

# **Marriage, Desire and Reproduction of Caste: A Study of Agarwal Baniyas of Delhi**

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Date: 20/7/17

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "Marriage, Desire and Reproduction of Caste: A Study of Agarwal Baniyas of Delhi" submitted by me to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for the award of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, embodies original research work done by myself and has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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## CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis to be placed before examiners for evaluation.

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## Abbreviation

RWA:	Resident's Welfare Association
ABAS:	Akhila Bhartiya Agarwal Sammelan
DPAS:	Delhi Parishad Agarwal Sammelan
AIVF:	All India Vaish Federation
IVF:	International Vaish Federation
ABVM:	Akhila Bhartiya Vaish Mahasammelan
AKAS:	Akhila Bhartiya Agarwal Sammel
HUF:	Hindu Undivided Family
NDMC:	National Municipal Development Corporation
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
MCD:	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MASEMR:	Maharaja Agrasen Scientific Education and Medical Research
CPWD:	Central Public Works Department
PWD:	Public Works Department
DDA:	Delhi Development Authority
VHP:	Vishnu Hindu Parishad
SANEWS:	Shri Aggrasain North Excellence Welfare Society
MASERS:	Maharaja Agrasen Scientific Education and Research Society
MATES:	Maharaja Agrasen Technical Education Society
MAIT:	Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Technology
MAU:	Maharaja Agrasen University
MAIMS:	Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Management Studies
BHU:	Banaras Hindu University



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

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#### Introduction

The central question that this thesis engages with is how do upper caste groups reproduce in the urban? This question is addressed by keeping the women's question at the heart of the enquiry. In the 'modern' capital city of Delhi, inequalities get articulated in a language of class, occupation and wealth. Privilege is attributed to one's individual hard work, merit and perseverance. This makes one wonder if a prism of caste and gender is even tenable to study upper-caste groups in the contemporary. Does caste influence and mould their life chances, intimate decision making, and choices? Has caste for the upper caste groups receded to the background, ensuring historical privilege but allowing the secular aspirations of class to function? What are the sites that should be investigated to understand the contemporary working of caste? Is caste no longer a social-political-economic resource for upper caste groups? And; What does it mean to be an upper-caste woman, man and group in urban India?

Questions on caste and gender in the postcolonial context have been invariably studied in a disjointed manner. When they come together it is through an exclusive focus on the Dalit women. In the mid 1990s, with a re-strengthening of the Dalit movement and a continual caste blind nature of the mainstream feminist movement led Dalitbahujan feminist scholars to postulate the Dalit feminist standpoint. This 'difference' of Dalit women was historically located in the caste counter movements and public spheres in which Dalit women were active participants. The publications of many Dalit women's autobiographies in the last two years, led to a correction of historical erasures, articulation of upper-caste oppression and an internal critique of patriarchy by Dalit men. However, in these writings the Dalit woman was either pitched against the upper caste woman or she understood her own circumstances vis-à-vis the upper caste woman's whose 'difference'

was not historically investigated. In the rural context, the upper caste woman in these writings appeared as an aid to oppressive structures, gatekeeper of the Hindu religious hierarchical order and responsible for demarcating and defining spaces, touch, manners of interaction and discrimination. Within existing scholarship, there is usually a single dimensional engagement with the upper caste woman, typifying her in the process. This combined with an exclusive focus on Dalit woman, makes it appear that the intersectionality of caste and gender begins and ends with Dalit women.

The selective invisibilisation of caste from select upper caste contexts has further been exacerbated by the journey of caste in its urban 'modern' locale. The questions posed above will be addressed by using an upper caste Agarwal *jati* (caste or sub caste group) in Delhi as my case study. Agarwal is predominantly a business caste, although now members from this community are also moving into politics and professional spheres. Those into business have a visible presence in parts of North India. They own industries, shops, trusts, schools, hospitals, printing presses and restaurants in Delhi. Numerous enterprises are named 'Agarwal' or 'Gupta' so much so that elderly men in caste associations are worried that these shops were run not by Agarwals but Chamars who wish to benefit from the economic might of the community. Members of this caste group migrated from parts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agarwals are often clubbed with businessmen hailing from Marwar region of Rajasthan-the Marwaris. Combining business groups erases their historical, regional specificity and different journeys of growth. Popular writings on business communities in India naturalises their business acumen, flexibility, and foresightedness (Das 2014, Inamdar 2014). In academic writings, it is the male entrepreneurial identity which focussed upon (Damodaran, 2008; Hardgrave, 1969; Markovits, 2009; Rudner, 1994; Timberg, 1978).

This chapter has been structured in the following manner: The present trends in the scholarship on caste and intersectionality of caste and gender studies is discussed in section one and two. In the third section, the research framework for the study is discussed. The fourth section discusses the field and the research methodology and in the fifth section chapterisation is discussed.



### *'Modern' Contexts of Caste*

The urban contexts of caste with neoliberalism have had a complex effect on the way caste functions in 'modern' India. Dumont's (1970) thesis on the substantialisation of caste following Ghurye (1969) attempts to capture the contradictory processes of caste in the modern period. This thesis still presents itself as a departure point in studies on caste. Many take substantialisation of caste as a given, while others dispute its validity or wrestle with Dumont's thesis to better understand the contemporary working of caste. Dumont (1970) argues that:

[There is] a transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no interdependence and in which there is no privileged level no firm units, to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* ... as a substance. (page 227, emphasis in original)

What Dumont postulates is that as the vertical structure of caste crumbles, it is replaced by a horizontal one making social inequality on the basis of caste questionable. Separation and competition get replaced by interdependence and hierarchical ranking gets replaced by a horizontal co-existence. However, this is not a totalizing thesis, Dumont (1970) qualifies that this change occurs at the politico-economic level and this is enveloped in a religious ideology. Scholars have disputed Dumont's last claim, by showing how the religious and the ideological framing of caste no longer constitutes the contemporary reality of caste. Some studies argue that this has led to a decline in ritual hierarchies with the principle of purity and pollution becoming non-tenable (Fuller, 1996; Mayer, 1996; Srinivas, 1995). Srinivas (1995) called the decline in ritual hierarchies the 'secularisation' of caste which was accompanied by a process of sanskritisation. Sanskritisation increased rituals in ceremonial functions which were accompanied by a decrease in rituals in every life like in schools, offices and marketplaces because of secularisation (Beteille, 2012; Srinivas, 1995). Some studies contest the erosion of untouchability. By focusing on the relations between caste Hindus and Dalits studies argue that discrimination through the

practices of untouchability and principles of purity and pollution continues to persist in rural areas (Mosse, 1994; Still, 2014). Studies in urban India show that moving beyond the traditional practices of discrimination, 'modern' forms of discrimination is through voluntary neighbourhood segregations (many times guided by dietary habits), and discrimination in private company recruitments. This inhibited the development of human capital for Dalits and created economic bottlenecks in entering sectors, which have predominantly being the forte of upper and middle castes (Deshpande, 2011; Newman and Jodhka, 2007; Prakash, 2015; Sadana and Thorat, 2009; Thorat and Attewell, 2007). From these studies, it is safe to discern that while in parts of rural and urban India, there is a decline in the traditional practices of untouchability, its 'modern' avatar is a constitutive part of economies and governs people's life chances.

The rest of Dumont's thesis, that is a move from 'structure' to 'substance' has taken caste studies in the following directions *First*, studies contest Dumont's reliance on the Brahmanical ideology in postulating his thesis on substantialisation (Gupta, 1984a: 1984b, Dirks, 1987). Gupta (1984a) argues for 'continuous hierarchies' and 'discrete castes' without the existence of a 'pure hierarchy' by showing that there is more than one ideology operating in the caste system which "adheres to similar values, but express the lived in situation differently and offer different guides to action" (page 1958). What Gupta (1984a; 1984b) is arguing is that as the vertical hierarchy gives way to a horizontal organisation of caste, each caste group has its own myth and origin stories which muddle and produces competing caste hierarchies.

*Second*, studies while admitting that the middle and new middle class comprised of segments of the upper-caste argue that class positions through culture and lifestyle determine inequality and difference (Donner, 2008; Fernandes, 2006; Liechty, 2003; Saavala, 2010). Hence in the last two decades, there have been numerous studies that have focused on the middle class in India. In these studies, class becomes the predominant analytical category and caste takes an unsaid role.

*Third*, some scholars that have focused on the professional middle class 'intelligentsia', argue that in urban spaces caste origins become increasingly irrelevant by delinking caste from occupation and marriage choices partially from endogamy rules (Beteille, 1996;

Beteille, 2012; Fuller, 1996). Beteille (1996) argues that status conscious modern urban India bases its distinctions on education, occupation and income. He argues that status differences might get articulated in a language of caste, but caste here does not pertain to a system of hierarchy. Fuller (1996) building on Beteille's argument, argues that class distinctions find cultural articulations across the world, and in India, the cultural component is provided by caste. Fuller (1996) argues that,

Members of the urban intelligentsia belonging to high castes can more safely dismiss the importance of their birth and readily employ caste as an idiom for class, than those belonging to low castes, because the latter are more aware of and sensitive to their lowly status within an elite in which they are a minority (page 17)

Caste in Beteille and Fuller's theorization loses its *material* bite or economic hold in urban India giving way to the secular concerns of class. Beteille and Fuller's positions stand contested by a large body of studies cited above to show the 'modern' economic practices of caste in urban India. Some of these studies have also privileged a political economic approach of caste to understand the economic changes (Carswell & Neve, 2013, Jeffrey, 2001). They argue that a fall in vertical hierarchies does not mean that caste inequalities stop persisting. Gopal Guru in a conversation with Jodhka (2012) reasserts the materiality of caste when he argues that "cultural difference may subsume within itself elements of both material and social hierarchy". A corollary of caste losing its economic hold on people is studies that argue for a privatisation of caste (Beteille, 1991; Fuller, 1996; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2015; Mayer, 1996; Mosse, 2012). Fuller (1996) argues that "people cannot openly speak of castes as unequal, they describe them as different" (page 13). It appears that people's public articulations are trimmed, while their private ideas about caste remain the same. What constitutes as the private or the public realm, however, is unclear.

*Fourth*, with caste becoming increasingly irrelevant to sections of the urban middle class and the privatisation of caste, studies argue that caste asserts its "peculiar tenacity" because of politics, or that politics is the reason for the sustenance of caste (Beteille, 2007:

48; 1996; 1991). This position has also been foregrounded by Ghurye (1969) and Srinivas (1962). Beteille (1991) argues that,

Caste has ceased to play an active role in the reproduction of inequality, at least at the upper levels of social hierarchy where it is no longer an important agent of either social placement or social control ... The recent attack on caste by egalitarians of both radical and liberal persuasions is misdirected even where it appears well-meaning. Caste should be attacked for its divisive role in electoral politics rather than its active role in the reproduction of inequality which is relatively small and clearly declining. The role of caste in politics is neither small nor declining. Caste is no longer an institution of any great strength among the influential urban intelligentsia, but it is an instrument of great force in mobilising political support in the country as a whole.

For some scholars in the political arena of caste studies, caste becomes an effective way to facilitate India's democracy (Kothari, 1970; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967). Others have studied the individual contexts of caste groups to show how they engage using their caste positions to fashion themselves as likely contenders in democratic politics and to challenge the control of upper castes in corridors of power (Micheluti, 2004; Narayan 2007; Jaffrelot, 2003). In Beteille's (1996) argument about the politics sustaining caste it appears that caste can function in 'modern' India only in its mobilisation capacity.

*Fifth*, as there is a move from 'structure' to 'substance', studies argue that internal heterogeneities within a caste group increases (Fuller, 1996; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2015; Seth 1999). Fuller (1996) argues,

... the substantialisation of caste at the ideological level is simultaneously contradicted at the empirical level by the increasing differentiation of status, power and wealth developing *within* each caste-a development which is itself contributing to the decline of clear-cut caste ranking and hence, paradoxically, to an

increasing normative emphasis on the difference *between* caste. Substantialisation is, in effect, a self-contradictory process, because as it develops castes actually become more internally heterogeneous (page 13, emphasis in original).

The internal heterogeneity within caste groups through a neo-Weberian definition of 'social class' was studied in Tamil Brahmins by Fuller and Narasimhan (2015) and they argue that Tamil Brahmins are a middle-class caste in the contemporary. Similar studies amongst the Dalits show the process of middle-class formation (Srinivas, 2016; Still, 2014). Parry (2007) questions Fuller's premise of internal differentiation within a caste group leading to a greater difference between caste groups. Using his ethnographic study in the steel town of Bhilai, he argues that there is a 'partial merging' of Hindu castes through marriage and inter-dining amongst the 'Hindu castes' (from Parry's description it appears he is referring to middle and lower caste groups) excluding the Dalits. Seth (1999) enters the internal heterogeneity within the caste group debate by using the de-ritualisation and politicisation of caste. He argues that it is difficult to capture the emergent stratification system in terms of 'pure' caste or class terms, however, he settles with the conceptual category of the 'new middle class'. The suffix 'new' according to him is because of a caste system which is much more diversified compared to the "old, upper caste oriented middle class" than that at the time of independence (page 2504). With ritualisation and sanskritisation losing its value, membership to the middle-class is through one's acquired traditional status and new lifestyles in the form of modern consumption. To summarise there are two close positions on the increase in heterogeneities within the caste group: (i) which shows processes of middle class formation within a caste group and an increase in differentiation within a caste group increasing separation with other caste group and (ii) which settles with the class identity of the 'new middle class' to understand internal differentiations.

*Sixth*, some scholars understand substantialisation as a form of ethnicisation (Barnett, 1977; Dirks, 2002; Fuller, 1996). Barnett (1977) argues that "caste inter-dependence gets replaced by regional caste bloc independence" (page 402). Fuller (1996) drawing on Weber argues that "status group stratification develops from perceived differences between styles of life, and if these differences are thought to be based on common descent

and are further reinforced by restrictions on intermarriage, in particular, status groups become ethnic groups” (page 22). It is unclear how substantialisation leads to the processes of ethnicisation of caste or what ethnicity means here; However, Fuller (1996) makes an important point about substantialisation as ethnicisation by arguing that this process helps make connections between the “politics of caste and religious nationalism” (page 24). He argues that an insistence on caste based solidarity has not inhibited the development of a broad Hindu identity juxtaposed against the religious minorities because of the ethnicisation of caste.

*Seventh*, studies on caste focus on its subjective dimensions and the modern “requirements of governmentality” (Bairy, 2010:14; Heierstad, 2017; Micheluti, 2004). Sharma and Searl-Chatterjee (1994) argue that Dumont encouraged us to think of “caste in terms of ideology rather than in terms of empirically observable groups of people having some kind of essential identity” (page 6). This move from identifying ‘essential’ traits to the realm of values and ideas underpinning caste then introduces the intersubjective dimension of caste. It introduces an element of flexibility, which in ‘modern’ India makes caste one amongst the many identity markers people have. Sharma and Searl-Chatterjee (1994) argue that caste as the action is something people “do” and not what is “done to them” (page 9). Hence, in Dalit studies, this has led to a focus on political consciousness and an increase in publication of bibliographies. This has led to debates on the centrality of experience in social science theorizations and about who gets to represent the experience of caste humiliation authentically (Guru, 2002, Sarukkai, 2007). The intersubjective aspect of caste has centralised the meanings people ascribe to their caste and the ways they identify or non-identify with their caste identities.

As seen from the description above, the post-Dumont phase of caste shows the complexity of understanding caste in the ‘modern’, while facilitating newer ways of thinking. Four points need to be distilled and reiterated from the above studies to anchor my investigation into intersectionalities of caste and gender in upper caste contexts: (i) levels of the caste system substantialising and not the system in its entirety; (ii) the effect it has on caste retaining its economic and social hold on individual’s life chances; (iii) the internal heterogeneities within a caste group and (iv) the inter-subjective meanings of

caste. Some of these points of entry (with the exception of Fuller and Narasimhan [2015]) have been used to study Dalit women and community although it is not explicitly stated.

## **Gender and Caste**

The post-colonial scholarship on caste and gender, while not directly engaging with debates on the substantialisation of caste have been facilitated by the changing nature of caste hierarchies. In the mid-1990s, scholars articulated the Dalit feminist standpoint critiquing the caste blindness of mainstream feminism (Guru, 1995; Rege, 1998). This was the post-Mandal moment when scores of upper-caste women had marched on streets defending the rights of their husbands and brothers in a language of citizenship, merit and class. Rege (1998) historicized the ‘difference’ of Dalit women’s position in Maharashtra within counter-publics and social movements of the 1970s and 1980s namely the Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Satyashodak Communist Party, Shramik Mukta Dal and Yuvak Kranti Dal. A strengthening of the Dalit feminist movement was happening at a time when the nationalist movements had finished resolving the women’s question vis-à-vis the colonial interventions in the public sphere. In independent India, hence middle class and upper caste women’s lives were relegated to the home where “nationalist patriarchy came to be normalised” (Chatterjee, 1989; Rao, 2003; Rege, 1998: WS 41). This relegation of women’s lives to the home, caste blindness of mainstream feminism and a simultaneous strengthening of Dalit feminism resulted in a lopsided development in the scholarship on caste with Dalit women becoming the sole actors of caste and gender studies. Rege (2006) evidences this lopsidedness by focusing on autobiographies published in Maharashtra. She argues that more than half the autobiographies published by women in the period 1950 to 1975 were accounts of companionate marriages and life sketches of their famous husbands. From the period 1976 to 2000, the autobiographies published were about women artists and wives of famous men. Reflecting on this categorization Rege asks-“why is the autobiography of companionate marriage, marital discord or making space in public sphere not referred to as the modern Brahmin women’s autobiography?” (page 50). It hence appears that while Dalit women became the exclusive actors of caste and gender intersectionalities, women of other castes had gone on to embrace the secular concerns of class.

There have been three kinds of scholarship in caste and gender studies, much of which continues to be about Dalit women: *first*, studies evidence the violence faced by Dalit women at the hands of upper caste men and women (Guru, 1994; Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991; Kannabiran, 2014; Parthsarathi, 2011) as well as Dalit men (Anandhi, 2013; Sujatha, 2014). Studies also show that Dalit women faced sexual violence because they are bearers of community honour (Chowdhry, 1997; Gupte, 2013). Violence against Dalits risen especially because their upward mobility restricts the ability of intermediate castes to enforce their ‘traditional’ power (Pandian, 2013). *Second*, ethnographies and autobiographies by Dalit women have questioned the historical erasure or Brahmanical rendering of Dalit histories, in the process rewriting history, asserting political agency and the community’s engagement with modernity (Ciotti, 2010; Pawar, 2015; Still, 2014;). *Third*, ethnographies on Dalit women in rural India shows how an upward mobility of men and families facilitated through a fall in vertical hierarchies; this has resulted in Dalit men wanting their wives to imbibe the demeanor and virtues of “submissiveness” and “self-sacrifice” associated with upper-caste women (Gough, 1993, Heyer, 2014, Kapadia, 1995: 249; Still, 2014). Kapadia (1996) argues that amongst the upwardly mobile rural Muthurajahs (Dalits) there is “both a liberal attitude towards caste hierarchy and a conservative attitude towards gender hierarchy” (page 251). Further showing the difference in the status of men and women within a caste group. Kapadia (1996) argues that,

in salaried Muthurajah families, the male salary earner, with his far greater education, his control of economic resources, and his spending power, belongs to a different economic class from his uneducated, nonearning, financially dependent wife. He has economic power, while she is financially dependent (page 252).

What emerges from these ethnographies is: *first*, the gendered working of caste ideologies and *second*, how caste differentiates and distinguishes women of upper and lower caste groups.

The sexual deference and pliability of women to patriarchy becomes the basis through which caste groups construct their respectability, status and social aspirations.



Their 'upper' and 'lower' caste statuses are not pre-given but formed relationally. The purity and honour of the family, caste, community and nation rest on the sexual control of women. Chakravarti (1993), a historian, through a close reading of texts from early India, helps understand how caste and gender hierarchies become the organising principles of the interconnected Brahmanical social order through a focus on the 'purity' of the Brahmin woman. The upper caste woman is an object of "moral panic" and is the gateway to the caste system (page 580). If the 'upper' caste woman rebelled, then the established property and status order would be subverted. This made women's sexual subordination of prime importance and it was institutionalised in the Brahmanical law codes and enforced through the state. This also meant that 'upper' caste women cooperated with the system; Chakravarti (1993) argues that this was secured through various means,

Ideology, economic dependence on the male head of the family, class privileges and veneration bestowed upon conforming and dependent women of the upper classes, and finally the use of force when required (page 580).

Fallout of this exclusive focus on Dalit women within caste and gender studies (with the exception of Fuller and Narasimhan [2015]) has been twofold: *first*, little is known about what constitutes as an 'upper' caste woman's lives, internalized sexual deference and gendered norms with an increase in education, age of marriage and residing in urban neoliberal contexts. An implicit understanding that emerges from the ethnographies on caste and gender is that women identify with their caste identity through the limitations it imposes on their life chances and choices. Do women in urban caste groups in the contemporary identify with their caste identities in the same manner? How are women produced differentially by caste ideologies and how do they negotiate with them?; *Second*, scholars work on caste and gender in an isolated manner (apart from focusing on Dalit women), that is while they show caste ideologies have changed social relations in the political and economic spheres, they leave the gendered working of caste to the feminists. Historians have shown that caste and gender questions were intertwined in the colonial period through the nationalist resolution of the women's question (Gupta, 2005, Sarkar, 2001). Does this intertwined nature of caste and gender stop functioning in the post-colonial context? Have the internal heterogeneities within a caste group, that scholar

attribute to processes of class formation make it non-tenable to study an ‘upper’ caste as a social group with its internal diversity in the urban. The disjointed treatment of caste and gender, poses empirical questions about the nature of its linkages, sites where they operate and subtle shifts in caste ideology articulations that might underpin institutional moves.

### ***Research Framework***

There are three interconnected *spheres* of social action through which this study engages with the contemporary changes in upper-caste and gender contexts namely political, economic and affective. To cover these spheres, three *sites* are focussed: on caste associations, family and the individual. The research framework is organised according to the ways in which issues emerge from the contemporary urban contexts of caste: first, the internal heterogeneities within the caste group are discussed; second, as the women’s question is central to this study, the institution of marriage is engaged through a lens of social reproduction; third, to capture the intersubjective dimension of caste, the ways in which caste and gender ideologies produce women and their desires. in a neoliberal environment, through an engagement with secularising processes is discussed.

#### **Internal Heterogeneities within a caste group**

As discussed earlier, a feature of caste groups in the urban is an increase in heterogeneities within a caste group. A sociologically neutral category of *caste stratum* is used to capture the internal diversity within the Agarwal. The use of an exploratory category allows attention to the reproduction of caste in the urban without having to organise them on the ‘caste-class’ spectrum. Four Agarwal strata are identified according to their participation or non-participation in the macro sphere of caste associations, time of migration and residence in Delhi.

The *first* stratum of Agarwal businessmen resides in parts of North Delhi like Civil Lines and Model Town. They were the first to migrate to Delhi at the beginning of the 20th century from parts of Rajasthan and Haryana (erstwhile Punjab). They migrated to Chandni Chowk which was the biggest wholesale market in India and referred to as the *shehar* (city). However, they slowly moved out of Chandni Chowk, as they found it was

becoming overcrowded and its narrow streets too polluted and parking difficult. Some families also claimed they wanted to move, as they did not appreciate the increasing number of Muslim families in Chandni Chowk. They are referred to as *Dili Walas* (those who came to Delhi first and belong here) in inner circles. This reference distinguishes them as old and established families, whose first generation had participated in the independence struggle. They have palatial houses with several cars, servants and expensive artwork adorning their walls. People in need of employment or favours wait patiently outside their homes. Their family name has become the name of roads in Delhi, showing their economic and political influence. They and their children are educated abroad and well travelled. They have successful inter-generational family businesses and are enlisted in global business lists. They share a close proximity with political leaders and their family members have been members of the Parliament. They and their wives however are not visible in daily caste association events and socialise in exclusive clubs and gatherings.

The *second* stratum covers living in parts of South Delhi. Some of the Agarwal families who live in parts of South Delhi (Green Park, Safdarjung Enclave, Greater Kailash and South Extension) diversified out of the agrarian economy in their grandparent's generation and moved to Delhi for higher education. Many families had moved to this neighbourhood by the 1970s, while the women moved from parts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh or other parts of Delhi after marriage. They were now second- and third-generation industrialists with manufacturing units (metal and plastic moulds, iron meshes, temperature-monitoring devices) on the outskirts of Delhi, and families with inter-generational professional firms (architects, real estate and lawyers). The number of those employed in their factories and professional firms varied. According to the size and success of the business, families had well laid out houses with modern interiors, several servants, and usually two to three cars. Floors were added to the house to accommodate the changes within the family. For example, if the family business was split between brothers and they were no longer on cordial terms, an extra floor was added with its separate entrance and kitchen. A separate floor was also added if the son in the family got married. However, then the kitchen continued to be common. Families also lived nearby in separate houses in the same neighbourhood. Some of the Agarwal family businesses in this neighbourhood hold important positions in the Agarwal caste associations and they and their wives have been

instrumental in building the Agarwal community and identity in Delhi since the late 1970s.

The *third* stratum has retained their agrarian-mercantile roots while they continue to participate in other family businesses in Delhi in the previous generation. They migrated to Delhi after independence and some of them attribute their move to the Partition and the ban on usury (Usurious Loans Act, 1918). Some of those who migrated to Delhi in the 1960s and 70s say it was because of a further weakening of their position in the agrarian economy after the Green Revolution, which led to the opening up of the 'credit-production-trade' network and offered other avenues to secure a loan (Jodhka, 1995). Some of them are first generation industrialists and live in parts of Pitampura, Rohini and Punjabi Bagh North West Delhi. The elites within this stratum have set up numerous philanthropic institutions. The elites from the first two strata also participate in them; however, a major push and participation come from the elites in the third stratum. This has led to them claiming that they are the 'authentic' Agarwal. Sections of this stratum now have a separate women's wing (like in Punjabi Bagh) in the caste association; however, this is a recent trend.

The *fourth* are those that live across the river Yamuna in places like Laxmi Nagar and Shakarpur. Both these places are a commercial hub for small shops interspersed with unregularised houses. This area is crowded with Chartered Accounts (CA) and Company Secretary (CS) coaching institutes. Agarwal runs some of these, and many of those studying in these institutes are the children of those who own businesses in Laxmi Nagar and Shakarpur. Agarwal own many small and medium enterprises like shops selling hosiery, utensils, sweets and jewellery here. Agarwal families moved here by the 1980s after living in different parts of Delhi. The Agarwal caste association in this area has the highest number of registered members in Delhi (above 3,000 families in 2015). There is no separate women's wing in the caste association in this stratum and women participate with their husbands in select activities.

There are intra-strata or horizontal networking and socialisation in each stratum through memberships in clubs, trusts, business meetings, traders' associations, marriages and religious gatherings. There are also inter-strata or vertical interactions in three ways:

*first*, for purposes of business; *second*, the elites from the first three strata are engaged in community building and philanthropic activities; *third*, marriage provides mobility to women across the first three strata. For example, women from the third strata are married in the second as long as there is a class, status, and compatibility between the potential bride and groom.

### **Family Business, Marriage, and Social Reproduction**

The intermeshed nature of family and business is an integral part of family businesses. Douglas (1992) in her study of 21 Jamaican business families in Kingston argues, that the structures and practices of power converge with the practices of kinship. Historically placed hierarchies of gender, colour and caste are reinstated by marrying almost exclusively within. Kondo (1990) and Hambata (1991) in their study of Japanese business families (known as *dozoku geisha*) show that through the management of *ie* (family as a site of obligation) and *uchi* (family as a home of emotional attachment), individuals create a symbolic whole with 'tremendous power'. Kondo (1990) argues that instead of focusing on the family as a kinship group, it should be understood as a corporate group which holds property in perpetuity. Hambata (1991) reveals the hidden role of women, children and ancestors in the power play in the board room, as brokers between families that are linked by marriage and as agents who can have their way in the corporate world through strategies.

Closer home, historical studies have also shown how the interests of the family were closely tied to the business (Hardiman, 1996; Hardgrove, 2004; Bayly, 1983; Birla, 2011). Hardiman (1996) begins his account in pre-colonial Western India and shows that the bania sense of *abru* (honour) was as much tied to their creditworthiness in the market, as it was with notions of morality and propriety that played out in the familial sphere. The bania's family included the living as well as the dead members and all had to be diligent in their devotion to God in order for the business to succeed. A number of religious and charitable associations centred on the temple and destitute animals were run to earn spiritual and business success. The bania family was regulated according to strict patriarchal principles, with due respect and deference shown towards the head of the household and submissiveness on the part of the women. A family without a strong head

was said to decay, with women and children talking out of their turn and becoming unruly and deviant. As argued by Hardiman (1996), the family honour was said to be compromised if interactions with members of the low caste were engaged or if forbidden food like fish, meat and liquor were consumed. The symbolic wealth of the Bania was played out by building mansions or *havelis* and by dressing the banian (the woman) in heavy gold and precious jewellery. Bayly (1983) writing about the North Indian merchant<sup>1</sup> in 18<sup>th</sup> century says the family firm was central to the mercantile society. It linked issues of credit with the totality of relations with gods, men, creditors and debtors. The firm was linked with the family, hence conception of ‘right marriage’, piety and credit were central to its functioning. Business practices and unorthodox behaviour reflected both on the social and economic status of the group since merchant families had to have respectable marriage partners as well as trustworthy traders. The concerns of the merchant included the management of temples, *ghats* (flight of steps leading to a river bank) and the ritual organisation of the bazaar which all impinged on the life of the family. Detailed expenditures of the family on jewellery, daily expenses, rural or urban property were maintained. Bayly (1983) shows how deposit or expenditure made by any member of the family could be traced in these books. The books show how the family operated as “system of ritualised occupational relationships” within the city and its environment (Bayly 1983; 377). The colour of the saris worn by the female members of the family was according to rigid rituals hence an account of the money paid to the dyers in the city was kept. The cows had a special religious place in the household and the expenditure towards their preservation and feeding was also recorded in the account books. Bayly’s (1983) and Hardiman (1996) accounts show how the conjoined functioning of the family and business as a conjoined unit of production.

‘Right’ marriages and the roles played by women in the families are important to the healthy functioning of the family business as discerned from these historical studies (Bayly, C 1983; Birla, 2011; Hardiman, 1996; Hardgrove, 2004). Sociological studies on the role of women in family businesses in the contemporary are scarce (Ponniah, 2017a). Bayly, S (1999) argues that a key feature of caste studies in the twentieth century is the study of marriages to ascertain the caste status. Hence moving from this top-down

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<sup>1</sup> Agarwal and Khatri are the higher merchant jatis, while Bayly (1983) mentions many other merchant jatis like Kalwars, Telis, Barhais, Barais, Jaiswal.

approach and focusing on the inner worlds of women in marriages shows how they negotiate with their roles in family businesses and caste ideologies. Studies have established that marriages are not just about the conjugal bond but involve a complicated material and affective economy. This involves inheritance rights, residence, care for the sick and elderly, childbearing, labour distributions and decisions around women's education, employment avenues and general well-being (Kaur and Palriwala, 2014; Ramamurthy, 2014; Grover, 2011; Uberoi, 1993). The study of marriages, just like families, no longer uses a dry morphological and anatomical lens, but sees it as a site for the production and reproduction of contested social identities. The focus now was to move away from seeing women as mere subjects of exchange in kinship studies, to agents who had the potential to remake structures (Kaur and Palriwala, 2014; Rubin 1975).

The framework of social reproduction renders itself useful to studying the inner lives of marriages for women in family business from an upper urban caste group. Social reproduction is treated as being outside of economic processes and performance (Cohen, 2013). Feminists use social reproduction to understand the gendered division of labour regarding "various kinds of work; mental, manual and emotional-aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintaining existing life and to reproduce the next generation" (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 383). The Marxist theory of social reproduction argues that it is the "perpetuation of modes of production and the structures of class inequality inscribed within them" (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 384). Feminist scholars modify this definition to include: i) The maintenance of existing life as well as that of the next generation; ii) they account for the gender inequality in the perpetuation of production. Within labour studies, using the social reproduction framework, scholars challenge the artificial distinctions made between production and reproduction (Gopal, 2013). At particular stages in capitalist development, women are withdrawn from the labour force to undertake domestic labour becoming of their class and caste status (Sangari, 1993; Papanek, 1979; Mies, 1982; Abraham, 2013). As argued earlier, women are produced differently according to their social locations which determine the nature of labour (paid or non-paid/ formal or informal) they are meant to undertake in marriages and families.

## **Desire and Neoliberal Agency**

The social reproductive roles that women undertake in marriages in family businesses and their negotiation with them are not ahistorical. This is reflected in studies on marriages by making a move away from the ‘fact of conjugality’ to focus on the everyday experience of it. It also shows the “changing contours of emotion and desire” and the meanings associated with inherited marital practices (Palriwala & Kaur, 2014: 15). As argued earlier, within studies on caste, the intersubjective dimension of caste and the ways actors identify with their caste identity is beginning to be explored.

The last decades of neoliberalism have slowly begun to change the citizen-subject/actor. Neoliberalism is equated with a “radically free market: maximised competition and free trade achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business” (Brown, 2003: 38). It is however not just relegated to the macro sphere of market and state, but is a “form of governmentality which reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire” (Brown, 2003: 39). There is no uniform model of neoliberalism or of the neoliberal subject/actor. It varies according to capital needs and intersections with local cultural contexts. How do the neoliberal rationalities affect upper caste women’s engagement with their social reproductive roles? How does it affect their identification and inhabitation of caste identities?

To understand these processual changes about how women negotiate with their caste-bound social reproductive roles that are intertwined in intimate relationships, in this study Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ with Foucault’s concept of ‘practices’. Bourdieu (1980) defines habitus as “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (page 53). The ‘habitus’ according to Bourdieu works towards reinforcing itself. Early experiences carry weight, and from amongst the new information, those that can threaten the “accumulated information” are avoided. The “past conditions of production” continue as long as “the structures within which they function are identical to the homologous with the objective structures of which they are the product” (page 61). Bourdieu (1980) argues that “the most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable by a kind of immediate submission to



order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is any way denied and to will the inevitable” (page 61).

The rigidity of the “habitus” has made feminists critique Bourdieu for “foreclosing the possibility of agency” (McNay, 2004: 181). When there is incongruence between the conditions of production of the “habitus” and the conditions of its functioning, Bourdieu argues that there is a “hysteresis effect” (page 77). This according to Bourdieu (1990) is when actors are “negatively sanctioned because the environment they actually encounter is too different from the one in which they are objectively adjusted” (page 62). However, this is because Bourdieu does not recognise the potential of change in the actor when faced with incongruence. It is not just what the social environment does to people, but also what people do to their environment. By discussing women’s desires (Chapters 6, 7, 8) I show how the actor’s capacity to desire produces the incongruence between them and their social environment. Women’s desire is neither fixed nor does it emerge in a vacuum, it emerges from their “habitus” and the way they mediate power relationships. Smith (2011) drawing on Foucault (1978) argues that there is no authentic or pre-discursive desire that can be recovered. Our understanding of “our own subjectivity, wants and needs are thoroughly been imbricated within the deployment of power” (page 457). In the Foucauldian framework. if the power is productive. it allows women to experiment with ‘practices’ or ‘tactics’ (Certeau, 1984). Neoliberal agency lies in the repetition of these practices or tactics, which as I will show in Chapter 6, 7 and 8, allows women to reproduce caste and family patriarchies, inhabit caste identities and undertake social reproductive roles, although slightly different from the generation before them.

### ***Access and Research Methodology***

Field work was carried out for close to two years between 2014 to 2016. The field continues to be active as I continue to meet many of my respondents. There are four inter-related research sites that constitute my field: (i) the Agarwal public sphere constituted by corporate and Jati caste associations; (ii) community’s business and political elites; (iii) women in two generations of family business in the second stratum; (iv) women in two generation of the fourth stratum of the family business. Three different types of data sources are used: *first*, publications and special issues of caste associations and copies of

the oldest community newspaper-*Yuva Agarwal* since the beginning of 1990s<sup>2</sup>; *second*, a total of 91 interviews were conducted (45 men and 51 women): 20 caste activists across corporate and Jati caste associations, 20 business and political elites, intergenerational interviews with women in the second (mothers [12] and daughters [21]) and women in the fourth stratum (mothers-in-law [10] and daughters-in-law [8]). With the women in both the strata, I interviewed a larger sample who were not limited to the neighbourhood I was studying, before choosing to conduct a smaller number of in-depth case studies amongst those that belonged to the specific neighbourhood. The case studies are discussed in the chapters (5 to 8) for they have a temporal dimension, where women speak about their meaning making processes and nationalities at different stages. Speaking to a larger number of women, however, helped couch my case studies better, to understand the ‘inner’ lives of marriage and caste identities. It also helped work through a pressing problem of not being able to gain access to a larger number of women in the second (elite) stratum in the South Delhi neighbourhood. The inability to find enough number of respondents as an amateur researcher terribly troubled me, but made me think more seriously about the difficulties of ‘studying up’ sociology. *Third*, observations and informal conversations at community events and women’s gatherings.

It is, however, important to present a disclaimer before one proceeds. The study does not claim to represent all Delhi Agarwal, neither am does it present the ‘essential’ traits of the community, for some of the study findings, are bound to be common with other caste groups and classes, further revealing the urban nature of caste. The purpose of this study is limited to understanding how caste reproduces as a resource by centralising people’s affective negotiations with their caste identities that structure the institutional strategies and individual tactics.

### **Constituting the Field**

The research sites were not pre-selected but were constituted according to my access guided by the existing interrelations between the different sites. Early on in the research, given the nature of the study and field, I knew it would be difficult to gain access and

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<sup>2</sup> Mangal Milan is another old Agarwal newspaper, however I had difficulty accessing older copies, hence chose to work with *Yuva Agarwal* alone.

establish a stable, long-term relationship with my respondents unless sufficient trust in the macro sphere of the caste constituted by its caste associations could be gained. What started as a means of gaining access soon turned out to be a valuable site for studying the ‘presents’ of caste as the interconnections between the associational sphere and the Agarwal families unfolded. The structuring of my access to women validates three things: *first*, the role and inter-connections between different caste associations constituted by community elites and families cuts across the public-private divide that unconsciously guides the disjointed ways in which researchers approach questions on caste and gender. That is researchers study associational efforts or caste in politics or caste in economics and locate themselves on the ‘change and continuity’ spectrum while reiterating that little has changed regarding endogamous marriages or circles of socialisation. The interconnection between what appears as incongruent sites is a central hypothesis of this study that is investigated in the chapters; *Second*, it shows that the associational sphere is an active site where the community elites meet, socialise and organise events. This challenges two common notions about the urban ‘modern’ lives of caste-d actors; i) people in urban India socialise across caste groups if not across class; ii) consumptive activities in the form of lifestyle choices are individual in nature albeit rooted in collective identities; *Third*, the unsaid approval of elite men in associations before accessing women in their families.

The macrosphere constituted by caste associations had regular events in Delhi which were advertised in Hindi community newspapers and some in mainstream English and Hindi newspapers. One of my first respondents told me about *parichay sammelan* (public matrimonial fair) organised by the community and advertised in Hindi newspapers. I called the number given in the advertisement and requested them to allow me to attend the event. The organisers were encouraging and I reached Talkatora Stadium on the decided day. Here I met members of the organising team and Yamini an elite older woman married in an industrial family. She asked me to meet the editor of *Yuva Agarwal*, a 34-year-old community newspaper. Despite knowing my interest in studying women in Agarwal business families, she felt that the editor- Mr Omprakash Agarwal would be the correct person to help me. I scheduled an appointment and met Mr Agarwal who since our first interaction four years ago has become a familiar informant although my Anglophone generic reference to him as ‘uncle’ does not qualify his help and his self-appointed role as my mentor. I requested him for a current subscription of *Yuva Agarwal* and the back copies

of the newspaper. Although the newspaper is now in its 34<sup>th</sup> year of print, Omprakashji only had copies from the beginning of the 1990s, carefully bound and stacked away in a forgotten dusty corner of the real estate office that doubled as a space for the editorial team to use. I also subscribed and read Vaish corporate and Agarwal jati association publications regularly. They kept me informed about the events organised by the association throughout the year.

I attended, observed and made notes in these events regularly, introducing myself when I got an opportunity as a researcher from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) interested in studying the Agarwals in Delhi. Some of the events attended in Delhi were: release of books on Maharaja Agrasen; internal award ceremonies; the inaugural functions of new caste associations in Delhi; commemoration functions of deceased caste activists; foundation stone day for cow hospitals; Delhi Ramlila; Lifestyle and Teej festivals organised by the women's wing of caste associations; festivities around Maharaja Agrasen Jayanti like *rath yatra* (chariot journeys) organised in Delhi and fairs in Agroha in Haryana. In these events, attention was paid to who were the organisers, the participants, the literature circulated and speeches made, the history of the event, and motivations behind organising them. The sections of the community who were the organisers of these events were different from those who attended them. This helped identify two things: those who were the business and political elites and the different strata (discussed in the section on research framework) that were interacting or not interacting in the associational sphere. Women in the second stratum were constituted by the wives of elite men who helped organise events and participated in them while the women in the fourth stratum were constituted by wives of men who attended these events by selecting specific Delhi neighbourhoods. Sections of the second stratum resided in parts of South Delhi while those of the fourth stratum lived beyond the Yamuna in East Delhi. The spatial segregation of castes in urban India has been established by studies (Haque, 2016; Thorat et al, 2015). This amongst the upper castes is a self-segregation couched in family and kinship networks that help members' access property at subsidised rates and rids them the fear of living in an anonymous metropolitan city. In South Delhi, Hill Lane<sup>3</sup> (Chapters 5 and 6) was selected because many of the post holders in the Delhi caste association lived here, the women's wing at the neighbourhood level had won awards and a quick analysis of the Resident's

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<sup>3</sup>This is the anonymised name of the South Delhi neighbourhood.

Welfare Association (RWA) booklet for the years 2014-15 according to surnames showed that fifty-eight percent of residents were Agarwal<sup>4</sup>. In East Delhi, Saharanpur<sup>5</sup> (Chapter 7) was selected because according to the Delhi Agarwal association, it had the highest percentage of registered members.

Only after finishing all my interviews in the caste associations and in the selected start interviews with the business and political elites from the community were conducted (Chapter 3). This helped access them comfortably after having accumulated sufficient contacts over two years of field work. Mr Omprakash Agarwal's guidance and introductions proved invaluable at this stage. From interactions in the macro caste sphere, the existing and upcoming philanthropic projects that resonated with respondents were identified. Using these institutions, those who were on the managing boards and the trustee lists of these institutions were selected. In-depth interviews were conducted along with an analysis of any information that was available in the public realm on these philanthropic projects and elites that funded them.

### **Studying Women in an Urban Elite Caste**

As the central question of this study is the reproduction of caste with a focus on marriages, in this section access and interactions with women in the two caste strata are discussed. As discussed in the section above, access to women was facilitated through the macro sphere of caste. In her historical work on the Marwaris of Calcutta, Hardgrove (2004) says when she had to capture the contemporary changes in the society; she employed 'appointment anthropology' (page 8). Unlike a village ethnographer, whose geographical mobility would be restricted and could drop by at people's homes without fixing prior appointments, the nature of an urban ethnography and especially one amongst the elite, requires the researcher to seek prior permission and to turn up for a scheduled meeting on time. Women in the second stratum did not participate in the paid labour force, and their role within the household was a supervisory one, as they had a generous array of cooks, gardeners, and drivers. However, they had a busy year marked by festivals, rituals,

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<sup>4</sup> The names in RWA registry was of the house owners and not those who might have rented accommodation in Hill Lane.

<sup>5</sup> This is the anonymised name of the East Delhi neighbourhood.

visits to and by extended kin, accompanying and helping their husbands in social and business gatherings.

Power minefields within the household had to be negotiated carefully. In the second stratum, only after permissions from the women on the ground floor that is the mothers and mothers-in-law were sought, I could interview their daughters and daughters-in-law on the first floor. Rarely were interviews with the men in the household conducted, unless invited for a rare lunch. Most of the interviews happened during the weekdays and afternoon hours when the men would be at work. The married son would many times have a separate floor in the same house but continued to share a common kitchen. Separate calls were made to daughters or daughters-in-law to fix an appointment. Interviews if conducted at home led to an entry into the household through a separate entrance directly linked to the daughters-in-law floor. I would then be invited into the house through a separate entry to her floor if the interview was conducted at home. With those daughters and sons that were working, interviews were conducted over the weekend, over a cup of coffee.

The physical mobility of women outside their household varies across generation and caste strata. Wilson (1992) argues that women's lives in the urban have to constantly find gaps in the male-dominated public sphere. Studies show how malls bring about a change in the 'purposeful' nature of women's movements in the public; women can also 'loiter' like men in public spaces although inside malls (Phadke et al, 2011, Srivastava, 2007). Women's mobility outside the household is also determined by their location within familial hierarchies. In ethnographies on women in North India, spaces determined and delineated women's attire and behavioural codes (Jeffrey, 1979, Raheja & Gold, 1994). Women in the older generation had more mobility compared to their daughter-in-laws, older daughters-in-law had more mobility compared to the newly married ones and daughters had relatively more mobility as long as they were studying and family members knew of where, how and with whom they are going out. Such hierarchies and controls on women's mobility were particularly pronounced in the fourth stratum of women in business families. There were no clear spatial distinctions within the household and women's mobility was more strictly monitored than the women in the second stratum. This made it difficult to interview women separately. The first round of interviews with a larger sample of women usually had the mother-in-law, daughters, daughter-in-laws and

their children together. Requests to interview the daughters-in-law separately, invariably still had the mothers-in-law in or around the same room. This made it difficult to ask about their everyday negotiations, financial independence, physical mobility and aspirations. After the first round of interviews, women for in-depth case studies were identified. Knowing it would be difficult to interview daughters-in-law separately, knowing that a significant number of the women in the neighbourhood were going to Reiki classes, I enrolled myself for a first-degree course (three to four months). Mothers-in-law were reluctant to give their daughters-in-law space and time with a stranger, whose intentions they were unclear. Over time, as women began to trust me, I accompanied daughters-in-law to their kitty parties where one could interact in a relaxed environment.

### **Researcher: Perception, Projection, and Ethics**

As I engaged in my research sites and maintained a relationship with members of the Agarwal community across Delhi, my position as a researcher was not value neutral. In the initial phases of my research when I was asked my caste, I would say I am a South Indian, which would be met with an immediate smile accompanied by a response, “Oh you are a madrasi”. The regional cultural identity of a ‘Madrasi’ continues to evoke the impression of naivety, harmlessness, cultured and educated in North India. It is an identity which many times are opaque to caste and religious probing. Many did not ask me which caste I belonged to after, being told that I was a South Indian and I found much mistrust and suspicion dispelled. The men in the caste associations saw my regional identity as a need to educate me about North India, Agarwal, their contribution to the nation and also to Tamil Nadu. When they did probe about my caste identity, I told them that, ‘I was a Nadar, a South Indian baniya caste’. This further helped quell any suspicion. A woman in her late 20s, unmarried and meeting strangers on a daily basis for research purposes would be viewed with suspicion; however, many justified what they understood my unmarried status, soon bordering on what the Agarwal Matrimonial classify as OG or over age, as a ‘Madrasi’ trait, to educate daughters till late, focussing on their careers and not insisting on their marriage. However, an Agarwal woman insisting on further education and a career would be considered as hailing from a poor family, where the father in the family was ill-equipped to provide sufficiently.

Depending on the ways I thought I would be perceived, I also performatively and at times unconsciously employed different facets of my personality. The role of a researcher did not seem sufficient to convince my informants about my intentions in the initial phases of my research. Some of my informants saw the long years spent doing research as futile, especially when they realised that I was not going to get a high-paying job at the end of my efforts. On one of my initial visits to a diamond and ivory merchant's house in South Delhi, although I was referred by a known contact, my clothes, educational qualification or research purpose were not good enough to help me gain an entry into the household. Living in rich urban spaces comes with its share of security fears that gets translated into modern architectural interiors with an inbuilt security camera system that keeps the lower class at a safe distance, allowing them entry only as paid house help. This experience taught me the need to present myself as someone not equivalent in class to them (as class dispositions are embodied) but keeping it ambivalent so that they would not have trouble categorising or dismissing me in the first instance. What followed was an expensive revamping of parts of my wardrobe and printing of calling cards with a logo of JNU that would give me some credibility.

It is not just the researcher studying subjects, but the field making the researcher into a subject that needs reflection. The way I was perceived, the disarming role my 'madrasi-ness' played and the manner in which I self-fashioned myself to gain access to my respondents made me question the field and the approach to be adopted. How can a researcher hailing from an identifiable North Indian caste group, especially one that was lower in the rung, from a minority religion and a lower class could study elite groups in urban spaces? Will in-depth interviews have to be replaced by distant survey methods, that permits the sociologist to stay within one's defined role of a researcher? Should sociologists/anthropologists replace the field with archives, community publications and journals while studying the elite?

Over time, as I developed stable relationships with my women respondents, I found it difficult to assist those in unhappy marriages apart from being a sympathetic listener. I wondered if my role of a researcher made them reflect on their situation making the situation, worse or talking to me was a process of catharsis for them. At times after long hours of interviews, when they asked me to not use their narratives I deleted their



recordings promptly. With the men, my inability to make them understand my research and their inability to think of the Agarwal narrative to be anything but a celebration of their contributions meant they saw my role as a community scribe. The men in the caste associations offered me scholarships and wanted to get my work published as they saw my research contributing to their community building efforts. I am unsure if my discomfort with the way my research was understood by men in the community will be addressed even in the long run. However, it raises a larger concern about social science research and what happens when those we write about read our work.

## **Chapterisation**

This thesis has been organised as follows. In this present chapter, ways of approaching caste and gender questions within existing scholarship are discussed followed by a reflexive discussion of research methodology and sites for investigation.

Chapter 2 traces the institutional history of caste identity within caste institutions in relation to the Vaish corporate and Agarwal jati associations in Delhi from the beginning of the twentieth century to the contemporary chapter 3 shows how the elites from the community in Delhi (especially economic elites in the third caste stratum) organise themselves into a *samaj*. The *samaj* is located in the community and association dyad and regulates its oscillation. It is organised through philanthropic projects that strengthen the capital needs of the businessmen and produces a majority Hindu culture.

Chapter 4 shows how the *samaj* through the association negotiates with the women's question post the 1990s ideologically. The changing aspirations of women vis-à-vis marital choices and their roles within families are engaged with through the organisation of marital fairs and community writings. Chapter 5 shows how the *samaj*'s ideological positioning vis-à-vis the women's question is realised at the level of elite families in the second caste stratum through the social reproductive roles undertaken by older women in business families. Chapter 6 shows how younger women are produced as the future of business families, community and the Hindu nation through a mediation of their desires through older women. Through the mother-daughter relationship, women are taught to

identify with their caste identities in a neoliberal environment and for their own and familial interests.

Chapter 7 shows the intergenerational tussles in the realisation of social reproductive roles expected out of daughter-in-laws in the fourth caste stratum. Marital tactics were undertaken by women to resist the complete coalescing of family and caste power structures while reproducing them in the process is presented. Chapter 8 shows how through a repetition of tactics women have a possibility of separating from unhappy marriages and the pretence of keeping up the façade of happy marriages in the caste community.

Chapter 9, the conclusion is presented, distilling points of departure and contribution to understanding the contemporary realities of caste and gender intersections in upper caste groups. Possible future directions for research in gender and caste studies are also presented.

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## Chapter 2

### **‘Modern’ Association: Forging an Urban Agarwal Baniya Identity**

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#### **Introduction**

Associations visibilise the processual institutional caste identity formation and the manner in which individuals in a caste group identity with their identity. Communities and identities are not given or out there to be discovered. Anthropologists, sociologists and historians working in this area have moved away from primordial to constructivist accounts (Ciotti, 2010; Hansen, 2001; Jodhka, 2001; Ludden, 1996; Micheluti, 2004; Pocock, 1972;). They have shown how collectives are formed through multiple, contradictory and interactive historical processes. The more unified, coherent, boundary marked and fossilised an identity is, the more it alerts one to the stable institutional processes that have led to its formation. Hansen (2001) articulates this succinctly when he says “the politics of identity generally is driven by the paradox, that no identity, no sense of community, and no imputed property of a place can ever be self-evident or stable” (page 2). There is no one truth, one ordinary moment that can be unearthed through extensive archaeological excavations. Just like narratives in ethnographies represent a fragment of social life, community accounts visible the entwined nature of social-political-economic-historical changes, responses, collective aspirations.

The caste associations play an important role in community formation. In late colonial India, the associational motivation was to increase their ritual status in regional caste hierarchies (Carroll, 1978; Dirks, 2002; Khare, 1970; Srinivas, 1962). The governmentality of the caste under colonialism structured these accounts (Cohn, 1968). In independent post-colonial India, the associations addressed the unequal distribution of public resources and undertook political roles (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967; Dushkin, 1980). They wrote *gaurva gathas* (tales of pride) to instil pride in their members about a

united past for political gains. Scholars have documented this across caste groups (Jodhka, 2001; Micheluti, 2004; Narayan, 2007). In some of the studies caste associations are seen as a medium of accruing benefits and caste identities are taken as a pre-given, while other studies have shown how communities are forged through associations (Carroll, 1978; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967). (Conlon, 1974) argues that the associations are an experiment with the validity and utility of caste in changing situations. Bairy (2009: 111-112) using Barnett (1977) argues that ‘modern’ space of associations is opened up when it is not one’s ‘caste code’ but ‘birth’ that defines who the person is. This Bairy (2009) argues leads the association to function as a “enunciatory space”. He argues that the “definitional task of caste association consists of speaking as and on behalf of a subject position” (page 112). Extending Bairy’s (2009; 2010) thesis the present study argues that by being attentive to the association as a “enunciatory space” the association is speaking to shows the ideological function of caste in the contemporary. The ‘modernity’ of the associational space through their enunciatory role shows how the caste group at an institutional level is negotiating with processes of secularisation, individuation and the structuring the oscillation between association and community. This is important in the formation of the caste group as a tappable resource to accrue power at different levels of the caste group.

The sources for this chapter are in-depth interviews with twenty-five caste activists (all men), observations from association events (attended between 2014 and 2016) and analysis of articles published in *Yuva Agarwal* since the 1990s. This chapter has been organized in the following manner: *first*, the different jati and corporate caste associations and their changing roles in identity formation in Delhi are outlined; *second*, the processes of constructing caste identity by the associations through the figure of Maharaja Agrasen since the 1970s is shown; and *third*, the enunciations or the self- perception and projection of the members in conversation with the identified ‘others’ is discussed. This shows how members identify with their caste identity in the contemporary.

## Changing Mandate of Associations

This section will historically describe the different associations in Delhi and their changing levels of identity formation according to the needs of its members and in conversation with the changing socio-political environment. The first Agarwal caste association in Delhi was formed in 1898 by members who constitute the first strata (the older elites) of the community. It was called the *Badhi Panchayat Vaishya Beesay Agrawal*. At this historical juncture, the Agarwal identity was not carved out and members either identified themselves as Marwari-Agarwal or as Agarwal-Marwari<sup>6</sup>. They lived and owned businesses in parts of what is now known as Chandni Chowk and Chawri Bazar<sup>7</sup>. The association was focussed on maintaining commensal rules and regulations to regulate caste distinctions and improve one's ritual hierarchy, much like the other associations forged during the colonial period. These written rules regulated the smallest details of interpersonal social conduct. Vijay Gupta, now in his 70s was nostalgic about an ordered time of the community. He says,

every *gali* or *mohalla* had a *Chowdhary* (a headman) who looked after rituals associated with birth, living and death. The *Chowdhary* would decide how much money is to be given and what the rites were. For example, thirteen days and seventeen days after a death in the family the *Chowdhary* would guide members of the community. They would tell how much to be given to a Brahmin, how to conduct a marriage, a *puja* and an engagement. At that time even if someone had twenty thousand rupees they

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<sup>6</sup> In 1918, Jannalal Bajaj established the All India Marwari Mahasabha and its first conference was held under the leadership of Khemraj (Mukul, 2015). It was the 'Marwari' as opposed to 'Agarwal' umbrella *jati* category which was in circulation in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in other parts of North India.

<sup>7</sup> Members of the association remember Delhi being contained within four gates: Lahari, Mori, Ajmeri and Kashmiri . Travelling outside these gates was referred to as *pali par jana* or *yamuna par jana* (going beyond the river). Source: Interview with Rai Chaudhary. The Agarwals lived in what they refer to as *mohallas* (colonies) which continue to retain their names (Sita Ram Bazaar, Chudiwala, Khari Baouli) however in the contemporary the residential spaces have shrunk and these *mohallas* are primarily associated with the goods sold.

were a crorepati. The *Chowdhary* was highly respected in the society and were crorepatis. If he said something everyone had to listen. If not that person was excommunicated. We could not sit with a young girl like we are sitting with you now. A *safai karamchari* (cleaning person) they could not come near us. The barber used to come to our place, we did not go out. We respected everyone and they respected us. We used to take bath every time we went out of the house and came back in. From the colour and style of our women's dress, you could decide what was the occasion. Women of the house did not come in front of their elders and always had their head covered.

These rules in the contemporary have little significance in regulating the life worlds of even the members of their own household. They are restricted to the pages of rule books. The current president of the association is Rajesh Gupta, a two-time ex BJP councillor from the baniya dominated constituency of Chandni Chowk (Sharma and Arora, 2015). Sitting in his air-conditioned office in the middle of the crematorium at Nigambodh Ghat at Kashmere gate, he says the association now undertakes two public roles: giving money to widowed Agarwal women and remodelling and running the Nigambodh Ghat. They are secretive of their first endeavour for he says the widowed women come from known Delhi business families. However, once their husband's died they had little support from their natal families. The money from the Maha Panchayat helps sustain them and is donated on a specific day every month. Only a few businessmen oversee this endeavour and Rajesh says that the men out of deference for the plight of these women lower their eyes while giving them the money. The second endeavour that is the modification of the crematorium at Nigambodh Ghat is a much-publicised affair. The crematorium was run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and an organisation oversaw its working. In 2001, the association took over the functioning of the crematorium. They modernised the space ensuring the electric pyres which were installed in the 1950s were running properly and CCTV cameras were installed to oversee the functioning of more than 100 pyres. The crematorium is one of the busiest in Delhi and has separate VIP pyres, where the likes of

VHP leader Ashok Singhal were also cremated (Press Trust of India, 2015) A centralised mike system to coordinate the activities was installed in Rajesh's room along with a help desk to guide people, the activities of the pundits were coordinated and the garden was manicured. Rajesh says it is the donations from businessmen in Delhi that keeps the Ghat working. Figure 1 shows the entrance of the Nigambodh Ghat with a divider sponsored by a Delhi Agarwal jewellery Group-P.C.Jewellers. With the taking over of the Nigambodh management by the association, Rajesh says that the Agarwal membership in the association has increased three-fold.



**Figure 1.** The entrance of Nigambodh Ghat with a divider contributed by P.C. Jewelers<sup>8</sup>

In the 1970s and 80s with the crumbling of the Nehruvian model of development, there were assertions by tribals, Dalits and farmers across the country. This was the time that Agarwal families that had migrated from parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to Delhi, around or before independence, were beginning to establish their economic foothold in the capital. They saw a need to re-energise their colonial caste platforms and forge a community by scripting a stronger identity. Three associations were set up (arranged in order of their establishment) in the 1970s and early 1980s: Akhila Bhartiya Agarwal Sammelan (ABAS); Delhi Parishad Agarwal Sammelan (DPAS); and All India Vaish Federation (AIVF). ABAS was formed by Banarsi Das Gupta, Member of Parliament and former Chief Minister of Haryana. A meeting was called with 150 Vaish representatives and a constitution was passed, Banarsi Das Gupta was elected the first president

<sup>8</sup> Picture taken by me.

unanimously. After Banarsi Das Gupta, Rajni Ranjan Sahu a former Member of Parliament was the president and currently, the president is Dr Gireesh K. Sanghi and vice president is Sunil Shashtri, both are former Members of Parliament. Dr Gireesh K. Sanghi was by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's side during the Bihar state election campaign recently. This shows the political clout of members who among many other institutions also head the Agarwal associations in Delhi. The present president of ABAS is Surendar Gupta, the head of a known business group and the present president of DPAS is Harish Agarwal.

The stated aim of ABAS since the 1970s has been to,

create authentic history of Maharaja Agrasen, Agroha and the Agarwal community; to arrange for this to be printed, published and circulated; to organise research institutes that would work on this; to develop Agroha as a religious tourist site; to celebrate Maharaja Agrasen's Jayanti every year; and to promote Sanskrit, Hindi and other languages ("Akhil Bhartiya Agrawal Sammelan", n.d.)

ABAS works at an all India level and has offices in different states. DPAS functions only at the Delhi level and focuses on extending the activities of ABAS in Delhi. Apart from these national level and state level organisations, there are also caste associations at the neighbourhood level. There are also numerous Delhi and national new caste associations that might choose to associate themselves with ABAS or function independently.

The All India Vaish Federation (AIVF) was established in the 1970s; however, it is only by the 1990s and 2000s that it becomes active. Although associations go through periods of activity and inactivity, one discernible socio-political change that re-energised AVIF was the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, which extended 27 percent reservations to the other backward classes in the early 1990s. Articles sent to *Yuva Agarwal* called reservations a 'cancer' that has not only 'made the upper castes backward but also killed the merit of talented students'. Behind these fears of the country's underdevelopment and the future of students was also the fear that 'lower' castes



would soon outperform them. In order to further unify, prominence to the Varna category was given and the likes of Laxmi Mittal and Bobby Jindal occupied the imagination of the urban Agarwal. The stated aim of AIVF was,

work for the social, political and economic upliftment of Vaish community along with services to mankind; to encourage all the sub-castes in the Vaish community for inter-marriage and to help them for the same; and to unite Vaish Samaj, to coordinate and connect various institutes to form a federation in every district. (“All India Vaish Federation”, n.d.).

On Sept 5, 1998, in Morena, MP a rally organised by the Agarwal and Vaish organisations in MP which saw 20,000 people attending it. Business and political elites present at this event include R.P. Goenka (industrialist and MP), B.D. Agarwal (Owner of Surya Roshni Limited), Sunder Lal Patwa (Chief Minister of Patwa), Ramesh Chandra Agarwal (Chairman of Bhaskar group), V.P Singhal, Banarsi Das Gupta, Rajni Ranjan Sahu, Santhosh Bagdodia (MPs) (International Vaish Federation, 2015). From the mid-1990s, all MPs and Rajya Sabha members from the Vaish community were honoured. In 1998, in the Constitution Club of Delhi silver mementos were given to the following MPs: Vijay Darda, Prem Chand Gupta, Ram Das Agarwal, Santosh Bagdodia, Ved Prakagsh Goel, Lakhi Ram Agarwal, Narayan Prasad Gupta, Rajni Ranjan Sahu, Vijay Khandelwal, Chaman Lal Gupta, Dhanajay Kumar, Vijay Kumar Khandelwal and Bheta Lal Jain. On 18<sup>th</sup> July 1999, for the first time, an attempt was made to bring together the leadership of north and south Vaish organisations. In the rally organised in Hyderabad, two lakh Vaish participated. A similar rally was organised in 2003, in which a special train from Delhi to Hyderabad was sent in which thousands of Vaish from Delhi attended a rally in Hyderabad. The Vaish organisations declared 2003 as the Vaish unity year. In the same year, a rally was organised in Alwar, in which 25,000 Vaish came together and the slogan ‘Ek Bar Phir Dikhi Vaish Samaj Ki Takat’ (Once again is seen the power of the Vaish community) was heard. In 2000, in a *parichay sammelan* (public matrimony) organised in Kota, Ram Das Agarwal in a speech asked people in the Vaish community to marry in their sub-sects also so that the unity and power of the community are maintained. Through all of these events, the leaders of AIVF could be seen socialising with state and national

heads. Ram Das Agarwal and Ramesh Chandra Agarwal (of the Bhaskar Group) with their keen organisational interests could be seen socialising with BJP leaders like PM Vajpayee in 2000 at the former's resident at 11 Janpath, Delhi and other state and national leaders at other occasions.

In 2012, AIVF was transformed into the International Vaish Federation (IVF). Its role was to expand the work of the Agarwal and Vaish organisations abroad by starting chapters in Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, Nepal, Dubai and USA and to bring the 25,000 Vaish organisations under one umbrella and encourage the identified 356 Vaish *jatis* to unite<sup>9</sup>. Its headquarters was in Delhi and Ram Das Agarwal, a mining baron, a business tycoon from Rajasthan and a former BJP national vice president and two times treasurer as its President. Ram Das Agarwal was one of the chief founders of AIVF also. The founding members of IVF were forty-one dignitaries who each paid eleven lakh rupees for their membership. These forty-one people consisted of businessmen and politicians from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Haryana. On March 2013 the foundation of IVF was laid in Bikaner House, Delhi. Representatives from fifteen states were present in this meeting. Some of the noted people present were: Ramesh Chandra Agarwal (Chairman of Dainik Bhaskar Group), Uma Shankar Gupta (Home Minister of Madhya Pradesh and President of Vaish Mahasammelan), Rajiv Mohan Gupta (Dainik Jagran group), Dr. Rajiv Bindal (Former Minister of HP), Ganesh Rana (President Rajasthan State Vaish Mahasammelan), Gopal Sharan Garg (National President of ABAS) and Rajesh Agarwal (MLA from UP). From 2013 to 2016, Ram Das Agarwal<sup>10</sup> as the president of IVF addressed important international gatherings like the All Industrial Protection for Trade Rally, the World Hindu Economic Forum in Bangkok and the NRI

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<sup>9</sup> The other stated roles of IVF are as follows: (i) Strong campaigns to demand 14% reservation at state and central level based on economic backwardness; (ii) Ensure by all means social security and pension to tax payers after age of 65 by government; (iii) Financial assistance upto Rs one lakh each to candidates appearing for central and state civil services and other competitive exams; (iv) Sensitize Vaish industrial houses to employ minimum 10% from community; (v) Grant awards in cash and kind to outstanding achievers to encourage them and inspire others; (vi) Encourage the younger generation to join IVF; (vii) Organise leadership workshops and encourage Vaish to contest in elections from the panchayat to parliament; (viii) To vote 100 percent in all elections; (ix) Organise parichay and vivah sammelans of vaish community; (x) Fight against the torture, harassment, extortion of Vaish at all level; and (xi) Propagate our historical contributions, achievements and sacrifice to maintain dignity and prosperity of our 'Bharat Mata' ("International Vaish Federation", n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> Ram Das Agarwal died in 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2017.

Vasai Association<sup>11</sup> Global Convention in Atlanta. In India, IVF donated close to eight crores for the Uttarakhand flood relief, honoured soldiers from the Vaish community and gave out awards for business, trade and social work in events which saw the heads of state present.

A historical description of the different associations shows their changing mandate as per the changing socio-political environment in the country and the needs of the people constituting these associations. The role of the first association was to regulate the everyday interpersonal conduct of the community through written rules and imposed through the nominated figure of the 'Chaudhuri'. One's birth and practice of the outlined interpersonal rules of commensality guaranteed one's place in the community. Once legitimised through one's ascriptive status following the outlined interpersonal rules and rituals, one was a member of the community. In the contemporary, the first association continues to draw its membership not by imposing rules of commensality on its members but by undertaking social projects. Post independence through the efforts of Banarsi Das Gupta, the Delhi and national level associations the Agarwal identity was built (this will be discussed in the next section in detail).

### *Constructing an Urban Caste Identity*

One of the primary things the Agarwal caste associations undertook in Delhi since their inception in the 1970s, was to establish Maharaja Agrasen (king) as a greater than life persona who drew his legitimacy from the Hindu scriptures. Agarwal's by drawing their descent from Agrasen wish to legitimise and reproduce themselves as having been in existence before time and as pure Hindus<sup>12</sup>. Agarwal like other social groups recognise that "the past is a scarce resource and it needs to be authoritative, credible and plausible" (Appadurai 1981 cited in Michelutti 2004: 99).

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<sup>11</sup> NRI Vasai is an NGO started by Indians in North America for Vasai Kanyaparneswari Devi for social and cultural works. "NRI Vasai Association", (n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> Similar strong idioms of religious descent and 'divine kinship' have also been employed by other groups like the Yadavs in Mathura. Michelutti (2004:9) argues that the Yadavs in Mathura make 'mytho-historical' claims that they are the descendants of God Krishna and supposedly belonged to the Kshatriya rung.

A multi-pronged strategy was employed to build ethnohistorical accounts since the 1970s by the associations. These accounts were anchored around the figure of Maharaja Agrasen. The associations worked towards making him into a *Maha Purush* through four simultaneous steps which are outlined in the following four subsections. *First*, Agarwal intellectuals wrote the history of Agrasen's divine origin and the descent of Agarwals. *Second*, this history was evidenced and reproduced as a truth and not a community's wishful imagination through state-led archaeological excavations, establishing Agroha as Agrasen's kingdom and converting it into a pilgrimage site. *Third*, Agrasen was spatially knit in and visibilised through the politics of naming public spaces after him. *Fourth*, the *Maha Purush* was then contemporarised as a political thinker and inserted in the national imagination delinked from his origin in a caste community.

### **Writing History and Agarwal Intellectuals**

Agarwal publications in the form of newspapers, newsletters and pamphlets in North India dates back to the 1880s<sup>13</sup>. The formation of ABAS and DPAS in 1975, gave a new breath of life to publications on Agarwal, Maharaja Agrasen and Agroha in Delhi. In the 1970s, *Mangal Milan* was started by Rameshwar Das Gupta and in 1981 *Yuva Agarwal* a fortnightly journal was published from Delhi. *Milan* and *Yuva Agarwal* are the oldest running Agarwal newspapers post-independence in Delhi and receive regular contributions from community elites. Both these newspapers have an editorial team and carry contributions from community members in and around Delhi. In 1983, with the efforts of

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<sup>13</sup> The first recorded journal was published in the 1880s in Ajmer and was called *Agarwal Upkarak*, subsequent to this the *Marwari Gazette* was published in 1890 fortnightly. This was a commentary on social issues that needed to be addressed amongst the Marwaris in Calcutta. After this in 1891, a journal named *Vaisho Natti Chandika* was published from Khurja in UP in Hindi and Urdu. In 1896 a journal named *Shri Venkateshwar* was published by Khem Raj Bajaj. Many other journals like this were started and stopped printing as years rolled on from different parts of the country. From the 1890s to 1970s the noted Agarwal journals published are: *Jain Prabhakar* in 1891 and *Jain Gazette* in 1895 and *Upkarak* in 1897 from Ajmer in both Urdu and Hindi; *Vaishahitkari* from Meerut by Akhil Bharitya Vaish Mahasabha in Urdu; in Calcutta Swami Shri Yukt Babu Ram Lal Ji Nimani was asked to start a journal and *Upkarak* was merged with it in the 1990s as its reception was dropping in Ajmer. In 1945, the Akhil Bhartiya Marwari Council published a monthly journal *Samaj Vikar*. After independence, *Agra Bandhu* was published by Prakash Bansal and *Agarwal Samachar* was published by Hari Kishan Agarwal from Nagpur. In 1961 the Akhil Bhartiya Agarwal Mahasabha published *Agarwal Sandesh* under the editorship of Jawala Prasad Gupta in Aligarh. In Meerut and Muzzafarnagar journals like *Vaish Uthan* and *Vaish Gaurav* were published. (Source: Agarwal (2014), (unpublished))

Nand Kishore Goenka, the Agroha Vikas Trust started publishing the *Agarwal Dham Patrika*. The associations started their own newsletters, for example, ABAS started *Yash Lok* and Akhila Bhartiya Vaish Mahasammelan (ABVM) started publishing the journal *Vaish Sammelan* in 1989. The association newsletters do not carry long opinion pieces and are limited to chronicling the community-making activities of the association and elites. At the moment there are twenty-four accounted for Agarwal newspapers, journals and magazines published and circulated from Aligarh, Agra, Meerut, Indore and Delhi. Some go off print while new ones emerge, the active publication space has led many in the community to bemoan the tendency amongst elites to obsessively chronicle and publicise their contributions.

Agarwal intellectuals (retired government servants, academicians, businessmen or those who run publication houses) were summoned by ABAS to write, circulate ordinary accounts of Maharaja Agrasen and to fortify the religious idiom of descent. Some of these books strove to establish their scientific approach in history writing to assert their credibility and that of Maharaja Agrasen as being divine. For example, in 1974-76, Dr Swarajyamani Agarwal, a PhD in Hindi literature and wife of a Delhi businessman was invited by ABAS to write a historical book linking Agrasen, Agroha and Agarwal. In 1977, she published the book titled *Agrasen-Agroha-Agarwal*. This book was received widely and continues to be in circulations amongst my respondents. Rakesh Goel, a 62-year-old respondent in South Delhi showed his autographed copy of the book with great pride. Shiromani draws on Parmeshwari Lal Gupt's book *Agarwal Jati Ka Vikas (1942)*<sup>14</sup> and argues that Gupt says the word 'Agarwal' is not more than hundred years old and this startled her, for she had read this word in the time of Sher Shah Suri when Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote *Padmavat*<sup>15</sup>. She says she uses a mix of historical facticity with mythological-storytelling as her way of doing justice to history writing as a project. She writes that although Maharaja Agrasen could not be established according to archaeological sources, he is established in the light of 1000 years of Agarwal traditions. She says that anyone can look at the events but only a person with imagination can access

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<sup>14</sup> Parmeshwar Lal Gupt's book *Agarwal Jati Ka Vikas (The Growth of the Agarwal caste)* was the first book of its kind which disputed the existence of Agrasen and attributed the origin and progress of the Agarwal caste to its regional, geographical and occupational spread.

<sup>15</sup> *Padmavat* is the first most important work in Awadhi written in 1540 by Malik Muhammad Jayasi (See Meyer et al (1909)) for further details.

the meaning and while the perspectives can be conflicting, imagination is never wrong. She draws on a range of sources, the works of Agarwal scholars before her, the traditions of the Agarwal community and an archaeological report prepared by H.L. Srivastava of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Using which she connects the lifestyle and traditions of Agroha in Hissar to the Agarwal community.

Other Agarwal intellectuals draw on Bhartendu Harischander's book titled *Agarwal ki Utpathi* (1981) (The Origin of Agarwal)<sup>16</sup>. This book used *Mahalakshmi Vratkatha*<sup>17</sup> and *Agravaishavandhanu Kirtam* (chronology of Agra-Vaisha lineage) as its source. This is the first written account of the ordinary story of Maharaja Agrasen, Babb (2004: 200-201) reproduces it in his work on the role of myths amongst trading castes in Rajasthan. It is summarised below<sup>18</sup>.

It is said that Agrasen descended from Vallabh, the first Vaishya on earth whom the Brahmans give the throne of Pratapnagar. Agrasen while not a God himself was so glorious that Indra (the King of Gods) also had to become friends with him. When Kumud, the King of Nagas (snake God) brought his daughter to earth, Indra was eager to marry her but, Kumud decided to give her hand to Agrasen, enraging Indra in the process. Indra hence decided to not send rains to Agrasen's kingdom; however, this is put to an end by Brahma's intervention. Agrasen then undertakes a religious pilgrimage by which Mahadev is pleased and gives him a boon. Agrasen asks for revenge over Indra, which Mahadev says could be accomplished if he worships Mahalakshmi. Agrasen worships Mahalakshmi with the help of Garg Muni in Hardwar, pleasing her with his devotion. As a blessing, she promises Agrasen victory over Indra and says his descendants would be spared of all unhappiness and after his death, he and his wife would reside near the North Star. Fearing Mahalakshmi's boon, Indra also decides to make peace with Agrasen. Agrasen through his life continues to be devoted to Mahalakshmi, who as a result of his austerities grants him another boon, according to which, Agrasen's descendants would bear her name, and that

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<sup>16</sup> This book was published by Shri Khem Raj Krishna Das of the Dekateshwar Press.

<sup>17</sup> *Mahalakshmi Vrat* is a special day for Hindus that falls on the last full moon before the end of the month, usually on a Thursday. On this day the prayer that is offered to Goddess Lakshmi to fulfill one's is known as *Mahalakshmi Vratkatha* ( Source: as told by Urvashi Gupta during an interview in Laxmi Nagar)

<sup>18</sup> Babb (2004) in his work on trading castes of Rajasthan reproduced parts of Bhartendu's account on Agrasen from Sharma's (1989: 583-87). This summary given is drawn from his account.

she would be the protectress and clan goddess (kuldevi) of his descendants, who in turn would celebrate her special festival of Diwali.

What is seen in this account above is that Agrasen is not a God himself; however he is glorious enough to compete, seek their blessings and safeguards a place amongst them. I interviewed elder members in the community, members of the caste associations and read books on Agrasen and broadly found the same account mentioned above. However regarding the origin tale about the 18 gotras, there were contesting accounts. According to Prakash Gupta, the president of the Patel Nagar Agarwal association, after the Mahabharat war, Maharaja Agrasen decided to leave the path of violence and embrace trade. He hence made a transformation from being a Kshatriya to a Vaishya because he was a peace loving man. He had eighteen sons and each of these sons was given a separate district to rule over; hence, Maharaja Agrasen was the first one to think of decentralisation of power according to Prakash Gupta. Members of these gotras have the following surnames: Bansal, Bindal, Dhalan or Dheran, Eran, Goel, Gondal, Jindal, Kanchal, Kansal, Makukal, Mangal, Nagal, Singhal, Tayal, Teran and Tungal. It is said that in total there are seventeen and a half gotras and not eighteen. The half gotra or what is called the *Dasa* is said to be the son that Maharaja Agrasen had with his maid and the other seventeen or Bisas, are the sons that he had with his queens.

However, Virendar Agarwal, the general secretary of ABAS was unhappy with this version. According to him, the 18 *gotras* could not be brothers because then when people married someone of another *gotra*, they would be committing incest. He said that Maharaja Agrasen was having a *mahayug* (big religious ritual) in each of his districts which involved animal slaughter. When the eighteenth *mahayug* was underway he stopped the slaughter and hence the eighteenth one was incomplete and came to be called *Dasa*. The *Bisas* are those that can trace their origin directly to Maharaja Agrasen and the *Dasas* are those that are considered as adopted children or those that were included in the community, according to the principle of *mamtha, samtha aur samman* (love, wealth and respect). Bhartendu's ordinary account about the 17 and a half or 18 gotras mentions both the halting of the sacrifice as well as the children from his queens forming the 18 gotras

Agarwal intellectuals expanded on these accounts and at times extrapolated to strengthen mythohistorical claims of being present at the beginning of things and reproduce themselves as purest of pure Hindus. Gupt (2014), an Agarwal writes that 20 is a pure number, and the *Bisas* are those that have all the 20 virtues that an Agarwal should have. These virtues are: practice of agriculture; cow protection; prosperity through trade; worship of Lakshmi; practice non-violence; help the poor and helpless; have faith in the traditions of *Ved* and *Shashtra*; practice purity in food; adopt Indian attire and behaviour; abandon vices; help the financially needy; worship towards knowledge; welcome guests; practice the principles of Sanatan Hindu Dharam; maintain purity of blood by marrying within one's caste but outside one's *gotra*; spend within one's means and divide one's property for cow protection, donations, trade, household and future purposes; follow a simple lifestyle; be brave, confident and self-determined; and to follow the rules of social institutions. Gupt says that the *Bisas* are those that follow all the twenty virtues, *Dasas* are those that follow ten of these virtues and *Panjai* are those that follow only five of these virtues. Another writer argues that the Mahabharata written by Ved Vyas has validity even in modern times. He says that there are 18 purans, 18 festivals and 18 *akshauhini sena* (a particular form of battle formation), the lessons learnt by Krishna in the battlefield is also 18. The gotras of Agarwals are also 18. This makes Keshan infer that the existence of the number 18 in the Mahabharata validates the existence of Agarwal in the time of the Mahabharata.

### **Building History**

Nand Kishore Garg, a three-time BJP MLA in an interview says that in the mid-1970s, they wanted to release a stamp of Maharaja Agrasen. Pradeep Mittal says the information broadcasting minister was Shakar Dayal Sharma and after much deliberation, this stamp was released. The community asked for ten lakh stamps He says,

a stamp is a good way to spread awareness. When people receive a letter and see a stamp that they do not recognise they usually try and find out who the person is. But to bring out a stamp of Maharaja Agrasen we had to show that he was a real person and not someone who was mythological.



The writings by the Agarwal intellectuals helped draft this demand with the government, but this is the time when they realised that the king also needed a kingdom.



**Figure 2.** Government of India postal stamp of Maharaja Agrasen released in 1976. (“Indian Post”, 1976.)

**Archaeological excavations and Agroha** In the 1970s, a temple trust called the Agroha Vikas Trust was set up in Delhi. The Trust came into being in 1976 in Delhi by Rameshwar Das Gupta, Banarsi Das Gupta, Sarat Kishore Goenka, O.P. Jindal, Master Laxmi Narayan Agarwal, Tilak Raj Agarwal, Subhash Chandra and Herpath Rai Tatiya. These were the prominent industrialists, businessmen and politicians amongst the Agarwal who have been contributing to the rebuilding of the Agarwal identity in Delhi and surrounding areas since the 1970s.

Under the tutelage of this Trust, important tasks like building a temple for Kul Devi Mahalakshmi and temples for Maharaja Agrasen in Agroha was accomplished. Agroha was also listed as the fifth most important pilgrimage place in the world and it becomes Agroha *Dham* (pilgrimage site). An excavation of Agroha was undertaken for the first time in 1888 by C.T. Rogers. The second round of excavation was undertaken by H.L. Srivastava under the Archaeological Survey of India in 1938-39. The third and last excavation was undertaken by the Haryana government in 1979-80. Writers and historians from the Agarwal community like Champalal Gupta, Dr Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Dr Satyaketu Vidyalandkar have made special effort to associate the archaeological remains of Agroha with Maharaja Agrasen and Agarwal. Gupta (2014) says that when C.T. Rogers and H.L. Srivastava excavated Agroha, they found a number of materials like statues, utensils inscribed with the word ‘Agrodak’. Gupta cites Parmeshwarilal Gupta’s work and argues that the word ‘Agrodak’ comes from two words ‘Agra’ and ‘Udak’ which means water or lake. This according to him means that the city of the Agarwals was located next to a river and perhaps associated to some republic like Agra. To borrow Micheluti’s (2004:

41) phrase “sacred topographies” helped further cement Agarwals’ kinship ties with Agrasen and Agrasen’s to his glorious past and religious linkages.

In 1995, ‘Maharaja Agrasen Jyoti Rath Yatras’ (journey) was undertaken in parts of the country. This *yatra* finds a mention in Babb’s (2004) account of the Agarwals in Rajasthan and he says how people in the villages knew little about Agrasen and Agroha until this rally. The *Agr Dwaj* (saffron coloured Agarwal Flag) was waved off by Subhash Chandra Goenka of the Essel group to mark the beginning of this *yatra* which covered the states of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal. It covered up to 3 lakh kilometres with the aim of connecting the Agarwals to Agroha Dham and to unify and renew the Agr-Vaisya<sup>19</sup> society.

### **Naming Public Spaces**

After Agroha was established as Maharaja Agrasen’s kingdom, the Agarwal went on to link and name public space in and around Delhi after Maharaja Agrasen. In neighbourhoods where the associations were strong, neighbourhood parks were named after him. Recounting an episode in 1998-2000, Devendar Singhal, owner of an interior furnishing store in Laxmi Nagar, Delhi and associated with the neighbourhood caste association said,

we wanted to name the road in front of the Agarwal Dharamshala as Maharaja Agrasen road in Laxmi Nagar. The corporator at that time did not support this. The Laxmi Nagar Agarwal Association announced an inauguration day for the road with the name of Maharaja Agrasen and demanded that the corporator make the change before the day of the announcement.

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<sup>19</sup>‘Agr-Vaisha’ refers to an attempt to unify all the Agarwals and the other *gotras* under the Vaisha varna. The precedence of *Agr to Vaisha* shows the dominance of the Agarwals in North India and their wish to be dominant within the Vaish community. In many interviews, the post holders of caste associations spoke about how the AIVF and IVF was dominated by Agarwals, as in this part of the country they were both numerically and economically stronger.

Seeing the association's resolve it was finally done and in the next MCD elections, the Agarwals ensured that none of them voted for him. This according to Devendar contributed to his loss. As per the association, five roads in Delhi is named after Maharaja Agrasen in Kalkaji, Kalyan Vihar, Model Town, I.P Extension and Mayur Vihar. The process of re-naming roads and constructing statues for Maharaja Agrasen was pushed either by politicians from the community or by parties in power to appease the community. For example, the Maharaja Agrasen copper statue near Kashmere Gate, where many of the public association meetings are held in Delhi was pushed for by Agarwal politicians in Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) namely Charti Lal Goel<sup>20</sup> Mange Ram Garg<sup>21</sup> and Nand Kishore Garg. In the early 2000s, highway number 10, which connects Delhi to Ferozpure in Punjab was renamed after Maharaja Agrasen. In 1990, a Crude oil tanker was named after Maharaja Agrasen and inaugurated by Jagdish Tytler.



**Figure 3.** A Government of India naval ship named after Maharaja Agrasen (“FleetMon: Tracking the Seven Seas”, n.d).

On the behest of the Trust and the initiatives of noted Agarwal politicians and business elites, many state governments announced Maharaja Agrasen Jayanti as a public holiday. National awards in the name of Maharaja Agrasen were instated by the Madhya Pradesh Culture department. Maharaja Agrasen was incorporated in the school syllabus in the

<sup>20</sup> Charti Lal Goel was a Vidhan Sabha speaker and BJP member in the 1950s. He is the father of Vijay Goel current Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports and a member of the BJP party.

<sup>21</sup> Mange Ram Garg was a member of the Delhi MLA in 2003 and affiliated with the BJP party.

states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan and some of his teachings have been written in English as moral science books for school children and published by Manoj publishers in Delhi. In Agroha, a grain market was named after Maharaja Agrasen and under the current Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar from the BJP party, a road in Panchula, Haryana has been named after Maharaja Agrasen (Pabby, 2015). In 2014, the National Municipal Development Corporation (NMDC), named a ten floored parking facility in Kamala Nagar after Maharaja Agrasen and it was inaugurated by the BJP leader Vijay Goel (“ Press Trust of India, 2014). Also for the first time, there was an arrangement reached between the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and a non-state partner like the Agarwal association in Delhi for a joint maintenance of Agrasen Ki Baoli (“Agrasen Ki Baoli”, n.d). The Agarwals claim that the step well was built by Maharaja Agrasen during the Mahabharat war. These efforts at spatialising and visibilising a caste identity through one’s ancestor do not remain just as an effort undertaken and forgotten by the association. It resonates with the community members, reinforcing the feeling of oneness and being present in the national imagination. For example, a respondent in South Delhi was elated when Agrasen ki Baoli figured in the new Aamir Khan movie PK and he shared it proudly with his children.

The politics of naming statues, roads and historical sites after Maharaja Agrasen shows the community’s political strength at lobbying. It also shows how Agarwal’s to cement their kinship ties to Maharaja Agrasen, visibilising their community identity and power in urban India. These public spaces remind them and others of their dominance and select circulation of their mythological Hindu past which makes constitutes the present of the nation-state.

### **Maharaja Agrasen as Political Thinker**

Post the 1990s, as the Agarwals started taking a keen interest in politics, it was no longer enough to construct Maharaja Agrasen as a *Maha Purush*. It was important to metamorphose him from a spiritual to a political thinker and leader and by extension fashion the Agarwal community as capable of participating in politics. The myth of Maharaja Agrasen had to be contemporarised to serve the current aspirations and self-fashioning of the community.

In an article in *Yuva Agarwal*, the author argues that the Agarwal community was ‘not a caste but a cultural movement’ (“Agarwal ek Jati nahi ek sanskritic andolan hai, [Agarwal is not a caste but a cultural movement], 2015”). According to the myth, Maharaja Agrasen had a policy that whoever entered his kingdom Agroha, would be given one rupee to start his business and one brick to build his house, by each of the other residents. Pradeep draws on this myth and writes that,

his kingdom was in real terms a socialist state (like in modern age support, giving of land and property etc) elements like democracy, poverty, eradication etc were there. Today whatever we talk in terms of secularism, independence, self-dependence, patriotism etc was known to him 5100 years ago. The four goodness of Maharaja Agrasen that is truth, non-violence, equality and closeness and four main principles that are the end of the bad, protection of saints, eradication of poverty and removing the exploiters has today also been adopted by the Agarwal community and these are the reasons that there are ahead of everyone else.

Maharaja Agrasen becomes not just the forefather of the Agarwals but all Indians. The political principles drawn from him precede the Indian nation-state and democracy while framing its contemporary conduct. Madan Mohan Goel, a former Dean of Social Sciences in Kurukshetra University, Haryana argues for the validity of Maharaja Agrasen’s teachings in undertaking Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Goel, 2017). He writes,

Maharaja Agrasen never discriminated against anyone and the subjects were very pleased with the way he conducted himself. He was a strong protagonist of spending 25 per cent of the incomes on the welfare of living beings in the society. He also made a case for 25 percent savings for future, which is a necessary and sufficient condition for coping up the financial crisis of any kind as in present times when the quality of life is becoming expensive with inflation beyond control.

Maharaja Agrasen's teachings then are shown to be relevant not just in politics but also in the new economy and the corporate sector both as an individual and institutional financial practice. It is said to help mitigate the economic concerns plaguing the economy through careful investment and saving of one's money. These teachings drawn from Maharaja Agrasen are projected as being universal. Disembodied from their caste origin, they are now presented as a way of life for all Indians.

An important ritual for contemporarising and celebrating Maharaja Agrasen and his teachings is the Maharaja Agrasen Jayanti celebrated in parts of North India every year. Rallies, fairs, award functions and book releases were held on this day. In 2015, in Agroha a fair was organised by the Agroha Vikas Trust. Subhash Chandra Goenka, the Excel group head and his father Sarat Kishore Goenka were present on this occasion. Speeches were made about the might of the community and the need to unite was reiterated. In Bhiwani for the first time the *Maharaja Agrasen Rashtriya Cricket Cut* (Maharaja Agrasen National Cricket Cup) was organised. In Delhi, three national English newspapers: The Times of India, The Indian Express and The Hindu carried half size images of Maharaja Agrasen seated on his throne with messages from the Chief Minister of Delhi and Haryana wishing the Agarwals an Agrasen anniversary. Showing how caste histories and ordinary figures can be used by political forces to mobilise and placate communities.

This occasion is used to call upon community politicians and businessmen elites to reassert their connections and talk about the future course of the community. Irrespective of the national political profile held, noted politicians like Jai Bhagwan Goyal<sup>22</sup>, Vijay Goel, Piyush Goyal<sup>23</sup>, Mangat Ram Singhal<sup>24</sup> and Ajay Agarwal<sup>25</sup> were present at the anniversary celebrations organised by the ABAS and the Agroha Vikas Trust opposite the copper statue of Maharaja Agrasen in Kashmere Gate in 2015. Jai Bhagwan Goel, a

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<sup>22</sup> Jai Bhagwan Goyal is a former North Delhi head of Shiv Sena. In 2008 he created his own party called Rashtrawadi Shiv Sena. He is a member of the BJP party.

<sup>23</sup> Piyush Goyal is the current minister of state with independent charge for power, coal, ne and renewable energy and mines. He is a member of the BJP party.

<sup>24</sup> Mangat Ram Singhal is a two time former Delhi MLA from the Congress Party.

<sup>25</sup> Ajay Agarwal is a lawyer and BJP member who contested in elections from the Rae Bareli in 2014.

member of the BJP and former head of the North Indian division of Shiv Sena in his speech in Delhi on Maharaja Agrasen Jayanti, cited the instance of state governments remembering Maharaja Agrasen as a reflection of the undisputable role of the Agarwals in the Indian economy. Five blind students from Delhi University were gifted cheques of Rs 1100 each by Piyush Goel. Community awards titled *Agr-Rata*, *Vaish-Ratan* and *Vaish-Gaurav* were handed out to Dr R.K. Goel, an environmentalist; Ashok Kumar Gupta (Chartered Accountant); Dr. Naresh Kumar Goel (a cardiologist at MAX Hospital, Delhi); Sarat Kishore Agarwal (CEO of Chrysal Crop Production) who was introduced as being a *gaubhakt* (cow worshipper) and a member of the RSS; and Vinod Kumar Gupta (owner of Zarda Pan Masala).

The associations since the 1970s have worked towards forging a singular caste identity through the figure of Maharaja Agrasen. This was undertaken in four ways: *First*, the Agarwal intellectuals wrote the history of Agrasen's divine origin and Agarwal kinship; *Second*, this history gets evidenced and reproduced as a truth and not a community's wishful imagination through state-led archaeological excavations. Agroha is established as Agrasen's kingdom and eventually converted into a pilgrimage site; *Third*, Agrasen is spatially built in and visibilised through the politics of naming public spaces after him by the community elites and; *Fourth*, Agrasen is transformed and contemporarised from a *Maha Purush* to a political thinker. In this way, Maharaja Agrasen is inserted in the national imagination and delinked from his origin in a caste community.

### *Portrayal through Association: The Misunderstood 'Modern' Baniya*

Once the Agarwal identity has been standardised through the figure of Maharaja Agrasen, identity claims about what it means to be an Agarwal emerges from the associations. The process of claim making shows that no longer are public positioning based on ritual or Varna hierarchies. The focus is on the community's actions in the urban legitimised by their religious descent. The Agarwals are acutely aware of the intra-caste hierarchies; however such internal differences are ironed out to produce a singular account of what it means to be an Agarwal. Much like the construction of the identity seen in the last section, emergent claims are also unitary in nature to construct a coherent identity. This is however not to argue that the identity claims do not hold relevance across strata within the caste group. In articulating one's caste belongingness along with other identity markers, Agarwal men in different walks of life believe and draw comfort in similar self-projections.

The identity claims are anchored through three 'others': caste groups, the masses and the nation-state. With the first (caste groups) it is a relationship of competition, one in which the Agarwal/Vaish are positioned to win. With the second (the masses) it is a relationship of imagined undeserving historical hurt. With the third (nation-state) it is a relationship of self-less contribution and embodiment of patriotism. The intertwined nature of these three 'others' can be seen in the following excerpts. Ram Das Agarwal clad in a crisp white shirt and Nehru jacket, sitting in his IVF office in Barakhamba Road in Delhi said,

Vaish are gifted with both money and brains. They are the children of Maharaja Agrasen and Mahalaxmi. Brahmins only have brains but no money while the Rajputs have muscle power but no brains. We have had big people from this community like Gandhi and Lalalajpat Rai. We have sacrificed much for this country. We are a *dharamparayan* (religious) and *deshbhakt* (patriotic) community. However, a common man does not even get to know all that the Vaish have done for



this country. People talk badly about us, exploit us, and kill shopkeepers. We contribute more tax than any other country. We have done many things for social welfare; however, we are always the soft targets of those with muscle power. We are stingy for ourselves but we donate generously with all our heart for our country, we are not violent like others but gentle and we follow the rules. We are not a community who takes from others; we are not the caste that begs. We will unite for *aan-baan-shaan* (glory) and we will participate in the nation building process. We will be called the sons of Bharat Mata. Other communities are aggressive and much organised and hence it is important for us to be like them.

Ashok Bansal, a small businessman in Laxmi Nagar and a post holder in the neighbourhood caste association said,

we Agarwal contribute about 65 percent to the country's taxes, even though our population in this country is not more than 5 percent. But no one takes us seriously. There was once a notice in Laxmi Nagar which called us thieves that really hurt us. We have made Agarwal *dharamshala*, so many temples but when the electricity bill comes they charge us the commercial rates and not the domestic ones. The way they do for a mosque. In Hindi films, they ridicule us as the stingy baniya. We are not like that. We are modern and spend money.

Mangat Ram Singhal in his speech on Maharaja Agrasen Jayanti said,

Agarwals have the blessings of Kul Devi Laxmi Ji and the money that we Agarwals have in Delhi, I believe even the government does not have it. I say this with a guarantee, those who are running the country whether it be the Delhi government or the central government they belong to the Agarwal community.

Dr Deepanker Gupta, an Agarwal poet and intellectual wrote a poem on what it means to be a Vaish. He says:

I am a Vaish and I am proud to be one.  
I am the child and successor of Agrasen and Bamashah  
I am the boon from Saraswati and Laxmi  
I am the priest of humanity. I work for the welfare of the nation.  
The pain of the world is ours. I take care of everyone.  
I am a Vaish and I am proud to be one.

The country's economy is from us.  
We made the country independent together.  
I am a pride of the father of the nation  
I am a Vaish and I am proud to be one.

I earn my money honestly. I keep myself away from vices  
My life is simple and true. I am the image of greatness  
I am a Vaish and I am proud to be one)

Dalits have been historically outside the nation building project and actively denied state resources. Their associational claim on the nation-state and its modern development schemes and policies comes from their unjust historical deprivation and oppression<sup>26</sup>. They do not need to justify their existence and find it easier to forefront a unitary identity which is forged through historical processes of injustice and state exclusion. However, why do the affluent urban upper castes like Agarwal see the need to forge associations or to continuously reproduce themselves as pure Hindus? Bairy (2010) argues that the Brahmin jati and corporate caste associations struggle to justify their existence because of their historically accrued privileges and varna and jati supremacy. The legitimacy of the Vaish

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<sup>26</sup> However post the 1960s; there are instances where the emergent Dalit political claims also rest on heroic pasts built through legendary figures. For example the Pasi community in Uttar Pradesh have constructed Uda Devi as a heroic ancestor to recover a 'glorious, pure and exclusive' past (Narayan, 2006:3). In this way they are pulled in two contradictory directions, the claims of a heroic past is to forefront a superior social status and claims of their backwardness helps in getting special provisions from the state (Ciotti, 2010: 9)

corporate and jati association and its action then needs to have both *economic* and *moral* overtones. The *economic* gets articulated through the figure of the poor Agarwal who needs the help of the association as well as the rich Agarwal and his philanthropic projects. The other caste groups are considered as a threat to the Agarwals in a post-Mandal environment and other religious groups who the Agarwal consider are getting unfair subsidies by the state (for example, the electricity rates in Mosques being charged at domestic rates). The *moral* however is more complicated and summons a generalised feeling of hurt and misrepresentation by the masses and the figure of the misunderstood ‘modern’ Baniya emerges. For example, Ashok Bansal talks about the stereotyping of Baniyas in movies and how they too are ‘modern’ and spend money. The response to their misrepresentation by the association is through two registers: *first* the naturalised dispositions of the Agarwal self that is non-violent, honest, frugal, sacrificial, selfless, and generous despite being historically wronged; *second*, by being the privileged ancestors of national leaders like Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Rai with the divine blessings of Goddess Laxmi and Maharaja Agrasen. The associations foreground their existence and make identity claims by defining what it means to be an Agarwal on their own terms. This definition rests on inherent traits and on national and religious legitimacy.

The associations are a part of the modern civil society (Basile and Harriss-White, 2000). Bairy (2010) argues that caste associations despite their own claims do not increase the socio-economic status of the group. However I argue that the associations, by themselves might not increase the socio-economic status of the caste, but help in the reproduction of caste as a socio-political-economic resource by acting as an ideological cloak ironing out internal strata contradictions and foregrounding a singular caste identity. They provide the first layer of organisation and cohesion by forging a community. The enunciation is not mechanically chosen to accrue power, but emerges from the community’s specific historical, local engagement and everyday interaction with ‘others’. It is also not an internal act that is secluded to the space of the association, but makes a language of caste belongingness available to all its members.

The writings by Agarwal journals also show how the Agarwals wish to be perceived and the underlying misrepresentation by the imagined masses they want to address. For example, Sitaram Agarwal in 1993 shares two stories from the annals of history to show

how the Agarwals are sacrificial, democratic, believe in equality and have pledged their loyalty to the nation-state. Sitaram writes that in 1936 in Bijolia district in Mewar, Rajasthan a movement was carried out under the leadership of Shri. Vijay Singh Pathik. This region was famous for wheat production and the farmers had stopped paying revenues to the British government. Hence Pathik was sent to jail and in his absence Ram Narain Chowdhury, an Agarwal was sent to talk to the revenue minister. During this meeting, there were two chairs kept and Chowdhury refused to talk unless the peasants who accompanied him were also treated with respect, hence emphasizing the principle of equality he had learnt from Maharaja Agrasen's teachings. The other instance that Sitaram writes about is again from 1936, Rajasthan. Swami Kumar Anand and his group were banned by the British government for their left ideology. A very rich Vaish Seth Shri Ghisulal Jajodiya offered to help them. He was also a part of the Congress movement. However, a labourer taunted the Seth for his immense store of riches and how he did not understand what a poor man felt. On hearing this *Seth ji* went back to the city and he gave all his money to the labour movement. According to Sitaram Agarwal, both these instances show that inspired by the teachings of Maharaja Agrasen, the Agarwal contributed to the national movement and made the nation proud. Similarly, Radhesham Garg writes about Lala Jhamkumal's sacrifice in Hapur Tehsil on the 10<sup>th</sup> March during the 1857 sepoy mutiny (Garg, 1993). He writes that in Pikhua district, Dhaulana region the descendants of Maharana Pratap the Sisodia Rajputs started the struggle and they burnt down the hill stations. When the police station was being burnt, the station master-in-charge was able to escape. He spent the night near the village and in the morning he went to Meerut to inform the British. He named 13 Rajputs and one Agarwal as being responsible for the unrest. As a consequence, all of them were hung to death in front of the entire village. The Rajputs according to Garg were supported by Lala Jamkumal of the Singhal gotra (Agarwal) who in one of the meetings told the Rajputs that 'you have become Maharana Pratap but I cannot reach the stature of Bhamashah<sup>27</sup> but I am ready to offer every penny that I have at your feet'.

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<sup>27</sup> Bhamashah was born in an Oswal Jain Community and a close aide of Maharana Pratap in the 1500s. During the battle of Haldighati against the Mughals when Maharana Pratap ran out of all military resources to fight, Bhamashah and his brother Tarachand donated 20,000 gold coins and 2,500,000 rupees to Maharana Pratap. The Agarwals claim Bhamashah as one of their ancestors. They also released a postal stamp in his name. Source- Bhawan (2004), The Agarwals claim Bhamashah as one of their ancestors.

In both these anecdotes, it is the benevolent *Seth* who stands by his people against the Britishers. History is rewritten to redefine and forefront the historical contribution of the Agarwals to the nation and to challenge the perception of Agarwal being callous moneylenders. The relationship of the Agarwals with the colonial Indian nation is that of selfless contribution, a relationship which they argue continues with the post-colonial state. The associations through their public positioning forge an ideological project to establish the misunderstood ‘modern’ Baniya and his community as deserving leaders of the nation-state and society both because of their economic and moral capital.

## **Conclusion**

The ‘modernity’ of caste associations is reflected by the changing roles they adopt vis-a-vis the caste identity and the identification it provides to its subjects. Bairy (2010) in the recent past has identified the “enunciatory” role of ‘modern’ Brahmin associations. However, he does not extend his argument to show how the ‘enunciations’ lead to the structuring of caste as a ‘modern’ power block with the internal creases ironed out. As shown in this chapter, the ‘enunciation’ in the case of the Vaish (corporate) associations and Agarwal (jati) association is a curious case. One would expect that much like the Brahmins, the Vaish because of their material strength and people’s association of affluence and entrepreneurship with them would find it difficult to relate and keep their associational spaces active; however, they appear nonchalant. Is this because they are non-reflexive or does this represent a state of false consciousness? It appears to be neither. As shown in this chapter, for the Vaish corporate and jati associations, the nation-state is not the other, but they are they are the nation. Unlike the Dalits who have been outside the space of the nation and state, the Vaish consider themselves as deserving subjects of a Hindu ‘imagined community’ and by extension, the only one’s capable of leading the nation-state (Benedict, 1983). Through the associational space they forefront the traits of the Agarwal self, their national pedigree and divine blessings which they argue makes them the most suitable leaders in society-state affairs. This articulation is telling of their self-reflection, their perspective of what a nation should be and what a nation-state should do. This ideological cloak provided by the association contrary to their claims of independence from state resources privileges them to become the highest bidders for public resources and accrue power. This is operationalised by the elites from the

community coming together and forging a *samaj* through philanthropy as discussed in the next chapter.



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## Chapter 3

### **Businessmen as Philanthropists: Producing Capital and Culture**

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#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the role played by associations in crafting a contemporary urban Agarwal identity is shown. As is seen, it is the economic and political elites who play pivotal roles in forging a community through the association. In this chapter, my focus is on one stratum (third) of economic elites who are not only invested in the association but use it to forge a *samaj* through philanthropy. The category *samaj* is constituted in this chapter and it is shown how it only includes the elites from each of the Agarwal strata (mentioned in the introductory chapter) is shown. This leads to the production of entwined capital and public culture in urban spaces. Historians have focused on how philanthropy has helped elites forge public identities during pre-colonial and colonial India. The sociological investigation into the role played by contemporary elites through philanthropy in India is scant (exception of Osella and Osella, 2009; De Neve, 2000). This chapter, moving beyond the identity claims, addresses three inter-related questions: what constitutes as philanthropy for the Agarwal? Who amongst the Agarwals undertakes these types of philanthropies? What are their social and political motivations? The businessmen discussed in this chapter do not simply give away money to charities but are actively investing their resources (money, time, network and reputation) and building institutions to sustain their ‘social projects’. The membership in these philanthropic institution building accommodates both Agarwal and other North Indian Vaish jati elites. Its participation builds on the project of uniting different Vaish jatis, as conceptualised by the corporate caste associations discussed in the previous chapter. By focusing on social mechanisms for undertaking religious and secular philanthropy, the chapter argues that it helps forge a *samaj* from the caste community and produces capital and a majority public culture. It is shown that forming a *samaj* addresses the urban context(s) of caste that leads



to an increase in internal differentiation and process of secularisation especially played out through a shift in the women's question (as will be discussed in the next chapter). The *samaj* is essential for both its own internal sustenance and for transforming the caste into a socio-economic-political resource for the entire community.

This chapter is organised in the following manner, the *samaj* is first conceptualised before discussing the three roles undertaken by it: i) The *samaj* provides the networks for capital accumulation and concentration for caste elites through internal cohesion, regulating conflict and competition. *Samaj* becomes a way of concealing the class interests of the businessmen and their efforts at capital accumulation through self-regulation and economic governance. ii) The *samaj* aligns the community to the nation. This is an ideological cultural project of perfecting and purifying the nation and its subjects through Hindu religiosity. Religion and the market are not exclusive of each other and together produce specific expressions of religiosity in the city. iii) Through the strength of its relationship forged with the nation, the *samaj* strikes a relationship of collaboration and contestation with the nation-state.

### **Community and/to Samaj: Caste producing Capital and Culture**

The conceptual categories of community (*Gemeinschaft*) and association or society (*Gesellschaft*) have been used to differentiate between the forms of social relations and stages in social development (Jodhka 2001; Nisbet, 1967; 2001; Tonies, 1955). These categories work in an evolutionary framework, where community is a pre-modern grouping that is characterized by a higher degree of “personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time” while in a society, individuals come together guided by their interests (Nisbet, 1967: 5). Bairy (2010) argues that “caste as community” is often used to signify a state where the caste is a primary but not the only means of legitimacy while “caste as association” is used to denote a “loose conglomeration, an association which is not binding but familiar” (page 315). Disregarding the evolutionary frame, he argues for an oscillation between the community and association as an agentic move of negotiation, which leads to a transformation of both.

By introducing the category of the *samaj*, in the community and association dyad, the social processes that help reproduce caste as a social, political, and economic resource despite a giving away of caste hierarchies is discussed. This allows a rewriting of hierarchies with the persistence of inequalities through the select accrual of power to specific castes. The *samaj* positions itself in a manner to structure the community and society oscillation (especially seen in the case of the women's question in chapter 4). The community and *samaj* are not the same, although studies in caste often use them interchangeably (Natrajan 2011). They also do not reflect stages in social formation or a unilinear progression from one form to the other as studies suggest but work simultaneously and symbiotically. The associations provide the first layer of consolidation through the figure of Maharaja Agrasen, the *samaj* takes it forward through philanthropy by bringing the city's economic and political elites together. The *samaj* cannot exist without the associations, and the identity claims of the association would be ossified in time, irrelevant to the present and future day Agarwal without the *samaj*. The *samaj* is produced from the community through the coming together of its elites, in this case through philanthropic projects. Scholars have argued that caste functions like a civil society in India (Fuller, 1996; Jayaram, 1996; Basile and Harriss-White, 2000; Prakash, 2015). Through the *samaj*, one unit of this civil society that aligns with the nation and negotiates with the nation-state determined by its internal dynamics and in conversation with socio-economic changes is discussed. In this way, it has both a substantive as well as relative existence.

Forging a *samaj* and ascertaining one's business standing and performance not just through one's business success but also through philanthropic projects and the networks generated through it becomes important given the primacy of network dependence for capital and resources. As internal differentiation within a caste increases, the *samaj* helps consolidate caste based capital. The businessmen (third stratum) interviewed in this chapter can be loosely classified as 'medium-sized' who primarily own private limited companies controlled by members of the immediate and extended family and resistant to the external scrutiny that comes with borrowing from the banks. It is impossible to ascertain the size of their businesses or their wealth for there is very little about them and their businesses in the public domain. They pride themselves on being able to raise the resources required for business amongst them and not having to borrow extensively from

the market. In outlying the mechanisms through which money was raised for philanthropic projects, many of them referred to large amounts of physical cash being exchanged. They emerge from strong agrarian and mercantile roots<sup>28</sup> and continue to retain them even while diversifying into manufacturing and other spheres of business (real estate and building). Their polite demeanour, respectful manner of conversing and ability to not be easily provoked has been cultivated over years of fashioning a self which is conducive to business transactions and dealings. Many of them dressed in a white cotton shirt and pants, matching white shoes and had gold bracelets or gold *kadas* (bangles that men wear)<sup>29</sup>. When asked to be introduced to more businessmen involved in the select societies and philanthropies, a phone call was enough to summon more businessmen to give collective interviews. On one occasion, a businessman said he postponed his meeting with a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) councillor when he received a call from *bhaisaab* (elder brother), revealing the strength, respect and importance of inter-personal relationships.

Much like the first stratum of the older elites or the second stratum in South Delhi (discussed in chapters 5 and 6), the third stratum elite, too, own multi-storeyed palatial houses. However, unlike the first stratum, a majority of them migrated to Delhi post-independence and unlike the second stratum, they continue to retain their strong mercantile roots. Some of them migrated to Delhi as late as early the 1990s, after members of their family had successful businesses in others parts of the county. While elites in other parts of Delhi (like South Delhi) might make overarching identity claims based on the philanthropic projects discussed in this chapter. They are not the ones to invest heavily in them. This leads the *medium* sized businessmen in this stratum to argue that the ones in South Delhi are not *authentic* Agarwal and have lost their way. “Symbolic boundaries”<sup>30</sup> within a caste group play out through philanthropy (Lamont and Fournier, 1992).

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<sup>28</sup> India’s modern capitalist class emerges from strong mercantile roots and the shadow of the colonial dominance in business. The rise of the Reliance group shows the “persistence of the mercantile element in Indian capitalis” (Majumdar 2017).

<sup>29</sup> The *kada* has religious significance in Sikh religion and is silver in colour; however the *kada* worn by these businessmen was made of gold. The men in the first strata of older elites spoke about how a white *kurta*, *dhoti*, a cloth on the shoulder, and a white cap distinguished a *seth* (a rich man) from others. The choice of wearing a white shirt, pant and white shoes then shows an updated version of an erstwhile *seth*’s attire.

<sup>30</sup> Lamont and Fournier (1992) focus on the ‘symbolic boundaries’ that leads to the cultural classification of people into social groups.

Culture produced by the *samaj* through religious philanthropy helps reinvest in Hindu-ness and is produced in conversation with its urban locale and the neoliberal subject. Sociological studies on philanthropy in the South Asian context show how religious message is customised to the needs of capital and vice a verse. Osella and Osella (2009) argue that Muslim entrepreneurs wish to customise Islam and focus on modern education in order to reproduce traits in Kerala Muslims that are compatible with capitalist growth like “attitudes of individual responsibility, energetic activity, and self-advancement” (page S215). Sloane (1999) argues that in Malaysia entrepreneurs actively participate to bring together material progress and religious reform. Rudnyckyj (2009) coins the term “spiritual economies” to show how Islamic ethics and management techniques come together in an Indonesian steel plant. Agarwal businessmen through the *samaj* invest to modernize Hindu religiosity (whether it be the construction of *dharamshalas* [religious rest houses] as movie multiplexes, use of technology in religious festivals to draw larger crowds, *satsangs* [spiritual discourse] on international cruises and foreign trips; cow hospitals being equipped with ambulances and Hindu duties of feeding the cow being facilitated through innovative trolleys) to keep the younger generation interested in messages drawn from religious festivals and gatherings and in turn the activities of the *samaj*. However, unlike the efforts undertaken by Muslim entrepreneurs, these businessmen are focused on changing the manner in which the religious message is conveyed without necessarily rewriting it. Culture and capital are conjoined, co-produced, and reinforces each other (Yanagisako, 2002). Rewriting culture through religion shows that the businessmen believe in its sustained relevance for their capital needs. The religious moralities are suited to keep the overlapping structures of family, *samaj*, nation, and the state together and hence they need to be communicated in ways that would continue to hold the people’s interest.

### ***Constituting Bazaar: Networks, Reputation and Self-Regulation***

In this section, philanthropy as an avenue to become a part of this exclusive *samaj* to participate successfully in the *bazaar* is shown. I argue that the *samaj* organises capital networks, delineates hierarchy, provides avenues for competition, regulates market action by establishing rules of individual conduct and ensures that the younger generation is

invested in maintaining these networks. Basile and Harriss-White (2000:5) uses a “social structure of accumulation” framework in which they argue that caste as civil society helps regulate the conflicts within a capitalist society and makes it compatible to the needs of accumulation. They argue that caste functions as an ‘ideological backcloth’ on which modern institutions of business associations, labour unions, and political parties can function following capitalist norms but structured by primordial caste hierarchies. Prakash (2015) through his study of Dalit entrepreneurs argues that market outcomes are governed by formal economic institutions present in the market and state but also the social institutions, collective behaviour, and social values shaped by caste. He argues that the Dalits are faced with an “adverse inclusion” in market processes for they lack the network resources of the upper caste entrepreneurs (page 1067). Vijayabaskar and Kalaiyarsan (2014) through their study on Gounders in Tiruppur show how caste-based kinship networks help to accrue to capital, contacts and tenders required to start a business, something that the Dalit entrepreneurs lack despite the initial push provided by the state. Markets are not autonomous, neither are they the only locale for transactions. A range of social and political institutions “mob the economy and fill the space on the one hand and society’s basic building blocks on the other” (Basile & Harriss White 2000: 2).

Exclusive and masculine spaces of socialisation and leisure are important sites through which business ties are strengthened, bonds created, and trust established. For example, Osburg (2013) argues that amongst the Chinese, new rich personal relationship (*guanxi*) between businessmen and with government officials is generated through “masculine forms of entertainment and leisure-banqueting, drinking, singing karaoke, playing mahjong, receiving massages, and foot baths” (page 10). Similarly, Ong (1999) argues that if the Hong Kong businessmen felt isolated from power circles in the United States, they established business and social networks through “tennis and other social groups, and mahjong and other social clubs” formed through the Hong Kong alma maters (page 104). In the case of the Agarwal businessmen, one such informal exclusive space of socialisation is through regular meetings to organise philanthropic projects in the *samaj*. Individual interactions couched in overlapping caste, family, and religious networks are not for consumptive pleasures but to undertake collective philanthropic projects. For example, the Haryana *Swastha Mandal* (Haryana Health Board) was a group of close to four hundred businessmen in South-West Delhi, who met every morning for exercise,

morning walks, and once in a year went on an all male foreign trip. Over time, this informal gathering was registered as a society. This society decided to organise a *bhandara* (a meal provided for the poor with a religious motivation) once a month. A fund of 125 to 150 lakh rupees was accumulated for this purpose. The society is now planning to set up an old age home.

Increasing ties by collaborating on common projects allows men and their families to become a part of the *samaj* through a careful investment of time and capital. Raghav Gupta and his two brothers started the a 500 crore company, in 1998. Their company is into textile, iron-ore, and pharmaceutical manufacturing. Lately, it has also moved to mobile phone manufacturing. Sitting in his office in West Punjabi Bagh, Raghav recounts coming to Delhi in the early 1990s and says he did not have ‘any *pehchan* in the *samaj*, *logo mai utna baitna nahi tha mera*’ (I did not have recognition in the society or know people in the society). In the last two decades, as his business flourished, Raghav has become a known face in the *samaj* and occupies important posts on society boards. Amongst other philanthropic positions in the last six years, he now heads a registered society called *Shree Krishna Janmashtami Mahotsav Samiti* (“Shree Krishna Janmashtami Mahotsav Samiti,” n.d). This society organises a seven-day Janmashtami festival in Punjabi Bagh and has constructed a temple and *dharamshala* (religious rest house) in Vrindavan. He along with a few other South-West Delhi businessmen have also started a new Agarwal caste association in the last three years.

Becoming a part of the *samaj* provides businessmen access to a pool of resources. Akash Agarwal, a builder in South-West Delhi, moved to Delhi in the beginning of the 1990s. He and his brothers had a successful cloth manufacturing business in Surat, however, a feud ensued and Akash left everything. He moved to Delhi to start afresh with his young family. Although he had a known family name in the *bazaar*, he had but no capital. He struggled for three years and after reaching out to the Agarwal *samaj* in Delhi, he secured a sizeable amount to start his construction business. He made and sold flats slowly clearing out his debts. He and his son have now diversified to managing banquets. Being attached to the *samaj* provided him with the required credit in a relatively easy manner. Rajeev Ram Garg’s father moved to Delhi in the 1960s and started as a grain

merchant. Rajeev Ram is into trading of lubricating oil and also into plastic manufacturing. He says,

we have enough and more resources in our community that if I needed money, say whatever amount it is or for whatever purpose it might be, I can raise at least 10 to 15 over the phone in 30 minutes. We have always believed in helping each other and others. We also tell our children that always return the money you borrow with interest and on time and that it is better to lose money than a friend.

The ease of accessing credit through caste kinship ties for any venture on the basis of established networks in the *samaj* is highlighted. In Rajeev Ram's advice to his children, the rules of the *bazaar* are seen where business decisions are a mix of instrumental and value rationality. Rajeev Ram says that everyone functions by helping each other. This is not a one-off statement made to portray oneself in a favourable light but has been reiterated by many businessmen. Capital cannot be reproduced by acquiring money alone; friendships in the *bazaar* strengthen wealth accruing processes. Every friend is linked to further business contacts, and upsetting one could mean upsetting many others. One's reputation is established through one's transactions which are private but become public knowledge in the *samaj*.

The motives behind one's capital investments in philanthropic projects are also held up for scrutiny in the *samaj* before establishing its worth. Ganesh Mittal, a builder and a Delhi distributor of a known travel company who holds important posts on temple trusts around Delhi says that,

it so happens that some have a lot of money, but they want a name. If they join a temple trust and make big donations then they feel their name will be recognised. So there are a lot of people who have no interest in social affairs, but for the sake of fame and getting a name donate money.

As new business groups enter the *bazaar*, the old established players differentiate themselves from the ‘new money’ by examining the nature and longevity of engagement in the *samaj*. Keshav Gupta, a builder, trustee and post holder in important societies, was born in Delhi. His father was famously known as the *rasgula* king in the 1960s. He says that,

we see in our line of work that it is those who have the *sanskar* (culture), who invest money in the right way. They are also those who do it for the name and want their name put up everywhere. The real *rais* (rich man) are those who give and give a lot but let their actions speak- *gupt dan* (secretive donations). It requires hard work and frugality when it comes not just to one’s living but also to one’s approach to fame. It also requires raising your children the right way so that they will continue the work that one starts.

Such members of the *samaj* then go on to become the ‘big men’ whose advices are sought; opinion respected, and they settle business or other feuds. Rajeev Ram Garg speaks highly of Dayal Chand *ji*, a Punjabi Bagh businessmen and a *big man* whose advice is often coveted. He says,

Dayal Chand *ji* is a big exporter. His work is in Kalkaji under the name of Deep Chand and Dayal Chand<sup>31</sup>. In the bearing market, there would be no child or adult who does not know his name in India. He is the king of bearing and has distributorship in three states.

However, what made Dayal Chand *ji* a *hasti* (celebratory), apart from his business acumen was his selfless contribution to the *samaj*. Rajeev Ram Garg says,

if you think of the hospital, he is the founding trustee. Many decades ago, when the hospital was running at a loss, he would

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<sup>31</sup>Deep Chand Dayal Chand and Company is a Delhi based company which imports ball bearings from China and Poland. It has a both domestic and international presence (“Deep Chand Dayal Chand & Company”, n.d.).



give twenty-one thousand rupees every month. He had a *koti* (bungalow) in Punjabi Bagh which must be worth fifty thousand rupees at that time and think he used to give twenty-one thousand to the hospital. A person is big when they are so selfless and he did not let the hospital shut down. He said this hospital is by the Agarwal *samaj* for the poor.

Actions in the *samaj* structures internal hierarchies. Success in business is an insufficient criterion for being remembered and having a *naam* (a name). The desirable traits referred to by Keshav Gupta and Rajeev Ram Garg is that of *sanskar*, self-sacrificial qualities and the merit through *gupt dan* (secretive donations). The *sanskar* that Keshav Gupta refers to, helps actualize economic rootedness and transmission of networks across generations. Rajeev Garg invoking Dayal Chand's selflessness decades ago shows that there is a memory of the *samaj* which is transferred across generations. This memory functions like a collective archive which chronicles people's memorable deeds as well as hurt, betrayal, unfulfilled transactions, unsettled debts, and unreciprocated favours. Both Rajeev Ram Garg and Keshav Gupta then invoke a moral economy of philanthropy embodied by *big men*.

The *samaj* provides avenues where competition between business groups gets played out, further structuring internal hierarchies in the process. Bigger societies like Maharaja Agrasen Scientific Education and Medical Research (MASEMR) are one of the sites where competition between bigger businessmen and industrialists like the Jindal Group and Essel Group play out. According to the Agarwal businessmen, Subhash Chandra of the Essel Group has been trying to assert his claim over the MASEMR and trying to secure a place on the managing committee. Smaller committees and societies are the spaces where medium businessmen settle internal competitions. Jatin. Garg runs a Chartered Accountant company in Ashok Vihar along with his two sons. He holds an important post in the Agarwal Welfare Society. The society is constituted by other known South-West Delhi businessmen and runs a school, hospital and *dharamshala*. Every society or committee has a core working team and post holders. Holding posts on the management or control board of societies, committees, and trusts of philanthropic projects gives recognition to one's capital contribution, success in business, and one's hard work. For the last two years, the

work of the society stopped because of infighting. However, according to businessmen in Ashok Vihar in 2016, Jatin Garg floated a panel for the elections which was supported by many trustees and finally won the elections. The success of a businessman and his construction as a 'big man' depends on the community clout he draws. These elections and securing posts in societies is one way of visibilising it.

In the *samaj*, these big men act as intermediaries, settle feuds arising in businesses transactions, and provide assurances on another's behalf. As Akash Agarwal says,

generally in our *samaj* when there is a difference of opinion, we resolve it by ourselves, two leaders might have a deadlock but they are only arguments and no physical fights. When they sit together and discuss it out then it gets resolved.

However, this has not stopped people from resorting to legal measures to resolve disputes. In 2011, a case was filed in the High Court by the Shri Krishna Janmotsav Samiti against the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) (Civil Writ Petition No. 2932/2011). The petitioner argued that their bookings for three gardens in Punjabi Bagh had been cancelled at the last minute by the MCD. What became clear during the course of the case was that there were two *Janmotsav Samitis*. While one of them was the older one which had been conducting the festival for the last thirty-four years in Delhi, the other was of a later origin. The latter wished to lay claim to the same spaces in which the former committee had been conducting the festival. Another discernible feature from the court case proceedings is that some of the members (all Agarwal) in both the committees overlapped. In this case, what initially appeared as a case of mistaken identity turned out to be competition in the organisation of the *Janmashtami* festival and infighting between groups of Agarwal businessmen in parts of South-West Delhi. It is unclear if the dispute between the two sets of businessmen stemmed from feuds in the *bazaar*, however it is safe to discern prestige associated with being part of such socio-religious organisations and the seriousness of their engagement.

This seriousness and involvement in the activities of the *samaj* is something that the businessmen wished would be carried forward by their children. The preservation of the

Hindu joint family as a unit is essential to sustain and strengthen affective ties with inherited intergenerational capital networks and businesses. Rajeev Ram Garg talks about the mechanisms undertaken to ensure that children from business families stay interested in the activities of the *samaj*, learn to work together, and build inter-generational ties (some of it gets translated into marriage ties) through sustained socialisation amongst themselves. A provision was started to help girls from poorer families get married. Every married couple was given four chairs, a table, a bed, a mattress, a blanket, a quilt, a television set, dinner sets, a fan, a cooler, as well as a cupboard and gas stove. This committee was headed by the children of businessmen in Punjabi Bagh and Ashok Vihar. Ram Garg says,

the children formed a committee and enlisted members for eleven thousand rupees each. They raised about thirty lakh rupees. There are about eighty children in this committee. In this my son and daughter, Pradhan ji's son, Dayal Chand ji's son, Srinivasji who is a builder his son, Satya Agarwal's son also became members. We told them not to go out of their way to get the money because we have enough people amongst us to give the money. This committee was started so that the children *bhatak na jai* (do not lose their way). We will be the ones to give the money. We need to develop the habit of doing good things in children.

Garg recounts of how when he was a child in the later 1960s, he would go to a temple in Kalkaji with his parents and ten members of his family. His family did not have a car back then but travelling together as a family slowly became a monthly ritual. They would carry about twenty buckets of home cooked food consisting of *aloo ki sabji*, *cholley*, *halwa*, *poori*, and *kheer* on every *ashtami* (8<sup>th</sup> day in the Hindu lunar calendar). The food would be first offered to God before all the members of the family had the same food together and gave it to the poor. Garg says that all the children would get angry at their father, but it helped to inculcate the feeling of the *samaj* and *samaj sewa* at an early age. Social work and charity are seen as a means of keeping the family together and helping children imbibe the desired familial values.

The *samaj* through its structuring of the *bazaar* shows that businesses include a range of formal and informal socio-cultural-political associations. Philanthropy helps blur the structuring role of caste ties for business. Markets are embedded in social structures which are underpinned by 'ideology and culture' (Basile and Harriss-White 2000). The *samaj* is one such social structure that does not allow the collapse of capitalism to markets alone and produces variants to the logic of capitalism.

## *Purifying the Nation: 'Modernising' Hindu-ness*

In this section, the ways in which the *samaj* purifies and perfects the nation by drawing on a majority Hindu consciousness through religious philanthropic projects is discussed. Religion is used by the businessmen to produce a united Hindu nation and its subjects. As city spaces and actors engage with the commercial global economy, the manner in which religion gets communicated undergoes a change. Religion becomes a medium and is mediated through consumption, leisure, and technology signalling the changes in the religious subject. Srivastava (2004;2025) argues that the pre-liberalisation male subject was the 'five-year plan hero' (FYP) constituted both by the "Keynesian and the neoclassical models of economic thought and he stood both for the government intervention and for delayed gratification through the reinvestment of savings for the 'national' good". Das Gupta (2016) argues that in neoliberal India the government working through "spheres of intervention and non-intervention" (page 177). This makes it important to replace the FYP hero with an enterprising subject characterised by *jugaad* (frugal innovation) as argued by Kaur (2016), smart work and not hard work, who undertakes risky investments, derives quick gratification by not denying but embracing one's consumptive needs. This section, by focusing on two forms of religious philanthropy, organisation of religious festivals and projects for cow *sewa*, shows the shifting forms of religious communication and performance undertaken to perfect the Hindu project of the nation.

### **Religion as Entertainment**

The centring of the neoliberal subject through consumption is not visible only in supermarkets and malls, but also at religious places of worship. These changing forms of religious expression visibilise the inter-generational shifts in the relationship with the divine. Raghav Gupta of the *Shree Krishna Janmashtami Mahotsav Samiti*, a committee which has built a temple, ashram, and auditorium in Vrindavan with regards to the ashram says,

when we became *sampan* (well endowed), for the newer generations they began staying away from *dharamshalas*. They

lived in hotels. In a hotel where there is *sura* (wine) and *sundari* (beauty), the mind cannot be at peace. One cannot clear their head. Every man has problems and going to the ashram is like cleaning one's mind. Ashrams do not have an attached bathroom. Today's new generation does not accept this. When I became the *pradhan* (head), I mulled over this and concluded that we need to convert these *dharamshalas* and make it a bit modern. We have stuck to the name *dharamshala* and there is no *tasmic* activity like drinking wine or *tasmic* food. The *bhojan* (food) and the accommodation should be proper. The way I have planned the property, it is being made within the *Janmashtami* trust. We began in 2010. The construction started in 2014. In a year, the ashram will be fully functional. At the moment, about hundred rooms are functional and our children live there. When our children go, they live in these ashrams. All our trustee's children go there and they like it there. The environment is good, there is a beautiful temple.

When asked what *tasmic* meant Raghav Gupta explained it further stating,

you know why *hinsa* (violence) happens. There are three reasons: man's ego, his culture, and next is food. Food has a big factor. You check your mind when you eat *tasmic* food. People meditate and do *yog*. Earlier we used to see saints do it. Now there are two people who have emerged in our times who do the same-Modiji and Yogi Adiyath. I am not talking about any Hindu *dharma*. I am talking about *yog*. We might sleep for eight hours, but it might still seem insufficient. These men sleep for two to three hours and that is enough for them. This is because of *yog*. If you control your mind, then it stays fresh and you can work for five hours. It makes you very capable. It is a mental exercise that works on your body, *sanathan dharma*<sup>32</sup> and Agarwal *samaj*. That is why even today we

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<sup>32</sup> Longkumer (2017: 4) defines *sanathan dharama* as "eternal religion and culture" as used by the Sangh Parivar to unite the Indian nation.

are less egotistical. We teach our kids to keep low and be humble like a fruit tree and to keep moving ahead like that. That is why there is no *hinsa* in our community and we will never fight.

Affluence and ‘modern’ spaces of leisure like hotels come with the threat of tempting the younger generation with pollutants like alcohol, food, and women according to Raghav. The younger generation in Agarwal families represents the new India which is technologically savvy, has a shorter attention span, is quick to discern the use value, and impatient to be gratified in the process. The Agarwal businessmen are aware that the manner of delivering older messages of value, culture, and religious duty need to be updated to cater to the neoliberal subject and the urban context, hence they invest in *modernising* Hindu-ness to actively participate in the processes of subjectification. Foucault (1997) uses “biopolitics” and “biopower” to show how power is exercised on populations through the control of human conduct. This study argues that lifestyle choices like where to stay, what to eat, and what to watch and how to spend one’s time cannot be left to individual discretions but collectively become ‘biopolitical’ projects that help fashion, ideal Hindu citizens. Agarwal businessmen believe that ‘technologies of the self’<sup>33</sup> like self-discipline and meditation strengthen not just the individual but also the future of the Hindu nation. *Dharamshalas* then have to address the physical comfort and luxury desired in order to convey the spiritual-therapeutic feeling of religious spaces. Raghav distinguishes such practices from Hindu *dharma*. In their separation, he hopes to establish its secular, ‘scientific’, and universal appeal, however, a specific political project unfolds in his understanding of *yog*, food, the human body, caste, and the nation. ‘Modern’ *dharamshalas* with their appealing ambience, luxurious settings, and regulated food menus help embody Hindu nationalism. The relationship between the divine and the neoliberal subject is no longer just defined by intense piousness, sacrifice or abstinence but through “neo-liberal Hindu nationalist consumerism” (Khalikova, 2017: 15). Rajeev Garg, who is also a governing member of the society with regard to the auditorium further evidences the ways in which the market and religion come together. He says,

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<sup>33</sup> Foucault (1988) says “technologies of the self permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (page 18).

our *dharamshala* also has an auditorium. The auditorium is like the movie theatres you see these days, it has very comfortable chairs, the construction is coming along well. We have spoken to our interior designers, only the finishing work is left now. Within a year, it will be open for the *samaj* to use. In the *dharamshala*, we have already started 150 rooms. For the auditorium, we want that it is spacious and comfortable enough that when people sit for three to four hours, they come out feeling fresh and not tired. You should not feel that for three hours, I listened to *Maharajji* (religious teacher) and that I am bored now. We will have a theme running in the background, for example, if *Maharajji* (religious teacher) is talking about Sudama<sup>34</sup> then people can see Sudama's *mehel* (palace) in the background. The children will not sit in the tents outside. We have made the auditorium like a PVR<sup>35</sup>. So the *katha* and programs are held there and we sit there like we sit in PVRs. So the culture stays alive.

Similar to the manner in which the *dharamshalas* and auditoriums are getting a makeover, technological innovations and the casting of celebrities in religious festivals is undertaken. Rajeev Garg who is on the organising board for the Punjabi Bagh *Janmashtami* festival says,

we hold meetings and a lot of discussion goes into it. We spend crore rupees of money. Every time the question is should we spend so much money? Three years ago we were unsure how to raise the money. Singla ji<sup>36</sup> got angry, he said cut this expenditure, cut that expenditure. Five of us sat down and wrote down the names of potential donors and called them. I called a *seth* and told him he is giving 21 lakh rupees. He said to take 19, my father will get angry.

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<sup>34</sup> Brahmin childhood friend of Lord Krishna

<sup>35</sup> PVR cinemas is a film entertainment company in India which replaced single screen cinemas with multiple screens, smaller theatres, comfortable chair and a luxurious setting.

<sup>36</sup> Amrit Singla is the Chairman and Managing Director of Mapsko Builders pvt ltd. They are into residential and commercial real estate and building (MAPSKO, n.d.).



I told him nothing doing it is going to be 21 lakh rupees. From someone, we got 12 lakh rupees. We called a meeting and raised the rest. When we got a crore of rupees, we went to Singhla ji and told him. When he approved the same day, we went to Mumbai and booked Hema Malini<sup>37</sup>.

In Rajeev Garg's account, the social mechanisms that help gather the money required for hosting religious festivals are visibilised. It requires the coming together of a group of businessmen and drawing on their existing inter-generational networks and personal credit to get others to contribute money. It also shows the internal contestations and the feeling amongst a group of businessmen, especially the *big men* in the neighbourhood that huge investments in religious festivals are unnecessary. Getting celebrities to perform in festivals and an increasing use of technological innovations has become a norm in other religious festivals like *Ramlila* too. Hinduism guides technological innovations as it competes with other forms of entertainment in the urban. Nagesh Gupta, an Agarwal businessman and post holder in the Ramlila Mahasangh says,

during the fight scenes whenever swords or arrows will come in contact with each other, sparks will fly.”When the effigy of *Ravana* will be set on fire, its eyeballs will roll and it will also shout “Hey Ram”. Around 10,000 crackers fit into the effigies will amplify the sound (“Technology, celebrities to draw crowds at Delhi's Ramlila's”, 2014)

However, despite the changing appearance and form of religious festivals, political motives and older moral message occupy centre stage. Freitag (1989) argues that in 1911, the British administrators were alarmed by the numerous ‘innovations’ that were introduced in the staging of *Ramlila* and the urban public's attraction to the play in North India. *Ramlila* drew heavy crowds and hence had the potential to influence people through the message it conveyed. Freitag (1989) says Ramlila from its organisation to its reception drew a wide based support, making it hard to find “any activity which expresses more

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<sup>37</sup> Hema Malini is a famous Bollywood actress whose career was at its peak in the 1980s and 90s. She is a trained classical dancer and apart from her many movies has played lead roles of Hindu goddesses in television series. She is a member of BJP and was elected to the Lok Sabha in 2014.

directly the ideals and tastes of the entire Hindu public of a North Indian town” (page 204). The symbols incorporated in the festival included both mythical and historical figures like Rani of Jhansi. In this, way the festival had more to do with political and state structures as compared to religion. Agarwal businessmen in the contemporary as organisers and producers of religious festivals have pragmatic applications for the messages drawn from them. Nagesh Gupta says that life of Ram enacted in Ramlila carried important messages for the contemporary lives. He says,

in Ramayan, we learn that the strongest message that emerges is of sacrifice. When Lord Ram was sent off to exile, Bharat did not sit on his throne. There is so much sacrifice here. He was the ruler, but he put Lord Ram’s slippers on the throne and worshipped them for 14 years. Nowadays, the families are breaking, *samaj* is breaking, the art of joining families is in Ramayan. Brothers are fighting, children are fighting. If we want to put an end to this conflict in families, increase the love between father and son, then we need we need to learn that through Ramayan families can be joined. It also teaches you how to get rid of all that is evil. This makes our families, *samaj*, Hindu *dharma*, and the country stronger.

Gupta wishes people imbibe the need to strengthen the interlinkages between overlapping structures of family, caste community, Hinduism, and the nation. The fate and unity of Hinduism have been a historical concern of the Hindu right and shared by Agarwal businessmen. Raghav Gupta elaborates the urgency to strengthen Hinduism and the role that religious festivals can play in it. He says,

today *sanatan dharma* is falling down. Our *pundits* did not accept the *adivasis* (tribals). They are all becoming Christian now. This is because of the caste system and discrimination. Today, if you show hatred towards another religion, your children will also learn it. If they see you hug a person of another religion, they will learn it too. If *sanatan dharma* has to be saved, then caste system has to

be finished. *Janmashtami* festival is free and all kinds of people come for it.

Rewriting the religious form by the *samaj* visibilises the bonhomie between religion and market. This challenges classical western thinkers understanding of modernity “disembedding” market from society and religion (Polyani, 1944; Mauss,1925). Religion to the Agarwals is not meant for the personal realm. In its “modern” practices, religion is not a “refuge or a domain of resistance against capitalism” it is actively produced in conversation with it (Osella & Rudnyckyj 2017: 19). In doing so, public religious practices become a site for meaning making, community building, and entrepreneurship through competition. It responds both to micro internal pressures of the *samaj* and macro political needs to unite Hindus across caste by reinvesting in Hindu-ness. For Hinduism to become stronger, it first needs to be cleansed from caste based discrimination and to re-focus on its auspiciousness and inclusivity. This is the exercise that Agarwal businessmen claim they are undertaking.

### **Gau Sewa with Urban Ease**

*Sewa* (service) has been a carefully collaborated political strategy of the Hindu Right which Patel (2010: 111) argues was first articulated in the 1960s as consisting of five principle characteristics,

An attempt to transform Hinduism into a homogenized, rigid, codified, and monochromatic identity; the belief that Hinduism is the most ancient, perfect and evolved religion, as against other existing religions; an attempt to create clear boundaries identifying the believers from infidels; a belief in the significance of the Vedas, the text that elaborates practices, as victims of threat to itself and to the nation; and lastly, as set of ideas that are insular, that is, ideas which are not willing to be engaged in a dialogue, discussion or debate with other visions, projects and ideologies.

In 1980, on the birth centenary of its founder, K.B. Hegdewar, the *Sangh* launched a service division. This saw the transition from *Sewa* as a way of maintaining Hindu solidarity to incorporating subaltern Hindus within the Hindu fold. The *Sangh* was aware that its presence was primarily amongst the upper-castes. Thachil (2014) argues that *Sewa* or service provision was the strategy adopted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) an elite party<sup>38</sup>, to be relevant amongst poor voters. The *Sangh* activists also realised that it would be easier to ‘energise’ grassroots activists through *Sewa* as opposed to purely electoral campaigns. Activists were motivated to counter the efforts of Christian and Muslim organisations in a lower caste and tribal communities (Thachil 2014: 23). Hence ‘service and not agitation’ became crucial to the movement’s future success as articulated by the founder of the *Sangh*’s major service wings-Balasaheb Deshpande (Thachil 2014: 106). *Sewa* is a political strategy that has brought the elites together, without fundamentally questioning the exclusivity of their wealth making processes and the poor voters with respect to the BJP party.

As argued earlier, *Sewa* through philanthropy is a constitutive part of the self-definition of business communities, like the Agarwals. *Gau-Sewa* (service of the cow) has found a renewed interest in the last few years, especially with the rise of the BJP to power in the centre in 2014. Nagesh Gupta is part of a group of Agarwal businessmen in Delhi who have started a mechanism called the *Gau Grass Seva* to collect food for the cows in Delhi. A trolley, with a bell attached and a picture of *gau-mata* (cow mother), is driven around in colonies (Figure 2 and 3). (Rathore, 2011). Nagesh says,

this is for all those who live in the city. We have made a trolley and it has a bell. This trolley goes to all the colonies and when the *grihani* (Hindu reference for a woman of the house) hears it, she understands that people have come to collect the things for the cow. Now she can give fruits or vegetable skins or *roti* (Indian bread). The first *roti* is usually given to the cow. In cities, you cannot go looking for a cow then who do you give the *roti* to? This provision is made for such people so the lady of the house can

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<sup>38</sup>Thachil (2014:3) classifies a party as elite, if its core constituencies are located within the ‘upper strata of the society’.

herself or through her servant deposit the food in tin boxes that we have made in the trolley. This way the food is accumulated and transported to the cows in the *gaushalas* (cow sheds). This way, without spending any money we have taken care of your *dharmic bhawana* (religious feeling). You get to do your *Sewa* and the cow gets clean and hygienic food from your kitchen.



Figure 2. *Gau Grass Sewa* trolley 1



Figure 3 *Gau Grass Sewa* trolley 2

By facilitating mechanisms like the *Gau Grass Sewa*, businessmen like Gupta speak of one's religious duties in a market vocabulary of supply and demand. A transactional language underpins one's Hindu duties. To undertake these duties, however, one does not have to go out of her/his way, intermediaries like the Agarwal businessmen help undertake these duties with the ease that accompanies urban lives for the middle and upper classes. If

the *Sangh Parivar* reaches out to the subalterns through their many service wings, it is also important to remind the affluent Hindus of their religious duties.

Similarly, Akash Agarwal speaks about an increasing interest in ‘Khamdhenu Mangal Parivar’ and mechanisms to include more people in the working of the cow hospital and ambulance service. Figure 4 and 5 were printed in the ‘Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar’s’ monthly journal and acknowledges the businessmen who make sizeable contributions through a full page advertisement. Promoting their business through advertisements and establishing oneself in the *samaj* through this, undertaking *gau-sewa*, and strengthening the Hindu community goes hand in hand. Akash says,

now from 100 members, we have 1000 members. Our cost of membership has increased from 10,000 rupees to 1 lakh rupees and now 2 lakh rupees. We receive good funds and popularity has also increased, therefore many donors approach us. Looking at our extraordinary work with the ambulance which no one has done so far, we thought of building a hospital for the cows only. So, we first made a budget for 12 lakh of rupees, it has now become 12 cores, as we need land, men, medicines, and other things. We realised that on a monthly basis we would need 50,000 rupees to maintain our vehicles and the doctor. So we started a small scheme to share the costs. The members of the scheme shell out 500 rupees every month. We have two people who go and collect this money. 500 rupees is a small amount, people feel like they are following their Hindu *dharma* and doing *gau-sewa*. Some just give it because they feel obliged to contribute. In either case, it helps us run our affairs smoothly.

The cow, as a political animal, continues to hold an important place in the imagination of Agarwal businessmen. As she begins to re-graze the political pastures through government-led efforts, it is with the consonance of businessmen who support, praise, and find comfort in the government efforts. The spiritual animal continues to provide a common ground for Agarwal businessmen to network and strengthen their business ties.

However, when asked about the numerous cases of violence surrounding the cow, Akash attributes it to a few '*kattar* (conservative) Hindus' that he also does not identify with. He says,

it is not true that Muslims hate cows, they also love the cow. It is written in their scriptures too that to kill the cow is *haraam*(forbidden by Allah). Not all Muslims are wrong. If you talk about the slaughter houses, then you would find that slaughter houses are not just of Muslims but also of the Hindus. This is a political play, which has turned people against the Muslim community, but I do not believe it is true.

Hence while businessmen like Akash might invest in totems of Hindu nationalism like the cow, they might not endorse the militancy of the Hindu right on the issue. The next section will elaborate on the relationship between the businessmen and the nation-state.

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Figure 4 Advertisement of contributors to the Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar (Advertisement for Gau Chikitsa Seva Kendra, 2015)



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Figure 5 Advertisement of contributors to Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar (Advertisement for Gau Chikitsa Seva Kendra, 2015)

***Proximity with the State: Contestations and Collaborations***

Once the ideological project of aligning the community to the nation by reinvesting in Hindu-ness is undertaken, this foothold can be used to forge a relationship with the state. It is not the individual citizens fighting for their rights, but rather the community through the *samaj* accessing the public resources. The *samaj* facilitates a direct and a stronger relationship between the community and the state through philanthropy. The value of this philanthropy lies in the context of the post-colonial state either struggling or lacking the political will to provide social safety nets to its citizens. The language of entrepreneurial philanthropy does not challenge the privilege or the economic and political structures that facilitates it. Thachil (2014) argues that philanthropy privileges the voluntary donations of

wealthy citizens and is therefore far less “threatening to their material interests rather than demands for involuntary, equalising, policy based redistributions of land or income” (page 238). The relationship with the state can also be accessed for traversing the bureaucratic labyrinth for businesses especially given the ambiguity of regulative policy environments. Jodhka and Jules (2017) argue that business in India is complicated by the state and regional variations of policies and rules. This requires business actors to “constantly adjust their behaviour and mobilise different dispositions as they pass from one world to another” (page 6). Majumdar (2017) argues that business success in Indian capitalism depends on securing the means, whether it is finance, technology, or state support from the outside than create them from within firms that would get them proprietorship. The success of Reliance heavily depends on its capacity to manage state support and permits when economic elites with similar capacities were unsuccessful in gaining them. Both these works show the individual and collective mobilisation and effort required to differentiate oneself in order to access the resources of the state favourably. This section focuses on ways through which the Agarwal businessmen distinguish, establish, and bargain with the nation-state for the setting up of religious philanthropic projects and by subsidising the efforts of the post-colonial state in providing social benefits.

### **Urban Space versus/and Religion**

The contestations over urban space, infrastructure, and built environment when it comes to religious practice, visibilise territorial modalities that shape the relationship between the citizens and the state. Religious place making, in the Indian context, has had a historically communal narrative. In this section, the focus of contestations over land is not between religious communities but between the organisers of religious festivals and cow hospitals with state authorities. Urban sacred is a way of expressing identities by making claims on public resources. The state has had a chequered relationship in this context, at times contesting and on other occasions colluding with powerful interests to help access public resources. This ambivalence has given sufficient room for some communities to organise themselves and find ways to access and mark urban space.

Religious festivals are temporary installations that help “ritualise the urban fabric” by capitalising on “the mobile technologies of acoustic and visual media from cassettes to

video, enabling new sensory experience” (Srinivas, 2012: 69). They draw large crowds, require months of preparation, are funded by rich businessmen and inaugurated by different state functionaries including the Prime Minister for the bigger *Ramlila*. The spaces of performance of the small neighbourhood and the large all Delhi *Ramlila* are relatively fixed. Permissions need to be sought from different governmental bodies to whom the land belongs and this has led to many conflicts. In 2015, the Delhi High Court bench in response to a plea filed by Dharmic Ramlila Committee<sup>39</sup> said that “tradition could not be allowed to violate legal provisions” (Bhatia, 2014). It stopped the age-old tradition of hosting the *Ramlila* celebrations at the Parade Grounds opposite to the Red Fort, as the parking facilities at the Parade Ground had been blocked in violation of the Delhi Master Plan (Mathur, 2015a). The court asked the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) to allocate a different site for the *Ramlila* festival. The court order said,

Use of public parking areas, especially multilevel parking plots and surface areas attached to them for any other purpose, is impermissible. In these circumstances, the court cannot hold that the right to profess and practice religion or hold cultural festivities on such areas trumps over such legal prohibition.

Last year, the court had held the NDMC Commissioner in contempt of the court proceedings for allowing the festival to be held at the Parade grounds and blocking the parking facility (Mathur, 2015b). Many other court cases have been filed over issues of land allocation for organising the festival (Civil Writ Petition No. 5358/2003). One of the chief organisers of the Shri Dharmic Ramlila Committee was Bansi Dar Gupta. The third and fourth generations of twelve noted business families are the core sponsors of this Ramlila. Bansi Dhar Gupta’s grandson, Dhirish Gupta, a prominent automobile industrialist is the current president of the committee. Sitting in his palatial home in Under Hill Lane in North Delhi, he says that ‘Ramlila is important for both the Hindus and the city of Delhi and it should go on’.

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<sup>39</sup>This is one of the oldest Ramlila in Delhi and was started in 1923. The committee consists of a team of 72 and 3200 central and ancillary members. The budget for this Ramlila goes as high as eighty to ninety lakh rupees.

In 1997, the Ramlila *Mahasangh* was formed to have a common platform for all the Delhi Ramlila committees to negotiate with different government bodies and sponsors. The *Mahasangh* has close ties with Rashtriya Sewa Sangh (RSS), the sister organisation of the Hindu nationalist party- Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). The current president of the Mahasangh is Sukhbir Sharan Agarwal and vice president is Nagesh Gupta. About 62 percent of the core group of the Mahasangh is constituted by Agarwal<sup>40</sup>. Time and again the Mahasangh has lobbied with the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Archaeological Department, Delhi cantonment board, and Central Public Works Department (CPWD) for a reduction in electricity bills, economic subsidies from the government, rent-free land and parks in neighbourhoods, permission to install banners for advertisement for ten days, maintenance, repair and sanitation facilities on the Ramlila grounds, lighting facilities, permission to have loud speakers after ten, and to open a single window system through which all of this can be processed for the Ramlila Mahasangh. Nagesh Gupta says they have staged close to two hundred protests to have their demands met in the last two decades. He also says the government has cooperated with them on numerous matters, like in 1998 Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana and again in 2003 Chief Minister Shiela Dixit ordered that the electricity should be provided to Ramlila in Delhi at a domestic and not commercial rate. In 2006, the Mahasangh appealed to the government of India that the Ramlila stood for cultural and social unity and should be provided 50 percent of financial help from the government, which was again granted. Nagesh Gupta sitting in his real estate office says,

there is no commercial angle in Ramlila, all of this is happening for our Indian and Hindu values. Hence the government should take a step forward and solve all the problems arising from organising festivals in Delhi. What happens is that some land in Delhi belongs to the corporation, some to CPWD, some to PWD, DDA and then the ASI department. All these agencies have different types of land and there is no coordination between these departments. Some departments will say the land is for free. Others

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<sup>40</sup> In 2015, Luv Khus Ramlila Committee, another organiser of large scale Ramlilas published a book, chronicling their efforts since 1997 in organising the event in Delhi. Amongst others it carried short messages from political leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Rajnath Singh, Harsvardhan and Sushma Swaraj.

would argue that it is for 5 lakh rupees. Some of the Ramlila committees are small and do not have money. Then we have to step in and tell these departments that some are giving it for free why are you charging 5 lakh rupees. There is no commercial angle in this festival. There are many things for which you have to struggle. For example electricity, now if there is a wedding it is commercial now it is the Ramlila festival then it is not commercial. Then we demand that either no money is charged or that it should be charged at domestic rates.

There are two narratives that emerge here. The first is that of the judiciary as expressed in the Shri Dharmic Ramlila Committee versus MCD case. The judicial system privileges the use of public spaces for public purposes and considers the Ramlila as an encroachment of *tradition* over the civil functioning of the city, which is already congested and densely packed. For the judiciary, in this case, the city is a secular space which could host religious festivals as long as the day-to-day functioning of the city is not disrupted. The liberal enactments of citizenship and identity find a resonance in the court judgment. However, for Nagesh Gupta and DhirishGupta, Ramlila is not just a religious festival but an essential part of the culture of Delhi. Nagesh Gupta sees ‘Indian and Hindu values’ propagated by Ramlila and that it is a ‘non-commercial’ event as meriting more cooperation and subsidies from the state. The time to time concessions that the Ramlila Mahasangh receives from the state shows the intermeshed nature of the secular and religious practices in city spaces.

The state can choose to align with certain interests when political pressures are exerted or if it goes in tandem with its own ideology of how public resources should be utilised. Akash Agarwal (AA) started the construction of a cow hospital through a registered society called the ‘Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar’ two years ago. Within Hinduism, different castes have forged a different relationship with the cow<sup>41</sup>. Agarwals like Akash, drawing

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<sup>41</sup> The Yadavs claim their lineage from Krishna, the cowherd, and the selling of milk as one of their caste occupations by extension. Using this mytho-historical descendant claim they have built a strong political identity (Michelluti, 2004). The Jatavs have been stigmatised for working with hides and in the tanning industry (Rawat, 2011). The Brahmins have had a key role to play in the

on Maharaja Agasen argue that Agrasen became a *Vaish* (trading caste) from *Kshatriya* (warrior caste) because he was against animal sacrifice. The Agarwals also believe in the protection of cows and embrace a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism in India has long been associated with Brahmanical purity and upper caste-ness. Their contemporary relationship with the cow is similar to that of the Brahmins that is one of *sewa* (service). However, unlike the Brahmins, the Agarwal businessmen also make capital investments in projects like the cow hospital in Delhi. The proposed plan for the cow hospital set up by the Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar includes a 24 hour cow ambulance service not just for the ill cows but also the homeless ones along with latest ICU unit, small and major operations unit, casualty ward, X-ray ward, ultrasound, pathology lab, ventilator, operation theatres day care centres, and labour room (“Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar”, n.d.). This is the first private initiative to start a cow hospital in Delhi<sup>42</sup>. There are five government run *gosadans* (cow sheds) set up under Section 10 of Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act (1994)<sup>43</sup>. The government has a budget of 40 rupees per cow for daily feeding. While the land is provided by the government, its management is handed out to different political groups and non-governmental organisations. For example, Gopal Gosadan, one of the government *gaushalas*, who lives 7 km away from Bawana village and situated in Harevli village is run by the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP), the cultural affairs and international activities wing of the Sangh Parivar (“Gopal Sadan”, n.d.). Its president is Rakesh Gupta, an Agarwal businessman-, who is also chairman of a media group. There are three government-run veterinary hospitals in Delhi, however, Akash feels that *gaumata* is not prioritised and has to wait her turn. His hospital is then exclusively dedicated to cows.

**Q:** Can you tell me about Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar?

**A:** We opened a trust called Kamdhenu Mangal Parivar, the name is such that we as a family come together to do good for Kamdhenu (a cow). We started with a hundred members, we are all friends. We contributed towards a common fund and purchased

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selective historical narrative of associating beef consumption and cow slaughter to the Muslims and Dalits and bringing cow to the centre stage of Hindu mythology.

<sup>43</sup>The *gosadans* are Dabar Hare Krishna Gaushala (24 acres); Manav Gosadan, Rewla Khanpur (16 acres); Gopal Gosadan, Harevali (15 acres); Acharya Sushil Gosadan, village Gummenhera (19 acres); Shree Krishna Goshala, Sultanpur Dabas (36 acres) (“Delhi Government”, n.d.).

an ambulance. We got a great response from everyone. In a day at least five requests came to pick up a cow. To lift a cow in a city like Delhi takes about two hours. When we saw that we were receiving too many requests, we decided to go for another ambulance, a Tata vehicle. In two years, after raising enough funds, it got advertised well due to good work and a lot of people contributed. We then bought a Bolero which could enter smaller lanes. Now we are busy around the clock and we get 15 calls every day. We then decided to build a cow hospital. From 12 lakh rupees, we now have 12 crore rupees.

**Q:** Where did you get your land?

**A:** The purpose of the land is already decided by the government. So, for the hospital, we had to shift a bit to the outside because if there is an agricultural land even if it is infertile the government will not let you use it for anything else. In Haryana, at Bahadurgarh which is close to Delhi, we found a land which is also an agricultural land. We had to apply for land-use change (CLU). The conversion has a lot of problems though, especially if you are a normal person, then it is really tough and after all, we are only *gau Sewak* (cow servants).

**Q:** What did you do then?

**A:** We did not know that the Haryana government had strict rules pertaining to CLU. We thought we would get it done easily. We prepared our file in case the government's policy changed. Now, we have put all the money we collected for the project and people blamed us. A *miracle* happened, when our file reached Chandigarh for CLU, we suddenly received the news that the court removed its stay on CLU in Haryana. Our papers reached

the Haryana Chief Minister's office, he signed the papers, and it was done. We heard that after our project got its approval, the court stay was reapplied. Would you not call it a *miracle*? (emphasis added).

This *miracle* that Akash refers to shows that when business and the nation are ideologically united by Hindu religiosity, legal loopholes can be identified and the state cooperates to invest in totems of Hindu nationalism like the cow<sup>44</sup>. Old totems of Hindu nationalism are pressed into service once again, however, this time the focus has shifted to the individuals involved in the enterprise and their comfort of undertaking religious duties.

### **Development and Common Good**

The Agarwals have set up numerous educational institutions in Delhi since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely Ramjas College, Hindu College, Desh Bandhu College, Kirorimal College, and Daulat Ram College in North Campus. Ramjas College was set up by Rai Kedar Nath who named the college after his father Ramjas Singh<sup>45</sup>. However, by the 1970s and early 80s, the Agarwals in Delhi realised that only a few people knew that these educational institutes had been established by them. It was also not financially viable for a single family to set up colleges, schools, and hospitals on their own. Hence, registered societies under the Societies Registration Act, 1980<sup>46</sup> were set up

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<sup>44</sup>The ease with which Binod could get his CLU passed is not an isolated one in Haryana. There have been other instances in the recent past where the idea of development for the government has been tied with religion and appeals to pockets of the majoritarian population. For example, Haryana's Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar of the BJP party has a dedicated ministry called the Gau Sewa Ayog. It proposed government benefits for those that breed cows, a 500 acre cow university modelled after the Kamdhenu University established by the Gujarat government in 2009 (Safi, 2017). Khattar has also decreased the CLU charge for religious and spiritual leaders.

<sup>45</sup> Ramjas Singh was a teacher in the education department in the 1880s. Kedar Nath in 1912 first set up the Ramjas High School in Kucha Ghasiram, he went on to setup a second school in Ansari Road, Darya Gang. In 1916, Ramjas College was setup in Sarai, Rohila over a 367 acre property and in 1918 it was moved to north campus where it continues to function successfully ("University of Delhi", n.d.).

<sup>46</sup> For more details refer to The Societies Registration Act, 1980 (n.d)



with the intention of setting up schools, colleges, and hospitals. This allows caste to take non-caste and secular forms of development and progress.

Three noted societies set up by the Agarwals are-Maharaja Agrasen Technical Education Society (MATES) (Figure 8), Shri Aggrasain North Excellence Welfare Society (SANEWS), (Figure 8) and Maharaja Agrasen Scientific Education and Research Society (MASERS) (Figure 9). Figure 8 shows that the trustees overlap in South-West Delhi in Punjabi Bagh, Pitampura, and Rohini. Keshav Gupta, the Chairman of the Maharaja Aggrasain International Hospital built by SANEWS and an established builder and real estate owner when asked about the reason for the heavy concentration of trustees in MATES and SANEWS from parts of South-West Delhi says that,

we Agarwal live like we would have lived in our villages. If one of us moved here, we would call five more of our relatives to move here. We also believe in helping each other. So if someone needs to set up their business, we would suggest which the best business to enter is and a location for his shop too. Most of us in this part of Delhi are from Haryana.

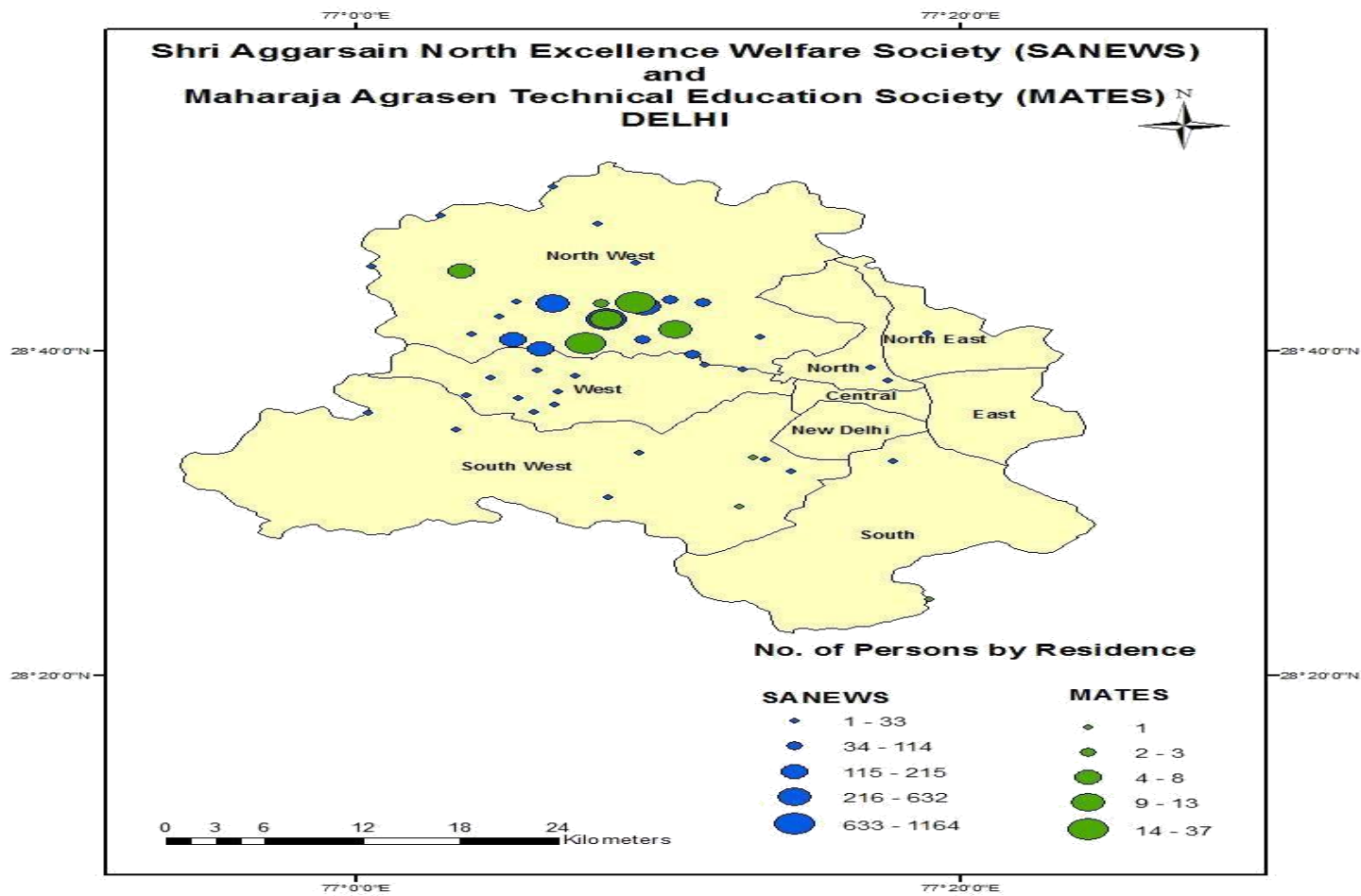
MATES and SASNEW are registered<sup>47</sup> in Delhi while the last one is registered in Hissar, Haryana. After using the addresses of the trustees of each of these societies, the study shows that a majority of the trustees hail from South-West Delhi<sup>48</sup>. In the case of MATES, 45 percent of the trustees hail from South-West Delhi such as Punjabi Bagh (consisting of 34 percent) and Pitampura (consisting of 11 percent) ( Maharaja Agrasen Technical Education Society, n.d) . While in the case of SANEWS, 70.6 percent of the trustees hail from parts of South-West Delhi such as-Pitampura (consisting of 42 percent), Rohini (consisting of 17.2 percent), and Punjabi Bagh (consisting of 11.5 percent). The

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<sup>47</sup> In Delhi, Societies are registered under The Societies Registration Act (1860). This Act is for the registration of literary, scientific, and charitable societies constituted for non-profit activities (“Delhi Government”, n.d.).

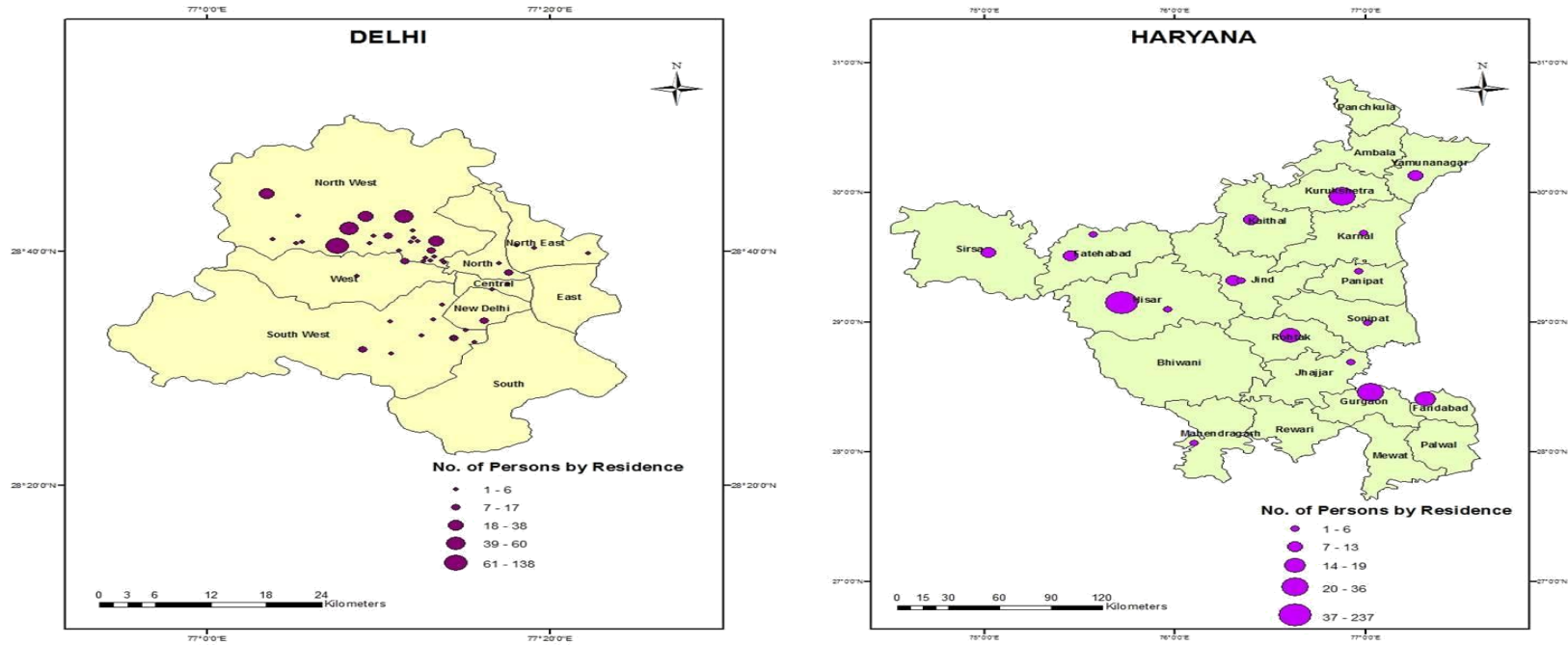
<sup>48</sup> The names, contact information, and residential details of the trustees are publicly available on the respective websites of the societies. MATES has 109 trustees; SANEWS has 3682 trustees; MASERS has 1420 trustees. For MATES the office addresses of the trustees were used, for SASNEWS their residential address, and for MASERS a mix of office and residential addresses were used. Residents were sorted according to the pin codes. Their precise location was collected from Google Earth and a geographic information system (GIS) was used to plot them.

membership of the third society MASERS is scattered both within and outside Delhi (consisting of 78.5 percent). A majority of the out-of-Delhi trustees are concentrated in Haryana, Calcutta, and Mumbai. Through the MATES numerous schools and universities namely—Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Technology (MAIT) (1998), Maharaja Agrasen University (MAU) (1994), and Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Management Studies (MAIMS) (1999) have been set up. They are also constructing a university in Himachal Pradesh. Through the SASNEW, a five hundred bed international hospital has been under construction in Rohini and through the MASERS, a medical university has been set up in Hissar (Maharaja Aggrasain International Hospita, n.d.).



**Figure 8.** Trustees of SANEWS and MATES mapped residentially in Delhi.

## Maharaja Agrasen Medical Education & Scientific Research Society



**Figure 9.** Trustees of MAMESRS mapped residentially in Delhi and Haryana<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>49</sup>The trustees in other cities have not been represented on these maps.

Both MATES and SASNEWS societies started as a small community level initiative which expanded as more Agarwal trustees joined and became bigger. Nand Kishore Garg is the Maharaja Agrasen Chair<sup>50</sup> in Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Technology (MAIT) and one of the founding members of MATES. He has an office in Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Technology (MAIT) in Rohini, Sector-22 where I met him. As one enters the college, there is a huge copper statue of Maharaja Agrasen seated on a throne, behind him on the right is a statue of Swami Vivekananda. As one enters Garg's office in the waiting lobby, there is a large embellished portrait of Goddess Laxmi. When asked about MATES and the history of the college he says,

when the Delhi government was in talks for making a new university-Indraprastha University (IP), there were talks of establishing affiliated colleges. So people in the *samaj* said let's start a *sansthan* (organisation). So in 1998-1999, we started MATES. One obviously needs land. At this point, the *samaj* was running a school called Geeta Vidyalaya. We built thirty more rooms there and started the college on a temporary basis. At that point 9 of us had started it and now we have close to 200 trustees<sup>51</sup>. We have regular elections and we function well. Our trustees are good willed people. We have told them 'if you want to enter education it is like a *yagna* (worship or sacrifice)'.

Similarly, Keshav Gupta of the Shri Aggrasain North Excellence Welfare Society (SANEWS), sitting in a semi furnished office in the hospital construction site in Rohini Sector-22 says,

in the *samaj*, some of us thought that a good hospital was required. The discussions kept happening and twenty to thirty people came together. Those trustees dreamed of making a hospital. By the time

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<sup>50</sup> In MAIT along with the Maharaja Agrasen, a Swami Vivekananda Chair has also been instituted. Similarly, a Maharaja Agrasen Chair has been instituted in Indira Gandhi University in Haryana ("Chair in Name of Maharaja Agrasen to be Established in Indira Gandhi Varsity", 2016).

<sup>51</sup> The trustee list is available in the public domain, however only details of only 109 trustees given.

we applied, the government of India, Delhi Development Authority (DDA) policy was expiring. When they had an auction of land for hospitals then we participated in this public auction and looking at our funds we could only manage to get a plot for a nursing home in Rohini, Sector-8. But people said you wanted to make a hospital and now you are settling on a nursing home. At this point, the society became more elaborate and we got more funds. When the auction happened in 2005, we got land from DDA for forty-eight core rupees. What we had in mind was a hospital which is international in its outlook and covering a 5 lakh of rupees of the area. The hospital will be ready in 2017 and will help the poor living in the surrounding areas. We have close to five thousand trustees now.

Both MATES and SASNEW are sustained first by the membership fee and then through regular donations. The membership fee for MATES is 5 lakh rupees per trustee, while that of SASNEW is not fixed. Nand Kishore Garg says,

their (trustee) donation is not a one-time act. We regularly keep in touch and meet. So we source it through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity<sup>52</sup>. New trustees join and they also contribute. Then, someone wants to sponsor some scholarship. Some would give ten lakh rupees and more in memory of their father. Sometimes, they might want their name on a block after themselves. This is how it functions in our *samaj*. We put up a photo and we get say 11 lakh rupees. We inaugurated a Vivekananda statue and we got money for that. Whenever someone visits they give money. Ram Das Agarwal *ji* had come thrice, once he gave 11 lakh rupee and on two other occasions had given 2 and a half lakh rupee. For us, money is not a problem. We

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<sup>52</sup> Under the Companies Act (2013) ‘every company private or public limited which has a net worth of 500 crore rupees or a turnover of 1,000 crore rupees or net profit of 5 crore rupees needs to spend at least 2 percent of its average net profit for the immediately preceding three financial years on corporate social responsibility (CSR)’ (Bahl, 2014).

have never let anybody's work stop because of money, just their intention should be correct. The Agarwals have a *vardaan* (boon) from Goddess Laxmi because of Maharaja Agrasen. If you drink the mother's milk, she will live and if you drink her blood, she will die.

Garg, also a three-time BJP MLA's vision of education coalesces with the current BJP led central government's ideas of cultural nationalism through education. He says,

we want to follow the old Banaras Hindu University (BHU) model by Madan Mohan Malviya<sup>53</sup> with minor amendments here and there. We want to create people who would dedicate themselves completely to the society and change the destiny of this country. To make this possible along with the courses, we have events and functions. Twenty such functions have been conducted this year. From *yagnas* (sacrificial devotion) to celebrating the 360<sup>th</sup> birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, holding Vivekananda<sup>54</sup> blood donation camp, we have many more things planned etc. More than the government, we think about these things. We are also into Digital India<sup>55</sup> and Skill India<sup>56</sup>. We have lectures on Chanakya<sup>57</sup>, for which professors from America came, *gyan sangam*<sup>58</sup> (a wisdom convention) of the whole country also happened here. In this, fifty-

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<sup>53</sup> Madan Mohan Malviya was an Indian politician and educationist who started the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1916.

<sup>54</sup> Swami Vivekananda was a strong proponent of Hinduism and is an icon for the Hindu right in the country. He was the first person to introduce the concept of Sewa and define it as 'organized service to humankind' (Beckerlegge, 2000: 60).

<sup>55</sup> In 2015, the BJP led central government launched its programme 'Digital India' to promote a 'digitally empowered society and knowledge economy' ("Digital India", n.d.).

<sup>56</sup> 2015, the BJP led central government launched its programme 'Skill India' with the objective of training close to 40 crore of people in varied skills ("National Skill Development Cooperation", n.d.).

<sup>57</sup> Chanakya was a political advisor to Chandragupta Maurya and helped set up the Maurya empire. He is considered a pioneer in the field of politics and economics. He also authored the Arthashastra, an ancient Indian text on economic policy and military strategy.

<sup>58</sup> This is a two-day national workshop organised by an RSS-affiliate body in Delhi with the aim of 'Indianising' the education system ("700 academicians including 51 vice-chancellors attend RSS workshop on Indianising education system", 2017).

five Universities Vice Chancellors (VC) gathered here and we discussed educational reforms. Some seven hundred people participated in it.

Garg's idea of what education should be is replete with references to thinkers who have emboldened the cause of the Hindu right in the country. With the BJP led central government coming to power in 2014, the ideas propagated by these thinkers have found a renewed interest, undergone processes of contemporisation<sup>59</sup>, active propagation and commemoration through national awards and statues. For example, Madan Mohan Malviya was awarded the Bharat Ratna (posthumously) in 2014. He believed that the Banaras Hindu University along with the Aligarh Moslem University would help produce men "true to their God, their King, and their Country" ( Daniyal,2014). He wished for the Dalits to be integrated within the Hindu fold to keep it united. He also did not accept food or water from the hands of anyone apart from a Brahmin. In 1915, he set up the Hindu Mahasabha with Lala Lajpat Rai. He endorsed a "muscular Hindu" identity. He organised the Ramlila procession in Allahabad which often led to communal violence, so much so that the procession was banned by the British till 1937 (Daniyal, 2014). The hosting of the *gyan sangam*, a national workshop organised by the RSS to 'Indianise' education systems shows the commitment of MATES and Garg as its Maharaja Agrasen Chair to provide platforms and endorse the government's saffronisation<sup>60</sup> of education. This event had three predominant themes-'cultural onslaught on the educational system, intellectual colonisation, and the resurgence of nationalism in higher educational institutions' ("700 academicians including 51 vice-chancellors attend RSS workshop on Indianising education system", 2017). The educational board of MATES is constituted solely by Agarwal businessmen and they are also MATES trustees. It would hence be safe to argue

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<sup>59</sup> On the 154<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and the launch of the book *The Modern Monk: What Vivekananda Means to Us Today* by Hindol Sengupta, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was likened to Swami Vivekananda. The PM also said that Vivekananda was his 'personal inspiration' ("700 academicians including 51 vice-chancellors attend RSS workshop on Indianising education system", 2017).

<sup>60</sup> 'Saffronisation' is a critique of the Hindu rights attempt to glorify and insert Hindu cultural history in education systems. The current BJP led government at the centre has aggressively improved upon the attempts by previous NDA governments by the appointment of their own people as heads of educational institutes, changing NCERT syllabus, advocating *gurukul* (residential schooling with hierarchical teacher-student relationships) system of learning and mandatory yoga classes in educational institutes, increasing the funding of RSS educational wings like 'Vidya Bharti' and 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram'.



that the Agarwal businessmen as MATES trustees endorse Garg's ideological positions and the nature of educational activities undertaken in the college. Re-investing in the idea of a Hindu nation and contemporary Hindu-ness through education and supporting the ideology of Hindutva goes together at certain historical junctures. Projects of religious and secular philanthropy through politisation of the businessmen could favorably work as bases for endorsing and propagating Hindutva. However despite many businessmen funding the activities of RSS, not all support the militant forms that Hindu nationalism takes as seen earlier in the case of Akash Agarwal.

By constructing and running hospitals, schools, and colleges Agarwal businessmen pride themselves as never asking the government for anything, instead helping it achieve its development goals. By providing the basic resources like health and education through community endeavours they act as intermediaries between the state and society. They not only address the concerns of the Hindu community through religious philanthropy but argue that they also help constitute the common good of the nation. It allows the businessmen to decide what should constitute as 'development' in coalition with state interests. Hindu value based education is seen as the much-needed initiative which would correct the imbalances introduced by Nehruvian models of western education, perceived as having strong Christian roots.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focuses on the production and role played the *samaj* through religious and secular philanthropy. Philanthropy does not lie in the realm of culture or a naturalised disposition of the rich- the lifestyles of the *rais* alone. Singh (2000) and Jaffrelot (2000) both argue that the mercantile castes constitute a majority in Delhi. This chapter shows how the mercantile castes ideologically control on the historical and political life of the city. The 'modern' expressions of Hindu-ness (through religious and secular philanthropy) are limited to its form while its ingredients continue to be the same old temples, cow worship and dietary habits. Reinvesting in Hindu religiosity finds a continued resonance for the internal and external functions that it performs for its funders- the Agarwal businessmen. *Internally* investing in Hindu religiosity caters to their capital needs, addresses their anxieties about the secularisations of caste subjects and the caste group

through an increase in differentiation. *Externally* it helps purify and perfect the nation according to the 'imagined' life worlds of the businessmen. This helps align the community to the nation-state to decide who and how public resources will be utilised. It further strengthens the self-projection and representation of identity claims of Agarwal (men) being selfless, philanthropic and patriotic. This chapter shows one of the ways through which the *samaj* occupies a position between the community and the association. This ideologically structures an individual's oscillation between the two. The next chapter shows how the *samaj* through the association responds to the pressures of the secularisation of caste with a focus on the Hindu women's question in the community.



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## Chapter 4

### Association and the Agarwal Baniyan: Domesticating Women and Building ‘Sanskaar’

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#### Introduction

The previous chapters show how the enunciatory space of the association is structured by the political and economic elites that forge a *samaj*. The production of the *samaj* happens through the elites internal engagement with processes of secularisation. This leads to ‘modern’ ways of fashioning Hindu religiosity (not its contents). Reinvestments in Hindu-ness help perfect the nation, its subjects and secure proximity with the nation-state through philanthropy. Studies on associations have not engaged with the association’s activities and women. Their engagement is limited to mentioning the number and social backgrounds of women in the association or on stressing the limited space accorded to them (Bairy 2010; Duskin 1980;). In the contemporary, probing the gendered ways in which identities are forged and patriarchies produced will visibilise processes of secularisation and ‘caste-d’ social action.

The sources for this chapter are similar to Chapter 2 that is in-depth interviews with twenty caste activists (all men), observations from association events (attended between 2014 and 2016) and analysis of articles published in *Yuva Agarwal* since the 1990s. I focus on the ways in which women’s question is represented invisibilised and reimagined at the macro sphere of caste. Hardiman (1996) writing in the nineteenth century says that the baniya was a masculine category, little is known about the life of the baniyan, the women in the household. Closer attention at the enunciating voices within the association shows that it is populated only by Hindu upper caste men. Three ‘others’ are discussed in Chapter 2, that is the state, masses and other social groups to show how the contemporary caste identity is forged in conversation with them. There is a fourth internal ‘other’ that is

the women in the community. I argue that through a domestication of the baniyan through marriage in joint families, the masculine Agarwal identity is strengthened and claims of building the *sanskar* of the nation by the community are forefronted. *Sanskar* is understood as moral-cultural-religious values. It is employed both at the community level through claims and at the level of families to socialise children (Chapter 6).

The value of the literature produced by community publications is no longer is in its didactic appeal, the extent of which is contested even in the colonial period. Neither are the writings presented as being representative of the world view shared by all Agarwal in Delhi. The writings are much thinner and sparse as compared to the rich journals, books, manuals and letters published during the colonial period. The strength of the literature analysed lies in highlighting the manner in which the question of gender is engaged with, the fears and insecurities that animate the community and constitute it by engaging with processes of secularisation. As argued by Gupta (2005), “representation is as significant as ‘reality’ or ‘facts’, for it shows what should be rather than what actually is, a mapping of ideology rather than reality, the process of becoming rather than being- all crucial for arguments about identity and community mobilisations” (page 11).

This chapter has been structured in the following manner: *first*, the relationship between secularisation of caste and the neoliberal ‘enterprise’ culture is discussed; *second*, it is shown that post the 1990s, the women’s question is centred through the institution of marriage; and *third, fourth, fifth and sixth* subsections present my findings.

### **Secularization, and ‘Enterprising’ Culture**

In this section, the secularisation of caste at the individual level which frames the *samaj*’s ideological positioning is discussed. This process is understood in the context of the baniyan with the emergence of a neoliberal entrepreneurial culture. Secularisation theorists have focused on the declining role of religion with modernization as compared to the earlier epochs in the Western context. Processes of societal differentiation, socialisation and of rationalisation are attributed to the declining role played by religion. Durkhiem (1964) argues that religion and social are synonymous, however slowly “the individual really feels less acted upon; he becomes more a source of spontaneous activity”

(Page 169-170). Luhmann (1990) argues that a move from stratification to functional differentiation in a modern society causes religion to adapt and at an individual level it leads to a privatisation of religion. Berger (1967) argues that secularisation is a “process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (page 107). He attributes the process of secularisation to the development of a modern industrial society which requires scientific personnel, whose organisation and training presupposes a high level of rationalisation. For Weber (2002) rationalisation of the religious ethic is central to the development of capitalism in Western societies. Morrison (2006) defines Weber’s theory of rationalisation as “the process by which nature, society and individual action are increasingly mastered by an orientation to planning, technical procedure and rational action” (page 218).

In the Indian context processes of secularisation are also investigated to show the changing relationship of caste and religion. Srinivas (1995) shows that the features of secularisation are: a decrease in ritual purity and pollution distinctions; decrease in the role of rituals in everyday life; an increase in the age of marriage of women; widening circles of endogamy and a politicisation of caste. All these processes he argues leads to “a spread of an equalitarian ideology, the caste system is no longer perpetuating values traditionally considered to be an essential part of Hinduism” (page 142). Seth (1999) argues that secularisation is the ritualisation and politicisation of caste. He argues that this leads to caste acquiring “new economic interests and social-political identification and own class-like as well as ethnic-type identities” (page 21). Similarly, Kothari and Maru (1970) also understand secularisation of caste in the context of its politicisation through an adoption of an associational form of organisation. Bairy (2010) uses secularisation to focus at the individual level. He shows that the contradictory pulls and pressures on the Brahmin self leads to them seeking legitimacy by de-legitimizing ‘traditional’ aspects (commensality rules) associated with an earlier self. What of the caste system and at which level secularisation plays out determines the *nature* of individuation. This needs to be empirically established.

Secularisation of caste and individuation is determined by the emergent neoliberal entrepreneurial culture. With the economy opening up in the last two decades, the centre of the neoliberal process is the new India’s entrepreneurial subjects and the creation of an

enterprise culture. Gooptu (2013) argues that an enterprise culture is based on the realisation that “desires and dreams (of new India) rest on mobilising the power and energy of active subject agents: the doers, who are endowed with what might be called aspirational capital and are imbued with ‘passion’, ‘self-belief’, and the ‘conviction’ that ‘no dream is distant” (page 3). The enterprising subject is not necessarily engaged in an economic activity, the enterprise becomes an ethic that guides all walks of life like education, leisure and family (Gooptu 2013: 4). Rose (1999: 84 in Gooptu 2013) argues that the notion of freedom itself, in neoliberal enterprise culture, needs to be reconceptualised as “autonomy” and “as the capacity to realise one’s desire in one’s secular life, to fulfil one’s potential through one’s endeavours, to determine the course of one’s existence through acts of choice” (page 8). This entrepreneurial culture is seen with the younger generation in Agarwal families which leads the *samaj* to modernise the forms of religious philanthropy (as argued in Chapter 3).

This study argues that central to the process of secularisation and individuation is the women’s question. This is because; gender is the bedrock on which caste identities are framed and social action devised. A caste group’s status is determined by the way their women’s question plays out. In Srinivas’s (1995) account the decline in the importance of rituals in everyday life was linked to an increase in the Brahmin women’s education and age of marriage in Mysore. He argues:

Traditionally, a young Brahmin girl worked in and around the kitchen with her mother until her marriage was consummated and she joined her affines. All that was required of her was knowledge of cooking and other domestic chores, the rituals that girls were expected to perform, knowledge of caste and pollution rules, and respect for and obedience to her parents-in-law and husband and other elders in the household. Education changed the outlook of girls and gave them new ideas and aspirations. It certainly made them less particular about pollution rules and ritual, though as long as they lived with their affines they could not completely ignore them (page 134).

Srinivas quotes Ross's (1961) study of educated women in Bangalore that, "women of the household will gradually cease to be the strong backbone of family traditions and caste customs" (Page 231). Fuller and Narasimhan (2015) argue that in the past Tamil Brahmins' caste status and claim to superiority over other castes depended on the "extreme inequality between men and women now depends on the relative absence of inequality between them" (page 151). Amongst the Tamil Brahmins a decline in importance to ritual purity, especially female ritual purity, an increase in education of women and their age of marriage gives the caste group its modern, middle-class status. Still (2014) argues that the Dalit movement to respectability depends on making the women in the community worthy of respect, as gender identity decides the caste identity. She further argues that "the stereotype of the wild, disorderly sexualized Dalit woman and her untamed hair, dishevelled sari, vulgar language and boisterous sensibility must be moulded into the image of the domesticated, docile Telegu *talli* (a chain with a locket worn by married women)" (page 219).

What qualifies as a women's question however historically varies across societies and communities. For example, in colonial India it was a tussle with the age of marriage, sati and women's education. Historical studies show the complex colonial engagement with the women's question (age of marriage, sati, women's education) that communities undertook (Gupta 2005; Sarkar, 2001; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Chatterjee 1993). In the latter phase of colonial rule, the 'new' emancipated woman with a combination of Vedic values and modern ideas is presented as the 'patriot' of the enfeebled Indian nation who would challenge the colonial might (Sarkar, 2001; Chatterjee 1993) The woman hence becomes the repository of tradition, spirituality and 'authentic' nationalism. The discursive management of women's bodies and their construction as symbols of the Hindu household and Hindu nation led to a vibrant public sphere which brought the Sanatan Dharmists and Arya Samajists on the same page (Gupta 2005). Women's sexuality, conjugality, desires, clothes, fashion, relationship with other members of the family like the brother-in-law, education and health practices were extensively written about and discussed in parts of North India and West Bengal (Gupta 2005; Sangari & Vaid 1989). In the colonial literature, women are asked to behave and regulate their actions for the benefit of their



families, community or the Hindu nation. For example, the ‘correct’,<sup>61</sup> female education is meant to not only promote a harmonious environment but also provide men with the pleasures of “noble and purified, and feminine tenderness and sympathy” of the female society (Gupta 2005:167). In the post-colonial association literature and events, the study argues that the discourse is centred on the woman’s question through marriage by acknowledging the emergent neoliberal entrepreneurial culture.

### **Centralising Marriage in the Women’s Question**

Writings and association activities show an engagement with the women’s question only post the 1990s, after elite women become members in separate women’s wing. Women were invisibilised from association writings and associated events; however, commemorations of noted businessmen and politicians, lessons learnt from the community’s role in the nationalist struggle, contribution to the Hindi language and the various philanthropic efforts undertaken find repeated mention in publications. For example, in 1993, during a discussion of the Luv-Khush Ramleela Committee, it was decided that instead of hiring people to act in the year’s Ramleela people from the committee should only act. However, during the meeting, the committee realised that they have no women members and hence they first needed to install women members before they could decide who would act (“Luv Kush Ramlila Samiti”, March 1993). This state of affairs while comical is also telling about the participation of women. Kumar (1994) in the context of the Agarwal Samaj in Banaras says the Agarwal Samaj was formed in 1896 and for the first twenty-two years no woman finds a mention in the writings of the Samaj. It took the Samaj fifty-four years after their inception to set up a school in 1967, despite being the richest caste in Banaras. She says that the ideological literature produced by education activists in Banaras is saturated with references to women as mothers and housewives and ‘one cannot help look for at least these mothers and housewives as one turns the pages of records (Agarwal) of work done’ (Kumar 1994: 215). The invisibilisation of women and their visibilisation post the 1990s through the institution of marriage shows the association’s engagement with processes of secularisation and individuation.

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<sup>61</sup> The ‘correct’ education for the UP Hindus was one which would combine the ‘ideal/traditional/Aryan women with modernity/civilisation’ (Gupta 2005: 167)

The *samaj* through the association positions itself in a manner to ideologically regulate the oscillation between the association and community, internally focusing on women across strata. In this way, it tries to structures processes of individuation and rationalisation that could change the fabric of families, communities and nation-state. The Vaish corporate or jati association do not threaten with violence when members make choices that go against its interests<sup>62</sup>, their role as argued in the first chapter is ideological in nature. Processes of secularisation especially with regard to the choices and decisions made by the baniyan threaten the moral-economic self that the Agarwal men forefront. The Hindu Agarwal self as being philanthropic, patriotic and religious is a masculine identity, despite repeated claims of its universality. This identity is maintained through the domestication of women's question through marriage and using this to claim that the community builds *sanskaar* of the country.

Women in Agarwal families are not hidden away or alien to this emergent neoliberal entrepreneurial culture. With an increase in education of women, the age of marriage and exposure through social media, women's marital choices, ways of organising their weddings, a way of choosing their partner and the conjugal intimacies they desire have also undergone slow changes. This leads the *samaj* to change its ideological impetus. No longer are women summoned to perform their Hindu wifely duties or serve the Hindu nation. A call to undertake roles motivated by a religious calling might lose its rational resonance with women. This makes it an older colonial discourse, however by taking a back seat does not completely lose its hold. With the emergent neoliberal culture, this study argues that the concerns about regulating women's sexuality are displaced onto the woman, through a discourse of self-responsibilisation.

This section shows how the women's question is centred on marriage. The following inter-related aspects of marriage are captured by the association events and community writings: How are weddings organised? How are marital choices made? What qualifies as compatibility in marriage (*parichay sammelan*)? And how should married women as daughter-in-laws behave in family setups?

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<sup>62</sup>Chowdhury (1997) shows how the Jat Khap panchayat police the boundaries of caste and gender through 'honour' killings in Haryana.

### *Parichay Sammelan (Public Matrimonial Fair)*

*Parichay Sammelan* (PS) is a measure undertaken by the *samaj* through the association for the community. The biggest PS is organised by the Delhi Pradesh Agarwal Sammelan (DPAS) along with Akhila Bhartiya Agarwal Sammel (AKAS) in Talkatora Stadium. It was first organised in the early 1990s. It is advertised in mainstream Hindi newspapers as well as Agarwal newspapers circulated widely in parts of Delhi. Two PS were attended in the years 2014 and 2015. The entrance to the venue had huge flex banners announcing the PS, its organisers and all those that had contributed financially to the event. Near the entrance, there were men dressed in saffron clothes selling religious books. The venue had a bevy of parents with their children holding cloth bags that consisted registrations forms and the year's PS book that had details of all the prospective bride and groom. Apart from those who registered on the spot, details of 300 men and 300 women were published in the book. There were numerous volunteers assisting parents with registration; there were a pundit and astrologer who could assist parents with last-minute queries, and there were Agarwal Matrimonial agencies distributing their calling cards. In the last three to five years numerous Vaish and Agarwal Matrimonial agencies have been set up in and around Delhi. Talkatora Stadium is a sports complex with the seats arranged in an ascending fashion. On one side of the stadium is a temporarily erected stage and this area also has seating arrangement, this is for members of the *samaj*. The event began with elaborate introductions to all the post holders and contributors to the organisation of the event. This was followed by an *aarti* of a picture of Maharaja Agrasen, kept to one side of the stage and 'Jai Agrasen' slogans in which everyone joined in. Just behind the podium, a makeshift studio was made with an anchor conducting the affairs. There were huge screens put up where the parents seated in the audience could see what was happening in the studio.

Prospective bride and groom were asked to introduce themselves, their name, age, *Manglik/non-Manglik*<sup>63</sup> status and individual or family income. I was told that the

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<sup>63</sup> *Manglik* is an astrological aberration caused by the planet Mars which causes tensions in one's married life, making a person with a Manglik status unsuitable to marry. With women, Manglik status ties a pre-determined behavioral trait caused by the astrological misplacement that is women who are Manglik are meant to be dominating hence unsuitable to be wed.

backstage was built so that those who were shy did not have to face the audience on the stage. They were given a registration number and from here on till the event was over they were referred by this number. The details shared with the anchor were the same as mentioned in the PS as long as the participant had registered earlier. If the parents liked what they saw on the screen and the rest of the candidate's details in the booklet that is his father's employment, if they owned their own house and how many married and unmarried siblings he had then they passed on the registration number to the men seated on the podium. One could frequently hear the chair of the event disrupt the introductions in the studio by saying 'number 112 number 204 sai room mai milai' (number 112 please meet number 204 in the room). In the basement of the stadium are 7-8 rooms built where both the families can meet and discuss if they are interested in any of the candidates registered. Children were always accompanied by their parents. In some cases, extended families also came along. Everyone worked like an efficient unit, discussing candidates and being quick in showing interest. Many men were on the phone, calling the parents of a boy or girl they liked, explaining where they could meet, as the rooms got taken very soon. Girls present were dressed in floor length *anarkalis* (long suits) with matching earrings and open straight hair; some wore jeans and a top. Men were dressed in embroidered suits and jackets. Some women in the mother's generation were dressed in bright sarees with intricate sequin work and covered their head; they stood out from their daughters who were dressed casually in jeans. Families could be heard discussing at length what they liked and disliked about the last 'party'.

Members of the *samaj* who invest in the PS claim that it will address problems of increasing dowry, children's need for choosing compatible partners and also ensure the *sanskaar* is ensured by the institution. Marriage continues to be seen as a religious and not civil alliance. An article in *Yuva Agarwal* documented the plight of a school teacher who had five daughters and despite having them all educated, when it came to marriage he was asked to give huge dowries. He approaches the Agarwal Samaj and questions them for the progressive write-ups they carry while their society was far from the picture they paint. This moved the then president of the association Pradeep Mittal to announce that PS was the only solution to such problems ("Paanch Putriyon ke Pita Ki Pareshani [The problem of the father of five daughters]", 2013). It is unclear how the Sammelan would address the problem of high dowry; however, claims of its success continue to be reiterated twenty

years later. In 2015, PS, Surendar Gupta, the president of ABAS in Delhi inaugurated the event saying “the pressing need for parents and their anxiety about getting their children and high dowry will be addressed by the Parichay Sammelan”. Ashok Bansal who helped organise the first PS in the 1990s says,

earlier girls would tolerate a little, now that is also not there, because of this, dispute increased and with disputes increasing, people have stopped supporting each other and finding matches for each other.

Jagdish Prasad Agarwal, the *Mukhya Sanrakshak* or chief organiser of the DPAS in his introductory note published in this 2015 Sammelan book writes,

parichay Sammelan is a *revolutionary* step. Boy and girl also get to select their *man chaha sathi* (partner that their heart desires). (emphasis added).

He further says that in the ancient times as the society was limited to a village the marriages used to take place with the help of elders, head and relatives. The boy and girl would see each other only on the day of the marriage. Now that education levels and choices have increased, people have started giving importance to looks, weight, height and setting ‘standard’ in marriages. Arjun Kumar the owner of *Yuva Agarwal* writes about an incident when a highly educated girl working in a good institute gave her introduction in PS, five boy’s families were interested and the organisers struggled to resolve this. In the end, all the five boys were brought on stage, questions were asked and the girl could decide for herself. She finally selected one. This according to him it was a ‘social revolution’ that was brought about by the youth of the country, who have overcome their initial negative feeling about PS for its potential of morally degrading girls, through public introductions (“Changes and the Youth Generation”, 1992).

Other *samaj* members see PS as a solution to the gap in values brought about by modernity. Marwari (2015) writes,

The new generation is growing with a spoilt mentality, it is not simple to maintain the discipline in the family and continue the rituals of the society. The reason is that the new generation has become arrogant and reliant on their own so-called thought. The cultural tradition and the experiences of elders are now only in the books...With the expansion of boundaries, the vehicle has derailed. By calling family and society as backwards, cases of the elopement of boys and girls increased. To control these situations, the Marwadi community should become alert. If we have to get to a solution of these problems (elopement and expenditure at weddings) then community marriages and *Parichay Sammelan* of the marriageable girls and boys can be a step taken in this direction.

Garg (2014) the chief guest at the 2014 PS and owner of Aditya Raj Jewellers in Delhi writes that,

In today's environment, it is being felt that in our families, the values are overlooked and there is a lack of sustenance of the tradition. It is also true that whatever values are left in our country is due to the Vaish society. We should inculcate the habit of touching feet of elders among our children. In the morning when they go to school they should touch the feet of elders, the benefit of touching feet is that in the children respect for the elders and shame in their eyes is maintained. They will not speak loudly before elders. Institutions should take this as their responsibility that they inspire others as to sustain their values, culture and traditions.

The language in which endogamous matches is presented by members of the *samaj* is that of 'choice' and 'social revolution'. Jagdish Prasad Agarwal speaks about a change in

times from bride and groom not seeing each other before marriage to now having a say in all aspects. He calls it a 'spoilt mentality' that leads to children superseding familial control and following their 'individual thought'. R.K. Garg sees the Vaish community as being the only one which has safeguarded the eroding *sanskaar* in the country. He asks institutions to pay attention to 'values, culture and tradition'. Arjun Kumar sees PS as being 'revolutionary' in nature in the choice that they give girls, which did not exist in the past. The selection of 'man chaha sathi' through PS according to its organisers becomes a way of countering the problems of dowry, expensive marriages and the threat posed by the democratising impulse that education holds by promoting love marriages and elopements.

The claims and justifications for the organisation of the PS rest on the changes in the choices of the younger generation and education have a crucial role to play. An examination of the details of 300 men and 300 women provided in the PS books in 2015 shows that 48 percent of men were in business and 25 percent of this was an intergenerational business. In 13 percent of the cases, there was a move from service class to business in the present generation. The nature of business was mostly shops for sarees, readymade garments, cosmetic, general and departmental stores, jewellery, army supplies, glass manufacturers, sweets and property dealers. An analysis of the educational qualifications shows that 73 percent of women had completed their post-graduate degrees, the corresponding figure for men was 40 percent. Similarly, 19 percent of men had only studied up to high school; the corresponding figure for women was 2 percent (Table 1). This shows that women were more educated than men and spend a longer number of years studying. Of the women, 12 percent had finished their engineering as compared to 8 percent men; 3 percent women as compared to 1 percent men had done their MBBS/MD. The range of things that women had studied was more diverse than that of men. Many women had done additional language and fine art degrees and qualifications, perhaps both motivated by their interest as well as finding flexible home based employment through language and fine arts tuitions. For example, Ruchi a 25-year-old Agarwal woman who was sitting next to me at the PS had finished her engineering and MBA. She said,

it is disappointing to meet men who have barely finished their graduation. They have a family business, but I want to know how

much the boy earns. I want someone with a professional degree, who might let me work too.

Table 1. Education Details of men and women registered in the Parichay Sammelan

Education/ Degree	Men %	Women %
School	19	2
Undergraduate	38	22
Undergraduate+Diploma Courses	3	2
Post Graduate	40	73

An analysis of the monthly income shows that majority of the women earn in the Rs 10000-30000 range, while a majority of men earn in the Rs 50000 -80000 range (Table 2). The reason why men might earn more than women, despite women being more qualified than men could be because of two reasons: *first*, 48 percent of men continue to be in business as compared to 3 percent women. The income from business sources might be more than salary earned from a professional job. This also shows the gendered nature of business within the community; *second*, 30 percent of women despite having higher degrees did not provide their income, while 34 percent women did not provide their employment details. This could be because they are students as indicated in the table (15 percent). It is also possible that since women working and earning continues to be a deterrent in marriage negotiations rather than being an asset, they might be dissuaded from providing further details. Parents decide to educate their daughters until the time they get married or allow the decision of their daughters' seeking gainful employment after marriage, in the hands of their future in-laws. For example, Ganesh, 27 had finished his MBBS, when asked what kind of a girl he wished to marry, his father was quick to reply for him. He said 'we want an educated girl from a good family who will take care of the house, us and Ganesh'. Radhika, 21 currently enrolled in an undergraduate degree (through correspondence), was asked what she thought about the PS or the kind of a partner, she was looking. She said, "I do not know (laughs). My parents got me here. They know best what is good for me". Juhi, 22 was doing a course in interior designing. She said, 'her parents had *allowed* her to enrol in this course till the time she was married, so she would just not sit at home'



Table 2. Income details of men and women registered in the *Parichay Sammelan*

Income/ Rs	Men %	Women %
Below 10000	3	2
10000-30000	28	26
30000-50000	17	17
50000-80000	31	7
80000-100000	4	0
100000 and above	9	3
Not given	8	30
Not earning (incl. students)	0	15

Interviews with the men reflect a commitment to education, motivated by the need to find a suitable match. Rajesh, 26 enrolled in an undergraduate degree in commerce through correspondence. He went to college only to give his final exams and spent his time assisting his father in their hardware shop. Rajesh's father, Alok says 'earlier it was good enough if the family had a successful business and the groom was involved in it. Now all girls want their husbands to be educated; BSC or BA is also not good enough for some'. Govind, 27 said "I just met two 'parties', the girls want an MBA or engineer. Their families want to know not just how much our business makes, but also how much money I make individually". Govind's father who looked visibly unhappy said, "what is the point of an MBA, when he has to manage the shop only. It is not hard to get a degree. He can join a correspondence course, but why are they asking such questions? It means they want our son to leave us and live separately with their daughter".

The success of the PS in arranging matches is unsubstantiated by the association members. However, the fact that it is organised regularly and attended widely, visibilise the ways in which the discourse of marriage is changing at the level of the association. It is an adaptive strategy employed by members of the *samaj* through the association when faced with urban lives and the range of life choices it offers.

### ***'Love Marriages are not Advisable'***

Love marriages carry with it the potential to question the boundaries of caste, class and religion. In 2015, *Yuva Agarwal* carried an article by Kundan (2015) who was in Kurukshetra University in Haryana to judge a cultural program. Kundan says he was pleasantly surprised to hear an interesting discussion amongst women about love marriage versus arranged marriage and see that they selected the former. He says these women came from rich families and were well educated; then why is that they chose arranged marriages? Why do they accept arranged marriages knowing that they will have to make many adjustments? He goes on to ask,

How is their faith in tradition still present? Why don't they want to live according to their will? Why don't they want to frame a new society and family? Why don't they want to frame a new society and family? Why do they want to give the right to take all decisions of their lives to those who have exploited women and kept them away from their rights?

The author settles for the following answer: "Our daughters are not senseless. They understand everything. You can call them orthodox but they understand the reality of heaven more than us" (page 3). The author argues that daughters in choosing arranged marriages over love marriages are choosing the security and protection that their families and society offer above that of their individual choice. For love, marriages carry with it the inherent threat of being cut out from the society.

In another article, according to the author, the socio-economic fabric of the Indian society is on a decline and he attributes it to two reasons, the decline of the joint family and education for the sake of education (Kothari, 1993). He says,

The illusionary vision of materialism, progressiveness, independent identity, equality etc has led today's generation to

take away the rights of their parents in deciding about their life. Grandparents do not live with families anymore and the new brides want to live away from the in-laws and they also do not give their children any values.

The lack of a value base according to Kothari led children to absorb everything they saw on TV and the internet and 'lose control of their senses' and opt for inter-caste marriages. He felt there was a rise in divorces in the country, as Indians were aping the West although they did not have Western kind of 'modernity'. In India, he argued girls were educated so that they could survive in the face of being widowed or divorced, and not for their own happiness or freedom. He goes on to say, that while the rural women are accused of female foeticide, the educated women are no better. They are helpless and exploited. When it came to inter-caste marriages he felt soon after marriage, the boys abandoned the girl returning her to the parents and forcing her to knock on court doors. This was leading to an increase in suicides.

The tone of both these articles is not punitive; women through a language of self-responsibilisation are asked to think through their life choices and its results. While the first author thinks women in the community are not 'orthodox' in selecting arranged marriages, but rational actors, who understand what is good for themselves. The second author, by reflecting on the socialisation and conditioning of women, argues that the society and they are not prepared for love marriages. Self responsabilisation comes with the burden of freedom. The 'autonomy' to be an entrepreneur of one's life means the burden of these decisions falls on the individual alone. This according to the author leads to an increase in suicides and exploitation of women. In neoliberal India, where love is showcased as an exercise in freedom, women are not dissuaded by reminding them of their traditional role as Hindu daughters. A discussion between the parent and the child shows a slow democratisation of the relationship. The former is not blindly imposing his parental authority on the latter, but reasoning with the daughter.

### ***'Say No to Expensive Weddings'***

The relationship between consumption and communities (not just individuals) is revealing of their life worlds, values, self-perception and representation. Veblen (2005) argues that conspicuous consumption is a way of distinguishing during the industrial differentiation of classes in the nineteenth century. Srivastava (2009: 341; 2007: 185) uses the category of “moral” and “surplus” consumption to capture contemporary consumption behaviour. He defines “moral consumption” as consumption which is “accompanied by an anxiety about it and its relationship with ‘Indianness’”. Surplus consumption he argues is the “consumption behaviour that unfolds through recourse to cultural symbols, meanings and strategies generated across a number of time spans”. De Neve (2011) argues that the affluent industrialists of Tiruppur’s garment manufacturing town in Tamil Nadu as they engage in process of consumerism wish to “locate themselves at the heart of what is locally constructed as an integrated and moral Tamil society”(page 75).

The relationship of consumption and mercantile and business castes like Agarwal is one which was primarily marked by frugality; self-denial became a virtue in itself celebrated for its Gandhian spiritual quality, and pragmatism. As far as in the previous generation, members of the *samaj* proudly spoke about how while growing up they had been taught to save constantly. Being socially minded meant spending less than one’s means and being aware of the society one lived in. However, over time frugality which was internally associated with strength led to the community being perceived as being stingy and calculative. The younger neoliberal generation also did not associate with this trait and as argued in Chapter 2, the ‘modern’ baniya felt misunderstood. Consumption for the younger generation became a way of ‘modern’ self-expression and at times an exercise in freedom denied in other quarters of life. In this section, it is seen that the association continues to hold frugality in marriages as an ideal which is far from realised in the contemporary.

Leaves were taken from the lives of noted Vaish industrialists to motivate others to be thrifty in marriages. An article about Jamnalal Bajaj recounted the close relationship between him and Gandhi who considered him his fifth son. When it came to Bajaj’s daughter Kamla’s marriage, the simplicity with which Bajaj conducted his daughter’s

marriage is presented as a message to the entire Hindu religious community, which in contemporary times had become a 'slave to consumerism' ("Jamnalal Bajaj ki Aachran Sudhi [Reforming character by Jamnalal Bajaj], (2004)). In another article the author writes about the marriage of G.D. Birla's youngest son-Basant Kumar's marriage with the daughter from the Biyani family in Wardha (Anuthi Sagai aur Adarsh Baarat [Unique engagement and ideal *baraat*], (1992)). While the Birla's had the money, the Biyani family were highly educated. Basant Kumar wanted to marry a girl who was literate, knew English and had an interest in Indian tradition. The daughter from the Biyani family was liked by all. Then Basant Kumar was asked to come to Wardha to meet the girl and her family. A girl and a boy meeting on their own were unheard of in the 1940s, however, Basant Kumar went to Wardha and the girl approved of him. Kasturba Gandhi, wife of M.K Gandhi blessed the engagement without any rituals in the presence of other Congress dignitaries and a marriage was solemnised later. In this marriage, only 22 guests were taken by G.D. Birla to the wedding. A wedding without ritual, extravagance and that involves the consent of the marrying individuals along with their families is then portrayed as an ideal marriage and it took place on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1942. Capitalists like Bajaj and Birla shared a close bond with Gandhi. An invocation of Gandhian values of frugality and being sacrificial was an anchoring aspect of nationalism and a political counter to the British. Gandhi's teachings and its practice by known figures in the community is meant to be an antidote to self-indulgent forms of contemporary consumerism.

From the early 1990s to 2000s didactic accounts on how to organise inexpensive weddings were printed in community journals. For example, an article was written about the ills of having a huge *baraat* (relatives accompanying the groom). The author argued that the strength of a groom's *baraat* had become a matter of prestige for the groom's side while it was a burden for the girl's side. People were advised to focus on inviting a small group of people who were committed to attending all the functions at the wedding and were not there just on the day of the wedding. The author makes five points in this article: *first*, he chides the *baraat* for being always late delaying weddings and keeping everyone waiting; *second*, he says the Agarwals in Delhi, unlike those in Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai have learnt from their Punjabi neighbours to dance on the road, block traffic and arrive late at weddings and how this needed to be stopped; *third*, *milni* (the ritual in which two sides of the family meet) only has the elder members of the family in Mumbai and

Calcutta, however in Delhi on an average around four hundred people are invited and are given silver coins and other expensive gifts which should be stopped; *fourth*, the trend of giving sweets with wedding cards is an expensive custom and needs to be stopped; and *fifth*, in Delhi weddings, according to the author there is a trend of giving money to the couple, as if it was a contribution towards the wedding and while earlier it was a token about of Rs 11 or 21, now it no longer has a limit. The author says that these ‘evil practices’ have not found their way to other states like Calcutta and Mumbai, but Delhi was particularly bad on all counts and needed to be reformed (“*Samaj Mein Sudhar ki Avashyakta* [A need for reformation in society]”, 1994). Similarly, in another article Agarwal (2003), enlisted a set of measures that could be undertaken to address marriage practices:

- (i) The cards should be simple and sober apart from close relatives it should be sent through the post. This will save petrol and time. The cards sent by post should be considered personal.
- (ii) Do not accept or give sweet boxes along with cards.  
The gifts given in marriage should be given only to close relatives
- (iii) Do not give *baarat* (groom’s side of the relatives) the face of a procession and do not use firecrackers and band. This will reduce expenditure and will also not interrupt traffic.
- (iv) The groom’s side should reach bride’s place by 9 pm so that the relatives from the bride’s side can go back home on time.
- (vi) The use of alcohol and dancing on roads should be avoided.
- (v) Avoidance of DJ and orchestra in wedding place should be maintained. The menu should also be simple and limited
- (vii) The programmes related to marriage should be low budget and it should celebrate within families only

(viii) The number of people from groom's die should be less so that there are fewer burdens on the bride's family.

In the Agarwal weddings I attended, standing amongst the diverse gastronomic delights ranging from South Indian to Italian, members spoke about the need for the community to reform by curtailing wedding expenditure. The national and the international cuisine coalesced through the 'strictly vegetarian' local demand. Between consumption and saving, lie the community's negotiation with vestiges of an imagined past and its aspirations to be 'modern' (through consumption). A senior member of the association, while sharing pictures of her son's wedding said that they had wanted a small scale, indoor afternoon wedding, however, their son wanted a 'big fat Indian wedding'. She said 'you have to give in when your children want something. What we think as culture, they think is old-fashioned. These tussles of self-representation, however, are not shared by many in the same generation, who see big budget weddings as an essential trope for establishing the success of one's family business and the marriage match secured. Neither is this tussle something the younger generation identifies. Bollywood style theme parties and destination weddings have slowly become the norm among the South Delhi elite. Karishma, a 23 year respondent in South Delhi described ways of identifying what the 'budget' and 'class' of a wedding was:

You see the wedding cards, some have gold embroidery, and the others are packed in heavy leather cases with dry fruits. You look at the caterers and see if it is Taj, Hilton or any other five-star restaurant. The venue, many have destination weddings then you look at who is the wedding planner, you see if it is a destination wedding. Our family friend's son just got married in Thailand and all the guests were flown in. Another friend wants to get married in the Jaipur palaces just like Saif and Kareena, and then you see how the interiors are. Someone we knew reconstructed the interiors of the Taj in Delhi because they did not like the way it was. Then you see who has planned the bride's trousseau and her designers. It is possible she might claim it is a Sabyasachi or a Manish Malhotra, but many times it is a fake. You see where she gets her makeup

done from if she has flown in a Bollywood stylist for hair and makeup. Then there is the choreography, you see who the choreographer in case they have a night with the celebrity performance. The brand of the car that her parents would give her would usually be the one in which she leaves the wedding venue, the list is long. At weddings, you can hear all the aunties trying to estimate the wedding budget.

Along with all the things mentioned above, pre-wedding shoots have also become an indispensable part. Karishma found Kuwar through her parents. She says it felt like ‘love at first sight’, but they did not have any ‘special’ pictures together since they had just met. A pre-wedding shoot gave the newly formed relationship a history, story it lacked, authenticity, exclusivity and ways of announcing oneself on the social media an essential part of performing love. She said ‘I wanted memories of our own before all the wedding craziness started’. The aspirational quotient for big budget weddings lay in their capacity to find individualising narratives couched in familial approval for the younger generation.

This section shows the contradictory pulls and pressures in the way the community wishes to represent itself in the urban. The ultra elite like established industrial families like the Bajaj and Birla families at the height of the nationalist movement saw their family weddings of strengthening the message of Indian and Indians being spiritually superior to the West. In the contemporary, weddings provide a visibility to family’s wealth, status and standing in the community. The previous generation might feel the need to be frugal to show its cultural superiority, however for the younger generation weddings become a site to showcase their individuality. Self-affirmation through social media shares and likes of wedding and honeymoon pictures become an exercise in enterprise and freedom when one’s marital choices are circumscribed by parental authority and one’s own desires of security.

### ***How to be a good ‘bahu’ (daughter-in-law)?***

Fears of the erosion of values, culture and the joint family are centred on the changing behaviour of the daughter-in-law. Newly married women can be particularly disruptive to



the peace and well-being of the household until they are schooled and disciplined to adjust to familial power hierarchies. The tone of the articles discussed in this section, is not aimed at overtly censuring the activities of the daughter-in-law. The secularising pull exerted by the ‘modern’ urban context will change the ways of inhabiting conjugal spaces and expressions of intimacy, however, the daughter-in-law is reminded not to forget her other conjugal duties. The conjugal union is but one among the many other relationships the ‘light of the house’ is meant to cater to. Lakhotia (2003) writes,

The mother-in-law waits for the bride to wake up so that she would send her bed tea but she is so late that the mother-in-law thinks that breakfast should be sent instead. Then after the daughter-in-law wakes up she comes out and again says that she is off to sleep and she has to pack to leave for her honeymoon. At that time mother-in-law remembers a time when she was too scared to talk in front of her in-laws. Then she thinks the new bride is only for her son and not the others in the family.

The daughter-in-law in the above excerpt is shown as being callous of her familial duties and hierarchies by prioritising her comfort and conjugal bond. The mother-in-law, however, does not reproach her for not waking up early and cooking breakfast neither does she expect her to be like her younger self, who was scared to talk in front of her in-laws. She only wishes that the daughter-in-law would pay heed to the other relational needs in the family. In another article titled *Achhi Bahu Kaisai Banai?* [How to be a good daughter-in-law] the author presents a to-do list that a daughter-in-law can consult and habituate for the smooth functioning of her household (“*Achhi Bahu Kaisai Banai?* [How to be a good daughter-in-law]”, 2014). The author says:

- (i) Become your own critic: recognise your own best and worst and see that what was not liked by the family just leave those bad attitudes.
- (ii) Talk sweetly: talk sweetly to your mother-in-law because sweet talk will always kill anger.

- (iii) Share your happiness and worries with each other and if mother-in-law is sad, do not hesitate to ask her what the problem is and ask her, 'maybe your head is aching and let me massage your hair'. Your asking this will cure her.
- (iv) Behave properly: She is elder to you hence you should give her appropriate respect. If you are sitting and she comes to that place you should first give her your space to sit and then sit after that.
- (V) Become hard working: Do not show laziness in household work and do all the work without asking your mother-in-law to help. Keep the house clean and proper.
- (vi) Praise her: Appreciate her for her recipes and tell her that her cooking is the best. Then see how you will enjoy your favourite dish on a Sunday morning with the television.
- (vii) Surprise her: Sometimes give her a gift. On mother's day give her card and some traditional gift and then see how she will become you mother.
- (viii) Love your sister-in-law and brother-in-law: Praise your brother and sister-in-law in front of your mother-in-law and not just your side and see how she will like it.

For the mother-in-law to become as loving as the mother, labour of love and respect had to be undertaken by the daughter-in-law. She had to mould herself to the likes and dislikes of her new family, abandoning those traits that were not appreciated. She then had to talk sweetly, praise, surprise, respect her mother-in-law and others in the family. The onus for making the relationship healthy and loving rested with the daughter-in-law, who in contemporary times needed to be taught how to behave appropriately since education and modernity had corrupted earlier givens in familial life. The relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law precedes the conjugal bond and structures it, as is seen with the lack of mention to the husband. The only mention that the husband finds in these articles is in the context of increasing infidelity led divorces in the country. A lawyer from Jaipur writes that in Hindu faith there was a 'special emphasis on women being chaste and *pativrata*, which means she only loves her husband'. He goes on to say that only if there

was mutual love, would the husband find the motivation to work and fend for the entire family. Unlike people in the West, the author argues, men in India only have male friends and women only women friends. This according to him would ensure that marriages stayed honest, people do not get tempted, businesses flourish and family life is peaceful.

The other relationships that the daughter-in-law can have for the smooth functioning of the household are with her domestic help. The editor of *Yuva Agarwal* in an article makes a case for women not depending on their servants and to learn to handle the work in the household by themselves (“*Naukro par nirbar hokar aapnai ko aapahij na banai* [Do not make yourself a handicap by depending on the servants]”, 2015). He says servants make one handicap, they evade our privacy, break/ steal things and even children learn to dominate the poor from an early age. He suggests that if women took care of all the work then they would stay fit and won't have to waste money on a gym, they would save money, feel satisfied and also make their husbands and children responsible. Women are asked not to have domestic help not by reminding them of their self-less domestic labour that is their Hindu duty but through pragmatic reasons that rest of safety, privacy and one's own fitness.

The relationship outside the household that the daughter-in-law can have is with her natal family. In 2015, *Yuva Agarwal* carried the minutes of the Maharashtra Agarwal women's association (“*Mobile phones sai badai talak* [Cell phones increase divorce]”, (2015)). One of the points made was that the reason for an increase in divorce cases was because of the increase in usage of cell phones. It was argued that earlier there was a single landline connection in the drawing room, which was used by all and not everything could be shared. However, with the coming of cell phones, daughter-in-laws shared all, small and big things and this led to many fights in the family. The mothers always gave opposite advice to that of the mother-in-laws without knowing the complete context. The situation was further worsened by daily soaps of Star Plus. The solution they proposed for all this was the strengthening of the joint family system. This strengthening could be undertaken according to an article in 2015, through the ‘politics of love’ in a family and not politics. The article goes on to make a case for the need to understand the different kinds of politics between different members of a family, which can be stopped only by loving and

forgiving each other. Technology increased interactions with one's natal family and not the woman or her circumstances are blamed for increasing conjugal tensions.

Much like daughters are not asked to choose arranged marriages by drawing on an old ideal of a 'good' daughter, similarly, a 'good' daughter-in-law in these writings is not constituted by drawing on the ideal of the Hindu *pativrata* wife. That ideal hangs in the background and is not effaced, however a language of reason and pragmatism is adopted which centres the woman in the discourse. It is a given that women will go on a honeymoon, could have extra-marital affairs, have domestic servants, watch television and own a cell phone. However, they are asked to reconsider their choices by prioritising themselves and the peace of their household as they engage in urban life. The onus of smooth, healthy functioning household continues to rest on the daughter-in-law and that is her sphere of enterprise.

## **Conclusion**

Studies on caste associations have not sufficiently engaged with women in these associations or an engagement with the women's question. This chapter argues, that central to the process of secularisation of caste is the engagement with the women's question, as gender is the bedrock on which caste identities are constructed. Through interviews with members of the caste association, *samaj* and a reading of community publications, this chapter shows that in the post-colonial urban context, the association's engagement with the women's question visibilises the fears that animate the community and fashions its identity claims. The institution of marriage is the only way through which the otherwise invisibilised women's question finds a visibility post the 1990s. As seen in this chapter, there are four aspects of marital lives that the association engages with: (i) an increase in education of women as compared to men making it difficult to find compatible matches; (ii) the threat of love marriages; (iii) a wish to represent the Agarwal community as frugal and frugality is associated with a moral virtue and recognition or a consciousness of being rich but in a poor country; and (iv) a fear of the changing role of the daughters-in-law in families that could disrupt the familial patriarchal hierarchies. The associations' response through its writings and the organisation of marriage fairs are not to draw on the ideal of the Hindu *pativrata* wife or daughter, although this guiding ideal hangs in the

background and is not effaced. The association instead acknowledges the neoliberal enterprise culture and subtle shifts in gendered subjectivities by introducing ideas of 'choice' and 'social revolution'. Women are urged to undertake the 'correct' actions through a language of self-reponsibilisation. The next chapter shows how the ideological project of the *samaj* through the association, plays out at the familial level through the older women in family businesses.



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## Chapter 5

### **Reproducing Elite Lives: Women in Family Businesses**

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#### **Introduction**

The success of the ideological role of the *samaj* through the association is realised through the family that will take upon itself and inhabit the role of socialisation as its own desire, to achieve its own ends through the roles undertaken by older women. No longer does the association need to employ mechanisms of social control or intrude on privatised familial intimacies like it did in the colonial period through a detailed rule book of social conduct (as shown in Chapter 2). It can build consent through an ideal of *sanskaar* internalised regulated by the older women in families. This chapter focuses on the roles undertaken by older women from the second stratum of the *samaj* (details provided in Chapter 1, page 14) to reproduce elite lives. A sociological and empirically grounded investigation of Indian businesses is amiss, leading to a scarcity of studies on the roles played by women as well. This chapter argues that women facilitate the cohesion of caste, family businesses and reproduction of elite subjectivities in family business through three mechanisms: forging fictive kinship through inter-strata ‘social work,’ forging fictive kinship within caste stratum through sustained socialisation and managing individuating aspirations of family members through marital choice.

Indian family businesses continue to constitute a sizeable share of business enterprises in India. Caste continues to play an important role in the structuring of businesses, with some of the leading businesses in the country hailing from old mercantile caste groups like the Marwaris, Agarwal, Chettiars and Khatri (Damodaran, 2008; Markovits, 2008; Tripathi, 1984). In the absence of financial intermediaries, the structuring role of caste and family extends to corporate boards and networks in globalised contexts (Daljit and Saxena,

2012; Khanna and Palepu, 2000; Naudet & Dubost, 2016). The entrepreneurial identity in many of the studies on Indian businesses continues to be male (Hardgrave, 1969; Markovits, 2009; Rudner, 1994; Timberg, 1978). In recent years in India, younger generation of women from established family businesses have been handling the core management of their companies. This promising trend has been facilitated through the amendments to the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act in 2005 which allows women inheritance in Hindu Undivided Family (HUF)<sup>64</sup> (Dasgupta, 2013; 2016). While a few young women from established business houses might have made their foray into the world of business, a majority of them are discouraged from joining and inheriting businesses. Hence instead of focusing on women's ownership or non-ownership of family businesses alone, this chapter focusses on the reproductive roles undertaken by women that are systematically invisibilized and benefits not always calculable.

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews conducted with twelve women from the second stratum in Hill Lane. Hill Lane is one of the posh South Delhi neighbourhoods, with clearly defined roads, parking space, private security guards for houses and retrospective gating. My respondents were in the age group of late 40s to mid-60s. They were married with children who were either already married or in the marriageable age group of the early to mid 20s. Women were married to men who either owned manufacturing units on the outskirts of Delhi or had an inter-generational professional business like Chartered Accountants (CA), Real Estate, Builders and Architects. Women were married in their early 20s and mostly held an undergraduate degree in Arts and Humanities. Only one of the women interviewed had worked before marriage, while another one had set up her own art studio, twenty years into her marriage. Women had migrated to Delhi in the 1970s and 80s from parts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Haryana after marriage. All of them had been living in Hill Lane for the last twenty to thirty years.

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<sup>64</sup>The amendment to the Hindu Succession Act allows gave women inheritance rights under the Mitakshara joint family property and not the Dayabhaga property. Refer to (Dasgupta, 2013; 2016).



## **Reproductive Roles of Women in Family Businesses**

Women's lives are formed on the interface of overlapping and competing patriarchies of caste and class (Sangari and Vaid, 1989; Rao, 2003; Rege, 2006) Depending on their caste/class, the needs of the family determine the "politics of status maintenance"(Papanek, 1979: 778). This requires women to constantly socialise and form networks with caste others. Unpaid status reproductive roles lead to the withdrawal of women from paid employment in select caste/class families (Abraham, 2013; Mies, 1982; Papanek, 1979). For example, Harriss-White (2002), in her study of family businesses in Arni village in Tamil Nadu argues that women perform three reproductive roles: reproduce and manage the capital-managing male labour; provide food as part of wages to labour; and get their daughters strategically married for business interests. Laidlaw (1995:358), in his study of Jain family business in Jaipur, says that women keep long fasts, while wealthy merchants make donations recognising them. In this way, the man's generosity comes across as 'an expression of piety' rather than a vulgar display of wealth. Hardiman (1996) writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western India says that there are two markers of wealth for a Bania, size of his house and the jewellery that hangs around his wife's neck. Women's roles show that family businesses continue to function as an economic enterprise, where the family needs to behave as a social group (Fox 1969; Bayly 1983). The *samaj* members through their families however unlike in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century have to attend to the internal differentiation within the caste group as well as their own individuating aspirations and that of its members.

Fictive kin in the context of this chapter are those individuals who one is not related by blood or marriage, however, shares the ascriptive caste status. It is the incorporation of unrelated individuals of the same caste within a kinship group. This creates both 'strong' and 'weak' ties (Granovetter, 1973). The 'strong' ties are those that are within the same stratum, while the 'weak' ties function across caste strata. Women help strengthen both these ties helping in the access of capital and resources within and for upwards social and economic mobility across. Their own worldview, ideas of leisure, codes of social conduct and aspirations are also realised within these ties. Forging connections and networks are not a given but are achieved through "an endless effort at institutions...which is necessary

to produce and reproduce lasting useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits” (Bourdieu, 1986: 246). These networks create social capital, which enables a “habitus”.

In this study, three levels of interaction were seen: *across* the strata at the Delhi level, *within* the stratum at the neighbourhood, and within one’s own families. Women in the second stratum are the focus of this chapter.

### ***Forging fictive kinship ties across caste strata through ‘social work.’***

The sphere of ‘social work’ for this stratum of elite Agarwal families was limited to their neighbourhood, Delhi Agarwal associations and Rotary circles. ‘Social work’ as described by elite Agarwal women involved both organisational and funding work. Women attend events for both categories along with their husbands. However, they hold posts only in separate women’s wings of the Rotary and association. The Rotary Club is a part of the Rotary International, and in India, it is divided into districts and zones. In the specific zone that my respondents were members, membership is open to all castes, however, apart from two to three Punjabi (Khatri or Arora) families, the rest are all Agarwals. Membership through invitation means that it is an intimate circle of known people. Rotary membership overlaps with that of the caste associations. Families with successful intergenerational industries were reluctant to participate in Rotary meetings and considered it a waste of their time. It was the men in professional firms along with their wives, who were more inclined to participate.

As argued in Chapter 4, associations are male-centric spaces. Women’s participation in Agarwal caste associations began as late as the 1990s, with the formation of a separate women’s wing. It is noteworthy to discuss women’s participation in associations, for this is the first generation of Agarwal women in the 40s to the 60s age group from business families who are participating in these spaces along with their husbands in Delhi. Women in the generation before them were home bound and maintained the upkeep of their families. In the generation after them (daughters and daughters-in-law), women socialise with their husband’s friends, occasionally volunteering with their mothers and mother-in-laws in activities of the association. At the Delhi level, the women’s wing is headed and

constituted primarily by women from the second stratum who live in South Delhi. This selective participation is because in the fourth stratum, women are either discouraged by families or do not have the luxury of time as they shoulder most of the domestic responsibilities.

‘Social work’ is undertaken through the organisation of events that help constitute the *sanskaar* across strata. The Hindu religious festival of *Teej* was organised by the women’s wing of the Delhi caste association in the month of August. Yamini (62) was the vice president the organisational committee in 2014. She said,

We had a budget of 1.8 lakhs and called a meeting of the executive committee, within a few minutes we raised 58 thousand rupees and for the rest, we asked the men’s wing to contribute. One of our friends owns a stadium in Rohini which was the venue for the event; another friend was into the manufacturing of bed sheets, which was kept as gifts for people who visited the events. Huge banners were installed; women practised dance and skits for months. Some put together a mother-daughter dance number; others did skits with their daughters-in-law.

Secularisation of caste and everyday life has decreased the ritual significance of the event for elite women as organisers. Yamini had to look up the myth behind the festival before writing her speech. Why did Yamini and the women’s wing then continue to spend their time and money organising *Teej* at the Delhi level? Yamini says,

Agarwal women in parts of Rohini, Pitampura or Laxmi Nagar, are not allowed to step out of their homes. Even if their husbands come for the meetings, they do not bring their wives. I made it a rule that men could not attend the *Teej* festival without their wives.

Elite women like Yamini, feel they provide the morally sanctioned cultural spaces of socialisation, consumption and self-expression for the less fortunate Agarwal women in Delhi, whose mobility is curtailed to their household or the homes of their extended kin.

Being able to organise women-only events within masculine spaces of association, makes Yamini feel she and her friends are contributing to the upliftment of other women and their community, albeit in culturally grounded ways and still within family regulated spaces. By facilitating women's mobility 'beyond their kitchen and families,' elite women forge fictive kinship alliances across strata through the common experiential identity of being a woman and an Agarwal woman in specific. They create aspirational standards for Agarwal women from third and fourth stratum on what it means to be an elite Agarwal woman —as someone who continues to relate to her familial values, wifely duty and Hindu culture— despite her upward mobility and exposure to 'corrupting' influences of money and South Delhi culture.

The events that women help their husbands' organise through the association is exclusively for the fourth stratum. For example, PS the day long matrimonial event organised is actively participated by families from the fourth stratum. The elite women as volunteers share the feeling of the benevolence of their husbands. Radhika (58) said,

Finding a suitable match for your children is the hardest thing to do. In villages you have close family ties; you check the boy/girl's family background. In cities, people don't know enough people within their community. Matrimonial agencies charge so much money. We through the caste association provide this service free of charge

Radhika was however aghast when I suggested the PS as an avenue for finding a match for her daughter. It is understood that such services were for the lower stratum of Agarwal, who lacked suitable networks and capital in the urban.

The sites of such events, however, helps older women in the *samaj* to publicly articulate their status while judging the status, household, servant and daughter-in-law management of other women in the group. In the preparatory meeting of the event, held in South Delhi in 2015, names of the business groups who were contributing to the 20 lakh PS budget were mentioned. Some of the wives of the business heads were present in the meeting. The DPAS convener, the only man amongst a gathering of twelve women, urged

a few women to ask their husbands to contribute more money. In return, the names of their business groups were displayed on the flex banners advertising the event in different parts of Delhi as well as on the day of the event. The topic of discussion soon diverged from the upcoming event. Women wanted the DPAS convener, to deliberate on ways in which there could be a clearer demarcation of spaces between guests and servants at weddings and other events.

**Rachna:** daughter-in-law's these days do not want to lift their own children, they are happy to hand them off to their mothers-in-law or servants.

**Garima:** they go to parlours before every event, wear nice clothes. Now if the child sits on their lap, their clothes will be ruined, so they need servants.

**Roshini:** my friend's son in Hong Kong has been raised by his parents and not his servant, so he is raised so well. He touches elder's feet at the age of two.

**Rita:** in my house, I serve my servant in a smaller plate

**Chitra:** in weddings also they eat dessert in big plates like the guests. If you go to expensive hotels, you have to feed them also or else they will say that you are starving them

**Rupa:** I just lost my 'Louis Vuitton' purse at a wedding; it had a lot of cash, my diamond jewellery and three phones. The *aaya* had stolen it

**Ramesh:** If the invitation is for the family, why is the servant also going?

**Rekha:** I just attended a Manish Malhotra event and we had to RSVP the number of people we were bringing along. You could not bring everyone you wanted.

**Radhika:** It is a status symbol for people to bring their maids along these days.

**Yamini:** We all are only talking from our perspective. You need to think of nuclear families where they only have servants for help. Also, only people who can take care of their many servants visit others who are similarly placed.

**Rekha:** We take our servants with us even when we go abroad. It is difficult to manage without them.

**Yamini:** We also have full-time help on every floor of our house.

**Ramesh:** Let us try and focus on the meeting; these are your personal matters that can be handled later.

This lengthy discussion on managing servants, their location vis-à-vis their employers, the number of servants each of them had if the servants accompanied them on foreign trips and if their ‘modern’ daughters-in-law deserved the assistance of servants, shows the ‘modern’ consumptive life worlds of the elites. Mittal’s irritation in the discussion of ‘personal’ matters in association spaces is instructive. No longer is the association meant to take care of such concerns, the privatised family is meant to manage it for the association.

The association through the activities undertaken becomes spaces for the constitution of the ‘modern’ caste self. Women by volunteering their time and investing their husbands’ money in such events, get an avenue to show off their creativity, avenues for which were curtailed after their marriage. Projects of self-formation in the case of elite Agarwal

women plays out by distinguishing themselves from internal (other elite Agarwal women) and external others (non-elite Agarwal women in the caste association). The elite self is made and unmade through women's familial roles and their efficiency in managing them. Being elite is a relational process that needs constant investments and being an elite woman means being well grounded in one's family. Apart from forging fictive kinship relations across caste strata also get to establish their family name, status and strengthen business ties within their caste stratum.

### ***Forging fictive kinship within caste stratum through sustained socialisation***

Fictive kinship ties are strengthened not just across caste strata but also within a caste stratum in the South Delhi neighbourhood through sustained and long interactions. The neighbourhood is a relational concept that structures social spaces in specific ways. This structuring is forged through "social relations and material social practices" (Massey, 1994: 254). The concept of the neighbourhood social space is that of a "strategy and/or technique of power and social control" (Low & Lawrence, 2003: 30). The neighbourhood is then a political space in which both individual and collective identities are constructed, lived and reproduced. Gender, class and caste identities are embedded and structure the social space of the neighbourhood and are structured by it in specific ways. Donner (2008) argues that amongst the middle-class women in Calcutta, the "neighbourhood is a site of practised self-discipline" (page 153). She argues that the respectability of middle-class women was expressed through selective participation in community *puja* and participation in Mahila Samitis<sup>65</sup> as representatives rather than as complainants. The withdrawal, policing and supervision of women in public spaces, is a way of expressing the symbolic boundaries of caste and communities. Donner (2008) shows how young married women and middle-aged mothers were proud of the way their in-laws family reflected what they saw as "traditional Bengali culture", through the expression of their "cultivated conservatism" by withdrawing women from public spaces (page 145). Froystad (2006) in her ethnography amongst upper-castes in neighbourhoods in Kanpur argues that "upper-caste respondents limited their presence in heterogeneous public spaces such as streets, markets and parks ... they withdrew

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<sup>65</sup> A local level women's organization that helps resolve marital disputes and attempts to protect women from domestic violence.

from public places altogether, but the most common were to create enclosures that made the insiders more homogenous” (page 162).

Agarwal women carved their own exclusive private circles within the public spaces and reinforced them through care, trust and sustained socialisation over the course of their married lives. These circles overlapped with friendships shared by their husbands and many times ran across generations. Reshma says,

earlier when our children were young we used to do many functions, now there is a space crunch. But earlier during the summer, we would also call people to take workshops for the kids like dancing, paper mache etc. At the end of the summer, we would invite all the families and have a big function, in which the children would perform the things they learnt. This way our children have grown up together. We would not think twice before leaving our kids in each other’s homes. We are like one big *family* (emphasis added).

The organisation of the PS required both men and women from elite Agarwal families to meet, discuss, plan and organise funds. Similarly, trips and events organised by DPAS and Rotary were another way of socialisation and collaborating for common ends. The DPAS organised trips on an annual basis; there were some trips, the cost per person was low enough for Agarwal across caste strata to participate. The last such trip was to Vaishno Devi, a Hindu pilgrim site in which enough people joined to fill seven bogies of a train. The others in which the cost per person was high, only members of the second and third stratum participated. The last such trip was to temples in Nepal. A special train was booked starting from Safdarjung station. The head of a business group famous for a well-known chain of restaurants in India helped organise the rail requirements. The capability to organise trains exclusively for DPAS activities shows the political influence and resources the community has. This train had security guards, cooks and did not stop to pick up other travellers. It, however, stopped to meet members of Agarwal associations in other states. Bharti (51) had gone on one of these trips and said,



when you step out of the house, you need many comforts; especially we Baniyas do not eat *pyaaz* (onion) and non-veg. Some of us don't eat *lasun* (garlic) either. That is why we have a special *Maharaj* (an upper-caste cook) to prepare our food. It is also good to meet *our* people in other places. Our Hill Lane, ABAS, and DPAS are all one, we keep meeting, seeing each other's faces and we have all become a *family* (emphasis added).

The comfort of socialising with people who share the same way of life, reinforced with similar taste in food and values leads to the expansion of the family unit to embrace caste others within a caste stratum.

These informal spaces of socialisation, involving men and their wives provide a relaxed atmosphere where business spills into the social and vice-a-versa. Informal environments created through socialisation help in the discussion of business, reciprocation of favours, identification of further clients and strengthening the economic with the affective. For example, Radhika's husband was the president of Rotary recently, and he organised a trip for forty families to the Jim Corbett Park. While travelling back from the journey, the men travelled in a separate minibus, and Radhika says their pet topic was each other's business developments, tenders, and contracts. One of the Rotary and Agarwal caste association members was into paper printing business and was having trouble sourcing material from Uttar Pradesh. The bus stopped in Moradabad, and amongst them, they found local contacts and sorted the problem immediately. Caste and family ties in business structure social networks, channels of information and credit and generate a feeling of 'trust' (Harris, 2003). One's membership in a caste was not a good enough reason for creating this selective trust. Trust shows a "nexus of relations" that are brought together through social obligations and "non-specific indebtedness" (Bourdieu, 1986; 252). These relationships get strengthened when women couch them in cultural, relational idioms sanctified by Hindu rituals. For example, Janaki and her husband, Rajiv who were new to the South Delhi circle of businesses were asked by the ABAS President and noted Delhi businessman to join both the caste association and the Rotary circle to "make contacts and work for the community". Janaki refers to the ABAS president as *bhaiya* (elder brother)

and ties a *rakhi* (cotton bracelet) on Raksha Bandhan every year. *Raksha* means to protect, and *Bandan* means a bond. It is a Hindu religious festival between a brother and sister. She says her husband was a middle man in fixing big deals, significant amounts of money gets exchanged against sureties. She says 'trust' is crucial in this process. Before making any deal, her husband would first check with *bhaiya* (referring to the ABAS President) about the 'party's' market credibility. She says also knowing that *bhaiya* stood behind her husband; meant people had reciprocal 'trust' on her husband's credibility and work. Economic activity was not undertaken by isolated individuals but was embedded in social structures, historical and institutional contexts that facilitate and constrains actions (Granovetter, 1992; Polanyi, 1944).

Kitty parties provided another site for the expansion of the family unit in the neighbourhood and permissible spaces for women's moral consumption and socialisation. A kitty party is a woman's gathering that usually happens once a month. The 'kitty' refers to the amount each woman contributes on a monthly basis. Once a year when it is her turn she gets a lump sum amount. There were couples' kitties, *bhajan* (session of religious songs) kitties, lane kitties and inter-generational mother-in-law and daughter-in-law kitties in the South Delhi neighbourhood. Membership to these kitties required the husbands to be members of the Agarwal association at the Delhi level. The *bhajan* kitties happened in the Shiv temple in the neighbourhood. The affluent Agarwal and Punjabi families in the neighbourhood had been jointly constructed the temple. A Punjabi, the head of the 'Evergreen Sweets' in Hill Lane market, headed the current management for the temple. On an average, each of these kitty parties had twenty-five to thirty members. The gatherings involved a game of cards and a lunch or dinner out. These gatherings earlier happened at home, however, they had now shifted to clubs, friend's farm houses and five-star restaurant and hotels. Radhika says,

earlier people used to think that those who go to kitties are very bold and they don't take care of their families. So when my mother called from Agra, my husband would say she has gone for a meeting. My mother would say 'why does she always need to be outside the house'. But I cannot run my house the way I used to run it 10 years ago, it will not work.

Children are also educated and my husband's business is also expanding. I feel in a kitty since we have known each other for years we learn how to change with time. We learn how to take care of our children and at times convey things to our husband.

The interactions in the kitty party helped women equip themselves to changing, 'modern' times by consulting each other. It functioned as pools of resources and networks. For example, Anila's daughter wished to study Architecture; however, no woman in her family had attempted this before. Her husband needed to be convinced. Anila requested her kitty party friend in the neighbourhood, whose daughter was also studying Architecture to ask her husband to convince her husband to allow their daughter to study what she wished.

The lane kitties (involving members living in the same lane in the neighbourhood) were the only kitty meets which incorporated non-Jain or non-Agarwal women, this was usually the Punjabi (from Katri or Arora business castes) women in the neighbourhood. Karuna says,

earlier Punjabis used to think that we Banias are stingy and don't have money and we used to think that they were all talk and had no money, but now they know that we are educated, dress well and rich and we know that they also have money.

Referring to the lane kitties, Karishma says,

I enjoy my time with the Punjabi women more than the Agarwal. They are open and free spirited. They know how to manage their mothers-in-law so much better than us. They do not waste their time arguing about petty things like 'what to wear' and 'where to go'. Their mothers-in-law are also smart; they know that their son will leave them if they made their daughter-in-law too unhappy. In our case, we can be sure that our husbands will only take their mother's side.

The urban 'other' of a comparable status in the neighbourhood for Agarwal women was Punjabi women. Through careful interactions, over time mutual stereotypes are built and rebuilt. Agarwal women choose who this 'other' would be; in this case, it was only a Punjabi woman from a comparable caste and not Muslim or women of the lower caste. Shweta and her family had lived in Hill Lane since the 1980s, they were planning to get their elder son married soon, hence, they wished to construct another floor in their house. The ground floor in their residential block was owned by a Punjabi who would not give them the permission to construct on top and expand their space. Two times the construction had begun and was halted, because the Punjabi resident threatened legal action. Finally, Shweta's family had to relocate to their pent house in Gurgaon. Referring to the incident, Yamini says we had told Shweta,

we can handle the matter together, but *bhaisaab* (elder brother) is such a cultured man not like these Punjabis ready to fight all the time. He refused to create any trouble. These Punjabis are refugees, whatever they have is because of what the government gave them. They are not self-made like us.

As families grew, provision of individual spaces for the new family unit had become a norm in this stratum of Agarwals. Difficult relationship with the urban 'other' got expressed over tussles of urban housing and parking space crunches. Punjabis were referred to as 'refugees', inferior to the 'self-made' native Agarwal. None of my interviewees had any Muslim friends or families they knew of a 'lower' caste. Rajini says,

I do not know any Muslims in our neighbourhood. Around us also there are no Muslims. Now if someone has given the house on rent to a Muslim, then we cannot be sure.

The selective interactions of families in the neighbourhood, lead to the formation of power caste and class Hindu clusters, which expressed spatially through a control of the sale of non-vegetarian items in the lane as well as the Hill Lane main market. Savita says,

earlier the shop in the corner of the road would not even keep eggs. We would not allow him. We have many Jain friends. Now we allow him to keep it, but we ask him to clean his hands before giving us a packet of milk or bread. He also finishes the eggs in the morning itself, so it is not that he is selling it throughout the day. In the Hill Lane market also you would have noticed most of the shops serve pure vegetarian food.

Despite women's account of the commercial space in their neighbourhood, non-vegetarian food in the form of Coffee Day and Barista sandwiches and burgers was sold. Male family members especially those in the younger generation also consumed non-vegetarian food, even if this consumption was outside the household. This was a permissible, well known but unspoken transgression, that had become the norm in male parties and gatherings. In the last four years, the neighbourhood park had also been named after Maharaja Agrasen. Yamini says, "there are so many of us here in Hill Lane. We easily go it done". Caste marking and renaming of public spaces like parks, is an assertion of economic and political might, creation of a legacy and universalisation of caste predecessors like Maharaja Agrasen as universal cultural icons of the Indian nation-state.

Unlike the middle and poor women studied by Donner (2008) and Grover (2011), the posh South Delhi neighbourhood did not have Mahila Samitis. The limited participation of select women was as help to their husbands. Yamini said,

when the Mandal Commission had happened, at that time my husband had written a *nukkad natak* (street play) protesting against it. I had made all the posters for it and we did it on the street corner. I have also campaigned for my husband, door to door when he ran for the Resident's Welfare Association (RWA) president's post.

In times as grave as the implementation of reservations for scheduled castes (SC) and other backward classes (OBC), the woman of the house entered and participated in the culture of the street. This was witnessed across the country in the wake of the Mandal

Commission in the early 1990s, when thousands of upper caste women, along with their husbands came onto the streets in protest and solidarity with their husbands. Tharu and Niranjana (1996) argue that upper caste, middle-class Hindu women protested in a language of citizenship rather than one of sisterhood against Dalit men as well as lower caste/class women. The neighbourhood as a social space echoes the national sentiment and forges caste and gender identities through fictive kinship ties in the urban.

### *Steering individuating desires of marriage and work*

As shown in the previous two sections, the social universe of Agarwal in Delhi is constituted by their caste and extended kinship ties. These networks also provide suitable marital alliances for children. Financial discussions before deciding marital alliances in Agarwal business families, unlike the Tamil Brahmins Fuller and Narasimhan (2015) studied are explicit. These discussions precede the matching of *kundalis* (astrological charts). Interested families for marriage refer to each other as ‘party’ and only a successful pairing of ‘budget’ leads to a change in the abstract category of ‘party’ to a recognisable family. Without approaching an interested party, families usually have a sense of the budget the groom’s family would desire. Only if there was a match between the suggested and expected budget, were marriage negotiations carried forward. Common family, friends and at times marriage brokers helped in the negotiation process. The budget refers to the money the bride's family would be ready to invest in the wedding celebrations. The dowry could be given separately both in cash or kind, from the total budget cited by the bride's family. Dowry could also be a part of the budget, depending on the parties involved in the negotiation. The groom's side decides how they would like the budget spent and divide it into sub-heads like caterers, venue, décor, clothes, and *milni*<sup>66</sup> (coming together ceremony). The groom’s side could also take the entire amount and decide to organise the wedding themselves. For the Agarwal elite in this stratum, dowry did not involve consumer durables; that was considered fit only for working class families. Their budgets were spent on expensive, elaborate weddings, a luxury car or perhaps furnished flats. Kanika who has a daughter in the marriageable age, says,

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<sup>66</sup> When the groom's family enters the venue for the wedding; they are greeted by members of the bride's family. Usually, it was a meeting of the men from both sides, in which gifts (in the form of money in envelopes or clothing) were given to all the close family members of the groom's side.

the marriage budget is a good system. No unnecessary confusions about the groom's family's expectations or last minute surprises come this way. However, one should be prepared for a slightly higher budget that is decided upon.

In this game of "cost analysis" (Bourdieu, 1976: 551), the wedding budget for the bride's side exhibited: a life-long marriage savings of the family; the success of their own business (if they were a business class family); money they would be ready to invest for the other daughters in the family (if there were any) and; the resources they had to continue giving 'gifts' to their daughters and in-laws for every small and big festival after marriage<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, the wedding budget, for the groom's side reflected the market worth of their business and its potential growth; the credentials of their son; the size and location of their house and; the family reputation established through a grounding in the larger Agarwal community.

A big marriage budget by the bride's side meant that daughters could be married up, despite not belonging to the same stratum or status as the groom. When it comes to marriages of sons, parents looked for alliances in the same class and status and not in one above them. This was despite the fact that 'marrying up' would be a source of more economic and social capital for the business. This was because women realised that daughters-in-law from families above them would be difficult to adjust. Women secretly spoke of families in their strata who had gone on to marry above their means only to have unhappy daughters-in-law and eventual separations. Daughters-in-law in Hill Lane then came from professional class families and the third stratum of Agarwal (living in parts of Rohini, Pitampura) as long as their status was comparable, budgets matched and sons were happy with the choice. Agarwal business families from the groom's side with successful businesses were ready to contribute towards big budget weddings, as long as they and their families liked the girl.

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<sup>67</sup> In Agarwal family businesses, for every small and big festival the bride's side sends gifts for their daughter and her in-laws. These 'gifts' are expensive especially in the first year of marriage or after the birth of a child. They continued for the rest of the life of the bride though the value of the 'gifts' given might decrease. Women as mothers ensure that appropriate 'gifts' were sent on every occasion.

Mothers helped strike a balance between the choices of children and business interests. Mothers as friends and confidants of their children ensured that their choices are considered along with status appropriate marriages. Renuka's (59) son, Piyush wanted a 'modern' wife, who would respect his parents, work with him and go partying with his friends. Renuka says,

I also want a working bride for my son. She can go to work with her husband and father-in-law. If she is at home, I will have to babysit her and I have my own circle of friends.

Renuka had been in Delhi, from the time of her marriage without her mother-in-law's supervision. In the afternoon's there was a cards game in her house, where all her friends in the neighbourhood came over. She convinced her husband to select a daughter-in-law who was also a CA and could join the family business.

Allowing daughters-in-law to work however continues to be a contentious issue in business families. Yamini's daughter-in-law, Kushboo had been working in a corporate firm for four years before marriage. When she had got selected through campus placement, her father allowed her to work on the condition that she would quit her job as soon as a marriage match was selected for her. Yamini's son's proposal had come for Khushboo a year before, however, Yamini's family had rejected it because Khushboo was working at that time. The second time when the same proposal came Yamini's way, they decided to meet Khushboo. Yamini felt Khushboo did not have the 'airs of a working woman' when she met her. Everyone, including Yamini's son, liked Khushboo. Khushboo says in her first interaction, she was really hurt when her father-in-law asked her 'if she worked to support her family'. After marriage, Yamini went to put in her papers, however, her immediate boss happy with her work told her he would retain her post for four months and she could rejoin if she felt she wanted to. Yamini did not hope to work after marriage, knowing that her in-laws would disapprove. However, after four months of marriage when she asked her husband, he did not have a problem and spoke to his parents on her behalf. Kushboo says,



my husband is the only son and the youngest child, he is really spoilt and his parents listen to everything he says. This worked in my favour, or I could have never worked.

Women's options to work outside the family or the family business then were dependent on the open-mindedness of their husbands or them acting as intermediaries for their wives. Yamini says she 'respects her daughter-in-law and her son's decision. The servant just has to pack one more lunch box in the morning'. Kushboo's work at times involved travels abroad and her husband was happy to accompany her after her meetings and make it a holiday. Women in the neighbourhood now cite Khushboo's case and Yamini's progressiveness as examples of their professionally qualified daughters also being capable of working after marriage. This, however, depended on their good 'fate' which would help them find families like Yamini's. The reliance on 'fate' shows the unpredictability and the lack of control women had in the situation. Renuka and Yamini's case with working daughters-in-law shows, slow moves in accepting working daughters-in-law; I was repeatedly told that this was not the norm. Yamini's second daughter married in an affluent business class family in Delhi and was not allowed to leave her house unescorted; her time with her natal family was regulated and the money given to her for her personal expenditure had to be accounted for constantly. In Renuka's case, her daughter-in-law worked in the family business, while in Yamini's daughter-in-law had an independent job in a corporate firm. Yamini did not want to join the family business as it was predominantly a manufacturing line and was unsure if she would continue working after having a child.

Working daughters-in-law in business families were considered unsuitable to the status of the family, as work is associated only with profitable earnings and not self-growth or expression. Daughters-in-law working would be a loss of the status reproduction roles expected of them. When Kanika had met her husband for the first time, she was positive about her chances of working after marriage. However, after marriage when she expressed interest, her husband was unsure. Kanika says,

no one said openly I could not, but it was understood. Their other daughter-in-law and own daughter, despite being qualified, were not allowed to work.

My husband suggested that I join his business part-time and my in-laws also did not have a problem with this. Kanika says,

I have a cabin to myself. I handle communications with international clients, handling problems in the international market, identifying conventions which would be good for the business and then attending them with my husband. We just returned from a convention in Hong Kong. But I actually want to do something of my own. This manufacturing line is a manly job. You have to stand on the head of the labour and get things done and the labourers are very *gavar* (uneducated and uncultured). My husband does not like me interacting with them and they also will not accept *bhabhiji* (elder brother's wife) is coming to work. International calls can be made at home also. I have been working all my life, and I did not see myself sitting at home. There is nothing wrong with being a housewife, but when someone asks me what I am doing, I want to be able to say I am doing something. I know the work that I am doing there; it can be done without me also. It is not my baby and my project.

Coming from a professional class family, having studied and worked in Delhi, Kanika wanted her own 'project', something to call her own. Mothers-in-law also realise that it would be counter-productive to the health of the family if educated daughters-in-law are actively discouraged. They encouraged daughters-in-law to pursue their hobbies by opening small projects on the side, like a designing boutique, learning short term courses like baking or joining the family business for a few hours. This added to the appeal of having a 'modern' daughter-in-law who was qualified, yet not required to work. Daughters-in-law would then have the flexibility of work hours, keep the status of being the daughter-in-law of an elite family and be creatively entertained in the process. Kanika

wanted to become a party planner and her mother-in-law was supportive of her plans. Women like Kanika's sister-in-law and Rajini who had two children in the school going age group were preoccupied being the primary caregivers of their children. They at times volunteered in NGOs and helped their husbands in Rotary circles organise events or host business dinners at home.

As opposed to their mothers-in-law generation in which one can see a mix of frugality and display of wealth, daughters-in-law have consumptive lifestyles characterised by frequent foreign trips (accompanying their husbands on business trips), shopping trips with their friends and mother-in-law and wear expensive jewellery in social circles and gatherings. Kanika says her life is about "*kaho aish karo, shopping karo, paisa udao*" (eat, drink, have a good time, shop and spend money). Women in the mothers and mothers-in-law generation were allowed to wear suits much later in their lives. However, the restrictions of daughters-in-law clothing in Hill Lane were rare. They were allowed to dress according to their husbands' friend's circles. Kanika says,

my friends back home are surprised to see me pose pictures with my in-laws in short dresses. Those who have been married in UP are not even allowed to wear suits. They feel very jealous. My in-laws are 'modern'. My mother-in-law is also a lot of fun and she would have tried restaurant before us with her kitty friends. It is just regarding women working that they have a problem.

To be an elite daughter-in-law was then to lead lifestyles that reflect the affluence of the family-business. Modernity is associated with the freedom to dress the way one liked. In this stratum of business families, for those women who have the good 'fate', they have 'fun' mothers-in-law, who participated in shopping and eating out with them, allowed the couple to have their own space and time and supported their daughters-in-law with their indulgences of side business or hobbies.

Higher education was a certain, but risky requirement for the up-gradation of family capital. If the family could afford to invest and spare both their sons for higher education, then it would be undertaken. However, it was usually the younger son if he had a

temperament for studies who was sent to study abroad; the elder son would have a basic degree and be involved in the day to day management of the business. Pursuing higher education, however, posed a risk to the continuance of the family business. When Usha's younger son, sent to the US to contribute to their business of manufacturing plastic moulds seemed reluctant to come back, Usha was quick to gauge his reluctance. Marriage alliances were sought and Rajat, her son, was married to Rachna on one of his visits to India. Rajat, in turn, came back to India to join the family business. Marriage is seen as a route for attaining social adulthood, responsibility and prioritising the needs of the family above oneself. In Roshini's case, her son after finishing his higher degree abroad wanted to work in India in a firm for some time. He worked there for a couple of years and Roshini says because he took so long to decide, her husband could not expand his manufacturing plant in time. Roshini also suspects that her son is seeing someone, but does not want to ask him till he brings it up. Higher education could mean sons not wanting to join the family business or find women they would want to marry. However, there were also sons who through their close bond with their family, did not want to choose women who had the potential of introducing any kind of 'conflicts' through their aspirations. Surya, a third generation real estate owner who finished a higher degree from a top business school in India was seeing his classmate, an Agarwal too. However Surya says,

I realised she was very ambitious. She would not be able to accommodate in our kind of setup. She came home and met everyone. They liked her. I have asked my parents, not to look for women from MBA backgrounds. These women would want a separate house and work. This will cause conflicts. I am ok with women working, they can have their own boutique or pastry but a full-time job will not work.

Futures of businesses depended on the marital decisions sons made and how well the new member the daughter-in-law was incorporated in the institution. Sameness facilitated easier incorporation; however, it was also essential to accommodate the desires of the daughter-in-law and not always forcing her to succumb to the needs of the family.

With an increase in age of marriage, children's education and modern (consumptive) lifestyles, the fear of families splitting leading to a split in the business were real. A ritual to keep families united, affective ties strengthened, channels of communication functioning and in the process ensuring the health of the family business was to find time to spend together as a family. In the previous generation, spending time together was a given. All items of food were made at home; as women were frugal and were also wary of eating food prepared by unknown castes. In the current generation, however, the home was no longer the primary site of socialisation. Eating out and parties were frequent and children and parents had their independent friend circles. The ritual of evening snack sessions, going on long dinners once a month, foreign trips together and celebrating festivals were some of the things women say they initiate to be a family in the everyday. Rituals helped the different family units in the joint family, residing on separate floors and at times managing separate manufacturing plants to set time apart for members of the family.

## **Conclusion**

By focusing on women's narratives from elite Agarwal family businesses, this chapter shows how women internalise, regulate and reproduce the ideological project of the *samaj* at the level of families. The elite Agarwal woman is someone who continues to relate to her familial values, wifely duties and Hindu culture despite her upward mobility and exposure to 'corrupting' influences of the South Delhi culture. An increase in internal heterogeneities in urban caste groups like Agarwal causes the upper elite strata to forge cohesion by strengthening 'strong' and 'weak' ties. Three strategies of reproduction are undertaken by women along with their families: inter-strata 'social work' at the Delhi level allowing caste to function as a socio-political-economic resource through caste cohesion; intra-strata sustained socialization making the social space of the neighbourhood to echo national sentiment and forge caste and gender identities through fictive kinship ties in the urban; and a negotiation and balancing of the individuating desires of children with that of the family and *samaj*. Elite upper-caste Agarwal women in the older generation as agents in the processual structuring of caste and family businesses are not passive. However, their labour is naturalised through a discourse of maternal love and wifely duty, invisibilizing their economic-affective roles in family businesses and in enforcing caste

and family values. They manage their educated daughters-in-law, the future of the family, business and *samaj* by allowing them just enough freedom that they do not feel creatively stifled. These women however unlike Ostrander's (1984) elite women are not on boards of cultural and educational organisations. Their morally permissible sphere of socialisation, mobility and consumption continues to be within extended caste and kinship networks. The next chapter focuses on how daughters are reproduced as the future of business, family and *samaj* through the marital decisions they make.

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## Chapter 6

### Entangled Love: Probing ‘Modern’ Endogamous Marital Choices

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#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the backroom roles that older women from the second stratum of the *samaj* play within families undertake to reproduce the entwined futures of caste, the interests of family businesses and their own lives are discussed. In this chapter, the focus is on the in-between phase when younger women enter adulthood and before they are interpellated into social adulthood through marriage in the same stratum of the *samaj* (as discussed in Chapter 5).

Studies on upper-caste and class, show the ‘shifts’ and ‘changes’ in the caste system while reiterating the stubbornness of endogamous and arranged marriages amongst the upper caste and class (Bairy, 2010; Fuller and Narsimhan, 2015). However, studies in the lower class and caste contexts show how there is a greater diversity in marital forms and inter-caste unions (Grover, 2011; Lessinger, 2014; Mody, 2008; Parry 2001). Classical literature stresses the importance of endogamous marriages for the social reproduction of caste and class dominance (Ambedkar, 1979a; Bourdieu, 1986). I argue that endogamous marital choices are a mere symptom of a larger process of self-formation in families undertaken through a discourse of ‘modern’ love. Marital decisions cannot be taken lightly as they decide the present and future of daughters’ conjugal intimacies, their post-marital happiness, the upward mobility of their natal families and the self-fashioning of the community and their moral claims on the nation. It is hence a key site for the reproduction of future women of the family, business, *samaj* and nation.

The persistence of endogamous marriages does not mean that individual choices and preferences are brushed aside. On the contrary, the subtle shifts in the organisation of intimacies are reflected in the expansion of endogamous circles to embrace sub-castes within the varna category or other dominant castes (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Upadhyaya and Vasavi 2006). These alterations in endogamous marriages have given way to the mutation of arranged marriages into “love-arranged” and “arranged-love” marriages (Donner, 2002; Seymour, 1999; Trautmann, 2003; Uberoi, 2006). Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) argue that within the modern middle class, “companionate marriages have become the ideal, although love marriages are limited to a ‘progressive’ small section” (page 751). These companionate marriages are a result of affective individualism. Affective individualism in the western context is seen as a weakening of family and community ties<sup>68</sup>; however amongst the middle-class Tamil Brahmins, Fuller and Narasimhan (2015) show a conjoined effort in finding marital matches by parents and individuals. The congruence of ‘modern’ individual and parental preferences within endogamous choices in upper-caste/class needs more probing. Hence in this chapter, the following question is addressed: why do individuals from select backgrounds in urban India not fall in love and marry outside their caste?

Twenty one interviews with Agarwal women in their early to mid-20s in the second stratum were conducted. These women were sampled randomly in the city of Delhi, drawing on my networks of friends, acquaintances and research respondents. This sample consisted of two kinds of respondents: (i) those who were born and brought up in Delhi and lived with their parents; (ii) those who lived in other parts of North India and had moved to Delhi for their education and lived in rented accommodations and university hostels. I use these interviews as a backdrop to understanding the four case studies that I discuss in detail in this chapter. These four women were the daughters of the older women discussed in Chapter 5 and by virtue of still being unmarried have been classified under the same stratum as their natal families. I met them numerous times over the course of two years (2014 to 2016) of data collection according to their convenience. All names and identifiable markers have been anonymised.

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<sup>68</sup>For more details see Giddens (1991); Giddens (1999); Beck (2002).



This chapter has been structured in the following manner: the research problematic that is ‘modern’ love is discussed in the *first* section. In the next four subsections, the research findings are presented and discussed. In the *first* sub-section, the nature of familial love and how it moulds pre-marital love is discussed in the *second* sub-section. Sub-section *third* shows the product of this moulding that is pragmatic love and the *fourth* subsection shows the psychic toll it takes on women to make their lives into an enterprise. The *fifth* subsection discusses marital love and how it is produced by familial, pre-marital and pragmatic love furthering women’s now learnt aspirations through an arranged endogamous marriage.

### ***The Problematic: ‘Modern’ Love***

Love is a universal emotion; however, its contours, nature and expression are cultural, politico-economic and historical in nature (Constable, 2003; Orsini, 2006;). Romantic love has been closely tied to marriage in South Asia. In colonial India, ‘arranged’ marriage was understood in the context of child marriage, where there was no room for consent or agency. It was also linked with ideas of female chastity, sati, and prohibition of child marriage. However, historians have shown that this idea of the ‘Indian Tradition’ was textually constructed and there were numerous forms of marriages, divorce and remarriages that had been invisibilised (Gupta, 2005; Sarkar, 2001). Even in the case of child marriages, it is seen that parental and societal authority did not go uncontested and there were many ways of exiting an unhappy marriage and cases of elopement (Walsh 2004). With English education and ideas of colonial modernity seeping in there were assertions of individualism and a challenge to non-consensual marriages. Along with this, there was an importation of Victorian ideas of love and companionate marriages. ‘Love’ marriages came to be associated with ideas of “progress, choice, agency and modernity” (Majumdar, 2009:7) However within the Hindu marriage system and discourse of cultural nationalism love was seen as a threat and a western pollutant (Mukhopadhyay, 2012)

From the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, love was spoken in the context of marital relationships in South Asia. With this came a uniquely Indian dichotomy between ‘love’ and ‘arranged’ marriages (Mukhopadhyay, 2012). This binary was also read as that between tradition and modernity. This dichotomy premised on ideas of choice and agency

has become somewhat irrelevant in the last two decades of liberalisation. Latest scholarship on the subject, show the arranged (endogamous) marriages amongst the middle class “integrate courtship, consent, and elements of choice” (Donner and Sachos, 2016: 1143). However, with the exception of De Neve (2016), little is known about the nature of modern ‘love’ and the subject it constitutes. De Neve (2016) in his ethnography of love marriages and youth aspirations in the South Indian garment city of Tiruppur argues, that to be successful post-liberalisation aspiring successful entrepreneurs need to mobilise parental and kin support and endogamous arranged marriages are the best way to garner this. He argues that arranged marriages, as opposed to love marriages, are best suited to the demands and pressures of India’s contemporary “enterprise culture”(page 1223). This chapter shows how ‘modern’ pre-marital love coexists with enterprise culture. Its mediation by familial love paves the way for the formation of pragmatic love for marital relationships.

The ideological function of the *samaj* vis-à-vis the women’s question as discussed in chapter 4, shows subtle shifts in the tone of the events and writings of the association. The last two decades of structural transformation has changed the politico-socio-economic landscape in South Asia at large and in India in specific. It has opened new avenues and motilities and at the same time increased disparities and rigidities. Harvey (2005) describes the process of structural transformation as one of “creative destruction”, not just of the institutional framework and powers but also of “divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart” (page 12). The “habits of the heart” hints towards a deeper change in the life worlds, values and rationalities of neoliberal subjects that would support the change in the role of the state and the market. However, neoliberalism is not only about the market. Brown (2003) shows the ‘social analysis’ of neoliberalism that when deployed as a “form of governmentality, extends and disseminates market values to all institutions and social action” (page 40). She further argues that “neoliberalism figures individuals as rational, calculating, creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’-the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions” (Brown, 2003: 42).

As shown in chapter 4, the *samaj* through the internal changes within its own families realises that it would be ineffective to ask women to make ‘correct’ decisions as a response to their Hindu call of duty to the family community or the nation, but because it would guarantee their own happiness. This discourse of self-responsibilisation is a trait of a neoliberal enterprising subject ideologically provided by the association through the *samaj*. This chapter shows how this ideological project resonates at the familial level through a co-production of love and enterprise culture. As the sphere of the enterprise is made to be the family for women, marital decision making is characterised by a careful and calculated strategy. The marital form (love or arranged marriage) while maintaining their endogamous nature is a means to an end. The imagined end of this business like relationship with marriage is emotional and material self-maximisation. I argue that the persistence of arranged endogamous marriages is because it caters to the ‘modern’ selves based on self-knowledge, reflexivity and the also addresses familial needs.

The conjoined nature of love and ‘enterprise culture’ shows a bonhomie of emotion and economy. However, the co-existence of love and materiality precedes the neoliberal ‘enterprise culture’ as seen in ethnographic studies (Cole, 2014; Constable, 2003). Cole (2014) shows that the attempts of western missionaries to introduce the concept of ‘selfless love’ in Madagascar, was not successful because for people affective bonds were tied to gift exchange and reciprocity. Closer home, Lessinger (2014) shows how love marriages are an economic adaptive change to the global destitution caused by globalisation amongst women workers in Chennai. This is because their caste and class position does not present women with any material resources. Studies show how marriages have historically been strategic, undertaken by families for their upward mobility across class and caste contexts (Osella and Osella 2000; Vaid, 2007). Giddens’s (1993) ideal type of a “pure relationship” forged through romantic love has been proven untenable and Euro-centric by the studies discussed above. It is still useful to borrow his argument about the democratisation of the private sphere linked to the democratisation of the society. Using Agarwal as a case study, this chapter shows how love and enterprise culture are knit together through familial love. The ways in which marital decisions are made through a negotiation of ‘modern’ romantic love shows us the intertwined nature of the intimate in the secularisation of caste identification and the manner in which caste reproduces.

## **Familial Love**

The mother is the primary parental caregiver for children in Agarwal family businesses. In young women's narratives, they repeatedly referred to their mothers, as opposed to their fathers. The latter spent their time and energy building their business or attending to the needs of their parents inhibiting the formation of a close relationship with their daughters from the formative stage. Some mothers share a close and evolving relationship with their daughters. Daughters related to the tussles forged by their mothers in raising them and at times were their only confidants in joint families. Anuja said,

my mother (Saroj) was really talented. She could sing, dance and paint. But she did not get a chance to develop any of her skills. Dad's business was just starting so all members of the extended family lived together and it was crowded. She took care of everyone, but still, my grandparents blamed her. They also wanted a son. So when I was born even if I used to cry, they did not pick me up. My mother had to take care of everyone and me. My father at that point did not support her, now he does. She did everything alone. She always pushed us to study in the best schools possible and encouraged our talents. She wanted us to make something of our lives, something she could not.

Similarly, Akriti said,

my mother (Jhanvi) is very intelligent. She could have been so many things if my grandparents had helped her finish her studies. Growing up all three of us siblings would go to my mother whenever we have any problems. Dad hardly knows what to do and only listened to his parents but his credit card is always there for us to use (laughs). She is my friend and not just my mother. She is very modern. She allows me to go on trips with boys. They

can come home for a sleepover. Can you think of any other baniya mother being this cool?

If some daughters were socialised with relative freedom and allowed to go on outings with friends, there were others who were tired of their mother's coercive methods and their strict socialisation. Modern time was one in which the future was always present. This time had to be reined in by families by making it productive rather than allowing it to the vagaries of youth or the timelessness of childhood. Time was broken down and assembled by sending women to grooming classes, gyms and allowing them to study however not over indulging in their career or education. Rukmani's mother, Radhika kept a close watch on her friend circles, trimming out all her male friends. Rukmani's current permissible spheres of socialisation were only her family friends' children or the other Agarwal children that her parents met through their social engagements. She says,

whenever I ask my mother permission for outings with friends or ask her to delay my curfew timing from 7 pm she says *log kya kahengai* (what will people say). This one phrase has decided the course of my life. When any of my male friends came home, my parents did not make them feel comfortable. If they invited me to their birthday parties or dinners, I was never allowed to go. In the end, I lost all these friends. If at times I managed to sneak out, I was constantly worried that someone would see me. You know everyone knows everyone here.

In closely interlinked homophilic neighbourhoods and social circles, word about a daughter's transgressions travelled fast. There was one cousin who had married out of caste and class, and Rukmani's parents repeatedly referred to her difficult life and bad choice. Stories of unsuccessful love matches in the family were meant to act as a deterrent for the rest of the children in the family. Growing up, Radhika ensured that her daughter was well-versed in Vastu, Astrology and Reiki all 'life-skills' that Radhika thought would come in use at some point. Radhika was a trained Reiki and astrologist and visited often by the other Agarwal women in the neighbourhood. Radhika was also aware of Rukmani being what she described as 'healthy', hence on one of the latest Agarwal community

outings with other families; she kept a watchful eye on Radhika's plate in the buffet. Rukmani says 'she kept making eyes at me to eat less and not to fill up my plate'. Rukhmani says 'one gets tired of smiling and pretending all the time. At times you wonder what your real self in these gatherings'. Rukmani enjoyed her workouts, hence going to the gym did not appear to be a task for her. Radhika also enrolled Rukmani in grooming classes in South Delhi when she was younger, to teach her the etiquettes that were becoming of her present and future class. These techniques when practised regularly would become a habit, and achieve the depth, a way of being for married elite women of tomorrow. Rukmani says her mother likes it when she wears short 'modern' clothes and lately has been teaching her ways of presenting herself suitably on the 'first date' that she goes with the potential suitors that her parents select after careful screening. Consumerist modernity could make a strict socialisation and an inhibited dress code to co-exist as an expression of oneself.

There are two kinds of relationships forged with the mother, the first characterised by friendship while the second by parental authority exercised through supervision and tutoring. Irrespective of the nature of the relationship, there existed a close bond. Daughters understood and empathised with the kind of struggles women have to go through depending on the marital union they entered and husbands they had. This mother-daughter bond is also exclusive, forged through years of trust and caring. Daughters when young are their mother's confidants when older some mothers become their daughter's friend and confidant. Young elite women were overinvested with their family, community and nation's social ambition. The phase before marriage cannot be one of careless abandonment associated with youth. Through the mother's technologies of socialisation, daughters inculcate gendered norms, family and community's aspirations. The nature of the relationship shared with one's mother has implications on decisions women made when it came to their romantic relationships.

### **Pre-Marital Love**

Daughters were socialised to believe that all romantic relationships, although different from the narrative of marriage, had to be tested on the marriage altar to decide their continuation or termination in the last instance. As romantic relations are both structured

similar to a marital union and tested by its capacity to translate into one, I refer to women's romantic relations as 'pre-marital love'. The implicit threat that love might pose to families and communities is lessened by its pre-structuring through familial love. Familial love helps enable or disenable pre-marital love on the basis of its entrepreneurial potential for self-maximization for women. In the process, it teaches women self-knowledge through the limits of their self-exploration.

Testing pre-marital love for its future potential begins early in women's lives. However, it got particularly serious, if women were closer to the marriageable age decided by their parents. In the case of my respondents, this age was around 25 years. Anuja says,

she (mom) never scolded me for dating someone, but her thing from day one was if you are dating someone you have to marry them. In school also, in the eleventh standard, she spoke to my boyfriend and said how it will work out, you are both in different streams, and your life will go apart.

Early on Saroj alerts Anuja to think of romantic relationships in terms of the future it held. In the process, she was teaching her daughter how to evaluate the soundness of any future romantic relationship she was to enter. Growing with a partner of one's choice or waiting for a partner to grow into their own economic or emotional maturity is not something families are ready to find security in or teach their daughters to work with. The partners and their backgrounds have to be ready-made. Despite Saroj's own difficult life circumstances, she wanted her children to experience a good life and marrying 'right' was an important step in the process. Anuja says her mother knew that having sent Anuja to Delhi schools and colleges, her daughter was bound to find someone on her own. Saroj wanted to be a part of her daughter's evolving 'modern' life and this process of inclusive decision making started early in their lives. In her 20s, when Anuja was in a serious relationship with a boy in the same caste. Anuja says, her mother told her early on that the relationship did not have a future. Being of the same caste was not the sole criterion. Her mother felt the boy did not have a bright career prospect and although he came from a business family, their status was not comparable.

Similarly, Garima told Chandani, her mother about her Jat boyfriend of two years. When she turned 23 her mother told her to call it off as it did not have a 'future'. This 'future' that finds a repeated mention in the above accounts is one which is materially secure, emotionally satisfying, accounts for the family's status and is within the same caste. Akriti told her mother Jhanvi about her Punjabi boyfriend of eight years from the same neighbourhood, who was currently employed abroad. She expressed her desire to marry him, however, in the end, chose to end the relationship. Below she shares one of the main reasons for her decision to terminate the relationship.

**Q:** What happened when you told your mother about your boyfriend?

**A:** My mother was initially concerned that he was a Punjabi, but that passed, she was more concerned about the fact that he had just started working and I had been working for two years. He worked in New Zealand and earned well but, mom was not sure if that would be enough for me.

**Q:** But you would also be contributing and working right?

**A:** I would, but that would not be at the start. Mom was like - you have worked so hard, why do you want to start from scratch? Why do you want to compromise on so many things? My mother knows me best, she knows how and where I can live and what lifestyle I am used to.

When asked if she would consider entering another relationship of her own choice. Akriti says,

I do not have the courage to convince my parents. I have to be very sure only then only can I do that. There was nothing wrong with my previous boyfriend and I loved him, but everything my parents said was also logical.



Akriti does not think that her love is irrational or illogical and neither does she think what her parents are saying is illogical. She makes an ethical decision about which course to take, depending on her reflexive understanding of what she requires in a marital relationship.

A strict diet of *sanskaar* was used to control a daughter's sexuality in cases where they were strictly socialised by mothers. *Sanskaar* is the socio-cultural-religious values of the *samaj* and internalised by daughters in families through the life-long tutelage of familial love. The benefit of this was reaped in the 'correct' decisions made by daughters, like Rukmani's reluctance to enter a romantic relationship. Rukmani says,

I did not dare to (date anyone) because if I do then the person has to be extraordinary. If they find a person on their own and there are ten things wrong with the person then it is fine. But if I find someone and there is something wrong with the person then it is my fault. Now they want someone from the same caste, status, good family and a great boy. If I have to consider all this then I will not be able to find someone. I did see someone in school for 2 weeks in school, but that was disastrous. I am a very lazy person to find someone on my own, then to continue that relationship, then to hide it from my parents. It is a lot of work.

The two-week relationship, Rukhmani refers to, much to Radhika's dismay was with her Muslim classmate in school. Rukmani says the first thing her mother said was 'there is something lacking in our *sanskaar*'. Radhika takes away Rukmani's agency to decide who she can date by using *sanskaar* as a moral yardstick to judge Rukmani's present and future decisions. The 'extraordinary' person that Rukhmani feels the need to find before entering a romantic relationship, shows that pre-marital love mirrors a marital relationship and is moulded by familial love.

Pre-marital love holds the potential of women choosing a spouse who could be more supportive than their fathers. However, it still does not guarantee the kind of families

women might be married into, their caste, status and lifestyles women might have. Some mothers who do strictly socialise their daughters are prepared to accept that their daughters by virtue of living and studying in Delhi might fall in pre-marital love. A relationship forged in friendship with one's daughter however also means having a say in the nature of pre-marital relationships women enter and how far they can be allowed to go. Going through the phase of pre-marital love teaches daughters the limits of their own self-exploration. Having gone through this phase, daughters are equipped to undertake self-regulation and management to "preserve, reproduce and construct" their own "human capital" (Gordon et al, 1991: 44) couched in the idiom of the family, *samaj* and nation. The slight nudges or loud advice given by mothers find a resonance with daughters as it is in tandem with the embodied familial aspirations and individual consumerist desires.

### **Pragmatic Love and Planning Life**

The self-knowledge gained through pre-marital love distills for women what they consider is non-negotiable in a relationship. The pragmatic dimensions of love get more pronounced, however, this does not mean other forms of love do not co-exist. Anuja initially struggled to convince her parents about her choice. As the pressures to find someone through the family increased, she decided to once again end her relationship. Pragmatic love here is not just self-love, a narcissistic cold obsession with one's enterprise but it is also a care of the other. Anuja knew that her decision would hurt her boyfriend, so she persisted in as long as she could. She said,

I had also fallen out of love with him. I did not want to hurt him, so I continued as long as I could. Love does not pay all the bills. I got tired of him not establishing himself.

Much like Akriti (mentioned above), Anuja too saw reason in her mother's advice about an 'uncomfortable' future with a non-enterprising husband. Pragmatic love exists in the post-marital phase in the desire to work together as a team consisting of two partners who share the same enterprising values of ambition, self-reliance and self-management. If one partner does not share these values, it would result in a lopsided partnership and jeopardise a successful future and one's happiness. As Anuja continued to meet people

through her parents, she met and ‘fell in love’ with a Punjabi boy. Her mother knew about Anuja’s current relationship too and advised her ‘not to lose interest easily by going too far’. Familial love enables those relationships that it thinks holds an entrepreneurial potential. Anuja (laugh) says my mother feels ‘I change my boyfriends too often’. She said,

my criterion for marriage has always been an educated man. Money is important, but he does not have to be a multi-millionaire. I also know that I will never make the kind of money that would be required to fulfil my aspirations. I will need a man for it and I am ok with it. I am also not taking up a job at the moment because say we get married, I will be relocating to another city and I want to have the freedom to explore my hobbies and not be stuck in a corporate job.

Although Anuja was a couple of months into the relationship, the pressures for her and her boyfriend to marry amounted. This, however, did not stop her from planning her career and life around the nascent relationship. Pre-marital love mirrors marital love in the extent of oneself women are ready to invest. She was also simultaneously meeting potential spouses through her parents. Her extended family did not know about her current pre-marital love and Anuja did not want them to know about it, till she was certain that she was going to marry him. However, once in a heated fight with a relative over Anuja being ‘too choosy’ and not even being ‘fair enough or pretty’ to make the demands she was making. Anuja told them

there is a guy who loves me. He is qualified, has degrees from India and abroad. His father owns a factory and he has a huge bungalow in South Delhi. He is also the only child and he does not care about my education or ‘budget’.

Anuja’s pragmatic love was meant to account for the familial aspirations of status and her own desire to be married to someone who was rich, educated and understanding. With every pre-marital relationship, Anuja entered, it became clearer to her what it is that she

could not do without in a relationship. Money and an educated partner were the two most important things for her. To succeed in one's criteria of what qualified as happiness, it was essential to enter pragmatic pre-marital love relationships and not be swayed by emotion alone. Garima in the context of breaking up with her Jat boyfriend says, "he was not stable financially, did not have a status, *jab mai sambal gayi* (when I stabilised), I knew there was no future with him". 'Sambhal' could be translated as stabilised or came into one's own through self-knowledge and the experience gained over years. This taught women what to prioritise and how to think through their decisions.

After breaking up with her boyfriend on her mother's advice, Akriti met potential spouses through her parents. When asked what kind of a man she would like to marry. She says,

in love marriage, you have to compromise for love. In arranged marriage, all the boxes should be ticked. He should be the same profession, not necessarily an engineer, but something allied. He could be civil engineer plus an MBA so that when I plan not to work, I can simply join his firm. Being a woman we have to manage the house also. House and job do not go hand in hand. That is why I want someone of the same profession. Also, say down the line in another four to five years we can start our own venture. Starting a business together makes a lot of difference. I am open to whatever my parents get. My parents have so many filters, even if they see twenty they will only get one.

The person should also be from South Delhi. My mom knows I cannot live beyond Dhaula Kuan. There are many typical business baniya families beyond Dhaula Kuan. They don't prefer someone who is modern and likes to go out. I am very modern, I like wearing shorts and I cannot settle in such families. I don't want typical business families, also the circles that these people have. In totality, the kind of lifestyle is very different from what people have in South Delhi. That is why South Delhi is south Delhi.

Akriti had a plan for her life, a self-direction. She was going to be married to someone who was well educated, owned a family business and lived in South Delhi. With her enterprising husband who had the required economic and social capital, Akriti would start a business in the future. They would have a comfortable life, a luxurious lifestyle and she would have the freedom to work or retire as per the demands of the home which she prioritised. Arranged marriage with the blessings of her parents was the way to achieve these aspirations. Her partner being ‘good, sensitive and kind’, the qualities that she had said she cherished in her pre-marital love, does not find a mention in Akriti’s life plans. These qualities were perhaps taken as a given, or could not be accounted for in short periods of interaction before marriage. What could be taken security in are details of a future husband’s education, employment, his physical location, family’s wealth and Akriti chances of employment after marriage. These aspirations were not just luxuries, but they were integral if Akriti wished to have the freedom to work after marriage, something that was still difficult for daughter-in-laws in Agarwal business class families (as shown in the previous chapter). It was essential not to marry in ‘typical business families’ to continue the life she was used to and one that was different from her mother’s characterised by constant compromise, sacrifice and circumscribing oneself.

Life plans could not be about anything else but marrying ‘right’. Things had moved in Rukmani’s generation to allow daughters to study what they wished. As opposed to the previous generation which undertook only degrees in Arts or Home Science<sup>69</sup>, daughters were allowed to study technical courses like architecture, medicine, engineering, management, finance and accounting. However having the technical expertise did not mean they could participate in the family business or be equipped to make claims on business ownership. Women were allowed to study while ensuring that they do not become over-educated or over-ambitious. By discouraging career and education prospects to participate in the family business and leaving employment post marriage in the hands of their in-laws, daughters were taught that their primary enterprise was to marry ‘right’. Rukmani says,

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<sup>69</sup> See Hancock (2001) for further details on the role of Home Science courses in the nationalization of domesticity in colonial India.

I did my graduation in architecture for five years. Then I did an internship with my father since I could not find anything elsewhere. Since I was in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> standard, I knew I wanted to be an architect like my father and I planned to do masters. My father does not have a degree in Architecture, so I wanted to be the one with a degree to help him. The first day in college, I spoke to my teachers and decided my master's specialisation, but life does not go according to your plan. I could not do masters because my father said you are 23, aur tumhari life nikal jayegi (and your life will pass). Then after much talking, we came to a middle ground, which was going abroad for a short specialisation instead of two-year masters. I studied and came back and started working with my father. When I came back from Milan I told my father I wanted to do masters in Milan, but he said I had already spent half the money he had saved for me.

These short-term courses abroad had been undertaken by other Agarwal women in Rukmani's age and class. It indicated to potential suitors and their families that the bride and her family wished to seek alliances from well-educated grooms (preferably with a degree abroad) with a successful business.

The option of making one's education and career an enterprise, however, increased in some cases where women lived in Delhi away from their families in university hostels. In such situations, marrying outside one's caste although still within an upper caste group was possible. This was because women equipped themselves to be economically and emotionally sufficient and found spouses who were in similar lines of work. When Rajini (26) expressed her desire to study in Delhi University, she was told that she could go only if she managed to secure sufficient marks to study in the top tier of women's colleges in Delhi and also had the required marks to get a hostel accommodation<sup>70</sup>. When she fell in love with her now husband and told her natal family about him, her elder brother who was

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<sup>70</sup> In the top Delhi university colleges a place in the hostel's rented accommodation is also decided by one's academic performance.

the patriarch of the family refused to talk to her. It had been two years since they have spoken. Rajini was now preparing to join her husband in Europe for her higher education. She says,

I was sure I wanted to marry him. We both understand each other and our passion for our work. It was a very difficult decision to make. But I was strong and certain.

If Rajini managed to marry the person of her choice and remained 'strong' in her decision there were a larger number of women in my sample who were destined to have arranged endogamous marriages. This played out in two ways. *First*, extended families in Delhi undertook the task of policing women's sexuality similar to their natal families. For example, Ayesha, 22 who was finishing her graduation from Delhi University although lived in a rented accommodation in North Delhi had a deadline that was set by her extended family in Delhi. She says they conducted 'spot' checks through unannounced casual visits. For her first year in Delhi, she followed the deadline although had lately refused to comply. *Second*, by daughters realising the futility of wanting to marry the men they found on their own. They knew that these affairs were a 'time pass', something they could not allow themselves to get 'too serious' or 'too involved' in as told by Gayatri, a 24-year-old respondent from Lucknow studying in Delhi. This 'time pass' however was not unproductive, casual or non-serious as women tried to suggest in their interviews to lessen the weight of what they considered as transgressions which could have repercussions. The experiences gained through such 'time pass' had the potential to influence the kind of men they wished to settle down within arranged marriages if given a choice to select them along with their parents.

Time was an important consideration in the lives of women. Rukmani's father felt her time would pass if she continued studying. Akriti while talking about her recent break-up said it was important to 'break up in time', giving one the room to recuperate before joining one's parents in the search for a life partner. Timely risk management was required to mitigate and recoup for the next life project. Women like their families made time productive by planning. Planning gave them a semblance of control over their present and future selves. The future plans were to be realised through their acquired entrepreneurial

skills of being in pragmatic pre-marital love relationships and moulding their work and educational ambitions.

### **Living Life in-between Plans**

The time of planning was full of hopefulness and potential. While women presented the reasons behind their breakups and plans for their future, their narratives were coherent and showed an unfading self-determination to actualize their and their families' aspirations through 'right' choices. Neoliberal rationalities anchored in the economic rational subject projects itself as a 'natural' or universal condition by invisibilizing other forms of self-hood (Gooptu, 2013: 7). Coached and pushed by familial love, the economic rational subject feels legitimised as the moral individual, however, this has its limits. Between one's well thought out plans and its actualization is when the toll of the enterprise culture is made visible.

For some, this was characterised by an incoherence of thought, aimlessness and despair. Anuja describes the phase when she broke up with her first boyfriend before she met her second boyfriend as one in which she was 'depressed' and spent all her time watching the television. She was not working at this point and decided to travel. Exploration while momentarily 'distracted' her about her familial pressures to get married, reinforced for her too that she wanted a partner. When she came back she met more potential suitors through her parents and began considering them seriously. She said,

I clearly knew in my head what kind of a guy I but because of the pressure I had, that image got a little hazy, I became ok, with just the money he had. I was ok settling in a small town. I was ok to compromise on everything. But it hit me, I knew in these families I will only be going to kitty parties, gym, holidays and spa. I did not want a lifestyle like that.

The matches that Anuja met through her parents were wealthy, but she knew they would not provide the 'modern' lifestyle or emotional succour that she associated with freedom and an expression of self. The need to fashion herself different from her mother and the



women in her extended family meant not compromising and being 'ok' with whatever came her way. Around the time this realisation 'hit' her, she met her next boyfriend. This phase of pre-marital love was however once again crowded by pressures to marry as soon as possible. The relationship did not last long, as the boy did not want to settle down in a hurry. Anuja again began the exhausting task of meeting men through her parents while keeping a look out for potential suitors on her own. This shows that the aspirational quest is a continuous project, interspersed with periods of self-doubt and despair that have to be regulated in order to move forward.

The in-between phase through the self-reflection gained about the limitation of one's self-exploration in pre-marital love could lead to practices of freedom that were different from the tutelage received from familial love. However, this was not seen to be the case. Garima before breaking up with her Jat boyfriend went back and forward before finally ending her relationship. She said:

I thought of running away with him (her Jat boyfriend) many times, but my friends told me it was not a good idea, I also did not want to hurt my family. I think I will be like Priyanka in 'Dil Dhadaknai Do',<sup>71</sup> (laughs) who falls for her ex-boyfriend after marrying the one her parents want her to marry.

Familial love focused on the marital enterprise by actively enabling or disabling pre-marital relationships that not did have a 'future', however, other life plans were not encouraged. Rukmani reflecting on her options in life says:

My situation is really vulnerable now, my parents ask me if I want to have a job, work in my father's business or my own business and they ask me to decide. I don't want to do a job, also my mom says that if I have a job it is easy for my in-laws to make me leave

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<sup>71</sup> 'Dil Dhadaknai Do' is Bollywood movie about the intimate lives of business families travelling together on an international cruise to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of the Mehra, a business group on a decline and hoping to claw back into an advantageous position by marrying their son 'right' and managing the marriage of their daughter, played by Priyanka Chopra's marriage from ending.

it and sit at home. If I have a business then there are more chances I will get to continue it. But I cannot work in my father's business; they say I have to start my own because my in-laws will not like it if I associate with my family so much after marriage.

I have all the tags a degree from abroad, Vastu, Numerology, Tarot card reading but I do not know what I like in all this. My life is passing by and I feel I need to live it all before I get married. I have no social life; I am told hundred times a day that I should get married. I am depressed.

In cases where daughters had been socialised strictly not to undertake any intimate experimentation, a singular focus on marriage along with a self-knowledge about their situation heightened their sense of despair. Her parents realising their daughter's state allowed her to undertake another short-term course abroad and encouraged her to participate actively in the Rotary circle they belonged. Such techniques helped distract and dissipate some despair while women waited to get married.

The toll of undertaking pragmatic love and one's life as an enterprise is seen in the in-between phases when grief makes women question and believe the rationalities they ascribe to their decisions. This could lead to a derailment from one's set life plan and look at other ways of inhabiting with a different set of rationalities. However, in the persistence of pragmatic love and self-regulation, the internalisation and mastery of the enterprise by women is seen.

### **Marital Love**

The in-between phase for some women ended when they went on to find partners that they and their families were excited about. Women through the self-knowledge gained through pre-marital love reacted to their future spouses with the same enthusiasm as they had when they had met their boyfriends. Their approval of the men their parents proposed did not just lie in their parent's happiness of finding someone of the same caste and class but also in the knowledge acquired about what kind of men they wanted having been in

pre-marital relationships. In most of the cases, it was through an arranged endogamous marriage while in the rare cases it was a love marriage with a comparable or a higher Hindu caste group. Akriti went on to marry the first man who passed through the many ‘filters’ that her parents had set. Her family through their contacts in the *samaj* found a business family that had a higher standing than their own. Akriti described her first meeting with her future husband in a language and an excitement which mirrored her first encounter with her boyfriend. She says,

when I met him, it was like he was the one. I knew this is what I wanted in life and I fell in love with him. It was like a fairy tale. He came from a good family and knew about my previous relationship and that I liked to party. We spoke for a month after our *roaka* (engagement) and then got married.

Akriti was to become the fourth and youngest daughter-in-law in the joint family. While her husband was educated and ‘modern’ the rest of her in-laws were conservative. She was the only daughter-in-law to hail from Delhi, had worked before marriage and wore short clothes before marriage. As a concession, she did not have to wear a saree like the other daughters-in-law and could wear a suit. In the first year of her marriage, Akriti was not allowed to go anywhere unescorted not even the beauty parlour. Jhanvi (Akriti’s mother) rationalised this by saying:

Women who need money work, the lucky ones do not need to.  
If women who have been busy like Akriti are trapped at home,  
frustrations will rise. Let’s see how Akriti manages this. If  
there are frustrations then we will find a way out too.

The sustained post-marital emotional support received through familial love again shows the parallels between marital and pre-marital love. Mothers helped their daughters deal with difficult in-laws, outdated rituals and managing one’s spouse efficiently. In cases where the ‘frustration’ of being trapped within the domestic amounted, they thought of newer practices to ease and re-equip their daughters to undertake their familial roles. One reason for Akriti’s ‘frustration’ is because plans to work in the family business or start a

joint venture with her husband did not materialise neither was she allowed to work. Her mother-in-law was especially conservative and had set notions about how women should behave. The partnership forged through pragmatic love could not be realised as the sphere of autonomy and enterprise for women post-marriage was increasingly restricted to the home.

The wish to undertake the post-marital enterprise creatively had decided the course of Anuja's pragmatic love realised now through an endogamous arranged marriage. Anuja continued to meet potential suitors through her parents after breaking up with her next boyfriend who seemed reluctant to define the relationship through marriage. She did not settle on her aspirations and in due time met someone who had a higher degree from a reputed college, was 'modern', had a flourishing inter-generational family business in a metropolitan city which was jointly managed by his father and elder brother.

After Akash (her first boyfriend) I never thought I could meet someone who could spoil and understand me as much. Suraj (her current husband) is ambitious, mature and most importantly knows how to have fun. I am lucky to have found a friend and the love of my life.

Anuja does not differentiate the boyfriend she broke up with on her mother's behest and later 'fell out of love with' and her future spouse. She was instead happy to have found someone through her parents who had the same traits along with the one's she had learnt she wanted in a husband. Love was not something which was restricted to pre-marital relationships; neither was it a learnt feeling post marriage. It was a feeling that existed much like pre-marital love right at the onset of marital love and made women decide if they wanted to marry the man that their parents proposed. Anuja felt lucky to have met someone within her marital budget of one crore, who met her aspirations. She said her parents could not spare more as she was the eldest daughter in a joint family and she set the marriage budget standard for the rest of the family marriages. She had a 'dream destination wedding' planned and had finalised her month long honeymoon in Europe. While she was actively discouraged to work, her time was spent organising and attending

expensive luncheons with her husband and her friends, spa and beauty retreats, and frequent foreign travels with her husband and long stays at her natal home.

In the absence of having gone through pre-marital love, familial love continued to tutor Rukmani about how to behave on her 'first' dates and expect from her post-marital life. Rukmani met potential suitors through her parents and said,

it seems my mother is preparing me for a war. She says after marriage I should not expect anyone to ask how I am feeling, or if I have eaten. A daughter-in-law never gets asked these things.

Despite her mother's strict socialisation, Rukmani had an opinion on the kind of life partner she wanted. Her parents were interested in a marriage 'party' in the *samaj*, however, they were a five to ten crore party<sup>72</sup> and that was above their budget. Rukmani says that she was happy, for the boy was overweight and she felt he did not have a spine like many baniya men she knew. She also did not always adhere to her mother's advice. On one of her recent 'date', she made the mistake of telling the man that 'she enjoys a drink occasionally' which was not taken too well. The second man she met made it clear that she could not work after marriage. Rukmani said she did not 'mind' marrying him because with him she felt there was some room for negotiation. However, her parents were unhappy with the match in the end for other reasons.

Endogamous marriages facilitated entrepreneurial partnerships through a 'modern' educated spouse, a family business and the promise of freedom through consumerist modernity and emotional satisfaction. The added advantage was having sustained familial love in the post-marital phase. Women described meeting their future spouses through their parents in the same language as they spoke about pre-marital love. However, women having gone through pre-marital love had changed. Their previous relationships helped distill out the traits in their spouse that were a non-negotiable before entering the marriage.

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<sup>72</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5, marriage 'budget' was first matched before proceeding to match astrological charts. The marriage 'budget' was a way of weighing how much a bride's family were ready to invest in the wedding celebrations and how the groom's side weighed themselves in the marital market.

Pre-marital love was not locked away but was alive in the way it influences women's present and future marital choices.

## **Conclusion**

By focussing on the processes leading up to women's marriages, this chapter shows how the ideological project of the *samaj* through the association resonates at the familial level through mother and daughter relationship. Intimate experimentations in the form of premarital love do not always need to result in a marriage although by definition they are built to lead to one. The mediation of pre-marital love through familial love leads to it being enabled or disabled depending on its entrepreneurial potential. Pre-marital love is a process that some women participate in before settling in an arranged endogamous marriage. This process of experimentation or a rite of passage through 'modern' love is important in the constitution of the entrepreneurial subject, characterised by calculation, ambition, self-regulation and self-direction. It tutors women to undertake pragmatic love rooted soundly in the affective and the economic, the familial and the individual and the *samaj* and the nation. However as women's enterprise is restricted to the institution of marriage by familial love, other avenues in the form of studying more or being ambitiously employed are discouraged if women continue to live with their natal families. Growing up young elite women believe that happiness in marital love is through the satisfaction of 'modern' consumerist desires and a luxurious lifestyle. This, however, can only be achieved by marrying and not through one's individual enterprise of building a flourishing career. This ensures that the sphere of women's enterprise continues to be the collective and neoliberal autonomy through 'modern' love does not mean being autonomous from the multi-generational family.

Arranged endogamous marriages are not forced on elite women to reproduce the familial interests and caste status. Instead, by catering to the aspirations of the enterprising individual and their families, arranged endogamous marriages rework and persist in their appeal in upper caste and class contexts. The process leading up to it creates the future gendered and 'caste-d' subjects of the community. However, the ways and reasons for inhabiting a caste group go through an inter-generational shift from one of duty undertaken through reproductive roles (as seen with older women in Chapter 5) to one

which where the caste identity is experimented, tested and inhabited for its entrepreneurial potential. The next chapter shows the inner workings of endogamous marriages in the fourth stratum of the community. It is seen how daughters-in-law are reproduced in endogamous marriages through the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, connecting the community to the association in the process.





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## Chapter 7

### **Marital Tactics in *Saas-Bahu* relationships: Women in Joint Families in Laxmi Nagar**

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#### **Introduction**

This chapter focusses on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship amongst the fourth stratum of Agarwal business families to understand the reproductive roles that women undertake vis-à-vis their family, business and community. Unlike the elite older and younger generation of women (daughters and daughters-in-law) discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, women's sphere of socialisation in this stratum is restricted to that of their marital and extended family. Studies show that within landed Hindu joint families, the position of the daughters-in-law in the family is inferior to that of the male and older women kin (Madan, 1965; Parry, 1979). While Vera-Sanso (1999) in low-income settlements in Chennai argues that the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is shaped by "shifting physical, social and economic dependencies and expectations of dependence in the future" making the stereotype of "dominant" mother-in-law and "submissive" mother-in-law not fit her respondents (page 578). This shows that disadvantageous position of the daughter-in-law in families, is not normative but stems and is a constitutive part of the social relations that underpin economic enterprises.

In this chapter, the conjugal bond is mediated through the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship in the post-marital phase, much like the mother and daughter relationship in the pre-marital phase for elite younger women in Chapter 6. In the early years of marriage, the daughter-in-law learns what is permitted and forbidden, desirable and undesirable through her relationship with her mother-in-law. However, the mother-in-law's power is not absolute. Through an everyday encounter, the impression that select disciplinary moments leave and her own engagement with them, the daughter-in-law learn

the permissibility of her own desires. Desire is both personal and relational (Moore, 2013). The daughter-in-law understands why she is different from the mother-in-law and this self-knowledge becomes important for the deployment of the ‘tactics’ of the self.

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews and participant observations in women’s gatherings with eighteen women (10 mothers-in-law and 8 daughters-in-law in Saharanpur<sup>73</sup>). I situate the specific case studies discussed in this chapter and make inferences drawing on the larger sample. Saharanpur, as opposed to the posh gated South Delhi neighbourhood of Hill Lane (second stratum) discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, is a crowded lower-middle class area which lies beyond the Yamuna. The lanes adjacent to the metro which connects Saharanpur to the central parts of Delhi are crowded by Chartered Accountant (CA) and Company Secretariat (CS) institutes, coaching centres, shops and eateries. To access the multi-storied houses which are interspersed with commercial enterprises one has to pass through bustling narrow alleys with precariously hanging electricity wires, competing traffic of plying rickshaws, youngsters on bikes and cows. A part of Saharanpur has gated colonies, while a majority is constituted by unplanned housing and commercial construction.

The chapter has been structured in the following manner: *first*, marital ‘tactics’ is conceptualized. In the *second* section, the micro-politics of the joint family anchored through the figure of the mother-in-law is discussed. The *third* section focuses on the tactics adopted by daughter-in-law through kitty parties and Reiki classes.

## **Martial Tactics**

Tactics according to Certeau (1984) are ways of undertaking everyday creative resistance to the modern structures enacted on ordinary people. For example, he argues that the city is generated by the strategies of governments and corporations that present it as a unified whole. The walker in the city, however, moves in tactical ways to create an “ensemble of possibilities” that are not determined by institutional plans (page 98). Certeau (1984) argues,

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<sup>73</sup> Saharanpur is an anonymous name of one of my research site. All names and identifiable markers of respondents have also been anonymized.

The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalise on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time-it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'. Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'. The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them (page 20)

Two tactics are discussed in this chapter: *first*, undertaking remunerative work through home based employment and *second*, by forging female friendships and learning self-management through kitty party and Reiki classes. These tactics are not innovative and are shaped by existing economic constraints, cultural conditions and gendered norms. They emerge from the existing domestic ideologies and need to be constantly worked on, modulated and reformulated as per the negotiation with existing power relations. They are not magic bullets or a means of social transformation. Their importance lies in the self-preservation and the possibilities of democratising inter-personal relationships they accord women in congested hierarchical everyday relations. They are the "mute processes" that organise inner worlds and socio-economic order (Certeau, 1984: 15). The mother-in-law represents the disciplinary figure, steeped in tradition, norms, ritual that represents the rules of the game of domestic life. She acts as the bridge between the caste community and the family. Through her disciplining, she intends to make the daughter-in-law an object of tradition of the community. The next section will focus on the tactics adopted by the mother-in-law in a joint family.

### *Micro-politics of the Joint Family: Mother-in-law*

The joint family is an “ideological construct, a set of material engagements and an emotional space, where not just the conjugal but a whole range of gendered relationships unfold” (Uberoi, 1993:14). One relationship that takes primacy over a conjugal bond in the family is that between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law (Donner, 2008; Lamb, 2000; Raheja & Gold, 1994). The reason for this primacy needs to be understood through the father and son relationship in a business family. Husbands of my respondents managed small businesses in the form of shops for daily needs, jewellery, clothes, utensils, phone recharge and repair, sweets and hardware along with the other male members of the family, primarily in the Saharanpur market. A few had a real estate business on the side and gave rooms on rent to students. The men in the family work together in shops. Similar to a family farm, a shop is co-owned by the *karta*, that is the oldest patriarch and inherited by his sons known as the co-parceners (Das Gupta, 2016; Parry, 1979). Upon his death or retirement, the ownership passes on to the elder son in case there is more than one son. Many of the sons grow up knowing that they would work and inherit the shop. This made them complacent at an early age; under-performing in school and barely finishing college. Those who are enrolled for a graduate degree usually in commerce or accounting do it through correspondence while continuing to work and focus on the shop. The incentive for mobility through education or contributing technical expertise to the existing business as seen in the elite sections of the community is not seen amongst the sons in this stratum as the size and nature of their business is limited. Sons are also socialised to take pride in being their own employer and the ethic of hard work being the key to success. Unless the family business was underperforming for an extended stretch of time, the son was not encouraged to make educational choices that might influence his future plans differently from that of the family. However, in the current generation, a motivation for education has emerged from the need to find a bride. As seen in Chapter 4, the women in the community are much more educated than the sons and wished to marry men who had a professional qualification.

As one is to be a successor to a father who not only controls the financial but also the technical, managerial and networks to succeed in the market, sons have a high level of deference to the father. This deference and hierarchy is not restricted to the place of work but also structures the intimate relations in the family. The interests of individual family units consisting of the son, his wife and children might not be the same as that of the other family units in the joint family. This could lead to frictions. The patriarch of the family through his relationship with the son ensures that the family aids the business by staying united and keeping the cost of reproduction minimal.

Coordinating the affairs of the family requires regular monitoring which is undertaken by the mother-in-law. A daughter-in-law as a new addition to the family has the potential to upset the productive familial economy with her set of aspirations if they are not in tandem with the collective interests of the family. Thus in a business joint family much like a landed family a bride is seen as a threat to the unity of the business and the family (Madan, 1965; Parry, 1979). Raheja and Gold (1994) argue that a wife threatens the 'solidarities of the patrilineal kinship'. A Punjabi proverb from local traditions and epic texts illustrate this, "a woman who shows more love to you than your mother is a slut" (page 122).

Mothers-in-law understood the difficulty of maintaining the stated hierarchies in the urban with an increase in daughters-in-law education and the age of marriage. The average age of marriage increased from sixteen to twenty-one years from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law generation. The average educational qualifications in the mother-in-law generation were a high-school degree, while that in the daughter-in-law age group increased to a graduate degree. Hence, some mothers-in-law were insistent on finding brides who hailed from mofussil towns on the outskirts of Delhi and Haryana like Najafgadh, Khanpur, Mandoli and Nangloi. By getting brides from small towns, women in the older generation said they could be sure about the family's standing, the girl's reputation before marriage and also have brides who had been insulated from the corrupting influences of Delhi life. This corruption ranged from the company women kept, clothes they wore, their aspirations for work, rituals they knew and how *taiz* (sharp) they were. A *taiz* daughter-in-law could upset the set hierarchies, which were constructive for the economics of the joint family.

The *first* strategy undertaken to isolate yet assimilate the daughter-in-law according to the terms of the joint family was to continue controlling the son. The control on the son does not emerge only post marriage, but over the course of his life, the son is encouraged not to think independently outside the familial interests. He is encouraged to recognise the importance of the mother for his upkeep and the father for his economic prospects, although this is undertaken through a sociology of love and importance accorded to sons over daughters. Yanagisako (2002) alerts us to the “altruistic sentiments in the constitution and deployment of power” (page 89). The fear of ‘sons going behind their wives’ that mother’s echo, emerges from their insecurity that the new bride might want to set up her household separate from the joint family. In the process, triggering an early division of property and taking away the sustenance of the parents in their old age.

The early years of marriage are crucial in reasserting the control on the son and teaching the daughter-in-law that she would continue to be his second priority. Inhibiting the conjugal intimacy and the scope to know each other, the daughter-in-law is taught that the joint family and its needs would supersede that of the individual family unit. Active efforts are undertaken to regulate the newly married couple’s time together, although these gestures seemed overt to women only in retrospect. Rajini (35) has been married for ten years. Describing the initial years of her marriage she says,

they kept the TV in our room. My sister-in-law would keep cracking jokes about the newly married couple not getting any time alone, but would not move till late at night. I had to struggle to sleep in the noise of the TV and then wake up early before everyone else. When my husband came back from work, I would still be in the kitchen. At night when he would want me to return to the room early, my mother-in-law would continue to give me work. When I reached the room he would be fast asleep.

The loyalty of the son gets tested when there are family feuds and the side he chooses. Jyoti (31) has been married for four years now. Her marital family consists of her father-in-law and his four brothers, their wives, their sons and their wives and children living

together across three floors. The families had split more than ten years ago; hence each brother had his own floor. The floor was further subdivided to give their sons, wives and children some privacy, however, on each floor, the kitchen was the same and everyone ate together. Jyoti on her floor lived with her mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, his wife, child and her husband. The split meant that Jyoti's conduct was not directly controlled by the older women on different floors though they did influence it indirectly. The 'they' that Jyoti refers to involve the older kin in the family with a special focus on her mother-in-law.

I would go on long drives before marriage, I loved solitary drives. Then after marriage, they would not let me touch the car. They said 'take the driver; go with your husband, only your brother can drop you'. I am very athletic. My brothers are national level badminton players. I used to swim all the time. After marriage, they did not give me permission for two years to go to the gym. They said if I want to go to the gym, I could go in a sari. Now how can you go in a sari? Before marriage, they said there were many gyms around our house. You can go ... but it was all lies. In the park in the neighbourhood, if I had to wear track pants and t-shirts, my mother-in-law said, go before five in the morning, before the men in the house wake up. For some days, I wore a sari and went to the gym and then changed there and then again wore a sari and came back. All my friendships also stopped and my husband's friends had to become mine because my husband was not comfortable with my set of friends. I have seen this happen to all my friends.

Jyoti's husband could see how his mother was restricting his wife's freedom, but he did not support her. He did not want to interfere in his mother and wife's relationship. Jyoti resented her husband for his complicity with his mother in her curtailment. This led to constant fights between them.

The son did not need to live with his family to continue expressing his loyalty to his mother and family. Sneha (30) had a love marriage. The choice of her marriage was guided

by the belief that her in-laws would support Neha's dreams, which her parents never had. Sneha says she saw the way the in-laws accepted and loved her elder sister-in-law who was a Bengali and lived with her husband in Australia. Sneha says 'I felt this was a liberal family'. However, her in-laws turned out to be 'typical Baniya in-laws' Sneha says. Her in-laws lived in Meerut, while Neha lived in Delhi with her husband. Sneha says,

my mother-in-law controlled Suraj from Meerut, increasing the differences between us. She would tell him to control me better and not help out at home.

After getting married and living together, Sneha realised that Suraj would not help her out in the kitchen. Sneha's mother-in-law found out from her son, that Sneha wanted him to share domestic chores. Instead of counselling Suraj to do his part, she told him to control his wife better. Neha felt she could not trust Suraj, for he would tell his mother all their personal matters. Suraj had a master's degree in commerce. He worked in a private company and earned very little. What Neha describes as their mutual sexual inexperience tuned into sexual incompatibility.

A year into the marriage, we still did not know how to have sex. I felt I could not push him at all. Coming from a business class family, my parents also did not respect him because he did not make any money.

The *second* way of controlling the daughter-in-law is by tightening the purse strings and making constant financial demands from the bride's natal kin. Daughters-in-law were economically dependent on their husband's, who in turn were dependent on allowances from their parents. When Rajini's husband and his two brothers came back from the shop, they left their wallets on top of the fridge. The mother-in-law would empty their wallets, just leaving enough money for the next day. Her husband would have to give a monthly account of the possible expenditure and get allowances from his mother. On most occasions, Rajini says her husband would be reluctant to ask for money, which increased their fights.



Soon after marriage on the festival of Holi, the mother-in-law was unhappy with the 'gifts',<sup>74</sup> coming from her Rajini's house. Rajini had two unmarried sisters and her father's health was not good. The added pressure of keeping her in-laws happy made her father further sick.

On the first Holi, my mother-in-law was upset that she did not receive a gold set. I did not say anything to my parents, but then she called my parents and told them that for the next Diwali she needed a gold set. My parents were worried about my happiness, so the next Diwali they sent a gold set for her. I do not know where they found money for it.

On the rare occasions when Rajini went to stay with her parents since Rajini did not have a brother, her husband Kunal came to pick her up. At that time during Kunal's *tikka* (welcome) her parents were obliged to give him money. Her mother-in-law would inquire about the amount given when Kunal went back home. Hence Rajini started decreasing the frequency with which she visited her parents.

The *third* way of controlling the daughter-in-law was by pressuring her to beget a son. A married woman's worth, status and identity were established through her capacity to reproduce (Bharadwaj, 2003; Nandy, 2015). There is an unequal distribution of property, as inheritance is patrilineal. This means that the most number of sons a woman produces her family unit's share in the joint property inheritance increases. Sneha's mother-in-law would repeatedly express her eagerness to meet her grandson. On one of these occasions, Sneha told her about the sexual problems that she was facing with Suraj. Her mother-in-law was quick to reply that 'you should have checked all this before marriage'. On another occasion, she asked Sneha to 'have a child through surrogacy'. Sneha says she was 'stunned and humiliated'. Her mother-in-law presumed that the problem had to lie with Sneha and not her own son. Sneha had lost most of her friends and could not turn to anyone else in her own family for guidance. The ritual burden of reproducing a son was

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<sup>74</sup>In Agarwal marriages, the brides' family continues to give gifts to the grooms' for all big and small festivals till the time she died. The gifts had to be particularly elaborate in the first year of marriage.

shouldered by daughters-in-law. Four years into the marriage when Jyoti was still not conceiving. Her mother-in-law met their family priest and advised Jyoti to keep the Wednesday fast especially to conceive a son.

Rajini also had immense pressure to conceive a boy, but her first child was a girl. When she became pregnant for the second time, everyone in her natal family was tense. Her mother went to meet her *Guruji* (holy man) and astrologer; both confirmed that Rajini would have a son. Rajini says she was 'lucky' that their predictions came true. After eleven days of Subham's (son) birth, there was a *havan* (a Hindu religious ceremony). There was also a *shuddhi* (purification ceremony) that happened twenty-five days after the birth. Post this, there was a ritual in which all the married women in the family and neighbourhood walked to the temple. Describing the video recording of the celebrations post the birth of her son, Rajini says,

you can see me in my bridal attire. On my head is a pot, kept on a white piece of cloth. A similar piece of cloth is tied to my waist in which wheat is kept. All these items for the *puja* come from my house. This wheat is given to all the married women so that they will also have a son. On top of my bridal attire, you can see that *dupata* (cloth). This is called a *peeliya*. It comes in red or orange colour and costs close to six thousand rupees. My mother-in-law was also gifted a *peeliya* ... you can see her behind me here. You do not get a *peeliya* if you have a daughter.

The gifting of the wheat shows, that inbuilt in rituals are affirmations and promises for other women to have a son too. Not only the mother but also the mother-in-law acknowledged it as being blessed with the gift of *peeliya*. When Rajini had a son, her parents gifted her gold set, a gold chain for the son, five pieces of silver utensils, eleven sarees, one silver waistband for the baby and lots of toys. They spent about three lakhs. The party that Rajini's in-laws threw, had a DJ, a video photographer and Rajini was decked up like a bride. She says it was no less than a wedding. When her daughter was born, however, there was no party or ceremony in the temple. Her parents then spent close to a lakh in gifts.

Soon the social and ritual significance of the son started becoming visible in the way her mother-in-law treated her son and daughter differentially. Rajini says,

my son and my sister-in-laws' sons would be given more milk, sweets, money and care. I was back in the kitchen toiling before the forty-day rest period was over. When the children reached the school going age, my mother-in-law wanted to send my daughter to a Hindi medium school and my son to an English medium.

The structurally vulnerable position of the daughter-in-law in the Hindu joint family gets manifested in the every day through a control on her physical, financial and sexual expressions and space. The manner, in which the intra-gender tussles play out, makes the daughter-in-law locate blame on the mother-in-law, though the locus of power is disbursed. Just like the son, the daughter-in-law has to forego her individuality. The daughter-in-law like the son needs to be taught to think first of her marital family and its interests, and then locate one's own in relation to that. Affective ties with the natal kin are stretched and monetization of the relationship through gift exchanges is the only permissible means post marriage. In many cases, the natal families impress upon the women that this is the norm, hence making the power of the marital family organic and natural. Conjugal intimacy which in the initial years of marriage gets heightened through sexual intimacy is curbed by regulating the alone time that the couple gets to spend. This hinders mutual understanding, trust and emotional dependence from an early stage of marriage. The financial controls ensure women's dependence on the husband and joint family and amplify frictions in conjugal relationships that are yet to be formed. The coaching, control and disciplining of the daughter-in-law is to make her both docile and productive for the family unit. Apart for the everyday domestic labour of sustaining the family unit, women are required to reproduce, and specifically, reproduce sons. The birth of a son is rewarded publicly through celebrations and secures the location of the woman in the family through the continuance of the patrilineal line.

In women's narratives, the defining moments in their relationship with their mother-in-law gets articulated. Three ways were identified through which the mother-in-law

exercises her control on the daughter-in-law: control of her son; financial restraints; and pressures to reproduce a son. It can be safely incurred that the everyday marital life is constituted with acts to sustain and repeat the mother-in-law's control through active disciplining, rebuking or through gentle prodding and coercion.

### ***Self Preservation: Daughter-in-law***

The power of the mothers-in-law though decisive is not absolute. Daughters-in-law through the crippling social relations of the Hindu joint family and mediated through the mother-in-law over time gains reflection, self-knowledge and interiorizes her limits. In women's narratives, one finds a causal mention of the tactics they adopt. These tactics develop over time and in them coalesce the intergenerational familial ideologies, aspirations of one's own life and thresholds of *dheeraj* (patience). The tactics do not emerge from outside one's familial performative categories (of being a daughter, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law) or in a manner that would upset them. The primacy continues to be the domestic ideology. However, in the practical acts of home-based work, kitty and Reiki classes' participation, women try to preserve themselves within stifling domestic circumstances that render them without a sense of self or individuality. Lost in the thanklessness of domestic chores, sacrifice, duty, ritual, child care or pressures to reproduce, these tactics become ways of self-care, preservation and regulation. They enable women to inhabit domestic worlds while allowing them to slowly modify the contours of their inhabitation. It shows women's aspirational nature of the relationship with themselves and their familial worlds. It is a discernible commitment to desperately live in the present while trying to imagine a different tomorrow, retain the present while tweaking it to suit one's limited needs better. The tactics are not meant to liberate women from caste and gender structures, but it shows how women negotiate processes of secularisation differently from their mothers and mother-in-laws.

### **Home based work**

Home based work is defined as self-employment that is remunerative, has flexible hours and produces goods and services that are consumed in the immediate neighbourhood. The pre-marital life and education of the daughter-in-law influence her

choice of home based work. The average age of marriage increased from 16 to 21 years from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law generation. The average educational qualifications in the mother-in-law's generation was a high-school degree, while that in the daughter-in-law's age group increased to a graduate degree. The graduate degree in a majority of the cases was done through correspondence, which required the women to go to colleges only when they had to give examinations. This was the natal families' way of policing women's sexuality and circles of interaction. Women also undertook ancillary courses in interior designing, fashion designing, beauty therapy, language and computer. Women's education in the daughter-in-law's generation shows that women were aware of the permissible avenues of employment available to them after marriage. Kabeer (1994) argues that "women's ability to participate in other (apart from unpaid household chores), more remunerative forms of production is likely to be conditioned by the degree of flexibility in their domestic labour as well as by the norms and values which govern access to extra-domestic institutions" (page 283).

Much like the daughters-in-law in the elite stratum (second), daughters-in-law in this stratum too were actively discouraged to work outside the home after marriage. In the elite stratum, mothers-in-law encouraged their daughter-in-laws to engage themselves creatively, for example going to baking courses or volunteering their time in the family business once in a while, however in this stratum there was resistance to this as well. Women had to find home based work on their own accord and in a manner that would not disrupt the domestic labour expected of them. Jyoti designs precious jewellery from home. She says 'they (in-laws) could stop me from doing a 9 to 6 job, but they could not stop me from studying'. Jyoti says 'I thought of all possible ways to keep myself engaged from home'. The world of business and the market spaces where their husbands' shops are located is exclusively male dominated. The women in these spaces are considered to be of the lower caste, who work unescorted buying and selling their wares to supplement the family income. The Agarwal women through home-based work, as opposed to the lower caste women in the market, then enter the world of paid work on their own terms. They work flexible hours, are their own bosses, decide the caste/class sphere of their interactions and get to prioritise their demands of the domestic.

As the ‘ups and downs’ in her marriage increased, Jyoti consulted her family astrologers. She told them that she had two interests: she either wanted to start a gym or was interested in working with jewellery. They looked at her birth chart and suggested that jewellery designing would suit her.

I enrolled for an eight-month gemology course. I had two classes for two hours every week, for that also I was given permission with great struggle. I have hired a *karighar* (worker). I design the jewellery; he makes the structure in the workshop. Then at home, he fixes the precious stones under my supervision. I get my stones from Jaipur and Mumbai. Everyone wears jewellery; also the astrologers keep telling their clients to wear some specific jewellery. Those also I design.

Jyoti currently makes thirty to thirty-five pieces of jewellery every month. The trips to procure the precious stone gave her and her husband opportunity to be away from the joint family on their own. Jyoti says ‘during these trips I tried to not think about the problems in the family and focused on us’. Once her jewellery business took off, she decided to sell things online. Jyoti started with selling pure crepe saris online. These saris cost close to four to five thousand and people seemed reluctant to buy them. The few saris that did get sold were quickly returned back. To incentivize the sale of saris, Jyoti started handing out free hair accessories with her saris. People seemed to like these hair accessories and there was a positive response. Hence, she decided to sell hair accessories online. Before marriage, Jyoti worked in a top interior designing company for five years. She says her father ‘let her work so that she would not insist later (after marriage)’. Her parents let her work since they were trying to find a suitable match for her. Working profitably outside the household is seen as a child’s insistence, an indulgence that should not ideally continue in married lives. Her father allowed her to work on the condition that she would leave her job as soon as she got engaged. At the time of marriage, when Jyoti was told that she could not work anymore, she says ‘I thought it would not bother me, but someone who has worked outside cannot sit at home. It becomes your second nature’. She attributes her reason to finding home-based work to the initial tumultuous years of her marriage.

Sneha (30) sits on an office chair switching between different phones and answering constant questions. She is surrounded by seven women on their phones speaking to clients in Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Jaipur, Meerut and Haryana. Her office consists of two interconnected rooms, divided by a makeshift curtain. The 'front room' as she refers to it, is where she receives her clients who come seeking for Agarwal or Jain matrimonial matches. The walls are adorned with paintings she bought from the Saharanpur market which still has their transparent plastic covering to protect them from dust. In the corner of her office is a small temple, with pictures of Goddess Laxmi, Krishna and Sai Baba. She also has a salt lamp, which she tells me is similar to the kind Amitabh Bachchan has to help absorb all the negative energy and protect her from any evil eye. Her office like many other entrepreneurial setups is located in the congested lanes of Saharanpur market. Sneha is the first woman in her family to start her own business.

Business is a difficult line; I could do it because I have seen my brothers and father do it. I have seen how they struggled with their business, made huge losses and still managed to come back. I have had no help from my family in setting up my business. I have done it all on my own. There is not a single woman in my family who has gone to do what I have done. They all get married, have children and get money from their husbands.

Sneha started interning with the matrimonial business of her father's friend at the age of sixteen. She had seen her brothers learn the ropes of the trade from working closely with her father, so an internship was what came to her mind when she thought about setting up her own. Her boss used to treat her badly, and no one could understand why she persisted at work. Sneha, however, learnt that she needed to persist if she wanted to succeed. She started her own business from her home, working alone from her laptop. Two years later, she rented a small office space and recruited people to work for her. She moved into the current office space two years ago. Currently, seven women work for her, whom she pays eight to ten thousand rupees a month. Speaking about her business she says,

we only trade with clients who have a budget of more than one crore. We have a high registration fee, but we make money only

when the marriage happens. We get a 12 to 15 percent cut from the marriage budget once the marriage is fixed. Even one successful marriage is enough money for a few months for us. We have a Facebook page, but we get publicity through word of mouth. We also have accounts in other matrimonial sites. Suppose from our networks we know a rich party is looking for a bride or a groom, we have found a way to download their marriage resume from these websites. Then from our contacts, if there is someone suitable for them, we give them a call. If they are interested, we ask them to register.

Sneha in the past few years owns two flats and her own car in Delhi. When her mother-in-law needed money for her knee surgery, both her sons did not have enough. At this point, Sneha had seven lakhs which she withdrew and gave immediately. She says that increased respect for her in her father-in-law's eyes. Neha's husband in the meantime, after seeing Sneha establish her business, also wanted to set up his own. Sneha provided the capital required and also took care of his monthly rent and salary of his employees. However, the business did not take off. Sneha says 'I got him involved in my business. I thought he would grow and become more mature.' Her business which started as a home based work became a small business. Although Neha is proud of her achievements, after interacting with her for more than a year, she confesses that:

I was forced to make my hobby into work because my husband does not make enough money. We have a standard of living and someone has to support it. My husband and my mother-in-law would like me to stay at home, but how can you live in Delhi in 10,000 rupees a month. I have now included him in the business too so that my parents also learn to respect him.

Rajni started taking Maths and English tuitions for children from class six to the tenth standard. She first advertised by telling her relatives and then slowly started putting up flyers around her house. Before marriage, she had done her masters in commerce through correspondence and also a beautician's course. After marriage, she wanted to do an interior designing course but soon became pregnant. Two years ago when her daughter



reached the school going age, her in-laws wanted to send her to a Hindi medium school. Rajni says all the male children in the family were sent to an English medium school and she could not let her daughter's future compromised. Rajni had two options, either to set up a beauty parlour at home or to take tuitions. She knew her in-laws would not give her a permanent space in their house to set up a parlour; hence taking tuitions became the automatic option. At present, she takes two batches of students in the afternoon. Each batch has seven to ten children and she charges Rs 700 to Rs 1000 per subject depending on the standard she has to teach. Rajni also takes chocolate and embroidery classes for women in the summer holidays. People used to come home and appreciate Rajni's homemade chocolates and her embroidered bed sheets and table covers. When Rajni saw other women around her in the neighbourhood starting pickle making and cooking classes, she felt she could also start her embroidery and chocolate making classes. Last summer eighteen women signed up for her classes and Rajni charged Rs 1000 per person. Rajni says,

The money I make is my own. I hope my daughter will study well  
... I am sure she will get a good husband and a better marital home  
than mine. I also give some money to my sisters when they need it.  
I even gave money to my husband once when he needed it.

For the number of women who could begin paid housework, there were an equal number of women whose circumstances did not enable them. Many women started work in the form of designing boutiques, tuitions, Tupperware and insurance sales, however, found the demands of their domestic to overwhelm them, making them quit half-way. For example, Radhika had started a clothes boutique close to her house; however, her elder daughter had an accident and broke her leg. Radhika (42) said as there was no else to take care of her daughter, she had to close her shop and she had not reopened it since.

Women who started home based work in the mothers-in-law generation usually started it after their joint families split or after their in-law's death. Gauri (58) says:

There were constant fights, many times because there were four  
daughter-in-laws in the same kitchen. However, when the men got

involved the fight became more intense. My husband felt the expenditure on Ruchi's (brother-in-law's daughter) wedding should not be shared. This led the families to split.

After a while, I then started selling LIC insurance to family and friends. I could not have done it living in the joint family.

Similarly Sneha (49) says:

Only after amma and bauji's death did we move into separate houses in the same neighbourhood. Fights happen in all households ... that is not big. Children grew up, were getting married. So we all needed more space.

At this time I joined a Tupperware group and became really good at selling them in our neighbourhood.

Unlike the daughters-in-law who struggled to start working earlier, women in the mother and mother-in-law generation waited for their opportunity. This happened after the death of their in-laws or if the size of individual family units increased enough not to be physically accommodated in an old house. The latter at times meant that individual units had branched off from the family shop and started their own business, which was remunerative enough to sustain the nuclear family unit. Clear lines of demarcation of business and residence are hard to make, its intermeshed nature continued even when families chose to stay separately in same or adjacent neighbourhoods.

Daughters-in-law in this stratum had to struggle to set up their home based work unlike the daughters-in-law in the elite stratum. They, however, undertook work sooner than in their mothers-in-law generation. The motivations for undertaking remunerative work was both economic and the wish to preserve oneself creatively to tacitly manage domestic pressures of social-sexual reproduction. Not all women were upfront in sharing their economic motivations for starting home based work or that they subsidised the needs of the family through their earnings. The male breadwinner image was maintained even in

those cases, where the women were primarily responsible for financially running the household. However, pressures of domestic reproduction took priority, while some women precariously tried to balance competing work demands others quit their remunerative work when domestic pressures increased. Domestic ideologies of caste and family status decided the nature and scale of work women undertook in both the generations, curtailing their interactions in their same caste, class and gender.

### **Kitty parties and Reiki classes**

Restrictive familial and domestic ideologies orchestrated women's friendships and morally sanctioned spaces of socialisation in this stratum of women (older and younger) much like the elite stratum. However, in the elite stratum, this was restricted to the older generation of women. Women's participation in the neighbourhood and Delhi caste associations in this stratum was limited to accompanying their husbands for events. For example, women along with their families participated in the *parichay sammelan* (public matrimonial fair) discussed in Chapter 4. Men participated in the caste association at the neighbourhood level. Their membership decided the constitution of one of the women's kitty party circles, much like in the elite stratum.

Kitty parties were amongst the extended kin in the family. This could involve fictive kin as long as they were Agarwal or Jain. Once or twice a month women would wear their finest and meet either in each other's homes or go to vegetarian eating joints like Haldiram or Bikanerwala sweets in Sahanpur market. They would finish their work early, play a game of tombola and save money by pooling them.

The second Saturday of every month was Rajini's kitty party and her mother-in-law was quick to point out that "it would be impossible to get any quality work done by the daughter-in-law for she would be in a hurry to go to her kitty". There were separate mother-in-law and daughter-in-law kitty parties. Going to kitty party though had now become a permissible sphere of socialisation which made Rajni's mother-in-law disgruntled. She saw it as "a waste of time, where women spoke ill about their in-laws". Rajini's kitty had fourteen women in the age group of 25 to 42. Everyone sat around a

long table in Bikanerwala glancing at the menu and quizzing the waiter about the quality of each item.

**Rajini:** Today again she had a problem with me coming to the kitty party. A week before the kitty I have to try and work extra hard to keep her happy so that she does not pile extra work especially to delay me. This week she has been angry with me so she decided to take it out on me today.

**Yamini:** During the week just press her feet at night, might keep her in a good mood.

**Rachna:** Your mother-in-law is the worst. Mine at least does not interfere with going to the kitty. She is happy about her own kitty and on the day she has her kitty, I do a little more work. So then it is like we have an unsaid way of helping each other.

**Pranjal:** I do not know if I can come for the next kitty. Both my sisters-in-law are coming with their children for the summer holidays. They will sit and watch TV all day and I will have to be in the kitchen.

**Rachna:** Why don't you lay down the rules clearly? It is just once a month of fun.

This excerpt from women's conversation in a kitty shows that what Rajni's mother-in-law sees as a "waste of time, where women spoke ill about their in-laws" was a necessary ritual. Being allowed to go or not to a kitty party was a measure, a symptom of how good or bad a mother-in-law was for others. Rachna and her mother-in-law struck a 'partnership' by helping each other with their domestic chores on the day of the kitty. This created an instance of solidarity that Rachna could share with her friends to show that her mother-in-law was 'at least' good in some matters. Her use of the word 'at least' shows that she is not completely happy with her mother-in-law but has

learnt to highlight for herself and others the good in their relationship. Rachna's recognition that Jyoti's mother-in-law was the 'worst' showed a long familiarity with the dynamics of Jyoti's household. In Rachna's acknowledgement of Jyoti's resentment towards her mother-in-law, she shows Jyoti and others that her mother-in-law's behaviour was not the norm. Such behaviour needed to be contested and challenged. If one had been dealt a bad hand, in the form of difficult mother-in-law confrontation was however not the immediate solution. Yamini, suggests a way of softening the power relationship by placating the mother-in-law. Rachna suggests a more aggressive approach to Pranjali to 'lay down rules clearly'. One had to contest the rules of domesticity set by the mother-in-law with one's own, learnt with the encouragement from one's friends. Pranjali's sisters-in-law not helping out in the kitchen is a given, however, according to Rachna, it was essential to have 'fun' once a month. Having 'fun' was a part of the monthly ritual, which involved a time of going out, dressing up, uninterrupted laughter, gossip and venting out. This ritual let women energise to continue shouldering the emotional and domestic labour required of them. In the process they also learnt permissible cultural ways of pushing boundaries and control through cajolement, pleasing and if required fighting.

In another kitty party, Krishna who was married for a year was visibly unhappy for not being her husband's priority. Rajini sympathises with her and tells her about the futility of fights from her own experience; instead, she suggests 'not talking'. Calculated silence early in the marriage, according to Rajini might help draw the husband's attention. She jokes about sexually passive husbands whose love was only for their mothers.

**Krishna** (married a year ago): He comes home and goes to his mother's room before coming to mine. I wait all day and then I get to barely see him.

**Rajini:** these husbands have no interest in anything apart for their mothers even in bed...(everyone laughed). Fighting with him might not work, try not talking to him. You are newly married it

might draw his attention. With time you will learn *dheeraj* (patience).

In the end Rajini repeats the age-old wisdom that is repeated to every woman when she finds it difficult to adjust in the marital home to be patient; however, it is instructive to recognise that Rajini says you will 'learn' *dheeraj*. A remaking of the inner world of endurance with patience is learnt and acquired with time as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Kitty parties were sites where women could express their fears, desires, and insecurities as well as assert supremacy and control over others conduct through judgment and jealousy. If a balance was not struck between the two, women were reluctant to share. Rajni advertised for her tuition, chocolate and embroidery classes through her friends in the kitty party. However, Jyoti did not feel comfortable talking about her work in her kitty circle. She said she felt 'women would judge her or think that her husband did not give her any money forcing her to fend for herself'. In Jyoti's kitty, there were eight women in the age group of 26 to 38 years. There was only one other woman who helped her husband in his marble shop, however, Jyoti was quick to add that 'what was the point; the money was not hers'. In one kitty at Jyoti's home in the afternoon, when Prakshi shared about her husband's plans to go to Thailand with his friends, Jyoti was quick to point out that it was a bad idea. Thailand's notoriety with sex tourism had become common knowledge. Jyoti took comfort in the knowledge that her husband only went out with her. The time when the kitty happened, was a tumultuous time for Jyoti as she had her husband had been consistently fighting. However, after hearing about the imagined transgressions of other's husbands, Jyoti made transient peace in her husband's fidelity. It is also noteworthy, that while women's spaces of socialisation were strictly regulated, men could go on solo foreign trips with their friends. Prakshi and Renuka's contention was not about their husband's going on solo trips but the place that they chose to go.

**Prakshi:** My husband and his friends are planning to go on a trip to Thailand.

**Jyoti:** How can you let him go with his friends to Thailand of all the places? My sister-in-law's husband had gone and god knows what all he did there. Don't let him go. My husband only likes going with me. I thank God for that.

**Renuka:** Ha my husband also went with his friends on business. I don't think he did anything, but he told me about his other friends going to bars and live sex shows.

Neha, unlike Rajini or Jyoti, did not have the time to go to kitty parties. After marriage, she had lost touch with most of her friends. When the troubles in her marriage began, she had no one to confide in. She had married on her own and could not share her problems with her parents or siblings. She felt she needed 'help', especially when she would cry on days end and even considered killing herself and her husband one day. One of her friend's sensing her state of mind pointed her in the direction of Reiki classes happening in Sahanpur. New age spiritual and therapeutic practices had found an unlikely customer, housewives from dominant castes in the neighbourhood in the last five years (Ponniah, 2017b). Neha met Kusum and Yashoda, two women in their forties who Neha now refers to as *bhabhi* (elder brother's wife). Kusum became Neha's counsellor, sex therapist, friend and Reiki teacher. Suraj encouraged Neha to go meet Kusum as he thought it made Neha 'calm'. Kusum looked at both Suraj and Neha's mother-in-law's birth charts and advised Neha certain modifications in her house. When fights because of the mother-in-law increased, Kusum tried to 'give positive energy' to Neha's mother-in-law's photograph through distance Reiki. Kusum also asked Neha to change the interiors of her house to blue, as it would prevent fights. When Neha was worried about her sexual incompatibility with Suraj, Kusum had a counselling session with Suraj. Neha says Suraj also trusts *bhabhi* so he spoke to her openly. When Neha's business was going through a lull period, *bhabhi* told her when it would get better. She also gave her a salt lamp for her office to absorb all the negative energy. With these minor modifications, Neha felt she was actively intervening to make things better. She also felt that her troubles were not endless and as her stars changed so would her life. Apart from giving women tactics to intervene, Kusum taught women the importance of familial love for self-love. In one of the beginning

classes, Kusum taught all the women the importance of loving everyone no matter what they had done.

**Kusum:** In this class, we will learn how to love everyone

**Neha:** How is that possible *bhabhi*? How can you love everyone?

**Kusum:** Write down the details of all those with whom you have a problem.

**Neha:** I can't even think about those people, leave alone writing their name

**Mridula:** My husband is mean and stingy. He insults me on the slightest of provocation, but I have continued to be positive about him. As Sneha grows up she will also learn to adjust better and be more mature when it comes to handling people.

As Neha refuses to understand the importance of loving everyone, Mridula much like Rajini tells Neha that despite her husband's meanness, she continued 'to stay positive'. Mridula does not ask Neha to love her husband, but removes him from the equation and focuses only on her response to him. She also tells her that with time Neha would become mature.

In circumstances where natal families might normalise the everyday violence or young women feel reluctant to share intimate details in the fear of bothering their parents, the site of kitty parties and Reiki classes are important avenues to talk. This talking and sharing are rituals of catharsis, that helps question and accept gendered norms. These sites help with the well-being of women by strengthening female friendships in order to sustain the unending domestic and emotional labour required of women. Women in distress, if given a safe environment share what bothers them in every day. Older and more experienced women share anecdotes or observations which lighten the atmosphere. The inbuilt gender inequality within the institution of marriage, mother-in-law's domination and husband's insensitivity is taken as a given. What however is not normalised is women's response to them. Lessons given to younger women or women in distress are not just about keeping *dheeraj*, but actively intervening in ways that are suited to the intra-household power relations. In the process, the ways of doing marriage slowly change as the gendered self is centred in domestic ideologies of caste and family.



An attention to the micro-politics of the household shows three ways in which the daughters-in-law learn to respond: centring and strengthening the self; trying to increase proximity with one's husband and focusing on their present as much as on their future conjugal lives. These simultaneous tactics are a result of the "weak turn (ing) to their own ends forces alien to them" (Certeau, 1984:20). They are 'opportunities' that make themselves available through a careful act of waiting. They co-exist amongst the commitment to love, duty, sacrifice, fidelity, patience to see through contingent life events and performance of Hindu rituals that focus exclusively on the mother-in-law and husband.

In women starting work and socialising in permissible gendered spaces they visibilise the thresholds of *dheeraj* and the differential aspirations daughters-in-law have, for their own lives and conjugal intimacies. It shows secret domestic economies, where the daughter-in-law takes care of in-laws knee surgery, earning their respect in the process, or pays for her husband to start his own business or for one's daughter's English medium education. The money does not dry out the affective, but helps order it giving women better control of their lives and sense of self. Neha is proud of owning two flats and a car in Delhi in her own name, while Rajini is proud about being able to help out her husband financially once.

Women realised that they needed to find a friend or ally in their husbands which would help their situation at home. Some felt that if their husbands took their side and not their mother's, there could be a beginning to a solution. Jyoti uses the trip to procure precious gems from Jaipur and Mumbai as occasions to be with her husband away from the troubles of the house. She says "during these trips I tried to not think about the problems in the family and focused on us". A marriage did not guarantee an automatic 'us'. The 'us' needed to be created and sustained through time, patience, love, understanding and acceptance. Neha gets Suraj to joint her business after his business failed. She says "I thought he would grow and become more mature. I now try to understand him". Growth and maturity are culturally seen as prerogatives of the man acquired by being a man of the *bazaar* (market). While women are meant to have unchanging marital lives characterised by forbearance, patience, selflessness and familial love. Neha recognises the need for them in order to forge the 'us' on an equal footing. Jyoti and Neha's attempts to strengthen

their conjugal bond shows the intimacies they desire from their husband are based on partnership and companionship. These are aspirations for their present and future lives. Rajini's insistence on ensuring her daughter has an English medium education just like her son highlights her refusal to subject her daughter to the structural inequalities that she has faced. She wishes a different, an improved future for her daughter, which involves education and a better marital home.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shows the complex affective manoeuvrings undertaken in the inner lives of marriage in the fourth stratum of Agarwal women in the Hindu joint family to ensure the continuity of the family business, through a focus on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. The mother-in-law's power is not absolute; mediating the daughter-in-law's desires through the mother-in-law makes the former realise what she values most in her life. This realisation and self-knowledge play out through a continual performance of the 'good' mother, daughter-in-law and wife. Through women's actions, the meanings they associate with each of the performative category (mother, daughter-in-law and wife) slowly shift. If doing marriage is the doing of life, then it is where individual, institutional social responsibility and ethical struggles take place (Bhapna, 2012). The constitution, collapse and re-constitution of these categories are a subtle and an unconscious though agentic process. It ensures identification and realisation of what it means to be a married Agarwal baniya woman. As argued in Chapter 6, caste is not sustained just by virtue of marriages being endogamous. Women in these marriages have to be produced as the present and future subjects of the family business, community and nation. By carefully allowing select tactics, women are reproduced in ways that help balance processes of secularisation (inter-generational increase in age of marriage, education and work aspirations) with the demands of the moral-economic-cultural social relations that underpin structures. The micro-politics of the household is reproduced through the micro-inversions undertaken by the daughter-in-law. The next chapter will further focus on the inner lives of endogamous marriages marital tactics to show under what circumstances women begin to question the domestic ideologies of caste, gender and family to make marital separation a possibility.





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## Chapter 8

### **‘Dheeraj’ to ‘Himat’: When is marital separation a possibility?**

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#### **Introduction**

Chapter 7 shows the patriarchal structuring of familial relations in the fourth stratum of Agarwal community that restricts daughters-in-law social reproductive roles within the family. To address the systemic repression, women undertake ‘tactics’ through a continuous process of submission, mastery and re-submission to gendered norms and expectations to make conjugal and familial relationships liveable. As conjugal relationships occupy centre stage in marital relationships in neoliberal India like never before, new strategies of inhabiting traditional familial setups need to be devised to sustain them. Through these tactics, women reproduce and challenge the patriarchal familial relationships. Their primary focus is on the conjugal bond while continuing to live, sustain and perform the other relational bonds in the Hindu joint family. Given the constricting nature of familial relations, this chapter argues that the only way for marital separation or a divorce to become a possibility is through a repetition of tactics. Using the embodied categories of *dheeraj* (self-endurance) and *himmat* (courage) from women’s narratives, this chapter shows under what circumstances the first might transmute into the latter, giving women the opportunity to break away from a cycle of sustained repression. The case studies presented in this chapter should be situated and seen as an extension of the previous chapter. Why is it that some women tacitly build on *dheeraj* and continue in marriages will some wish to breakaway?

A woman’s capacity to initiate a separation or divorce is a safe measure of her location in the family and community. According to the Brahmanical theory, the indestructibility of

marital relationships extends not in one life but many (Pothen, 1986). Marriage is a *kanya dan* (the gift of a virgin). The *kanya* (virgin) now belongs to the marital family and cannot be returned back to her natal home-for *dan* can never come back to the donor' (Parry, 2001: 794). Studies show that it is easier for women lower in the caste hierarchy to separate from unhappy marriages compared to those in upper castes. Unnithan-Kumar (1997) studying the Girasias (a fringe group of the Rajputs) shows that amongst the Girasias, "easily repayable brideprice sums (in cash) and the wife's identification with the father's lineage rather than the husband's kin group" facilitates divorce (page 202). He also argues that Girasia women have a reputation for sexual freedom. Berreman (1963:160) shows that in the Garhwal hills, through a procedure called '*chut*' or a divorce, the 'marriage bond' could be broken. Divorce is taken as 'a matter of course'. The frequency with which men and women instigate divorce in Garwhal hills, according to Berreman (1963: 161) "appears to be equal".

The strength of a woman's bond with her natal family determines her bargaining power and the rate of divorce across caste groups (Kolenda, 1987; Raheja & Gold, 1994). A women's 'fall back' position decides if she will cooperate or engage in conflict (Sen, 1987). A strong natal relationship also increases the possibility of divorce or separation through the promise of a second marriage as seen in the case of Jats (Choudhary, 1994). Dumont (1964: 83) makes a distinction between a primary and secondary marriage. The primary marriage is referred as the "proper' marriage, characterised by its full ritual". The secondary marriage is considered "inferior" even though it might be perfectly "legitimate". In these secondary marriages, a relative autonomy of women to choose their partners is seen across caste boundaries, albeit in low income and low caste families (Parry, 2001; Grover, 2011). This is further complicated, if women have children from their first marriages (Mukhopadhyay, 2011).

In lower caste and class contexts, a "plurality of resources that address marital disputes namely 'women's grievance cells' in police stations, the legal system (courts and family courts), biradri panchayats (caste associations), influential mediators (neighborhood leaders) and human rights" are seen (Grover, 2011: 161). Focusing on the work of the Mahila Samitis, Grover (2011: 169) shows how the caseworkers provide shelter and protection in cases of domestic violence and reconciliation services to 'mend' rather than

break homes. Parry, (2013) shows how wives of Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) employees approach the counselling cell when marital relations get strained. Compromises are reached between employees and wives in ways that are ‘made to work’. The BSP workers get “heavy hints about criminal cases and disciplinary proceedings” which ensures that they cooperate in marital relations as they do not wish to be thrown out of well-paid jobs.

These studies while showing what makes separation or divorce a possibility for women in lower caste and class conflicts, shed a little light on the functioning of the constricting familial relations in upper caste and class contexts. In this study, I did not find many women in the community who had been through a separation leave alone initiate a divorce. Hence, there are two questions that this chapter addresses: How does the domestication of women within families inhibit women from seeking a marital separation? And what are the conditions that might pave the way for women breaking away from violent and unhappy marriages?

This chapter has been organized in the following way: *first*, embodied categories of ‘dheeraj’ and ‘himmat’ are conceptualised; *second*, findings are presented; *third*, the chapter is concluded by inferring from women’s select backgrounds, what cripples their chances of a separation and what might enable them.

### *Travelling from ‘Dheeraj’ to ‘Himmat’*

*Dheeraj*, as a category first appears in the tutelage or wisdom given to women about how to live and sustain marital lives usually by older women in the natal family. It brings together the life-long gendered socialisation, observations, interiorisation of gendered norms which reconstructs an inner world of endurance for women. *Dheeraj* helps women sustain their lives at times on blind faith and trust in fate. Every tactic teaches the permissibility of desires, boundaries that can be pushed, gaps in power relations that can be worked upon for one’s own benefit and the malleability of intimate relationships. It helps rebuild *dheeraj*.

Through case studies in this chapter two scenarios are explored. The *first* is when the marital and familial situations do not allow *dheeraj* or the inner world of endurance to be

rebuilt through tactics like, building female friendships inside or outside the family, financial independence, and learning to express oneself through consumptive modernity or proximity with one's husband. This scenario results in a state of negative resignation and despair with no solace. In the *second* scenario, the repetition of tactics through cycles of submission, mastery and re-submission could lead to a fundamental incongruity between the embodied subject and her familial conditions that are non-yielding. This is when the "generative principle" of the habitus does not adjust in advance to its "objective conditions" (Bourdieu, 1980; 32). Under such circumstances, *dheeraj* could transmute into *himmat* (courage) not to sustain marital arrangements but to separate from them. *Himmat* arises when the repetitive tactics that strengthen the self enough to realise that the dispositions or practices of *dheeraj* are ill-equipped to handle the new condition. This transmutation arises as much from the women's hopes and desires for their present and future lives, as from the agency of their old and new familial circumstances, made possible through the tactics employed. *Dheeraj* and *himmat* represent stages or levels, albeit non-linear in their functioning in the subject's constitution and negotiation of dominant norms and values. These processes do not happen overnight and could last an entire life course of a married woman.

### **Differing enactments: Anu and Smriti**

#### ***Anu: 'I do not have the 'himmat' to do anything'***

Anu is 35 years old and has been married to Subham for the last eighteen years. What separates her life from both the women in second and fourth stratum and makes her story curious is that: she does not go to kitty parties or rotary or caste association meetings; does not have any acquaintances outside the family; is not overtly religious and has the money but does not know or allowed to spend it. The BMW and Mercedes parked outside her palatial South Delhi house, her once a year travel to Europe with her husband and daughter, her latest model of I-phone, and the six servants in her household visibilise the trappings of wealth and a 'modern' consumptive lifestyle. However, the woman in the corner most bedroom in the household, with all things dear to her arranged in the drawers below her bed does not embody the lifestyle she occasionally refers to or belongs to the house she inhabits. The affluence and its paraphernalia lack depth and are dis-associated



with what is central in the presentation of her. From earlier instances, she has learnt that she could not make claims on the money. She once liked a diamond and polki set, which resembled the set that her mother had gifted her at the time of the wedding and was promptly, returned back by her mother-in-law in exchange for three gold sets. However, her husband showed no interest in paying for it. Anu was eighteen when she was married to Subham. Her father had a successful business in Chandani Chowk. There were three *rishtas* (marriage offers) that came for her, two of them are from noted Delhi business families and one was from her husband. Her father selected Subham because he did not find any *aib* (bad habits) in the boy. He did not smoke, drink or even consume *paan* (betel nut)'. Anu did not have any say in the matter; neither did she see a reason to have one. She trusted her parent's choice. She also was not reluctant when she was pulled out from a prestigious college in Delhi University to marry for she had been raised to accept that she would be married by her eighteenth birthday. Subham by this time had been working as an apprentice in one of the then biggest cloth wholesale manufacturers in Delhi and wanted to enter manufacturing of cloth. The extravagance and money came in the last ten years of Anu's marriage.

Recounting the early years of her marriage, Anu says that she was allowed to use the semi-automatic Onida washing machine once a week. The cheap washing powder her mother-in-law used irritated her hands. When she asked for a different powder, she was asked to work with what she had or else get something better from her own house. The water from the first wash, which was always the father-in-law's white clothes, had to be collected. Her mother-in-law instructed her that the detergent in the water could not be wasted. The same water was used and re-used for the second, third and fourth round of washing. Anu recollects washing clothes sometimes till 2 in the morning. In the end, the water had to be poured in the sewer to keep the many cockroaches at bay.

When Anu tried telling her mother about it, her mother shared instances of having to wash utensils all night, which had made her nails permanently rotten. She said,

look at my nails. They are permanently rotten. My mother-in-law used to make me wash utensils till 3 in the morning. Keep *dheeraj*.

This is the fate of us women. It will get better with time. See now my life is much better.

Anu told her mother about the increasing pressures to have a son and Subham's reluctance to sleep with her. Her mother called her mother-in-law and said *khyo Subham ji, muh udhar kar kai sotai hai* (Why does Subham turn his back on my daughter and sleep?). Anu's mother-in-law created a ruckus and things went out of control. Anu's mother was not allowed to step out of her household by Anu's natal family or speak to her daughter for weeks. She constantly lamented that "the biggest mistake of her life was having a daughter". Three years into the marriage, her in-laws called an elder home to make things better between Anu and her husband. The man requested Anu's in-laws to let him speak to her in private. Anu says 'I was so scared I did not say anything, even when he kept on asking'. Her father-in-law barged in the room, accusing Anu of spilling the family secrets and asked her to leave the house immediately. It is instructive to note, that the first and the last time Anu decided to go to her natal home, was also not on her own initiation. At her natal home, Anu did not find many people on her side. She says 'everyone was concerned about how their children would get married'. Her mother increased her tutelage of *dheeraj*. Anu says she was 'sent back' against her will. Her husband had told her clearly before returning that *ghar bhi wahi hai, aur ghar walai bhi wohi hai, tho soch samaj kar ana. Aura ek bar wapas akar, phir apnai ghar janai kai barai mai mat socha* (The house and the people are the same, so do not think you can come and go back again to your own house). This was the first and last time Anu went back to her natal house. Minor modifications were made in her marital house. The detergent which irritated her hand was exchanged with a powder which resembled Surf, a better brand of detergent. Anu realised a year later that it was not genuine Surf and just resembled it. There was no change in her in-law's behaviour, instead, they seemed to hold it against her for betraying the family honour and letting the world know that she was unhappy. They now monitored her phone conversations with her mother. The only thing Anu could do was to keep *dheeraj* and hope that her life would get better like that of the older women in her family. She says she 'patiently tried to be a daughter-in-law and good daughter in the hope that things would improve'.

The role of the ‘good daughter-in-law’ and ‘good daughter’ came together in Anu’s reproductive duty of having a child. However, the ‘good’ only qualified if she had a son. Anu’s first child was a daughter, which made her position within the family further insecure. Her father-in-law did not come to visit her in the hospital to see the baby. In a week’s time, she was back on her feet in the kitchen cooking for the entire family. If Subham tried playing with the baby at night, her father-in-law would ask him to go to bed for he had to focus on building his business empire. Anu says she did not fight with Subham, ‘how can you fight with someone who is not interested in finding the middle ground?’ In the last five years, the demand to have a son has become particularly loud. Her father-in-law tells everyone who comes home to pray that Subham has a son. A pandit comes for the morning puja, her in-laws have increased the money they donate to their family guru in Palam and Anu is asked to keep a fast on Wednesday. Four years ago, Anu gave her all to help the family have a son. She agreed to undergo a bariatric surgery. She hoped that it would improve her location, sexual relationship with her husband and her in-law's treatment of her.

**Subham:** ‘chal tujai katwa kai lata hu’ (let me go get you cut)

**Anu:** I used to cry when he said this. I was very fat. I was 123 kgs. The procedure was for 3-4 days and I was in the hospital for 5 days. He was caring during that time. But then things became worse again. In a month he was back to his usual self. There was no improvement in bed either.

The surgery was Anu’s ultimate submission to the amplified violence and domination in her everyday life. It was also her husband’s last effort at actively trying to squeeze out what within patriarchal normative structures is considered a husband’s right and a wife’s duty in the marriage-to beget a son. It was symptomatic of the failure of her parent’s incapacity to intervene on their daughter’s behalf. It was the threshold of Anu’s *dheeraj* and her hope that by being a ‘good daughter-in-law’ and ‘good wife’ she could improve her situation. Post the surgery as Anu says, ‘things became worse’. Subham no longer saw the need to even assert his power actively. Years of subjugation, humiliation and hurt meant that Anu knew her place in the family and no longer needed to be told.

Anu was not a trophy wife, someone Subham would want to display and feel proud of in his new rich business circles. With the affluence, his parents did not need Anu to toil in the kitchen as they had a generous array of servants. Anu says “Subham saw me only as his daughter’s mother whom he owed no explanations”. On a recent Europe trip, Subham had trouble finding his credit cards. He handed his bag to Anu to search and she found Indian versions of the Viagra tablet. She recognised *Shilajit* tablets, the ayurvedic medicine for enhancing energy and potency but did not know what the ‘beautifully packaged medicines’ were for. In Europe also Anu says she was ‘only Mehak’s mother’. When they returned back to India, she saw the same medicines in her room in Delhi. From a local chemist, she learnt that the medicine Caverta an equivalent to the Indian Viagra. That day she recounts calling Subham about forty times but he gave her no response. A week later after begging him for an answer he said, he did take them but refused to say anymore. In turn, he told her, ‘I know you take medicines for depression and to sleep at night, you never told me about them’. Anu in her conversation with me says:

A: Do you think he is having an affair?

U: I do not know Didi. Have you asked him?

A: Do you think if a man has sex with a woman outside he still would not feel any desire for his wife sleeping next to him?

In her questions, Anu had already accepted Subham’s infidelity and gone to ask why he felt no sexual desire towards her. More than his infidelity, it was the lack of desire towards her that bothered her. Her unanswered questions show that Subham had not even seen a reason to explain his actions. He did not make attempts to hide the tablet which shows that he does not care that about the implications, or is comfortable in the knowledge that there would be none. The only time in the day when Anu could talk to Subham was when he was in the washroom in the morning. He came home late into the night and his free time was spent with his sisters and parents.

In the last few years, with her teenage daughter beside her Anu began getting ‘restless’ with her husband’s continued indifference and humiliation. Her in-laws no longer abused

her actively, because her daughter began to speak back on behalf of the mother. Anu on her part began identifying patterns in Subham's behaviour. In a recent party, he abandoned her in a room full of people, busy drinking with his friends and not acknowledging her presence. Anu says '*mujhai kisi bhaid bakri ki tarah khyo cho daitai hai yah*' (I do not know why he abandons me as if I am some cattle). She remembered an earlier incident in her marriage when Subham had behaved in a similar manner. He had taken her to Dubai on business, where they stayed in a business client's house. After the meeting, everyone planned to visit a pub. Anu at this point was not allowed to wear western clothes by her parents or her in-laws, hence wore a saree. She was not allowed inside the pub because of her attire, which made the client's wife extremely angry and she behaved rudely towards Anu. Anu says 'I felt so small and humiliated like I was nothing. What hurt me most was Subham continued to drink downstairs and did not even say sorry'. This incident had happened much earlier, but the recent instance of abandonment made Anu question Subham's behaviour 'everyone thinks back and feels bad. Why do you think he never apologises?'

Reflecting on her recent 'restlessness' Anu says,

Why is this happening only to me? Why am I the only one with a husband who does not love or support? People have bad in-laws, but their husbands support them. Their in-laws do not abuse them all the time. When I see around me the way the other daughter-in-laws manage in my family, I see how they fight. I have a lot of money, but what is the point of all this. It is not my money. My parents see that I have so much money and think that I should continue to be in this marriage. They do not realise that money is not everything. My condition is the worst. I have a husband who earns a lot. If you think ten years down the road, you will know that you met someone who no one gets an appointment with, with such ease. But no one understands me. Would you talk to people when you know they do not understand you? My husband is zero in bed, in practical matters. *Mai khyo hun iskai sath?* (why am I with him?).

In the last few years, with her daughter by her side for support and having seen the way in which the sisters-in-law in the family handled their marriages, Anu had begun to reflect on her circumstances. In identifying the patterns in his behaviour, Subham's reluctance to communicate or work on any aspect of his behaviour and marriage, Anu was now desperate. For years she had tried to live in despair and resign negatively to her life and circumstances. She saw the other women in her family going out with her husband's and at times their husbands supporting them against their in-laws. She was envious of their close bonds with their husbands, something she had never had.

Anu, however, did not have an outlet for her emotional or sexual 'restless-ness'. In conversations with me, she spoke about the need to visit a sexologist, but retracted her question in the knowledge that her 'husband was not interested'. She did not go to the kitty parties in her posh neighbourhood, for she felt they were 'all snobs'. She says there are a lot of Punjabis in the neighbourhood and 'you know how Punjabis don't put up with their husbands or mother-in-law's abuse'. She had no friends outside the family. She met her sisters-in-law occasionally for lunches in the mall, dressed in trousers and long tops looking like any other 'modern' urban woman. She said 'now I have the permission, and clothes actually fit me'. She spent most of her time, obsessing and managing her servants. Her in-laws controlled the working of the kitchen and what was bought in the household. Her sphere of management was hence not the entire household, but her and her daughter's room. She got her room cleaned obsessively. At times she flirted casually with her daughter's tuition teacher in whom she confided occasionally. She flirted with the drivers at home in the safety of being their *bhabhi* (elder brother's wife) and woman of the house, as they drove her and me around in Delhi. Her only point of dispute now with Subham was if the servants in the household gave her enough respect and did her work the way she liked. These muted disputes also occurred rarely as Subham came back late into the night and many times slept in the guest room. When her despair increased which was more often than before she asked,

why am I only unhappy? What will make me happy? Why don't I have any *himmat*? I don't have *himmat* to do anything. I have kept *dheeraj* for so many years, but nothing changed. I do not have the

courage to leave him. I can live separately and let him live freely. I do not have courage for that also. How will Mehak manage? She is used to such a luxurious lifestyle. When I live separately with my daughter...what will I tell people around me? Who is Mehak to me? Won't everyone talk? Subham will never give me any money. He could hurt me too, they are very powerful people.

What does Anu's life story show about the working of *dheeraj* and *himmat* in women's married lives? *First*, *dheeraj* or an inner world of endurance and patience is the only tutelage with which women are sent to their marital homes. Over the years, to sustain, rebuild and rely on *dheeraj* it is important that the tactics address marital discord and sustained oppression make differences in the quality of life of the married woman. These tactics could stem either from the woman or from her natal family. In Anu's life story, one visible tactic was to stay in her natal home early in the marriage. This too was not initiated by her but was forced on her by her in-laws. Women use temporary stays at their natal homes as a way of bargaining with their husband or in-laws. The time period they stay as well as the subsequent negotiations had implications on the health of the marital bond (Palriwala, 1991). However, in Anu's case, she had little support from her parents or extended kin, she says she was 'sent back' against her will. Her return to her marital home saw a tightening of restrictions on her and a more aggravated form of abuse. On another instance, when her mother tried to speak to her mother-in-law about Subham's reluctance to sleep with Anu it further increased the fights in Anu's marital home. This was followed by a further restriction on Anu and her mother's space. The failure of her parents to provide her adequate support meant a strengthening of Anu's in-laws and husbands efforts at actively suppressing her and a weakening of Anu's resolve to fight back. Anu says she did not fight with her husband, for she saw little hope. In the absence of a rebuilding of *dheeraj* through Anu's life course, she only had to rely on the ossified form of *dheeraj* which she had inherited from her mother at the time of marriage. *Second*, in the absence of a rebuilding of *dheeraj*, Anu's recent emotional and sexual 'restlessness' is symptomatic of the threshold she had reached. In being a 'good daughter-in-law' or 'good daughter' she had even undergone a bariatric surgery. However, she saw little change in her life. She saw her sister-in-laws fighting and trying to make something of their lives and marriages in the last few years, which made her look at the futility of *dheeraj*. However, to channelize their

restlessness or to step beyond the threshold of *dheeraj* Anu did not have any friends to confide in, parents or kin for support, financial security, a teenage daughter and remote prospects of a second marriage. In Anu's narrative, *himmat* is seen a step beyond *dheeraj* which she is not equipped to undertake, leaving her in a state of resignation, despair and unsettling questions.. In her case it is not the practice of freedom through a rebuilding of *dheeraj* transmuting to *himmat but dheeraj* and *himmat*, two separate responses to marital discord with one not aiding the other.

***Smriti: 'The same story was repeated, this is the fate of women, keep 'dheeraj'***

Smriti was 24 when she got married to Roshan. Roshan had seen her once and 'fell in love with her'. He, however, was not the one to approach Smriti. His father asked Smriti's father for her hand in marriage. Her father was overwhelmed and without consulting his daughter gladly agreed for the match. He said *meri beti ab aapki hu* (my daughter is yours now). Smriti and her parents lived in South West Delhi in the same complex as Roshan. Smriti remembers being extremely unhappy with the way her marriage was decided, where she had no say in the matter. She took his number from her father's mobile and called him for a meeting. They met during his morning walk for three hours, where Smriti told Roshan about her plans to study for Civils exam and how she would never get a Delhi cadre. Roshan agreed to everything Smriti said. There was a period of six months between their engagement and wedding and Smriti says there were 'many times' when she felt she should not be marrying Roshan. They had gone out for ice-cream and Smriti says 'I thought to myself that shit I am going to marry this man'. This continued from the first day onwards. Roshan was a workaholic and would switch off his phone. Smriti says she used to cry. Once he was meant to go on a business trip to a neighbouring town and he switched off his phone for three days. When Smriti called on his land line on the fourth day, his mother picked up only to inform that Roshan had never left and was at home. Smriti recollects times going for coffee with Roshan, only for his elder sister to call him and accuse him of having no time for his family anymore.

Smriti says she felt if she married Roshan she just might have 'more freedom' than what she had in her own house. When Smriti was 16, her father wanted to go back to his 'roots' in Hissar from Kathmandu. Smriti says she hated Hissar. In Kathmandu, one could



think of ‘ambitions, career, and working’ in Hissar her avenues were limited. She ‘struggled’ and wanted to go to Delhi to study, however her father was against this. Smriti says her father believed that *ladki crystal hai, agar aap usai godrej ki almari mai lock kar kai rakhtai hai hto who thik hoti hai, agar usmai crack aa jai tho wo kisi kaam ki nahi* (women are like crystal, if you keep them locked in the cupboard only then are they fine or else they develop a crack and not of much use). Smriti ‘fought’ with her father, as he continued to insist that she could only study in a ‘girl’s college in a ‘girl’s hostel’. By the time they could reach a consensus the admissions in Delhi University were over. The next option her father suggested was a Hindi medium college in Jaipur, Smriti resisted and finally, they settled for an English medium college. Smriti says for her it was about ‘getting out’ of Hissr. A huge donation was given as her admission was late. In the first year, Smriti topped her college and got admission in a college in Delhi University. This time again her father’s condition was that she would not ‘stay in their mama’s house or travel by bus’. What was settled for her was a graduate course through correspondence and to help run Smriti’s aunt’s dance school in Delhi. After college, when Smriti wanted to work her father ‘being from a trader’s family, felt jobs were inferior’. He gave Smriti permission to study for the Civils exam. This was around the time when she got married. Smriti says all the women in her family had been married by 19. She too would have been if her uncle who was the patriarch of the family had not died unexpectedly around the time she was finishing her graduation.

After marriage, much like the life stories of women discussed chapter 7, there were a series of controls exercised on Smriti by her in-laws. In Smriti’s account of her post-marital life, she uses the word ‘strange’ repeatedly. Not comprehending the nature, motivations of the control or the manner in which familial relations played out meant Smriti questioned them constantly while being forced to internalise some of them. She had little emotional or spatial room in the house for herself or with her husband. The concept of being allowed to be on one’s own, or with one’s husband was alien in the household. She says,

there were very *strange* controls...and most of these controls were in the name of love. It is difficult to negotiate with love. They would sit till 2 am and say talk to us. Mother-in-law would go to

the temple in the morning she would have stories from there, stories of relatives who lived close to us. Now, what can you talk till 2 in the morning, but that was the family system. There was no time with your husband, it will very *strange*...

It was a very *strange* setting. I had to get ready and go upstairs early in the morning and only late at night I would be allowed to come down. Even if you want to sleep during the day, then you sleep upstairs... 'why do you need to go down' they said. So your rest period was also with your mother-in-law and sister-in-law. If your husband came for dinner, you did not need to go down. He would change and come upstairs. At night when everyone is done chatting, then you will go down say at 1 or 2 at night. I do not know why they had a bedroom downstairs, even in that there was so much control. The house was built in such a way that there was an opening, so my mother-in-law could see how many times the light of the bedroom was switched on, how many times the bathroom light was switched on. She used to keep a tab on me and you had to give an answer in the morning for all this. My father-in-law would come and wake up my husband in the morning, saying *chalo kaam karna hai* (we have to work). We hardly ever had any privacy. It was all very *strange*.

Smriti says, she could not say that she wanted to be alone with her husband. Her elder sister-in-law had a divorce and she lived with them. When her husband came back from work, she would insist that the three of them went out for coffee. Smriti could not say that 'she wanted to spend time with her husband alone'. Smriti says her sister-in-law had taken it upon herself to keep Smriti entertained. She once said 'your husband does not have time for you, but I am there'. Smriti told her 'but I do miss him and would like to spend more time with him'. Smriti's sister-in-law broke into tears and felt extremely hurt at what she perceived as ungratefulness on Smriti's part. Her relationship with her husband had been a difficult one from the beginning, as is shown during their courtship period. On their second day of honeymoon in Goa, Roshan had said that 'he was not enjoying and that he

missed his work'. During the honeymoon, apart from the few trips they managed, Roshan spent his time on his phone, working on his laptop, talking to his father frequently about work or watching television. Smriti says,

I was never attracted to him. He was very good with his work. So there were a few instances where I would be like wow, but he was also a big fat liar. *Jaisai banyagiri sai kaam kar rahai hai* (doing work the way a baniya would do it), saying one thing to one person and another thing to someone else. He was always on the phone, so much so that once he ran over a dog. He had no voice or a spine of his own.

Early in the marriage, Smriti says they fought frequently. Smriti would cry for several hours, sleep late and wake up early. People at home could see her eyes were swollen, but it was assumed this was because she was up late at night. Smriti had a strong and wide circle of friends, and over time she introduced Roshan to them, in the hope that he would also develop his own friend circle.

Smriti's mother-in-law kept monitoring their contraception use. Once when Smriti had gone to her mother's place for three days, her mother-in-law called angrily asking her to return immediately. A few days later, she told Smriti that she was cleaning Smriti's room and the dustbin fell from her hand. Her mother-in-law said *marai badan mai aag lag lagyi* (my body was on fire). She had found a used condom, which Roshan had carefully wrapped in a newspaper. After this Smriti says Roshan would take the condom to his office and throw it on the way. Her mother-in-law devised another method. On Monday, Roshan's shop was closed, so the mother-in-law proposed that they would go to the temple. Every Monday Smriti would ask her mother-in-law if they should go and her mother-in-law would say not this Monday but the next. In a month, there would be one month in which Smriti would have her periods and she could not enter the temple. Smriti says it took her six months to realise that this is the way in which her mother-in-law kept controls on her periods. Apart from the emotional and reproductive control on Smriti, she also had no money of her own. The money in the house was kept in a drawer and the key was kept in a specific place. Whenever someone needed money they had to inform and

take what they wanted. Roshan had no money or bank accounts in his name. So even if the amount was as paltry as Rs. 200, K needed to ask her mother-in-law for it. Smriti says she had grown up always having a pocket money and she was not used to asking for money. She liked baking and wanted an oven, which at that time cost Rs 3,200 but her husband would constantly say 'next month' and it never came.

These controls were interspersed with everyday humiliation and emotional abuse. When Smriti was preparing for her Civils, her father-in-law demanded he wanted to eat idly for breakfast. Smriti told him that she leaves by 6 am and if she made it before she left they would not taste good when he returned for dinner, Smriti had made idly for him and presented it very excitedly. Her father-in-law screamed at her, saying 'is this the time to eat idly?' Smriti says she started crying and remade dinner. Another occasion, during dinner time Smriti's sister-in-law usually went to a relative's house. When she was back, everyone else was seated at the table and Smriti did not serve her food. This became a huge issue, and her sister-in-law threw the plate as she felt insulted. Every evening Smriti's mother-in-law would leave to meet her relatives in the neighbourhood, without telling Smriti about what to make for dinner. Smriti would prepare the dinner in her absence only for it to be thrown by her mother-in-law, on the premise that it was not good enough to be served to people in the house. Smriti says,

there was a kind of a silent fight. The environment was negative and people would stop talking to you. It was all very strange. You never knew what someone would say to you at any point. If someone came, they would show so much love, but as soon as people left it was back to status quo.

Smriti's parent's response to her in-law's behaviour was a combination of silence and denial about the true nature of their in-laws. Smriti says when her aunt's daughter wanted to get a divorce, her parents had told her 'if something like this happens in your life, just eat poison and do not bother us'. Smriti says that stayed with her. She also did not know how to communicate what she felt because her in-laws loved her excessively in front of her parents. When Smriti's parents saw her crying, they would not ask what was wrong. Smriti regarding her parents says,

the same story was repeated, this is the fate of women, keep *dheeraj*, it will take time to settle and you will settle down. They saw me lose weight. When I used to dance, go to the gym then also I did not lose so much weight as I did when I was in the first year of my marriage. No one really enquired. It was assumed that I would be happy.

Smriti says she did not expect her parents to support her. She also felt confused and unsure about reasons for her unhappiness early in the marriage. When she compared her life with her cousins, she felt her life was much better.

One of the things she struggled and kept constant through the course of her marriage was her education. Six months into her marriage, she had her exams for masters that she had enrolled through correspondence. She stayed with her parents to give the exam, which made her in-laws very unhappy. She cleared her exams through first division and also cleared her National Eligibility Exam (NET). Soon after marriage, she had to abandon her Civils preparation. She decided to take the Civils coaching not because she wanted it but she saw it as a way to 'see the outside world'. She took the morning coaching so that by the time all the men left the factory she could come back and study. Smriti says, however, this arrangement did not work out. There was 'always my mother-in-law or sister-in-law loitering over my head, food for your husband ... there was always something'. Hence when Smriti cleared her NET and Masters degree successfully, she got a letter from her university to enrol in the M Phil program. Smriti says 'I thought I was not doing Civils so let me do this at least'. She was assigned dissertation supervisors who encouraged her to apply in regular for her M Phil. Smriti went on to meet other professors for guidance and some seemed sure that she could not clear the entrance for prestigious Delhi institutes having done her graduation and masters through correspondence. Smriti says 'I took this as a challenge and cracked it'. She now had admission in an MPhil programme. In due course of time, she interned with an NGO and got involved in an international research project that took her abroad. Smriti says her in-laws could not actively stop her education, for in the beginning of the marriage they had said they would let her study.

Simultaneously Smriti also tried to be the good daughter-in-law. She says she would not give her in-laws a reason to complain. She would wake up early make the breakfast, around lunch time she would be back to send hot chapattis to the office. At dinner time she ensured the food was served on time. She did all the other housework expected of her. She says,

I was living both the lives together. I used to feel I am such an expert, multi-tasker. The image of Goddess Durga with her eight hands, I was someone like that. I did not give them a chance to say that I did not take care of the house.

Smriti was a good cook just like her mother. Hence she used to invite all her relatives and host big dinners. Smriti says these were her ways of keeping the whole family together. This did not necessarily make her in-laws happy but everyone in the extended family thought highly of her. On one occasion, despite the continuing tensions and fights at home when her father-in-law was critically ill and her mother-in-law was out of town. Smriti says she 'fed him like a child'. They needed 5 lakh rupees for his surgery and Smriti had by now earned sufficiently from her project. She contributed the money required. She also spent the first year of her salary from the project, re-decorating the house. She says 'I wanted to show them how money was spent'. So her tactics involved both a show of her daughter-in-law duties, redefining them in the process as well as asserting her own individual growth and financial independence. Smriti says she was even ready to have a child if it meant her in-law's acceptance. The constrained environment at home and constant fights had affected Smriti to the extent that she was on anti-depressants. Her gynaecologist had told her that she needed to be in a better state of mind to conceive. When Smriti got through the MPhil program a few months later when she felt better she conceived. Smriti says she would think that she would not let her in-laws play with her child and this was her way of seeking revenge on them. However she miscarried, she says perhaps her mental state was not good enough to 'hold on to the pregnancy'. Smriti says she was 'devastated' by her miscarriage. She took three years but managed to finish her MPhil.

During her MPhil days, Smriti says she was exposed to fields of gender and human rights and she no longer wanted to have a child just to gain her in-laws acceptance. Her work in the international project took her abroad frequently for long periods of time. During this time, she did not get to see Roshan and when they met it was like a 'honeymoon period'. Smriti says,

the more I stepped out of the house, more and more I became separate from the house. I could not fit back in. From my husband ... I might have felt we were getting closer but we were actually growing separate.

Roshan and she had not travelled abroad together and through the three years of her project, she had been doing it by herself. She wanted him to travel with her. She took him with her for three weeks and he hated her for keeping him away from 'his business and parents'. He was very unhappy. During this trip, they fought constantly and he went back at the end of the three weeks. When Smriti called him from the US he would put her calls on hold and they barely spoke for an extended period of time. When Smriti returned to India, after living out of suitcase for three years, she decided that she would try and have a child if Roshan wanted it. She says,

I had also made peace, saying that if this is how they are, so such is life. I did not want to take a divorce after nine years. I have lived the life I wanted. So I thought I would study further and have a child.

However, things mapped out differently from the way Smriti had imagined them to be. Separation through the nine years of their marriage had meant different things. When the 'kitchen politics' had intensified and Smriti was an anti-depressant, that was the first time Roshan and she had decided to move out and find a place of their own. Roshan had agreed reluctantly for at this point he was worried about Smriti killing herself. However, this did not work out because her father-in-law had come and begged them not to do this and things would become better. When they did not, the second round of separation was to move into separate floors with a different kitchen. The third type of separation was when

after coming back to India, Smriti and Roshan's fight intensified over him not wanting to spend the day after Diwali in Smriti's house in Hissar. This fight blew out of proportion and this time involved Smriti's parents as well. After days and months of fighting, Smriti said

So far we think our fights are because of the people upstairs, let us not separate and see if it is because of us. Let us give this a year's try and separate if we are not compatible.

Roshan agreed, however, every time a house was finalised he would deny. Finally, he said he did not want to go to a separate house. Smriti then decided that she would move out and that they would not talk or see each other during this trial period. Roshan helped her find a house close to a cousin's house and Smriti's place of work. However, when Smriti was ready to move out, Roshan begged her not to leave. Smriti says she spoke to a friend, who advised her that '*himmat* kar kai try this'. When Smriti asked Roshan for fifty thousand rupees according to their prior agreement, she received a three-page long legal email from Roshan's lawyer.

Smriti had moved in with her sister and continues to live with her. Smriti says she has not pushed for a divorce for she does not want to spend her energy on a 'dirty game'. She does not want to remarry so does not technically require the divorce either. She says Roshan would not give her alimony; instead, he wants the property that is in her name. Reflecting on her life post-separation she says,

I have a beautiful life now. I have dated men. I have done everything that I wanted to do. Just this liberty to go to Ladakh on a bike and not having to tell anyone...I could not have done this if I lived with my parents or my in-laws. I have no regrets in life.

In Smriti's narrative, we see a differing enactment of *dheeraj* and *himmat*. Early on in the marriage much like Anu's, in times of marital crisis, Smriti was asked to keep *dheeraj*. Smriti articulates her discomfort and inability to understand her marital family's setup and



controls on her. Smriti knew that she could not rely on her parents to support her. All her efforts, which preceded her marital life was to negotiate for a little more room, whether it was for her education or to move to Delhi from Hisar. After marriage she continued to do the same, this involved both a focus on herself while trying to strengthen her marital relations. The focus on herself involved studying constantly, drawing self-worth from clearing exams and entrances, having a rich circle of friends that she built over the years, travelling for work, being exposed and receptive to gender and human rights framework, gaining financial independence and expressing it through re-doing her house. Strengthening her marital relations involved fighting with her husband when she disagreed, trying to initiate him into her friend circle, travelling with him to aid their mutual growth and compatibility, playing the role of the good daughter-in-law, trying to have a child to gain acceptance, nurturing her father-in-law to health and financially providing for it. Her final effort at working on her marriage was to separate from her marital family when things became hard to bear. The focus on the individual and familial was undertaken simultaneously in conversation with both of them. It involved cycles where Smriti went through depression and dejection as well as fleeting moments when she recognised what she liked or disliked about her husband or in-laws. The repetitive tactics of the self-led to her growth in ways which made it hard for her to ‘fit back’ and making her ‘separate’ both from her house and husband. When Smriti returned from her project which took her abroad, she says she was ready to have a child and study further. She says ‘I have lived the life I wanted’. However, when things did not go the way she imagined, she and Roshan considered first separating from her in-laws together and then separating from each other. Both these separations were in the hope of working on their marriage rather than dissolving it. When Smriti separated from Roshan it was meant to be a ‘trial period’ which she says her friend advised that ‘*himmat* kar kai try this’. When Roshan sent her a legal notice, Smriti was upset and went through her ups and downs. However, the years of trying to rebuild her *dheeraj* or the doing of marriage in ways that she was not completely subsumed and dominated by the family equipped her not just to handle the separation but to carve out a life of her on her own terms. In Smriti’s narrative *himmat* is not a step beyond *dheeraj*, but a transmuting of *dheeraj* into *himmat*.

## Conclusion

In contexts in which women know that they will have little support from their natal homes, and opportunities to remarry (especially with children) marital separation is difficult. In these contexts, it becomes important to focus on the suffering that disabling structures produced by the family and the community. The threshold of women's suffering and the process of arriving at them could show the impossibility or possibility of exploring divorce or separation as an option. As seen in the case studies, separation could mean different things through the course of a woman's life, for example, moving to one's natal home, with one's husband into another home away from the marital family, separating one's kitchen or trying to live separately from one's husband. All these tactics need to be seen within women's framework of 'staying' in the marriage and not necessarily its dissolution (Surtees, 2003). It is important to strive to create room to experiment with these tactics to rebuild one's *dheeraj* and unsettle the coalescing power structures of marital families, gendered norms and the normative violence of marital lives. Such experimentations in the doing of marriage, could at times also pave the way for the building of *himmat*, not just to make separation a final move but also in the making of a fulfilling life post-separation. The reliance on one's own means to move away from an unhappy marriage explains why there are very few women in the community who had separated or sought a divorce.





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## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

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#### Introduction

Keeping upper caste women at the heart of my enquiry, this study set out to understand how caste and gender are reproduced in the urban. In the post-Dumontian literature, it appears that while caste in political, economic or religious spheres might be undergoing a change, it shows a peculiar tenacity when it comes to marital choices across caste groups (especially the upper caste). The disjointed handling of caste and gender in the urban caste groups by some scholars does not help in empirically understanding how members of upper caste groups identify with their caste identities and the inter-linked reproduction of caste, as a resource for upper-caste groups in the contemporary. Neither does it show how caste based patriarchies influence women's life choices.

To probe into the processual reproduction and negotiation with caste and gender identities in the urban, the Agarwal business caste is used as a case study. To grapple with the complexities introduced by the urban contexts of caste, the study was carried out through different *spheres*, that is the political, economic and the affective. To engage with these spheres, a multi-sited and multi-pronged approach was employed. The inter-connected sites that emerged as from the field were: caste associations, the business and political community elites, the family businesses across caste strata (structured by their differentials in wealth, status and power) and the 'caste-d' actors in these institutions. Three types of data sources were used: a close reading of community publications over two decades, in-depth and inter-generational interviews with both men and women in the community and observations made at community events and women's gatherings.

### *Reproducing Caste-Gender: Points of Departure*

Recounting the main contributions of this thesis and the inter-connections between chapters, this section is structured according to the points of departure from existing literature: *first*, it is shown that the roles played by business and political elites vis-à-vis the reproduction of caste as a political-economic resource, is in consonance with the changing inter-generational inter-subjective meaning of caste; *second*, by focusing on the secularising gendered subjects, the contradictory pulls on their ways of identifying with caste are discussed; *third*, the interlinkages and co-production between the different spheres, that is the community, family and the individual in an upper-caste group is shown; and *fourth*, on the basis of these three sections, the study shows what it means to be an upper caste group in the urban.

#### **Business and political elites: Caste as capital**

The cohesiveness of a caste group is essential to help caste function as an extra-economic social relation to convert money into different forms of capital (social, political, cultural). The community's business and political elites play an important role in providing this cohesion. Using Khan (2012), elites are defined as "those who have vastly disproportionate control over or access to resources" (page 362). To ensure that caste functions as a capital generating and converting social relation, the urban contexts presents three challenges to community elites: *first*, the difficulty of cohesion between the elites across the city; *second*, the increasing internal heterogeneities within a caste group; and *third*, the possibility that the younger generation within the elite families straying away from the path charted by their families and the *samaj*.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the elites forge a *samaj*. The *samaj*, as opposed to the caste associations, is exclusively for the elites in the community. One of the ways of forging the *samaj* is through the collective undertaking of religious and secular philanthropy. The stability of these philanthropies and a continual socialisation through them is ensured by

forging institutions that provide projects, social ties, money donations and relationships durability and exclusivity. Ostrower (1995) also argues that “philanthropy is one of the activities that contribute to facilitating cohesion among elite groups” (page 6). Given the primacy of network dependence for capital in family businesses, philanthropies in the form of committees, societies and trusts helps ascertain business standing, performance, regulation of business practices and internal hierarchies between business groups. By encouraging children to participate in philanthropic institutions or to forge their own, businessmen ensure the sustenance of institutions, the capital generating social networks, values and the worldview that ground and knit kinship, business and caste community together. The capital networks established is a window into the organisation of the business elites and the nature of Indian capitalism.

Caste as social capital has lately been presented as a model for business growth and economic development. Das (2002: 150 cited in Vaidyanathan 2012), the former CEO of Proctor and Gamble argues that,

instead of morally judging caste, I seek to understand its impact on competitiveness. I have come to believe that being endowed with commercial castes is a source of advantage in the global economy. Bania traders know how to accumulate and manage capital. They have financial resources and more important, financial acumen.

Business dispositions are naturalised and the caste accrued privileges for a select few is seen as an asset for the economy. Similarly, Vaidyanathan (2012) a professor at Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore argues that,

in a financial sense, caste provides the edge in being a risk taker since failure is recognised and condoned and sometimes encouraged by the (caste) group. ... We also find that caste in politics divides but caste in economics unites. Not only that, castes which have used business as a route to upward mobility has succeeded much better than those who tried to use politics. ... We fail to recognise that it is a valuable social capital, which provides

a cushion for individuals and families in dealing with society at large, and more particularly the State.

In the absence of uniform labour laws, taxes, implementation and transaction costs, caste through kinship networks is seen as apt for absorbing financial risks. However, Vaidyanathan does not consider how inclusivity for some in social capital networks is built on the principle of exclusivity of others. Scholars have critiqued caste as social capital as it reinforces inequalities in the market, by restricting participation and sustaining businesses only by a few (Jodhka, 2015; Prakash, 2015; Vijayabaskar & Kalaiyarasan, 2014). By showing the internal and informal processes through which an upper caste group organise themselves into capital generating networks, this study shows the caste exclusive membership of family businesses that function like “old boy’s club”. Vaidyanathan (2012) makes a distinction between the economic and political roles of caste. However, in the case of the Agarwal’s, the community’s business and political elites are interlinked and reinforce each other’s social action. Markovits (2008) also traces the interlinked nature of business and politics during the colonial era and shows how the Congress party strengthened the weak Indian business class. Businessmen entering politics has been on a rise lately and participation in philanthropies helps strengthen their individual portfolios, establishing them within the community and larger society at large.

Another way through which the business and political elites work together is by the former-investing and contemporarising Hindu-ness. As shown in Chapter 3, capital investments help ‘modernise’ expressions of Hindu religiosity (PVR like dharmashalas, religious festivals with technology and superstars, cow hospitals with 24-hour ambulance services) while it’s content continues to be centred on the construction of temples, cow protection and restriction of dietary habits. Such investments by the community’s business and political elites helps position the Agarwal community as leaders and defenders of Hinduism forging a strong Hindu identity. Hence as opposed to the scholars like Beteille, Fuller and Gupta who argue that with the substantialisation of caste it loses its material hold, this study shows the complex ways through which caste is reproduced in its ‘modern’ urban form to reproduce its economic, political and social value for upper caste groups by their elites.



## Secularisation with persistent caste and gender inequalities

The elite's engagement with the processes of secularisation has led to macro-level institutional moves like the identity claims, strengthening and re-investment in Hindu religiosity and the organisation of marriage fairs. From interactions in their families, elites realise that it is essential to engage with the secularisation of women and to focus on the institution of marriage to continue reproducing caste in the urban. As shown in Chapter 4, women in the community are invariably more educated than the men, making the second generation shop owners' children consider enrolling for higher education to be able to find wives in the community and to diversify their business. The *samaj* through the association undertakes the ideological role that helps provide caste cohesion by domesticating women through endogamous marriages in joint families. Gramsci (1971) had argued that instead of a use of force, cultural knowledge helped align the interests and values of the dominated and produce consent. Undertaking endogamous marriages is a complex process of balancing parental and children's aspirations; however, through the organisation of public matrimonial fairs, elites wish to provide the other caste strata in the community with options of finding matches within the caste group.

Central to the secularisation of caste is the changes in the urban women's aspirations through an increase in education and age of marriage. This is because caste identity and status is linked to the status of women in the caste group and has an effect on the marital choices made. Realising this, the ideological articulation of the *samaj* through the association has changed. No longer do they draw on the ideal of the Hindu pativrata wife or daughter; although, this guiding ideal hangs in the background and is not effaced (as discussed in Chapter 4). The association instead acknowledges the neoliberal 'enterprise' culture and subtle shifts in gendered subjectivities by introducing ideas of 'choice' and 'social revolution'. Women are urged to undertake the 'correct' actions through a language of self-reponsibilisation and for their own happiness.

The ideological project of the *samaj* is realised at the level of the family through the mother-daughter and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship as shown in Chapter 6 and 7. Arranged endogamous marriages are not forced on elite women, neither are they ideological dupes or empty vessels pushed to reproduce the familial interests and caste

status. Instead, this study shows that by catering to the aspirations of the enterprising individual and their families, arranged endogamous marriages rework and persist in their appeal. The processes that lead up to deciding on an arranged endogamous match like the tutoring of familial love to look for pragmatic love even in pre-marital love relationships, helps in the production of future gendered and 'caste-d' actors of the community, family and nation. The process of mediation of the daughter's desires through the mother, and the mother's parenting style from being an authoritarian parental figure to a friend, changes the intergenerational identification with caste identities. Amongst the older women (as argued in Chapter 5), their elite status is made and unmade through the social reproductive roles that they undertake vis-à-vis the family and caste community at the Delhi and neighbourhood level. In the younger generation, the caste identity is experimented, tested and inhabited for its entrepreneurial potential. By sustaining caste and familial relations differently from their mothers and mothers-in-law, caste for the upper-caste women is reproduced albeit by changing its appeal, resonance and identification.

This social reproduction role for women varies not just intergenerationally but also across the caste strata as argued in Chapter 7. Younger married women in endogamous marriages in the fourth stratum have lesser physical space, mobility and financial independence as compared to their counterpart in the second caste stratum (Chapter 5 and 6). However, an increase in education, the age of marriage and living in urban contexts means their aspirations from their conjugal lives and familial intimacies, is different from that of in their mother-in-law's generation. This leads to constant frictions that if not addressed in time could upset familial patriarchal arrangements and hierarchies. Younger women undertake marital 'tactics' (home based work, attending kitty parties and Reiki classes) that helps self-preserve while reproducing the family and caste status. This allows them to inhabit intimate relationships while resisting the complete coalescing of power structures. The importance of these marital 'tactics' is realised in remaking thresholds of endurance and to separate from unhappy oppressive marriages as shown in Chapter 8.

Processes of secularisation are an inevitable aspect of 'modern' contexts with market economies. Attention to the inter-subjective meanings and the subjectivities produced by and through caste in the urban with the processes of substantialisation changes the way people identify with and reproduce their caste identities. As argued in Chapter 2, it makes

the role of caste associations to change from dictating social conduct in the everyday life during the colonial period to one of “enunciation”. Caste identification is also gendered in nature. The Agarwal (men) identify with their caste identity by fashioning themselves as selfless, patriotic and philanthropic; this is presented as a universal claim by the caste group. However, one way of sustaining these moral-economic identity claims is by making women shoulder its limits. Women in the Agarwal community, identify with their caste identity according to the controls exercised on them. For example, across strata, women are discouraged from undertaking paid work as it would take them away from the social reproductive roles expected of them by family businesses. While aspects of secularisation might be inevitable in nature, the course is ideologically guided by elite men, through the association and mediated by older women in families.

This mediation in families ensures that the essence of caste that is endogamy as argued by Ambedkar (1979b) is sustained although the motivations for entering such matches and ways of inhabiting these marriages have changed. The mediation also ensures that women continue to perform their social reproductive roles with slight tweaks allowing them to inhabit traditional structures although differently. Hence as opposed to Fuller and Narasimhan (2015) and Seth (1999) who also write about upper-caste groups, this study shows that the realities of caste today despite processes of secularisation facilitated by substantialisation cannot be captured by a Marxian or Weberian definition of class when upper-caste women are kept at the heart of the enquiry.

### **Urban Realities: Caste and gender intersectionalities and overlapping spheres**

In the above section, it is seen, how the three sites: caste associations, family and the individual are connected with each other. The secularisation in the inner worlds of actors through substantialisation is not isolated to changes in the family’s socialisation or the individual’s choices but is also reflected in the strategies adopted by the elites through the associations. The political and economic dimensions of caste are not delinked from the affective constituted by the desires, interests and marital choices of actors. Scholars by unconsciously or consciously relegating marital choices to the ‘private’ space of the family, reiterate the tenacity of endogamy while leaving it unexplored and unconnected to

the political and economic spheres of social action within caste groups. This also leads to a mere reiteration of personal comfort or cultural explanations for circles of socialisation continuing to be homophilic even in the urban.

This selective criticality, because of a lack of a gender lens in analysing caste, also leads to a relegation of caste to select spheres like political and select sites like politics. Beteille (1996) argues that in the upper strata of the society, the family is the site for the reproduction of inequalities but not caste. He says:

... the family plays a crucial if not decisive role in the reproduction of social structure, including the structure of inequality. To be sure, the family as an institution is not equally effective everywhere and it does not act in isolation from other institutions anywhere. But all things considered, it will be safe to say that the family plays a far more active role than caste in reproducing the inequalities associated with the new occupational system. The retreat of caste as an active agent for the reproduction of inequality at the upper levels, and the continuing, if not increasing the importance of the family constitute two of the most striking features of contemporary Indian society (page 436).

However, in this study, it is seen how the family, both in the second and fourth strata, is central in reproducing caste and gender based inequalities and worldviews. The interlinked tie of the family business with the samaj and the association leads to the production of future women of the family, community and nation. The multi-sited and multi-sphere caste based patriarchy reproduces the caste group through its subjects in 'modern' urban spaces. This makes an intersectional caste and gender lens a valid prism for understanding contemporary urban realities of caste.

### **Agarwal: An urban upper caste**

What does it mean to be an upper caste group in contemporary urban India? With traditional hierarchies of caste giving way, articulations of caste based power have

reinvented themselves. It is a given that to be an upper caste group in the urban, it would be essential to have the economic capital and devise a sustained way to convert it into other kinds of capital (political, cultural and social capital). In such capital conversions, networks of capital and kinship are integral. This creates new hierarchies of caste based on power and status. Active discrimination is replaced by newer ways of organising oneself into caste based monopolises, that consolidate capital networks, forge the nation and strike a relationship of collaboration and contestation with the nation state. The Agarwals, unlike the Dalits, are not outside the space of the nation and state and unlike the Brahmins, they do not feel that they have been betrayed by the state. The Agarwals in the contemporary believe that they are the nation and should be the ones to decide how the resources of the nation-state are used. This way the existing state forms can be used to the advantage of the already advantaged and structure the course of economic and political development. This means that despite India's democracy and neoliberal market forms, opportunity structures as argued by Jodhka, 2016) are not egalitarian and social mobility not "open".

Forging these newer hierarchies is not only economic in nature. As shown in this study, the social, cultural and the economic go hand in hand. By ensuring that women continue to be domesticated through endogamous marriages in the family and their desires mediated through mothers and mothers-in-law, Agarwal men's moral claims of being the most suitable defenders of Hinduism, India's moral cultural fabric and the leaders of the nation-state are foregrounded. The transformation of a middle caste to an urban upper caste group is anchored through the historical accrument of capital, capacity to undertake capital conversions and being morally grounded through a conservative negotiation of the women's question. This transformation could fail because of its inherent self-contradictory processes brought about by secularisation in the urban context. To be an urban upper caste group, it is essential to find a tandem between processes of capital conversion and the processes of secularisation as negotiated by 'caste-d' actors, otherwise, the process would not be replicable, durable or resonate with its members. The normalisation of the "the spirit of the Baniya DNA, which is wired for enterprise" (Mamdar 2014: xi-xii cited in Jodhka and Jules 2017:2) does not lie in what they achieve in the bazaar alone, but in making their gendered subjects realise that their 'entrepreneurial' capacities are best realised through caste and family interests.

## **Conclusion: Future of urban caste and gender studies**

The investigation into urban upper caste contexts by keeping the upper caste women at the heart of the enquiry is one point of entry into a question and field that is vast. Such processes are not isolated just to the Agarwal business caste but might be shared by other caste groups. However, a lack of similar studies in urban makes comparisons difficult. The emergent aim of this study was to capture the contemporary realities of caste and gender in the urban without being quick to fit a community in the ‘caste-class’ spectrum, claiming to represent it in its entirety, finding the ‘essential’ traits of a caste group or fall for the Indian version of the class analysis. The ‘modern’ urban contexts of caste complicate processes of reproduction by being multi-sphere, multi-sited and co-produced. To capture them research methodologies have to be innovative, categories of analysis open to begin with and sources multiple.

The persistence of patriarchy is attributed to one’s ill fate of being in a conservative natal family, finding a ‘bad’ match and a difficult post-marital family. Such individual explanations while placating the wounded heart by quickly assigning blame does not help in finding systemic answers to nature, scope and reproduction of caste based “multiple patriarchies” (Sangari, 1995; 3381). A methodical engagement with the framing of such caste patriarchies in the contemporary would, however, make one realise the capacity of its actors to reproduce them by acknowledging their own desires. The futures of caste and gender studies then lies in being able to grapple with the invisible and invisibilising power relations between urban institutions that might appear to work independently and being attentive to the desires of the actors that inhabit these institutions.

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