves and for their husbands, their parents were very proud of this fact. In Section 6.2.1 Rita happily informed me that her elder daughter has "very good" English and has been able to facilitate her and her husband's migration to Australia.

[202] Young women from lower class families could also be found engaging in more open interactions with young men within the village space. On a visit to a religious shrine in Himachal Pradesh with other villagers, the young girl in the group from a lower-class family was speaking very openly to the boys in the group, who were often joking with her or chiding her in a familiar manner. She responded positively and did not seem concerned that she might be seen as flirting with young men in the presence of other community members. Not just younger women, even older women from less secure middle class or lower-class families were more comfortable talking to other men from the village. Gunita's mother, Babita was often seen to be interacting with another man, from a lower-class family in the village. He would visit Babita's house every evening and sit outside talking to her, while Gunita and her grandmother were sitting inside.

[203] It is possible that some of the 'arranged' marital alliances that appeared to contradict norms of hypergamy were love marriages, but people did not reveal this to me. In fact, I often asked Nina if hers was really a love marriage and she said that a lot of people thought so, but it was an arranged marriage. Kavita told me that a lot of times love marriages were presented as arranged marriages.

women and constructed them through the lens of immorality. Moreover, although the caste dynamics of these love marriages were not discussed, it was evident that these young women had not married upper caste men[204].

The narrative about one such woman who belonged to a poor family was that she would keep getting married to men of her choice and after each marriage, she would take money from the man and leave him[205]. Another young woman who was repeatedly discussed in the village was also from a lower-class family and had married a young man from the same village itself. This marriage defied the norms of exogamy as marriage of a man and a woman residing in the same village was considered incestuous. Also, the young man she had married was well known within the community for being a drug peddler. He had even been to jail and the story circulating in the village was that they were together before he was arrested, and she waited for his release. When he came out they got married. While the couple had faced resistance from the family and the young man's mother had still not accepted the girl, the two of them were residing together with his family as a married couple. Love marriages like these subverted the ideas of appropriateness in the village and even young women from middle-class families joined their mothers in critiquing such alliances. The young women's 'looking down' on non-hypergamous and lower-class love marriages coexisted with their own pursuit of romance[206], as discussed in Section 6.3.3

8.4 Discourses of Marriage

8.4.1 Parental Views

Generally, discussions of marriage occurred with the parents, who described their desires and anxieties around their daughters' marriages. Especially among the less educated middle-class families, mothers expressed that they wanted to get their daughters married to well-settled migrants. This desire was especially directed towards their educated daughters, who had either

[204] While most marriages in the village were caste endogamous, there were some cases of cross-regional marriages. Some young women from poorer families had married into Jat families in Haryana. These marriages were likely arranged by poor families to avoid exorbitant dowries in the local marriage market.
[205] My middle-class respondents actively dissuaded me from talking to her. Upon finding out that I had met her, they warned me to not speak to her again because she did not have a good reputation and might involve me in something.
[206] Somika was dating the older brother in this family and in contrast to other middle-class families in the village, who talked about the younger brother involved in the drug trade and his father in a negative light she had a positive disposition towards this family. She said the family was well-to-do when the father was a migrant but when he came back their economic position declined. Somika appeared to associate this family's immorality with economic decline and a fall in status from middle-class to lower-class.

completed or were pursuing a BA or MA degree. Less educated young women generally studied till grade 12, after which they were married either to locally employed men or to men who had migrated to the Gulf. Marriage related mobility was more accessible to educated young women as their marriage had the potential to facilitate not only their own but also their family's mobility.

In the presence of their daughters, mothers generally asked me, often jokingly, to find migrant grooms for their educated daughters. When they made these remarks, their daughters were quick to change the topic. It was only when they spoke to me alone that the mothers engaged in larger discussions about marriage and their concerns about finding a *pakka* boy, meaning someone who has permanent status in the country abroad. The mothers of these educated young women did not want *kacha* or temporary marriages for their daughters as marriage was a 'serious business'. The term kacha referred to both the impermanent status of the boy being considered for marriage and marriages that were brokered for the purposes of migration or fraudulent marriages, in which the bride was deserted by the groom. Thus, the category 'kacha' serves as an all-encompassing term that referred to migrant marriages where the outcome is less than desirable. At a basic level, parents wanted to ensure that the boys who were being considered for their daughters had permanent status and would facilitate the migration of their daughters.

In emphasising a pakka boy, parents are instating their desire to ensure that these negative eventualities are avoided. They are also able to distinguish themselves from lower-class others, who are seen to engage in marriages of convenience. In such marriages, the alliance is arranged for the explicit purpose of migration and upon receiving status in the country, the couple divorces each other. On one occasion, I met a young woman, Sameera, from a neighbouring lower-class family in Kavita's house. Her father, Kishor, was related to Kavita's father and had a long history of unsuccessful migrations. He had first migrated to Europe in the 1970s but had returned a few years later and tried to migrate to the US after that. Sameera's father recounted that while Reshmo's husband was able to successfully migrate to the US, he had been caught and deported back. He expressed his resentment over the fact that while Reshmo's husband was successful, he had not extended any help to him. His eldest daughter, who is now married, had migrated to Italy independently. The middle daughter was a nurse in a government

hospital[207]. Sameera, the youngest daughter, who was 20 years old expressed her strong desire to migrate. She mentioned that she was preparing for the IELTS exam and planned to migrate independently if she managed to get a good score. When I asked her about what would happen if that plan did not work out, she told me that it was possible to marry someone to migrate and that a lot of people do it. After Sameera left, Kavita clarified that Sameera was referring to a marriage of convenience and she added, "*Sameera and her family are very desperate to migrate…they even sent one of their daughters alone to Italy.*" (9 December 2015) For young women from upwardly mobile families such as Kavita's, it was important to distinguish their bid to migrate from that of young women like Sameera, who were from lower-class families. The emphasis on respectable alliances with permanent migrants was an important way of marking this separation. In contrast to the checks and balances enforced by upwardly mobile families, lower-class families were constructed as desperate and willing to bypass ideas of respectability to ensure migration.

8.4.2 Young Women's Narratives

Despite the importance of marriage in facilitating the young women's ability to move away from the village space, they rarely talked about their marriage plans. In one case, when talking about the plans that her migrant sisters had for her, Kavita showed me some pictures of boys that her sister had sent from the UK. However, this kind of disclosure was exceptional. Other times, it was only upon my prodding that the young women talked about their marriage. When pushed about the kind of man she would like to marry, Rajini said, "Stand *ho ladke ka . . .*" (6 May 2016) meaning the boy should have a good position and be well-settled. This type of generic responses to the type of marriage partner they were seeking reverberated among other young women, where they often responded by indicating whether they would like to marry a local boy or a migrant. Their choice echoed the mobility imaginaries around migration and urban modernity and was determined by their own trajectories and plans of mobility.

In one such instance, while expressing her views about her marriage partner, Rajini says,

> *. . . my father does not want me to get married to a migrant because he has heard of so many cases . . . my sister's case[208] is different because she was not educated, so that was the best option for her . . .*(6 May 2016)

[207] She was the only young woman in the village who was employed in a government job.
[208] Rajini's sister recently got married to a man who is a migrant in the Gulf.

Rajini's views on marriage point out a concern that was common among a number of young women, regarding the risks around marriage to a migrant. Often, if the wife of a migrant did not migrate within a year of the marriage, rumours would begin about the marriage being fraudulent and the husband having a second wife abroad. In fact, the number of fraudulent marriages in the Doaba region of Punjab, where migrant men come and get married to local women but never take them abroad, has been on the rise. The women who are abandoned by migrant men are often called holiday brides or honeymoon brides. Between 2016 and 2018, there were 4,307 complaints of Indian women being deserted by their NRI husbands in Punjab, Gujarat and Kerala according to the Ministry of External Affairs [209]. Other estimates peg the number of abandoned brides much higher at 15,000 within the Doaba region itself[210]. Despite the real risks of marriage migration, it continues to be the most popular and reliable way for young women to move away from the village. In Chaheru, mothers of educated young women discussed the possibility of finding migrant grooms for their daughters but were often silent on the negative implications of such marriages.

The young women were more aware and concerned about such implications and often said that in order to prevent becoming honeymoon brides, they made sure to carry out a background check through other migrant relatives and kin abroad. Marriage migration, while primarily a site of oppression for young women, also served to marginalise young male migrants who were dependent on their NRI relatives. Kavita discusses the case of her boyfriend whose migration to Canada was facilitated by his brother, who now wants him to get married to his sister-in-law. The sister-in-law in question is a divorced woman and has a child. Kavita's boyfriend is being pressurised into this alliance by his brother, who is also threatening to send him back home if he doesn't agree. Kavita is concerned because of the fix her boyfriend is in and the threat it poses to her own potential for marrying him. One day, towards the end of my fieldwork, she breaks down and tells me that although her boyfriend has told her that he will marry her, she has broken off the relationship because she is afraid that he will have to marry his brother's sister-in-law in Canada, which means that he will not take Kavita with him to Canada. She will have to remain in India, while his other wife lives with him in Canada. Thus, the young women were concerned about becoming the left behind, second wives of migrants.

[209] https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/spurt-in-cases-of-marriage-fraud-behind-govt-s-push-for-nri-bill-1554835184671.html

[210] https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/punjab-govt-cracks-down-on-nri-grooms-who-abandon-brides-103900-2012-05-30

As a result, they also explored the option of non-migrant local men as marriage partners. Rajini points out that her education enables her to make 'flexible' choices around her marriage partner. As an educated young woman, she can choose between marrying a migrant or a local young man.

These calculations about who to marry were also dependent on the young women's own mobility trajectories. A number of young women pointed out that if they are able to secure government jobs, they would remain in India and marry local men. It is only if they are unable to do so that they would consider migration. But given the strong culture of migration, many times, young women preferred migration over other opportunities. For instance, post her marriage, Nina found out that she had cleared the exam for a government job. But by that time, she and her husband had already put in their application for migration to New Zealand. While she decided to forgo the job opportunity and wait for the migration to materialise, the elongated waiting period made her increasingly frustrated and she talked about the forgone job opportunity with regret. She conveyed to me that the migration process had taken much longer than she had thought it would and she had been married for almost a year before she and her husband were finally able to migrate to New Zealand. Thus, young women's discourses around marriage and marriage partners were often embedded in their own plans around migration and employment.

Moreover, education seemed to offer the young women the choice to either pick a migrant or a local man as their marriage partner. Although, as will come forth in the cases of Sonia and Reema, education did not always ensure that the young women who married migrants were able to migrate themselves. In Chaheru, in addition to Nina, there was one other woman who, owing to her high IELTS score, was able to facilitate her own migration along with that of her husband. But these young women were exceptions and largely young women who married migrants were dependent on their migrant husbands to facilitate their movement outside the village.

8.5 Left Behind Wives

While for young women and their parents, marriage to a migrant was associated with movement away from the village, in reality, despite marrying a migrant, mobility remained elusive for a number of young women. Moreover, the expectation that marriage to a migrant

would lead to the young women's own mobility was prevalent among young women who were married to migrants from 'big countries' Given the visa conditions[211] of Gulf migrants, it was understood that they could not take their family with them and consequently, the expectations of the wives of these Gulf migrants were only of regular remittances. These women were also not engaged in projects of status production and were freer to roam around in the village and take up respectable forms of employment as ASHA workers[212] or leaders in the women's self-help group[213]. In contrast, women who had married migrants from 'big countries' and remained in the village post their marriage were restricted in their physical mobility, in their ability to take up employment and additionally, were unable to experience the movement away from the village that had been promised to them. Thus, the sense of being left behind and having their mobility paradigm thwarted emerged in the case of the young women who were married to well-settled European or North American migrants. In the case of these women, they were often living with their in-laws and were in regular contact with their husbands through phone conversations. Their husbands usually made annual visits back home. In exploring the experiences of left-behind migrant wives, it is useful to draw on the concepts of agency and Dalit patriarchy.

Previous work on left behind wives has attempted to understand the women's experiences through the metrics of empowerment and autonomy (for example see Akram & Karim, 2004; Desai & Bannerji, 2008; Datta & Mishra, 2011; Gulati, 1993; Maharjan, Bauer & Knerr, 2012). Specifically, these studies look at the impact of men's migration on the women's workload, responsibilities, economic security and social status among others. How the women fare on these indicators is used to then ascertain their level of autonomy and/or empowerment. In contrast, Rashid (2013) argues that examining the women's experiences through the narrow lens of autonomy and empowerment echoes the development discourse and reduces women to passive actors in need of intervention. Rashid (2013) purports the importance of engaging with the concepts of self, agency and power that emerge from the women's own negotiations and narratives. She draws on the work of Mahmood (2006), who proposes that agency must be understood on the basis of the conditions of its emergence. Rashid (2103) uses Mahmood (2006)'s framework to look at the experiences of left behind

[211] They could only stay there as long as they had a job.
[212] An ASHA worker or accredited social health activist is a community health worker that addresses issues of maternal and child health in rural areas.
[213] There was a women's self-help group in Chaheru that was called *Mahila Samit*i or women's organization. This group was organized and actively supported by the MLA's wife.

wives in different conditions: in a nuclear household with their children in the husband's village, with the in-laws in a joint family set up in the village, in their natal homes with their children and as a working women. In engaging with women's own narratives, Rashid is able to show the varied experiences of migrant wives and the multiple constructs of agency that emerge. Rashid (2013) shows that often as agentive beings Bangladeshi women are attempting to inhabit dominant gender norms by fulfilling the conditions of a good wife, daughter in law and mother. She makes a strong case for expanding our definition of agency to include those acts that may serve to perpetuate patriarchal oppression.

In using Rashid (2013)'s framework as a point of departure, the present work attempts to situate agency in women's everyday discourses and navigations. The wives of well settled migrant men were seen to be occupying a distinctive position in the community, as they embodied the mobility ideal of the community. They were educated young women who had managed to marry well placed migrant men, which would eventually lead to their own migration and positioning as migrants. As per the community perception they had attained class mobility even if they physically remained in the village. Consequently, wives of migrant men conducted themselves in public spaces in such a manner so as to live up to the mobility ideal of marriage migration. Despite the public display of wealth and consumption, privately, these migrant wives continued to struggle with immobility and the rupture in their personal imaginaries of mobility. The private narratives of left behind wives revealed that their negotiations were directed around charting their independent mobility or movement away from the village through migration. The agency of these left behind migrant wives emerges in their balancing of their public and private lives. This can be further explored through the experiences of Sonia and Reema.

Sonia has been married for the last three years and also has a one-year-old daughter. She has completed her MA from Ramgharia College and was even teaching at LPU for some time before her marriage. Sonia's husband works and lives in Italy. Right after their marriage, Sonia stayed with her husband for a month and half and thereafter, he kept coming back to India every few months. But he has not come home for the last two years as he is waiting to finalise the papers for his wife and daughter's migration before he comes to India. He has never met his daughter. Often, owing to problems with her mother-in-law, Sonia lives in Chaheru at her father's house. While in Chaheru, she is mostly on the phone, talking to her husband. In fact, it becomes very difficult to talk to Sonia in her natal house. On one occasion, when she has to

go outside the village to get sanitary napkins, I accompany her and get a chance to talk to her alone, away from her family. Sonia confides that while she wanted to go bahar or outside, she did not want to marry a man so much older than her (Sonia's husband is eight years older than her). She is also concerned that her husband has not even seen his daughter and has not, as yet, facilitated their migration. When I ask her if everything is fine, she reiterates that it is just taking time for the paperwork to come through. She also adds that she has gotten a relative to check and confirm that her husband is not up to something else in Italy (implying a second marriage).

In contrast to Sonia's private admission of her qualms about marrying an older man and her anxieties about her own migration, while talking to other community members, she is careful to uphold the image of a happily married woman. People in the community often gossip about how she has been married to someone so much older than her. When people ask Sonia how is it that her husband has not even seen his daughter, she calmly explains that her husband is in the process of arranging their visas. She presents herself as being well-settled in her marital household. In fact, other people in the community do not seem to know just how often she is at her parents' house because she does not step out of the house much. When Sonia does step out, she is careful to wear well-stitched and fashionable clothes and ensures that her daughter is also dressed and groomed appropriately. This variation in narratives for public and private consumption also comes forth in the case of another left behind migrant wife, Reema.

Reema[214] is in her mid-thirties and has been married for the last ten years to a migrant who lives and works in Italy. Reema wears fashionable and expensive suits, spends on her personal grooming and her kitchen is well stocked with fruits and vegetables. Her children are well dressed, articulate and are often seen playing with different toys. In fact, they resemble city children. The general impression in the community is that Reema has a lot of money and is a spendthrift. In fact, Kavita, who is her neighbour, comments that Reema married her husband, despite knowing that the man has a wife and a family in Italy, only because of the money[215]. Kavita relays that Reema gets INR 35,000 a month from her husband and that money is the only reason why she is sticking around.

[214] All the other young women discussed in the thesis are between the ages of 18 and 26. Reema is in her mid-thirties and is older than the other young women. Her experiences around marriage are particularly pertinent to the discussion of marriage migration.

[215] Based on Kavita's telling, Reema's husband got married to an Italian girl to get PR and chose not leave this woman even after he got PR. Kavita tells me that this is why he does not take Reema with him to Italy. Also, Reema's mother-in-law claims that Reema knew about all of this prior to her marriage.

Kavita often complains that although Reema has done a stitching course and is trained as a beautician herself, she gets Kavita to do her waxing and stitching and then does not even pay her the commensurate amount. Kavita paints Reema as a scheming and aggressive woman who cheats people off their money, oppresses her in-laws[216] and is only interested in her husband's money. Moreover, she interprets Reema through the lens of the mobility imaginary, according to which, people's actions are explained by their desire to move up and ahead. Reema's negotiations, struggles and immobilities as a migrant wife are, therefore, overlooked. Thus, the construct of mobility is maintained by both migrant wives who are careful to create an image of wealth and status as well as by community members who only view migrant families through the mobility imaginary.

In contrast to this manicured public image, in her private conversations with me, Reema defines the struggles and constrains that mark her everyday life. It is likely that my status as an outsider in the community enables Reema to express her problems more freely. She is upset and frustrated that her husband is neither facilitating her migration nor allowing her to work within the village. She says,

> *Your bhaiya[217] (brother) is not clear about what he wants to do. He doesn't take a decision. He doesn't take us there . . . there are so many girls who were married with me whose husbands were abroad and now they are all there with their children . . . and he also doesn't say that we have to stay here. In the last 3 years, he hasn't been sending enough money home and when we ask him, he says he hasn't been paid. But if he hasn't been paid, how is he managing there?* (11 February 2016)

Reema's frustration appears to stem from her 'left behind' status and insecure claim to remittances. While other young women have surpassed her and have been able to move away, she is still 'stuck' in the same place where she started. Reema is a well-educated woman (she has completed her MA degree) and her alliance with her husband (he has only completed grade 10) was likely premised upon migration as an opportunity opening up for her. However, Reema's husband has failed to facilitate her mobility and is even infringing on her autonomy within the village space by restricting her movement and economic resources. Reema recounts that she was offered the job of an Asha worker by the sarpanch, but she could not take it up

[216] Kavita and her mother claim that Reema beats her mother-in-law.
[217] Since I call her Bhabhi, which means brother's wife when she is talking about her husband to me Reema says, "your bhaiya"

because her husband does not allow her to work. Even her trips to other people's houses are monitored by her mother-in-law and then relayed back to her husband.

Similarly, Sonia also mentions restrictions around employment[218] and clothing. In describing her husband's control over her clothing, she says, ". . . *he has this thing in his head that my wife should wear jeans and look good . . . he would like me to wear short and tight dresses as well*." (25 November 2015) While Sonia's husband's insistence that she wear Western clothes appears out of place in the rural cultural context, it appears oriented towards showcasing her status as a migrant wife. In fact, even migrant men who visit from Europe and North America wear shorts, T-shirts, sunglasses and expensive watches, all of which are out of place in the village but positions them as high-status migrants. Moreover, contrary to the assumption that Sonia would enjoy parading her position as a migrant wife in Western attire, she expresses discomfort and laments that now she is always stuck in jeans and cannot wear suits. When I ask her how her husband will even know what she is wearing, she says that he will ask her about it when they talk on the phone. In fact, the phone becomes an explicit instrument of intervention for the husband. Even Reema's husband listens in on my early conversations with Reema and her family. I only find out about this when Kavita tells me later. The phone also sometimes allows for a positive intervention from the husband, as in the case of a newly-wed Gulf migrant and his wife. A misunderstanding arose between the wife and the mother-in-law when the latter thought that the former was talking to another man when the wife claimed that she was actually listening to religious hymns. The husband intervened via a phone call and told his mother to not bother his wife. Thus, much like Rashid (2013)'s findings, despite their physical absence, migrant men continued to be involved in household dynamics.

Intra-household dynamics and the ensuing negotiations with their mothers-in-law also occupy an important role in the young women's narratives. Sonia explains how her migration is being obstructed due to such intra-household dynamics. She mentions that her mother-in-law doesn't want her to go because she fears her son will stop sending as much money home if his wife migrates. The mother-in-law also does not let her go for IELTS classes or work because she fears Sonia will surpass her son and leave him. Similary, Reema claims that her mother-in-law reports on her behaviour to her husband and also controls the money that he sends back home.

[218] Sonia's husband is of the view that she can work post migration, once she is abroad.

The cases of both Sonia and Reema suggest that contrary to the pervasive mobility imaginary which implies that marriage to a migrant will facilitate mobility, it appears that mobility is evasive. Instead, young women negotiate for greater autonomy within the cultural and spatial confines of the village, while waiting to migrate. In addition to coping with being left behind by their "mobile" husbands, migrant wives have to work around the restrictions imposed upon them by their husbands and mother in laws. The gendered restrictions, which involves young women's withdrawal from devalued forms of work and management of young women's engagement with the public sphere is reminiscent of processes of class mobility among lower caste communities. Kapadia (1995) and Still (2017) insist that the transition to class mobility among lower caste communities entails adopting more conservative norms around women's behaviour, which uphold the value of female seclusion (Kapadia, 1995; Srinivas, 1956; Still, 2017). Still (2017) terms this process of appropriating and adapting upper caste patriarchy as the "Dalitisation of patriarchy" (p. 190). It spurs a shift in Dalit women's identity within the household, from being economically productive members to the producers of status and respectability (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2017). This modification in women's household role also coincides with their withdrawal from lowly valued agricultural and manual work.

In response to these conditions of Dalit patriarchy, both Sonia and Reema align with gendered expectations and in publicly playing out their roles as "good" migrant wives can be seen to be reproducing the conditions of their oppression. However, in performing their role as migrant wives, Sonia and Reema are able to accrue status and class mobility. Moreover, their personal narratives suggest that young women are also questioning and resisting these gendered expectations. Migrant wives are also "making plans" and attempting to negotiate greater access to economic resources and autonomy around clothing, employment and physical movement. In fact, in discussing her future plans Reema mentions that once the children are grown up, she will leave them with their maternal grandmother and go abroad. Similarly, Sonia also talks about starting beautician work from home. While it is uncertain whether these plans will materialize, at the level of plans and discourse Sonia and Reema, much like the unmarried young women express a commitment towards independent claims of mobility. It is not enough for young women to accrue status through marriage to a migrant. They envision mobility as reflective of individual mobility and their own movement away from the village.

8.6 Conclusion

Despite the young women's plans for mobility rarely featuring marriage, in practice, their mobility and movement away from the village hinges on marriage. Parents of educated young women are especially interested in ensuring the marriage of their daughters to well-settled migrants, which would facilitate the social mobility of the young women and their families. In contrast, the young women are more concerned about the risks of marriage to a migrant and when they discuss marriage, it is defined as part of their plans for independent mobility. At a discursive level, the young women reveal a high level of autonomy in discussing whether they would like their marriage partner to be a migrant or a local depending on their education level and employment trajectories.

Although there is an emphasis on autonomy and independent mobility in the young women's plans, the practices around marriage reveal sites of social continuity and immobility. In contrast to discourses of premarital relationships, which reveal the young women's and their parents' openness to inter-caste alliances, most marriages are arranged and caste endogamous. Also, when young women from middle-class families engage in love marriages, these are often projected as arranged. Thus, marriage practices among the middle-class in Chaheru serves to reproduce caste and gender hierarchies.

The experiences of migrant wives that have been left behind in the village reveal a more complex connection between marriage and mobility than what is revealed by mobility imaginaries. While mobility imaginaries discussed in Section 5.2.1 draw a simple link between marriage migration and mobility, many young women, despite marrying well settled migrants remain in the village. In probing the experience of these left behind wives, this chapter locates young women's agency in the "balancing act" that they perform between their private and public selves. Left behind wives put up the veneer of class mobility for public consumption. This public display of class mobility involves migrant wives partaking in the conditions of their oppression while simultaneously reinforcing their status as migrant wives. But within the household, they have to negotiate restrictions around physical mobility, employment, clothing and ensure access to remittances. Their personal narratives reveal the discrepancy between mobility imaginaries of migration and the experience of marriage migration. Additionally, these narratives also point to young women's resistance to gendered

expectations and their personal immobility. Taken together, marriage continues to be an important conduit to migration-based mobility. But it is also a site of patriarchal oppression and immobility that young women have to actively negotiate.

9 Moving Away

9.1 Introduction

This thesis is an exposition on young women's navigations around the processes of transition and change and their efforts to carve mobile identities while remaining in the village. In addition to centralising the narratives and practices of the young women, this thesis regularly engages with the perspectives and positionality of their parents. This provides the context for the young women's interactions and reflects the concurrence between the young women's plans and their parents' expectations. But the focus remains on the young women's everyday discourses, practices and imaginaries. The thesis unravels the young women's process of defining an upwardly mobile and middle-class identity through their negotiations with education, consumption and marriage.

The emergence of a middle-class culture in Chaheru is significant because it is associated with shifting discourses on caste, class and gender. The multiplicity of middle-class identities corresponds with the young women's varying espousal of rural and urban cultures, gender norms and mobility aspirations. Despite gendered restrictions around physical mobility, urban consumption and education, the young women attempt to access mobility within familial confines. This reflects a form of negotiated autonomy, which, along with a selective adoption of upper caste gender practices and the withdrawal of women from low status work, reflects an emerging construct of middle-class femininity. Moreover, the young women select class culture as the pathway to mobility, over and above assertions for caste mobility and politics. Within the space of the village, while discourses of caste identity recede to the background, caste norms persist through marriage practices.

Mobility or the physical and cultural movement away from the village appears as an important prism for talking about the young women's class aspirations and the consequent class identities. While mobility is mostly imagined rather than enacted, it is an important preoccupation among the young women in the village. This notion of mobility suggests the primacy of cultural transitions in upwardly mobile Dalit communities. Much of the previous work on upwardly mobile Dalit communities has focused on the economic, religious and political markers of social change. These works generally focused on the public assertions of Dalit mobility at religious sites, political forums and offices (Judge & Bal, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2010; Nisbett,

2007; Osella & Osella, 2000; Ram, 1988; Ram, 2009; Saberwal, 1976; Saavala, 2003; Saavala, 2006). The present thesis marks a departure from this work in two ways. Firstly, in drawing on the construct of mobility, it attends to the underlying cultural negotiations that exist in the young women's interactions with education, consumption and marriage. Secondly, this thesis is located in the homes of the young women. Therefore, it captures the domestic and routine tussles around Dalit mobility and seeks to reorient the gaze towards sites of social change and resistance in the everyday lives of these young women.

In its first part, this chapter discusses the gap between mobility imaginaries and the experiences of mobility in Chaheru. In its second part, the multiplicity of middle-class identities is introduced. The divergences that exist in middle-class identities on the basis of ideas of appropriate femininity, middle-class femininity, cultural orientations and caste identity are discussed. The third part of the chapter discusses the contributions that this thesis makes. The heightened discourse of mobility along with the decline in discourses of caste identity are linked to the emergence of a new mobility paradigm among upwardly mobile Dalit communities. The contribution of this thesis in expanding the construct of the Dalit woman is also discussed. In conclusion, this chapter reflects on the mobility trajectories of the young women and their linkage with Dalit mobility in Punjab along with the young women's own negotiations around mobility and moving away.

9.2 Reimagining Mobility

The desire for movement away from the village is a powerful impetus for the young women to carve 'mobile' identities within the village space. The circulating imaginaries around migration and urbanity inform and shape the young women's aspirations for mobility. The mobility imaginaries purport that physical movement to urban and Western spaces will enable one to claim a belonging to mobility. While the imaginaries around urban movement prevail mostly among educated families, mobility imaginaries around migration are pervasive. In addition to their reductive constructions of the bahar and the village, these imaginaries assume that mobility entails a linear movement from the village to 'mobile' spaces outside the village.

However, as the young women seek to mark a move away from the village space, the cultural shifts and tensions involved in this transition come to the fore. The avenues through which the young women seek to move away from the village are education and marriage. In contrast to

the mobility imaginaries which draw an easy link between each of these trajectories and mobility outcomes, the actual experiences of the young women demonstrate the tensions and immobilites involved in moving away. Young unmarried women, seeking to move away from the village through independent migration and education, display a resistance to completely adopting the urban space and leaving behind the familiarity and comfort of the rural. As discussed in Section 5.4.2, when Malika moves to an educational institute in Chandigarh, she finds it difficult to cope with its unfamiliar and immoral gender norms. The discordance between her mobility imaginary and the reality of living in an urban space also takes a toll on her relationship with her childhood friends. Eventually, she manages this conflict by taking up accommodation as a paying guest with a family in Chandigarh. This illustrates Malika's efforts to integrate some aspects of rural morality in an urban space. The experiences of the left behind wives elucidate that even after marrying well established migrant men, the young women have to navigate around restrictions on clothing, employment and physical mobility while waiting for their own migration.

A mobility trajectory like Malika's is rare, as most young women in the village are in a transitional stage and are waiting for mobility. Thus, Malika's experience is particularly instructive not only because it charts a unique process in the village, but also because it points out the necessity of cultural integration in projects of mobility. It questions the assumptions of a linear cultural transition from a 'backward' rurality to a 'modern' urbanity that underlie mobility imaginaries. Additionally, the experiences of the left behind wives demonstrate that marriage to migrants allows the young women to engage in public performances of class mobility but privately, it further entrenches them in normative gender and caste norms. The experiences of the left behind wives contrast with their own narratives and plans for independent mobility. Thus, women's practices around mobility reveal greater complexity and heterogeneity than what is implied by the mobility imaginaries circulating in the village space. Moreover, in attending to the young women's everyday practices around mobility, one can glean that despite the persistence of the ideal of mobility, in actuality, mobility involves a selective uptake of urbanity, normative gender norms and Westernisation rather than a neat transition.

9.3 Multiplicity of Middle-Classness

Given the difficulties of making a transition away from the village, the young women are

concurrently involved in projects of establishing mobility and a middle-class status within the village through education and consumption. However, it is not a single ideal of middle-classness that all the young women are attempting to emulate. Instead, the young women's own mobility aspirations, in interaction with the culture and positioning of their families, produces divergent notions of middle-classness. Young women from secure and especially those from educated middle-class families, attempt to claim proximity to urban spaces through the uptake of educational mobility and urban leisure. This propels the fashioning of urbanised middle-class identities, which correspond with stronger assertions of cultural sophistication and open-mindedness. Young women from these families strive for higher levels of education and concurrently, they pursue high-status employment and migration as avenues of mobility.

In less secure families, while the young women seek proximity to some ideas of urban modernity, they are not constructing urbanised identities. Instead, in their interactions with education, fashion and food, they try to strike a balance between rural and urban cultures. Also, especially for young women from less secure migrant families, attaining high-status employment is not an important component of their mobility plans. They often seek some form of low-status employment in the private sector or work from home as they wait for migration through marriage. They are also more likely to see their education as a conduit for migration and as preparing them to take on the role of a modern migrant. Thus, diverse constructions of middle-class identity correspond with different ideas of mobility, appropriate femininity, culture and caste identity, which will be explored in the next two sections.

9.3.1 Appropriate Femininity

Young women's constructs of middle-classness concur with different ideas of appropriate femininity. Young women from secure and especially those from educated middle-class families, claim proximity to the urban middle class. Concurrently, their view of appropriate gender norms aligns with the urban milieu and with a more liberal notion of female mobility. They travel longer distances for education, adorn urban fashions and maintain romantic relationships away from the purview of the community. This notion of female mobility also arises in some secure migrant families such as Malika's. In fact, in defining norms of appropriate behaviour, the security with which a family can claim a middle-class status is more important than its family culture.

In contrast, in less secure middle-class families, the terms of negotiation are very different. In these families, the young women engage in a more explicit balancing between their aspirations for mobility and their parents' concerns around female modesty and respectability. In these families, the construct of appropriate femininity is defined through the balancing act that the young women perform between pre-existing cultural frames and the new cultures that exist outside the village. This balancing act translates into the young women carrying out more cautious and moderated negotiations around education and the uptake of urban fashions. In these families, the young women's very access to education is precarious and hinges on the family's financial state. Consequently, the young women are more careful about demonstrating alignment with rural morality and gender norms in their grooming and fashion. Often, these young women make fashion choices that demonstrate a proximity to urban styles while also retaining modesty. Importantly, these constructs of appropriate femininity are facilitated by their parents' varying valuations of not just female mobility, but also urbanity and rurality. This will be further elaborated in the next section.

Evidently, the construct of appropriate femininity defined vis-à-vis family culture and positioning, shapes the young women's negotiations around education, consumption and mobility. While young women from educated families appear to engage in stronger assertions of female mobility, these navigations are also shaped by a family culture that is seeking alignment with urbanity. Thus, as is repeatedly illustrated throughout this thesis, the young women's autonomy cannot be gleaned through radical transformations, but rather, through the everyday negotiations that occur within the confines set forth by their families.

9.3.2 Middle-Class Femininity

The notion of appropriate femininity constructed by families and young women in Chaheru reflects the shifting conditions of women's autonomy among upwardly mobile Dalit families. As discussed in Section 1.6.5, among middle-class Dalit families, upper-caste ideas are selectively adapted for projects of class mobility (Kapadia, 1995; Still, 2017). In Chaheru, based on the type of middle-class identity claimed, different upper-caste norms are selected and adapted. Among educated and secure middle-class families, the liberal attitude towards female mobility and sexuality echoes gender ideals of the predominantly upper-caste urban middle class.

Less secure middle-class families evoke ideas of female honour and respectability in their curtailment of women's movement, clothing and educational choices. They reference the conservative gender norms of the rural upper castes. However, many times, these norms of respectability are made more applicable to the younger women in the house as older women, like Babita, engage in more open interactions with the opposite sex and their physical mobility is not bound by ideas of respectability[219].

Despite their appropriation of different upper-caste norms, middle-class families converge in their preference for high-status female employment. Across differently positioned middle-class families, young women withdraw from low-status employment and choose to take tuitions or do stitching work at home as they wait to attain more respectable forms of employment[220]. Thus, especially among secure middle-class families, two ideas of femininity came forth. Along with the withdrawal of women from low-status work which echoes ideas of female honour, there is a concurrent move towards urban ideas of female mobility. This aligns with the construct of middle-class femininity purported by Radhakrishnan (2008), wherein women's claim to status is no longer predicated on their fluency in domestic roles. In order to establish a middle-class status, they seek to participate in high-status and respectable forms of employment. Similarly, in Chaheru, while the young women align with parental expectations, they also assert the importance of acquiring high-status employment and education. Across different middle-class families, the construction of appropriate middle-class femininity hinges on the young women's balancing different cultural milieu and expectations.

9.3.3 Cultural Orientation

As discussed above, the young women's fashion and grooming choices reveal the degree of comfort that their families, and by extension, they have with urban culture. While their fashion choices are defined largely by their family's level of class security, their food practices are shaped by their family's occupational culture. In addition, family food practices also reveal differing cultural orientations that map onto the type of middle-class identity the young women seek. Among educated families, there is a move towards diversification of food habits and an

[219] In addition to her more open interactions with men in the village, Babita also claimed that she was not shy about walking around in the village and did not, in fact, curtail her physical mobility. On one occasion, when there was no water in the bathroom, she took a bath in the courtyard under the tap installed there. Thus, Babita experienced a higher, albeit different, kind of autonomy than her daughters did.
[220] Among secure middle-class families, even older women withdraw from manual work.

uptake of food items from different regions of India. Food practices in such families are more similar to those of families residing in cities like Delhi and Chandigarh. This aligns with the more urbanised middle-class identity that young women from educated families are fashioning. In contrast, migrant and self-employed families continue to practice more rural food habits and cooking styles. Young women from these families also integrate aspects of rural culture in their claims for urban modernity and mobility. Taken together, the young women's consumption practices across fashion and food are tied to the cultural orientations that underlie their middle-class identity.

9.3.4 Caste Identity

The young women's everyday discourse suggest a decline in caste as a praxis of identity and mobility. Ideas of caste identity are only drawn upon to support and bolster claims of class mobility. Like the varying constructions of appropriate femininity, the young women's middle-class identity shapes the extent to which they draw on and appropriate ideas of caste in their project of class mobility. Young women from more educated and secure middle-class families suggest that their class positioning allows them to pass the stigma that is associated with their lower-caste identity and interact openly with the upper castes. They often draw upon the negative stereotypes of backwardness, illiteracy and vulgarity associated with the lower castes to distance themselves from the lower-class families in the village. Young women from other middle-class families only mention caste in passing when discussing the stereotypes attached to Chamars. Also, on the rare occasions when they depicted less 'sophisticated' behaviour, they drew attention to their own 'Chamarness'. This points to continuities in internalised ideas of Dalit backwardness. It is only in the case of Nina, whose natal family has been strongly associated with Dera Ballan, that there is an effort to associate with one's caste identity and harness caste pride. Caste narratives, especially those pertaining to caste pride, were absent from the discourses of the other young women.

As pointed out earlier, the diminishing importance of caste among the young women may be linked to the village's caste homogeneity and my limited observation of the young women in more heterogeneous caste environments. However, this pattern is also indicative of a new paradigm of lower-caste mobility, which is not predicated on caste identity (Beteille, 1992; Beteille, 1996; Sheth, 1999). As discussed in Section 1.6.3, the 'new middle-class' identity purports that middle-class positioning is no longer defined by one's caste rank, but rather by

economic achievements and improved interaction with the upper castes (Ram, 1988). Belonging to the new middle class relies on professional employment, education credentials and most importantly, the performance of modern consumption (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Donner & De Neve, 2011; Fernandes, 2006; Jaffrelot & Van Der Veer, 2008; Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2003). Educated and secure middle-class families in Chaheru can be seen to be most strongly emulating this ideal of the 'new middle class' as their orientation towards urban consumption and education is not only tied to marking their distinction from the lower classes, but also establishing their proximity to the urban middle class. Thus, they are embroiled in acquiring the language, know-how and mannerisms associated with urban middle-class cultures. This repertoire of cultural knowledge facilitates the young women's ability to communicate and compete with upper castes in elite spaces.

However, it is important to note that despite the discursive undermining of caste and the primacy of class, caste continues to be reproduced through arranged and endogamous marriages. The openness of parents to premarital inter-caste relationships is contrasted with actual marriage practices. In order to understand the incongruence between subversive discourses of caste and conventional marriage practices, it is useful to draw on the work of Ahuja and Ostermann (2015). They note that while the number of inter-caste marriages have not necessarily risen, there is an openness to such alliances, especially among the upwardly mobile or upper-class lower castes. They assert that instead of only measuring the outcome, which is inter-caste marriage, one should focus on the interest in intermarriage, captured by the positive response to an out of caste profile, as they believe it is a better indicator of social distance. Also, the final outcome of marriage is mediated by more complex factors than one's openness to inter-caste alliances. It is possible, for instance, that someone who is open to an inter-caste marriage, may decline such an alliance because of the groom's employment, his level of education, family set up, etc (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015) .

Status emerges as an important mediator in determining openness to inter-caste marriage as people's marriage decisions are guided by the desire to enhance or maintain their status. Respondents were more likely to express an interest in inter-caste marriage when they could leverage their pre-existing status or endowment to gain one they lacked. Among the lower castes, those who were economically better off were more positively predisposed to an inter-caste marriage. Among the upper castes, those who were middle class were more interested in inter-caste marriage than those who were wealthy. The economically less well-to-do lower

castes and the economically well-off upper castes, both stood to gain less from intermarriage, as they either did not have the status endowments for an exchange or already possessed high-status endowments, respectively. Specifically, lower-caste women from weaker economic backgrounds were more concerned about the social distance between their prospective partners and themselves. In contrast, lower-caste women from wealthy backgrounds felt that their higher socio-economic status made them a suitable match for all castes. Inter-caste relationships and marriage also emerge as natural outcomes of increasing mobility among the lower castes as when they join the ranks of the middle classes, their economic positioning allows them to dissociate from their caste status (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2015).

Thus, even in determining marriage outcomes, caste interacts with class positioning to determine the discursive openness to inter-caste marriage as well as the propensity for inter-caste marriage. While the young women in Chaheru are not partaking in inter-caste marriages yet, their openness to the possibility and the discursive appeal of class over caste points to the shifting paradigm of lower-caste mobility. Thus, while contemporary marriage practices reveal continuities in caste norms, the discourses on caste, wherein caste identity is drawn upon to support the processes of class differentiation[221], reveal the increasing importance of class status. Class identity is not only expressed through practices and discourses around education and consumption, but also by laying claim to urban and Western cultures. This strong aspiration for physical and cultural movement away from the village can be probed and interpreted as an emerging paradigm for class mobility among lower-caste communities.

9.4 Contributions

Previous work on lower-caste communities has either emphasised the continuities in caste or pointed out the primacy attached to class over caste in forging upwardly mobile identities among lower-caste communities. As discussed in Section 1.6.2, a dominant strand of the literature on lower-caste mobility asserts that conditions of liberalisation and economic growth have not led to a reduction in caste discrimination (Deshpande, 2011; Deshpande & Newman, 2007; Heyer, 2014; Still, 2014; Thorat, 2002; Thorat & Newman, 2007; Walker, 2008). This work points out that the attainment of certain qualifications does not allow Dalits to surpass

[221] In fact, even when caste identity is explicitly drawn upon by the young women, it is not unrelated to goals of class mobility. Specifically, on the trip to Benares, Nina draws upon her identity as a Punjabi Chamar. This discourse around her regional caste identity allows Nina to establish her separation from the low-status local population and present herself as closer to Benares' respectable middle-class.

forms of historical disadvantage that are linked to a lack of social networks and the inability to demonstrate class competence. An alternative and less prominent strand of literature on the same subject acknowledges the decline of caste in projects of lower-caste mobility (Beteille, 1992; Beteille, 1996; Fuller, 1996; Ram, 1988; Sheth, 1999). This thesis situates itself within the second strand of literature on the 'new middle class' as it examines the ways in which the young women are attempting to access idioms of class mobility not only through the prism of caste but also gender and culture.

Admittedly, in the context of Chaheru, the historical disadvantages associated with caste and class status constrain the young women's ability to access high-status employment. Young women are often unable to access elite educational institutes due to their insecure economic status. Concomitantly, they are unable to develop fluency in English, competence in urban and Western mannerisms and access strong social networks of well-placed Dalits[222] (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2014). This limits the young women's ability to compete for high-status employment positions and they often articulate a sense of being 'left behind'. Moreover, when they actually seek to move away from the village, either through education or marriage, the young women are often grappling with internalised orientations towards the rural and restrictive gender norms.

While remaining in the village, the young women often compared themselves with family and community members who have been able to mark a shift away from the village space and expressed feeling 'stuck'. The ability to move away through high-status employment or migration was the main source of differentiation among the young women. The increasing focus on mobility or movement away from the village in Chaheru can be understood with regard to a strong migration culture and the resultant sharp distinctions between those who have moved away and those who are left behind.

Others have also discussed a palpable 'mobility ethos' in upwardly mobile lower-caste communities. In fact, Osella and Osella (2000) point out that among the Izhavas, mobility is a form of social identification (Naudet, 2008; Osella & Osella, 2000, p. 13). In the case of Chaheru, mobility operates as a lexicon for class identity, but it also suggests the cultural

[222] While there are some Dalit families in the village engaged in government employment, they are concentrated in low-level positions. Also, these families are a minority.

transition and upheaval involved in projects of class mobility. The mobility imaginary invokes a dichotomy not only between the village and bahar, but also between the rural and the urban.

Thus, mobility can be seen as an emic narrative which not only captures class aspirations, but also the cultural transitions and conflicts involved in class mobility. This notion of mobility is not tied to tangible outcomes and is more focused on its processes. Even in the absence of desirable outcomes, the aspiration for mobility is an impetus for shaping mobile subjectivities and new forms of social differentiation. This construct of mobility can be applied to understand the social and cultural dynamics of class mobility among lower-caste youth in diverse contexts. In attending to the cultural dynamics of class differentiation, it is possible to see youth as invested in a more complex process of social change and identity formation than what is revealed by mobility outcomes.

This approach to the study of mobility derives from this study's methodological choice to locate itself in the homes and everyday routines of the young women. In these spaces, I was not observing delimited events during which agency was activated and a particular mobility goal was achieved. Rather, as the young women went about their daily routines, they were making regular decisions about 'appropriate' gender practices, education, fashion and food. Thus, the young women's routine lives were implicated in the larger social and cultural processes and while they were not completely delinked from tangible outcomes around agency and mobility, they were not defined by them either. Even in the absence of desirable mobility outcomes such as migration and high-status employment, the young women engaged in evolving negotiations around education, consumption and migration to assert their middle-class status and proximity to mobility.

In addition to unravelling the cultural aspects of class projects, this thesis differentiates and complicates the narrative about Dalit woman. As has been pointed out by Ciotti (2017), the dominant image of the passive and victimised Dalit woman serves to construct the experiences of Dalit women only through their oppression and caste (Ciotti, 2013; Ciotti, 2017). In contrast, in locating itself in the everyday negotiations of the young women, the thesis is able to uncover these young women as multifaceted individuals who are shaped by their interactions with rural and urban cultures, gender norms, mobility imaginaries, education and ideas of class mobility. Moreover, the young women are not merely responding to the limitations put forth by their family's cultural and economic milieu. They attempt to negotiate access to 'appropriate' forms

of education and consumption that align with parental expectations and their own aspirations for mobility. This idea of a negotiated and contextualised form of autonomy captures "the processual and generational nature of agency" (Ciotti, 2013, p. 55; Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1998; Mahmood, 2006). Much like the above-mentioned construct of mobility, this notion of agency is not about isolating particular outcomes that can be defined as agentive. Rather, it is invested in the processes and interactions that the young women undertake to define their identity, status and proximity to mobility.

While the present work captures the resonance of mobility, it is limited in working within a caste homogenous space and observing the young women mostly in the village and their homes. It is possible, therefore, that in caste heterogeneous spaces, away from their families and homes, these young women operate on different ideas of mobility, caste and class. Future work can refine and develop this construct of mobility and assess its relevance in understanding lower-caste mobility across contexts.

9.5 Conclusion

This thesis produces a gendered analysis of middle-class formations and contributes to the scarce literature on Dalit women in Punjab[223]. Moreover, it locates the young women as spearheading the important process of outlining the cultural contours of Dalit mobility. This project is oriented at defining and inculcating appropriate mannerisms, language and knowledge around urban and Western goods, norms and leisure activities (Appadurai, 1986). This marks the Dalit communities' development of cultural resources which will enhance their ability to compete with the upper castes and upper classes. Especially when this cultural project is seen in the context of Ad-dharmi mobility in the Doaba region, it appears as a natural and important stepping stone to forging enduring forms of mobility (Jodhka, 2002; Judge & Bal, 2009; Ram, 2009; Singh et al., 2012)

Despite the larger implications of the young women's navigations around Dalit mobility, it is important to remember that these young women comprise a small minority. Moreover, while they are buttressing an important cultural transition, they themselves face difficulties in

[223] There are only a handful of studies on Dalit women in contemporary Punjab. Also, some of the work on Dalit women in other parts of India is limited and while discussing the experiences of differently positioned women, it does not centralise the narratives of women (for example see Ciotti, 2006; Still, 2011).

accessing mobility outcomes. Marriage to well-settled migrants, while facilitating class mobility, does not always translate into the young women's movement away from the village. The young women's increasing ability to take up education at more elite institutes like LPU or Kamla Nehru College induces a stronger possibility of attaining mobility outcomes. But even upon attaining access to better quality education, the young women lack the guidance and mentorship to make the transition to high-status employment. An example of this is Somika's struggles with securing government employment. Despite belonging to an educated family and pursuing education at Kamla Nehru College, Somika has been trying unsuccessfully for many years to attain government employment. Towards the end of my fieldwork, she enrols herself for preparatory classes, but her navigations around mobility remain tentative and unsure.

When I returned to the village for a brief visit, six months after my fieldwork, I found that Somika had joined a private job in Jalandhar for a brief period. Other young women had also experienced a shift in their mobility plans and practices. They were at different points in their mobility journeys. Kavita had developed more clarity about her reduced chances for migration and had, instead, decided to pursue opportunities for employment. She had even joined the preparatory classes for government exams for a few weeks and was optimistic that she would be able to convince her brother to allow her to work in Jalandhar. The last time I spoke to her, which was a few months ago, she told me that her sister in the UK had found a boy for her marriage. The boy was her sister's brother-in-law and worked as a lawyer in the UK. However, a month later, she told me that the boy has not been able to come to Punjab yet and that when the *rishta* is finalised, she will update me. Thereafter, I received no updates on her marriage and only know that she has still not been able to secure employment.

Gunita's life also underwent some changes, as her brother returned from the Gulf and her family became further steeped in debt and financial insecurity. While the reasons for her brother's sudden return were not discussed, a few weeks after his return, he was enrolled in a drug de-addiction program. Her brother's presence hampered Gunita's independence, especially when it came to using her phone[224]. She was also expected to be more involved with the household work. She often fetched her brother food, water and clothes, and also approached her mother if he needed money. In terms of her education, Gunita's struggle with her

[224] She became more discreet about using her phone and told me not to mention her phone in front of her brother. When I inquired more, she said that if he found out she has a phone, he will also ask for one.

coursework persisted, but she resolved that she would pursue a beautician course after her undergraduate degree so that she could make some money and support her family.

Amidst uncertainty and the shifting contours of immobility and mobility, some of the young women were successful in attaining mobility outcomes. Rajini graduated her MA program with top honours[225] and managed to secure a job at SSDMS. Nina and Bikram successfully migrated to New Zealand. Initially, Nina worked while Bikram completed his course. Then, within a year, they both found jobs, albeit temporary part-time ones. Thus, the young women's life stories reveal different navigations around mobility. Some of them have been more successful in attaining concrete mobility outcomes and moving away from the village. But this does not imply that they have made a smooth transition towards urbanity and Westernisation. They often continue to struggle to claim belonging to aspirational spaces outside the village. Others who have been unable to move away continue to adapt their plans and preferences in the hope of mobility. Despite the obstacles they face, stemming from their familial ethos and structural positioning, the young women demonstrate the ability to adapt and continually claim forms of negotiated mobility, even without moving away.

[225] She came second in the whole college and her name was also in the newspapers

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Appendix

Dera Ballan

Regardless of their religious affiliations, for the people of Chaheru, Dera Ballan continues to be an important part of the social and educational landscape of the village due to the proximity of its affiliated school. In the village, the construct of Dera Ballan as a religious institution derives from the interaction with Sant Sarwan Dass Model School (henceforth referred to as SSDMS) and its adjoining gurdwara. Most villagers were hesitant to openly critique Dera Ballan, so they talked about their views on SSDMS instead.

A number of villagers recount that initially when the school opened, it offered free education for the Ad-dharmi community. Consequently, people enrolled their children in the school. At this time, the principal of the school was a man who was popularly called Joy Sir and the school, under his supervision, functioned very well. While there are different versions of the story of Joy Sir[226], they all concur that he maintained a strictness with the teachers and ensured higher quality education for the children. He built a house behind the school and genuinely cared about serving and bettering the Ad-dharmi community. But after he left, the quality and moral standard of the school seem to have declined and the perception and reputation of SSDMS have undergone a shift.

In contemporary dealings with the school, Reema, the left behind wife of well-settled migrant, expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in the school's admission process. Young women such as Kavita and Rajini, who are seeking teaching jobs, did not think about SSDMS as a possible choice for employment because they believe that the school only accepts people who have references. Thus, among most of the villagers, the perception of SSDMS is that it is centred on moneymaking and is not concerned with their struggles and upliftment. Bikram, an alumnus of SSDMS recounted that initially, people from the village used to regularly go to the gurdwara next to the school. But then a senior member of the gurdwara's

[226] The story about the first principal of the school was that he was very good at his job. He was strict and fair in his dealings with the community. The official story about him, which is also reproduced by a number of villagers, is that he lost his job because he was embroiled in a finance scam and went underground to prevent arrest. An alternative version of this story is that Joy sir was against increasing the fees and felt that the school was meant for poor children. So, the management created the whole case around him to remove him from the school. The second version of the story is held by a number of lower-class villagers who perceive the school's management as being corrupt and immoral.

organising committee appears to have commented that the people were just visiting the gurdwara to eat *langar*[227]. Ever since then, the people have stopped going as frequently to the gurdwara as before. Thus, for most people in the village, Dera Ballan and its affiliated institutes are seen to be excluding the poor. This breeds distrust, resentment and distancing from the school and Dera Ballan, especially among the lower-class villagers[228].

Moreover, the active involvement of migrants and the internationalisation of the Ravidassia movement has contributed to the elite image of the movement[229]. The involvement and centralisation of migrants is also evident in the running and management of the Ravidass Jayanti celebrations in Benares. During the event, the NRI devotees live, eat and congregate in a separate area which is cordoned off from the general public. Most of the big donations of money and gold are made by NRIs. The elevated positioning of the NRIs within the movement is not resented by the locals, but is normalised and aspired for. Moreover, NRIs and their donations are linked to the movement's ability to display a religious spectacle.

The involvement of and the funding from Ravidassias residing in North America and Britain have been credited with expanding Dera Ballan from a religious organisation to one focused on community development and welfare. Migrant funding has been directed towards building Dera Ballan's congregation hall, Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Hospital, Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Eye Hospital and SSDMS (Singh et al., 2012). Also, the Dera Ballan building itself is impressive due to its grandeur and high-quality facilities. It boasts of a well-equipped congregation hall, a shrine, a langar hall[230], an ayurvedic dispensary and a residential building for guests who want to stay overnight[231].

[227] This is free food served as religious offering to worshipers at a gurdwara. The providing of langar is seen as an important component of *seva* or selfless service in Sikhism.
[228] The village level association of Dera Ballan and the Ravidassia movement with elitism mirrors the institutional operation of the movement. While visiting Dera Ballan, I did not see any 'poor' followers or people who appear dishevelled and badly dressed. On the contrary, while everyone did not appear to be wealthy or equally well off, most people were well turned out. In their ability to maintain a neat and put together appearance, the devotees align with the middle-class emphasis on being respectable.
[229] https://ravidassia.wordpress.com
[230] The space where all visitors, regardless of caste, class and gender, are served food for free.
[231] In fact, similar language has been used to describe the Radhaswami Beas Dera, which people claim maintains a high level of cleanliness, good facilities, reasonably priced and tasty food and large green spaces. Somika says, "It is so well maintained that it is hard to believe a place like this exists in India."

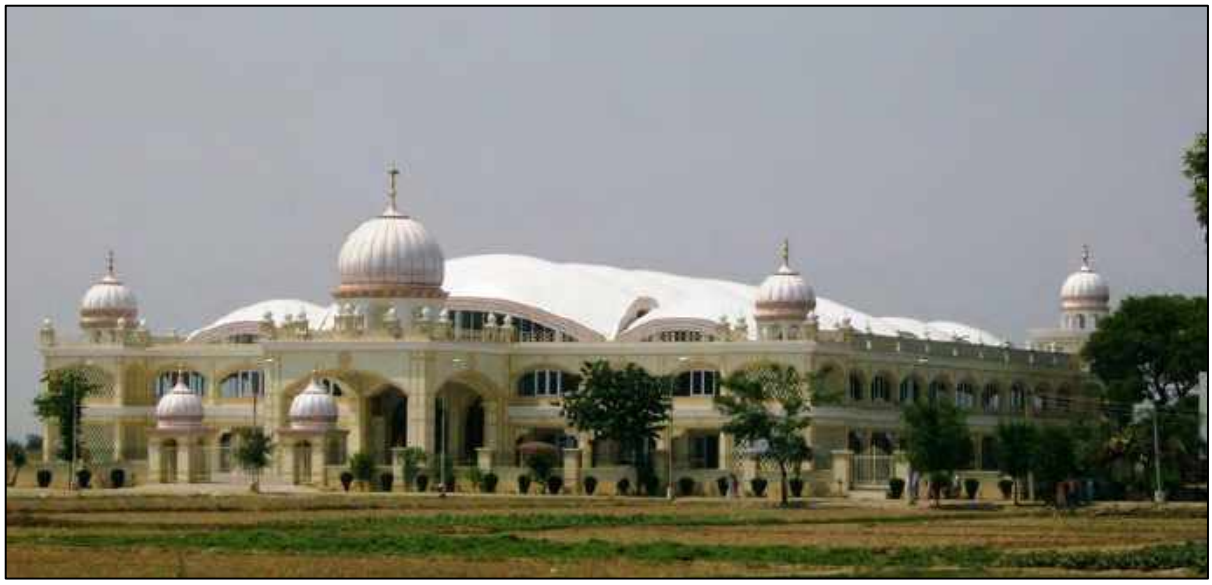

Figure 16.0: Dera Sachkhand Ballan

In addition to the focus on facilities and cleanliness, which appeals to middle-class sensibilities, Dera Ballan fosters caste pride through explicit displays of status and wealth. Notably, the Ravidass temple in Benares has an outer coating of gold and the statue of Guru Ravidass that is kept inside the temple has a crown made of gold. These displays have been made possible through migrant donations and are a source of pride for the devotees who see such displays as paralleling the grandeur of Sikhism. Thus, not just in its perception among the villagers but also in its institutional discourse, Dera Ballan comes forth as an elite space. It is likely to appear alluring to upwardly mobile middle-class families who are attempting to gain a higher status in their local context. The ability of one's religious identity to act as a signifier of one's status thus comes to the fore in Chaheru, especially amongst the middle-class families.

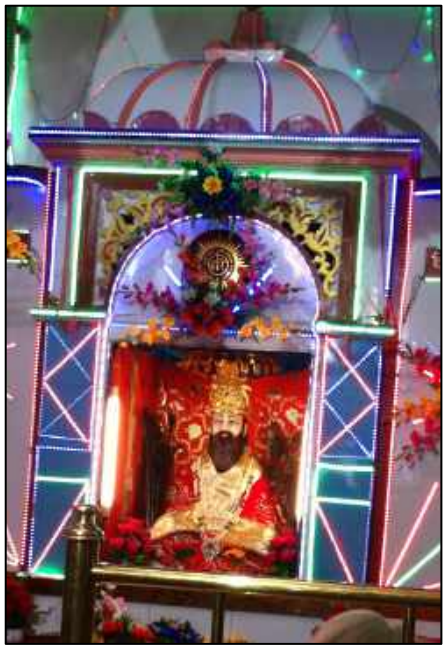

Figure 17.0: This is the celebrated statue of Guru Ravidass in the Ravidass temple in Benares, in which Guru Ravidass is wearing a gold crown.

Religious Practices

Contrary to the image of a religiously homogenous space as posited by the literature on the Ravidassia movement (for example see Jodhka, 2004; Jodhka, 2009; Ram, 2004; Ram, 2009), there is immense heterogeneity and flexibility around religious practices in Chaheru. Most families continue to follow a number of Hindu rituals and festivals as well as partake in the celebration of *gurpurab*. It is only families that strictly follow the teachings of a particular Dera that dissociate from Hindu rituals. Also, families that are politically aligned with BSP critique the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)[232] and Brahmanism and don't celebrate Hindu festivals, even though they do maintain a reverence for Hindu gods and goddesses[233]. Most families, however, followed the teachings of a particular Dera[234]. In Chaheru, a common assumption was that everyone has been baptised at a Dera and those who were not, were encouraged to do so. Religion and participation in religious activities operated as a way of demonstrating respectability, even among lower class families.

[232] RSS is an acronym for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and is a right-wing, Hindi nationalist volunteer organisation, which is widely regarded as the parent organisation of the BJP.
[233] The private adherence to Hindu gods while maintaining a public image of being opposed to Hinduism can also be seen as part of political leveraging by the people.
[234] It is common in Punjab for lower caste families to pay allegiance to a Dera.

However, eclectic religious practices and being part of a Dera were not mutually exclusive. Most people had a small temple within their homes which housed pictures of Sikh gurus, Hindu gods and the guru of the Dera that they were affiliated with. Only those families that maintained a strict adherence to a particular Dera or religion did not have pictures of multiple gods in their homes. In Chaheru, families that followed eclectic religious practices and were not affiliated with a particular Dera were usually poorer. Some of them were also followers of Dera Sacha Sauda[235]. Most aspiring and secure middle-class families demonstrated allegiance to a particular guru. These families had posters of their guru not just in the temple space, but in other parts of their homes as well.

A number of married younger women[236] also wore lockets with either the name of their guru or his message inscribed on it. For middle-class families, beyond demonstrating respectability, participation in religious activities was also a way to signal their higher status to other members of the caste community. Saavala (2003) points out that engagement with religious practices, including those traditionally associated with upper caste Hindus, was not oriented towards demonstrating caste mobility to the upper castes. Rather, these practices were oriented towards consolidating one's class status within the caste community.

In Chaheru, middle-class families were not attempting to engage with upper caste rituals, but rather, with the precepts and activities of various Deras or religious movements. At an institutional level, these movements were an affront to upper caste religious practices since they mostly comprised of lower castes and offered an alternative route to social honour and respectability. Thus, most middle-class families were followers of either Dera Radhaswami Beas, Sikhism or Dera Ballan.

In fact, those who were attached to the Ravidassia movement through Dera Ballan tended to be from either middle-class elite migrant families. Educated middle-class families dissociated from more caste-centric movements like the Ravidassia movement. They aligned themselves, instead, with more secular or upper caste religious movements like Radhaswami Beas or

[235] This is an alternative religious movement that is centred around the figure of Gurmeet Ram Rahim, the leader of this movement. Gurmeet Ram Rahim is a controversial figure who has made self-promotional movies and music. In August 2017, he was convicted of rape. In 2019, he was convicted for the murder of a journalist. The movement under Gurmeet Ram Rahim tended to attract poorer families in the village, but it did not enjoy the status claimed by other Dera-centric movements such as Dera Ballan and Radhaswami Beas.

[236] Generally, unmarried girls were not baptised by deras because it was assumed that upon marriage, young women would adopt the faith and the name of the marital family.

Sikhism respectively. Religious movements like Radhaswami Beas provide prestigious multi-caste networks that also allow families to override caste as a source of identity and establish respectability in the eyes of caste compatriots. These families perceive the caste-based Ravidassia movement as politicised and radical in its emphasis on a distinctive religious text and practice.

Many families that were not securely middle class or were aspiring to a middle-class status had not yet decided where they wanted to take *naam daan* or be baptised from. These families generally followed eclectic religious practices. For example, in Kavita's family, while her mother was a follower of Dera Ballan, she did not go to Dera Ballan and instead, frequented the *panji peer* in the village. Also, in Gunita's family, her mother, Babita, paid her respects to Hindu gods and celebrated Sikh festivals but she did not have allegiance to a particular Dera.

Figure 18.0: This is a shrine that is located at the outskirts of Chaheru and is often frequented by lower class and less secure middle-class families. It is called *panji peer*, which references the five great saints who are buried here. This religious site bears testimony to the pre-partition history of Sufism in the area.

Thus, alignment with high-status religious movements was associated with holding a secure middle-class position within the community. In the young women's narratives, however, religion did not feature as prominently. But this context of religious practices and movements indicates the social dynamics of Ad-dharmi mobility that lend credence and legitimacy to the young women's navigations around mobility. For example, the young women's desire to move away from the village space through migration can be contextualised with respect to the celebration and valuation of migrants in Dera Ballan.