

**Honour, Community and Gender Relations: A study of Jat and Muslim
women in Muzaffarnagar, Western Uttar Pradesh**

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for the award of the degree of*

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SOCIOLOGY

by

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DECLARATION

I, Astha Mishra (Registration No. 16SSPH02), hereby declare that the work embodied in the present dissertation entitled “**Honour , Community and Gender Relations : A study of Jat and Muslim women in Muzaffarnagar, Western Uttar Pradesh**” carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Aparna Rayaprol**, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any University. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET. A report on plagiarism statistics from the Librarian, University of Hyderabad is enclosed.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Honour, Community and Gender Relations: A study of Jat and Muslim women in Muzaffarnagar, Western Uttar Pradesh**” submitted by **Astha Mishra** bearing registration number **16SSPH02** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Setting the scene

In August and September of 2013, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, two districts in western Uttar Pradesh, in the northern part of India, became sites of violent communal riots. Two communities, Jat and Muslim, who had shared long pasts of working together on agrarian lands and forming winsome political alliances, were now polarized and mired in communal conflicts. Mohabbat'nagar¹ was burning. As per the First Information Report (FIR), the issue started with a motorbike accident, and escalated into brawl and murder. Yet in a peculiar turn of events, the news reports and locally dominant narratives placed a Jat woman at the centre of this issue. It was highlighted that the Muslim man had molested (chhed-chhad) the sister of Jat men, and it was in retaliation to this blatant attack on a Jat woman's honour, that the Jat brothers killed the Muslim man. In response to this, a group of Muslim men killed the two Jat brothers.

To de-escalate the situation, and discourage any type of public gatherings, the local state authorities imposed strict curfew in the districts of Shamli and Muzaffarnagar. However, powerful Jat and Hindu leaders continued to organize meetings, maha panchayat and launched the "Bahu-Beti Bachao Andolan" (save daughter-in-law and daughter campaign), a project that suddenly seemed urgent, and called to save young Hindu women (daughters and daughters-in-law in the reproductive ages) from the epic dangers of Muslim men and the threat of "love jihad"². Amidst these developments, the situation in Muzaffarnagar escalated, and an isolated, criminal case transformed into a communal riot, in which several people were killed, displaced, robbed, and sexually violated. This event is known as the 'Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013', and it has shaped the direction of this research.

In rural-agrarian north India, people joke that "there is no better place to hide an abducted person than in a harvest-ready sugarcane field" (Dixit, 2013). But these dense fields were unable to hide and protect the people trying to escape communal violence. Rather, the

¹ Alias of Muzaffarnagar, literally meaning 'town of love', because of the history of 'interdependency' and 'amity' between different communities.

² Love Jihad is an idea according to which inter-community love between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man is a conspiracy to convert Hindu women to Islam (Sarkar, 2018).

sugarcane fields, where historically the Jats and the Muslims had worked together, transformed into sites of murder and rape. The half-naked, partially decayed body of a woman discovered in the farmland, tells this tale (Dixit, 2013). The canals that managed the water needs of these interdependent and intertwined agrarian communities, were destroyed and several lives drowned in it. These bloodied agrarian fields and canals reflected the destruction of social fabric of the region, which was previously characterized by ‘interdependency’ and ‘co-operation’ among different communities (Singh, 1998).

Immediately these communal riots captured the attention of the scholarly community. From state enquiries, and fact-finding commissions, to academic research, the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013, became an important event to comprehend, primarily because India hadn’t seen a large-scale riot in more than a decade³, and social scientists were eager to locate the shifts in communal riots over this period. One of the most striking and significant shifts was observed in the spatial trend, as riots were seen as an urban phenomenon, surprisingly entering the rural realm. How and why the communal riots made an entry into the villages, a social site that had continued to maintain communal harmony in the post-independence period, is an interesting sociological question. Scholars were interested in making sense of these changes which led to communal violence (Kumar, 2016b), in spaces that were based on community “interdependency” and fulfilment of “mutual interests” (Singh, 1998).

The second unique feature of this riot was the use of new communication technology, and social media, to organize and spread the riots (Ahmed, 2013; Mander et al., 2016). The circulation of a video from Afghanistan in the WhatsApp networks of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts in the north Indian hinterlands worked towards making people anxious and provoked them to organize communally, in response to this technologically induced threat. This kind of technologically driven communal violence provoked scholars to think about how new technologies of communication have transformed the innate nature of rural-agrarian region and its people (Kumar, 2016a, 2016b). It was argued that the proliferation of new media and communication technologies in the rural-agrarian hinterlands reconfigured social relations and sociality, and the riots of 2013 reflected the new “techno-mediated socialities” that were emerging in the region (Ahmed, 2013).

³ Before 2013, the last large-scale riot was in Gujarat in 2002.

The third interesting feature of this riot was visible in the way communities and people were organizing themselves, to discuss how ‘our’ women were under threat from men of the ‘other’ community. This was reflected in the way that communal mobilization happened on the pretext of saving the honour of daughters and daughters-in-law. However, these efforts seemed contradictory when looked in the light of dangerous trends that persist in the region, such as, poorest child sex ratio (CSR), heinous gender-based crimes and atrocities such as female feticide, female infanticide, and honour killings (Tripathi, 2013; Chowdhry, 1997, 2004; Kaur, 2008). It was ironical that a region with so many gender-based disparities was using the rhetoric of protecting ‘our’ women from men of ‘other’ communities. It seemed that the collective community in the region was engaging with gender identities in contradictory ways and I started looking at the rubric of gender and community in the region.

Situating Muzaffarnagar

Muzaffarnagar is a district in western Uttar Pradesh. Saddled between the Ganga-Yamuna doab⁴, Muzaffarnagar is primarily an agrarian region, with around 71 per cent of the population living in the rural-agrarian areas and relying on farm-based activities (Census 2011, Government of India). Because of its strategic location, it was one of the few regions, along with Haryana and Punjab, where the green revolution was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s and agriculture gained momentum, became more scientific, commercialized and profitable. As power-driven tube wells, secure irrigation, High Yielding Variety seeds (HYV seeds) were introduced, the production of high-value food crops such as wheat, and cash crop such as sugarcane, increased. Soon, Muzaffarnagar, and western Uttar Pradesh (UP), emerged as a resource-rich region which was providing sugar and wheat not only to the country, but exporting to the whole wide world. This is how a small town in the rural hinterlands came to be recognized as the “sugar bowl”, and “breadbasket” of India (Behal, 2020).

Green revolution eventually spread to other parts of the country, but it never became as successful as it was in western Uttar Pradesh. With the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in an otherwise BIMARU⁵ Uttar Pradesh, Muzaffarnagar, emerged as an illustrious

⁴ The term *doab* is used in India and Pakistan, to denote the fertile tract of land lying between two converging rivers.

⁵ The term BIMARU was developed in 1980s by demographer Ashish Bose. This acronym depicts the poor performing states in terms of demographic indicators, population explosion, backwardness, and comprises of northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

example to highlight regional disparities when compared with its eastern counterpart. Due to historical reasons, which will be discussed in the next section, western Uttar Pradesh emerged as an important agrarian region in the north Indian landscape. The economic clout of western Uttar Pradesh was immense, and this region was so different, distant, and disassociated with the otherwise poor and backward Uttar Pradesh that 17 districts of western Uttar Pradesh demanded a separate state, Harit Pradesh (Green province) (Singh, 2001). The demand for a separate state is an old one and regains momentum now and then.

Sugarcane is an important resource of the region, and many industries are organized around it. District Muzaffarnagar has eight sugar mills. The farmers, apart from cultivating cane, also produce and sell ‘gur’ (jaggery) of high, edible-grade quality. This light brown jaggery with grain like texture, does not require any refining and commands an independent market within and beyond Uttar Pradesh. There is no involvement of moneylenders and intermediaries, and the farmers freely engage in the commercial selling of jaggery (Damodaran & Singh, 2007). Because of the profits that this cash crop brings, agrarian communities of western Uttar Pradesh, especially Jats, regard sugarcane as a ‘shahi’, royal crop. The lure and stature of sugarcane is such that, even now, when agrarian distress is at its peak, farmers continue to sow sugarcane, and even marriages are fixed based on land under cane cultivation (Rai, 2018). Sugarcane is linked to the honour and status of agrarian families which is why even when the sugar mill payment schedule is running in arrears, leaving farmers poverty struck and destitute, they still don’t forgo cane cultivation (Rai, 2018). Apart from the sugar industry, steel and paper are other major industries in the region. Steel products such as angles and bars that are manufactured in the industries of Muzaffarnagar are sold throughout the country.

The economic strength that has developed around agriculture has translated into political power as well. The region of western Uttar Pradesh has produced influential political leaders who have found a strong support from the region’s prosperous and landed sugarcane farmers. For example, Chaudhary Charan Singh, a Jat farmer from the region, who first became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and then went on to become the Prime Minister of India, through the support and backing of the sugarcane farmers. This support came from different sections of agrarian societies and was known as the MAJGAR alliance (Muslim, Ahir, Jat,

Gujjar and Rajput). Another example to illustrate the agrarian political clout of the region is Mahendra Singh Tikait, a powerful Jat leader, who squatted on Rajpath, New Delhi in 1988, along with thousands of farmers, and demanded a raise in the procurement price of sugarcane, among other things (Daniyal, 2017). In 2020 when the central government introduced farm reform act in the parliament – Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, a large section of farmers protested in the national capital at New Delhi, for over a year (Kumar, 2021). The National Capital Region of Delhi became a space to see the anxieties and distress that rural-agrarian communities have been going through, for the past many decades, since the onset of agrarian transformation. This came to be known as the farmers’ protest of 2020, one of the largest social movements of contemporary times, in terms of collective action from agrarian communities. This protest was successful as the central government decided to repeal the laws in question. The successful outcome of this protest evidences the clout of agrarian communities but also reflects the anxieties and tensions that agrarian communities are going through, in the contemporary times.

Because of its geostrategic, economic and resource-oriented significance, Muzaffarnagar has also emerged as one of the major commercial, and industrial hub of western Uttar Pradesh. It is one of the sites connected to the major industrial corridors which run through the heartland of India and connect distant parts of the country and aims at focused development and industrialization of resourceful but disconnected regions. Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) which passes through Meerut Muzaffarnagar Industrial Area (MMIA) and Amritsar Delhi Kolkata Industrial Corridor (ADKIC) are two industrial corridors that connect the district with major industrial cities of the country (Nivesh Mitra). Delhi Mumbai industrial corridor is one of the most futurist infrastructure programs, which is aimed towards developing “smart cities” and convergence of next generation technology in infrastructure sector (Nivesh Mitra). Similarly, Amritsar Delhi Kolkata Industrial Corridor (ADKIC) is a gigantic project, launched in 2014, to boost the manufacturing sector and agro-processing plants. These infrastructural and industrial corridors are a recent development and reflect the resource-rich importance of the region and its increasing connectivity with the national and global world.

The National Highway - 58 (NH-58), which passes through the city, is the backbone of road transportation in the region; this highway connects the north Indian hinterlands to the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). Connectivity with the national capital has provided an impetus to the already transforming trajectories of movement and mobility of the people of Muzaffarnagar by connecting them with the capital, and other important cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai, Dehradun, Chandigarh etc. This connectivity has ensured continuous flow of goods, ideas, information, and people, which has facilitated urban and global forces in the region. This has led to the fuzziness between rural and urban, as more and more people are constantly moving back and forth, between village and city, experiencing, living and carrying with them new goods, ideas, and practices (Kumar, 2016a, 2018).

Simultaneous to the fuzzy boundaries between the rural and the urban, the region of western Uttar Pradesh has been going through agrarian transformation, a process which has been brewing since the post-green revolution period, that is, the period from the late 1980s. The green revolution which began in the 1960s transformed into agrarian distress by the 1980s. Green revolution was intended to enhance agricultural productivity and growth, however, it also generated undesirable and unintended consequences such as ecological calamities, inequality, distress migration, poverty, and farmer suicides (Mohanty, 2018). For instance, extensive use of chemical fertilizers over the past many decades destroyed the quality of soil and disrupted the food chain, which implicated ecological crises. Moreover, in the past few years, premature heat waves, a profound manifestation of ecological distress, have destroyed the nascent wheat crop, and in the process led to export crises (Down To Earth, 2022), fodder crises (Shukla, 2022), and food crises (Sajwan, 2022). This has highlighted the precarity of agriculture, and its disastrous implications for the local and the global world.

Agrarian distress has also been intensified due to inflation, increasing electricity charges, rising cost of diesel and fertilizers, decreasing subsidies and support to farmers, and increasing unpaid dues to sugarcane farmers by mill owners. All these issues have severely affected farmers across generation, caste and religious lines. In this regard, it has been argued that while the green revolution produced a class of rich farmers, a larger group of people, relying on the agrarian way of life, were rendered economically vulnerable. In the light of agrarian transformation, rural economic inequalities exacerbated, and class differences became more sharpened (Kumar, 2016a).

Considering agrarian distress, these farm-based communities started moving towards non-farm work, as a survival strategy. As per this trajectory, not only Jat men but Dalit and Muslim men also started looking at non-agrarian pastures for sustenance and survival in the modern, expensive, and consumption-oriented world. Because Dalits and lower caste Muslims didn't have agrarian land, they focused on artisanal and other trade-orientated activities (Rao and Mitra, 2013, 850). Others migrated to big cities, thus managing to resist working for the local dominant caste, the Jat landlords, at poor wages and exploitative settings. In the pursuit of non-farm work, Dalit and Muslim men migrated to different parts of the country, to cities like New Delhi, Dehradun, and Hyderabad, and found employment outside of the oppressive feudal structure and not so-profitable agrarian work, and started pursuing their aspirations of social, economic and cultural mobility. A substantial number of Dalits continue to work on the Jat fields, however, their dependence on the Jat landlords has significantly declined over the past decades (Jeffrey and Lerche, 2000; Leiten, 2003).

The historically marginalized communities have also started investing in education, and through political mobilization, and affirmative action policies (reservations), they have managed to secure formal and public sector jobs (Pai, 2000; Singh, 1998). They have used education as an instrument for upward mobility and to enter the public sphere in respectable positions, an 'honour' that was previously denied to them because of their ascribed identities (Pai, 2000; Singh, 1998). This aspiration for 'permanent' government job makes more sense in the context of agrarian distress, a condition which has provoked farm reliant people to look for other economic opportunities. According to a 2018 survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) 65 per cent youth in small cities and 69 per cent youth in the Indian countryside are aspiring for Sarkari Naukri (government job). Another dataset reveals that 82 per cent of rural graduates aspire for and work towards sarkari naukri (Srinivasan, 2020, p. 86).

The rise of non-farm work increased the lure of 'Sarkari Naukri' (government job) and further translated into an increasing aspiration for education. The demand for education in pursuit of non-farm paid employment has led to a "mushrooming" of degree colleges, pharmacy institutes, and polytechnic institutes, along with computer centers, and management institutes (Jeffrey et al., 2004). The district of Muzaffarnagar has two state colleges, seven aided colleges, and forty-four self-financed colleges. Many of these colleges are owned and managed by upper-class Jat families. The hegemonic control of Jats in formal and higher

education sector has been seen as an instrument to sustain social capital and privileges (Jeffrey et al., 2004). Yet, cracks are also emerging in the hegemonic power structure.

Due to agrarian distress, and the diversified occupational choices, that are now available to erstwhile dependent Dalit and Muslim communities, the Jat anxiety is at an all-time high. The processes of social transformation, such as the commercialization of agriculture, urbanization, and migration have weakened the social relations that were organized around land and the agrarian way of life. These social relations were based on face-to-face engagement, dependency, and reliance of different communities on the dominant caste, i.e., Jats. Social hierarchies, appropriation and exploitation of labor defined everyday social relations and intercommunity engagement. However, the shift to non-farm work, and simultaneous increase in migration, and education, led the dependent communities to be independent and free from oppressive social relations that were operational in this regional setting. All these developments made Jats more distressed and anxious.

It is evident that there is a churning in the social, cultural, economic and political context of the region. The trajectory of upward mobility of erstwhile dependent communities have raised alarm and led to different kinds of conflicts. This is reflected in the everyday tussle and conflict between Jat and Muslim, Jat and Dalit, and between men of different communities regarding women (Chowdhry, 2005, 2009; Pai & Kumar, 2018; Singh, 1998, 2016). The tussle often takes forms of communal violence, caste-based violence, and gender-based violence. For instance, it is argued that one of the underlying causes of the 2013 Jat-Muslim riot in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli was the competitive resentment and the economic anxieties, which were embedded in agrarian distress (Daniyal, 2017; Singh, 2016). Similarly, inter-caste conflicts have intensified due to the rising case of elopement and love marriages, and the dominant perception of Jat communities is that first the Dalit men took their jobs, via reservation, and now they (Dalits) are taking their (Jats) women (Chowdhry, 2009).

Despite its economic strength and agrarian mettle, the region has no visible presence in foreign and modern business establishments. According to the district website, the present challenge of the district is “concerning crime and a decaying infrastructure” (Official Website of Muzaffarnagar). This shows that even though the region has geo-strategic and geo-economic importance, the high rate of ‘crime’ in the region has negatively impacted the industrial pursuits and capabilities of the region. In addition to the ‘crimes’ in the region, the

everyday occurrence of communal conflicts, and caste-based atrocities have also affected the region's socio-economic and political landscape⁶(Kumar, 2016b). The analogy that “rural India is like a watermelon: green on the outside, but red on the inside”, couldn't be more accurate (Bentall & Corbridge, 1996). The red here doesn't refer to the ripe watermelon, but the bloodied nature of agrarian distress, and the violent engagement between co-existing communities due to contestations and competition around depleting agrarian resources and increasing competition in non-farm settings. Thus, the unravelling story of the rural-agrarian transformation and distress has been characterized by rising non-farm economy, changing rural power structure, diverse and heterogeneous forms of urbanization, increasing migration, etc.

A Socio-Historical profile of the communities in the study

Muzaffarnagar's population consists of three main groups – Jats, Muslims and Dalits. Traditionally, the Jats are landowners, the Muslims are seeking to diversify into trade and informal economy, and the Dalits are largely wage workers. While Jats have dominated land ownership, Muslims and Dalits remain numerically dominant in the region. The district has a 57.51 per cent Hindu population, out of which 17 per cent are Jats. Muslims are more than 40 per cent of the population, which is much higher than their population percentage at an all-India level, i.e., 13 per cent, or the state level, which is 19 per cent (Census of India, 2011). Jats and Muslims have shared a long and enduring relationship. They have been economic allies (because of agrarian interdependency, as we have seen in the previous section) and political allies.

Jats: The Jat identity that we see today is of recent origins, developing since colonial times. Historians claim that in the pre-colonial era, this group was “amorphous”, with a “weak assertion of identity, and their community identity was rather fragile, and inchoate” (Datta, 1999 in Pai and Kumar, 2018, 185). Jats were primarily a pastoralist group and started becoming sedentary agriculturalists only after the 17th century (Datta, 1999 in Gupta, 2010).

⁶ For instance, the riots of 2013 not only destroyed the social fabric of the region, particularly between the *Jat* and Muslim communities but also had lasting economic and political repercussions as well. The riots led to the shutdown of several industries that were in and around Muzaffarnagar; many industries around the Muzaffarnagar region are still shut down, waiting for the climate to normalize, in the wake of ‘everyday communalism’. Meanwhile, the lower cess tax on industries in Uttarakhand has provoked many industrialists to move to the neighboring state and set up their industries and businesses there (explained by a respondent who is a prominent industrialist of western Uttar Pradesh). These developments have led to economic crises where men don't have many economic opportunities in the region, and they must migrate outside for work.

This group was not governed by kings and nobles but was organized around clan with affiliated villages forming a Khap or a biradari (community), bound by bhaichara (brotherhood). Historically, western districts in Uttar Pradesh experienced the 'Bhaichara system' where the tax collection was done through the network of cousin brothers, who were part of one clan (Datta, 1999 in Gupta, 2010). The revenue system of Bhaichara, which was relying on the network of kins and cousins, translated into more secure tenancy rights, which in turn encouraged more investment in agriculture, both private and public (Banerjee & Iyer, 2005).

In the present scenario, Jats are primarily a rural community with a robust sense of identity and community. They are a dominating force in the agrarian landscape that spreads across 17 districts of western Uttar Pradesh, from Baghpat to Agra. Electorally they are 6 per cent of the voters, but the clout of this community affects the political fortunes of at least 10 electoral constituencies (Pai and Kumar, 2018). Given the regional and numerical specificities in contemporary western Uttar Pradesh, Jats have been identified as a 'dominant caste'⁷. This community is numerically, politically, and economically dominant, even though not belonging to the 'upper' caste per se. Technically classified as Shudras, they sanskritised through reformative practices of Arya Samaj. They pledged towards cow protection and emulated upper caste tradition and practices, and claimed Kshatriya (warrior) status, along with Rajput, Gujjar, Ahir, and Saini (Datta 1999 in Pai and Kumar 2018). Because of their historically mobile nature, these communities have sometimes been referred to as 'intermediate castes'⁸. Due to their strong economic background, and their status as landowners, they never suffered any type of caste discrimination in society. Their approach towards religion has been perceived as practical and realistic, and historically they are interspersed among different religious groups such as Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim. In Muzaffarnagar, there are Hindu Jats, and Muley Jats (Muslim). Over the past few decades, there has been a rise in religiosity, where we see Jats embracing mainstream religions, and alternative religious cult. The most recent example is Baba Ram Rahim, leader of Dera Sacha

⁷ According to M. N. Srinivas, "a caste may be said to be dominant when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low" (Srinivas, 1959)

⁸ Intermediate caste are mostly peasant proprietors and dominant castes groups like the Marathas of Maharashtra, Patidars of Gujarat, Kapus of Andhra Pradesh, and *Jats* of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. They are demanding "Other Backward Class" status to receive reservations in employment, education, and politics as well as adequate financial support for their respective caste corporations and other economic benefits.

Sauda, who gained massive following in western Uttar Pradesh⁹(Jodhka, 2014). Jats are known for their physical strength, virility, and are driven by values of industriousness and hard work. Because of this, many Jats were employed in the colonial forces (Chowdhry 2013). Today, Jat men are employed in different types of national and regional armed forces, such as army, police, BSF, CRPF, etc. Because of this association with the 'Jawan' (soldiers) and 'Kisan' (farmer), they frequently claim patriotic status.

Two developments in post-independent India helped Jat emerge as a strong, peasant class. First is the abolition of the zamindari system wherein absentee landlords were removed, which helped Jats emerge as a dominant caste/class in the rural-agrarian western Uttar Pradesh. By the 1960s, due to the post-independence land reforms, Jats had medium to large landholdings, and thus emerged as the locally dominant, surplus producing, rich peasant class (Hasan, 1989). Even today, they are the largest landowners in the district, and actively prevent outsiders and local non-Jats from buying land (Lerche, 1995). Jats despise small-scale, garden cultivation and are very unhappy if they don't get proper land for farming. Jats possessing more than 12 acres usually hire contractual farm laborers, for 6 or 9 months, depending on agricultural activities, which range from cutting, tying and weeding of sugarcane and harvesting of wheat. Most of the casual labor and farm servants are from lower castes. When Jats have less land, they rely on household members for farm work; it is here that the Jat women emerge as the productive yet unpaid members of the labor force, since they are working on the family farms (Chowdhry, 1994).

In the light of agrarian distress, Jat households have resorted to pluri'activity, with one or several members of a household employed in government service or in business, yet they do not see this occupational development as a goal. Instead, they take pride in being farmers. Money earned is ploughed back into production in the form of investment in agricultural machines, milch cows, fertilizers, etc. (Lerche, 1995). Moreover, Jats are quite different from other land-owning castes such as Thakurs of eastern Uttar Pradesh in that they traditionally take part in the actual ploughing of the land and engage in agricultural activities. They self-

⁹ The headquarters of Dera Sacha Sauda is in Sirsa, a small town of Haryana, bordering the Malwa region of Punjab. The Dera has become popular, and thus attracts huge following in the region. Though it is headed by a Rajasthani *Jat* and its functionaries are mostly upper caste Hindu Punjabis, most followers and devotees belong to Dalit caste groups and the marginalized peasantry (Jodhka, 2014).

identify as ‘Zamindars’ (landlords) and have started using the title of ‘Chaudhary’ (Jaffrelot, 2000).

The second development that has helped the Jat community emerge as an important force in the region, is the green revolution. Technical innovation in the agrarian landscape, by introducing high yielding variety seeds, tractors, fertilizers, electric tube-well, and better irrigation lines, induced prosperity for the agrarian classes, and since Jats formed the major group of landholders, they benefitted immensely. Under the green revolution, even slightly better-off farmers started producing wheat and sugarcane, took to dairying and poultry, and were able to hire servants from lower castes. Soon they were able to educate their children and move towards non-farm jobs, especially salaried employment. Rich farmers, mostly Jats, have occupied the most prestigious professional and white-collar employment and have avoided laboring work. The city is interspersed with many clinics and hospitals, most of which are owned by the Jats, however, the Khap (clan group) is repetitive: Balliyan Khap, the largest in the region, is the hyper visible Khap name in public spaces and amenities like schools, hospitals, hotels, and restaurants. Balliyan Khap is not only the largest Khap in the region but has the largest land holding in the region. The members of this community constitute the dominant public sphere of Muzaffarnagar. Senior members of this community are chief guests for national festivals, openings, and inaugurations.

Poorer Jats have had difficulty getting into lucrative, high-ranking non-agricultural jobs. However, they have been successful in landing lower-level professional or white-collar jobs, such as those of police officers, teachers, managers, and clerks (Jeffrey, 2001). Because of agrarian distress, and rise of non-farm economy, schooling has emerged as a recurring aspiration in the agrarian households. Schooling helps securing salaried, government or white-collar employment for the sons and hypergamous marriages for the daughters. But because of lack of formal sector jobs, young Jat men have either acquired clerical jobs in the informal economy or moved into managerial/supervisory roles in agriculture. Some have gone into business, including the “school provisioning” business (Rao and Mitra, 2013; Kumar, 2018). Yes, the Jat men seem to be educated, but not many of them are working professionally, as observed during fieldwork. The same cannot be said for Jat women, as we will see in the upcoming chapters.

This profile of Jat community reflects that the implementation of green revolution in the rural hinterlands of north India has changed the imaginings of rural/agrarian landscapes, by solidifying landowning rural elites, and inducing them with certain pride and confidence that comes with access to fixed assets. However, the Jats are now an erstwhile dominant caste, and the community is struggling to keep up with the glory of the past. The rapid division of land due to rules of inheritance is making Jats insecure about their agrarian base. Even their most profitable cash crop, sugarcane, has not been providing monetary returns. The farmers have not received money from the mills, and the debts amount to Rs. 600 crores (Sood, 2018). Dependency on farm income, the fear of losing land/identity and shrinking job opportunities in both the public and private sector brought young Jat men, hardly interested in agriculture, together with the older generation to join the recent wave of farmer protests. Others, who have no agrarian land in the village, provide technical services, repair farming equipment, and install tube wells. Many of them have moved to the towns and cities in search of better financial opportunities, preparing for competitive exams and government jobs, while some are struggling and doing “timepass” (Jeffrey, 2010a, 2010b). There is not enough work about the Jat women who have not only experienced a fundamental shift in their relationship and engagement with agrarian land but have also started entering public spaces for non-farm paid work.

Muslims: Muslims are a heterogeneous urban group, divided by class, caste, dialect, and geography (Pai & Kumar, 2018, p. 187). In the early 20th century Muslims held at least one-fifth of the total land in the United Province. Cities such as Aligarh, Bulandshehr, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, and Agra, which were commercial cities and thus centers of power, were home to Muslim landlords (Robinson, 1975 in Pai and Kumar, 2018). These cities were home to factories and small-scale industries for locks, glass, bangles, and Muslims played prominent roles in these establishments, either as owners or workers. They were also involved in the production of clothing, hide, and perfume (Wright, 1997 in Pai and Kumar, 2018). While Muslims were very knowledgeable in the science of perfume and developed the art of ‘ittar’, and had a monopoly over hide manufacturing, the Hindu community did not get into it due to the rules of purity and pollution. During the 1947 partition, rich Muslims migrated to Pakistan leaving behind poor Muslims who were performing menial work as artisans or landless laborer (Brass, 1974 in Pai and Kumar, 2018). Those Muslims who remained in India became economically marginalized (Shariff, 1995 in Pai and Kumar,

2018). Partition not only affected the Muslims economically and socially but politically also as many candidates could not contest for elections (Misra, 1998 in Pai and Kumar, 2018).

It is noteworthy that not all Muslims in the rural hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh are agriculturalists. Studies in the region have highlighted that Muslims have been sustaining and surviving by performing non-farm work as laborer and artisans. The tradition of Muslims primarily doing non-farm work continues even today where Muslims are artisans who turn to agriculture only during the busy harvesting season. There has been a rise in Madarsa in the region, which has been linked with upward mobility among Muslims. The funding of these institutions is through donations, and subscriptions, so the rise of these institutions can be understood within the context of the better financial status of Muslim households, as they started making money by shifting to non-farm work (Jeffrey, et al. 2004). Muslim women have also benefitted from the rise of madarsa in the region, who get to pursue their gendered aspirations vis-à-vis community norms of piety and purity. Madarsa has supported, encouraged, and strengthened women access to education, and improvised their lives (Borker, 2018; Jeffrey et.al. 2004).

The Muslims who had medium land holdings, as compared to the Jat landowners, have now diversified in many businesses. Many of the steel mills in the region are managed by elite Muslim families of the region. This group who is diversified in its earnings, with a holding in agrarian land also, are the people who provided community assistance during the riots of 2013, and many of them have been involved with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in the varied capacities of ownership, management, and the actual running of NGOs. Those who don't have land have been providing agricultural labor, as well as engaging in petty trade (in livestock, cloth, household products) and casual labor, locally and in urban centers like Delhi. Many Muslim men have migrated to cities like Hyderabad and Chennai, and sell clothes, dupattas(scarves), dress materials, fabric, bedcovers, pillow covers, curtains, and so on. These men are occasional visitors in their hometown, coming back only for replenishing stock or during the festivals, however, they come at least twice a year. The Muslim women, with no males present in the household, are involved in a myriad of petty but important economic activities important for sustenance. They stitch uniforms, make laces, and embroider clothes for manufacturers from Delhi. They embroider clothes for globally renowned brands, for petty wages. Many of the Muslim women work on the land owned by Jats as daily wage laborer, getting per day, 150 rupees. They stop coming to the farm when

they think they have made enough money as economic mobility curtails their physical mobility. Several young men were working in offices (as security guards), hotels, restaurants, and factories in and around Delhi, and a few have used this access and mobility to further their social networks.

Demographic profile and visible gender disparities

Agriculturally, Muzaffarnagar is one of India's most prosperous districts, however, it is also one of the 100 districts with the poorest infant mortality rates, with dangerous implications for the nascent girl children (Borooah & Dubey, 2007). The district ranks 42nd in terms of poorest sex ratio, with 889 females per 1000 males, which is alarmingly low in comparison to the state average of 912 females per 1000 males. According to the 2011 census report, there are 863 children for every 1000 people. In the urban area, there are 174,687 children between ages 0 to 6, with 93,619 boys and 81,068 girls. 14.90 per cent of the district's urban population is made up of children. District's 28.75 per cent population is urban, and 71.25 per cent population is rural. In the district, 57.51 per cent population is Hindu, out of which 17 per cent are Jats. Muslims are a significant 41.30 per cent of the population. The district's overall literacy rate is reported at 69.12 per cent. In comparison to women, who have a literacy rate of 58.69 per cent, men have a considerably higher rate of 78.44 per cent. However, Muzaffarnagar has greater male and female literacy rates than the state average. The state of Uttar Pradesh has a male literacy rate of 77.28 per cent and a female literacy rate of 57.18 per cent (Census of India, 2011).

Numerous investigations conducted by the government and non-governmental organizations, including one by the United Nations Population Fund, have shown that female feticide is a common practice in Uttar Pradesh, and that the situation is even worse in the western regions. The studies are evidenced by the increase in ultrasound and in-vitro fertilization facilities as well as the decreasing child sex ratio (number of girls against 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group). In Uttar Pradesh, the number of facilities for conducting sex determination tests have grown from 400 in 2001 to over 5,000 in 2013, while the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) has decreased, going from 916 in 2001 to 863 in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). This indicates that just 863 girls live in Uttar Pradesh. In fact the parts where the 2013 riots happened coincides with the parts referred to as the "killing fields for the unborn girl child" (Tripathi, 2013). For instance, Muzaffarnagar's CSR is 863, which equates to 82 less girls than the average ratio. Like this, there are 91 girls "lost" in Meerut, 104 in Baghpat, 62 in Bijnor, and 58 in Saharanpur, among

other nearby districts (Tripathi, 2013). Similarly, in the neighboring states of Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, the phenomenon of missing girls is pervasive.

Scholarly work on the issue of poor sex ratio highlights major reasons for son preference and daughter aversion. Some of them are economic reasons where there is a desire to balance mouths in relation to resources and reduce threats around diminishing agrarian land by reducing claimants. These factors translate in daughter aversion and son preference. Fewer daughters also mean fewer dowries, but it also means fewer children, and fewer claimants to land (Kaur, 2008). It is also argued that daughter aversion happens because of a combination of reasons related to economic constraints, aspirations for upward mobility and availability of technologies to produce desirable and patriarchal outcomes. Thus, male unemployment coupled with agrarian distress reinforces economic insecurity and in response to this, family strategizes that investments should be directed towards sons, rather than daughters, and this is how daughter aversion works. Thus, daughter aversion emerges as a strategy for pursuing family aspirations, upward mobility, and family-building strategies, in times of agrarian distress (John, Kaur, Palriwala, and Raju, 2009).

There are other issues related to the low child sex ratio. For instance, although daughters are unwanted, daughters-in-law are essential, which is why there is a rise in cross-regional brides in this belt (Kaur, 2004, 2012). Moreover, empirical work in the region also reveals that while the situation of women is not good, things are not going well for men either. Historical data reveals that son preference is not as “all-encompassing” and “undiluted” as we are led to believe (Kaur, 2008). Agrarian communities, whose major threat is land fragmentation, overcome their vulnerabilities by maintaining optimum family size. In the northern countryside, optimum family is ensured not only by female infanticide but also by non-marriages of some sons. Non-marriage of some sons in a family helps limiting the family size and reducing the number of legitimate claimants to the agrarian land. In these cases, where some brothers strategically remain unmarried, fraternal polyandry (where brothers share wife) becomes a community-sanctioned practice. In other cases, bachelor brothers who remain unmarried, to ensure optimum family size, enter sexual liaison with lower caste women, and can never have a family of their own (Kaur, 2008). These issues evidence the patriarchal strategies undertaken by agrarian communities, which reflect the gender relations operational in the region.

Poor sex-ratio poses challenges to social institutions such as family and kinship and presents global political challenges. Ravinder Kaur has argued that China and India, two most populous countries in the world, are skewing their population in favor of males. This socio-demographic phenomenon of son preference is happening at an alarming rate and will have serious consequences (Kaur, 2015). It has been predicted by demographers Valerie Hudson and Andrea den Boer that disproportionate male to female ratio will lead to excess young males without stable social bounds such as family and marriage. These “low status, young adult males” will be involved in most violent crimes. Because of these “bare branches”, i.e., young males without families, China will engage in military adventurism, and India will see a rise in communal violence, violence against women, authoritarian government. (Hudson and Boer, 2004; Kaur, 2015).

History of Conflicts in the region

Although, it has been claimed that Jats and Muslims shared a positive and cordial relationship before the riots of 2013, the history of the region reveals many big and small incidents that bring out the anxieties of both the communities. Moreover, since the riots of 2013, many events have occurred at the national level, with significant implications for the region, and the district. Muzaffarnagar is a recurring name in the national consciousness. Even if people don't know the district, and have never been there, they have heard about it in the news as being a nasty region, characterized particularly by conflicts. Over the past decade, the district has seen crucial events such as the riots of 2013, protests regarding the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), protests regarding the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in 2019, and the farmers' protest in 2020 (Kumar, 2021).

Forcible Sterilization program, or Nasbandi Goli Kand, 1976: In the 1970s, in order to control population increase, people were encouraged to have tubectomy and vasectomy surgeries. This time period is known to North Indians as "nasbandi ka vaqt," which reflects how common this activity was in those days. Sterilization clinics started popping up throughout North India, and vasectomies were happening at an alarming rate: 331 vasectomies were performed daily on average in Uttar Pradesh alone in June 1975, 1,578 daily in July 1975, and 5,644 daily in August 1975 (Ali, 2015). During this time, Muzaffarnagar became the focal point of a violent incident. District officials in Uttar Pradesh ordered the police to pick up peasants and force them for sterilization, to reach the goals, set by Sanjay Gandhi, an important Minister from the Congress party. On the afternoon of October 18, 1976, several

men participated in a nonviolent demonstration against compulsory sterilization program. They were expressing their dissent over the fact that young, unmarried people without children, were sterilized alongside older people and people with children. The protesting crowd flung stones at a family planning clinic. Police shot 25 Muslim peasants and killed 3 more people inside a mosque. To hide the deaths, they tossed the dead bodies into a nearby river. Shaheed Chowk is the name of the street where the demonstrators were slain, and the names of those 25 dead people are still etched on the walls, as a memoir of those days (Ali, 2015). This event is a recurring memory in the consciousness of the people of Muzaffarnagar.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019: Protests for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act were organized in many parts of the country, including Muzaffarnagar. On this occasion, a massive gathering of protestors started advancing from Meenakshi chowk, towards Mahaveer Chowk, a kilometer away. Meenakshi Chowk is situated at the boundary of Khalapar, a Muslim dominated region within the city, while Mahaveer Chowk marks the edge of Jat Colony, a Jat-majority neighborhood. During these protests, some people were killed, many were jailed, and several others were fined because they participated in the protest (Dhara, 2019).

Farmer Protest, 2020: In September 2020, the parliament of India started discussing three farm bills: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Kumar, 2021). The farmers perceived these acts as "anti-farmer laws" as it would leave farmers to the mercy of big corporates. Soon after these acts were introduced, unions started organizing protests, mostly in Punjab, that soon spread to Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. Then these protestors marched toward Delhi and stayed at the borders of Delhi for almost a year, till the act was repealed by the government. The impact of this movement was significant in western Uttar Pradesh, as a region that was divided across communal lines, came together to form a larger alliance in the name of agrarianism. A riot torn district, and communally divided region saw Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim kisans, men and women, coming together to form a large alliance between farmers and laborers (Kumar, 2021). These events in the region have shaped the nature of the field, as well as the nature of fieldwork¹⁰. While the citizenship amendment

¹⁰ These issues will be discussed in greater detail, in the second chapter on methodology.

protest happened when I was doing my fieldwork, the farmer protests happened by the time my fieldwork was over. These events not only highlight the prevalent and visible conflict in the region, but it also highlights the 'community'-oriented (agrarian and religious) nature of these conflicts.

Thematic literature review

The following section discusses thematic literature along the lines of agrarian transformation, urbanization, the shift from farm to non-farm work, increased migration from rural to urban areas, increase in education and employment, rise of consciousness among marginalised groups, and resultant conflict.

Agrarian Transformation, agrarian distress

Agrarian transformation is a large-scale, multifarious process that agriculture-dependent societies go through as they move towards more industrialized and market-oriented modes of production. However, as a structural process, it entails a restructuring of complex interaction between ecologies, economies, and societies in different social, political and economic contexts. This structural process has happened all over the world; however, the timing and trajectory of this transformation alters from locale to locale. Europe went through agrarian transformation in the 18th century but regions like sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced agrarian transformation in the late 19th and 20th centuries (Mohanty, 2018).

Agrarian transformation includes agricultural intensification and territorial expansion, integration of production into a market-based economy, acceleration of urbanization and industrialization, increased migrations of people within and across national borders, new territorial understandings, and a re-organization of the society–nature relationship (Portilla, 2017). These broad and distinct elements highlight that agrarian transformation is a long, wide-ranging process, following a distinct trajectory in different parts of the world.

The trajectory of agrarian transformation in rural-agrarian north India is distinct and ongoing, with a long history. In the late 1960s, the western part of Uttar Pradesh, along with Punjab and Haryana, was incorporated into the grand scheme of green revolution, which aimed to address the local, national, and global food crises by employing technological innovations in the realm of agriculture. This was done by using tractors, high-yielding variety seeds,

establishing new lines of irrigation, and the use of chemicals to destroy insects and pests that were pervasive in the agrarian fields. The main objective was to gain food security through scientific methods. However, the revolution lasted for only a decade or two, and by the 1980s, many unanticipated challenges emerged, which highlighted the dark side of the green revolution, and marked the beginning of agrarian distress.

For instance, the technological innovations that were used on the agrarian farmlands, changed the very nature of farming, for the worse. The increasing use of insecticides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers spoiled the fertility of the soil in the long run. Moreover, as pests grew immune to pesticides, farmers began fueling more pesticides and insecticides. This harmed the crops and became a cause of environment and soil pollution, with productivity and ecosystem also affected. This contaminated the air, the soil and the water table, and exposed animals to the dangerous chemicals that were being used on the field (Behal, 2020).

In his ethnography in Khanpur town in the Meerut district of western Uttar Pradesh, Satendra Kumar gives an important example of missing vultures in the skies, relating it with impending ecological crises. Vultures, omnivorous creatures, have stopped consuming the dead animals in the region because these animals consume plants and leaves drenched in dangerous insecticides and pesticides (Kumar, 2018). Not just animals, but humans are also paying the price of the green revolution with increasing vulnerability to diseases like cancer, renal failure, and birth defects (Behal, 2020). Apart from highlighting agrarian distress, these aspects also illustrate the background in which the non-farm economy emerged.

Urban non-farm employment

The rising urban non-farm employment is one of the most telling aspects of agrarian transformation, and the havoc it has created on rural-agrarian society and its people. Non-farm work has expanded in the Indian agrarian context since the 1960s, primarily as a result of capitalist agricultural growth. The green revolution led to an increase in diverse rural industries such as agricultural processing, transport, and storage enterprise, and also stimulated consumer income (Jeffrey, 2001). NSS data reveals that more than 50 per cent of rural households are involved in non-farm work (Gupta, 2005). Growth of non-farm work has also been noted by other studies in western Uttar Pradesh, from Jaunpur and Muzaffarnagar by Jens Lerche (1995, 1999), from Moradabad by Jean Dreze and Naresh Sharma (1998), from Meerut by Rita Sharma and Thomas Poleman (1994). These empirical studies have found that the rural agrarian economies are transforming, with increasing

reliance and expanding income-earning opportunities in the non-farm sectors. This data on non-farm employment not only highlights the reducing scope of agrarian dependency but also an essential shift in aspirations. The steady march of employable individuals in the villages in search of non-farm economic goals has been made possible by agricultural stagnation.

Agrarian Urban processes, and the rural-urban continuum

The rural-urban continuum is as old as Sociology as a discipline and was contextualized within the industrial revolution. Subsequently, Sociology as a discipline has never moved away from understanding issues related to rurality and urbanism, agrarian transformations, and urban restructuring. Scholars such as Dipankar Gupta, Surinder Jodhka and Satendra Kumar, who have been studying the nature, texture, and fabric of rural-agrarian India, argue that the Indian village is not what it used to be. But, despite the significant shifts, the villages have not become cities, and the rural has not become urban, thus going against western predictions and trajectories. These complexities are shaped by multiple factors, such as, diminishing returns of agriculture, land dispossession, looming threat of land fragmentation, increasing exodus from rural to the urban, rise of non-farm activities, etc. for instance, there aren't many employment opportunities available for a meaningful existence because of the village's feudal landholding structure. In this context, urban processes have helped as villages have become more electrified, connected, and enabled access to better opportunities. But does it mean that we can accredit these social transformations happening in the rural-agrarian landscapes, to urbanization?

Dipankar Gupta argues that Indian village is not transforming because of external forces such as that of urbanization; rather the impetus for change is inherent in the trajectory of rural-agrarian economies. The “sheer inertia” and “impasse” of the agrarian economy has not allowed any “optimism”, and has only induced “disenchantment” (Gupta, 2005, 2010). This situation has provoked the Indian villages to embrace urban forces. And therefore “the town is not coming to the country as much as the country is reaching out to the town, leaving behind a host of untidy rural debris” (Gupta, 2005). According to Surinder Jodhka, there is an active relationship between the rural and the urban, due to integration of market spaces, flows of consumer goods and services, and movement of labor. Moreover, there are increasing aspirations for an urban way of life among people of the hinterlands; yet this does not mean that the rural ceases to exist (Jodhka, 2014a, 2014b). Similarly, Satendra Kumar

argues that the emerging rural-urban networks, have reconstituted the village and led to the emergence of new rurality. While the new rurality has changed the village and its culture, it has also provided the basis for the village to sustain and persist in the neo-liberal economy, democratic politics, and a globalizing world (Kumar, 2016a).

Thus, rural, and urban are dynamic spaces, which are coming in increasing contact with each other, through mediums of technology, mobility, aspirations, consumption and so on. And while these processes are changing the innate texture of rural-agrarian landscapes, the rural is still present, albeit in a different form. However, there is also no denying that the rural and urban are actively reaching out to each other, and the boundaries between the two distinct spaces have become fuzzy, blurred and permeable.

Urbanization in agrarian landscapes

Agrarian questions have led to several processes that have dynamized rural-agrarian landscapes. One such process is the peculiar nature of rural-urban engagement, and uneven and diverse forms of urbanization processes that are dispersed through rural-agrarian hinterlands (Mishra & Harriss-White, 2015). A variety of difficulties relating urban and rural surroundings are brought about by the reconfiguration of rural-agrarian regions. There has been scholarly attention on these complexities, especially in areas of work, livelihood, mobility, technology, exclusion, and access. This has led scholars to understand urban and rural, town and country, village, and city as extreme binary concepts and “politicized data containers” with “bureaucratic” and “academic” histories (Harris-White, 2021). Barbara Harris-White suggests that these categories are useful thinking devices, but they must be empirically tested before being perceived as reliable guide to ground realities.

There is no evidence that agriculture-to-industry transition or rural-to-urban transition has occurred in India, as evidenced by existing studies and macro trends (Shah and Harris-White 2011), thus suggesting that rural-agrarian economies have developed dynamic and complex relationships with urban economies. The agricultural sector in India is experiencing significant changes (in terms of its contribution to GDP and economic growth), despite continuous migration from rural to urban areas. Both agrarian transformation and urbanization are taking place simultaneously, allowing rural and urban to interact in complex ways. Because these spaces are not clearly segregated, one may argue that the new reality is essentially urban. As an example, the concept of “extended urbanization”, and “urbanization

beyond the city limits”, illustrates the urbanization process that is transcending the city limits, and has become a part of rural-agrarian landscapes. For instance, by extending and dispersing “central functions” of the city to peri-urban zones, small and medium-sized towns, and transportation corridors, urbanization process has been regionalized and reterritorialized (Ghosh and Meer, 2021).

Shubhra Gururani (2019) argues that the urbanization of agrarian land was one of the key strategies identified in the 1991 economic policy to attract investment and capital from abroad. As per this strategy, agrarian land was “de-agrarianized” and “land assetized” to accommodate huge corporate offices, special economic zones (SEZ), infrastructural corridors, and housing for a growing urban population. In Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, the lure and logic of global capital transformed the regional peripheries and entangled agrarian peripheries with global capitalism (Gururani, 2019). Agrarian urbanism is what led to the creation of places like Noida, Gurgaon, the hi-tech city in Hyderabad, and so on. Noida is the acronym for New Okhla Industrial Development Authority and was formed in 1976 as a part of the urbanization thrust around the national capital. This region between Uttar Pradesh and Delhi transformed under urban impetus. Similarly, Gurugram (originally Gurgaon) has got its name from ‘gur ka gaon’, village of sugar, highlighting a rural-agrarian past, which has transformed into one of the fastest growing cyber hub of north India. Before urbanization, these spaces were traditionally associated with the agro-pastoral sector and the rural economy. Because of targeted urbanization processes, and state support, these regions evolved into the first urban peripheries that embraced the new urbanization potential of the country.

The city of Muzaffarnagar, however, is not Gurugram (Gurgaon), Noida, or Hyderabad. In comparison with these metropolitan cities, where global consumption is directly impacted, Muzaffarnagar is an entirely different landscape. Muzaffarnagar is a small rural-agrarian district in the hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh, and its trajectory for urbanization is very different from the previously discussed cities. Muzaffarnagar is a resource rich region, that has seen significant changes, such as the development of industrial corridors to facilitate extraction of the resources, and connectivity to the global markets. For instance, the National Capital Region Planning Board Act of 1985, was implemented to expand New Delhi's territory from 1,484 square kilometers to 33,578 square kilometers, to create the National Capital Region (NCR) (Gururani, 2019). The NCR has now expanded to 55,083 sq. km, incorporating large

areas of agrarian and pastoral hinterland in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to make room for the upcoming urban transformation. As a result of this process, a strange small town in the north Indian rural hinterlands, such as Muzaffarnagar, became connected to the city. This process, however, doesn't offer a nuanced explanation for the complexity of urban-rural processes, therefore, a scholarly enquiry that considers the rural perspective is crucial here.

Rising aspirations for middle-class 'ness in the rural-agrarian settings

The middle class refers to "people falling on the middle of an imaginary social spectrum along which income, property, wealth and occupational opportunities are distributed" (Aslany, 2020). As per the latest figures, almost one-third of India's middle class is rural (Aslany, 2020). Yet studies on the middle class are confined to the urban context and locales. There is an implied understanding that urban arenas host processes of class formation, and rural-agrarian societies are rarely analyzed in middle-class terms. There are theoretical reasons to explain this intellectual gap that doesn't recognize the presence of the middle class in rural agrarian societies. One reason is the Eurocentric conception of class that essentially understands class as proliferating and developing only in industrialized, urbanized contexts. In classical Marxist understanding, class is related to means and modes of production, and this understanding effectively eliminates any enquiry around the existence of the middle class in rural agrarian societies which are seemingly away from industrial, urban and global processes, and are mired in feudal, agrarian and landed processes (Aslany, 2020).

Even when we try to think of class in Weberian terms, or as per Bourdieu, and recognize culture as a critical aspect of class, again these enquires systematically erase the presence of the middle class in rural-agrarian contexts. This dimension of 'middle-class-ness' which involves a culture of consumption, and is expressed kinds of "housing, social networks, leisure pursuits, style, and aspirations", is generally considered alien to the rural-agrarian society, culture, and ethos (Aslany, 2020). The hope of upward mobility in the urban context focuses on consumption of services, such as health and education, to achieve competencies and forms of security. But this kind of insight and analysis is missing in the context of rural agrarian landscapes. It seems that there is no symbiotic presence of the middle class in rural-agrarian contexts. Despite rising rural inequality (and consequently rising rural income and wealth), rural consumption patterns mimicking urban ones, and the expansion of the non-farm economy into agrarian regions, there is hardly any discussion on the rural middle class in India (Aslany, 2020).

This gap has led scholars to locate the middle class in the rural agrarian landscapes. The presence of rural middle class in India was first highlighted by Pavan Varma, who argued that a small segment of rural middle-class emerged post-independence, because of state rural development policy. Following independence, as part of the cultural and economic transformation, there was a widespread trend among farmers toward commercialization and consumerism. Disposable products that were previously considered unnecessary in rural households, such televisions, refrigerators, and motorcycles, became increasingly popular as a result. The rural-agrarian people started emulating urban lifestyles and middle-class status by engaging in vastly different consumption practices. By removing their families from the fields, funding their children's private education, and looking for urban jobs, this group of agriculturalists aspired for upward mobility and urban lifestyle. Consequently, an aspirational middle class of consumers started to emerge, by the early 1980s (Varma, 1998).

Craig Jeffrey has argued that middle class emerged in rural-agrarian communities due to green revolution. Farmers who benefitted from this technology, utilized their agricultural dominance to diversify out of agriculture and into small business and white-collar government work, increasing their agricultural returns and establishing “a middle class of sorts”(Jeffrey, 2010c, p. 38). Maryam Aslany’s research on India’s rural middle class, has demonstrated that middle class is not confined to urban arenas but have spilled out into agrarian settlements. Middle class in rural areas takes the form of auxiliary, professional, skilled labor and managerial classes. They come from landed and educated households, with pluri-active families with complicated and diversified occupational structures, thus managing to raise household income, and this is this middle class in rural-agrarian India (Aslany, 2020).

Rising conflicts and contestations

Agrarian distress has provoked the younger generation of rural-agrarian communities to re-imagine their futures in vastly different ways, as compared to the previous generations. They are imagining their futures around non-farm work, and they are pursuing these dreams and aspirations by seeking education, employment, migration, and so on. These human pursuits have transformed the existing social dynamics, as there is a rise of new classes and the demise of the old hierarchies and erstwhile dominant groups. This situation has destabilized the status quo, which has further translated into increasing insecurities, mistrust, and intra and inter community-conflict.

Several studies have established a positive correlation between agrarian distress and an increase in violent conflicts (Griffin, 1990; Shiva, 1993). Agrarian transformation and distress have exacerbated economic inequalities and led to an increase in violent conflicts. It has been argued that the Green Revolution “increased the power of landowners, especially the larger ones, and this, in turn, has been associated with a more serious polarization of classes and intensification of conflict” (Griffin, 1990). There is enough data highlighting correlation between declining agricultural productivity and increasing district-level conflict and deaths from conflict events. Ajaz Ashraf highlighted that rural distress in the region finds its expression in social oppression and communal violence by Jat men against Muslims, lower castes, and women. Ashraf based his arguments on shrinking landholdings and sites of social conflict, where violence against Dalit and Muslim communities increased as the size of landholdings and agricultural yields declined (Ashraf, 2015).

It is also argued that with the rise of education among oppressed sections of society, and the shift from farm to non-farm work, Dalits and Muslims have started challenging the traditional caste-class hierarchy, which was earlier an essential aspect of rural-agrarian life (Singh, 1998). In the earlier system, landless Muslims were bound to the land-owning Jats within the village. Muslims would typically be carpenters, ironsmiths, and casual farm labor working on the Jat fields. However, due to dwindling agricultural fortunes, Muslims found employment outside of this system and started pursuing their own social and economic aspirations of upward mobility. The pursuit of upward mobility and the fulfilment of socio-economic aspirations weakened the relationship between the land-owning Jat and the Muslims; thus, challenging the age-old practice of interdependency and reliance between the communities, which often normalized hierarchy and inequality.

The rising aspirations among Dalits and Muslims, coupled with agrarian distress, has generated cultural tensions, and economic anxieties in the hearts and minds of dominant castes such as Jats as they are losing traditional authority and economic status. These changes have not only altered the working relationship between different communities but have also torn the social fabric of the region because of recurring conflicts among face-to-face communities. Jagpal Singh argues that the Muzaffarnagar riot was a culmination of social, economic and political processes in western Uttar Pradesh, which arose in the mid-1980s, during agrarian transformation (Singh, 2016). As the windfalls of the green revolution

passed, and the agrarian crisis intensified in the 2000s, social relations among different communities became more fraught and fractured. The contestations were particularly visible among Jats, Muslims and Dalits. Sudha Pai and Jagpal Singh who have looked at the Jatav community in western Uttar Pradesh, found that the nature of Dalit identity is changing. With time, this identity has become more assertive (Pai, 2000; Singh, 1998; Pai and Singh, 1997). Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar argue that in the present scenario, it is social jealousy, cultural aspirations and economic anxieties, which are the driving force behind ‘everyday communalism’ (Pai & Kumar, 2018).

Due to agrarian distress, western Uttar Pradesh, a place known for its agrarian lifestyle and strong peasant identity, has witnessed a rising aspiration of Sarkari naukari/ government jobs. This has heightened the resentment and conflict among competing groups. Rama Srinivasan who has done her fieldwork in Haryana, a landscape very similar to that of western Uttar Pradesh, argues that the aspiration for Sarkari Naukri is the most unsustainable aspiration, which has made men desperate and angry. Jat men, who feel entitled to both, local domination, and government jobs, are forced to compete with women as well as men from other castes, a predicament that provokes anxiety, dissatisfaction and violence (Srinivasan, 2020, p. 103). This has led to assertion and conflict between different kinds of masculinities. There are frequent news reports of Dalit youth being battered by the young male members of the dominant caste for keeping a moustache, riding a horse, or for opening a gym, owning a mobile phone or a fancy motorbike (APN, 2022; BBC, 2018; Editorial, 2021; Kateshiya, 2018; PTI, 2019; TNS, 2021). Naturally, these situations have led to conflicts that seem to have a basis in caste and religious identities, but economic resentment and agrarian distress play a major role.

Locating the ‘missing’ women in the changing trajectories of rural-agrarian communities and emerging structural transformation

In the previous sections, we have seen that rural-agrarian communities are transforming in the face of large-scale structural transformation. In these discussions, gender and community are vitally related to each other. Yet, women continue to be marginal or missing in scholarly work on rural-agrarian communities that are undergoing diverse and contradictory forms of social and structural transformations. It is as if gender remains unaffected by these processes of social and structural transformation.

Literature on gender and community has highlighted the reproductive functions women perform for their community or the violence they face as members of 'other' community. Communal violence (rape of Muslim women in Muzaffarnagar riots 2013, Gujarat riots 2002), caste-based violence (Dalit women frequently raped by landlords, who are mostly upper caste men), ethnic violence (Hutu and Tutsi conflict in Rwanda), are specialized forms of violence which women experience because they are members of certain communities, and represent 'otherness', which often translates into violence. In wars and conflicts, foreign forces attack each other's reproductive potential. Even the formation of nation, "an imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), is accompanied by gender-based violence (partition of India, formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh). On one hand, nations have been perceived "as 'natural' extension of the family and kinship relations" (Shils, 1957; Geertz, 1963; Van der Berghe, 1979) and the homeland is "constructed as a woman/mother" and a place where "wars are fought to protect women and children" (Enloe, 1998). Yet, most theorizations of nation-states and political theory tend to ignore women completely, as illustrated in many cases of the formation of independent nation-states, across the world, but more specifically in south Asia, with the partition of India, and formation of Pakistan in 1947, where women were not only ignored in the critical processes of state formation, but they were also physically violated in the entire ordeal of partition and formation of new nation-states (violence against Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women in the partition riots of 1947). This type of gender-based violence, which is very much embedded in the collective community's identity, persists because women are "signifiers of ethnic difference" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992), and symbolize a crucial difference between the 'self' and the 'other' (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). Gender-based shaping of community "involves binary constructions of 'our' women versus 'their' women", thus giving clear boundaries to the community. In some instances, this ideology also leads to perpetration of sexual violence against the women of enemies, since one is not attacking the woman, but her community.

It is worth noting that while all the communities suffered in this process of partition, women were specifically targeted because of the intertwined nature of gender and community identity. They were subjected to brutal sexual violence as these women were the carriers of the collective identity. Women's bodies represent the community's ability to reproduce. During partition, women were killed, raped, maimed, violated, burned, abducted, forcefully impregnated because they symbolized collective identity and community honour. They were forced to convert and marry. Young and unmarried women were urged to commit mass

suicide, by their families, when faced with sexual violence. Women who offered themselves for death, to protect the purity and sanctity of their community, were called martyrs (Butalia, 1994).

The abducted women: A very pertinent aspect of the gender and community debate is the case of the 'abducted women' who were earlier kidnapped by the "enemy other" and were subsequently "recovered" by the "parent state". The efforts put in by the state to recover the abducted women, reflects the importance of woman's body for the community, and by extension, for the nation-state. Ritu Menon highlighted how, both, India and Pakistan persistently sought to recover the abducted women. She went beyond the obvious explanation of "humanitarian rehabilitation" to uncover many layers of identities and meanings wrapped around a woman's body (Menon, 1998). Urvashi Butalia argued that the abducted woman was symbolizing the shame of the nation as the mother, and hence the honour of the nation had to be restored by her sons (Butalia, 1998). Essentially, the state and the sons collaborated to retrieve their daughters and sisters, thereby avenging the loss of territory, and in some ways restoring the idea of the nation.

The saga of rape, mutilation, abduction, and retrieval sheds light on the complex and layered relationship between community and gender. Feminist theory has scrutinized the consequences women endure because of being members of 'other' communities. In the seventies, when feminist historiography started, the events of partition, and the subsequent violence against women, became the pivot of feminist arguments and interventions. At the beginning of this kind of ethnographic research, women were often portrayed in a singular manner, as victims of violence. This is evidenced in the works of scholars like Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, and Veena Das whose research is on the women of the 1947 Partition (Menon and Bhasin, 2000; Butalia 1998; Das, 2007; Menon, 2004).

Cultural reproduction of community: The other theme around gender and community is with regards to the cultural production of community, through the process of biological reproduction and socialization. As per this culturalized discourse, women's bodies and their sexualities emerge as territorial embodiment, markers of difference and reproducers of collective communities. As major socialization agents, they are repositories of knowledge about community, which are necessary to be passed to the next generation through socialization process. These aspects highlight the centrality of women to cultural construction

of social identities and collectivities, as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations (Yuval-Davis, 2003). As “biological producers” of children/people, women are “bearers of the collective” (Yuval-Davis, 2003). The central importance of women's reproductive roles in ethnic and national discourses becomes apparent when we consider that membership in a community is provided by birth and marriage. In cases where nationalist and racist ideologies are very closely interwoven, birth and marriage might be the only way to join the collective. The only way 'outsiders' might join the collective is by intermarriage, which is why those who are concerned with the 'purity' of the community are also preoccupied with the inter-community, inter-faith relationships and resist inter-community marriages (Yuval-Davis, 2003).

Studies have shown that women's claim to equal rights have been negotiated through aspects like tradition, culture, religion, community, and family. Gender relations have been framed by notions of honour and stigma. Women in many societies are killed by their relatives because of adultery, domestic conflicts, and other infringements of social norms which are perceived as bringing dishonour and shame to their community (Chhachhi, 1991; Chowdhry, 2002). This highlights the ambivalent position of women within the collective community. They often symbolize “unity”, “collectivity”, “honour”, and the “raison d'être” of community-oriented projects, such as going to war. Yet, they remain excluded from the collective projects, and remain an object, around which communities organize.

As it is evident, majority of these studies focus either on the violent nature of gender and community engagement, or the reproductive and cultural centrality of women in collective community projects. In both these cases, women continue to remain passive and victims in the processes of the community. There is a glaring omission in how community and gender interact (other than violence and private reproduction) and how, within the established patriarchal community norms, women negotiate and bargain, thus playing a vital role in the public sphere. Moreover, these studies also overlook the agential capacities and gendered negotiations that women employ in their day-to-day lives to deal with structures of patriarchy, such as that of community, family, etc. Their agency increases in the form of contestation, negotiation, and accommodation, as they become part of the public sphere, and enter the domain of the labor force. This changes how women deal with the community and demand new ways of seeing.

Research problem

In this study, I examine gender in relation to community, a debate that has resurged in contemporary times, across the globe, but more so in South Asia and specifically in India. Community and gender shape each other in myriad of ways, however, existing literature locates this dynamic relationship mostly through instances of violence and by linking women to community through reproduction. But is violence and reproduction the only form of engagement that women share with their community? My work sees a shift in how women negotiate and bargain with their community within the existing patriarchal and violent settings.

By going beyond these existing, visible, and violent forms of engagement between gender and community, I am looking at how we can reassess this relationship and engagement that women share with the collective entity of community, in the context of emerging social transformations. By looking at this dynamic engagement between gender and community, in the backdrop of social and structural transformations, I want to highlight the role of women as rational social actors, and not just passive recipients of a community ethos, or carriers of community identity.

This work is about the intersecting dynamics of gender, generation, and class among women of two communities, Jats and Muslims, living in rural-agrarian north India. The region under study, Muzaffarnagar, is confronted not only with withering agrarian relations, but also the entry of urban forces, the expansion of capitalist relations, and varied forms of neoliberal consumption. Many studies explore the tenuous relationship between intergenerational class aspirations and the resultant tensions. This is particularly true within the context of agrarian societies, which are coming face to face with capitalist, neoliberal and urban forces. Young men from agrarian societies have been the focus of these studies, as they are struggling in a rapidly changing agrarian society (Jeffrey, Jeffery, & Jeffery, 2004; Kumar, 2018). However, there is relatively less enquiry around the women who experience and live through these complex socio-economic circumstances. Women have been excluded from social inquiry, and their perspectives have been ignored. Women as active agents, who are closely involved with the making and unmaking of these large-scale structural transformations, is an area that hasn't been explored. As part of this study, I am interested in women from rural-agrarian contexts, who have worked on farms but have remained distant from the public sphere due

to a tragic mismatch between “high participation” and “low evaluation” (Chowdhry, 1993). However, due to large-scale social and economic transformations, these women have finally made an entry into the public sphere and public life.

“Community” is a recurring term in sociology, but rarely explicated. I am drawing from Bina Agarwal's (1994, p. 73) understanding of community which is based on a place of residence, such as a village community, or social grouping, such as a religion or caste community. Yet it is also important to highlight that people can be a part of multiple communities at once. Moreover, members of one community can eventually exist in several locations throughout the globe, because of migration, information and communication technologies and transnational flow of ideas. Thus, communities are not homogeneous; they are diverse in terms of power, resources, and interests (Smith 2005). The nature of community in the region of western Uttar Pradesh is determined by agrarian, rural, communal, casteist, and patriarchal factors, along with information and communication technology, migration, social media, etc.

Women are changing the organization of social reproduction and livelihoods. There is no doubt that any 'community' and its reproduction will always involve tensions between genders and generations. The former is widely recognized, the latter less so (Park and White, 2017). In the context of agricultural transformation, researchers and activists have paid less attention to generational differences and tensions in rural people's lives. This disregard is unexpected given that intergenerational conflicts and relationships have frequently been discussed in studies of agrarian change in the past and elsewhere, particularly in Africa and now in Southeast Asia (Sumberg et al., 2012). Generational differences become crucial when we want to locate and understand structural changes such as that of agrarian transformation.

There are significant studies on the aspirations of youth in urban spaces, however lesser in the context of rural youth as if the right to aspire is only an urban phenomenon. Even when the aspirations of rural youth are in focus, the focus is primarily on males, and women are easily missed out. Throughout this study, I explore how women's aspirational mobility has evolved in close connection with technological advances that have permeated the lives of ordinary rural people from agrarian backgrounds. The distressed agrarian economy, and the rapidly transforming urban forces, local agrarian culture which is diffused by electronic media, education, literacy, urbanization, and modernization, are all factors that impact gender relations. In this regard, I want to pay attention to gender, generation and class dynamics, to

comprehend how rural-agrarian communities reproduce in the face of emerging capitalist relations. By studying the intersections of gender, generation, and class in the context of long-term structural changes such as agrarian transformation, urbanization, and the rise of transportation and communication technologies, this thesis contributes to uncovering the most neglected domain of middle-class aspirations of young women from agrarian backgrounds.

Research questions

- What are the new forms of engagement between gender and community?
- What is the gendered character of social structural transformation? How has the shift from farm to non-farm economy led to a change in gender relations?
- How to understand women's agency in the face of large-scale processes of structural transformation?
- How has the demand for education and employment, altered women's aspirations and mobilities?
- How are women dislodging and negotiating with masculine, patriarchal domination in the pursuit of these aspirations?

Objectives of the Study

- To provide a feminist analysis of multiple patriarchies as they operate in the lives of differently located Jat and Muslim women.
- To locate gender and community engagement in a rural-agrarian setup.
- To explore the factors that reorganize gender relations.
- To look at the processes of contestation, negotiation, accommodation that women take up in the face of social transformations, while dealing with collective community.
- To locate new techno-mediated sociality and its implications for gender and community.
- To locate the intersections between gender, generation, and class.

Theoretical Framework

To answer these larger questions, I have relied on three interconnected theoretical frameworks, within feminist theory, namely: New political economy, intersectionality, and agency. Feminist theory informs us that women are neither submissive to social transformation nor a passive and subservient category. However, mainstream academic discourses mostly highlight the violent aspects of this relationship or focus on the reproductive functions of women that help in the reproduction of the community. These discussions around gender and community emerged in the earlier understanding of feminist theory. Some of these conceptualizations have become static, with time, and have prevented a systematic enquiry into the new ways in which women are engaging with the overarching entity of community. The engagement that women have with the community through violence or reproductive processes invisibilizes the economic and productive roles that women play in society at large, and erases the contribution that women make to their collective communities. Moreover, such explanations do not consider the varied negotiations and agential capacities that women undertake while dealing with the community.

Feminist theory and New political economy

Feminist scholars have underlined the importance of deconstructing the duality between culture and political economy. Feminist scholarship is bringing to light the historical construction, and therefore impermanence of the dualism between the public and private spheres of life. This awareness allows us to overcome the binary separations between the cultural and the political-economic (Clark, 1993). This framework is called as new political economy, wherein we do not segregate culture and economy.

There is a general notion that gender and ethnicity underscore identity and difference, which may or may not translate into an individual's material interests. Moreover, gender and ethnicity as social constructions are seen in the "symbolic" or "cultural" realms, and class is understood in material terms. There is a perpetual separation between cultural and economy. Thus, gender and ethnicity are seen in terms of honour, deference, worth, value, and status, but the social relations around these axes are not seen as translating into power relations, economic inequality, hierarchy, and stratification. In this background, Floya Anthias argues that "material inequality is informed by claims and struggles over resources of different types, undertaken in terms of gender, ethnicity and class". This theoretical framework, which is

framed as per new political economy, helps in “determining the allocation of socially valued resources and social places/locations” (Anthias, 2001).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged in response to the “conceptual limitations of... single issue analyses” (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality has been used to understand how different axes of experience and identity interact to produce different effects that cannot be explained by employing single category analysis. It is an analytical approach which recognizes that an individual’s experiences are simultaneously shaped by multiple social locations that they occupy, such as caste, class, race, religion, gender, generation, rural or urban locations, etc. Intersectionality is a useful methodological device to understand and explain the experiences of “compound disadvantages” (Guittar and Guittar, 2015). The concept of intersectionality originated in black feminist thought and was first defined as “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Crenshaw, 1989).

An intersectional approach to looking at the experiences of rural agrarian women means recognizing that women from rural-agrarian societies have a multitude of overlapping identities. For instance, gender and gender relations in rural agrarian communities around the globe have been influenced by migration and labor markets that link rural and urban places. Moreover, as communities are transforming in the face of social transformation, how can we understand these social changes from the intersections of generation, gender, class, and so on? Drawing from qualitative data from the hinterlands of western Uttar Pradesh, this study applies intersectionality analysis to explore how gender, generation, class, community (caste/religion), and rural/ urban, intersections influence women’s position to engage in paid work but also creates gendered, generational, and communal (community-oriented) anxieties. This enables us to capture patterns and changes over time and specific social relations of difference, amidst overlapping categories of community (caste, religion), gender, class, generation, and region.

Agency

Agency can be understood as an actor’s ability to think for themselves and act, accordingly, make decisions in their self-interest, and participate in economic and public life (Kabeer,

1999). As defined by Amartya Sen (2000), an agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her values and own objectives.” Agency is an intrinsic aspect of empowerment because it entails employing choices that contend existing power relations (Kabeer, 1999). These diverse definitions of agency are embedded within feminist ideology which advocates the right to self-determination in an inherently unequal and patriarchal world. Agency improves women’s outcomes in multiple, intersecting domains, which is why it is considered an important manifestation of women’s empowerment.

My understanding of agency stems from the post-colonial feminist tradition that has developed in the global south. Post-colonial scholarship highlights the imperial gaze and the imbalance of power that is inherent in the representation of women from the global south. Scholars like Uma Narayan (2000), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) draw attention to savior tendency of western academics in their portrayal of homogenous and eternally oppressed category of “Third World Woman”. Since then, there have been varied intellectual engagements to view women from the global south as persons in their own right, continually navigating through their social worlds, with a diverse set of agential capacities (Mahmood, 2005). For instance, Iran is infamous for religious fundamentalism, yet post-colonial feminist scholars studying Iran have highlighted individual women’s agency in subverting or co-opting these fundamentalist movements to meet their own ends. Their agential capacities are expressed through “collaboration, acquiescence, co-optation and subversion” (Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001). Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti talks about classic patriarchy like India where women act in their self-interest by indulging in “patriarchal bargain”, as they “strategize within a set of constraints” (Kandiyoti, 1988, 275). Under the constraints of patriarchal oppression, women may adopt varied strategies, such as focusing on everyday household negotiation, or by manipulate the system, a strategy that has been called co-optation. Women may not always resist because they also have stake in the patriarchal system. Sometimes they acquiesce to the demands of the powerful while still negotiating for some personal gain. In her discussion of classic patriarchy like India, Kandiyoti refers to “thorough internalization” of patriarchy by women themselves (Kandiyoti, 1988). Other times they coerce other women (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996, 20). Likewise, Kumkum Sangari (1993) understand agency as “socially structured, and often sanctioned form of indirect agency” reflected through consent, complicity, and incitement.

Agency has also been interpreted as “the capacity to endure, suffer and persist” (Mahmood, 2005, 17). While white western feminist tradition understands agency as synonymous with resistance, post-colonial scholars understand this tendency as hyper-romanticized and reductive (Abu-Lughod, 1990). There is also an interpretation of agency which means “a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (Mahmood, 2005, 210). Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Gold, drawing on James Scott (1985), outline “everyday forms of resistance, expressed by rural north Indian women through songs (Raheja & Gold, 1994). Yet, Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery urge us to not overplay the seeming potential of women’s agency as they act “within largely unalterable structures” (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996, p. 16). Thus, agency can take many shapes across different domains and settings.

Overview of the chapters

In the second chapter, I will discuss the ‘how’ of my research, by elaborating on the overall research design adopted in the study. In the first section, I discuss the philosophical foundations of the study which is located within feminist epistemology. In this section I will discuss why I am doing feminist research, and why we need feminist research. In the second section, I will discuss the methods of data collection: fieldwork, interview, and Focus Group discussions. These methods were determined by the nature of the field. I have used Anslem Strauss’s technique of data analysis which is used to generate theory from raw data. This is followed by reflections on the fieldwork process. The chapter concludes by discussing issues of reflexivity, an important practice among social scientists with a feminist orientation. I will reflect on ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in the study such as issues of insider vs outsider which help reflect on the positionality of the researcher, the power relations among the researcher and the researched; I will also discuss the issues in researching violently divided societies, and about establishing rapport in times of mistrust.

In the third chapter, I will critically examine honour as a daily cultural code which is pivotal in organizing social and gender relations. Eurocentric literature on honour that has emerged from colonized geographies is reviewed in this chapter. Honour conjures visions of violence against ‘oppressed’ gendered bodies. However, a critical analysis reveals that this understanding of honour and gender follows from a culturalist and colonial gaze. Such a gaze denies the complexity of women’s interpretations, and negotiations they make as rational social actors by adhering to culturally prescribed norms of honour. Women strategize with

different formulations of honour, as per their positionality and bargaining power within the family, and community. This strategic negotiation of honour by women may lead to continuities in cultural practices or bring about social transformations. Drawing from fieldwork and interviews with Jat and Muslim women from the rural-agrarian hinterlands of Muzaffarnagar, I demonstrate how we can go beyond cultural explanations of honour and recognize women as rational social actors with agential capacities. Thus, I identify honour as a negotiated process and argue that women in the region are ‘doing’ honour to access opportunities and aspirations for upward mobility.

In the fourth chapter, I use the feminist theoretical framework of public and private to discuss varying and myriad issues of paid and unpaid work, recognized and unrecognized labor, issues of safety and threat in public and private spaces, etc. I argue that the public and private dichotomy is an important component of contemporary consciousness in the society of western Uttar Pradesh. The patriarchal ideology of public-private division provides the avenues and mechanisms of hegemony, subordination, and marginalization of women in the region. However, what has changed with time is that the social understanding or social agreements on what constitutes these spheres, how these spheres interact with each other, how this affects the stability of the distinct spheres, and the agency of people, particularly women have changed. Women alter the meanings attached to public-private binaries through negotiations and out of everyday needs related to survival, if not choices, and then access public space. They do this by claiming honourable behavior, and therefore a legitimate claim to a representation of the community in the public space. Thus, the public and private in the context of the Muzaffarnagar region should also be seen as a fluid arena which changes and shifts in different contexts and times, within the milieu defined by new forms of masculinity and patriarchy.

In the fifth chapter I look at how economic and social aspirations are interrelated. Economic aspirations that have been shaped by the agrarian crisis, and rapid urbanization are making way for young women to move out of their homes and enter the labor markets. In this background, we see that women are embracing economic opportunities, and working towards socio-cultural aspirations, that are shaped by mobile, motorbike, and malls. This chapter also highlight the generational anxieties that are emerging in the hearts and minds of older generation agriculturalists. There are visible gaps between technological modernity (illustrated by mall, motorbike, mobile) and cultural modernity. Cultural modernity in the

region still seems to be struggling with the new trends of gendered physical mobility and techno-mediated sociality, which has led to generational anxieties and conflicts. This chapter highlights the processes that have enabled social transformation and what it means for social and gender relations in the region.

The sixth chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, where there is a summary of the chapters and reflections on the limitations of existing research, and possibilities of further research in this area.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

This chapter elaborates the research methodology followed for the dissertation research. Methodology can be understood as “theory and analysis of how research proceeds” (Harding, 1987). This is a sociological study, done with feminist methodologies and sensibilities. Feminist methodology is not separate from sociological enquiry, rather is a significant part of it. Feminist perspective, which is an assimilation of theory, methodology and practice, allows the sociologist to “account adequately for the complex marginalities”, which is central to any sociological enquiry (Rayaprol, 2016). It has been argued that “if the sociological method has given analytical rigor to feminist work, it is the feminist perspective that has completely transformed sociological understanding” (Rayaprol, 2016).

Emergence of feminist methodologies and epistemologies

This work is informed by feminist epistemology. Epistemology is defined as theory of knowledge and is concerned with how we access knowledge about the world, how this knowledge is justified, and what it means to know something. More specifically, it “answers questions about who can be a “knower” (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men’s experiences and observations?); what kinds of things can be known (can “subjective truths” count as knowledge?)”(Harding, 1987). Following this understanding of epistemology, feminist epistemology translates into a form of intellectual enquiry which is embedded in an explicitly identified social location, which is, the lived experiences of women who have traditionally and historically been excluded from knowledge production processes.

Women’s perspectives and experiences have been invisibilized in traditional social sciences. In the quest for objective knowledge, traditional social sciences discarded women’s insight, perspectives and knowledge as opinions. This is because most of the early social sciences were written from a cis-hetero, colonial white male viewpoint, which was disseminated and established as knowledge, since enlightenment, through positivism, and even now. Positivism has an epistemological position that says we can make observations, and deduce facts about reality through logic, without that knowledge being mediated by our bodies, cultures, and histories. The epistemological premises of positivism have allowed dominant perspectives to be presented as ‘objective’ and ‘universal’ even when these knowledge

systems are pivoted on a specific social, historical and embodied location. Donna Haraway identifies this tendency as “the god trick”, wherein knowledge claims are presented as transcendental, and trans-historical (Haraway, 1988).

Academic texts and social theories have rarely talked about gender as a category, and relegated gender to private sphere, because gender as a unit of analysis invokes uncertainties that often harms the abstractions and generalizations required in theory. It is in response to these huge lapses in traditional knowledge systems that feminist epistemology has emerged and evolved. Feminist social theorists have argued that women’s experiences are fertile grounds for knowledge and that by grounding intellectual enquiry in women’s everyday experiences, scholars can ask new questions, and open new areas of enquiry, thereby making knowledge system more inclusive and diverse (Smith, 1987). Thus, by accepting and recognizing that women can be knowers and have equal claims to knowledge, feminist epistemology has overturned the foundation of existing androcentric knowledge system.

Sandra Harding delineates three distinct feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist postmodernism. Feminist empiricism recognizes that women have been missed out in the existing systems of knowledge, and this omission needs to be addressed. It thus talks about doing “good science” by “adding women” in the research (Harding, 1987). The aim of feminist empiricists is to fight the androcentric bias by employing rigorous empirical research in the search for greater objectivity (Rayaprol, 2016). However, it was soon realized that just ‘adding’ women is not enough, and this reflection led to standpoint theory.

Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and asserted that people from the margins hold a particular claim to ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge’. In this sense the standpoint epistemology highlighted the relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power. It argued that the women’s standpoint is a position of ‘epistemic privilege’, and that this knowledge should be recognized and re-centered within larger systems of knowledge. This epistemology derives much from “socially situated knowledge”, which, in conventional accounts is discarded as ‘opinions’ just because it is produced by women (Harding, 1987, 1992). So how should we recognize and re-center these domains of unrecognized knowledge? In this background, the feminist epistemological principle of ‘positionality’ becomes crucial. Positionality holds that our social locations shape our

experiences and knowledge of the world. “This stance holds that our positions in relation to various social structures necessarily inform the knowledge we produce about our shared worlds. Positionalities are not static, nor are they total” (Kinkaid, Parikh, and Ranjbar, 2021). Thus, positionality emerges situationally and relationally, and needs to be accounted for, in intellectual enquiries.

In this regard, Dorothy Smith suggests that we should “start from the marginalized lives” and “take everyday life as problematic” (Smith, 1987). One example of this would be the feminist critique of the public-private distinction, wherein feminist theorists have highlighted that because of the historical construction of women as natural caregivers and reducing them to their reproductive roles, they are relegated to private/domestic sphere of home and hearth (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). They are associated with nature, which is always submissive to culture (Ortner, 1974). Because of the organization of social world into neatly divided, dichotomous categories of public and private, men have been a part of public and political life, considered synonymous to culture, which is higher in hierarchy than nature; they have channelized their energy into thinking about abstract concepts and philosophies that are considered valuable and important. In contrast, women’s activities are relegated to the private/domestic sphere thus made invisible and seen as “natural” rather than as part of human culture and history, which must be valued, preserved, protected, and recognized as knowledge (Smith, 1987). When feminists began to examine and question liberal theory’s assumption about the separation of the social world into public and private spheres, they began to see how gender becomes universally subordinated category of oppression, and invisibility. These systematic and continuous feminist critiques around the everyday life and its problematic, around public, and private, have changed the nature and understanding of paid work, a realm that was previously allocated to and accessible by, only men.

Standpoint feminist epistemology was soon challenged as the horizons of social enquiry expanded and highlighted the numerous differences among the seemingly homogenous category of ‘woman’. Empirical evidence revealed that women were a fraught and fuzzy group, divided across class, caste, race, ethnicity, religious, regional, and many other differences. These social differences and social locations shaped women’s experiences, identities, access to resources, and defined the limits and extent of their bargains with patriarchy. These differences also explained how women from the margins have been invisibilised historically, their experiences are erased, and they have no claim to existing

knowledge. The aggregate nature of sociological theory missed out on a diverse range of experiences that were not located in global north, or were not white, or upper class, upper caste. It is in this context that we can understand feminist postmodernism which extends the limits of standpoint feminism, and challenges claims of universalism of any sort, be it feminism. Postmodern feminists have deconstructed the category “woman” and highlighted that it is a social construct, a hegemonic idea with which only few women identify.

Essentializing women’s experience is problematic for academic research when we ignore the plurality of identities that shape each other; and the solution to this lies in recognizing that there are different kinds of patriarchies, different mechanisms of struggles, and different kinds of feminisms. For instance, there were concerns about the white, western feminist academic tendency to essentialize women from the ‘third world’ countries (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997), black women (Collins, 1991), Dalit women (Rege, 1998), or rural-agrarian women (Chowdhry, 1997). In this sense, this scholarship has expanded the horizons of feminist epistemology by asking for an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991) that considers the ways in which caste, class, race, religion, ethnicity, and gender shape women’s viewpoints, perceptions, and experiences. This type of analysis helps to identify and understand the workings of “interlocking systems of oppression” which often create a complex web of power relations and a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 1990). In this sense, feminist epistemology has evolved by being sensitive to the issues of difference, hierarchies, power relations, and striving towards social justice (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004).

In the pursuit of my research enquiry, I am drawing from standpoint feminist theory and intersectionality. ‘Intersectionality’ was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991) to argue that black women’s experiences are shaped by both, racism and sexism, which makes their marginalization distinct from that experienced by both white women and black men. Intersectionality has been used to explain how different social locations (caste, region, religion, etc.) intersect, inform, and reshape myriad of gender identities. It has also been highlighted that these “axes of social division” shape people’s lives, their social and cultural practices and ideologies, and the institutional arrangements (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Since then, debates have ensued on whether intersectionality should be conceptualized as a “crossroad” (Crenshaw, 1991), or as “axes of difference” (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yet, there is also a collective understanding that the relationship between gender, caste, community, social location, violence, work and wages is multifaceted, and that these categories “mutually

constitute” each other, “producing specific political economies of gender orders that are intersectional but also, importantly, co-constitutive and co-produced” (Kannabiran & Swaminathan, 2017).

It is pertinent to highlight that feminist research is not just about giving voice to women’s world views; rather it is also about challenging dominant ways of thinking, analyzing, and thus transgressing the stereotypical representation of women as passive, emotional, victims of violence and patriarchy, and never using reason, nor employing agency (Mohanty, 1984). In this sense we must give up universal assumptions, to give up the notion that there is only one form of patriarchy, or one kind of feminism. Patriarchy has many faces, but women are also rational and strategic actors, who are continuously navigating through the patriarchal social structures, and bargaining and negotiating with it (Agarwal, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1998). The idea is to listen to experiences from the margins, to understand the frailty of patriarchal structures controlling women’s “transgressions”. With this belief and praxis, I have pursued my enquiry.

Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods are used in a scenario where we need more enquiry and exploration. Qualitative research is about “oscillation between theory and evidence”, between “analyzing and generating material”, between “first- and second-order constructs” (Schütz, 1962, 59). Qualitative research is about “getting in contact with something, finding sources, becoming deeply familiar with a topic, and then distilling and communicating some of its essential features” (Aspers and Corte, 2019, 151). The categories, concepts, and constructs that the researcher begins with, and takes for granted at the beginning of the research process, are ‘qualitatively’ transformed by the end of the process (Aspers and Corte, 2019, 151). Qualitative research methods have a long history of being employed when the work engages in enquiry around gender, because for a long period of time, there was no ‘knowledge’ around gender, and techniques of qualitative methods helped fill up this huge intellectual gap. For instance, South Asia has a long history of feminist scholars using qualitative methods to bring to light the hidden dimensions that were missed out in androcentric theorization of partition historiography. The gendered re-reading of partition is one of the most prominent illustrations wherein feminist social theorists across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh used qualitative research methods, such as that of oral history method, life history method, to bring out

experiences and knowledge that were missed out in statistical and graphical representation of human loss in partition scenario.

In the 1970s, when the feminist historiography started, the events of partition, and the subsequent violence against women, became the pivot of the feminist arguments. We saw feminists of the seventies, time-travelling to the events of partition and rewriting the history that had been missed out in the earlier version of “authentic national history” (Butalia, 1994; Das, 2007; Jeffery & Basu, 1998). Feminist intervention in androcentric partition historiography revealed that the existing debates on the partition of India, had left out women, and in order to locate gender as a category, and to understand gendered violence, they had to revise the hi(s)tory. The reporting and recognizing the violation of women through numbers and statistics was a challenge in itself. Additionally, lack of systematic qualitative enquiry precluded any voices and views from being heard.

To fill this intellectual gap, qualitative methods with historical and feminist sensibilities became the *modus operandi* through which new data and insights were gained into the watershed moment of partition in the Indian subcontinent. This is just a small illustration of how gender as a category has been overlooked in social analysis. It is also evident that traditional social theories rarely talked about gender. The primary caveat of the existing social theories was for men, by men. In this scenario, qualitative methods become an important mechanism to reveal the ‘invisible’ women. I have primarily relied on field work, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, focus group discussions, informal, freewheeling discussions, situational conversations, and participant observation to collect data that is missing from existing domain of knowledge.

Considerations on deciding field

In ethnographies, there are repeated narratives of discovering field site “by chance”, which sounds platonic and romantic, but this phrase prevents “any systematic inquiry into how those field sites came to be good places for doing fieldwork in the first instance” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1977). For instance, there is a famous tradition of anthropologists moving around the world to study the ‘natives’ however, it was the post-colonial work that informed us that these choices of anthropologists were closely linked to the social geography and of colonial empires.

As a sociologist doing fieldwork, there are many things to be considered while deciding a field, but not all of them are intellectual considerations, rather most of the considerations are around logistics of doing fieldwork, and the ethical dilemmas that as young researchers we are constantly reading about, and getting to practice, for the first time. Logistics of doing fieldwork include issues of access to the field, to respondents, ethical dilemmas and so on. It is amidst these intellectual, ethical and logistical considerations through which we decide the field/ site of study. Moreover, the field can also transform the nature of our enquiry.

There were three reasons for selecting Muzaffarnagar as the site of fieldwork. Firstly, because I was interested in the engagement between gender and community, Muzaffarnagar seemed to embody all the visible contradictions of this engagement as it was a communally sensitive district and was also infamous for honour-based instances of violence, female feticide, and the gendered nature of communal atrocities. The history of communal violence, practices of honour-based violence, and female feticide provides an important background and context for the analysis of contemporary gender relations. In this context, Muzaffarnagar was chosen as the region where I could see the interplay between gender and community, of 'self' and 'other'. Muzaffarnagar had suffered the violent communal riots in the year 2013 which had specific implications for the women of both the communities, Jat and Muslim. While my study is not about the riots, the riots of 2013 have shaped the nature of gender and community in the region, and it was interesting for me to look at the new framing of gender, gender relations and community.

Fieldwork: Obtaining Entry, Gaining Acceptance

Fieldwork is a technique of qualitative research that involves the researcher spending substantial period in the field that is being studied and using the knowledge gained as data. The idea behind fieldwork is all about being involved with what we are investigating and the people we are researching. It is about doing research in a practical, applied, 'hands on' sense. When Robert Park urged the scholars "go get the seats of your pants dirty in real research"¹¹ or when Geertz talked about "being there" to gather "thick description" (1973), they were pointing towards doing intensive fieldwork. In this sense, fieldwork is about getting out there, and becoming part of what is going.

¹¹ A statement by Robert Park, recorded by Howard Becker, and first published in McKinney, *Constructive typology and social theory*, 1966, 71.

While selecting a field based on its socio-economic and demographic profile is one thing, however the actual process of making an entry into the chosen site is quite a difficult task, especially when the region has a history of conflicts, and the contemporary nature of society can be described as ‘divided’ and ‘polarised’. When I visited Muzaffarnagar in September 2017 for the first time, the field was completely new and unfamiliar to me. In addition to this, the district was also under curfew because Baba Ram Rahim, a religious leader heading an urban religious group called Dera Sacha Sauda, was convicted of rape by a special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court. On August 28, 2017, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. I had not anticipated that a religious leader with base and following in urban areas of Punjab and Haryana had also made entry in the rural hinterlands of western Uttar Pradesh. His popularity in the region was evidenced by the fact that the district of Muzaffarnagar was under section 144, which translates into curfew and restrictions on public gathering, when Baba Ram Rahim was convicted of his crimes. Small riots followed in the region in the aftermath of the verdict. It is in background of this event that I made first physical contact with the field, i.e., district of Muzaffarnagar. Coincidentally, 28 August 2017 also marked the fourth anniversary of Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013. The events of 2013, and then 2017 provoked me to look at the nature of community in the region. How was the collectivity being organized now, what was the nature of this collective- community and how is it different from previous understanding of community? And what was the role of gender in the new organization of collective community? Moreover, how do gender relations shape the nature of community, and how community changes the nature of gender relations?

Muzaffarnagar city is divided into distinct Muslim and Hindu neighborhoods, and it has been like this for the last thirty years. Since I was looking at the women of two communities, I had to locate them in different places, because I was seeing homogenous spaces, in terms of neighborhood, villages, and localities. The first place that I visited on entering the field was district magistrate office (kachahri), which is the administrative hub of the district. I started looking at various schemes that are employed by the district administration for women’s empowerment. In this context, I found one specific program, Gender champion, wherein five women from the district were awarded the title. Out of these five gender champions, four were Muslim, and one was Dalit. Conversations with these gender champions revealed myriad of relationships that women share with community, and that is why they were asked if they would be willing to talk more, and if I could interview them. One of the gender

champions is a member of an important NGO, 'Action Society for Women' that deals with issue of violence against women in the region of western Uttar Pradesh. Most of these instances of violence are perpetrated through the community, for instance, child marriage, female feticide, and honour killings. Many of the instances of violence are also completely within the domain of household and privacy, such as domestic violence, financial neglect, and psychological harassment by the husband, and so on. Action Society for Women NGO has been educating, and organizing people, especially women, against such issues of violence which are so difficult to talk about and seek justice for. In the regard, Action Society for Women NGO has been working since 2005, on tenacious issues which involves protecting women, when perpetrators are family, and community. I started hanging out in this NGO, along with the trainers, following them, to understand the local workings of the community and women's struggle with the same. Through this engagement I also got to know that most of the women who were working in this organization had themselves shared difficult history with social institution like family, overarching groups like community. Thus, engagement with these NGO workers also became an avenue to understand the fluid nature of public and private lives and spaces.

Another gender champion was running an NGO, Shaziya Siddiqui Social Welfare Organization, to educate and give professional training to riot affected women, and destitute women in the rural parts of the district. The third champion was running a kabaddi training school in the rural parts of Muzaffarnagar. Many school and college going girls used to come for training in this school with the hopes of getting a sarkari naukari through sports quota. This was also an activity that allowed young women to travel around and experience the worldly matters on a first-hand basis. Engagement with these women opened me to reflect on how enhanced mobility transcended the boundaries between the rural and the urban and changed the nature of public and private.

In addition to locating respondents through the state and non-state institutions (NGOs), I also located respondents through educational institutions. Before travelling to Muzaffarnagar I met a professor in Delhi University who had conducted preliminary research on the riots of 2013. He gave me contact number of a college professor in Muzaffarnagar, who could give me leads to respondents. I then met Preeti, a research scholar who was also teaching in a local college to make a living, and who later became a key informant for this research. Through Preeti I established many connections in the field, and found several potential respondents,

first generation working women, who were navigating the society of Muzaffarnagar, as it was going through myriad of social- economic and politico-cultural shifts. These were younger generation women, from agrarian families who were entering the realm of education and employment for the first time with new hopes and aspirations. Looking at these women allowed me to reflect on the intersections between gender, generation, class, and community identity.

In addition to state and educational institutions, I also located respondents through the community. As I got comfortable navigating spaces like DMs office, neighborhoods, college, I started asking around in different circles about women who made a name for themselves and their community. This was a non-threatening question, and I got many leads. I got suggestions of women who were closely involved with their community and were bringing “social change” through “social work”. I got contacts of women who had done exceptionally well in education and sports, who were doing social work of different sorts, ranging from teaching tailoring, computer, sports, and even organizing satsang and running moral police organizations.

Thus, I asked women to participate in my research as I met them in college, community gatherings, city administrative office, NGOs, and public places such as restaurants, and mall, etc. Whenever possible, I used to establish rapport by engaging with them and asking them about their life, work, and livelihood. I used to introduce myself as “a researcher who is looking at life and struggles of working women”. This process allowed both of us to open to each other. Soon I would gather contact information so that I could develop contact and communicate with them later. The goal was to have the perspectives of at least forty to fifty women, between ages 20-60, from two communities, preferably commuting between the village and the city, and were pursuing either higher education, professional work, or any other kind of paid work. This technique of sampling permitted multiple viewpoints to emerge, spread across socioeconomic statuses, generation, class, and community. This technique of sampling follows a purposive design which allows for maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to select those respondents “who are expected to hold different perspectives on the central phenomenon” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, 174). When we choose respondents from different socio-economic locations, we can study varying structures of patriarchy and different mechanisms of negotiations undertaken by women. Participant observation at public spaces, and community meetings, family

gatherings, and at spaces like college, cafes, restaurants, mall, and NGO helped further flesh out the data.

My sample consisted of a total of forty people: 22 Jat women and 18 Muslim women (Annexure 3). A brief profile of these women has been discussed in the upcoming section. I also communicated with men from both the communities, and their insights illuminated the nature of the field and intricacies of gender relations. There were many times when I had to meet the men first, whether in their capacities of being representatives of the neighborhood, village, college, office, or because they held power over women in familial settings. Thus, interactions with husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons happened as I followed my respondents to their homes and entered in their lives. I had to explain the nature of my research in the least controversial manner so as not to antagonize or scare away my potential respondents. I couldn't say the words communalism and feminism, as both these words generated serious reactions and restraint from the potential respondents. It is in these circumstances that I started asking senior males about women who enhanced honour of the region and the community, whether Jat or Muslim. Men were generally eager to talk about women who had raised the honour of the community. Only when the patriarchs and community representatives were sure of my motives, after closely looking at the nature of my enquiry, only then I was allowed access to the women.

However, as I entered the home of women, and started engaging with them, and on some occasions living with them, I got insights into the aspirations, dreams and struggles of women. There were two respondents who were kind enough to host me. As the research progressed, these two people transformed from being a respondent to key informant. Preeti, the first key informant, who also provided residence to me during fieldwork, was of same age as me. She had moved to the city in 2014 to pursue masters. When I met her, she was pursuing PhD and simultaneously working in a college. The similarity between us proved to be quite helpful in my research. She introduced me to young women, both Jat and Muslim, who were working or studying in the city, and were frequently navigating between rural and urban spaces in their day to day lives. The other key respondent with whom I stayed was a Jat family. The male patriarch is an important agrarian leader and has a good standing in the Jat community. The family introduced me to different circles where I could meet young and old women and talk about their lives and the kind of social change that they have witnessed

over the past few decades. This Jat family also put me in touch with middle class Muslim families, a demographic group that I was missing out on.

The main goal was to identify the nature and structure of patriarchy that is operational in the region, and to identify the negotiations and bargains women employed while sustaining in the structure that is embroiled in myriad of socially significant processes such as agrarian transformation, urbanization, communalism, and so on. While communalism was the first feature I had identified before entering the field, as my engagement with the field increased, I realized that communalism was only a very recent development, and that this ‘everyday communalism’ needed to be contextualized amidst the growing agrarian, strategic, economic, and spatial concerns that have emerged in the region. As the context became clearer yet complex, the questions around gender became more exciting. The idea was to understand the trajectories of aspirations and mobility of women in a rapidly transforming world. To understand their engagement with family, friendships, community, neighborhood. These are tricky questions, because it seems simple, but it is difficult to operationalize it. Therefore, I started looking at interpersonal interactions among men and women, among women, amidst the family and community. As I started hanging out with college girls and the working women, these episodes enabled the fieldwork pace to pick up. These meetings also became launch-pads for many spontaneous conversations about family, honour, aspiration, parental anxieties, community, and cultural anxieties, as well as about household organization and the gender politics of domestic life more generally.

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interview has continued to remain a popular technique of qualitative data collection. Researchers continue to rely on this method because of the openness and reflections that this technique offers, as it allows more centrality to respondents’ experiences. This method allows for more interaction between the researcher and the researched, and thus opens new enquiries and areas of reflections. Semi structured interview method is an appropriate technique if a researcher is looking for in-depth, informal, extensive, and well-focused discussions.

I designed my interview schedules in accordance with life history methods, wherein I gave primacy to my respondents. I asked them to tell me their story. While I had specific themes for the interviews, my interactions were driven by what women wanted to speak about and

share with me. This resulted in lengthy conversations stretching over several hours, and meeting respondents for a second and third time. Fifteen interviews turned out to capture life histories of the respondents. As we progressed through the respondent's life, I used to pitch in questions from my interview schedule at appropriate times. The interview schedule was designed with carefully chosen questions which adequately covered my own curiosities that led me to pursue this study. It was used mainly to gain more insight about the women's lifeworld in a society that is going through myriad of social and structural transformations. I asked questions on the nature of public and private spaces, women's dreams, aspirations, struggles and preferences. I also asked about their engagement with community, family, neighborhood, friends, peers, and colleagues. In depth interviews were designed to seek insights into life experiences related to gender roles, social norms and expectations, identity, aspirations, transgressions, sexuality, as well as ensuing stigma, violence, acceptance, and agency. These questions helped answer how women coped with gender expectations, and how they negotiated with patriarchal community. Detailed interview schedule has been attached in annexure 4.

I always sought permission from the respondents on whether I could record their voices. While most people allowed me to record their voices, they couldn't understand the utility and relevance of mundane questions that I was asking to them. Most of such people were women, who had no idea that they were repositories of knowledge. Those who realized the implications of recording their answer on device where it could be replayed, and reused, they didn't allow me to record the interviews and I had to make notes in the diary. Most of such people were men, but also younger generation women, who were increasingly becoming aware of the threats and insecurities of digital technologies. They were aware that their voices could be used in myriad of contexts and spaces. The resistance to recording voices becomes clearer when we understand it in the context of prevalent communalism and polarized communities in the field, and the unreliable nature of technology, wherein these recorded voices could be played on a television, printed on a paper, or circulated on WhatsApp in the form of small clippings. No wonder the respondents were resistant to recording the voices. In these moments, my diary became a crucial instrument wherein I could record insights. I recorded crucial observations that I witnessed in the field, interesting anecdotes that were offered by the local men and women, which were useful to understand the field.

Because this study reveals several intimate aspects of women's lives, gaining the trust of respondents was a tough exercise. In a social context that can best be described as communally volatile, the respondents didn't share much in the initial meetings and conversations. Thus, it was imperative that I spend substantial time in the field building rapport and friendships. It was not easy to talk to these forever busy women about their life, their experiences, their understanding of the prevalent gender dynamics and gender relations in the region. They were reserved and suspicious regarding the questions asked, and it took several conversations for them to open to me. They couldn't understand why I was interested in their everyday lives, what was so special about it. Sometimes they were filled with disbelief on the kind of questions asked, after all what really was so interesting in household chores, or they shifted from choolha to gas.

When it came to experiences of violence, and other memories that triggered difficult emotions, the respondents were often at loss of words. They knew my questions, they had experienced the violence, but they did not know how to talk about it. For instance, 'honour', a term that women had often heard, but didn't know how to explicate. Many of the people I interviewed, especially women, relived their past life and experiences in the process of sharing information about their lives. This was mostly in the scenarios where women were sexually violated by someone who was known to them, was a part of/ had access to the 'private sphere' of home which signifies safety and tranquility. In many instances, the interview was the first time that women had spoken about these intimate issues of bodily threat and experiences of violence from kith and kin. It was an emotional scene when women who had lived almost half their lives were reminiscing about their past experiences of the private sphere, that was often violent and tormenting, because it was from a known person. The invasion of 'privacy' was such that it was difficult for women to talk about issues of harassment, safety, trust, family, community. The social relations with the harasser were strong, and he was most often an uncle, brother-in-law, cousin, neighbor, and so on. Women were still living with them, in their vicinity. So, when they discussed about these issues, it was a traumatic experience. Was it easy to talk about sexual harassment that happened in the safe space of home, by a family member? How to explain the aspirations when the world around them is full of anxieties? Sometimes there was silence, sometimes descriptive words, and sometimes tears.

Focus group discussions

Many times, personal interviews transformed into group discussions; particularly when interviews were conducted in neighborhoods and in educational institutions, where the flow of people couldn't be controlled. Unanticipated afternoon siestas in the neighborhoods, and lunch hours in college canteen and staffrooms were the sites where interviews transformed into group discussion as there was no way to stop the flow of people. This situation provided group engagement which provided significant insights and enabled me to engage in women's daily conversations and gatherings. These unanticipated group discussions also expanded my network in the field. These group discussions gave my respondents a freer space to reflect on each other's lives, views, and experiences. Women in face-to-face communities are very likely to discuss their personal experiences with one another; privacy is severely constrained, as living near one another provides little place for secrets.

It was deliberate move to not impose any structure or restrictions on these freewheeling group conversations and discussion. These engagements were left open, so that the women could lead me to issues that I was unable to register. For instance, when college teachers met, they were discussing the significant generational differences and distance that they experienced while engaging with teenage students. Generational differences between mother-in-law in their fifties, thirty-year-old school teachers and eighteen-year-old college students was immense. Technology, and freedom were aspects where I saw most discussion, and friction, between older and younger generations. These insights led me to identify generation as key parameter to assess social change and I started looking at intergenerational shifts in gender relations, a theme I had not anticipated while taking this project.

Focus group discussions in the neighborhood revealed how women consumed information, global debates, and discourses. During the afternoon leisure sessions, older generation women discussed television serials and news that they had viewed on multimedia mobile or heard through grapevine networks. The topic of discussion was generally in response to contemporary events of local and global importance. I will share three instances. 1) While doing fieldwork in 2019, I was staying with Preeti's mother, Meenu, at her village. In those days, Meenu and other women from the neighborhood used to watch a serial that was based on a transgender woman and her struggle and attainment of motherhood. Meenu and other women reflected that motherhood is a "very powerful force, and anyone can want to be a mother". These are revolutionary views in a sexually conservative and segregated society,

yet Meenu underscored the powerful desire of being a mother, and how it should not be seen as transgressive.

In another instance, in 2019, India was sharing border related conflicts from Pakistan and China. Meenu and other women of the neighborhood became aware of the issue through Meenu, as she is one of the few women in the village who can easily access television and newspaper as and when she wants. In one of the discussions, Meenu declared that if she given a chance she will go to the border, or on highest peaks of the Himalayas and hoist the Indian flag there. After all she is a 'brave jatni'. These issues that they encountered and consumed through social media, television and real lives became topics of discussion.

A third instance is when a young doctor was raped in Hyderabad, the women of Muzaffarnagar were aware of her attire, through news channels and social media. When I met these women, they had many insights on perception of safety and threat that working women are experiencing in the present times, and how it has changed from their times. These conversations led to discussions on violence in domestic sphere, issues related to honour, freedom, restrains, notions of appropriate femininity, perception of threat in public and private spaces, and so on. These three instances are also a reflection of how digital technologies are shaping the perception of women. Their world views have expanded beyond regional boundaries, through social media, mobile, television, etc.

In addition to primary sources, I also relied on secondary sources of data collection. Secondary data refers to those sources which are already available in the public domain and has been collected by someone. Secondary data may be in the form of published work or unpublished work. Some of the sources of secondary data are books, magazines, annual reports, reports prepared by scholars, universities, educationists, etc., public records, historical documents, biographies. In this study, I have relied on books, regional newspapers, census, government documents, and other surveys at the national and regional level, local YouTube channels, and documentaries on the region and communities that are being studied. These sources provided me insights into the larger context of the region and its people.

Documentary

Though motion pictures have been used to support ethnographic research since the late 19th century, photographic imagery, video footage, audio files and documentaries have been

considered and used as an integral process of social science research. A documentary can be either primary or secondary depending on the context. In context of my research enquiry, I have used five documentaries to make sense of the historical context of the multiple ways in which gender and community engage with each other. These selected documentaries helped me understand the larger narratives surrounding the event of riot of 2013, practices such as honour killings, how women engage with community, religion, and modernity, and so on.

Immoral daughters in the land of honour, directed by Nakul Singh Sawhney, and released in 2011. This documentary follows five Jat women's struggle against the overarching Khap panchayat, as they face honour crimes, surveillance from their community and social boycotts. These chilling experiences of young Jat women are interwoven with narratives of older generation patriarchs who believe that "those who threaten our traditional code... are the educated youngsters the Dalit officers who want everything to be equal and of course our own immoral daughters who imagine equality, behave like animals, and want our traditional customs to die out". These narratives highlight the gender-generation anxieties that I will be talking about in the fifth chapter.

Morality TV and the loving jihad, directed by Paromita Vohra, in 2007, is a documentary that is set up in the north Indian city of Meerut, a neighboring city of Muzaffarnagar. The documentary focuses on the complex dynamics of love, choice and sexuality of women, constant surveillance and control of women's mobility and sexuality by the patriarchs and police, and a violent history of feudal ideology and communal and caste-based conflicts that are at interplay in the region. 'Operation Majnu' is introduced, a vigilante movement aimed towards moral policing, and spearheaded by police and media. As per operation Majnu, Operation Romeo, couples are constantly under surveillance, and they are shamed and brutalized by the police, and recorded and telecasted by media in the name of sensational and spicy news. This documentary not only highlights issues of love, consent, and agency, but also highlights that by associating inter faith love with jihad, love has become more politicized than ever. These locally prevalent discourses of love jihad that have now garnered its own currency, further raises questions on issues of choice and agency of women that stand in stark contradiction with the entity of collective community.

A girl in the river: the price of forgiveness is a documentary directed by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, on the issue of honour killings in Pakistan. The story is located in the Punjab of

Pakistan, and focuses on a 19-year-old girl, Saba who was shot in the face by her male kins, and thrown in a river, all because she had married without her family's consent. Saba managed to survive this attack. Although her father and uncle were arrested, Saba was under immense pressure to forgive them. If Saba agreed to forgive the family, in Pakistani law it would mean that the perpetrators of the crime would escape further punishment and leave the jail. What was most striking to me was that the father and uncle took pride in their violent actions in order to preserve their honour. At one instance, Saba's father says that because he shot his daughter, people of the community are interested in forming alliance with him, and they treat him with respect and fear. In any case the members of the community want to engage with him because he protected the highest honour. By shooting one daughter, the prospects of his entire family had increased, and honour reinstated. This allowed me to reflect on how women's honour reaffirms and collates the collective community as one group. It also allowed me to reflect that patriarchal networks survive by enforcing honour.

Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai/ Muzaffarnagar eventually: Released in 2015, and directed by Nakul Singh Sawhney, this is a documentary on the riots of 2013 in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. Broken into parts, the film looks at different people affected by the violence, people from the districts of Shamli and Muzaffarnagar, the grassroots activists, women who lost education, men who lost employment, and people who lost lives, house, and lands because of the violent communal riots.

The World before Her, released in 2012, and directed by Nisha Pahuja, this documentary follows two women with different background and aspirations. The two women represent the two distinct trajectories that India as a nation-state has taken in the past few decades. Ruhi Singh is a 19-year-old woman from Jaipur who left her home to pursue her aspiration of becoming a model. She participated in the Miss India contest. Ruhi, represents not only a new type of global capital, and consumption culture, but also significant shift in aspirations and attitudes of young women. On the other end we encounter Prachi Trivedi, a 24-year-old woman, who is trained in a particular type of politico-religious ideology. She works as a trainer in the Durga Vahini Camps in Aurangabad; here we see her train young Hindu girls to hate Muslims, Christians, and western culture. The film oscillates between the religious-cultural camp and Miss India contest, and we manage to see not only contrasts between the two worlds but also surprising parallels, through their dreams, ambition, and outlook, and moreover how they engage with their community entanglements.

These five documentaries are very different from each other, however there is a striking commonality between them. These select documentaries explore myriad of relationships that women share with their community. In ‘Immoral daughters in the land of honour’, we see how young women are challenging traditional gender roles and honour codes, and what does this mean for the community. In ‘morality TV and the loving jihad’, women are active agents whose sexuality is prohibited and surveilled by the state and the community and capitalized by morality television. In ‘the price of forgiveness’, we look at the violent manifestations of the concept of honour. In ‘Muzaffarnagar baaqi hai’, we look at women as subjects of communal violence, and ‘in the world before her’, women are active perpetrators of community identity, and community-based violence. These documentaries informed the research work in exploratory stages when I was exploring interlinkages between gender and community. The documentaries were an important source of data, and helped familiarize with different trajectories, manifestations and forms of engagement between gender and community. Moreover, they provided captivating and informative narratives to understand issues of gender representation, gender discrimination and sexuality.

Respondent profiles (Pseudonyms have been used everywhere to protect the identity of respondents.)

Jats

Preeti Dahiya: Preeti is a 28-year-old Jat woman. She is pursuing a PhD in history from a college in Muzaffarnagar city. To sustain, she teaches at another degree college. She also takes classes at a local school, in addition to providing tuitions in the neighborhood. Her father is a home guard, and her brother is in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Her mother, Meenu, is taking care of the household, and in the past, she was also managing the agrarian land, and farm animals. However, as the family became pluri-active, Meenu stopped going to the fields. Preeti is one of the key informants. She helped gained access to many young women and provided insights on the workings of the region. She is desperately seeking ‘sarkari naukari’, government job. If this doesn’t work out soon, she will have to get married. She has access to smart phone and is present on different social media accounts. She has a scooter as well.

Meenu Dahiya: Meenu is a 47-year-old Jat woman. She is Preeti's mother. She has studied till 8th standard, same as her husband. In the present circumstances, Meenu manages the domain of household, but in the past Meenu singlehandedly managed the agrarian fields and the cattle. Her husband was an alcoholic, and her children were young. She, along with her children, used to work on the agrarian farms, and to survive in the harsh agricultural environment that has been characterized as agrarian distress. In retrospect, she takes immense pride in the ways in which she navigated those difficult circumstances and ensured that her children could do well in their lives. She has access to a mobile phone, and television. In addition to this, she also has access to a washing machine, mixer and grinder, gas connection that made her housework easier.

Varsha Rathi: Varsha is a 28-year-old Jat woman. She is Preeti's neighbor. Varsha has done M.A. but she never could get an opportunity to work outside. She lost her father at a young age, and since then her brothers have been taking decisions for the family and its members. The brothers couldn't get any opportunity for education and employment because they were burdened with farm work. This also spoiled future prospects for Varsha, and she couldn't pursue her aspirations. She got married during the Covid-19 period. Before marriage, Varsha neither had mobile, nor TV. After marriage, she has both, given by her brothers. Television as dowry and mobile to keep in touch.

Shruti Rathi: Shruti is 24-year-old, post-graduate, and she is one of the students of Preeti. Shruti lives in a village in the Muzaffarnagar district, but she has studied in a city college. She lost her father at a young age, and her elder brother got his father's job. Absence of father spoiled the prospects for Shruti, and she couldn't pursue her aspirations. She wanted to do fashion designing, but her family wanted her to do bachelor's in education (B. Ed.) as it was a safe option. Moving in neither of these directions, now Shruti is teaching at a village school, while waiting to get married. She has access to smart phone, television, and is present on various social media applications. She keeps going to the city frequently, to keep in touch with friends, and experience freedom.

Indu Kadiyan: Indu is a 28-year-old Jat woman, living in the city of Muzaffarnagar within a joint family. Her family has no land, and it is a pluri-active household, where at least three people are doing non-farm work. Indu is pursuing PhD in Hindi, and for sustenance she is teaching at a private college. Her brother works in the local wing of Bajrang Dal and doesn't make enough money on which a joint family can survive. Like many other youths of the

region, she is also aspirant of Sarkari Naukari. There is no pressure for marriage, primarily because the family hasn't arranged dowry, but there is lurking consciousness that time is passing. In this background, government job is silver lining that will solve everything. She has access to a smart phone and is present on social media applications. Recently she has purchased a scooter as well.

Shivi Balliyan: Shivi is 29-year-old Jat woman, who migrated to Muzaffarnagar through marriage. She is originally from Delhi, and used to work in Delhi secretariat, a government job, that she quit before getting married, and moving to Muzaffarnagar. The family in which Shivi is married to, is one of the prominent Jat family in the region. This family has huge land holdings and owns many businesses in the region. In this sense, marriage for Shivi has ensured economic upward mobility, because Shivi belonged to a middle-class family. But there is also implication of downward mobility because of the shift from Delhi to Muzaffarnagar, as her mother-in-law ensures Shivi's happiness by ensuring that she has access to meaningful engagement that a working girl from Delhi is accustomed to. Because of this generosity, Shivi has multiple degrees, she has finished MBA, enrolled in law, and thinking about doing PhD. She has a smart phone, a scooter, television, and a car. She is present on varied social media applications. In addition to this, she also has access to technology that has made household work much easier, such as washing machine, mixer and grinder, and a gas connection.

Ekta Balliyan: Ekta is a 52-year-old Jat woman and is Shivi's mother-in-law. She is married in one of the largest khaps in the region, the Balliyan, and her husband is one of the most important agrarian leaders in the region. Although she is not into politics, she has a huge network capital. She is well regarded and respected by the men of her community, and people often seek her opinion. She also acts as beechwaliya (marriage fixer) for poorer Jats, because of her vast circle and influence. She has access to smart phone and is present on varied social media applications. In addition to this, she also has access to technology that has made household work much easier, such as washing machine, mixer and grinder, and gas connection.

Roopa Mallick: Roopa is a 36-year-old Jat woman, who lives with her 8-year-old son, and her elderly father. Her husband has been a migrant worker from the past ten years and is presently working in a reputed IT company in Pune. To overcome boredom, she makes videos for fun, and uploads it on digital spaces, such as 'Instagram', 'TikTok', 'tiki', and 'Likee'.

In past few years she has acquired a big following on the internet, and now, making videos is a job for her.

Neetu Chaudhary: Neetu is a 20-year-old Jat girl living in the heart of the city. Till few months back she had access to education, she had limited but recognized access to public space, but she ruined everything when she ‘made a boyfriend’. When her mother found about the boyfriend she discontinued Neetu’s education, and stopped her access to public space, with immediate effect.

Jivjarin Devi: Jivjarin is 38-year-old Jat woman, who has recently moved to the city with her family for her children’s education, and husband’s posting. She was the third girl child, thus unwanted, but managed to escape the fate of female feticide. However, her name is a reminder of her unwanted-ness, as Jivjarin means, a person who makes the heart burn.

Gaura Rathi: Gaura is a 20-year-old graduate. Her family lives in the village, but she moved to the city in pursuit of education. She belongs to an agrarian family and receives no support for her education. She survives in the city by giving tuitions to neighborhood children. She is preparing for government jobs in order to change her life, as she believes that ‘job’ is very important. She has access to smart phone.

Babli Devi: Babli is a 42-year-old Jat woman, who moved to the city ten years back, for her husband’s business and child’s education. She has a daughter who is working in Noida in an IT company, and her son goes to the Millennium school, a new school that caters to aspirations of parents who want English speaking children. She has access to smart phone, and television. In addition to this, she also has access to varied technology that has made household work much easier, such as washing machine, mixer and grinder, gas connection and so on.

Sarika Balliyan: Sarika is 24-year-old postgraduate. She lives in a village, but because of education, she frequently commutes between village and city. She was the university topper in Masters, and this event was celebrated by the entire village. She is an aspirational woman, who is actively looking for employment. There is no visible pressure for her to get married, primarily because her family has no money for dowry, and secondly, because they believe that Sarika’s education will soon be remunerated in the form of a ‘good job’. She has no television, but she does have a mobile phone, which she shares with her mother. She still cooks on a choolha, however gas connection will be taken when one of the brother gets married.

Nisha Tomar: Nisha is a 20-year-old Jat girl who lives in the village. She goes frequently to the city because that is where she is enrolled for college. She makes ‘TikTok’ videos and uploads it on digital spaces and has managed to gain a huge following in the online world. She makes 50 second reels and, in those reels, she performs on hit songs, in Haryanvi, Hindi, and English language. Because of her popularity, and the view she gathers from the online public, she is also paid by these social media applications.

Meeta Chaudhary: Meeta is a 45-year-old Jat woman, who lives in the city. She is an Anganwadi worker, where she gets an honourarium, and she also works in an NGO that is fighting corruption. This NGO is more closely associated with a political party, and it is through this political party and NGO that she morally polices young women who violate community norms.

Shilpa Sangwan: Shilpa is a 35-year-old, college teacher. She is essentially from an agrarian family but had to enter the domain of work force due to a difficult partner. Married underage, she was also a victim of domestic violence. She finished her schooling and pursued B.Ed. as she realized that marriage wasn’t going to be a bed of roses for her. She has a male child, and she aspires to raise him in a gender sensitive manner.

Bina Kak: Bina is a 55-year-old Jat woman. She had come to the city as a daughter-in-law, but over the past many years, she became a daughter and is now a mother-in-law. Her husband is a district court judge. She is now a part of ‘Mohabbat’nagar campaign’, an initiative to remove communalism in the region. In the past she has worked in many gender-based NGOs that work towards women’s education and safety in public spaces.

Ritu Mallick: Ritu is a 28-year-old Jat woman. She has done her MBA from Meerut and has briefly worked in Noida. She belongs to an upper class, agrarian family, and led a relatively better life than other respondents, due to her class location. Moreover, constantly moving to different cities has provided her with a certain sense of freedom, and worldview, through which she can bargain with patriarchal structures. During covid-19 she not only lost her job, but she also lost her father, which forced her to come back to her village. While circumstances were not in her favor, she used technology meaningfully to change her life, and got married as per choice.

Ladli Chaudhary: Ladli is a 60 years old, upper class, Jat woman, who lives in the heart of the city. She is the regional head of Mahila Morcha, a women’s association with political and religious affiliations. The neighborhood in which she lives, is called Jat colony, a hub of

richest Jats in the region. Her husband was the principal of a degree college, and she herself is 12th pass. She would have been a graduate, but her marriage changed everything. The cultural changes of contemporary Muzaffarnagar make her anxious. In order to deal with this social anxiety, she makes sure that she organizes satsang to reorient young Jat women, towards the ethos of the collective community. She also maintains contact with Jat mothers who have unmarried daughters, and discuss with them issues such as love jihad, loss of culture, and how to re-socialize, and re-orient young women towards Jat-Hindu culture.

Ramesho Chaudhary: Ramesho is a 58-year-old, upper class Jat woman, who lives in the heart of the city, in Jat colony. She has two daughters, both of whom are working, married and settled, in Mumbai and Dehradun. She is a member of Mahila morcha, and her job is to make sure that “Hindu girls don’t deviate from their paths”. She does this by constantly keeping in touch with young and old women around her. She socializes the mothers about the emerging threats to their daughters, and to daughters, she explains the perils of “excessive freedom”.

Pinki Chaudhary: Pinki Chaudhary is a 48-year-old, Jat woman. She works as an Anganwadi worker. She belongs to a lower middle-class family, and is one of the few, poorer Jats, who have to live in Muslim majority area of Muzaffarnagar. Her life has been marked by sexual harassment in the private space, and the culprit has always been a relative.

Swati Tomar: When she was 24, Swati lost her husband in the riots of 2013. As a compensation for her husband’s death, she was given a job in the magistrate office, and received 5 lakh rupees. Earlier she used to live in the village, but since rehabilitation, she is living in the city.

Muslim

Shaziya Siddiqi: Shaziya Siddiqi is a 28-year-old Muslim woman, living in a village where riot affected population was rehabilitated. In 2013 she had to quit her education because of the prevalent communalism in the region. This motivated her to set up a training centre wherein she would teach school going boys and girls who had to quit their education due to riots. Later, due to state recognition as a ‘gender champion’ and funding, she set up ‘Shazi Siddiqi Welfare organisation’ to educate and train young, marginalized women of the region. She taught them stitching, computer, hardware, and software. She has also been actively involved in the Program, ‘Beti padhao, beti bachao’. She has been using smart phone since

she started social work, and although she has a television, she doesn't have the time to watch it because of her busy life. Her father helps her commute around the city and in the villages.

Khurshid Parveen: Khurshid is a 48-year-old Muslim woman living in the heart of the city. Her husband is a government lawyer, and she is a homemaker. They have substantial land in the village, and businesses in the city. The sons take care of the business, while the daughter is doing MBBS from Aligarh Muslim University.

Nazneen Parveen: Nazneen is 21-year-old Muslim woman, living in the heart of the city. She is doing MBBS from Aligarh Muslim University. She has access to smart phone, bank account, and scooter.

Nargis: Nargis is 21-year-old Muslim woman, living in Khalapar, Muslim dominated region. She recently graduated and has been looking to pursue Masters. She is teaching in a neighborhood school, which has been set up by her elder brother. She has access to smart phone but doesn't have a scooter. However, this doesn't restrict her mobility, as she commutes in the 'safer', and relatively proximate parts of city with her friends from the same neighborhood.

Nihaz: Nihaz is a 25-year-old Muslim woman, who lives in the city of Muzaffarnagar, in Khalapar. Her father has business in the city, and her mother is a homemaker. She has finished her Masters, and looking to do B.Ed. She teaches in a neighborhood school. She got married during Covid-19.

Zooni: Zooni is 18-year-old Muslim woman, from a lower middle-class family. Her father owns a business, and her mother is a homemaker. Zooni is doing graduation from a city college, however because of the communalism, she had to compromise on the choice of college, and is now attending a college that is in her locality.

Sobiya Jameel: Sobiya is a 23-year-old, middle class, Muslim woman. Her elder brother works in IT sector, in Delhi. Her father is an employee of the state government. Her mother is a home maker. Sobiya is pursuing PhD from Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, and frequently commutes between the two neighboring districts on her scooter.

Shehnaz: Shehnaz is a 34-year-old Muslim woman. She lives in the city. She was born and brought up in a village and was married to a distant cousin. However, her husband was unable to take care of her, and her children. Her parents were not supportive of the situation, so

Shehnaz moved to the city, along with her children, and started the divorce proceedings. Presently, Shehnaz teaches Botany in a college.

Shaheen: Shaheen is a 28-year-old Muslim woman, who lives in the Muzaffarnagar city. She got married at a young age, and her husband was violent towards her, and later left her for another woman. Shaheen then joined Action Society for Women organization in order to help herself, and many others like her.

Soofi Jehan: Soofi is 38-year-old Muslim woman, who lives in Muzaffarnagar city. She is one of the main faces of Action Society for Women organization. A seasoned social worker, Soofi has been working with this NGO since its inception. Her story is also about domestic violence, neglect, abuse, and divorce. Since then, she has finished her education, and did master's in social work from Uttarakhand. She aspires to do a PhD. However, she has to wait till her children finish their schooling. Now she lives alone, along with her two sons that she hopes to raise in a gender sensitive manner. Her parents are also supportive of her present situation.

Dr Fiza Shaikh: Dr. Fiza is principal of Shine public school, a school in Muslim ghetto. She was 18 when she got married to a rich farmer. However, due to some land conflict, her husband was killed, and her in-laws didn't want anything to do with Fiza. In a destitute situation, Fiza went to the city, and with much struggle she obtained a PhD, and has since then set up Shine Public School.

Farida: Farida is a 24-year-old, Muslim woman. She lives in the city with her parents. She has finished her B.Ed. and is teaching in a government school.

Dr. Zeba Siddiqui: Dr. Zeba is a government lawyer. She has a PhD in law, and presently she is looking at women's cell in the district.

Noorjehan: Noorjehan is a social activist who works towards women's education and empowerment. She is 42-year-old, and lives in the heart of the city. She teaches young women how to deal with issues of sexual harassment in public spaces. She gives them classes in self-defence, shares the helpline numbers, and so on.

Rukhsana: Rukhsana is 32-year-old Muslim woman, living in the city. She is one of the rehabilitated people who have been given a job in the district magistrate's office.

Sofiya: Sofiya is a 19-year-old college going student. She lives in Muzaffarnagar city, in Khalapar, a Muslim dominated area. Her father has a business in the city, and her mother is a homemaker. She aspires to become an engineer and live in a ‘big city’. She has a smart phone, and visible presence on social media.

Gulbahar Chaudhary: Gulistan is a 24-year-old Muley Jat. She lives in the village, but frequently moves between village and city. She plays kabaddi and has played in the district and state teams. She has travelled far and wide because of the competitive sport. She aspires to get a sarkari naukari, through sports quota. However, things haven’t been working out for her, and if situation persists, she will have to give up on her aspirations, and get married. She shares mobile phone with other female members of the family.

Gulfishan Chaudhary: Gulfishan is a 32-year-old, Muley Jat. Gulfishan is Gulbahar’s elder sister. She works as ‘shiksha mitra’. She was one of the first working women in her village. Her job as a shiksha mitra enabled her to help other sister to enter the realm of education and employment. She was one of the Gender champions that was awarded the title because of the sports coaching that she has started in Muzaffarnagar. She has access to smart phone, television, scooter.

Recording and Organizing data

Keeping in line with the traditional technique of keeping a diary and a journal that acts as imponderabilia of everyday life, as a millennial researcher I also used a diary, mobile phone and a separate recording device to record observations, interviews, and conversations. But with time I couldn’t carry up with making notes in my diary and started relying on the recording devices solely. There was a realization that respondents preferred an active communication and eye to eye contact, which couldn’t be fulfilled if I was making notes.

However, my ways were soon mended, by the act of a thief who stole my mobile phone on the Meerut railway station, as I was returning from a long field visit. That mobile had 20 interviews that couldn’t be retrieved. Those moments in the train, after losing precious data, allowed me to reflect on the injustice that I was doing to my respondents by not keeping their words safe and secure. How was I going to ask them to repeat what they had told me in moments of trust and privacy? With this realization, I stopped relying on my recording devices and started relying on the handwritten notes. In addition to this, I uploaded the interviews and the transcripts on cloud for the purpose of safety and accessibility.

Once data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, all data was transcribed. It took me four months to transcribe all the data that I had collected from the field. Once interviews were transcribed, files were maintained as Microsoft Word documents, according to the pseudonym name of the participant or the number of the focus group (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc). I also prepared an excel file wherein I recorded socio economic profile and primary details of the informants. This included pseudonyms, age, education, region, employment status, marital status, access to mobile phone, access to television, and presence on social media.

Making sense of the data

For the analysis of qualitative data, I used the grounded theory approach, propounded by Anselm L. Strauss and Barney Glaser. Grounded theory provides techniques to analyze data in a thorough, intensive, microscopic manner; this analysis helps in bringing out the complexity of data (Strauss, 2003, 10). Grounded theory offers a systematic approach to identify new questions in the field, develop new concepts and allows the researcher to make further distinctions regarding existing concepts. This analysis involves two main procedures: constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When compared with other approaches for data analysis, grounded theory emphasizes the detailed process of coding, and being sensitive to and recording the various fine-tuned distinctions that have emerged from the field (Aspers & Corte, 2019, 150). As the researcher makes fine-tuned distinctions between different categories and concepts, through constant comparison and theoretical sampling, the process helps generate new questions and new areas of inquiry.

Following this technique of data analysis, I began by examining, re-reading and coding the text, i.e., the transcript of the interview. Coding was done through three processes, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, I examined the interview transcript line by line, and allocated codes to chunks of data that were reflective of that code. The meticulous evaluation and free assigning of codes led to “category construction”. Categories are larger conceptual themes which we allocate to similar set of data. It was through open coding that two hundred codes were retrieved and thus formed the basis for the next step, i.e., axial coding.

The next phase of analysis 'axial coding' is a more rigorous analysis done around one dimension or core category at a time (Rayaprol, 1997a). Axial coding links codes with their sub codes. It is after this round that connections between certain codes emerge. Over the course of this round of coding, categories are arranged into a way that reflects the relationship that these categories share with each other. This level of coding reveals relationship between different codes.

In the round of axial coding, I perused the transcript again, for identifying relevant and recurring codes. Then I constructed a master list of repeating ideas (an idea expressed by multiple respondents) (Auerback and Silverstein, 2003, 54), with memos reflecting the gist of the idea. I entered memos on the margin of the document explaining why a particular narrative was important, and what research question it answered. Once this was done, the repeating ideas were analyzed till it was assigned an overarching theme. A theme is “an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas has in common” (Auerback and Silverstein, 2003, 62).

It was eventually through the process of selective coding that few overarching themes were identified, and the axial codes were collated under those themes. It was therefore a journey from many codes to categories and then to themes. The process of initial coding gave a brief idea about what the data represented. The coding process helped to distribute the data in terms of topics and themes. The following three substantive chapters reflect the three broader themes that were identified through the process of coding. The first theme is around honour, the second theme is around public-private dichotomy, and the third theme is around aspirations, anxieties, intergenerational mobility.

Reflexivity

The ‘reflexive turn’ has transformed the very nature, practice, and outcome of research. “The problem of reflexivity and the ways in which our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others” (Denzin, 1997, 27) has emerged as a recurring concern for social scientists. Reflexivity involves reflections on central aspects of doing research such as construction of theory, epistemology, and data collection. A researcher must acknowledge, document, and reflect on self, their positionality, epistemology, the methods used, the issues of representation, power dynamics between the researcher and the researched, accountability of researcher in the process of data collection and interpretation (Jones et al., 1997). These

reflections are crucial, especially when a researcher's methodological choices are presented as a series of "neutral, mechanical and decontextualized procedures" that is applied to a set of data. What becomes more problematic is when in the quest for objective truth, research is presented as conducted in social vacuum, the subjectivity and the positionality of the researcher is invisibilized, and the specific interpersonal, social, and institutional contexts are ignored. The researcher is presented as a disembodied and clinical character without any affiliation to gender, sexuality, class, values, beliefs, preferences.

Feminist sociologists have been particularly focused on reflexivity as they continue to reflect on positionality, subjectivity, and the roles they play in co-creation of data and construction of knowledge, along with the respondents (Harding, 1992; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). Reflexivity in feminist research indicates that the gender location of the researcher significantly transforms positionality, the nature of intellectual discourse, and the outcomes of research. Thus, reflexivity has re-signified the researcher's sensibilities, sentiments, appearance, and social position to the research process.

Reflexivity is crucial for feminist research because, epistemologically and ontologically, it is concerned with feminist critique of existing androcentric knowledge. Feminist critique of knowledge and knowledge production is based on challenging the notion of objectivity, which is a claim of scientific rigor, yet continues to exclude subjective experiences of women, making these legitimate forms of knowledge marginalized and invisible. Traditional research assumes a split between the researcher and the researched, the object and the subject, and producer and receiver of knowledge. But feminist enquiry doesn't proceed with these dichotomies; rather, feminist theory highlights the idea of inter-subjectivity, which illustrates that there is a flow, a circulation, certain reciprocity in creation of knowledge. By recognizing the reciprocal nature of knowledge, and by acknowledging one's subjectivities, feminist work becomes reflexive. In the field my subjectivity is informed by my social location as a research scholar of central university, as a young and unmarried woman from an upper caste, and my personal praxis and politics as a feminist. In a variety of ways, these subjectivities influenced the nature of my research.

Between insider and outsider

The dichotomy between insider and the outsider has been one key way to highlight the intersubjectivity of a researcher, yet this distinction seems insufficient, because "in structural

terms, we are all, of course, both insiders and outsiders, members of some groups and, sometimes derivatively, not of others.”(Merton, 1972). My own experiences and subjectivities in the field were frequently shaped by whether I was classified as an insider or an outsider. For instance, because I am from Uttar Pradesh, I assumed that the respondents and I would speak same language, and share same history, and by this I could feel a sense of certain proximity to the field and its culture. However, I was soon proven wrong, and my position as an outsider became apparent. I was outsider in the sense that even though we spoke the same language, our dialects were starkly different. In fact, the context of our languages was also different. The spoken language of western Uttar Pradesh, its context, and terminology was different from my urbanized Hindi interspersed with English words. In the beginning, I couldn't comprehend much, and I had to rely on other people to translate for me on several instances. Moreover, I was a city girl, born and brought up in eastern Uttar Pradesh, in a service class family that never had to deal with practicality, reality and ethos of an agrarian life, and this was where I was an outsider. I was a consumer, and they were the producers. It took me substantial time to identify these primary traits of the field which are embedded in agrarian ethos. My position was quite different from the people I was studying, in terms of class, caste, and regional differences. Moreover, overt differences such as my urban location, academic background, and urbanized Hindi dialect, put me in a different, hierarchal position.

The paraphernalia with me such as voice recorder, camera, laptop, all placed me in a position of difference. What perhaps generated most interest was my accent, and my short hair. Having short hair made me less feminine, and more ‘modernized’. It was very often that my respondents assumed that because I am from city, I eat noodles and pasta in breakfast. When I asked them why they thought so, they replied that “people in city eat this kind of food... pasta, burger, pizza.” My caste location also was an important factor that determined the course of my study. The residential access that I had in the field was because I belonged to an upper caste location. This was revealed to me during the last stages of fieldwork, when rapport with the people who were hosting me was the strongest. Preeti, who hosted me for a major part of the fieldwork, disclosed that she offered me a place because of my caste position. Similar remarks were made by another key respondent with whom I was staying. Mr. Balliyan remarked that it was because of my position as an upper caste person that he offered me a place to stay, otherwise he doesn't even allow poor Jats to sit on his sofa.

There were also concerns about my position as a university student. In the past decade, north India has seen many protests, most of them being led by students. Many student movements happened during the time when this research was conducted (CAA NRC protest, Farmers protest, and most importantly the protest that followed the unfortunate demise of Rohith Vemula in 2017). On several occasions I found myself answering questions on student's movements. There were questions like, "why don't students study, why do they protest". University of Hyderabad, my alma mater, emerged in popular consciousness, when Rohith Vemula died by suicide in 2017. This event led to one of the biggest student protests in the country, and resurged the question of caste in Indian universities, and public sphere. I felt the tremors of this event in my field as well, which is almost 1600 kilometers away from my university. Politically inclined Jat men were eager to talk about Rohith, caste, and student movements. These conversations were often condescending and took a serious turn. The male respondents were either curious about my family history and political affiliations, or they complained about how women were deviating from their natural path. Such interactions required me to politely participate in or listen to them while directing them back to my research inquiries. I occasionally had to strike the "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti, 1998) to get the answers from my respondents, without offending them.

Through the course of my research, I realized that my respondents were more interested in my personal life, and other identities that I inhabited, apart from my identity as a researcher. They evaluated me on my views and opinions on the social happenings. They wanted to know my marital status, what was the waiting about, what about family and children, my romantic life, etc. On one occasion, one of the male respondents remarked that I should have children soon, as "it is trouble in conceiving in old age". On other occasions, I found that the respondent had gathered enough information about me by looking up my social media accounts. By the time I met my respondents, they had already scrutinized my public posts on social media accounts, my institutional affiliations, my social networks in the form of mutual friends, my political beliefs, and so on.

I also got a lot of respect and recognition because I was a university research scholar. People wanted to know what I studied, girls used to discuss about how they could make a career, what could they do to speak better English, and so on. In this sense I was fortunate when I think about my own situation and how it affected my interaction with the field and its people.

After all, I was a PhD candidate, a privileged status that certainly influenced my respondent's perception of me.

I felt like an insider when I was talking to women of different communities. Talking to women about their tensions and anxieties, their dreams and aspirations, opened a channel of communication that was unanticipated when I previously took this research project. For instance, before undertaking this research project, I was also a victim to the ideology that reduced women's perception of their freedom on the clothes they chose to wear in public spaces. I had heard and read about 'Jat' and 'Muslim' women who were always veiled and were struggling in the patriarchal society of Muzaffarnagar. This perception informed my dressing and how I was 'doing gender' in the field. However, as I started doing fieldwork, and living with my female respondents, my perception about them changed. They wore different clothes on different occasions, they maneuvered their choice of dressing and their sexuality as per context and the environment. Women were not struggling in a passive way, they were beacons of hope, rationality, sensitivity, and resilience that is necessary to survive in an inherently patriarchal society. Patriarchy, poverty, communalism, and sexism were the major forces in the field; however, the young women were resilient, and always making ways to bargain with patriarchy and community. Young women were articulate about feminism. In retrospect I believe, most of them were feminist, as per the patriarchy they encountered. In this sense, I was compelled to reassess the trajectory of these women, as they survived and sustained in an inherently patriarchal, feudal, and communal society. Many a times, I was compelled to learn from these women, their resilience, strategies, and positivity, in face of difficult circumstances characterized by communalism, lack of safety in public places, patriarchal communities, etc.

The shift in enquiry, from communal riots to community

The impetus for this study was provided by communal riots of 2013. Before entering the field, I had read the newspaper reports and academic reports on the riots of 2013 that were available in the public domain. The gender question was perpetual in the reports but was not discussed in much detail. To pursue this research gap, riots became the point of entry into the field. However, due to varied methodological, theoretical, and ethical reasons, the nature of my enquiry and research questions altered substantially, and while gender remained intact in the enquiry, communal riot was no longer a variable. The first reason is a methodological one, which I realized while doing fieldwork. During the six years of engagement with the

field, several small-scale incidents happened, with consequences for inter-community harmony in region. The first was the riot in 2017 that happened because Baba Ram Rahim, the infamous god man who was convicted of multiple rapes and murder. His followers in the region started a riot in 2017, and several districts in western Uttar Pradesh, along with Punjab and Haryana were under curfew. The second incident happened on 26 January 2018, in Kasganj, a neighboring district of Muzaffarnagar. Communal clashes broke out in Kasganj and spread to other districts after stones were pelted and young man was killed, while a ‘tiranga yatra’ was taken out to celebrate Republic Day. The third event happened in December 2019, when NRC CAA protest was going on different parts of the country, and Muzaffarnagar also became a site of protest. The fourth incident happened in 2020, in backdrop of four controversial farming laws that were proposed in the Indian parliament, and if passed, these laws would change the face of farming, and thus agrarian communities, for the worse. Since western Uttar Pradesh is also an important region in the agrarian landscape of India, and Muzaffarnagar has been a bastion of farmers’ politics since the 1970s, naturally the district became a site of protest. As my fieldwork progressed alongside these incidents, which continuously revealed the social fractures, my focus started shifting from the riots of 2013 and I started looking at these incidents, agrarian and communal, in connection to each other. I realized that the region became a site to many communal, political, agrarian and gender-based conflicts and issues. Amidst these developments, it didn’t make much sense to focus on a particular event, and lose sight of processes, and thus ‘community’ emerged as a more pertinent variable, to understand social change and gender relations.

The second reason due to which I had to alter my research questions was to do with ethical concerns. While my entry in the field was four years after the actual incident of violence, this didn’t mean that the effects and consequences of the communal violence had diluted or watered down. On the contrary, the nature of communalism was such that some scholars have characterized it as “everyday communalism” (Pai and Kumar, 2018). The consequence of everyday communalism was that people were scared to share their views around communal riots. So, when I entered the field with questions on riots, the people who had witnessed these riots in proximity, were often resistant to share their views. On occasions when people were ready to talk about riots, it was a practiced narrative, highly filtered down, and manipulated version that the people of Muzaffarnagar had developed in response to the increasing media attention and scholarly attention on the event of 2013. The issue was that while I kept asking questions about communal disturbances, the people avoided answering them. I am not the

first person to research this field. Since 2013, many researchers and journalists have come to this region and have tried to gain insights into the people of hinterlands of western Uttar Pradesh. This kind of constant and interrogative gaze into their lives have made an impact on people. They are used to people coming and asking about riots, about inter-community engagement, about violence, and rapes. Because the people were accustomed to talking to journalists, social workers, police, fieldworkers, they had developed a seamless narrative that had no space for question or enquiry. When I went to speak to women who were victims of communal conflict, it was immensely difficult to locate them. There was also the issue of silence and desire for anonymity on the part of these women who had lived through such brutality. Women were desperately trying to move on, seeking anonymity, and trying to disassociate from the stigma and fate that ensued sexual, communal violence. While communal riots remained an important point of entry into the field, however as my research progressed, I realized that people did not really want to talk about the ‘communal riot’ per se. The events that were characterized by communal conflicts brought distress and discomfort in the hearts and minds of people, and they didn’t want to engage in this discussion.

The last reason for the shift from communal riots to community is related to issues of originality. Communal riots and communalism as events and processes have received extensive attention from scholars around the world. There are several explanations on why communalism is rising, and how communal riots are organized, who are the stakeholders of these riots, and so on. The gender question in the area of communal riots and ethnic conflicts has been discussed in different ways by feminist scholars and there was little left to pursue. Thus, it was in response to the extended scholarly gaze on issues of communalism and communal riots, which provoked me shift the base from an event to processes and people, and this is how I moved to looking at gender, and community.

Researching violently divided societies

One recurring concern was the difficulty in studying people from two different communities, both of which have shared acrimonious relationship in the recent past, which continues to haunt them in present. Many times, I was put in situations wherein I was asked about how people from other community were responding. However, these were difficult questions to answer in a highly polarized and communalized society. I tried to avoid such situations and evaded them. In societies that are violently divided, these concerns are pervasive, and it was like walking on a razor’s edge, while navigating between two polarized communities. Inter-

community relations were mired in mistrust, because of historical and everyday communalism, and the local politics was active and connected through the social network and rumor machinery. Thus, it was difficult to develop rapport with people of both the communities. Many a times I had to answer why I am looking at both, Jat, and Muslims, am I researching on the riots? One of the field visits was conducted after the CAA- NRC came to light, and during this visit I could not find a single Muslim person to talk to. Potential respondents assumed that I am collecting data regarding national citizens register, and they stopped taking my calls, and distanced themselves from me. This further allowed me to reflect on the issues of threat and vulnerability that are experienced by people and communities, in a communalized, conflicted society.

Because of these prevalent issues, I decided to change the nature of my inquiry. my approach to the field and started looking at the engagement between gender and community. Gender and community provided a gentler, non-threatening way through which I could reach out to people, and engage with them, without really triggering them, or reminding them of the violent engagement/interactions they previously shared with their neighbors in the past. Moreover, by locating women through the prevalent discourse of community, I was able to discuss myriad of gendered social actions that often go unaccounted for while talking about communal riots.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, ethical problems frequently surface during the data collection and analysis stages. Ensuring the ethical rigor of a study rests with the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Throughout the course of this investigation, several ethical issues were carefully considered, including participant anonymity and full disclosure of the study's objectives and potential dangers. All the respondents were made aware of the research methodology and the fact that their responses would be considered during data analysis. It was with their due consent regarding recording of information that was done. It was only after the respondents completely understood the process of research and then they consented to it. The respondents after being explained the research process they were given a choice if there was any point in the interview where they wanted to withdraw from the process they could do so. They were also given a choice if they were uncomfortable with any question, they had the choice of not answering that question. It was ensured that the consent from the respondents were voluntary. It was during the process of interview that it was explained to

the respondents that their information will not be used for any other purpose apart from the research that we are engaged in. The participants' privacy was always maintained during the research process. Every piece of private information gathered for this study that could be used to identify the participants has been treated in strict confidence. All personally identifiable information, including the transcripts of focus groups, field notes, and interviews, is kept in a cloud file and has only ever been accessed by my supervisor during the study.

Exit from the field

I never got an opportunity to really take an exit from the field. In March 2020, I was doing fieldwork when the world shut down due to Covid-19. That is when I had to leave from the field. At that point I assumed that I would come back to the field when the situation subsides, however that situation never came as Covid-19 continued to persist. After this visit, I never got an opportunity to go back to the field. In this sense I never got to bid adieu to my respondents. I have read in ethnographies about the bittersweet emotions that researcher and her respondents' experience. While doing data analysis, many times I felt the need to go back to my respondents for further nuances and clarification, though at times, I overcame this distance through phone calls. I was regularly in engagement with my respondents through phone calls, and this not only helped me in getting clarity on the data, but it also helped me in reconnecting and keeping in touch with my respondents over a course of the difficult time of global pandemic. These conversations that happened over the mobile phone, came at a time when I was at the last phase of my fieldwork, however these conversations proved most insightful and provided much needed clarity on the social enquiry that I had undertaken.

Chapter 3: Negotiating honour

The central theme of this chapter is honour. Honour, especially, the gendered notion of honour, is a recurring concern in the rural-agrarian society of Western Uttar Pradesh. This is reflected in numerous cases of gender-based violence in the name of honour, that are reported in the region (Chowdhry, 2002), and more recently, in the communal riots of 2013, that were organized to avenge the honour of women belonging to a particular community (Jats) and led to violence against men and women of 'other' community (Dixit, 2013). These events reinstate the correlation between honour, gender and violence that is often made in sociological research. But is honour-induced, gender-based violence the only reality to understand and explain the gendered notion of honour? Are there other interpretations, understandings and interconnections between honour and gender relations? In this chapter, I will critically examine the background and context in which honour has emerged as an important currency that continues to determine, organize, and shape social relations and gender relations among women of two communities, Jats and Muslims, in the 'rural-agrarian' society of western Uttar Pradesh.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I will do an analytical and critical literature review of the concept of honour, which will help in understanding ideological and practical implications of the concept. Some of the themes are normative understanding of honour, through rewards and sanctions, and its relevance as the link between individual and community; political economy of honour; patriarchal underpinnings of honour, and the subsequent gendering of shame; reviewing honour as a 'third world' characteristic which has severe implications on the global south, where women are stereotypically represented as victims of honour, culture, and violence. In the second section, I will focus on the field observations, ethnographic data, and lived experiences of women, and I will juxtapose these insights vis-à-vis the theory and literature on honour. I will discuss the myriad, localized and discursive practices of honour, by the Jats and the Muslims. I will use the feminist lens to go beyond the well-established idea that women are passive recipients of the honour culture, and honour-based violence. Further, I will argue that women are engaging, negotiating, and bargaining with the honour codes in a novel and distinct manner. By looking at the diverse negotiations of women with patriarchal honour codes, we will have a better insight into the changing social and gender relations in the region.

The concept of Honour

In much of people's history, little was perceived more valuable than the idea of individual 'honour.' One of the earliest references in classic literature, highlighted the peculiarities of honour, "better to die 10,000 deaths than wound my honour". This line expressed by a character in Joseph Addison's *Cato, A Tragedy* (1710) reflects the prevalence and exceptionality of the idea of honour in the society. However, despite the persistence of the term, honour remains difficult to define because it is a "complex ethos" that is culturally interpreted in myriad of ways (Cairns, 2011). It means different things, in different cultures, at different times (Kaufman, 2011). For instance, in Chinese culture, "face" is important, in Japanese culture "meiyo", meaning "glory of the name" is the central idea around which the society is organized and regulated (Stewart, 1994). Similar ideas that align with reputation, glory, and status are present across cultures, with different manifestations, and interpretations. For instance, in classical Greek thought, the "value" of an individual was contingent on a wide variety of qualities, such as expertise in war and warfare, rank, wealth, noble birth, age, special skills or profession, and kinship (Cairns, 2011). However, in this context, honour was only ascribed to wealthy, aristocratic men, such as the incomparable Achilles of *The Iliad*. Similarly, in some of the earlier English works, honour was interpreted through martial proclivities and warlike tendencies. Trial by combat was a law, and so was dueling. In typical patriarchal cultures, honour, therefore, was understood as "courage of manhood", and "martial prowess", as these aspects were considered "chief advancer of the gentry" (Battley, 1981).

As English honour continued to be associated with chivalric prowess, violence in the name of honour became an enduring feature of the early modern aristocracy, and more 'gentlemen' were motivated to violently avenge the insults on the kin members (Pollock, 2007). This trend of violence that accompanied the quest for honour stimulated the founding of ethos from which the "feudal type of justice flowed axiomatically as the waves of anarchy receded" (Kelly, 1986, 106). Thus, violence in the name of honour became a distinguishing feature of a time when different social systems were developing in early Europe (Mark Bloch in Kelly 1986, 106-107)

Scholars related the diminishing presence of honour in the euro-western context, to processes of social and economic transformations such as modernity, technological changes, the rise of the industrial mode of production, bureaucratic systems, increasing modes

of communication, and aspirations for upward social mobility (Berger, Berger, and Kellner, 1974; O'malley, 1981). It was argued that with modernization, feudal and archaic notions of honour was replaced by 'dignity' and 'merit', which are the characteristic features of 'advanced industrial societies', such as highly modernized societies of North America, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe (Berger, 1970; Kelly, 1986). Peter Burke argued that western societies had moved from the "honour system", which saw more aggression, masculinity, and hierarchy, to the "politeness system", which was gentler, especially towards women, and more egalitarian (Burke, 2000 quoted in Pollock, 2007).

Marxist analyses gave centrality to change in the modes of production, to explain the depleting currency of honour. In the context of western societies, honour was seen as an ideological component that transformed into dignity, with the shift from one mode of production (feudalism) to another (capitalism). It was argued that "the feudal mode of production incorporated a dominant class ideology of honour as a condition of its existence" (O'malley, 1981). Thus, as feudalism was being replaced by capitalism, honour was being replaced by dignity.

With time, scholarly work on honour, in the euro-western settings, began to diminish. Efforts were taken to sanitize the academic gaze on euro-western landscapes concerning honour, and honour-based violence. Peter Berger argued that honour was an "ideological leftover in the consciousness of obsolete classes, such as military officers or ethnic grandmothers" (Berger, 1970, 339). The archaic and primitive nature of honour was highlighted by other scholars as well. Frank Stewart, whose work on honour is one of the most cited, wrote, "since honour no longer plays any part in our thinking, I shall draw my illustrative material mostly from the past" (Stewart, 1994). Drawing materials from the past, although a methodological choice, also highlights the assumption that honour is not a contemporary practice, but a residue of the past. This does not mean that honour was discarded from the euro-western intellectual trajectory, but that it was reinstated in the non-western world.

In later decades, most of the studies on honour were anthropological and emerged after World War II. These studies were organized around the Mediterranean Sea, a region that juxtaposes West Asia with southern Europe. The rationale behind this choice was more political than anything else (Giordano, 2012). As the decolonization process escalated, the colonies were not only struggling with stabilizing difficulties, but they were also becoming more suspicious

of the white men coming and studying their (native) cultures¹²(Albèra, 1999). The suspicious attitude of the natives and the decolonization process across the colonies forced the anthropologists to look for other pastures, albeit greener and richer (Albera, 1999). In the moment of western intellectual and political crisis emanating from decolonization processes, the Mediterranean region emerged as a solution in response to the problem of doing fieldwork. This region was geographically European, thus ensuring proximity and safety, but culturally exotic, and ‘other’ enough to be anthropologically studied. It is in this geographical and historical context, that a systematic study on the ‘obsolete’ and ‘archaic’ idea of honour was brought back to life.

Honour as the link between individual and community

The link between individual and community vis-à-vis honour was explicitly highlighted in the Mediterranean region, where organized study around honour first began. Honour, in this geographical context, was understood as a moral framework for behavior, norms, sanctions and rules that facilitated the acceptance of an individual in collective life. Anthropologist Julian Pitt Rivers, who drew principally from early modern European history, and fieldwork in Spain, suggested a dual-aspect definition of honour: “Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride” (Pitt-Rivers, 1965).

This bipartite theory of honour (Stewart, 1994) highlighted the individualistic and collective dimensions. The ‘individualistic’ dimension highlights that honour is first and foremost, recognized through self-evaluation... “value of a person in his own eyes”. The collective aspect highlights that honour is evaluated and approved by others, the collectivity, and the community (Giordano, 2016, 419). By upholding honour, individuals find a place in their respective communities and become a part of the collectivity. Julian Pitt-Rivers also

¹² Nearly 30 nation-states in Asia and Africa attained independence from the colonial rule, between 1945 and 1960. While many prospective new nations in Africa and Asia were progressively separating from the colonial dominion and were on the verge of freedom, countries like India (1947), Indonesia (1945), Burma (1948), Ceylon (1948), and Malaysia (1957), had already achieved independence. But the path to independence and decolonization was mired in conflicts. India and Pakistan witnessed communal conflicts, Kenya saw nativist uprising, Indonesia witnessed guerilla warfare, and French Indo-China saw full-fledged wars. In this situation, anthropological fieldwork became challenging. These challenges were further induced by the eroding colonial authority, thus failing to provide safety and security to white-European fieldworkers (Giordano, 2012, 14).

highlighted three facets that are necessary for honour: “a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others” (Pitt-Rivers, 1965). This means that honour is not just in the mind, but it translates into forms of social action and these social actions are open to judgement and evaluation by the society, which further enhances honour or reduces it. This view is agreed upon by other scholars too, who describe honour as one of the “universal aspects of social evaluation” (Peristiany, 1965). Individuals become part of the collectivity based on “participation in a system of relationships that is based on shared recognition of status divisions and derived behavior expectations” (Stewart, 1994, 54). All members are individually responsible for the collective honour, and the dishonourable conduct of one reflects on the others who are a part of that community.

Due to the link it provides between individual and community, the concept of honour has been imbued with great power (Campbell, 1964). Because of its overarching nature, and all-encompassing capacity, honour has been understood as a ‘social fact’, meaning it is external, general, and coercive. All these aspects and interpretations of honour highlight that the idea of collectivity and collective conscience lie at the heart of the honour codes. All social groups possess a collective honour, and the task of an individual is to maintain the status quo in terms of honour; this is primarily because “the dishonourable conduct of one reflects upon the honour of all” (Peristiany, 1965). It is essential to abide by certain rules and regulations to maintain honour. An honour group is made up of persons who adhere to the same code of honour and recognize each other in doing so. All social groups (family, community, caste, religion) are honour groups, in the sense that to be a part of that group, members must live by the honour code. As we can see, despite being an individual responsibility to behave honourably, honour is something more than an individual attribute, as it is deeply intertwined with social solidarities, collective ethos, and communities.

People stick to the honour codes because they want to be a part of the community, i.e., ‘us’. Membership in a community provides people with certain benefits and access that is only available to the insiders. Following honour codes lead to the formation of insiders, but it also leads to the establishment of difference and otherness in terms of people who do not subscribe to the community-prescribed honour codes. Difference and otherness are important for honour to be operationalized (Welsh, 2008, xv). It is in the context of recognition of differences, and the related process of othering, that honour can be understood as a “class thing”, because it creates “groups” (Welsh, 2008, xii). By subscribing to the honour codes,

one becomes a part of the group, and non-adherence is permeated with threats of exclusion. In this sense, groups and communities are based on the ideology that ‘we are this and not that, and because we are this and not that, we will behave in a certain way, and observe certain rules’. Within the discursive tradition of being something, as opposed to the other, a nexus is formed between the ideals of a community and individual subscription to these ideals in the form of honour.

Honour as a patriarchal ideology

There is enough scholarly work highlighting that honour ideology regulates inter-sex and intra-sex relations (Gilmore, 1987). Patriarchy accords honour to men, while women are bound by notions of shame. The social construction of shame concerning gender and patriarchal honour has emerged amidst complex historical processes. In some of the earlier literature, honour was perceived as a masculine interest, where “man's relationship to other men through women was the fundamental axis of evaluation” (Dundes and Falassi, 1975 in Gilmore, 1987, 4). In this sense, social relations among men were determined by women’s public and private behavior and their social and sexual conduct. Anthropologists working in the Mediterranean region highlighted that patriarchal honour was maintained through the shame of women, and it was 'shame' rather than 'honour' that seemed salient and recurring in everyday life. In a study in Oman and Cairo, a gendered understanding of shame applied to misdeeds such as inability to take good care of the guests, insulting them, indulging in gossip, theft, miser attitude; to actions which are considered immoral, such as homosexuality, women cheating on husband, or losing their virginity before marriage (Wikan, 1984). Thus, the onus of honour and the threat of shame are very much related to women of the community, which is why in many communities and languages, there is a gender-specific term related to shame. For instance, among the Bedouins, individual and collective honour are termed as Sharaf, but when it comes to the conduct of women, they have a specific linguistic expression, ird, which is used only in the context of women, particularly regarding their “chastity, prudence and continence” (Peristiany, 1965, 247). Among the north Indian-Hindi speakers, ‘muh kala kara diya’ (blackened face) is an expression that brings a gender-specific understanding of shame (shame and stigma, brought on the family by womenfolk). Thus, it is evident that honour and shame are not gender-neutral categories. Although honour and shame are interrelated and complementary values, it is also true that they are conceptualized as opposing values, which further relates to different gender ideals, expectations, and roles. Honour is a gendered ideology and shame is an integral part of it. This gendered shame had two aspects: sexual

and normative. While sexual shame compromises female chastity, and virginity; normative shame is related to the way they discharge their responsibility, such as not taking care of the guests properly (Pitt-Rivers, 1977, 78).

It is the sexual notion of shame that is more threatening to women and the community, although in their everyday lives, women are evaluated as per the normative aspect of shame. In patriarchal society, “the honour of a kin group rests on the sexual purity of its natal women”, which is why different cultural values reiterate the importance of female purity. Whenever there are ambiguities around the chastity of women, it is accompanied by shame for the community. Thus, shame is contagious, and spreads from individuals, specifically women, to the wider community (Davis, 1973, 160 in Gilmore, 1987). Moreover, the shameful behavior of women reflects on the kinsmen who are apparently unable to control their womenfolk. When kinsmen are unsuccessful in enforcing and maintaining the culturally appropriate gendered status quo, they are ‘shamed’ in relation to other men. It is in this mutually enforcing, moral obligation among males, that women, because of the shame factor, are recognized as the “weak link in the chain of masculine virtue” (Campbell, 1964, 199). Thus practices of female surveillance, social sanctions and sexual control is not only a way to protect the honour of women themselves, but more importantly of the patriarchal community.

These explanations on honour have been critiqued on various grounds. Sherry Ortner has understood these explanations as lacking “time depth” and functionalist in orientation, where the purity of women is essential to the social coherence and stability of the group (Ortner, 1978). Others have critiqued these explanations as an exercise in “teleological fallacy”, where a cultural problem is explained through the function it fulfils (Giovannini, 1987, 63). Moreover, in the analysis of honour, culture, or female chastity codes, we cannot limit our analysis to cultural meanings, but we must also look at how these honour codes are related to the material realities of the society. This does not mean ‘reducing’ the codes of female chastity to reflections of the material world. However, as researchers, we must acknowledge that the salient features of material and social life often supply the raw material for cultural codes to emerge and operate.

The political economy of honour

Honour is not confined to any particular of society; agriculturalists, nomads, pastoralists, elites, all these groups have certain understanding of female purity, honour and shame (Ortner, 1978). However, what warrants such omnipresence of honour? Earlier, there were no enquiries about why such a system persisted across different societies; rather normative understanding of honour dominated intellectual enquiry, wherein honour was understood in terms of reward and sanction characteristics in face-to-face communities. Cross-cultural studies, which understood honour as a unifying feature of different societies, emerged. Even though scholars were looking at a variety of cases in different cultures, they got lost in a particular cultural symbolization, and thus lost sight of the broad similarities of patterns. However, by the 1970s, there was emergence of academic work, which looked at the conditions that led to the emergence and sustenance of different forms of honour culture, across societies.

Honour is not merely a fragment of culture but has significant economic implications. The necessity for honour is grounded in material conditions and social worthiness. Historically, “honour/shame syndrome originated in a politico-economic complex, in which small atomistic kinship units competed over scarce resources, in the absence of effective state control” (Schneider, 1971). Because of economic and institutional poverty, female purity emerged as a valuable commodity to family, and hence a means of acquiring valuable affine to survive. Woman’s chastity was treated as an “immaterial resource” because of its “central position as an exchange value” (Davis, 1977, 43). Jane Schneider argued, “female modesty is metamorphosed, almost in the manner of a fetish, into a pseudo commodity, or more accurately a capital good.” (Gilmore, 1987, 4).

Sherry Ortner argued that the social concern regarding female sexuality, body and honour is not ahistorical; rather this concern is “structurally, functionally and symbolically” embedded in the historical emergence of “systematically stratified state-type structures” (Ortner, 1978). The emergence of the state and the emergence of the patriarchal extended family happened simultaneously. This was the first time that patriarchy became operational, as the newly developed institutions of state and family demanded absolute authority of the family and senior males over everyone. As a result, women were, for the first time, brought under direct and systematic control- first by their birth families, then by their husbands and relatives. At the same time, a significant shift in gender ideology was seen. Previously, women’s sexuality

was considered dangerous and polluting, as reflected in Mary Douglas' work (Douglas, 1966). But with the rise of the state and patriarchal family, suddenly women's honour was perceived to be in danger and thus came the necessity for male protection and guardianship. At the same time, we saw symbolic idealization of the woman in the role of mother, rather than in sexual and bodily terms. It is in this context we saw the emergence of the ideal woman, who was a mother, yet a virgin, devoid of sexuality, fulfilling all her productive and reproductive functions. This is the trajectory of gendered notion of honour which has developed with emergence, survival, and sustenance of institutions such as the state and the family¹³ (Ortner, 1978).

Anthropologists Jane and Peter Schneider identified politico-economic and ecological reasons for the persistence of honour culture in diverse Mediterranean societies. In the absence of the state and state-like structures, the pastoral and agrarian communities were struggling to organize men in groups. In response, they developed a mechanism of social control- the code of honour and shame, to deal with intense conflict created by the external ecological pressures, within and among groups. In these situations of inter and intra-community conflict over resources, honour was defined as "the ideology of a property holding group which struggles to define, enlarge, and protect its patrimony in a competitive arena" (Schneider, 1971)

While pastoral communities were struggling to find a structural solution to a compelling ecological issue, such as regulating access of men and animals to natural resources, agrarian communities were struggling in maintaining lineage continuity. In pastoral societies, female reproductive capacity became valuable, as "might is right" when one needs to protect, acquire, or fight for resources. As a result, fertile women became similarly contested resources like pasture and water. The fundamental issue in agrarian societies was the probable breakup of the family of procreation. Due to inheritance laws, the daughters and sisters were supposed to keep the group together while the fathers, sons, and brothers were pitted against one another. This reiterates the centrality of gender to notions of honour, as well as its significance for the 'realpolitik' (Ortner, 1978).

¹³ (This aspect is further elaborated through feminist critiques of the public-private dichotomy, and has been discussed in the fourth chapter)

In these distinct moments of survival crisis, honour emerged as a solution to keep the fragmented groups and scattered situations together. Jane Schneider writes “honour as ideology helps shore up the identity of a group (a family or a lineage) and commit to it the loyalties of otherwise doubtful members. Honour defines the group's social boundaries, contributing to its defense against the claims of equivalent competing groups” (Schneider, 1971). In a later work, Jane and Peter Schneider look at other forces that led to the construction of female chastity codes, which include the consistent efforts of empires and religions (Islam and Christianity), to establish their hegemony over extended kin groups, on a local level. Other factors included the rise of slave trade in Mediterranean communities, which made women more vulnerable than men. In such an environment, female chastity was important because it controlled external threats to kinship groups (Giovannini, 1987, 63).

Thus, the idea of honour is not only limited to a few men or women but is crucial to almost all the communities and societies. Despite the centrality of the sentiment across cultures and societies, the way honour is framed differs in every society. Despite the continuous and consistent academic engagement with ‘honour’, most perspectives understand honour in a reductionist way. These reductionist explanations have been critiqued by feminist scholars who have studied the post-colonial world. Post-colonial studies, along with other critical studies, such as subaltern studies, have emerged in a post-war, and decolonized world. These academic interventions have not only challenged and critiqued the existing discourses of culture, dominated by western scholars, but have also presented more nuanced, and complex ways of seeing the global south.

Dangers of orientalist explanations for ‘honour’: The post-colonial perspective

Studies of western societies, argued for the shift from honour to dignity, thereby framing honour differently. The concept of honour, in anthropological studies, in non-western societies, has been narrowed down to represent a restricted and particular conception of honour and gender relations. This notion of honour is considered typical to Mediterranean societies, Middle East and beyond, thereby disassociating it from the modern western world (Herzfeld, 1984). The Mediterranean anthropology research on honour shows that academically, it is recognized as a sentiment of the non-west, and more particularly, of the Islamic societies.

While the Mediterranean region witnessed the growth of two religions, Islam and Christianity, the ethnographers studying honour were bringing field insights and ethnographic data from the Muslim societies,¹⁴ or small, agrarian, or nomadic communities around the Mediterranean, both very different from the mainstream euro-western ethos.¹⁵ There is a widely argued and accepted correlation between honour and Islam, in that both are considered “inseparable and binomial” (Giordano, 2012). The orientalist conceptualization of honour has established the “east in general, and Islam in particular, the focus of a knowing and superior western eye” (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Honour has also been recognized as a sustaining feature of contemporary Islamic societies as well as a distinctive cultural aspect of migrant Muslims in the west. (Cairns, 2011; Withaekx and Coene, 2014, 379). Due to orientalism, honour has emerged as pivotal to understanding debates on “culture and identity” (Gill, 2006). Because of the negative connotation that has been attached to honour, and frequent association with the non-western societies, honour has become synonymous with “backwardness, crime and otherness” (Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

Post-colonial scholarship has highlighted the issue of cultural representation, or rather misrepresentation of the east (colonized) by the west (colonizer). Edward Said argued that while discussing the relationship between the east and the west, we should account for imperialism which is embedded in this contact between west and east. “Imperialism is important, not only as an economic, political and social context, in which cultures and people encounter each other, but also to understand the imbalance of power that has defined much of this contact” (Said, 1978). This imbalance of power is most visible in the way the east is represented by the west. This issue of representation of east by the west becomes more problematic in the context of western academic representation of the ‘third-world woman’, and the subsequent stereotyping that has followed such representation. Status portraits of the ‘third world woman’ are mostly along the lines of their oppression by a culture that has still not learnt to be ‘civilized’ and therefore the necessity of intervention by the colonial forces.

¹⁴ Societies that had at some time been under the influence of Islam, in the Ottoman Empire. Geographically, Ottoman Empire comprised present Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and so on. A lot of work on honour has emerged in this region, be it from the structural-functionalist perspective to the most recent feminist, post-structuralist (Saba Mahmood, Lila Abu Lugodh) studies on cultural norms, values, and honour.

¹⁵ Julian Pitt Rivers and David Gilmore studied the Andalusian society; Bourdieu studied Kabyle society; David Campbell studied the Saratksani community, transhumant shepherds of Greece, Clifford Geertz studied the Moroccan society.

Honour, women, and feminist analyses

In the previous sections, we have seen that female body has a recurring presence in the debates on honour. For instance, over the past several decades, there has been a growth in the body of literature that examines "culturalized" forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and violence or abuse motivated by honour. Even overt cultural practices such as veiling (burka, purdah, ghunghat), and gender segregative practices become symbolic of oriental women's oppression,¹⁶ and this provides a platform for the western scholarship to establish the superiority over non-western societies.¹⁷ The evidence of this can be found in Lila Abu-Lugodh's argument that the euro-western representation of Muslim women's suffering, and lack of rights have political and imperial motives. She gave a very interesting example to highlight how the status of non-western women became a reason for political intervention by the west. A prominent and widely read American magazine, *Times Magazine*, ran a cover story on Aysha Bibi, a young Afghan woman, whose nose was cut off by her husband and family as a way of punishment. The headline that accompanied this image was "What happens if we leave Afghanistan?" and was used to justify the continued presence of American troops in Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod, 2013, 27). Such discourses are problematic because honour crimes and other related practices are explained as the behavior of a particular community¹⁸. In this case, the culture itself, or "tradition," is underscored as a gendered violent action, and is represented to the entire world as a culture-specific act (Abu-Lughod, 2013, 114). Moreover, these brutal instances of gender violence also provide the context for the civilizing, colonizing, and imperial mission of the west.

It has been argued by the post-colonial scholars that explaining culture (honour) through culture can be the biggest theoretical fallacy (Abu-Lughod, 2008; Asad, 1979) because we then commit the "error of circular reasoning by trying to explain culture in terms of itself" (Giovaninni, 1987). Lila Abu-Lughod argues that within the anthropological discourses,

¹⁶ For more details, see, *Do Muslim women need saving*, Abu-Lugodh 2013).

¹⁷ In a paper written as late as 2016, the abstract of the paper states the following: "Honour crimes (sometimes termed honour-based violence), which tend to occur within Islamic communities located within 'host' countries in Europe. It is a very specific type of crime, which takes place in the family setting in Muslim families and is in direct contradiction with the democratic values and legal systems of Western states." (Smolík 2016)

¹⁸ It is crucial to stress that the honour culture is more of a universal practice with many cultural specificities and is not exclusive to any one community. In his book *Honour Bound: How a Cultural Ideal Has Shaped the American Psyche* (2016), social psychologist Ryan P. Brown discusses how honour influences almost every aspect of our lives, including spontaneous bar fights and organized acts of terrorism, romantic relationships, mental health and well-being, unsportsmanlike conduct in football, the committing of suicide, foreign policy decisions by political leaders, and even how we behave in public.

“culture operates to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy.”¹⁹ This cultural hierarchy is most visible in what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has referred to as the “western savior complex” which portrays women from the global south, as victims of patriarchy, continuously suffering and struggling, with no agency whatsoever; as opposed to this is the image of a “western feminist subject who is liberated, free of constraint, an agent of her destiny” (Mohanty, 1984). Mohanty discusses how western feminists have analyzed cultural practices in third world societies as barbaric and have (mis)represented the third world woman in terms of underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, poverty, religious fanaticism, and so on. Such misrepresentations of the third world women are problematic, because the “every day, fluid, fundamentally historical and dynamic nature of the lives of the third world women” is reduced to some “frozen indicators of her well-being” (Mohanty, 1984, 6). Mohanty thus creates a crucial distinction between ‘woman’ and ‘women’, where ‘woman’ is a “cultural and ideological composite other, constructed through diverse representational discourses”, while ‘women’ are “real, material subjects of their collective histories” (Mohanty, 1984).

These colonial and hierarchical discourses “cemented both the assumed moral superiority of the west over the rest and the existence of an intense eye upon ‘other’ cultures that were deemed to require changing their gender relations to become modern and enlightened” (Welchman and Hossain, 2005, 43). Feminist theory has emphasized culture as a crucial weapon for othering and how gender differences served as one of the pillars on which imperialism was founded (Abu-Lughod 2008, 470). The use of the woman question in colonial politics has been noticed by academics researching British colonialism in the Middle East, Africa, and later in South Asia. For instance, the civilizing mission vis-a-vis the practice of Sati (widows immolation on husbands’ funeral pyre) and child marriage, was used to justify the colonial intervention and British rule. Colonial accounts of Sati stress that Indian women were often “submissive”, “unquestioning”, and “obedient” with regards to religion, culture, and tradition (Mani, 1987). These debates by the colonizers were not only used to highlight the deplorable conditions of women from the global south but also the savior tendency of the colonial masters. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously explains this intervention as, “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1985)

¹⁹ In this context, she urges anthropologists to “write against culture”, by writing “ethnographies of the particular” (Lughod, 2008).

The arguments made by scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod (2013, 2016), and Saba Mahmood (2005), among others also highlighted the misrepresentation of the cultural and societal landscape of the global south. They offered a starkly different understanding of honour, modesty, and other practices that are understood vis-à-vis culture. Lila Abu-Lughod, in *Veiled Sentiments*, highlighted that modesty, an aspect of gendered honour which demands sexual propriety from women, is a part of widely accepted, complex moral code. She argues that veiling must not be understood as lack of agency. For Bedouin women, “pulling the black head cloth over the face in front of older, respected men was considered a voluntary act. One of the ways they could show their honour and assert their social standing was by covering themselves in certain contexts” (Abu-Lughod, 2016). Thus, the women decide and debate where to veil. For Bedouin women, maintaining honour translated into increasing social status. Thus, honour, in this context is about maintaining and subscribing to personal ideals, such as courage, kindness, credibility, and the refusal to accept insults. To elevate their status, both men and women followed stringent measures, lest they deviate from the prescribed and personal ideals (Abu-Lughod, 2016). Yet this understanding and interpretation of honour is missing from euro-western discourse.

Saba Mahmood in her study of women who lead the piety movement in post-colonial Egypt argued that the pious women actively tried to embody religiously prescribed and community accepted forms of modesty and bodily comportment (Mahmood, 2005). Reserve, restraint, and modesty are required from pious Muslim women, and women actively stick to these gender ideals, which strengthens their status and honour. Women want to live by these codes of modesty, and honour. Their embodiment of moral virtues, honourable and pious behavior, is often used as a legitimate position to negotiate with problems in the household and outside. Such diverse academic work, which is firmly situated within women’s experiences, provides evidence that the idea of honour has been conceived in a variety of ways, by keeping in focus the cultural and regional specificities. The complexity of women's lived experiences of honour has been highlighted by feminist thinkers. It is asserted that, in contrast to fixed conceptions of honour, its meaning is fluid and constantly changing.

Debates on Honour in India

In the Indian subcontinent, the concepts of honour and shame are closely linked. Shame (sharm) can be considered as a gendered equivalent of honour, rather than its binary

opposite²⁰ (Gupte, 2013). Honour is gendered ideology, as per which men and women embody honour in starkly different ways. As per the ideology, honour is mostly possessed by men, and women possess only shame. Women are the repositories of patriarchal honour as a daughter, wife, and mother, while men and senior women preserve collective, patriarchal honour by regulating the sexuality and conduct of women. The greatest threat to patriarchal honour lies in the female body, due to the reproductive and procreative powers (Chowdhry, 2007). Regulating women's bodies and sexuality is central to preserving/ maintaining collectivity's honour. Women's sexuality is controlled through early marriage, restrictions, and surveillance by the family members, extended kin, and sometimes even neighborhood and community. This is the patriarchal ideology of honour, which has been highlighted by feminist work.

Honour is located in the body of a woman because of the specific construction of procreation ideology as per which the male seed germinates the female earth (Dube, 1986). While women and their physiology are primarily perceived as a passive recipient, male semen is regarded to be dynamic and powerful. The idea of honour is found in man's capacity for creation. There is a clear idea of a common bloodline continuing through the male members, who serve as links for the passing of common blood to the next generation through semen. The father's blood is in the veins of the child and comes from his contribution of semen, commonly thought of as concentrated blood. Caste endogamy, which secures patrilineal descent, is based on this logic. This suggests that female sexuality must be controlled to ensure the paternity and lineage of the progeny (Chowdhry, 2002). The seed/earth symbolism of reproduction sustains an ideology of honour in which strategic resources of both types, material (productive resources such as land) as well as human (reproductive resources, i.e., women), remain in the hands of men. Both production and reproduction need to be controlled, because autonomous and unsupervised production and reproduction are dangerous for the collective community.

Honour as maintaining hierarchies and differences

It is worth noting that the societies that are most concerned with the idea of female purity are the ones with a developed stratification system (Ortner, 1978, 22). Locating honour in a woman's body also addresses the purpose of maintaining social hierarchies and differences

²⁰ The opposite of honour (izzat) is the state of being without honour (beizzati).

along the lines of caste, class, religious and ethnic differences. Several scholars suggest that the formation of community identity and establishing inter-group differences are very much related to women's engagement with culturally distinctive gendered practices, such as veiling, segregation, and tightly controlled marriage patterns (Chowdhry, 2007; Basu and Jeffery, 1998). Hindu and Muslim women's external behavior, clothing, and demeanor are used as symbols by women themselves, their husbands, families, and communities to communicate a variety of meanings, ranging from social status to distinctive communal identities (Desai and Temsah, 2014). Similar findings are reported by Moshe Schokeid about Israeli Muslim Arab males' increased control over the sexual behavior of female relatives as a sign of ethnic and religious identity in opposition to the dominant Jewish majority (Moshe, 1980 in Gilmore, 1987).

Talking about caste hierarchy and gender identity, Uma Chakravarti says that the need for sexual control of women (upper caste) is twofold, firstly to maintain patrilineal succession, and secondly to maintain caste purity. Thus, sexual purity of women is central to 'Brahmanical patriarchy' because the caste structure depends on it (Chakravarti, 1993). Patrilineal succession is enforced through the institution of marriage and family. Purity and pollution are central to the caste system, an institution central to Hindu societies. Therefore, there is an understanding that the stability of society and its structures depend on the purity and conduct of its women. Because female virginity and chastity are extremely valuable, and an important resource of the continuity of the patrilineage, women remain under strict surveillance and vigilance.

Apart from the caste system and its hierarchies, honour ideology also manifests in religious differences. A feminist reading of Indian partition historiography reveals that women of other religious affiliations were more vulnerable to sexual violence. The end of World War II, which also led to the beginning of the decolonization process, ranging from Africa to Asia and Latin America, led to the emergence of new nation-states, based on ethnicity and other social fault lines. The decolonization process entailed the emergence of new nation-states and the partition of old ones. The formation of new nation-states around ethnic identities saw a violent culmination of gender and honour. The period also witnessed a diversity of scholarship around societies and cultures, albeit from a very different lens. The biggest examples remain from the Indian subcontinent, where the decolonization process was followed by the partition of the Indian subcontinent, and what followed was violence against

women on a magnanimous scale, all because women embodied the honour of the community, and that of the nation-state. Women were considered the carriers of men's honour, and thus the violence was avenged by dishonouring the women from the other community. Women were raped, shamed, mutilated, impregnated, killed, and converted, to dishonour their community. These instances of sexualized violence against women of 'other' community reflects that women are carriers of community identity; they are the symbols and repositories of collectivity. Women are central to community identity, and community identity cannot be separated from women's identity. That is why any assault and attack on women is perceived as a symbolic attack on the communal identity (Butalia 1994, 2000; Kapur and Cossman, 1993).

Moreover, communities also determine and construct notions of femininity, which women must prescribe to, if they want to be deemed honourable. The construction of ideal femininity is crucial for communities because it embodies important markers of community identity. The honour of collectivity is established, if the women of the community follow expected norms and rules. The practice of sati can be understood in this context as it was assumed that the life of a widow would be worse than death by immolation. Sati was therefore an act of honour for the family of the dead man. Widow immolation on the funeral pyre of the husband has been identified as a distinctly patriarchal and violent practice, because of the wide social consent and institutional support the practice had received. It is one of those instances where violence against women is lauded, celebrated, and supported publicly because it is a part of a particular community's customs and tradition. There is mutual engagement among violence, consent, institutional support, beliefs, and ideology (Mani, 1989). According to feminist scholars, the spectacular event of sati is produced by ideologies that support and legitimizes oppression of women (Loomba, 1993). Moreover, there is double violence that has been encompassed in the practice of Sati. The event of sati is presented as a "unique, transhistorical, trans geographic category" and to see the burnt woman is imbued with special powers. Sati is markedly different from other women in her community because of her will. Sati denotes three distinct points: the virtuous woman, the chaste wife, and the immolated widow. "The good woman is above all a chaste wife, and the ultimate proof of her chastity is her consent to self-immolation" (Sarkar, 2013). Her "consent" or rather "the strong will" to be burnt along with the husband, is considered to bring honour not only to the woman but also to her family and community. In this way, the practice of Sati also reinforced

the ideas of normative femininity (Loomba, 1993) and the women who ‘embrace’ this practice represents chastity, strength and devotion to their family, and community.

Working concept of honour: Insights from the field

The central significance of honour as a working concept was vividly highlighted to me during my fieldwork in Muzaffarnagar, a district that is geo-strategically, and socio-culturally significant in western Uttar Pradesh. The region’s economy, politics, and the socio-cultural sphere is organized around agriculture. Even notions of honour are entangled with the agrarian way of life (Mishra and Rayaprol, 2023). One example to understand this is how peasant communities have associated honour with farming in general, and farming sugarcane in particular. Historically, sugarcane has brought prosperity to the region and its people. The crop has changed the fortunes of peasants struggling in a brutal agrarian climate. Because of the profits and prosperity that this cash crop has brought to the agrarian communities of western Uttar Pradesh, especially Jats, peasant communities in the region consider sugarcane as a ‘shahi’, royal crop. The lure, stature, and prestige around sugarcane is such that even now when agrarian distress is at its peak, farmers continue to sow sugarcane, and even marriages are settled based on land under cane cultivation (Rai, 2018). Sugarcane is linked to the honour and status of agrarian families which is why even when the sugar mill payment schedule is running in arrears, leaving farmers poverty-struck and destitute, they still do not forgo cane cultivation. Even as non-farm employment and urban migration are on the rise, people ensure that they have some land back in the village, and make sure it is cultivated, because agriculture is an important aspect of their self-identity, and it is how they claim honour. This illustrates the economic entanglements of honour and its embeddedness in the agrarian economy.

Life in western Uttar Pradesh is still governed by honour in a variety of ways. Western Uttar Pradesh's rural areas are characterized by conflict. Sometimes this is just due to disputes involving insults or challenges to honour and people competing for honour. Conflict is more frequently and essentially centered on strategic resources, such as grazing rights, access routes to land, and water use rights. The most common causes of disputes among people include intrusions on personal space, property, usurpations of water rights, abusive pasturing, animal theft, crop devastation, adultery, and murder. Brawls, fights, accidents, and shootings happen frequently; as a result, the neighborhood has earned the moniker “crime city”. Such violations are viewed by them as threats to the property holding group's honour. This is

similar to Jane Schneider's understanding of honour as "an ideology of the property holding group which struggles to define, enlarge, and protect its patrimony in a competitive arena" (Schneider, 1976). But more often conflict is around women, a key productive and reproductive resource. As Muzaffarnagar is a complex agrarian society where kinship ties are still strong, the older kin members have control over the younger kins. Voluntary veiling (purdah and ghunghat) and separation from men indexes women's respectability because there is concern around the regulation of female sexuality. The practice of purdah, the restrictions on mobility, and the socialization of young girls into culturally appropriate dressing, are some prominent ways through which young women's sexuality has been regulated among both Jats and Muslims.

Women as an important resource for the agrarian economy

Traditional gender roles and honour codes are organized around the agrarian economy, which determines the norms around labor, sexuality, and mobility. Female body is central to the processes of production and reproduction for the community. Women's reproductive powers, pose a threat to the family's resources, if polluted by sexual contact with outsiders. The control on women's sexuality and their body is also important for other symbolic and cultural aspects. For instance, the dominant culture of the region, which is embedded in agrarian ethos, demands high participation of women, without providing any economic worth or social recognition. Women who do "hard" but "unpaid work" are considered as having "high moral values" (Chowdhry, 1993, 1994). As women continue to perform unpaid labor on family farms, it induces the honour of family, community, and women. Historically, even though women had no property rights (Agarwal, 1994, 1998), they were regarded as equal partners in agriculture, a role that became legitimized after marriage. So along with wife and mother duties, women are also 'bound' to take up agriculture and animal rearing work. They gain personal satisfaction in doing unpaid agrarian work, "hamare ghar (khet) ka kaam sai kaisi sharmindagi" (There is no shame in doing your work) (Chowdhry, 1993). Thus, the traditional notion of honour of rural agrarian women lies in doing unpaid work for the family. Women going out for paid work is alien to the prescribed traditional gender norms and roles and brings shame to the family and community at large. Moreover, women's participation in the labor market was, and is still considered undesirable because it constrains the traditional gender role of motherhood, towards her children as well as her cattle and land. However, because of agrarian distress, a stark shift has been observed in these patterns of women's

participation in markets and labor force participation, which will be discussed in the later chapters.

Gender Socialization around honour

The norms of honourable behavior for women are more stringent and coercive than for men. One of the respondents in this study, Nazneen Parveen (Muslim, 21, medical student) says that her brothers are scolded for indulging in physical fights, while she is scolded for something as “natural” as speaking loudly. When asked if men and women can enjoy the same activities, the 21-year-old medical student emphatically states ... “Yes. Both enjoy going out, working in the city, earning money, doing a job, partying, and roaming around with friends. But many girls are not allowed. I was not allowed but my younger brother was.” While her brother participated in ‘Roadies’, a popular television show, catering to urban youth, Nazneen has no similar experience.

The most alarming part is that when the younger, unmarried, college-going girls were asked about their perceptions of honour, they were at loss of words. However, they managed to paint a vivid picture of honour that is derived from everyday lives, for instance, Zooni (Muslim, 18): “we see in movies that something bad happens to the girl, or she does something bad, and then she loses her izzat. Occasionally, we hear from our parents or people from the neighborhood talking about how shameless (besharmi) actions of a girl leads to loss of honour (izzat) of the family, community (parivar, biradari)”. Similarly, Nargis says (Muslim, 21): “I have been hearing this word from my parents. All the time izzat, izzat. They say that ‘izzat ek baar aawe, baar baar nahi’, honour comes once, and if we lose it, then we won’t be honourable again. That’s why we are afraid about loss of honour.” The responses of Nargis and Zooni reinforce the findings from the literature, that when it comes to women, honour/izzat is understood through shame. Young women are socialized by their family members, neighborhood, and community; and the position of izzat/ honour is vulnerable to the stigma of shame. One of the most important aspects of gender socialization is young girls being led towards the institution of marriage. Marriage is an important institution in the control over women’s sexuality; when not confined to wedlock women pose danger to the community at large. Women recount that from a very early age they were socialized about how to be a good daughter-in-law.

Shruti Rathi (24, Jat) recounts that as a young girl, she was socialized that life is full of “adjustments and compromises”, and that “there are no negotiations in married life...” She further states: “Sometimes, when I fight with family members, then my sister-in-law tells me not to repeat the same behavior in Sasural, as such behavior is not appropriate for a daughter-in-law. Sometimes it is important to listen, and forget and move in. That’s how family sustains. That is how relations survive.” This narrative brings out that the dominant gender norms and gender socialization reinstate values of “adjustment” and “compromise” and that women should not fight or raise their voice. From a very young age, the girls are socialized by stressing on the importance of these submissive values, which is not only to enhance the prospects of marriageability, but also to continue the assertion of patriarchy in the household.

Bhaichara/brotherhood as a structure of honour, control, surveillance, and subversion

Gotra/Clan exogamy, village exogamy, and caste endogamy are the basic principles that govern key social processes in western Uttar Pradesh (Chowdhry, 2002). These rules are more strictly practiced among peasant communities, primarily due to the pervasive fears of land fragmentation, a prominent source of anxiety in agrarian societies. Agrarian culture is the dominant culture, these practices have also spread to other communities in the region (Chowdhry, 1994). Due to the existence of these principles, marriage (and thus, sexual activity) is prohibited between members of the same clan and village, and all men and women are bound by the brother-sister morality. That is why locally, kinship terms are prevalent such as Bhai (brother) and Behan (sister) among non-kin as well (Channa, 1997). Moreover, both the Jat and Muslim communities place a strong emphasis on the concept of brotherhood/bhaichara. The idea of bhaichara is central to both the communities, they are seen as a community of equals in which significant economic gaps do not translate into social class differences. Thus, believing in bhaichara and transcending the ties of biological kinship, they embrace all the males and females of the village of one’s generation as brothers and sisters, notwithstanding caste affiliations. Bhaichara (brotherhood) is the term through which both communities develop a feeling of community. Izzat (honour) lies in preserving traditional egalitarian practices such as ekta (unity or solidarity), biradari (larger kin group) and bhaichara (brotherhood) (Chowdhry, 2002; Hasnain, 2014). Bhaichara (brotherhood) establishes equality among all and denies any hierarchy. The collective voice and collective action emerge within these egalitarian practices in different kinds of political contexts, however when it comes to women, “the same collective acts unite to reinforce patriarchal ideology to control women” (Chowdhry, 1993, 97).

Brother (Bhai) as a concept has a great encompassing capacity (Dumont, 1988, 27; Madsen 1991) One of the most crucial tasks that is allocated to a brother is to protect his sister, and her honour. However, there is another contradictory position from which the brothers operate. Bhai and bhaichara (brotherhood) are forces that work to control women. Festivals such as Raksha Bandhan and bhaidooj can be understood in this light, as these festivals propagate unilateral ideas of protection and a sense of entitlement over women's bodies. This sense of entitlement that brothers have over sisters, through the idea of protection, very often gets translated into powerful tools of coercion and control. Young women are surveilled, controlled, and often subordinated within this twin system of protection and control. Dipankar Gupta understands the bhaichara system as the "tyranny of cousins" (Gupta, 2010). The term "tyranny of cousin" was originally coined by Ernest Gellner to refer to the situation where "clan replaces kingships and blood ties". In such situations, "laws do not function, not even those of monarchs and absolutists." But what functions is "parcellized authority, where micro tyrants rule". Following Gellner, Gupta argues that there is a very fine line between bhaichara and tyranny of cousins, as it is these clan cousins who participate in surveillance, control and honour killing of the sisters, if they try to bring shame to the clan, village or gotra by falling in love (Gupta, 2010).

It is the collectivity in the form of biradari and bhaichara that reinforce patriarchal gender ideology in the name of honour/izzat (Chowdhry, 2002). Men have a tremendous need to defend their classificatory and blood sisters to protect the biradari and the bhaichara relationship that is prevalent in the region. The so-called defense of the honour of sisters is the root of most conflicts and violence in this area. Boys feel obligated to defend the college going women in their community. Due to the sexual harassment of girls, disagreements between groups of boys from various villages frequently arise. (More about this in the fourth chapter).

However, substantial data from the field reflects that another form of bhaichara is also operational in the region, especially from women's standpoint. 'Bhai' (brother) is a frequently used term when women want to legitimize their friendship with men. Women derive legitimacy in interaction with non-related males in public spaces by presenting their association as a brother-sister relationship. Nazneen Parveen, who has recently moved to Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) to pursue medicine, says that all her male friends are

“like brothers”. Sarika Balliyan (Jat, 24), who is living in Muzaffarnagar city alone, and working in a college, where she works in proximity with non-kin men, also uses the same terminological classification, to describe her friendship with unrelated males. Sobiya Jameel (Muslim, 23) who lives in the city and works in the mall frequently takes lift from her male co-workers. How does she navigate such behavior in a restricted neighborhood? She justifies this heterosocial engagement by explaining that the men who drop her are like brothers and protect her from harassment in streets and public transportation. Similarly, Gulistan Chaudhary (Muslim, 24) who lives in the village but commutes to the city frequently, through help of male friends who have bike, addresses this relationship as “bhai-behen” type relationship.

Leena Abraham, who has studied youth sexual cultures in the Mumbai metropolis, has identified “brother-sister like friendship” as an important typology, to explain heterosexual relationships among peers; the other two being, “true love” and “time pass” (Abraham, 2002). Bhai-behen relationship depicts that heterosocial interaction is within prescribed social and cultural limits. This classification doesn’t allow others to raise suspicion and restricts social teasing. Declaring their association as friendship allows young men and women to hang out, socially engage in public spaces, study together, and talk on the phone. Bhai-behen relationship has emerged in a social context where there is a social restriction on heterosocial engagement, but there is also a persistent desire to establish friendship in a culture where heterosexuality is the norm (Abraham, 2002).

The term is particularly useful for young women for a variety of reasons, such as maintaining distance from a boy who has been romantically pursuing her (bro-zoned is the latest urban terminology in this regard). Simultaneously, the Bhai-behen relationship provides young women to get to know men, in social spaces, without compromising their sexual reputation. For others, a Bhai-behen relationship is an initiation into a romantic relationship. In this sense, the Bhai-behen relationship is a broad and fluid category that women creatively use, and in many instances, women rely on the Bhai-behen relationship to subvert the stringent heteronormative and patriarchal codes.

Gendered honour codes generate antagonism among relatives, specifically sisters

This is more likely to happen if one sister is attempting to circumvent the norms of gendered honour, by flirting, being in a relationship, or meeting with a man. My interviews with

younger generation women revealed that they were deviating from the norms in these ways (the causes, consequences, and implications of 'illicit' heterosocial engagement will be discussed in the fifth chapter). But never with the help of a sister, because sisters were the first ones to disclose these normative transgressions to other family members. Preeti recounts the time when she used to attend coaching with her cousin sister. Both the girls got an opportunity to study because they could commute together, and togetherness implied safety, ensured honourable behavior, and illustrated a meaningful purpose for accessing public space. Since two girls from one family were eager to learn and be educated, they were allowed to go out. The negotiations were easier because they were two in number. Later, Preeti realized that her sister developed a romantic relationship with a classmate. While Preeti focused on her studies, her sister did not, and often bunked classes, and roamed around with her boyfriend. Preeti complained about the deviant behavior of her cousin sister to her parents and other family members. Eventually, the family stopped the cousin sister from attending coaching classes before any real damage was done to family and community honour. Meanwhile, Preeti continued with her honourable behavior, and went to the city for higher education, subsequently converted her educational degree into paid employment, and eventually started living alone in the city, in a place that she called her own. Preeti asserted that her family's honour was at risk because of this incident and that safeguarding the family's honour was her top priority. While protecting family honour was certainly the complaint's visible purpose, it also had the covert purpose of highlighting Preeti's chastity and commitment to her work. The implications of this intervention by Preeti had long-term effects, as the cousin sister was married off hurriedly, and Preeti got an opportunity to pursue higher education while living alone in the city.

The betrayal of one sister by another begins to make sense once we examine the implications of having a female sibling whose reputation has been ruined. The young women who are often involved in such surveillance practices understand that when and if one sister transgresses the norms of female chastity, the social perception will taint all the sisters' reputations and the family honour. Because of the surveillance roles that sisters (and brothers) take up against each other, there is palpable mistrust among them. David Gilmore writes that women who exhibit chaste and modest behavior have a vested interest in gossip, because each time a female transgressor is discovered, coerced, punished, and condemned, the prestige surrounding the chaste woman is highlighted and reaffirmed (Gilmore, 1987, 69). Women actively reproduce the patterns of female purity, ensuring and maintaining

patriarchal ideas of honour and shame, by socializing and telling others that honourable behavior is for their own good, and spying on and gossiping about one another's daughters is part of an overall deep internalization of and loyalty to the system (Ortner, 1978).

Contradictions of endogamy and ambivalence around honour

Ethnographic evidence from Haryana, Punjab, and western Uttar Pradesh, indicate that women of the region are strongly policed to marry within the caste, clan and community norms, and when the norms are transgressed, they are subjected to violence and sometimes even murder, popularly termed as honour killings. While gotra/clan exogamy, village exogamy, and caste endogamy are the basic principles that govern key social processes in this rural-agrarian belt, there is also enough evidence that highlights the existence of practices that circumvent these stringent rules pertaining marriage.

While on one hand, we see how khap-enforced endogamy results in honour killing of girls and boys who make an unconstrained choice, the practices of inter-caste marriage and cross-regional marriages have also come to the social fore. These practices have emerged concerning men, where the stringent rules of endogamy are forgone by the family and the community considering the unfavorable sex ratio. It has been argued that patrilineal systems of descent, inheritance, patterns of post-marital residency, and dowry practices are related to the poor sex ratio in north India, which favors sons over daughters. (Dasgupta, 1987; John et al., 2009). The declining sex ratio in the region has led to new systems and rules of marriage, such as “cross-regional marriage” or “bride-import” (Chaudhry, 2016; Kaur, 2004, 2012). These new systems of marriage are against the dominant north Indian marriage norms. The cross-regional brides, and lower caste brides, do not fall within the caste, region, clan, and village-determined rules of endogamy and exogamy. The entry of these outsiders is justified by the “absolute necessity of having a woman to run a household and open the doors to food and water” (Mishra, 2013, 48:74). Thus, different forms of marriage are being accepted, as a response to the missing women in the region, and this highlights the contradictions around honour and endogamy.

A related phenomenon that is prevalent in the region is ‘fraternal polyandry’ (brothers sharing one wife). The practice of fraternal polyandry is generally found among land-owning castes, as a response to adverse sex ratio, a consequence of sex-selective abortions, male child preference, daughter aversion and subsequent neglect; and secondly and primarily due to the

pervasive fears of land fragmentation, a prominent source of anxiety in agrarian societies (Kaur, 2004; Jeffery and Jeffery, 1997; Mishra, 2013; Pradhan, 1962; Darling 1977; Hershman 1981)

Interestingly, there is also enough historical and contemporary evidence that highlights the bad fate of some men, highlighting that son preference is not as encompassing in the agrarian belt as we are made to believe. To achieve the optimum family, peasant families in the northern countryside not only practice female feticide but also make sure that some sons remain unmarried, and thus without family (Kaur, 2008). Both these strategies help in reducing claimants to the family resources, especially agrarian land. Thus, for some men, bachelorhood is involuntary and a family imposition. The sexuality of these unmarried men is managed by community-sanctioned fraternal polyandry, and sexual liaisons with lower caste women (Kaur, 2008). Thus, as per community strategy, some men are never accorded a marriage or a family of their own, highlighting the discrepancies within honour ideology.

Along with the involuntary bachelorhood of some sons from peasant families in rural agrarian communities, there are different kinds of marriage practices that have been introduced, and many have even been brought back to the social scene. For instance, there is provision for both widow and widower remarriage, as per levirate and sororate, wherein the dead husband/wife is replaced by a real or classificatory brother or sister (Chowdhry, 1994). As per the traditions of Karewa, a Jat widower can marry his wife's sister, or a Jat widow can be married off to the deceased husband's younger brother known as dewar, without any ceremony.²¹ There is enough literature that highlights the plight of a widow, especially in a context where access to resources and property rights are deeply intertwined with the marital status of women. In this context, Karewa becomes a representative of a liberal social climate in a society that has many stringent rules regarding marriage, and Jats claim this with great honour. Ekta Balliyan (Jat, 54) recounts a popular saying in the region that glorifies the persistence of Karewa, "a Jat woman never becomes a widow", which highlights that a Jat widow's dignity is kept intact by remarriage. But more importantly, this is also a covert family strategy to ensure cohesion so that there is no fragmentation of family or property.

²¹ Karewa has also been reported among Muslim peasant communities in the rural agrarian north Indian belt. For instance, the Muslim Rajputs of Gurgaon, who started to be known as Gaurwa Rajputs, had begun to practice widow remarriage in its Karewa (levirate) form (Chowdhry, 1996a).

Moreover, this strategy also highlights the centrality of women to the agrarian economy, both in their productive and reproductive capacities.

These myriad and contradictory practices go against the honour culture that is dominant in the region and the contradiction is gendered in nature. These practices not only reflect the political economy of marriage, but it also reflects the burden of honour on some, and the disposal of honour for others, all for the survival of the community. This also demonstrates that rural patriarchy works in myriad and diverse ways, and for its survival, accommodates contradictory strategies that might seem pro-women, but works for the perpetuation of the patriarchal systems.

Honour and paid work

Another domain which highlights ambivalence around the traditional notion of honour is women doing paid work in public spaces. Women account for 41 per cent of world's agricultural labor force; in poor countries, they account for 49 per cent of labor force. In Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan countries, almost 60 per cent of the women are involved in agrarian activities and produce more than half of all the food grown worldwide (International Labour Organization, 2019). Women in rural economy work in varied capacities such as subsistence farmers, small-scale producers, as workers, in plantations, agro-industries, and so on. There is an increasing trend of women doing agrarian work, which is explained by male migration to urban landscapes. As men are moving to cities for non-farm work, women are taking up their place on the farms (International Labour Organization, 2019).

While women continue to play a critical and transformative role in agricultural growth, they continue to face persistent obstacles and constraints. There has been a long history to invisibilize the gendered labor that goes into the survival of agrarian societies. Women in agrarian societies have a long history of high participation and low evaluation (Chowdhry, 1993), and they have also been denied property rights (Agarwal, 1994, 1998). Bina Agrawal (1994), Prem Chowdhry (2011, 2017) have highlighted the issue of women's dispossession in terms of land rights in North India.

The relationship that women share with work is most exhausting, yet equally invisible and unrecognized. In the domestic sphere, women are always working and doing unpaid work and emotional labor. However, when it comes to doing paid work in the public sphere,

women face cultural, legal, normative, and economic constraints to work, for instance, the inheritance rights which have been against women. These situations alienate women working in agrarian landscapes.

“Honour-income trade-off”²²

The scholars studying the female labor participation rate have drawn attention to honour-income trade-off. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asian countries, for instance, confront an honour-income trade-off, which means that female employment rises only if the woman earns enough to balance the loss of family honour (Evans, 2022). In other words, men’s loss of honour should be compensated well. Alice Evans highlights that because of the focus and value put on female chastity and honour, the advantages of female wage labor were counterbalanced by the inevitable suspicion, humiliation, and social exclusion. She uses instances from the MENA region to demonstrate her point, when Muslim patrilineal clans sought to preserve honour and chastity by keeping women to themselves. Despite the growth of industries, women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) continued to labor from home, weaving carpets in front of their male relatives. Few families were willing to take a risk and be the first to send their daughter away because they feared that her reputation may be tarnished by her proclivity. Thus, families' inability to budge from the honour culture unilaterally generated a vicious cycle where wage labor remained unusual for women, which is a “patrilineal trap”. (Evans, 2022).

Though honour and income do share an interesting and paradoxical relationship, especially when gendered bodies are doing paid work in public spaces, nevertheless, these norms are also changing, as is reflected in the narratives of Jat and Muslim women from western Uttar Pradesh. It is true that as per traditional gender norms and roles, women’s participation in the labor market has negative implications on honour because the status of a working woman is not in sync with the prescribed traditional gender norms and gender roles. There is a long-held belief that when a woman leaves her house, she compromises her reputation and the family’s honour. In Dhaka, Bangladesh for instance, migrant women working at night in export-oriented garment factories experienced hostility and abuse within the factory, and

²² In economics, trade-off can be understood as the idea that “if you choose one thing, you are going to lose another. The trade-off is taking the opportunity to have something, but in order to get that thing, you have to give up, or sacrifice, something else.” <https://study.com/academy/lesson/trade-offs-in-economics-definition-examples.html>

while navigating between home and workplace. These working women deal with real threats of assault, kidnapping, rape, verbal abuse, etc. Society relegates female workers to low-class status, and the factories they work in are sometimes referred to as warehouses, and baby-producing centers (Amin, 1997).

Moreover, as per the traditional gender norms, female participation in the labor market stands in stark contradiction with women's naturalized gender roles pertaining to motherhood (Rosaldo, 1974). Women's reproductive duties demand full time dedication, except in cases of extreme economic distress. In this scenario, women's work outside the home is presented as a sacrifice, which is alienating them from their natural duties and vocations of reproduction and care work (Stolen, 1998, 69). Moreover, women entering public spaces for paid work is also reflecting that their husband is unable to provide for them and the family, which also leads to loss of honour. But there are certain situations and conditions where female employment is not only necessitated but also appreciated, and in these scenarios, the meaning of honour is reinterpreted and altered by the newly working women who are challenging the prevailing social and gender norms.

An increasing number of women have been entering the workforce in western Uttar Pradesh, especially in the 21st century. Due to agrarian distress, and the out-migration of young men, in search of non-farm employment, there has been a shift from the traditional gender roles that were embedded in agriculture (Mishra and Rayaprol, 2023). In the contemporary society of Muzaffarnagar, women doing paid work in public spaces is normal, especially because increasing agrarian distress has forced households to become 'pluri-active', where multiple members of one household must work to survive and sustain themselves (Jodhka, 2014a, 2014b). While these issues will be discussed in greater detail in the fourth and fifth chapters, it's important to discuss the implications of paid work on women's honour and community honour, and how the working women claim honour/ assert their honour in a context where accessing public space is necessary for survival.

Pinki Chaudhary (Jat, 48), Meeta Chaudhary (Jat, 45), and Soofi Jehan (Muslim, 38), were not socialized towards paid work. Moreover, they were neither educated, trained nor aspired for paid work. However, challenging personal situations such as domestic abuse, drunken husbands, marital rape, mental harassment, and a lack of support drove them into the public sphere for paid jobs. Pinki and Meeta worked on fields, provided cleaning and cooking

services in the neighborhood, and started sewing clothing. Later, they started working as ASHA and Anganwadi workers. Soofi went on to pursue master's in social work and started working in an NGO. Pinki, Geeta, Soofi and many other women of the region had to come out of their homes, into the public space, for paid work, and this led to many people questioning their honour and reputation. Their salary was also not enough to justify loss of honour as per the honour income trade-off,²³ then what led these women to pursue paid work in public space? The narratives of middle age Jat and Muslim women, who came out of the domestic sphere in the early 2000s, show that they entered the public sphere for paid work, but not out of choice but due to majboori/compulsion. As their narratives revealed, they were living in a toxic household environment where the husband didn't provide for the family. It was in response to "abusive husband", and "for the preservation of the sanctified family", "to feed the children", "to take care of the in-laws", "to make sure that the roof is repaired", that these women entered the public space to do paid work. These noble causes that working women reiterated while communicating with the family and community members, ensured their honour.

Some women aspired towards being doctors, particularly in gynecology, teaching, and social work (a post-riot phenomenon). For instance, Nazneen Parveen wants to become a gynecologist because "there are not enough doctors in my community, and if I become a gynecologist, it will help many women of my community who can seek reproductive healthcare because of the 'private' nature of these interactions." The doctor's profession is honourable, but when Nazneen Parveen wishes to serve the community's female members, it becomes much more honourable. As a result, she is not only considered as honourable by her family but also makes a case for honour on the grounds that she is looking out for the reproductive health of her fellow women in her community to advance the interests of the community at large.

Since 2013, women of both communities have started working as social workers. Shaziya Siddiqui (Muslim, 28) lives in the village where riot-affected people were rehabilitated. Because of the communal atmosphere and breaking out of the communal riot, she had to discontinue her education. When she saw the plight of the rehabilitated people, especially the

²³ Pinki and Geeta made Rs. 10,000 each, and Soofi made Rs. 15,000 per month. A detailed table including salary of respondents is enclosed in appendix.

children who could not be accommodated in schools because of their refugee status, it resonated with her own loss of education. She started working as a social worker and started teaching the children of riot-affected people. Presently, she is teaching and training lower class, and lower caste, boys, and girls, in computer hardware and software; tailoring classes to girls; and spoken English classes to both. She is highly visible because of her work in the village, the community, and even in the district because of her distinctive contributions. She has been awarded for her efforts to society and her photographs are published on the official district website. While she is not earning anything and relies on donations and external funding for her NGO, yet her work is deemed honourable, not only by the family but community, village and the state as well. This example highlights the discrepancies within the honour-income trade-off.

Shaziya highlighted that as she started working, hanging out with strangers, and developing an identity and image in the public space, she had to take extra efforts to appear more grounded (*zameen se jude huwe*), by controlling her desires (more in terms of expensive clothes and makeup) and limiting her 'shauk' (unnecessary and expensive consumption of goods). Fiza maintains that despite going out for work, earning money, and meeting strange men, she continues to live her modest way of life by not spending too much, and saving money for children and emergencies. She is asserting her honourable behavior by demonstrating her prudence. She says: In my *nanihal* (mother's maternal home), they tell me that you are doing so good, you go on stage, and they felicitate you, you are well-known and important member of the society, and you are not doing any fashion- *vashion*. Why don't you wear standard clothes and clothes of your desire. Standard means fashionable, branded, the ones which are sold in showrooms, expensive clothes, quality clothes which look good and last long. I tell them that even if I wear dresses worth thousands of rupees, I still must remove those clothes, at the end of the day. I will have to undress from that suit, and still, it will ruin one day, and I will have to throw it. Then why should I throw away my husband's salary? It's better if I use the salary to educate the children, who will bless me. I will be protected from doing bad activities. I will save the money for the education of my daughter. This is prudent and honourable.

Gaura Rathi (Jat, 20) wanted to be a fashion designer, but she was forced to pursue a bachelor's in education. Teaching as a profession is encouraged, but fashion design as a choice is rejected. This choice is not arbitrary, there are reasons, of which some are economic,

and others are related to honour. It can be argued that fashion designing can be an expensive course, and that is why Gaura was encouraged to pursue teaching, she was also not allowed to pursue dancing, jewelry making, or other less expensive courses. However, her family convinced her that teaching was a respectable profession. It should be mentioned that teaching is a career that has traditionally been linked with women and is viewed as a 'soft alternative' for women who want to work in public. Because teaching is seen as an extension of women's home responsibilities, it has been and still is a socially acceptable job choice for middle-class women.

Sarika Balliyan, (Jat, 25) explained: "One bhabhi from the village recently opened a beauty parlour. She even stitches clothes to get some extra money. She works hard for the well-being of the family; however, her mother-in-law accuses her, and the old neighborhood ladies taunt her. They consider her bad because not only does she goes out for work, the kind of work she does (beauty parlor) is not good for the other girls. They present their own 'bahu' as respectable because they stay at home."

The idea of the 'cult of domesticity' which is perceived as the ability of women to embody the ideals of the home and carry out their duties, with skill and pleasure is valued and perpetuated (More about this in fourth chapter). In western Uttar Pradesh, appropriate female behavior emphasizes "modesty, obedience, self-sacrifice and attachment to the home" (Derné, 1994). Interviews with women of different generations, communities, and class locations revealed that they all were socialized following the specific models of culturally appropriate (therefore honourable) gender behavior. The most important aspect of being a good woman, of being an honourable woman lies in how well she performs the traditional gender roles; these traditional gender roles are firmly embedded in values of tradition, domesticity, modesty, and privacy.

From a very young age, girls are socialized in the values of modesty and do not have impulses toward sexual gratification. Parents, especially older women, find it necessary to impress upon them the importance of restraint and modesty. Both Jats and Muslims, have varied gender expectations concerning appearance, comportment in public and private spaces, appropriateness and deferential. But notions of appropriate domesticity and femininity are also deeply intertwined with middle-class morality. A woman does not merely symbolize household honour, but she is the epitome of household honour (Ghar ki izzat). Therefore, it

is not only crucial to control women's behavior, but it is also essential to restrict and control the situations and circumstances where honour can be jeopardized. "If Hindu women should behave according to Maryada (decorum, decency, rectitude, dignity), Muslim women were to follow adab (etiquette) and akhlaq (moral virtues)" (Jeffery et al., 2004, p. 25).

Ethnography in the region highlights how a man tells his wife that overindulgence, carelessness, and disregard (fazul kharch, beparwai, gaflat) have ruined nations and families. He prohibits her from hoisting elaborate ceremonies which are not sanctioned as per tenets of Islam (Jeffery et al., 2004, p. 5). Similarly, Jat girls are taught to live in line with agrarian ethos. Parents question them about the new kind of needs that the girls are spending money on. As we will see in fifth chapter, this issue becomes contentious when we locate the myriad of conflicts which are happening within the purview of aspirations of the younger generation of women and the anxieties of older patriarchs.

The honourable behavior of a woman is to manage the household with the money she receives from her husband. Her honour lies in presenting the house in the most beautiful way to the outsider, the guests. A good house, a beautiful, well-managed domestic set-up adds to the honour of the woman and asserts her perfection in the most important role that she is supposed to perform. Extravagant expenditure on 'un-Islamic' practices are often looked down upon. Shaziya Siddiqui explains her understanding of honour in the following words, *"My husband's salary, however less it is, I don't care about it; all I care about is his love. Whatever he earns, and gives to me lovingly, I must take that and ensure that this money is enough for our house. I take whatever money he gives, and try to run the house with that money, and not humiliate him, or disrespect him before others. This will ensure both our honour."*

These narratives highlight that the social and cultural norms dictate that there should be limits to how much women can spend because unnecessary spending is bad for women. Money in the hands of a woman without any constraints might lead her to do bad activities, which again is related to loss of honour and reputation for the family. This also highlights that financial prudence, intimately connected with sexual prudence, is the desired quality of women, and women embrace this quality to assert their honour. But as the forthcoming chapters will reveal, the new consumption culture is rampant among young women and men, who have started earning money through non-farm employment, consuming fashion and engaging with

the market through digital technologies, and new urban spaces of consumption. Moreover, these new trends of consumer culture that are embraced by young men and women have raised complex and contentious issues for rural-agrarian patriarchy, which has been accustomed to a culture of servitude and unpaid labor of women in the region.

Emerging tensions around the gendered notion of honour

There is prevalent anxiety around the loss of honour, as expressed by the respondents, across religion, caste, class, and community. However, there are generational variations concerning problematic perceptions around honour. The older generation of both the communities are in consensus that there is a high threat of loss of honour, at present, due to the increasing independence of younger generation women. Moreover, male friends and boyfriends are a looming threat in the times of necessary access to school, coaching, and mobiles. Parents worry that co-education schools, which boast of imparting English education, create avenues for illicit heterosocial engagement, which creates anxiety in the minds of parents and other members of society. Mothers and fathers are particularly concerned with the mixing and blending of non-kin boys and girls in public spaces, such as malls, colleges and so on. Mothers, aunts, and grandmothers complain about increasing mistrust in the environment of the city (*sheher ka mahaul*) due to education, boys, malls, and mobiles. This often leads to conflicts among women of different generations.²⁴

In this context, young girls are socialized about the loss of honour in relationships, and family as the only place to come back to. They are taught by the mothers and the aunts of the neighborhood that they are vulnerable, because they are girls, and should always be conscious of consequences. These consequences range from physical punishment to the complete denial of education, and any other type of public engagement. One terminology that emerged in the context of women's understanding of honour and shame was the notion of risk. Risk has been identified as the most prevalent and inappropriate gender behavior that relates to loss of honour. Khurshid Parveen, the mother of a 24-year-old girl, points out that taking risk is “*not*

²⁴ Generational conflict is due to many other reasons, for instance, a new way of doing things, or not following the traditional practices. However, strangely, most of the conflicts are between mother and daughter. Mothers don't like their daughters spending too much money. These days' girls have too many clothes. They waste an awful lot of money. The daughters, however, justify their spending as a requirement for the new roles that they take up in the course of paid employment. For instance, Preeti, a Jat woman works in a school, and a college as well. For her work, she needs to have many proper dresses, which are smart, trendy, as well as respectable. While Preeti says that she spends only what she earns, she feels bad that her mother is unable to appreciate her new lifestyle that is based on her hard work and struggles.

appropriate feminine behavior, it means acting without thinking or taking decisions spontaneously, leaving result and consequences for later... thinking that God will take care of it. These days' girls take many risks, without any concern for consequences. I tell my girl that izzat (honour) is fragile and can be lost at one small action. So why trouble our family."

The older generation Jat and Muslim women feel that the values of restraint and modesty have been given up by the younger generation women. Pinki Chaudhary, says, *"these days girl focus on beauty, but I tell them that they should be "mazboot,"²⁵ (strong). Of course, Jat women are physically strong, but they should also be mentally strong. For instance, your parents are giving you a mobile for your safety. So, use it for that only, to be safe, and don't misuse it. Some so many girls have started walking on the wrong path due to this. They are behaving like 'awara' (vagabond) women, they are keeping the wrong company, and doing wrong activities. Society is becoming 'frank', and our girls are proof of this. They are maturing fast. They make friends on Facebook, but in the name of friendship, girls are eloping with boys. Boys promise them "I will do this for you." "You are so beautiful". And girls are falling into the trap. We all are explaining to the girls, all the time. Even the political parties are doing so much for the girls. Anyway, the sex ratio is so poor in this region and particularly in our community, but how can we resist these crimes if our girls keep walking on the wrong path? These days you might hear about the program "Beti Bachao, Beti padhao" (save daughter, educate daughter). So, it is complex. We must save our daughters also, and we must educate them also....."*

When asked what is the most pressing issue that the Muzaffarnagar society is facing, many older generation respondents (men and women) pointed out that with the changing times, it is very important to control "our girls", that "limits" are important for raising good women. Ramesho Chaudhary (Jat, 58), compared women to flowing water, in the sense that both possess the same strength to nurture and to destroy. To harness feminine energy, she says that women need to have boundaries. She says: *"Look at a river, the river has no control, so when the flood comes, the river will be out of control and kill people. However, if we look at the canal and its sturdy boundaries, we can see the power it holds, and we can harness it in*

²⁵ Physical strength is an important trait for the Jat woman. Historically the Jat women have worked for long hours in the agrarian fields, alongside men. They are known to be sharing some of the most difficult and painful works in the field, sometimes even irrigation, and harvesting the sugarcane. Even in popular culture, Jatni is a figure of strength.

appropriate ways. Canal has a boundary, similarly, a woman has 'maryada', limits. And we must stay within 'maryada', limits. If we live a dignified and honourable life, then there will be the betterment of society, country, family, and self. These days thinking has changed. Women have started exhibiting/ displaying themselves, they are indulging in showing off. They have lost self-control..."

Similarly, Khurshid, expresses her concern for the younger generation of women: *"Today we are fine, but we don't know what type of daughter-in-law, we will get in future. What if she doesn't want to do household work and we can't do it because of old age? These days which daughter-in-law cooks food for others?"*

These narratives bring out many complexities that are now emerging in the preservation of honour. Moreover, these narratives are also reflective of how starkly honour codes and gender norms are changing. Traditional gender roles and honour codes in a rural-agrarian economy are mostly shaped to extract women's labor, for free and without providing them any recognition or worth. But because of agrarian distress, women have started going out for work and education. Naturally what accompanies this is change, but how much change is too much change? Women are taking "risks", they have "lost self-control", and they are "crossing limits". And these trends have been facilitated by education, access to public space, and engagement with non-kin men. If a family restricts public space, education will be restricted. Also, sexual safety is an important concern for those who are going out of the house for tuition, college, and school, and the mobile phone acts as a facilitator in terms of women keeping in touch with family. But along with the mobile phone comes, social media, and all these social networks often lead to a boyfriend. Coupled with this is also the threat that what if the women stop working at home? What if the daughters and daughters-in-law stop cooking food, a threat in the hearts and minds of the older generation women who are raising daughters, and expecting daughters-in-law?

Young women try to conform to the pressures of cultural expectations, and rules prescribed by the family. The younger generation women, particularly unmarried and college-going, feel control. They complain about being on the receiving end of "unfair restrictions" and "suspensions". Even when they are not controlled, they are very aware of the fact that the family's reputation depends on them, their conduct and behavior, particularly in public spaces, which is why they live under immense pressure, especially with increased

surveillance, and in a strong gossip culture. Since the young women realize that they are the bearers of the family honour, and community identity, they often make choices following the prescribed norms and cultural practices of the region. While the older generation feels the need to control the girls, the younger generation of women are often irritated with new restrictions and that they are not being trusted. They are self-righteous and patient, yet they also frequently defend themselves by citing their moral rectitude and modesty, even if they do enjoy wearing brightly colored hair accessories or lipstick or are wearing jeans and commuting on a scooter. They talk about themselves as individuals who can distinguish between right and wrong; in both the communities women consider themselves as powerful agents of moral standing.

I came across many young women during my field visits, who asserted that they had the power to go outside if they wanted to. They claimed that the decision to go out is their own, and they have the freedom to access the public spaces, but they do not go out because they do not want to, or because the parents approve, but don't appreciate it. This conversation around permitted access to public space, but women's voluntary denial to access this space, illustrates the intergenerational negotiation of honour and shame and the complexities of social agency. To exercise her agency in a situation where she has very little choice, Varsha Rathie claims that she has the freedom to go to a café if she wants to. By claiming that the decision to not go is her own, Varsha thus enhances her respectability in the eyes of her mother. This resonates with the insistence of many women who claim that it is their own choice to stay home, despite the presence of opportunities for them to leave. In both cases, women assert their limited agency to enhance their status as 'good girls' or 'good women', despite constraints on their choice (Crivello, 2008). This demonstrates how public adherence to gender norms enables women to obtain personal concessions from their families, giving them more flexibility to pursue their education or work. They negotiated with their family by subscribing to honourable behavior (modesty, domesticity, sincerity), and seek permission to challenge the traditional gender norms that prevail in society.

Young women especially worry about gossip. Words about their honour and reputation have long-lasting effects on 'marriageability'. Gossip remains an important cause for worry in a society where honour is also perceived as reputation. "People talk" is a recurring phrase in the narratives of women, which suggests that gossip is a source of anxiety for young women. Gossip brings shame, and as Wikan points out "it is shame rather than honour which is the

predominant concern” (Wikan, 1984). Young women say that Muzaffarnagar is a “small place, not only in sense of space but also with regards to mindset”. They feel that the city is characterized by a gossip culture, “where everybody knows everybody else’s business and makes a point of doing so”. Young women are concerned about maintaining a respectable reputation, as their worth will be assessed, along the socially and culturally recognized parameters of respectability. The belief that “people talk” is critical in determining the gendered nature of habitus, as reputation for shame and modesty are built through the words of other people. For these reasons, many young women consider cafés and cinemas off-limits. Even if they are not doing anything bad, there is always the risk that “people talk”. But a new shopping mall in the city has changed everything, as we will see in the fifth chapter.

Vartha Rathee, recalls how she was socialized by her mother. *“She never talked about a boyfriend as such, but she told me not to do any such thing like love and don't engage with anyone unnecessarily. She warned me don't do any inappropriate activities such as roaming with boys or loitering in the city...”* Varsha’s narrative reflects the traditional gender norms as per which, loitering is connected to honour, respectability and normative femininity, and it is as problematic as roaming around with boys. Loitering can be understood in the context of the public-private dichotomy, which is central to women’s control and subordination, in a patriarchal and segregated society. Women who develop a reputation for spending excessive amounts of time in the public spaces, in cafés and cinemas are associated with ‘the street’ and are viewed with suspicion. Awara ladkiyan (street girl) refers to women who conspicuously occupy the masculine space of the outside. Shilpa Phadke talks about how public spaces and loitering provokes dangerous connotations around women’s sexuality. She writes “while the explicit fear is the possibility that lower-class men will attack women in public space, implicit is the anxiety that they may form a consensual relationship with middle-class women thus violating caste, class and community norms of sexual endogamy” (Phadke, Ranade, and Khan, 2009, 2011).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to understand the concept of honour, its manifestation in the field, and how women engage with these notions. I have started by discussing the historical and cultural significance of the idea of honour, including how it first appeared as a concept in the earliest societies, how it evolved and transformed across various historical eras and the theoretical frameworks that have been employed to understand it. After discussing the

various conceptualizations, theoretical frameworks, on the concept of honour, I view it as a negotiated process that is mutually constituted within the particularities of social practice. This can be understood in the context of some of the more recent post-structuralist feminist studies conducted in Mediterranean societies, where researchers argue that honour and shame are “malleable and highly valued, which should be analyzed with the broader gender system, in which the status and morality of women and men, of young and old, are negotiated. Rather than resulting in iron bars on the cage of morality, negotiating honour and shame can be a delicate process that balances conformity with creative strategies for bending the gender rules” (Crivello, 2008). This has been illustrated in the field, Muzaffarnagar where cultural ideals and gender expectations are strong and stringent, but by engaging with them in creative ways, women manage their reputations and assert their honour, and seek concessions vis-à-vis local patriarchy.

I argue that young women perform honour to access a more strategic position, through which they seek to distinguish themselves, without compromising their social affiliations and ties. Moreover, following the region’s infamously complex cultural order, what women wear, on what occasions they choose to wear their choices, the careers they choose, frequently serve as distinguishing badge of honour. Moreover, women's attire also represents their honour in addition to their religious standing, especially in the context of Muslim women. They are able to pursue education and employment only because they were able to negotiate with their families without violating the established norms of honour. Therefore, limiting the concept of honour to a single, prescriptive term entails separating its complexities from the participants' social or material circumstances.

The two communities that are the focus of this study, Jats and Muslims of western Uttar Pradesh, continue to share an enduring concern with the cultural values of honour and shame. Ideas, sentiments, and practices related to honour and shame have long been held to be a distinctive feature in the socio-cultural landscape of western Uttar Pradesh. The prevalent cultural norms and customary practices are conceptualized around the traditional notion of honour. The ‘small city’ and the ‘small-mindedness’ of the people (chhota sheher, chhoti soch) are highlighted as key concerns in both Jat and Muslim women’s negotiations with honour. Younger generation women from both the communities, Jat and Muslim, fear the consequences of gossip on their reputation and their marriageability and seem to be contending with the same challenges. Young Muslim and Jat women appear to be grappling

with the same dilemmas and have shared concerns about the effects of gossip on their reputations and marriageability. The honour code in Muzaffarnagar, therefore, seems to cut across both, community, and class. An analysis of the cultural codes of honour prevalent in the region reveals the complex intersections of caste, class, region, religion, gender, and generation interconnections, and further reveal how the female body and female sexuality are at the heart of these cultural codes. Moreover, any sincere and nuanced analysis of honour as a negotiation process that allows women to pursue their interests in western Uttar Pradesh without flouting established honour-based cultural norms would also have to start by acknowledging a polarized society whose intricate cultural order, communal, familial, and institutional structures have been destroyed by communal violence in 2013.

Chapter 4: Everyday reconfigurations of the public-private divide

Public-private dichotomy is a western liberal patriarchal ideology that demarcates worth according to gender. Feminists have used this distinction as an analytical tool to comprehend the pervasive subjugation of women. Following the feminist framework, this chapter examines the form of public-private distinction, as it manifests in the contemporary society of western Uttar Pradesh. In Muzaffarnagar, traditional gender ideology restricts women in private sphere by extracting from them domestic, reproductive, unpaid labor. This translates into lesser self-esteem, lower autonomy, and more vulnerability to violence, for women. But women are socialized to believe that private space, i.e., home, is safer for women. In contrast, the public spaces are characterized by cultures of masculinity, and violence, which affect and inform women's access and limitations in public sphere. The communal nature of the region, the agrarian setup, the communal riots in the district, and the caste tensions in the public space are a reflective of this claim. The public space is the space of the 'other', a violent space, characterized by an unfriendly and hostile atmosphere that prevails in the city; this characterization becomes a legitimate ground for the separation of private from the public. The separation between public-private is justified by establishing the safety of the home, and the criminal nature of the public space. In this chapter, I am using public-private dichotomy as an analytical device to understand myriad of interconnected issues such as visibility, veiling, recognition, paid and unpaid work, safety, physical mobility, temporal mobility, notions of honour, etc. that are shaping gender relations in contemporary society of western Uttar Pradesh. By looking at these diverse aspects in an interconnected way, I provide a feminist understanding on the historical development and ideological reworking of the public-private dichotomy.

The distinction between public-private has been regarded as one of "grand dichotomies" to be produced within the western liberal philosophical discourse, which manages to explain the social world in more "comprehensive" and "sharply demarcated ways" (Weintraub, 1997). This dichotomy has been used by scholars from various standpoints to describe, explain, defend, and critique the organization of the social world. It has also been an entry point in many debates, either around social and political issues, or moral and cultural issues, and in the organization of the everyday aspects of life. What started as predominantly liberal division of the world into public and private domains in the 18th century, has now, in the recent decades, been reinvented, reconfigured, and transformed, and has entered new

disciplinary terrains and new arenas of inquiry, ranging from public choice to social history, dramaturgy, information and communication technology, geography, and most crucial here, the feminist scholarship.

This chapter is divided in two parts. In part one, I discuss the meaning, origin, and the context in which the public-private binary emerged. In this part, I have highlighted the philosophical traditions that have shaped this binary, and the subsequent feminist critiques of these androcentric conceptualizations of the public-private dichotomy. Furthermore, I also discuss how public-private distinctions have been employed in the non-western context and discuss relevant aspects which need to be kept in mind while reading the liberal, western conceptualization of public-private, and white feminist critiques of public-private distinction, in the global south context. This historical analysis will help us understand how and why these terms were created in specific ways, at specific critical junctures in the past, and will further explain the various ways in which these historical creations shape modern social reality in various ways. In part two, I bring the field insights to the discussion and look at how public-private distinctions have been historically constructed in the rural-agrarian belt of North India. I will then juxtapose the theoretical and historical insights with the narratives from the field.

Contextualizing Public- Private dichotomy

Despite its pervasiveness, public-private dualism has been conceptualised and interpreted in myriad of ways and has been invoked in many contexts. For instance, one of the intrinsic meanings that is attached to the binary of public-private is the notion of accessibility. Accessibility may be understood as something that can be known, inquired or “at least is capable of being known or observed” (Gavison, 1992). In this sense, there are also notions of visibility, and transparency on one hand, and on the other hand there are ideas of secrecy, and confidentiality (Starr, 2007). Another way to investigate this dichotomy is through the oppositional ideas of freedom and interference. Here private sphere is the sphere of freedom, with no interference from outside, and the public emerges as a realm with different levels of freedom and interference, depending on the context (Gavison, 1992). Similarly, the public-private distinction can also be invoked to highlight difference between individual and group/community/collectivity, wherein small, and voluntary groups can be understood as private, in comparison to relatively larger and anonymous groups which become public. The

same small and voluntary groups become public, when discussed in comparison to distinct individuals (Gavison, 1992).

It is therefore evident that there is no rigorous conceptualization on what constitutes the public and the private; rather these terms have been understood in different ways, from different standpoints, and from different disciplinary locations. Due to the multiplicity of wisdom, understanding, and interpretation, it is realized that the public-private dichotomy is complex, relative, and not clearly demarcated. However, the recognition of complexity in this dichotomy is a relatively new form of intellectual enquiry. When the public-private distinctions were created, and socially agreed upon in the western liberal context, myriad of social complexities were invisibilised to clearly divide the world in public and private spheres. It was only with the emergence of critical feminist theory, that we started questioning this binary through critical, constructive and nuanced ways.

Origins of public-private dichotomy

Public-private distinction is not apriori; rather the distinction arose out of complex political and economic concerns persisting in the western societies, between 16 and 18 centuries. Euro-western societies were following a multifarious trajectory of modern social organization, such as disintegration of feudalism, concomitant rise of industry, markets, and capitalism, coupled with the formation of nation-states. It is in this early modern period of structural transformation, which involved transitions from feudalism to capitalism, medieval to the modern, decline of aristocracy and the rise of bourgeoisie, and spatial segregation between site of production and reproduction, that public-private dichotomy emerged (Bondi & Domosh, 1998, p. 272).

It was realized by the aristocrats, and wealthy feudal landlords, and other important decision makers of the then prevalent societies (all men) that a new social order was impending, to manage the contradictory social forces. This social order was provided by liberalism, which was conceived to overcome the violent and destructive chaos that was perceived as a persisting feature of European feudal societies. Liberalism involved dividing the society into different, distinct, and opposing realms, to accommodate the newly imagined society (critically explicated by Carole Pateman, discussed in the next section). Thus, different kinds of distinctions were manufactured, such as division of power between the church and the state, separation between the market and the state, and most crucial here, and the division

between site of production and site of reproduction. These separations were considered important because they ensured that the values of institutions remain intact, and not get threatened amidst arbitrary disagreement and violent discord.

Since public-private dichotomy emerged alongside the state system in the public sphere, the existing social inequalities in the private sphere were never really discussed, and thus continued to remain invisible. Because of the invisibility accorded to the private sphere, both the critical social institutions, the patriarchal family, and the capitalist markets, were served immunity by their association with the private sphere. For this reason, it has been argued that it is the amalgamation of patriarchy and capitalism which is instrumental in shaping the nature of contemporary liberalism (Thornton, 2016, p. 450). Therefore, the contradiction between the public and private spheres is a flexible political mechanism that may be used to effectively protect powerful interests, like those of the patriarchal family and capitalist markets, while projecting an air of impartiality and naturalness (Thornton, 2016, p. 451).

Apart from the liberal distinction between the public-private, there is also a classical, civic-republican perspective on the dichotomy. The classical tradition of organizing the society through public-private ideology has its roots in the Greco-Roman societies. In these societies, public-private distinction manifested itself in the form of polis and oikos, wherein Polis was the realm of public and political, occupied by strong, powerful men, and Oikos, was the realm of domesticity, a realm of reproduction and production that was populated by women and slaves. The earliest kind of differentiation between public and private is between Polis and Oikos, or city and household. Here it is important to highlight that the polis/political sphere of classical republican perspective is very different from the euro-western liberal state where state is a politico-administrative body. In the former, the state is conceptualized as the realm of politics, discussion, debate, deliberations, and collective decision making. Jürgen Habermas's conception of the "public sphere" is an effort to theorize this conceptualization of polis/public sphere of social life.

Habermas characterized the public sphere as a distinct entity, facilitated by economic developments that necessitated and institutionalized a counter force to the dominant state. According to Habermas, the public sphere is made of private individuals entering public places to discuss issues of public concern and "common interest" (Habermas, 1991). Through the rise of print media, published literature, and at the coffee houses and salons, private

persons assembled to discuss political events, illegitimate uses of state power, and to appropriately reference public opinion. In this sense, the public sphere provided avenues for making the state accountable to citizens, and designed a discursive tradition, wherein people could have unrestricted deliberations and discussions with each other. This was accomplished through the freedom of the press, of assembly, and of speech. Public sphere in this sense was separate from the state, with members who acted as “counterweights to absolutist states”(Fraser, 1990, p. 58).

Habermas conceptualized the bourgeoisie public sphere as an arena of communication and discussion, where the inclination and responsibility of individuals towards moral, common, and communitarian good prevailed. While an idealistic perspective to understand society, there are certain omissions, and commissions that have been incorporated in this theorization of the public sphere. The idealist characterization of public sphere by Habermas is starkly different from the liberal individualist conceptualization of public sphere. However, the similarity in both the perspectives is that the focus is on the public sphere. The public sphere remains at the center of sight, and at the center of analysis. The conceptualizations (liberal and republican) have mostly tried to capture the nature of public sphere, kept the public realm on pedestal, and have understood the private realm in relation to public sphere. Thus, in both the conceptualizations, there is an inherent hierarchy, where public sphere is considered ideal space for social action, a realm infused with power, and private sphere remains wrapped around the public realm like an auxiliary support system. Furthermore, both the conceptualizations are based on a certain set of assumptions, which reveals androcentric and Eurocentric biases. Because of this, the public-private dichotomy has received stringent, material critiques from critical and feminist theory.

Gender-based errors of omission and commission are inherently built in the public-private dichotomy. Nancy Fraser has drawn attention to the fundamentally patriarchal presumptions that underlie Habermasian conception of the public sphere. Fraser argues that the seemingly egalitarian and neutral public sphere is characterized by relations of dominance and subordination of class and gender (Fraser, 1990). Giving examples from revisionist historiography, she argued that despite all the promises and claims of inclusion, publicity and accessibility, the bourgeoisie public sphere excludes women.

Revisionist historiography: Cracked boundaries between public-private

The first step to understand the historical construction of public-private dichotomy, and therefore its impermanence, is by locating women in the patriarchal and androcentric history, by looking at alternative accounts of historical and structural transformation. Critical feminist theory and revisionist historiography have been the harbingers of these knowledge systems, which highlight the fact that while the public sphere was built on the rhetoric of publicity and visibility, yet it excluded some section of people to accommodate and incorporate others. For instance, Joan Landes identified gender as key axis of exclusion in the public sphere. She claimed that austere speech and behaviour in public was encouraged in euro-western nations because it was seen as "rational," "virtuous," and "manly"; this conceptualization of public sphere was developed in opposition to the woman-friendly salon culture which was branded as "artificial", "effeminate", and "aristocratic". Using these examples, Landes argued that the notion of the public sphere was developed with masculinist gender norms to exclude women from public and political life (Fraser, 1990).

Geoff Eley argued that the gender exclusion in public sphere of euro-western societies was firmly embedded in processes of class formation (Fraser, 1990). Looking at the historical formation of public sphere in France, England, and Germany, Eley argued that it was civil society that provided the impetus for public sphere. This voluntary network of philanthropic, civic, professional, and cultural activists known as the civil society was anything but inclusive. Instead, a stratum of bourgeois males who were attempting to depict themselves as a universal class and prove their suitability to rule used this place as a training ground and power base. Thus, bourgeois class formation was inherent to the civil society and the public sphere. The practices and ethos of public sphere enabled markers of distinction, separating emerging elites from popular and plebeian (Fraser, 1990).

Separate spheres not only led to class formation but also changing gender relations. This enquiry was pursued by Marxist feminist social historians who systematically tried to understand how class concerns were crucial in shaping notions of femininity. Key markers of class distinction between the upper and lower classes included new gender norms that ordered feminine domesticity and a clear division between the public and private worlds (Fraser, 1990). For instance, Barbara Welter in her 1966 essay "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" found that print media was transmitting the image of ideal and domestic femininity to the larger public to promote a particular idea of womanhood that

provided stability during a period of disruptive change caused by industrialization (Welter, 1966). This point was further elaborated by Gerda Lerner, who studied the 19th century American society, and highlighted how gender was shaped by the industrial revolution, which led to creation of different kinds of femininities. American industrialization happened in the context of shortage of labor, and underdeveloped economy. In these precarious circumstances, industrialization process thrived on the labor of women. However, industrialization did not affect everyone in the same manner, gave different types of work and lifestyles to different classes and genders of people, and among myriad of results, one significant result was the creation of ‘the lady’ and ‘the mill girl’ (Lerner, 1969).

In the colonial period, women worked outside the home, as it was socially approved and was considered a civic responsibility. Thus, women were found working at mills, plantations, tan yards, dockyards, shops, pubs, and lodging house. They served as gatekeepers, jail guards, reporters, printers, doctors, apothecaries, midwives, nurses, and teachers, among other professions. However, things started to change by the 1840s as spatial segregation happened between sites of production and reproduction. While men’s access to public space, paid work, and public sphere was naturalized, women were excluded from the new forms of industrial life, and new democracy. As wives, they benefitted from rising affluence of the household, but this also reduced their role and recognition as political and economic actors. The economic opportunities that were previously open to women, were now closed. Yet, some women continued to work. When occupations such as spinning and weaving were transferred from the private/ domestic realm to the public realm/ factory, the poorer women became industrial workers. Lower class women started entering low paid, low status, and low skilled jobs, and these activities were recognized as ‘woman’s work’. Contrarily, women from the upper and middle classes were given more ‘natural’ and ‘appropriate’ duties in the home, such as wife and mother.

The women from middle and upper classes who had more access and fewer economic reasons to go out for paid work, cultivated domesticity in the home and emerged as ladies. As class differentiations sharpened overtime, the genteel lady who stayed in the domestic realm came to be associated with ideal femininity, and the economic values added by the lower-class working women were marginalized and invisibilised. In accordance with these class differences, class-based notions of femininity emerged, which were expressed in the form of “cult of domesticity”, “cult of true womanhood”, “genteel lady of fashion”, “female world of

love and ritual”, “circle of domestic life”, “woman’s place is in the home”. Thus “what constituted as woman’s proper sphere became more narrowed and more confined than ever” and explained women’s exclusion from public life, and official forms of power (Lerner, 1969, p. 7).

This understanding of the separate spheres influenced scholars writing from a Marxist-feminist position in the 1960s and 1970s, because it pointed out the historical inequality of the sexes. These historians focused less on the idea of a physical separation between the sexes, but the social constructions of difference, class and gender that informed liberal, post-enlightenment ideology (Wright, 2012, p. 53). In this sense feminist historiography with Marxist orientation, described not only separation of spheres but also illuminated how these spheres served the interests of the dominant class. Linda Kerber argues that this separation was neither a “cultural accident”, nor “biologically determined”, but it was actually a “social construction, camouflaging social and economic service, a service whose benefits were unequally shared” (Kerber, 1988). Keeping these historical explanations in context, the next section examines feminist critiques of the public-private dichotomy.

Feminist critiques of the public-private dichotomy

In her critique of the bourgeoisie public sphere, Nancy Fraser urges for a critical approach to assess the public-private dichotomy, because these terms are not “straightforward designations of societal spheres” but “cultural classifications and rhetorical labels”, the purpose of which is to delegitimize some interests and valorize others (Fraser, 1990, p. 73). Thus, she urges us to look at the vested interests and the power relations that go in the making and unmaking of public and private spheres. Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who has looked at another important dichotomy of purity and pollution, urges us to be suspicious of clear-cut dichotomies because the reality is messy: “binary distinctions are an analytic procedure, but their usefulness does not guarantee that existence divides like that.” (Douglas, 1978, p. 161). So even though feminists have used the analytical construct of public-private to explain the structuring and power relations in the social world, ideologically they remain opposed to this separation. This is primarily because the ideological division between public-private takes very real and material forms as people, spaces, and labor are segregated into these neat and hierarchal categories of public-private, and determines worth, value, power, recognition, and contribution in the world.

The first strand of feminist critique of public-private dichotomy is about how women are reduced to their reproductive roles, and thus denied access to public sphere. The connection between women's reproductive capacities, and their de-facto position in domestic sphere might seem "obvious" but it is not. Gender inequalities cannot be explained through sexual difference, but it can be explained through the institutional dichotomy of the public-private. Anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo argues that public-private distinction provides the structural framework through which women's position and gender inequalities can be understood in a variety of historical and social settings (Rosaldo, 1974, p. 23). Due to women's reproductive capacities, their position in the domestic sphere is naturalized, they are denied positions of authority, deprived from social prestige and recognition, and are denied the cultural values that are considered male prerogative. They do not have the same access to culturally valued authority that is available for men.

Due to this gendered allocation of values and roles in accordance with public and domestic/private, if and when women exercise power, it is considered manipulative, disruptive, illegitimate and unimportant (Rosaldo, 1974, p. 21) and in some cultural contexts, bring disrepute to the family and community which is associated with the particular woman (as discussed in the previous chapter on honour). Parallel to this imbalance, is the circumscribed role for women that often comes within the ambit of domesticity, which ensures that whatever value women add on as individuals, and whatever labor they put in, is often limited to the domestic sphere, and therefore goes unrecognized, and unpaid. On the other hand, men are the locus of cultural value; and all the activities which are recognized as male or masculine, are considered a part of public sphere, and have more value attached to it. The public sphere is associated with men, collectivity, legal order, social cooperation, disembodied and abstract ideas, culture, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, waged labor, production, the police, and the state. The domestic sphere is associated with women, reproduction, affective and familial ties, the embodied, the natural, the familial, property, intimacy, emotions, unpaid labor, etc.

The fraternization of 'valuable' and 'important' categories in the public realm prompted feminists to challenge the foundation of modern society, including its foundational ideologies, disciplines, categories, and conceptions. Ideas like liberalism, political freedom, and social contract, were held under feminist inquiry. In this context, Carole Pateman argues that the social contract that grants men independence and liberty is based on an earlier sexual

contract that calls for the systematic subordination of women to men. The liberal state ensures rights, freedom, and liberty to its male citizens through a social contract, is embedded in a prior sexual contract. Thus, social contract, that makes all social relations and hierarchies as a natural state of things, is underscored by a sexual contract which establishes men's right and control over women (Pateman, 1988, p. 2). It might seem that the social and sexual contract are contradictory, because while the former talks about equality and freedom, the latter talks about inequality and subordination, but they are, in fact, complementary to each other. The myth of political theory is that all citizens in the social contract are equal, however, that is not the case because men govern women, their bodies, their sexuality, and their labor. This patriarchal relationship informs contracts made in both private (marriage) and public realm (employment, prostitution, and surrogacy).

In this context it will be important to refer to Sylvia Walby who says that the public-private distinction place "certain limitations on its heuristic utility for capturing historical change" (Walby, 1990a, 93). She argues public and private patriarchy interacts through six fundamental patriarchal structures, which are, mode of production, paid work, state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions such as media, education, etc. (Walby, 1990b, 178). Private patriarchy is embedded in household production and is overseen by a male 'head of the household', who controls women individually and directly, in the private space of home. In private patriarchy, man takes the position of father or husband who directly benefits from women's unpaid labor. This type of patriarchy prevents women from participating in larger socio-economic activities (Walby, 1990b). In public patriarchy, women have access to public and private arenas. They are not stopped from entering public arenas, but they are subordinated in public spheres, thus ensuring their collective appropriation. In the public version of patriarchy, institutional restrictions on women's participation in paid job and politics are erased. While women may no longer be excluded from involvement in larger society, patriarchal segregation (such as in paid job) and subordination of women (such as sexual harassment) means that they still confront inequality and discrimination within it (Walby, 1990b, 179). In this sense, the public and private are not discrete units, rather if contextualize Walby's considerations, we can very well realize that patriarchy operates in continuum in interconnected and intertwined aspects of public-private.

While the public sphere has been understood as a transformative sphere that includes not only the state, but also arenas of market, law, and civil society, the private sphere has continued

to remain around family, reproduction, and domesticity. The dichotomy has received much criticism on both practical and theoretical grounds, by highlighting how this dichotomy is a masculinist construct and has paved way for an androcentric and Eurocentric discourse on public life, and it is these critiques that continue to remain a framing concern for feminist theory.

The feminist critiques of public-private dichotomy reveal that women, their articulation, activities, and economic contributions have been invisibilized, deemed unworthy and remained unremunerated, due to the patriarchal and capitalist strategy which involves not only the separation of public from private, but establishes a hierarchy of public over private. The feminist critique enables us to understand that the separation of two spheres, and the gender specific allocation of spaces, is a patriarchal construction, which not only assigns different genders to different spaces and roles, but also has hierarchal implications. Women's lives and work largely remain invisible and unrecognized because in the domestic realm, yet what becomes hyper visible is the work that happens in the public sphere, the sphere, which is occupied by males, and associated with economy, politics, civil society. In this sense, there is hierarchy at multiple levels, there is hierarchy between the spaces, the work that is done in these spaces, and the people who do the work in these spaces. In this context, the next section aims to examine how the women from global south have been represented in colonial and post-colonial feminist scholarship, and their experiences in the context of everyday gendered spaces.

The assumed silence of 'third-world-woman'

The liberal conception of public-private has privileged some narratives, and relegated others to the margin, by assuming the silence or lack of important content. In early anthropology, the male participant observer did not write about women because they were "silent" and "inarticulate" (Rosaldo, 1980, p. 390). The hierarchy created by colonial anthropology mutated the already existing patriarchal distinctions between the public and private sphere. For instance, anthropological studies on the rural north India have depicted women as silent and accepting all forms of male domination. This representation of rural north Indian women has remained a static category, constructed by social scientists to describe and explain one part of the social reality. However, such a characterization only reinforces the Eurocentric gaze and western liberal separation of public-private.

Androcentric, Eurocentric theorists might have thought what insights muted, veiled, and oppressed women can offer? Many prominent social scientists, even western feminists, have been a victim of this assumption. However, post-colonial feminist literature has highlighted that rural north Indian women have not been heard.

Rural north Indian women have been classified as "third world women," and this terminological description evokes a series of issues. The first issue is about the essentializing and homogenizing tendencies of 'imperial theorists', feminists included. The other issue is about the problems in identifying and defining patriarchy, or in other words, how to understand patriarchy in a culturally different context. Both these issues are intimately linked to the "postcolonial issue" (Castaing, 2014). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) highlight the heterogeneity of women (as opposed to singular, ahistorical, and homogenous 'woman') as the subject of their own history and discourse. This heterogeneity in third world women is "subverted by the ethnocentrism of white-upper class specific feminist thought that reproduces orientalist discourses" (Castaing, 2014). The focus of postcolonial feminism is to locate and identify the 'third world women'²⁶ as different and diverse, different in experiences, and diverse enough to restrain from classifying them into neat categories. Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the ways in which western, Eurocentric, feminist scholars understand "third world women": in terms of underdevelopment, repressive customs, high illiteracy, poverty in both rural and urban areas, victims of religious extremism, etc. With much angst Mohanty states that "the everyday, fluid, fundamentally historical and dynamic nature of the lives of the third world women" is reduced to some "frozen indicators of her well-being" (Mohanty, 1984, 6). The social scientists studying the 'third world woman' have tried to save them from their own cultural fallacies and Mohanty is critical of this savior complex. The 'western savior complex' represents the women of the third world only as a victim of patriarchy, continuously suffering and struggling, with no agency whatsoever; as opposed to this is the image of a western feminist subject who is liberated, unconstrained, agential, and master of her own destiny.

²⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty —defines the Third World geographically: "the nation-states of Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-east Asia, China, South Africa, and Oceania constitute the parameters of the non-European third world. In addition, black, Latino, Asian, and indigenous peoples in the U.S., Europe, Australia, some of whom have historic links with the geographically defined third worlds, also define themselves as third world peoples."

The 'asymmetry' in feminist portrayals of women from the global south has been questioned by post-colonial feminist theorists. Post-colonial feminists have opposed the standard western feminist practice of universalizing the oppression of women and have instead highlighted the difficulties of cultural, historical, and economic heterogeneity, as well as resisted "essentialist portraits of culture that often depict culturally dominant norms of femininity, and practices that adversely affect women within their own cultural contexts" (Narayan, 2000, 85). Uma Narayan questions the way western feminists assumed the homogeneity of all the women from global south. Narayan draws attention to the stark disparity in how women are represented, noting that while the most marginalized and underprivileged women are often portrayed as the typical 'Third World women,' however the most underprivileged women from societies are rarely considered representative of their cultures (Narayan, 2000, 1998).

Women of rural north India pose many challenges to the western liberal conceptualization of public-private and challenge the dominant perception of 'oppressed third world woman'. Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Gold who have done their fieldwork in Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh write: "we have seen the same woman who veil with utmost modesty before in-laws boldly hurl obscene insult songs; we have seen that model wives sometimes do risk everything to seek enriched lives by meeting their lovers after dark or by defying husbands and in-laws to pursue religious goals; and we have seen the less dramatic ways too, in which women may manipulate kinship ties to the advantage of themselves and the people they care about..."(Raheja & Gold, 1994, p. xxxv). By paying attention to these unconventional voices and rethinking them, one can take into consideration power dynamics and subaltern subjectivity and demonstrate everyday modes of resistance to systems of ideological and material domination (Scott, 1985, 1990). Following Scott, Raheja and Gold try to unravel the "hidden transcripts" implicit in women's speech and song, and "often veiled, but sometimes overt and public words and actions through which women communicate their resistance to dominant". Analysis of public oral performances of the private encounters reveal that the women of western Uttar Pradesh have neither been submissive to the power relations, nor lacking in worth. Oral performances show that women's rituals helped to maintain order, prosperity, and productivity in the home and in the community. The narratives and songs depict strong, independent women, while the men are portrayed as submissive, obedient, ineffective, or rash (Raheja & Gold, 1994).

Similarly, there is a general perception about Indian women's active religious participation, but their absence from the public realm. In contrast to this very dominant perception, Aparna Rayaprol, who has looked at the south Indian immigrants at an Indian Hindu temple in Pittsburgh has highlighted how south Indian Hindu women negotiate the boundary between the public-private through the religious institutions (Rayaprol, 1997). Her feminist ethnography reveals that women have challenged these dominant perceptions by being involved in public activities such as construction and maintenance of temple as well as reproduction of culture for their communities which can be understood as activities of the domestic sphere. In this sense the temple becomes the site of intersection of the public and the private, as women are performing different kinds of gender roles ranging from rational, bureaucratic roles such construction and maintenance of the temple as well as in the more private and gendered task of socialization of children (Rayaprol, 1997, p. 32). These ethnographic insights highlight that by ignoring women's speech, the previous scholarship on 'third world woman', white academic gaze has remained ignorant to the micro-political context of speech and power relations that women use in their everyday life. Moreover, many times a singular site provides avenues for intersection of both, the public and the private spheres. This intersection complicates the workings of gender relations in that space, and we are forced to reassess the hierarchies, the roles, and the division of labor, which is embedded in the public-private divide.

Complexity of employing public-private in global south

When public-private dichotomy is employed in southern landscapes, as an analytical device, it needs to be reconfigured in consideration with space, location, geography, etc. For instance, according to Janaki Abraham, who has researched the walled city of Bikaner, Rajasthan, in northwest India, categorising places as 'private' and 'public' inhibits a nuanced understanding of spaces created through routine practises (Abraham, 2010). Public-private dichotomy inhibits inquiry into social reproduction of space, particularly in relation to social relationships, hierarchies, and power, and how categories of public-private are socially and culturally defined. Giving example of *pata*, a raised wooden platform, Abraham shows fluidity of public and private spaces. Only men are permitted to use *pata*, which has several restrictions on who may sit and where. For instance, men of the dominant caste sit on the *pata*, older men of higher prestige and status sit in the centre of the *pata*, and younger individuals sit on the edge of the *pata* for many years until they can move into the centre. *Pata* can also be understood as a multipurpose space where men spend several hours'

discussing politics, public affairs, watching people in the public space. In events of death and marriages, pata transforms, and becomes an extension of the household. Because the houses in the walled city are small, and don't have enough space for visitors, during funeral and wedding meetings, women go inside the house, and men sit outside, on the pata. In this case, pata is made public because it is visible to the public and a part of the house, thus it is not available for use by anyone else to sit on. In other cases, when parents and other family members come to meet their married daughters in the sasural, they are not supposed to eat and drink anything, they sit on the pata, meet, and greet their daughter, as they were on the street and hadn't entered the house (Abraham, 2010). Thus, the continuities between the house and the street and the problem in naming these as either 'private' or 'public' is obvious. It is this kind of fluidity and merging of the public-private that is observed in this study.

Looking at the public-private dichotomy in the rural, agrarian north India

Women have been relegated to the domestic sphere by the patriarchal forces (state, community, and home) in western Uttar Pradesh. The dominant ideology of the region dictates a vision of strongly segregated society along the lines of gender, with segregated spaces, and segregated roles, also known as gendered division of labour. There are aspects of this ideology that enable women's continuance in domestic/private sphere. We had some insight into this aspect in the previous chapter while looking at the honour culture that is prevalent in the region. It was highlighted that women's confinement to domestic spaces is the dominant social norm and informs the culture of 'izzat' (Honour) which is highly operational in the field.

Honour of women is integrally embedded in the appearance/performance of domesticity. Loss of izzat is not a singular phenomenon; it has consequences for many different sections of the society. There are actual and potential threats of loss of face, loss of title, loss of membership from the community, and loss of land. Women's bodies and sexuality are seen as posing several threats; hence it is considered appropriate to restrict their access to public space. In the previous chapter on honour, we saw that women are either staying inside the privacy of home to enhance the family honour or entering the public space by negotiating with the honour culture. But honour-izzat aspect is only one, albeit crucial, part of the dominant gender ideology, and is not enough to understand why and how women continue to remain de-facto members of the domestic sphere. There are other aspects that reinforce the patriarchal ideology of the division between the public and the private. The first mechanism

is through spatial and physical segregation which is popularly known as ghunghat/purdah in the region and the second and more crucial aspect through which public-private binary is maintained is through the mechanism of unpaid agrarian work.

Purdah/ ghunghat/ veiling as mechanism to divide public-private

Purdah/ ghunghat/ veiling is an important feature of north Indian communities, more particularly the region that is being studied here. In the region, both the Jat and Muslim women follow the system of veiling. While Muslim women follow purdah, Jat and other Hindu women follow ghunghat. Muslim and Hindu women have remained restrained and unable to participate in social, economic, and political roles because of veiling. While consequences remain the same, i.e., social, political, economic, and public exclusion, it has been asserted that there are significant differences in the social purpose and expression of veiling in Muslim and Hindu communities (Papanek, 1973, 1982) Muslim customs are said to safeguard women from men outside the family. Social anthropologist Hanna Papanek, who worked in Pakistan in the 1970s, referred to the burqa as “portable seclusion” because it allowed women to come out of private spaces, while still adhering to the moral obligations that demands distance and protection from non-kin men (Papanek, 1973, 1982). But ethnographic evidence from prehistoric and ancient Babylon, highlighted that only women who were masked and accompanied by a male family member could go outside of the house. Similarly, the women of the ancient Assyrian society were also expected to remain indoors, behind curtains, where there was hardly any natural light and no breeze.

Hindu customs, on the other hand are aimed to control women of the family and enforce women's subservience to their in-laws. Ghunghat/ veiling limits a woman's ability to claim her right to resources in her conjugal home. Ursula Sharma who has studied upper caste women in Himachal Pradesh argues that ghunghat is a mechanism of controlling the behaviour of “in-marrying women”, or the daughter-in-law (Sharma, 1978, 219). Prem Chowdhry contends that ghunghat is a system that forbids a married woman from asserting her rights over financial resources and decision-making in her marital home (Chowdhry, 1994, 289). Hence, Purdah and ghunghat appear to be two different veiling systems that correspond to differences in social structures, values, and family structure.

The veiling custom cannot be reduced to a fabric covering a woman's body; rather, it is better understood as a system that encourages women's seclusion through a rigidly structured

division of labour (Devi and Kaur, 2019). This veiling system reflects honour, prestige, division of labour, dependency, social distance, and the upholding of moral norms as set by the society (Papanek, 1982). Thus, two interdependent and closely linked principles can be used to conceptualize these factors: “separate worlds”, and “symbolic shelters” (Papanek, 1982). These principles run parallel, rather than being mutually exclusive. Separate worlds relate to division of labor, wherein the two worlds are sharply demarcated, and mutual dependence among men and women is still very high.

On the other hand, veiling also offers women a metaphorical sanctuary by shielding them from the challenges and risks posed by the wider society. In this way, the veiling system is predicated on certain assumptions about people’s interactions and impulses, such as sexual desire and violence, which are fundamental to the human experience (Papanek, 1982). Moreover, women's status as sheltered beings become an important source pride for their protectors, i.e., the family and community. As seen in the previous chapter on honour, masculine honour is significant yet extremely fragile, because it is organized around productive and reproductive resources, and in this context, secluding, restricting, and controlling women’s bodies becomes an important aspect of honour. It has been argued that this practice of veiling, which often translates into seclusion has huge consequences on the gender relations, because the institution of purdah and ghunghat deny women the right to work as it denies women to be present in public spaces.

However, some significant trends raise questions around this aspect. For instance, in Bangladesh compulsory veiling for women is practiced. However, women are employed and are contributing in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)(Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2018; Rahman & Islam, 2013). In fact since the Covid-19 when all the great economies are showing negative trends, Bangladesh is the only country that is showing positive trends in terms of GDP, correlated with high female participation rate (The World Bank, 2022). This example shatters many of our preconceived notions about veiling, women’s contribution to national economy, and about homogenous representation of Muslim women as being oppressed because of veiling and seclusion.

Sylvia Vatuk contends that a more fruitful approach would be to follow the course of these shared concerns in the two communities, allowing us to see veiling aligned with other behaviors that confront the same issues. She bases this argument on the fact that both

Muslims and Hindus care about the protection of women and the promotion of harmony through codes of respectful relations within family and kin groups. This strategy would enable a subcultural and regional assessment of Muslim-Hindu distinctions without exaggerating their disparity (Vatuk and Coleman, 1972). This means giving primacy to region and recognizing that region plays a major conditioning role.

Some academics argue that once region is controlled, Muslim women have the same level of independence as Hindu women, wherever they live. Shireen Jejeebhoy and Zeba Sathar make this assertion in their study of women's autonomy in Tamil Nadu in South India, Uttar Pradesh in North India, and Punjab in Pakistan. They argue that gender norms and social interactions are driven by regional social systems rather than by religion (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). They discuss regional variations in women's conditions, including the greater degree of female powerlessness in north India compared to south India. Compared to women in south India, women in the north of India perform worse on several indicators because they enjoy less autonomy and freedom of movement, fewer practical inheritance rights, fewer opportunities to control economic resources, less control over domestic decisions, and less control over their own bodies. A young woman in the north is expected to live in seclusion and submit to her husband's family after marriage. Her property rights are only ensured in the role of wife or widow, thus highlighting the necessity of marriage for women's access to material resources. Kinship literature in north India highlight that women gain respect, prestige, and authority by the time they acquire the role of mother-in-law. Contrarily, women in south India have greater autonomy as they have more control over resources, are less isolated, more likely to work outside the home, and have greater decision-making authority. Furthermore, their honour is not always based on the procreation of sons (s) (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). This analysis highlights that region as a parameter become more significant to understand women's position in social hierarchy. As I have highlighted previously, that both Jat, and Muslim women veil in the region, but how does it translate into public-private dichotomy?

The working yet veiled agrarian women

In the introduction of her book, 'The veiled women' (1994) Prem Chowdhry presents two contradictory images which are useful in analysis of public-private dichotomy in terms of gender relations. On one hand we have the "ubiquitous sight" of rural women veiling, and the other image is of women working on the fields. How can we make sense of these

contradictory actions performed by women? How to comprehend the incongruence between the two sights? We must understand that these images are neither segregated nor discrete; there is no distinction between veiling woman and working woman. Both are one and the same. And the collapsing of two images of women depicts the fraught nature of public-private distinction in rural agrarian north India. It is very difficult to identify these contradictory distinctions that are only manifested/visiblised through the veiled but working bodies of women. Women's economic contributions and their carefully structured mobility where women are veiled and sequestered is elusive to many eyes.

In rural areas of western Uttar Pradesh, women enter public spaces, yet they are not associated with public sphere, which is the domain of power, recognition, and acknowledgement. They enter public spaces to perform agrarian labor, paid when on the field of others, and unpaid on the field of one's own. But in any case, paid or unpaid, women contribute immensely to the economy, due to their involvement in all kinds of agrarian activities. The critical analysis of the colonial and post-colonial histories of Haryana and Punjab shows that Jat women have labored in agriculture since the early settlement period. In the Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, women from across the communities have traditionally worked in the fields (Chowdhry, 1993).

When the region was surviving on subsistence level economy, and was dependent on family labour for cultivation, women emerged as an important economic asset. Because of women's high performance in the agrarian field, they were highly valued. The exercise of women working on the fields became more profitable when they were women of the family, especially in wifely roles. Marriage was an economic necessity for an agrarian man, because as an "akela aadmi" single man, he was unable to perform well agriculturally, and this affected his ability to pay revenue dues. A widower was considered "half-paralysed" (Chowdhry, 2005). The cultural custom of buying and selling brides can be viewed in the perspective of the underprivileged peasantry and the value of women economically. The British were against this cultural practice because it resulted in high number of bachelors in agriculturalists, as everyone couldn't afford to buy brides, which meant less productivity on the agrarian fields because of lesser participants in field work. Thus British started regarding this custom of selling daughters as 'bad' and 'barbarous' (Chowdhry, 1994). This was the civilizational mission of colonial administrators, which was directed towards extraction of material and economic resources.

Women were always involved in all kinds of agrarian activities. A 19th century Haryana proverb "jeore se nara ghisna hai" refers to women as animals that are chained, forced to work, and endure all (Chowdhry, 1993). The high participation of women in agrarian activities was common across communities. A Jat woman (Jatni) has been referred to the colonial administrators as an economic asset for her active involvement in agricultural activities (Chowdhry, 1996, p. 59; Khanna, 2001). Women handled tasks including gathering fodder, caring for livestock, threshing, and winnowing, and turning cow dung into fuel cakes. In fact, my own research I found that women in rural areas are completely in charge of processes related to agricultural processing, and animal husbandry. As noted by one of my respondents, Preeti who is a researcher, and a college teacher, *"Growing up in a poor family, with alcoholic and unemployed father, things were difficult. We just had three bigha of land, and no income. Mother, brother, and I used to work on the fields, and my father used to drink alcohol. We have been involved in all kinds of labor, without my father present, and without any hired labor."*

Irrigation, which is considered a masculine job on the agrarian field, was also done by women, when their husbands didn't perform their share of duties and labor; women took pride in doing non-traditional labor of irrigation. Meeta Chaudhary, a Jat woman, had to work on the agrarian fields when her husband stopped taking care of her financially. She took immense pride that she used to go during odd hours of the night, to do irrigation work. It must be noted that these agrarian fields, become the venue for sexual assaults. Moreover, accessing public space by defying social norms of physical and temporal mobility (where and when can one go out?) leads to shame on part of women, but in circumstances where normative defiance is necessitated by a noble cause, women also claim honour through these acts of 'shame'.

Now the natural question arises that when women were so active and involved in the rural agrarian public spaces, how they came to be associated with the private/domestic sphere? The mechanism through which women are given perpetual membership in the domestic sphere is because of the paradox between "high participation" and "low evaluation" of women. Woman's work is regarded as 'help' because she helps her husband, "an ideal cultivator and a revenue payer"(Chowdhry, 1994, 59). Colonial administrators have written that "the Jatni is an economic treasure. She does not plough, dig, or drive a cart, but there is

no other form of agricultural labor which she does not practice and ordinarily adorn” (Darling, 1928, 35). Culturally, women have been equal partner in agrarian work. However, this responsibility is positioned on their status as married woman. Marriage not only implies wifely and motherly roles, but also strong roles in agriculture and animal rearing work, even as women’s contribution is invisibilized. Thus, the dominant cultural understanding is that the agrarian work including her husband’s, is a woman’s responsibility.

The cultural devaluation of women’s work increased in the aftermath of green and white revolutions. Under the heightened demands of changed socio-economy, there was an increased and extensive use of female labour, cutting across caste, class, and community; however, women’s contribution was considered inferior and supplementary to that of men. This is important particularly in the context of agrarian, land owning communities, because while they use women’s labour, they do not recognise it, and exclude women from accessing the traditional source of power, i.e., land. The twin patriarchal policy of using female labour without valuing it, and denying the property rights (Agarwal, 1994), assures male domination so that women are associated primarily with domestic/ private realm.

In my own fieldwork, I discovered that the gendered division of labor is so pervasively normalized in society that women frequently defend men’s labor as “hard work” and women’s labor as trivial. When I told the women that I wanted to talk to them about their work, they told me that they do not do any work, “just at home all day”, a classic case of gendered socialization where women are constantly trained not to recognize their worth and contribution in the domestic sphere.

Women of western Uttar Pradesh lead a regimented life, struggling between fields and home, doing agrarian work, livestock work, and household chores. However, they are socialized to not consider their contribution important, crucial, or valued. For instance, in a conversation with elderly women from the Jat and Muslim communities in rural Muzaffarnagar, women were reluctant to discuss topics related to women’s unpaid work since they believed it was normal, and not worth wasting time on. Women of the older generation believed that the job they performed at home and on the family-farm had no rights associated to it. In this sense, the findings from the field relate to what is in the literature as the women have not gained any status and recognition for their work because the dominant cultural work ethic appropriates their work and labour, without allowing them any economic and social worth.

So, women are present in public spaces, doing chores, on the fields, yet their contribution is not recorded in any way. Their agrarian work often happens in the ambit of domesticity as they are working on their own fields, so performing a 'duty', and not a 'work'. They cannot go for paid labour, if their family has land. The cultural norms in the agrarian region permit women working outside of their home, if the labour is performed in family fields. Those who work for themselves enjoy high status and prestige, and therefore women who work on the family farms are considered respectable, and honourable. What we are seeing here is that women are entering public spaces, performing important economic labour, but they are not recognised as members of public sphere, because their contribution is not recognised. Economic worth can only be realised if women are paid for the work that they perform, but they are not paid for the work that they do because the work is mired in the idea of domesticity. However, as we can see, this is not the case. Instead of recognising the contributions of women, the nature of labour and the conditions of participation reinforce and maintain the stereotype of men as providers and women as housewives. While these trends are visible among older generation of Jat and Muslim communities, the younger generation women from both the communities have different perspective, and higher participation in public space for paid work.

The unsafe private spaces?

There have been reports of domestic violence incidents increasing because of the global COVID-19 situation (Gupta and Stahl, 2020). Even before this, WHO estimates revealed that almost one in three women globally had experienced non-partner sexual violence or physical and/or sexual intimate relationship violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2012). This supports the idea in domestic violence literature that homes are not necessarily safer than public spaces. As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which compiles annual data on recorded crime in the nation, 96.5 per cent of the crimes against women are by perpetrated by people known to them (NCRB, 2021). The majority of 'crimes against women' are committed by family members and happen in the private setting of home. For instance, 2021 NCRB data reveals that "cruelty by spouse or his relatives" was the primary cause of most occurrences of violence against women (32.6%) (NCRB, 2021). According to the National Family Health Survey-5 results from 2019–2021, 45 per cent of women and 44 percent of men believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife. 40% of "ever-married women" (those between the ages of 15 and 49) said that their husbands had abused them emotionally, physically, or

sexually. Thus, it can be argued that women's protection is not guaranteed by their homes, families, or friends.

In my own field, the long and extensive conversations with women revealed that almost all of them had violent experiences within the 'safe' confines of home. Many women had such experiences which one respondent painfully expressed as "*dukh, dard, and saza*" (misery, pain, and punishment). Meeta Chaudhary recounts that she was married off at a very early age because of an unanticipated surgery, and her family couldn't arrange the required amount because of dire socio-economic conditions. The only avenue from where financial help could be availed was through a man, who was ready to lend the money but only on the condition that Meeta marries his brother. So Meeta's marriage was a consequence of an unanticipated health emergency; and this was only the beginning of a very tough ordeal. "*My husband was an alcoholic. Naturally what followed was conflict, violence, poverty, and this was happening in my everyday life*".

Shilpa Sangwan (Jat, 35) talks about the multiplicity of threats that women experience in private spaces, "*There are many threats to a woman. You don't need to go very far to understand threat to women, just look around. Girl gets married, without any consideration to their age, choice, or desire; they are sent off to 'Sasural'. In most cases, her husband is an alcoholic who beats her every day. These stories are very common in our place. But no one says anything. Why? Because the girl knows that she has no other place to go, she must stay put. So many cases in my family. No one says anything because who will interfere in others business*".

Swati Tomar (Jat, 30) lost her husband in the riots of 2013. She was compensated by the state government in the form of cash and was also given a permanent job at the district magistrate office. This series of life events increased Swati's vulnerability rather than helping her out. Because she had a permanent job, her in-laws didn't want her to do a second marriage or go back to her natal home, because both these moves would lead to a loss in permanent income. The worst part is that her parents shared the intentions, as her in-laws. The only way Swati managed to survive the situation is by moving away to city, on account of her sarkari naukari (government job), which enabled her to move away from the decisions and shadows of her parents and her in-laws and look for a better life away from natal and affinal 'home'.

There are degrees of acceptability of violence in women's lives. Conflict with spouse is often seen as an unavoidable part of domestic life. For all women, experience of violence was shaped by disputes related to alcoholism, bad temper, suspicions of infidelity and tensions about work and poverty. Alcoholism is a prominent social problem; however, it is not really discussed in the public spaces (Chowdhry, 2005). Physical violence is a lived reality in the lives of many women—Jat and Muslim; rural and urban; and lower-, middle- and upper-class families. And this aspect of private space highlights the violent nature of private/domestic space (Jejeebhoy, 1998). Women talked about being beaten and verbally abused if they did not meet their husbands' demands on time, for instance, not serving food on time, answering back to the husband, or speaking up to the saas or nanad was offered as another reason. Noorjehan (Muslim, 42) told me: "*A woman always bears the brunt of the man's anger*". This echoes the findings of other studies on domestic violence in India based on national surveys (Agnes and D'Mello, 2015, 78). Women were also beaten if they refused sex; another recurring reason remains inability to produce a male heir.

Pinki Chaudhry (Jat, 48), "*My father used to torture my mother because she couldn't give him a male child. And she used to 'torture' us. She used to take out all her anger on us. What could she do? She didn't know any other way to cope with the violence that my father was subjecting her. She took it out on us. She used to beat us, abuse us, and rebuke us*".

Sexual harassment is very important part of home, which is rarely discussed in public spaces, the reason being the sanctity of home. Another related reason is that women do not have a proper mechanism (appropriate language, empathetic listener, safe space to discuss the trauma and violence) to talk and discuss about these traumatic and physically invasive incidents. Women's narratives reveal that they were helpless when such cases of sexual harassment happened as the pressure of kinship ties was such that women were unable to speak about it. Women who experienced sexual harassment in the private sphere were in shock, and unable to comprehend the betrayal that they had to suffer, when they were harassed by a known member. Women across class, and religion, have experienced sexual harassment from a person they knew, most of them were relatives. Preeti recounts an incident that she witnessed as a young girl. Her uncle used to frequently harass her mother when her father and brother were away. Her uncle used to cross the small partition in a joint house and harass her mother. Ekta Balliyan (Jat, 52) has harassed by her father-in-law on multiple occasions. Narratives reveal harassment by father-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, cousins and

so on. There were related instances of child sexual abuse, and the private sphere did not give space for complaint or protest.

Meeta Chaudhry (Jat, 45), *“we were already poor, and the situation worsened when father passed away. One mother five daughters, and no male in the house. Families without a male are very vulnerable, home, land, girls, every important thing is threatened when a man is not around. My mother saw refuge in marrying us early. My elder sister was the first one to get married. My mother thought that a son in-law will help the family, behave like a son; but no one helps, everyone wants to ‘use’ (physical exploitation, financial exploitation). My Jija ji (brother-in-law) saw an opportunity, he thought that he is getting five young girls, and a house, with no male member around. He started creating nuisance in our lives. He sexually harassed me on multiple occasions, but I had no way to escape. Where should I have gone with my complaint? I have no brother, no father, my mother was there but she was always angry/ frustrated because of us (because we are daughters, not one but five). This was not my first experience, when my father passed away, many relatives came to our home. I was feeling relieved thinking that although I lost my father but still there are many people on whom we can rely. And in that time, when I had lost my father and I needed support, I was sexually harassed by my own uncle!”*

These narratives highlight that violent and hostile experiences are an important aspect of private, domestic, and ‘safe’ spaces. These violent encounters are a part of women’s everyday life; however, despite affecting women in such intimate ways, and altering their lifeworld and habitus, extended family, neighbourhood, and panchayat do not interfere in such matters because these are private issues, happening in domestic spaces, where there is no public interference. After the discussion on the nature of domestic/ private sphere, it is evident that community location makes no difference to women’s domestic lives. Historically, both Jat and Muslim women’s lives were firmly embedded in the domestic sphere. Both communities assign women to the domestic sphere. Women from both the communities talk about the drudgery of household, too much work, still do not recognise the work done by them. Their community identity also does not affect their household decision-making - concerning what to cook, whether to buy expensive items, how many children to have, their health care, and marriages. Community identity makes no difference to female autonomy. In the region, in terms of child mortality, Muslim families are more egalitarian. Muslim daughters have better chances of survival, as there are no visible trends of female feticide and honour killings that

are present landed communities (Dasgupta, 1987). However, women from both the communities talk about the home as unsafe space. They have often and frequently been violated physically by male kin members. Both have been victims of domestic violence, marital rape, lack of financial support from the husband and so on.

Very rarely women come out of the home, into public space to resist/ protest/ seek justice with regards to violence that they experience in home. It is more difficult for Jat women to come out and seek justice. The reason is that the Jat community is the dominant community of the region. Jats not only own the land, but also run the Khap panchayats which act as the local courts. Their networks are huge and all-encompassing. In addition to this, the modern state and related institutions work in accordance with the local patriarchy and dominant community (e.g.: police not interfering with underage marriage of girls, the family and the community seek help of police to evade any problems if any; another example is police not supporting the inter-caste and inter-faith couples who love/marry/elope, instead work with the family and community). Women can only come out of their homes to seek justice, when they know that they will receive justice. However, the collaboration between community, family, and state (all patriarchal institutions) dismisses any attempts that Jat women take (Sawhney, 2011).

In contrast, Muslim women have better chances of coming out of violent marriages. Also, divorce rate is high among Muslim women, as my data reflects. Jat women are also in bad marriages, but because they belong to the dominant community, which dictates dominant gender norms of the region, they have difficulty getting out of bad marriages. This is not the case among Muslim women, because Muslim marriage patterns are less alienating from natal kin in north India as parents tend to get involved in daughter's marital problems, which often leads to divorce; it is not to say that Muslim families encourage divorce, but that they are more involved in their daughters lives after marriage (Jejeebhoy and Sather, 2001). It is in this context we see more Muslim divorced women, working and studying and trying to make a living. In contrast, Jats follow clan and village exogamy, patrilocal marriage migration, which alienate women from their family and community.

While both Jat and Muslim women have had unsafe experiences within the realm of home, there are differences in the ways in which the women deal with these situations. This point is explained by Soofi Jehan, a prominent social worker in the region of western Uttar Pradesh.

She is founding member of an organization called Action Society for Women that tackles the pervasive issue of violence against women. When I ask her what kind of women generally approach their organization, she says, mostly Muslim and backward castes. *“We want to work with all women, however only Dalit and Muslim women approach us. Jat women do not approach us because of the social pressure that they experience in a Jat dominated society. You know how situation is in upper class, upper caste families! Problems of upper caste, upper class girls are very different. The upper-class girls consider themselves better than the rest of the women, the poor girls, the weak and marginalized ones. They think that they have good clothes, good education, good manners, and a nice way to talk. They are carrying with themselves the burden of family’s honour ‘ghar ki izzat ka bojh’ Even if they are living in worst circumstances, they won’t come out to complain. However, they live a restricted life because of this ‘ghutan bhari zindagi’. The lower caste and lower-class women, which are mostly Dalit and Muslim women, are more in numbers in terms of putting their voice and their opinion when it comes to violence within home or other such issues within domestic space. The rich girls don’t have the freedom, the ‘azadi’ to come out and discuss these issues because everyone is their Chacha or Tau or knows their Chacha or Tau (paternal uncles). In these circumstances it is very difficult to get justice.... And they go on living a suffocated life and experience violence.”*

Soofi’s narrative highlights how difficult it is for Jat women to come out of precarious marriages and dangerous family situations, primarily because they are members of a dominant, land-owning community. Their status as women of dominant caste provides them with certain social and cultural privileges such as “good clothes, good education, good manners, and a nice way to talk” through which Jat women actively inculcate honourable behavior and appropriate femininity (which is also highlighted in the previous chapter on honour), and gain access to education, consumption of goods and services (more about this in the chapter 5). Yet, despite these privileges, Jat women seem to have relatively lesser avenues to take a recourse in bad marriages. On the other hand, Muslim women might lack behind in many consumption practices, and fair lower on indicators of education and employment, yet, as my data reveals they manage to come out of violent and problematic marriage.

While conversing with upper class Jat women, I got to know that upper class Jat men who are often the owners of new spaces of employment for young women, such as schools and

colleges, harassed women who worked for them. And while the Jat wives knew about this, they were unable to do anything about it. This reflects the precarity of Jat wives in the most intimate, domestic settings. Safety of women is a big issue in the domestic spaces, and this is common to all the women, Jat and Muslim, upper and lower class. But ethos of domestic/private spaces is such that it is very difficult for women to effectively claim safety in these ‘sanitized’ spaces. Empirical evidence reveal that home is not a safe space, but then why and how does the idea of safety becomes attached to domestic spaces? Home as a safe space becomes more apparent in the context of outside. The outside world, and the public space pose myriad threats to different sections of people. While the home is only threatening for women, the issues of safety that women experience in public spaces have implication for the collectivities, such as family, and community.

Unsafe public spaces: criminal, masculine and communal

Public space in the region is perceived to be unsafe. Many women correlated their restricted mobility and access to the public space with the wide range of crimes that happen in the public space. Accidents, brawls, street fights, are common in the region. Evidently, the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 began with a bike accident (Sawhney, 2015). When the young women were asked about their experiences and perceptions on the issue of safety in public space, the most recurring issue was the hostile atmosphere of the city. This atmosphere leads to actual and perceived threats with regards to women’s access to public spaces. College student Zooni (Muslim, 18) says, *“I rarely access public space; only for work (education) or when it is absolutely necessary. The reason is that the environment of the city is not good/ sheher ka mahaul sahi nahi hai”*.

Studies on masculine youth culture in the region have shown that due to the high unemployment rate, the young educated, unemployed males in the region are doing politics of waiting (Jeffrey, 2010a). These men describe themselves as “unemployed”, “just waiting”, and “passing time”, “hanging out with nowhere to go” (Jeffrey, 2010b). This time pass, a masculine activity, in masculine public spaces, limits women’s access to public spaces. Because of agrarian distress and lack of employment opportunities, non-elite young people often find their path to economic, upward mobility, and social progress blocked. These educated unemployed young men, who are often demoralized about their own inability to marry and treated as “immature”, start seeking masculine identity outside of domestic sphere (Kaur, 2010; Chowdhry, 2004, 2005, 2007). They claim meaningful identity by developing

a distinct public masculinity. This public masculinity is constructed by indulging in community activities, by supporting the decisions of dominant caste male leadership, leading protest, highlighting local issues. To contend their own marginal masculinity, young unemployed men start working for caste panchayats and other extra-legal bodies, and violently punish youth who have married across caste lines or eloped without their parents' consent and contravened customs in the sphere of love and marriage.

The parents, the neighbourhood and the community members feel threatened by the presence of these young males in public spaces. Yet the question of appropriate men and masculinity seems to be missing in the public discourse that is prevalent in western Uttar Pradesh. Rather the onus of propriety, protection and appropriate and respectable social performance remains on women. The most recurring threat is with regards to women's safety, a concern shared by parents and socialized in daughters. Patriarchs are concerned about the safety of bahu-beti (Daughter-in-law and daughter) in the public spaces (this is quite ironical when we look at the behavior of the same patriarchs who often use violence in private spaces, as illustrated in the section on the unsafe private spaces).

Zooni says, *"boys pass comments on us when we are passing through the streets. Another respondent, Rehana: When the family members see or hear of the harassment happening in the society, they stop us from going outside. It is because of the fear that our family members don't send us out. The 'outside' is not that safe..."* This anecdote demonstrates how people view the public sphere as a place where sexual harassment and dishonour are possible. However, these perceptions do not deter women from going out because they realize that they must negotiate with the harassment. Shruti Rathi explains: "If someone passes one or two comments, it is ok, we can ignore it. But if he passes more comments, and starts behaving inappropriately, more frequently, then we need to speak up. We should answer him so that he doesn't become too bold and start commenting more or does something more dishonourable." Young women realize that sexual harassment is a part and parcel of public life, however they also realize that it is important to draw boundaries when the situation becomes too unsavory. Zooni (19) *"Comments and all are 'chance'. It happens. You are walking and someone will say something."* It seems that there is a range of sexual harassment the young women negotiate and resist.

Threat around intercommunity romantic engagement

The second threat is related to interfaith and intercommunity romantic engagement among youth. Craig Jeffery who did research on the educated, unemployed male youth in Meerut, writes: “Concern over male time pass came to a head in Meerut in December 2005, when Meerut police beat young men and women allegedly engaged in ‘lewd behaviour’ in a public park” (Jeffrey, 2010b). This attack by the police on young people was under the purview of “Operation Romeo”, aimed to reduce sexual harassment, and sanitizing public spaces. But young couples argued that they were consensually “talking and holding hands”, and highlighted experiences of police brutality. One police constable responded, “Those who hit the young people were wrong, but the public are fed up with idlers.” (Jeffrey, 2010b, 471). Paromita Vohra’s documentary *Morality TV and Loving Jihad: Ek manohar kahani* is on the Operation Majnu that happened in Meerut during 2006, and 2011. Under this operation the local police made a crackdown on the unmarried couples who hung out in the parks of Meerut. Police was accompanied by the media, and they recorded the entire episode which was later telecast on the different news channels for weeks. Both these operations, targeted young men and women who were hanging out in public spaces (Vohra, 2007). While the overt reason remains to curb sexual harassment in public spaces, covert reason remains to counter the potential threats arising from the development of romantic engagement between boys and girls of different communities. Because of this reason, women experience restricted access to public spaces and denies the young women of Muzaffarnagar their right to agency.

The public space is filled with young and unemployed male who are doing timepass, and young and ‘naïve girls’ going out for education and employment. The romantic possibilities between the ‘over smart boys’ and ‘naïve girls’ pose a critical threat to the purity, sanctity, and boundaries of the community. These romantic possibilities become more threatening when love spills over the boundaries of caste, religion, village, gotra/clan. Pinki Chaudhary says, “*There are many cases in our area, boys make the girls elope with them. They take young ‘innocent’ girls, later they torture them and trouble them and that is when the girls come back. I hear about many such cases...*” Vikas Balliyan (local Jat leader): “*it is a reality that no one can tolerate their women going out with men who are culturally and religiously different. These men eat meat and beef, and our women are not like that. Our girls are innocent and don’t understand the politics behind love. How can we see our women (jat) with people who try to change them?*”

Ladli Chaudhary says, *“the biggest threat to our women (jat) is from the ‘ghuspaihiye’, outsiders who enter forcibly. The men of these communities have the mentality of an intruder. These people have bad intentions, towards us, the insider. They will be nice and sweet in front of us and will attack us when we are unaware. Peeth mein chhura bhokenge. This is the culture these days in our society and our country. Now this atmosphere has entered in our villages too. In villages women work on the field, they harvest sugarcane and wheat, they collect fodder for the animals. Earlier they used to move alone but now they move in ‘jattha’, groups. They move in groups of 5 to 7 and are accompanied by 1 or 2 men. This is a recent development since the situation has started deteriorating. This is also related to the 2013 riots. Since the riots, the situation here has changed.”*

These three narratives are from the older members of the Jat community who claim that public spaces are unsafe for Jat women because of the presence of males from other communities. They claim that the men from other communities try to lure the young and naïve Jat women and the naïve Jat-Hindu women fall in the traps of men from ‘other’ communities and ruin the social order. The wording used by each respondent varies a little, but the message is common: respectable women should protect their families from the poor males who come from "other" communities. Protecting Jat women becomes a difficult exercise for the community members, at a time when Jat women must enter public space for paid work to help the agriculturally disenfranchised family (more about this in the fifth chapter). Women in reproductive ages, engaging in any kind of relationship with men of other community poses immense threat to this erstwhile dominant, and agriculturally salient community. This perception of threat to the Jat community is rooted in their status of an erstwhile dominant community that has not only been witnessing agricultural distress but also has serious implications for caste endogamy and village and gotra exogamy. It is important to highlight here that while Muslim or lower caste men are projected as a threat to Jat women in public space, the men who are predators in their families are not talked about. Thus, gender and community engagement in this case seems dubious.

Muslim women’s situation in communalized Muzaffarnagar is much more complex. Being a minority member has significantly different effects on a Muslim woman's access to, use of, and negotiation of public space than it does on a Jat woman who belongs to the dominant community. It has been asserted that Muslim women's minority status significantly alters the

way in which they view and perceive the world (Hasan and Menon, 2004). According to Sameera Khan, the problems relating to Muslim women's access to the public space and sexual safety are made even more complicated by the fact that the Muslim community is the one that is most at risk and under surveillance. Her study demonstrates the connection between the exclusion of the Muslim community as a whole and the limitations placed on Muslim women by their own group. Muslim women's physical movement is constrained by community norms and their behavior and performance are also more closely monitored by their family and community. Insecurity about being a woman in public and about belonging to a minority group characterize Muslim women's interaction with the public realm (Khan, 2007). This hyper visible and communalized identity of Muslim women leads parents to be more suspicious of public space and they socialize their daughters in a similar way. The threat of public space, is therefore, looming large in the hearts and minds of Muslim girls. While in many cases, threat of sexual harassment is real, in cases where young women have not gone out much, anticipation of threat seems like a part of their socialization. Zooni says: Environment is such that we cannot go outside (Mahaul aisa hai.) The thing is that these days we cannot trust anyone. Elders also tell us the same thing. Betrayal is at every point, anyone can cheat us, near and dear ones, or even the unknown ones.

Khurshid Parveen, mother to a young daughter who is living in a different city, shares: *"During our time, there were not many cases of sexual harassment. But ever since this has become an issue, I too have become cautious regarding my daughter. I tell her to be careful when she is talking to any classmate. She should always assess the nature of her class fellow. No need to talk to him if he is bad. Do a 'purdah', ignore them completely. Don't indulge in talking too much with the strangers...."*

When Zooni started going to college, the first thing her mother asked her to do was to mind her own business, "apne kaam se matlab rakho". Thus, we can see how young Muslim women are socialized about being sensitive to issues of trust, breach of faith. The concerns over intercommunity romantic engagement become more palpable in a multi stratified society with a history of conflict among different communities. In these situations, when love happens between members of different caste, religion or communities, there are serious consequences. The history and everydayness of communalism impacts young Muslim women in myriad ways. One of the most important aspects in which Muslim women are

specifically affected is community-oriented segregation of space and increased surveillance on them.

Segregation of space and increased surveillance for women

Sameera Khan noted that homogeneous neighborhoods give inhabitants the impression of having more physical protection and security; however homogenous neighborhoods also ensure policing and surveillance of women. This has harshly affected women's negotiation in the public domains and the capacity to engage risk. Mumbai has witnessed five communal riots, and with each episode of violence, Muslim women were pushed into spatial restrictions. They lost their freedom to go beyond the neighborhoods. The world of women simply shrunk when men decided they did not want to send their women to other areas of the city because doing so would require them to travel into other communities' territory (Khan 2007, 1529). Several narratives of Muslim women from Muzaffarnagar corroborate with what Sameera Khan has argued in the context of post-riot Mumbai.

Nargis says, *"I received a lucrative job opportunity, but it was on the other part of the city. That part of the city witnessed riots (CAA- NRC 2019). So, I tried to convince my parents, but they were under the influence of family and community, 'pariwar wale aur samaj ke log'. They denied me, told me not to go that side. That area is Meenakshi chowk where the riots happened. Now I am working as a schoolteacher in my neighborhood, for one third salary that I was getting there. Similarly, Asiya opined: You can't do what you want to do. You pursue a job that fits in with their ideas of appropriate timings for girls to be out, so usually you become a teacher."* Similar narratives were shared by several young women.

Sobiya Jameel (Muslim, 24) says, *"I am worried that if I go to Meenakshi chowk (a Hindu-dominated area), I have to cross at least 10 Muslim neighborhoods, and then enter into a Jat territory. The Muslims will gossip about me, and the Jats will pass comments on me or dishonour me."* Dr. Fiza Sheikh, (Muslim, 45), who runs a school in a Muslim neighborhood says, *"Muslim communities are increasingly ghettoized. Communities seek to protect themselves (especially women) from external attack. By remaining in their ghetto and veiling, Muslim women can mark themselves as community members and secure local protection. By shrinking their worlds, women gain safety. Some women want to venture out - for school, work and leisure, but are constrained. After the riots, Muslim women experience heightened surveillance, stricter dress codes, and earlier curfews. The men decided that they did not*

want their women to go out because it meant crossing the other community's areas, so the world of the women just shrank."

Noorjehan (Muslim, 45, social worker) says, *"We find that after the riots, many more parents do not want to send their children to school outside the area."* Similarly, Sumbul, a college going woman, says, *"earlier I used to wear jeans, when I was living in Meerut. Since I came here to Muzaffarnagar, I don't wear it because environment is bad. Since then, I am wearing head scarf. My father asked me to cover my head with a head scarf."*

As I have highlighted in the introduction chapter, the community (caste, communal) oriented violence has been a long presence in the region. These repeated instances of caste and communal violence and tensions have led to the formation of homogenous neighborhoods, and segregation of the city into distinct spaces which are occupied by people of the same community. Muslim communities have imposed restrictions on women's freedom of movement and economic independence because they feel endangered and under siege. This limits women's freedom to explore the city, hang out with friends, broaden their views, criticize unfair practices, and plan protests or reforms. As women of the minority community their lives are very much restricted. Soofi is divorced and works in an NGO and sustains the family; since social work is not that well paid, she often has to seek help from her parents. She is a social activist and is known among many communities and groups, and well recognized in the social circle. People know her mother, who is also a social worker. We might think that a certain age, and certain experiences might accord women some freedom, but that doesn't seem true in this particular case. Soofi was a part of the CAA NRC protest in the city. And well recognized Soofi was soon identified by the local Jat leaders and policemen (with whom Soofi closely works, in the capacity of social worker), and they complained to her mother. They threatened her with jail, and subsequent misfortune that would soon follow. Soofi's mother immediately called her and asked her to leave the protest and go back to home. Her mother threatened her with curtailed financial support and Soofi had to retreat. Soofi's experience suggests a very complex engagement with patriarchy and communalism.

Access to public spaces: performing honourably, and seeking permission through homosocial access

Women of Muzaffarnagar are immensely aware of the conditions in which they must negotiate their entry in the public domain. They are socialized very early in their lives about the meanings and the values that are attached to both public and private spaces. Young women understand that to get legitimate access to public space, they must follow the prescribed honour codes that are particular to the region and its people. Thus, as we saw in the previous chapter on honour, that young women claim access to public space, by performing their gender appropriately and following acceptable behavioral norms. This synchronized performance in accordance with the dominant social cultural norms, or honour codes is a negotiation process embarked on by the women, in order to access the public sphere.

Trust between parents and daughters is an essential factor for the gender bargains and gender negotiations to work, especially in societies where communities have such strong hold over the individual families. As discussed in the previous chapter, families in the region are not independent, rather they belong to collective entities such as caste, religion, community, neighborhood, village, or gotra. The social relations are organized around land, and land is taken care by the bhaichara form of system. In this context, sending a daughter out in public space, when it is not a social norm, requires mutual understanding between parents and daughters; and trust is the basis of that understanding, a trust that the daughter will not spoil the family name, that she will respect the freedom which is granted to her, and use it meaningfully to change the economic situation of the family.

Neetu Chaudhary is a 20-year-old Jat girl living in the heart of the city. Till few months back she had access to education, she had limited but recognized access to public space, but she ruined everything when she “made a boyfriend”. When her mother found about the boyfriend she discontinued Neetu’s education, and stopped her access to public space, with immediate effect. Now she wants to marry the “untrustworthy” (vishwass nahi hai) daughter as soon as possible, before any “comprise with izzat happens”. She tells me that she really wanted to send her daughter to pursue education, however she (Neetu) broke the trust by making a boyfriend. *“If you can trust your daughter with your honour, then there is no problem in sending her out, but if you can’t trust her, then what can we do about that girl. The only option is to stop everything that is distracting her....”* Preeti had a similar revelation. She

says: *“I realised long back that I had to remain focussed. I saw many girls being married off because they had a boyfriend or did something similarly inappropriate. That is when I decided that I will never make a boyfriend.”*

In addition to being honourable, keeping in touch with the norms of the region, and establishing trust with parents, girls also negotiate with the restricted access to public space by moving around in same sex groups. Homosocial access to public space serves several purposes. Because of the criminal and communal nature of public spaces and prevalent patriarchy, girls have not been able to access public space. However, group membership has provided some relief in this sense. When girls move around in same sex groups, they have better chances of being protected from sexual harassment in public spaces. And they can use public transport in a better manner. The group membership provides a strong support system, and young women rely on their group to negotiate through the unsafe and hostile public spaces, and the restrictions posed by the family, community, and neighborhood. Moving around in groups is not only protective for the girls, but also helps establish trust with the parents. Because the girls are moving around in same sex groups, they are not antagonizing the community members, neighborhood, or the family. Thus, movement with a group is a prominent mechanism to bargain with the restrictions on movement.

Gulistan Chaudhary (Muslim, 24) lives in Soram village, which is a Muslim dominated village with substantial Dalit population. Gulistan has been playing kabaddi since she was 12 years old. She recounts, *“I was very fond of sports. I have an elder sister, she was selected as Shiksha Mitra, and so she got me admitted in the school when I was in 5th standard. My parents had a dream, they wanted their children to study. But no one in the village was sending their girls to school. So, when my sister got this job, I was also sent with her to study. In school I saw girls playing kabaddi, and that was a beautiful scene. Girls dressed up in sportswear, playing freely without concern for anyone. When I sought permission, my father was angry and upset, but only because of my sister’s position as Shiksh Mitra, I was allowed to play kabaddi. When I won my first district match, my father was very proud, and his entire perception towards sports changed. He saw that the girls were literally changing their lives, and that changed his opinion. He talked to fathers of other girls who used to come to play. When one person meets another, and they talk, they feel less isolated and alien and that’s when courage develops. Same happened with my father. He saw many girls, he saw their fathers, and he felt strong. So, he told my sister, “You make her play. And I am standing with*

you. It doesn't matter who is there with you, I will support you." Later, after seeing me, many other girls from my village started coming out to play, and now we have our own kabaddi field in the village." Gulistan's narrative highlights that her access to education and sports was facilitated through her sister who was working as a Shiksha Mitra in a government school. Gulistan overcame familial restrictions on education and public activities by honourable behavior, homosocial access to public space through her sister and other kabaddi players of the village, and negotiated within stringent gender norms, one day at a time.

Public spaces, the streets, and the corners, and the roads leading to school and colleges are unsafe, and therefore pose an eternal danger to honour of women, their family, community, neighborhood and village. The time spent with friends, "on the way" between home and school/college is a sacred time. Between home and school/ college these girls shared experiences of violence at home, harassment in public spaces, how to seek meaningful employment, how to convince parents, discuss fashion, problems of love life, and so on. Female friendships are important, not only because they provide access to public space, but for becoming more confident and freer.

Talking about unsafe public spaces Gulistan Chaudhary, the kabaddi player, who frequently travels in different parts of the country through public transport, says, *"Yes, we get scared, especially when coach sir is not travelling with us, or when there are fewer girls. Sometimes the journey is of one night or two nights. I am the senior in my group, so I must take responsibility of the players. There are many responsibilities when travelling with girls. Sometimes I couldn't sleep the entire night of journey, I used to go and check, I used to sit with those who were getting more scared than me. If we don't get reservation, then it becomes more difficult, as then we must travel in General compartment. Once we were travelling to Firozabad for a sports camp. In the train one unknown man harassed our team member, which led to a huge fight in the train. All the girls gathered and taught the man a lesson. That day was bad because one of us was harassed but it was good day since we all came together to fight for our safety."*

Gulistan's narrative reiterates that although women are unsafe in public spaces, but they continue to navigate the rough terrains of unsafe public space by relying on female friendships. Studies have demonstrated that social groupings, or informal groups, are effective for sharing knowledge about different possibilities that are available in different

domains. Without communication along social ties, there is a larger likelihood that people will feel that the issue they are dealing with is extremely personal and not something that can be changed for the population as a whole (Clark, 2004). However, this changes when women move around in same sex groups, form friendships, and engage in discussions. Through the practice of homosocial movement, or moving around in the same sex groups, women can frequently map and remap patriarchal boundaries between public and private spaces.

The research for 'why loiter' was conducted in the metropolitan city of Mumbai. In this book, the authors demolished the illusion that Mumbai is a safe city where its women enjoy complete access; rather, they found that even in this cosmopolitan city, women's access to public spaces remains "at best, conditional." If this is the case of a metropolitan city like Mumbai, what can we speak of Muzaffarnagar? Compared to the big city of Mumbai, Muzaffarnagar is only a small town, with agrarian-feudal values, and a pervasive reality of everyday communalism and casteism. Muzaffarnagar is no Mumbai, but it appears that the young women of Muzaffarnagar want the same things that the women of Mumbai want, the right to safety and the right to loiter.

Purposeful/Meaningful access to public space through education, employment

Women do not have direct access to employment and education. Firstly, in an agrarian society the importance of education is low because the society and power relations are organized around land; education does not make much sense in terms of utility, profitability, and meaningfulness. Moreover, as women are associated with domestic/ private spheres, with the arena of home, hearth, cattle, and fields, are diligently doing their culturally prescribed unpaid work, education is not considered important for woman. Education has been considered useless for both males, and females, but more for females because of their association with the domestic realm. Vikas Balliyan says: "*Boy's education was never given a preference as they were never interested. They knew that they had land and had to work on that. Girls had no work and they had to complete basic school education and do the household chores.*" On a different note, Umesh balliyan, a farmer says: "*Are chhori hai, ke padhaana. Chhoriyaan gobar ghera hai. Aur ke kaam hai?*" (*Why is it important to educate girls? They finally must perform housework and make dung cakes. What else could they possibly do?*). For women, access to education, and therefore access to meaningful employment, is a cumulative result of several factors that are related to agrarian distress,

feminization of labor, state intervention towards eradication of gender biased practices such as female feticide through implementing programs like ‘Beti bachao, beti padao’.

In terms of economic issues that have prompted women's access to education, I want to discuss about the role of agrarian distress and how it has made women's education and employment necessary. It is in the context of rising agrarian distress, agrarian families have started promoting their children to look for non-farm, stable and salaried employment. Uday Pal is a farmer in the region, and he says: “The country depends on us for food but we cannot depend on farming for our own livelihood.....Only houses that have somebody with a job or in the army can make ends meet here.” (Daniyal, 2017).

In a scenario where agrarian work is neither profitable nor sustainable, the idea of secure employment becomes crucial. This illustrates the importance of sarkari naukari, which not only accords job security but also regular monthly salary that is very helpful in times when agrarian fields do not sustain the family. In lower- and middle-class families it means that many young men are aspiring and preparing for sarkari naukari such as SSC, SSB, or waiting to be employed in police, CRPF, BSF, army, home guard, subedar, and so on, a trend that has increased since the colonial times. In richer households, boys drop out from education because of disinterest and because of strong financial backing, or because they want to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities for which higher education is not necessary.

While the boys have been unmotivated or waiting for meaningful employment, the girls have been motivated, sincere and performing well, academically. Parents of young girls depend on their diligent daughters and invest in their education in the hopes that they will be able to land respectable positions as teachers, nurses, or paid government employees. This alternative income, brought in by the women is very helpful for the families, in times of severe agrarian and financial distress.

As the old generation respondents suggest, earlier it was extremely rare for Muslim and Jat girls to complete their education, let alone pursue advanced degrees or find employment. Even if they managed to access educational opportunities, it generally ended during adolescence. Significant studies suggest that one-third of girls drop out from school before the turn 16 and one-third are married by the time they turn 18. Early marriage and drop out rates have alarming consequences for women’s wellbeing (Duflo, 2012). But “*these days all*

our girls go to school.... Without education it is not possible to manage anymore”, says Ramesho. Indeed, Jat and Muslim girls are educated today, but in many cases, their families make educational investments in girls with the goal of presenting them as ideal wives who would be able to support their children's education and maintain a good home. Parents of young girls perceive education as having an instrumental value, which will help attain upward mobility, and end the cycle of poverty and distress in rural and agrarian economy (Nandy & Dutta, 2020, p. 32; Adams & Andrew, 2019; Rao 2010). In her study of female education, marriage, and honour among upwardly mobile Dalits, Clarinda Still noted that Dalits are educating their daughters to marry them "upwards" because education enables these girls to become housewives, a term that indicates an escape from a life of demeaning agricultural labour that involves "hard work in the hot sun" (Still, 2011, 1119).

Education doesn't often translate into employment, especially when it comes to women. In the previous section we have discussed how young men are waiting for sarkari naukri/ government job, an appropriate gender role for men. While there is not enough sarkari naukri/ government jobs, there is rise in many other types of paid employment in the private, unorganised, and informal sector. These categories of work may not be as well paid or as secure as the sarkari naukari, but it is a promising gap that is being filled by the young women of Muzaffarnagar. Preeti is making twenty thousand rupees in a month, by giving tuitions, teaching at a school, and teaching at a college. Shruti works at a school in her village at a month pay for rupees six thousand. (a detailed table on income is attached in the appendix).

This data set reflects something very important: that women are taking up jobs that are not being done by men; that the choice of particular job is not arbitrary, the kind of labour that women perform is feminized in nature. My engagement with the field also reveals that female labour participation is increasing, however because the participation is in unorganised and informal sectors, they are not being recognised as working women. These young and working women are missing from the data, another reason why women are in public sphere but not recognised as public beings. These types of work can be understood as work that has been feminized, such as teaching, and social work. A low paying job won't be taken up by men because this money is not enough for them, because of the perception that a man is the head of the household. Women on the other hand do not have the social pressure to earn for the family or act as the head of the household, a gender role that has been denied to them

historically. But they do need money for themselves, a need that often goes unrecognised because of women's location in the domestic sphere.

The young women in Muzaffarnagar start working, just to earn enough for their basic needs, which cannot be fulfilled by the struggling family. Younger generation women use this money to buy clothes, makeup, vehicle to commute, pursue education and other interests, and so on. The families do not object to this because educated girls will ensure suitable grooms. But these working young women often help the family in unanticipated and unexpected ways. For instance, Preeti saved enough money to finance her elder brother's honeymoon to an exotic destination. Gulistan invested a major part of her saving in the repair of family house. In these circumstances, where girls help their families in unprecedented and unanticipated ways, the family members are supportive of women's work. The only caveat is the issue of honour. Even when girls are unable to contribute much, if they take care of themselves and their education, the family has no problem.

By embracing forces like education, employment and migration, women are becoming 'productive' members of modernizing societies. Regardless of how less their salary is, the fact that women are doing paid work affects their status positively. As a result, women become less reliant on their husbands, fathers, and brothers and take more initiative when making domestic decision (more about this in chapter 5). Numerous studies focus on the connection between intra-household power dynamics and the contributions that women's earnings from paid job make to the household. When examining how female employment influences intra-household dynamics, researchers look at how women achieve desirable outcomes in the domain of reproductive control, childrearing, and control over the provision of home labor and resources.

State intervention is another way that has helped women have easier access to education and work. On the field, the historical tendencies of favouring sons over daughters are evident, and during the last few years, the state has heavily intervened in this issue. State has come with several programs to curb the disproportionate gender ratio in the region, a result of female feticide, and infanticide, and in general to curb violence against women, by highlighting the economic worth of the girl child. One such program is *beti bachao, beti padhao* (save girl child, educate girl child). In the times of modern education, and increasing

number of women in employment, and state support for the same (beti padhao, beti bachao)²⁷, young women skillfully use these ideas and opportunities to bargain with family, kin and community, in order to get access to public space.

Public space as an arena of freedom and emancipation

Young women are being exposed to an alternative way of life, as they are pursuing higher education and non-farm paid work. They do not have the same goals and aspirations as the older generation. My interactions with the region's youth reveal that the girls are far more interested in pursuing higher education than the boys. In many cases, the access to public space is necessary because it provides avenues to fulfil aspirations, aspirations of the family, and most importantly, aspirations of the women themselves. That is where they move from rural life and enter the urban world, which is fluid, urban, mobile. Women's aspirations are therefore reflective of the shift that is taking place, from traditional to non-traditional gender roles. This is facilitated by education, access to public space, and access to social media. Because of education, and access to public space, women's worldview has expanded, and they aspire for independent living, which is possible by moving from village to the city.

Conclusion

The public and private dichotomy is useful in making sense of contemporary consciousness in western Uttar Pradesh. In Muzaffarnagar, the traditional patriarchal ideology tries to reinforce the binaries so that the benefits of property, honour, labor are left undisturbed. The reality of public-private is much more complex, and the distinction or the separation of spheres is not as clear on the field. This chapter informs us that rural women's efforts are rarely viewed as labor by males, and occasionally even by women themselves. This happens through the traditional gender ideology that dictates the gender norms and gender roles, by demanding women's high participation and but allocating them low evaluation.

²⁷ The policy program beti bachao, beti padhao is an example to understand this. "Coordinated and convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and education of the girl child. In this background, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 22nd January 2015 in Panipat, Haryana to address the issue of decline in Child Sex Ratio and related issues of empowerment of girls and women over a life cycle continuum." The objectives of these scheme are three-fold, aimed to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. "1) To prevent gender biased sex selective elimination 2) To ensure survival and protection of the girl child 3) To ensure education and participation of the girl child." For more details, visit, <https://wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes>

However, this does not mean that there is no resistance in this gender segregated society. Different social forces such as education, employment, aspirations of women, the crisis of agrarian economy, and the state support to women's betterment of status through different kind of intervention (*beti padhao*, *beti bachao*) do not let the hegemony of this patriarchal binary prevail. Women alter the meanings attached to public-private binaries through negotiations and out of everyday needs related to survival, if not choices, and then make a claim to public space. They do this by claiming honourable behavior, and therefore legitimate claim of representation of the community in the public space. Thus, the public and private in context of Muzaffarnagar region should also be seen as a fluid arena which changes and shifts in different contexts and times, within a social milieu defined by new forms of masculinity, patriarchy, and gender negotiations.

Moreover, generational distinctions are apparent when we are looking at the context in which women make an entry into the public sphere. The older generation women had come out of their homes to work in public spaces because of deprivation, poverty and violence in private sphere, the younger generation women were venturing in public spaces for a liberating career. So, for older generation women, coming out from private to public space was not a choice but an economic necessity. For the younger women the access to public space was more meaningful and explicit, as it was about making a career, and supporting the family. This reveals that gender roles, and traditional gender expectations have changed. Women are negotiating with it every single day, in different capacities and through different mechanisms. The idea of 'working' women is now laden with ambivalence as the data suggests that everyday more and more women are entering public spaces for paid work. The idea of women going out for paid work, is now more acceptable in the region, because it is necessitated by agrarian distress, yet the patriarchs continue to remain anxious.

This chapter shows that the boundaries between public and private life creates channels for the continued hegemony, subordination, and marginalization of women in the region. However, what has changed with time is that the social understanding of what constitutes these spheres, how these spheres interact with each other, and how this affects the stability and agency of people, particularly women has changed.

Chapter 5: Gender relations, generational conflicts, and aspirational mobility

This chapter focusses on the rising ‘aspirations’ of young women from rural-agrarian north India, and how these aspirations are shaped by the interplay of three factors: rural to urban mobilities, technologies of communication and transportation (mobile and motorbike), and a new culture of consumption (malls). By looking at these three interrelated themes, I discuss the gender relations in practice, in rapidly urbanizing, rural- agrarian, north India. I discuss the multivariate phenomenon of what I call, ‘mall, mobile, and motorbike’²⁸, and how this transforms gendered aspirations, and in the process, creates a distinct class of young women. Subsequently, the chapter also brings out the novel and unique ways in which the agrarian and gendered interdependency is being challenged by the youth, especially the working and educated women of Muzaffarnagar. ‘Mall, mobile, motorbike’ leads to a new kind of gender relations in which class and generational tensions are inbuilt and thriving. The present chapter brings forth the changing world view, challenges to existing social norms, and new aspirations of the younger generation of educated and employed women. The chapter also focuses on the generational fissures, tensions and anxieties that are generated because of the changing gender relations. An increase in the number of upwardly mobile, aspirational women, from rural-agrarian backgrounds, who are moving to urban spaces, and are aspiring for an urban, middle-class identity, has led to generational conflicts, and other forms of social conflicts which often happen around the axis of community, such as caste and religion.

The remaining of the chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will discuss the idea of rural-urban continuum that needs to be incorporated to study regions like Muzaffarnagar, which are in proximity to the urban processes and locations, but also continue to be embroiled in the rural-agrarian ethos. In the second section, I will discuss the emergence of new technology (information, communication, and transportation) and how it has induced a trajectory of social change that has transformed the gender relations of the region. In this section, we will see that gender roles and gender norms, that are on the confluence of local agrarian ethos, and regionally informed patriarchy, are given away with due to the rise of these new technologies such as mobiles and motorbikes, and new sites of global

²⁸ Mobile and motorbike are discussed by the anthropologist Satendra Kumar (2018) as well, however through these elements he is interrogating the altering nature of rural sociality; furthermore, he connects these technologies to rise of religiosity and communalism in the region.

consumptions such as shopping malls. In the third section, I will discuss the implications of these everyday practices, the patriarchal backlash that often takes forms of conflicts such as generational anxieties, communal conflicts, and caste tensions, all of which are underscored by the gender dimension. This will be followed by a conclusion.

Rural-urban entanglements: Comprehending the ‘urban turn’ in rural-agrarian Muzaffarnagar

In the past few decades, new debates and critical scholarship has emerged in the context of changing rural-urban dynamics from the global south that have brought to light the ways in which rural and urban emerge as deeply intertwined, complexly entangled among each other. There is a significant disjuncture between the lived reality of global south, and western theories of urban processes and forces. Looking at the trajectories of large cities, small and medium towns, and even the villages, it is widely agreed that expanding urbanization is now a way of life (Patel, 2018). Yet, rural features appear to coexist alongside urban in the development of urbanization in the global south (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). For instance, urban-oriented processes like governance and planning have caused once-rural locations to be reclassified as urban regions (Roy, 2016). Similarly, peripheries of the urban landscape wherein the rural and urban territories and forms of land use are tangled to such an extent that they are almost confusing (McGee, 2008). The ability of people to blend visions and practices of rurality and urbanization is another important factor (Roy, 2016).

Researchers have looked at how groups or individuals participate in the creation of urban culture in rural places. When immigrants return home after living in the city, they frequently bring urban customs with them, like building homes in the city style and engaging in more extensive consumer behavior (Dyson and Jeffrey, 2021). To indicate social mobility, rural middle classes additionally attempt to blend urban ideals, practices, and forms with rural ones (Jeffrey, 2010). In addition, young people are frequently at the forefront of initiatives to combine urban and rural areas in rural regions. For instance, Andrew Deuchar documented how young people from North India enacted images of themselves as "urban people" in rural settings. This was done by three ways, which included cultivating urban style and bodily comportment, circulating anecdotes about city life, and by mentoring the other rural youth about urban life and experiences (Deuchar, 2019). Craig Jeffrey and Stephen Young in their work on north Indian town of Meerut, discussed how unemployed male youth often found their path to success blocked, yet didn't travel to major urban centers, but focused on their

“micro-geographical acuity, the everyday shuttling between different bureaucratic offices and their capacity to combine rural and urban tactics or bring traditional and modern materials together”, and sought to create social identities that amalgam visions of urbanism and rurality (Jeffrey and Young, 2014). These examples of social performance served as a foundation for developing self-respect and reconstructing rurality in relation to urban dynamics.

Thus, these diversities of experiences suggest that rural and urban are not separate entities but are in a continuum, and that the boundaries between the rural and the urban are unclear and fuzzy, so scholars use the expression “rural-urban entanglements”. The entanglements between the rural and urban areas have been made easier by several important factors, such as transportation and communication technologies, and new sites of consumption such as malls.

Technologies of transportation and communication

The entry of communication and transportation technology into the rural hinterlands of north India, has been a subject of investigation, primarily because that is where the “real action lies”(Srivastava, 2015). It has been highlighted that with the passage of time, the information and communication technology has become more democratized, and what was previously understood as an urban and upper-class commodity is now being increasingly accessed by people in the small cities, towns, and villages. Consumers in the rural hinterland areas are embracing cell phones and mobile internet to fill the gap between rural and urban, and bring new, affordable entertainment. As more and more people are migrating from rural to urban areas in search for education and employment, mobile phones provide them with connectivity, and information that helps them negotiate in the rough terrains of an unknown and unfamiliar city space. Mobile is essential in places where there aren't many other options for entertainment; the 4 to 5-inch mobile screen makes it easy to watch movies and other visual content. The need to connect to the global community and maintain one's social and image-conscious aspiration is another factor driving the growing use of smartphones and mobile internet (Srivastava, 2015) and has escalated social transformations and gender relations.

Transportation has enabled and sustained the process of migration, ensuring movement and mobility, that has sped up the slow pace of rural-agrarian life. The roads, railways, buses, and connectivity with state and national highway have given an impetus to the rural-agrarian life.

The rise of transportation technologies has decreased distance between the rural and the urban and we don't know where the urban begins and where the rural ends. The communication technology, especially a mobile phone with a camera, has altered every aspect of social and cultural life. These technologies have disrupted the conventional distinction between "informed city" and "ignorant villages" (Ahmed, 2013). The binary of informed city and ignorant village does not reflect the changing trajectory of rural India, especially villages and small towns that are located around big cities. For instance, a multimedia mobile phone with data pack, along with satellite television, has connected the rural population to dominant global issues.

Satendra Kumar has highlighted that due to the mobile phones, the distance between the rural and urban has decreased, and imagination and aspirations of rural people are around the urban way of life; this has also affected the sociality of villages. He uses the example of young men who prefer to engage in online chatting, play games, watch porn on their phones, or watch television soap than engage in conversation with their peers or village elders (Kumar, 2018). Thus, due to the mobile phones, there is a significant reduction in face-to-face engagement, which was earlier a basic organizing principle in rural-agrarian communities. He also highlighted that the communication and entertainment technologies have led to a rise in consciousness about caste and religion, and the public expression of religiosity has also increased. For instance, among Muslims, religious channels like QTV and Peace TV are widely consumed. Similarly, Hindus are watching Astha channel. At the same time, more and more Jats are leaving their Arya Samaj roots to join religious and spiritual groups like the Dera Sacha Sauda, which originally originated in urban areas but has since spread to the rural hinterlands of western Uttar Pradesh. This indicates that there has been a rise of religiosity in both, the Jats and the Muslims.

Culture of consumption and aspiration for middle class

Communication and mobility technologies, such as the mobile and motorbikes, and the new sites of consumption, such as the malls, restaurants, and cafes, highlight the ways in which the consumption patterns have changed lifestyles in the rural-agrarian hinterlands of north India. Moreover, these consumption practices suggest a fundamental shift in the aspirations of the young people from rural-agrarian societies, as they are consuming fragments of global culture.

While the consumption of global goods is significant shift in the rural-agrarian setup, what does it mean in the context of youth? In a national level survey conducted by the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies and CAS in 2016, titled “Attitudes, anxieties and aspirations of India’s youth: changing patterns” it was found that the young people of India are “quite conscious about how they look and appear”. 61 per cent young people reported their fondness for wearing stylish clothes, 58 per cent liked wearing stylish footwear, 59 per cent are quite fond of keeping the latest mobile phones, 41 per cent have a moderate fondness for buying perfumes and deodorants, 39 per cent said they like applying fairness creams, and 36 per cent reported fondness for visiting beauty parlors and salons (Kumar, 2017). The data for this study has been derived from urban and rural localities. Nevertheless, this statistical data indicates a very significant cultural shift in rural societies, that rural consumption is very much aligned with urban consumption. It is imperative to understand that consumption can also be a marker of social success, especially for the youth.

These consumption practices are recognized as effective forms of gaining social distinction. And more largely, these distinctions signify that rural youth are no longer rural, but have become urbane. Even when there is no identifiable middle class, it is the aspiration for middle classness that becomes more important a social phenomenon (Jeffrey, 2010b). Scholarly work on rural-agrarian landscapes, with particular focus on rural youth, find that it is the aspiration for middle classness that becomes crucial in understanding the changing nature of agrarian, urban transformation. Urban culture transcends the urban site: if urbanization is understood as "an irruptive, uneven and relational historical process whose dynamics reach far beyond sites of agglomeration", it means that urban forces also transform villages in addition to towns (Ghosh and Meer, 2021, 5). As the global markets have entered the hinterlands, there is a visible change in rural demand which exhibits trends of status aspiration, taste, and compulsion to emulate urban consumption. Telecommunications, television, and direct experiences have extended these desires from India's "metropolitan habitus" to the north Indian hinterlands (Aslany, 2020; Cavalcante, 2016). Digital era has rapidly converged rural aspirations with the urban. Furthermore, at a given income level, both urban and rural consumer groups aim for the similar brands, demand a similar standard of living, and are similarly at ease with technology-enabled consumption.

But there are also imminent structural reasons which provoke a change in aspirations. There is a more general claim that the region's peasants' aspirations were "increasingly informed by

a wish to avoid farming," leading to out-migration and altered household structures (Portilla, 2017). Young people in rural areas began to explore opportunities beyond the rural and began moving into the 'urban' and 'city' realms as the agrarian economy was no longer able to satisfy their goals and aspirations. As a result, the blurred lines separating the rural and urban areas were shaped by both, the aspiration of global city, and the needs, wants, and demands generated by agrarian distress.

Looking at women's aspirations for upward mobility and 'middle class-ness' through mobile, motorbike and mall

Several decades ago, with the advent of tractor, the entire practice of doing agriculture changed, and so did the social relations. Tractors enhanced the prospects of green revolution, but mechanization of agrarian work restricted women to the private sphere, and further enhanced the social inequalities by allocating the resources to a certain section of communities. In the case of Muzaffarnagar, a rapidly urbanizing rural-agrarian geography, the social transformation is facilitated by the technology of communication and transportation. Due to mobile and motorbike, the boundaries of rural and urban are in flux, and this has induced changes in several aspects of rural-agrarian life, whether it is the practice of doing agriculture, or whether it is the changing social fabric, and altering gender relations. Technologies of mobile, motorbike, and new spaces of consumption such as cafes and malls, have altered the lives of women of rural-agrarian society of Muzaffarnagar. The subsequent sections examine the impact of technology on agrarian societies and social relations.

There is unconventional trajectory of events that are happening in the patriarchal society of Muzaffarnagar. Because of the rise of pluri'active households that have been necessitated by agrarian transformation, facilitated by education, and escalated by motorbike and mobile, what we see is hordes of young women from the rural-agrarian settings, moving to the urban space, towards the city, in search for a better life by engaging in non-farm occupations. These educated, young women who are either employed or seeking employment are, in many respects, harbingers of change, which is amply reflected in changing social interactions and gender relations. Let's have a look at this trajectory of change in gender relations that has emerged in the backdrop of new forms of information and communication technologies and new consumption culture.

Empirical studies have shown that women in India have gained an opportunity to use mobile phones as a major asset, however, compared to men, women's access to mobile phones tends to be significantly more limited (Tenhunen, 2018). However, it is important to recognize that mobile phones are crucial tools for people in contemporary times. Despite the patriarchal concerns and contestations around the information and communication technology, mobile phones have become a way of life, more so in the Covid-19 world. However, Covid-19 has only escalated a trajectory of social change that was already set to unravel. As my study highlights that even though access to mobile phones is lesser among women, the number is increasing every day, and is enough to generate gendered anxieties and tensions.

Moreover, the expansion of mall, multiplex, and café/restaurant culture has also significantly affected lifestyle, drastically altering how young people in rural-agrarian north India spend their money and their free time. Additionally, in the past ten years, there have been enormous developments in networking and communications technology, which have profoundly changed how people interact, communicate, and consume information. The trajectory of consumption in Muzaffarnagar is therefore increasing with the passage of time. The introduction of motorbikes, the internet, and smartphones has led to a rapid convergence of aspirations between urban and rural India and enabled a “techno-mediated sociality” (Ahmed, 2014).

Young women who are living in the nearby villages, consider Muzaffarnagar city a suitable site to live in for several reasons, primarily because of the access to transportation, the motorbike. Through the access to transportation, many of the young women are challenging the traditional gender relations and bread-winning norms. Having studied outside, young women of the region have also found employment outside the native village. There are numerous educational institutions and coaching facilities that helps them get ready for the workforce. Additionally, there are developing (and in-demand) job opportunities in secretarial, call center, and information technology fields. Young women claimed that compared to cities like New Delhi, where salaries are lower and living standards are higher, living in Muzaffarnagar is significantly more affordable. While some of them had little financial aid from their parents, they were able to live in Muzaffarnagar for comparatively less money. Most of them worked to support themselves in the city while also relying on familial and other social networks. These young women live independently in hostels and strived for employment and a more respectable middle-class status, and metropolitan

lifestyle. As they begin to live in the city, far from the traditions of the village, they are also exposed to less repressive metropolitan cultures and a change in hierarchical gender relations. “There is a lot of interference in the village”, the girls say. “City gives us space, freedom and anonymity”. That is why more and more girls from agrarian families aspire to move towards the city. Young, working women derive self-esteem from their productivity. Due to their economic capacity, they are viewed as productive assets, which confers on them a certain level of influence, importance, and worth. To live in city, is about learning, growth, and progress. Staying back in the village means staying back in life. Women frequently circulate narratives emphasizing the options they have in city, in order to establish their identities. These included relating tales to their friends about visiting a movie theatre or a mall.

Gulistan belongs to a very small village, but because she is a part of the kabaddi team, she has seen many parts of the state and even the country. She has travelled to big cities, and experienced novel places such as cafes and malls. According to her, villages are characterized by the lack of opportunity while cities are places where opportunity thrive. She advises young women of her village on how to apply for government job, how to fill applications, and so on. She encourages women to play sports so that they can get a permanent job through sports quota so that the young women can make their life better and move to city and do paid work. Similarly, Preeti considers the city a site of progress and “forward thinking”, whereas the villages represent stagnant time. Swati Tomar said that people in her village *“are not concerned with the future or modernity, they are just living in the agricultural past.”*

This practice of living away from the village and home, and living alone in the city, provides young women to pursue a life of their own choice. Proximity to the village/home provides them with sort of economic/ financial safety net as there are times when it is difficult to survive in the city, and girls are left with little to no money. Nisha Tomar (Jat, 20) is working in the mall that has recently opened in the city. She works in a mobile showroom and gets paid five thousand rupees a month with no benefits. She also gives private tuitions to survive and sustain herself but still there are times when it is difficult for her to manage. How does she survive, I ask? She opens a drawer and in that I see almost twenty packet of sanitary napkins, and fifty pouches of shampoo. Thereafter she goes in the kitchen and points to barrels of rice and masala and sugar. She smiles broadly and proudly shares, *“these are my basic needs. I always keep an extra stock of necessary things, and petrol in my scooter. Because of scooter I can visit my village every weekend and come back when I need to. The*

weekend visits help me out when I am financially troubled. My father gives me some cash, and sometimes even refuels the scooter. My mother gives me food and cash. Most of the time I bring milk and curd also, and home-grown vegetables. Apart from food, and looking proper for work, I don't have many needs. In fact, no one can guess from my dressing and style that I am living in such menial resources."

My initial response was pain, and I ended up spending a lot of money on her. But later, I realized that what Nisha is doing is tactically challenging a market-oriented society that is exploiting women's labor, and she does this by anticipating and managing her basic needs, and by seeking support from friends and family. She is also maintaining good relations with the family, thus bargaining with patriarchy. Every time she goes to her home, she buys things like sweets, snacks, clothes, and whatever else she notices that is missing from her home. These actions of Nisha can be understood as subversion, an equally important form of gender agency that has enabled many south Asian women to survive in a patriarchal society. The non-farm work that she is doing in the city do not provide enough for a decent life, and ultimately, she is compelled to fall back on her village resources. These stories give us the ability to comprehend how the nature of youth demand is transformed by status aspirations, mobility, and impulses to emulate. In pursuit of this goal, they sacrifice spending on what economists view as essential needs like food, cutting back on daily meals in favor of buying consumer durables, frequently on instalment plans, EMIs, etc., which sometimes leads to unmanageable debts (Guerin, 2014; Cavalcante, 2016; Harriss-white, 2021)

Due to Muzaffarnagar city's proximity to the villages, young working women choose to live there because it is easier to go back to home, when necessary. Young women returned home an average of ten to twelve times per year, which is quite frequent, compared to male migrants, who only did so twice per year. However, this difference may also be explained by the fact that women migrate closer to their homes than men, who migrate to far-off locations. Many of the women made weekly trips to their village to attend religious celebrations and weddings, help with harvests, and fulfil familial and social responsibilities. The frequent movement between the village and the city has been facilitated by the scooter, previously denied to women, but with the passage of time, more and more women have been moving around on their scooters.

But the access to something as basic as scooter that was denied for a long time has now been enabled because women from distant parts of the district are entering the work force. As they are navigating between the home and the outside, village and city, the access to safe transportation becomes a legitimate necessity. Respondents highlighted the problems of sexual harassment in public spaces, and moreover the unpredictable and unreliable nature of public transportation, which often meant that women were late to work, and late for home. These circumstances enabled many women to demand for the freedom to access motorbikes. Moreover, scooter is understood as an investment, especially in the context of college going and working women, who must travel to distant parts in the city for tuitions and coaching, and personal transportation helps in navigating this distance that is often marked by lack of safety and wastage of precious time. The parents and community members have realized that they cannot afford to miss out on the returns which come from women's work and employment, by denying women safe access to transportation and mobility. The scooter has now emerged as their greatest ally, particularly when job prospects are available in the shopping malls, call centers, and auto dealerships that are mushrooming around new urban neighborhoods. With the desire for education, it's no wonder that so many young women are negotiating urban and rural settings, their homes and the outside world, careers, and families. The same is true for women who can now drop their children off at school and then leave for work. Government school-teacher Shehnaz Hussain (Muslim, 34), who lives in a rural area 30 kilometers outside of Muzaffarnagar and is in the vicinity of Dehradun, drives up to the highway, parks her scooter somewhere secure, and boards an interstate bus.

Other than reasons of practicality, the access to transportation also leads to accessing more amorphous feelings of freedom, movement, and mobility. Many women say it's a "*heady emotion*", "*hair flying in the wind*", "*riding to any place one wants, with not a care in the world*", "*just the feeling of freedom*", "*the sense of adventure and the intoxication of speed*". To the working women, the two-wheeler brings a more practical kind of liberation. "*You must buy a Scooter, your whole life will change,*" says Indu Kadiyan. Noorjehan (Muslim, 42), who is an activist in the Action Society for Women organization, says: "*Riding a two-wheeler is a woman's expression of confidence. It makes me feel in control of my life. Earlier because I had to rely on buses and trains, I used to be late. Because I am social worker, I have no strict time schedule, which means that I am often working around the clock. But the trains and the buses don't care for my schedule. Neither do they care if I reach my home on time. Since I am a divorcee, many people are out there to gauge the timing of when I am*

arriving home, and how. When I take a lift from someone, or when I am late, there are many questions on my propriety. Since I have purchased a scooter, I am easily escaping most of these questions and taunts that the patriarchal society subjects me to."

Every afternoon, young women take over the streets on their vehicles, riding doubles or triples, pouring out of schools and colleges. *"It's thrilling,"* effuses Rukhsana (Muslim, 32), clerk, Muzaffarnagar. Soofi, who enjoys zooming past male riders in the dusty roads of Muzaffarnagar quips: *"Why should the boys have all the fun?"*, a statement that has become popular since it was uttered by Preeti Zinta, a popular Bollywood actress, in a scooter advertisement. Nihaz further says, *"Most men can't resist racing women on bikes, and I love racing them,"* she grins.

WheelsEMI is an organization that offers loans to working women so that they can buy motorized two wheelers, and they found that "more than 15 per cent of our customers are women — not enough but a good start"(Gopalan, 2019). According to JD Power surveys, one in four scooter buyer is a woman. Most women scooter buyers are young. In another study it was found that in an otherwise sluggish two-wheeler market, the demand for scooters has been growing, primarily due to an expanding base of women drivers(Modi, 2015). Now, more than a quarter of new scooters are being registered in the names of women buyers. Companies say the actual share of women using scooters is estimated at about 35 per cent, as a large number of sales are registered in the names of male family members - husband, father or brother as many times women are not eligible for loan(Modi, 2015).

Earlier motorbike was a rare phenomenon, and if people had money they would generally invest on tractors or cars, so that they could set up taxi service connecting the village to city. But now motorbikes have become a rage, especially among the young women. Young women, who are aware of unsafe public transport, have helped increase scooter sale. Motorbike is a celebrated and symbolic component of youth aspirations and ensures that the distance between the city and the village is reduced significantly, and users are transgressing the boundaries between the rural and urban, making it permeable. As these narratives suggest, mobility should be understood not just as a means of providing access to workplaces and amenities, but also providing opportunities, freedom, aspirations – over time and across space. The mobility models amidst the rural landscapes determine the degree to which

citizens can participate in social and professional opportunities and contribute to economic struggles of the agrarian community.

When the respondents in the field were asked to share their dreams, and aspirations, they expressed that they wanted to travel Switzerland, or swim in the Indian Ocean, and meet M. S Dhoni. These aspirations are distant dreams that hover in the hearts and minds of younger generation women. Yet these aspirations and dreams also reflect the connectivity that is being provided to the people of the hinterlands, through the magical mobile. Because of smart phones, the rural-agrarian population is consuming the visuals and still images of sacred religious places, dream destinations, critical political events and even global wars, pornography, which has led to creation of many “visual yet-imagined communities”(Ahmed, 2013). Social media consumption that transgresses the localized boundaries, and transverses through the global, transnational landscapes represent the new face of ‘aspiration’ in the region. Women are coming from ‘interior’ parts of the state but are rising fast in the social ladder by education and employment. The views of young women are shaped by the internet and social media, and these aspirations and dreams break the clear distinction between rural and urban. These dreams are a consequence of the processes such as globalization and urbanization, the spread of which has encapsulated the rural hinterlands through the development of transport and communication, thus blurring the boundaries between the rural and urban, and significantly transforming gender relations.

It has been argued that the capacity to aspire is a “navigational capacity” (Appadurai, 1996, 59), especially among those who do not possess the social, cultural, or economic capital to pursue their ambitions. Young people who are brimming with navigational capacity do not necessarily accept structural barriers of class or region as a given, but seek other strategies for upward mobility, which are often consumption- oriented. Thus, while class differences do translate into distinctions in taste, differences and aspirations, the rural and urban orientation of these differences is being blurred through smart phone, shopping apps, malls, etc. Appadurai attributes this largely to the communication revolution – the rapid spread of information and communication technologies over the last decade, be it the internet or mobile phones, bringing in their wake a new global culture, linked to the consumption of different types of goods and services, which serves as marker of status, and distinction. Thus, young people’s experience of movement, of accessing new technologies and ideas has resulted in creating a new landscape of aspirations and social practice.

Rama Srinivasan who has conducted her fieldwork in the neighboring state of Haryana writes that “at a time when the promise of globalization and neoliberal policies has lost its capacity to inspire, the fragile localities constructed by communities fail to recreate the material culture of the world that has already been lost and are unable to see the promised benefits of the new world order. The post-agrarian North India is marked by a culture of aspiration that often eludes the affluent but has the capacity to inspire hope and to present pathways to the marginalized”(Srinivasan, 2020, p. 84). In the context of western Uttar Pradesh, this sort of navigational capacity is most palpable among younger generation women, who are striving for upward mobility through cultural and technological consumption.

Talking about the importance of social media in the life of youth, it has been argued that an “App Generation” has emerged, in which life has become characterized through the lens of an “app”, transforming the nature of identity, intimacy, and imagination for young people (Gardner and Davis, 2013). Young women are on internet, not just doing ‘timepass’, but “looking for more”. What are they looking for, online? These days’ young women are relying on social media for a lot of things. They are taking online classes and learning to speak English and preparing for competitive exams. Through information and communication technology, the young women are ordering clothing from Myntra, Amazon, Flipkart, online shopping apps that provide worldwide fashion on a single screen, and fast delivery. The online shopping is further facilitated by a motorbike, where the delivery person will deliver ‘modern’ clothes just at the doorsteps on the village house. Tik tok is another prominent app on which there is a huge presence of young women and men, who “just want to enjoy life”. The boredom of rural-agrarian setup is dissipated by consuming the glorious and thrilling world of tik tok and other social media apps. Now, the women use face filters which transforms from no make-up to makeup look, then they attach a trending music clip, and thereafter they upload the clip online. Most of the girls that I met in the field are using tik tok. Some use their true identity, but most of them alter their identity in order to enjoy the anonymous space through a click.

Roopa Mallick (Jat, 36) lives with her 8-year-old son, and her elderly father. Her husband has been a migrant worker from the past ten years and is presently working in a reputed IT company in Pune. She makes tik tok videos for fun, and uploads it on various online spaces, such as ‘Instagram’, ‘Tik tok’, ‘Tiki’, and ‘Likee’. Her Instagram profile was open access for

all, and she had uploaded almost eight hundred videos. The number of people who follow her on Instagram are in thousands. She says that the number of followers is more on other applications such as 'Tiki' and 'Tiktok'. I stayed with her for three days, and I noticed that her days are organized around social media. She wakes up, sends off her son to school, and after having breakfast, she starts getting ready. She does an elaborate make up, dresses up, selects songs on which she wants to dance, and filters that she wants to use, 'trends' that she wishes to follow. When I asked her why she makes these videos, this is how she responded, *"When I realized that my husband neither liked me, nor appreciated me, I decided to pursue my own interests. Since I enjoyed dancing, many friends suggested that I should upload my videos on tik tok. I made an account on tik tok, and within a few days I had thousands of followers. Now it has been almost four years since I have been on this application, and I have made several friends, and thousands of followers. My husband doesn't talk to me, but there are many other people who want to talk to me. They give me gifts, even if those gifts are online. They appreciate me, they like my videos, and comment on them. That makes me happy. I am kind of a celebrity there."*

Roopa's narrative reflects how women are using mobiles, which is transforming the very nature of intimacy. Due to the internet, and social media, the sociality of rural-agrarian regions have taken a shape and form of techno-mediated sociality. In addition to this, the narrative also throws light on the ways in which women make a sense of their lives, how they negotiate a loveless life, seek attention, and gain happiness. Roopa's choice doesn't bring any financial changes in her life, but experiences agency that has been facilitated through internet, mobile applications, and social media. Roopa's life is an important illustration of how women exercise agency using technology.

Nowadays, phones are used to arrange marriages. However, traditionally, it is the father's job to find suitable wives for their sons. Mothers can't go door-to-door looking for potential brides for their sons or grooms for their daughters, but they can take part in the marriage process by learning about appropriate brides and grooms through their networks. Women now play a bigger part in marriage negotiations thanks to widespread availability to cell phones. Traditionally daughters cannot communicate with the prospective grooms, however this norm is being broken by young women through the help of a mobile phone. Ritu Mallick (Jat, 28) is a very 'beautiful' girl. She lost her father in the first wave of Covid-19. It was always anticipated that with her beauty, and her spectacular abilities to manage the

household, both redeeming qualities, there wouldn't be much problem in finding a suitable match for her. Her family was confident about her desirability as a daughter-in-law, and that no one would reject her when the situation of match making would arrive. However, with the untimely death of her father, everything changed. Fathers are very important in the process of match making, and in the case of a dead father in a traditional patriarchal society, the girl loses most of the value that is allocated to her. This happened with Ritu also. There was a time when there was a string of alliances, and people used to wait for her response, and now after the death of her father, no one was willing to marry her. The kind of alliances that were coming for her were not suitable and didn't match Ritu's aspirations. The relatives and community members who often play matchmakers wanted Ritu to compromise and get married to a village boy. They rebuked her for being choosy and for being insensitive to her family's plight. But Ritu had studied in Noida, and briefly worked there as well. She was smart, educated, and was exposed to 'urban' ideas and people. She didn't let this issue sustain and with some consideration and discussion with her family, she made an account on the matrimonial website. Ritu got to know about the workings of the matrimonial application while she was working in Noida. The reasoning that she gave to her brothers and mother was that she was a city girl, and if she relied on the middlemen to fix her alliance, as is the norm in Muzaffarnagar, and other parts of western Uttar Pradesh, she would never find a 'deserving' candidate. Her family members understood this and went against the regional norms that involved community members fixing alliance for girls.

The moment Ritu made an account on the matrimonial website, she started getting matches. Her entire days were spent in assessing the profiles of eligible bachelors. She used to discuss with her mother, but since the mother had "not seen the world", she used to call up her cousins in other parts of the country via mobile phone to discuss which boy was more suitable and fit for her future aspirations and 'deserving' of her. She used to spend hours on the mobile, analyzing every single detail. One day she found a boy that was matching with most of her choices. He was well paid, working in an MNC, posted in Lucknow, which was far enough and yet near, in case she needed to hurry back to home for domestic matters. He had a small family, and she didn't like working much. He had also lost his father, just like her, so in a way, this was a match made in heaven. She showed an interest in his profile, and he reverted, and he soon sent his contact number for further communication.

It is important to highlight that this process of finding eligible boys, and establishing contact, and getting contact number usually takes ten to fifteen days, however due to the revolutionary technology of smart phone, and the matrimonial application, the whole process was sped up, and everything happened with the swiftness of a 'click'. The sadness that had ensued Ritu's life with the untimely demise of father was vanishing, as she was getting occupied in these clicks and replies. Now a telephonic conversation was required. Anyway, the neatly designed matrimonial website provided all the crucial details about the income, caste, gotra, size of the family, and occupation of the parents, but only that is not enough. *"One needs to verify also". "And to get married, we cannot rely on app alone"*.

This narrative that has been told to the researcher by Ritu during a telephonic conversation, brings out several crucial points. What this narrative provides to this study is the insight on how women shape their agency through technology in a patriarchal society. The presence of this revolutionary and almost magical technology of the mobile phone has given a new life to an almost distraught Ritu who was struggling due to the unanticipated demise of her father. Even if her father would have been alive, Ritu would never have so much freedom to choose her life partner. This was only possible because her father was not present, and therefore the community was not responsible for looking for alliances. This in turn led her to make an account on the matrimonial website, that is still considered dubious and shameful in the society of Muzaffarnagar. If it wouldn't be for the matrimonial website, who would have Ritu disclosed to what she wanted in her prospective partner?

Ritu likes to drink occasionally, but how could she have shared this vital piece of information, and to whom? It is because of the matrimonial website that takes into consideration, these choices. The beech-waliye/middlemen and community members would never take into consideration such a preference. Thus, mobile phones have provided avenues to young women of rural-agrarian western Uttar Pradesh, to choose. Marriage is important and unavoidable for young women however this difficult and life altering process has been facilitated because of the mobile phone. There was a time when girls got to see their partners on the day of marriage, but now due to mobile phones, girls are not only seeing the partners beforehand, if they don't like the boy, they try to convince the parents to look for a better choice, and if they like boy, they can communicate with the boy post engagement, that gives a romantic spin to the phenomenon of arranged marriage. In this way, the very nature of

intimacy and fixing matrimonial alliances has changed due to the techno-mediated sociality that is enabled by smart phones, and social media applications.

Shehnaz belongs to a lower middle class, Muslim family. I had first established contact with her during my pilot study, when she was still attending college to get a M.Sc. in botany. Suddenly she went out of the radar. When I asked about her whereabouts, I got to know that she had fallen in love with a lower caste boy, and when her family became aware of such ‘dishonourable conduct’ of her daughter, they stopped her from going to college. She was just allowed to attend the college during exams time. During the year 2020, she suddenly appeared on my WhatsApp contacts. Her display picture was an artificially conjoined picture of her and a boy, and a status that read ‘I am engaged’. From that day onwards, she changed her WhatsApp status every day to put romantic audio-visual songs, most of them belonging to 1990s era. One day I called her, and she updated me with everything that had been going on in her life, how after a long struggle with loneliness, almost no access to public space, and always cautious and doubtful gaze of parents, relatives, and neighbors, she decided that the best solution was to get married. And that she is happily engaged to boy of her parents’ choice. I remarked that I do watch her statuses every day. She happily shared that those songs were dedicated by her fiancé, and that she was having the best time of her life. I asked her how many times she has met her fiancé. She told me “Just once”, and even then, she didn’t talk much because of social expectations, threats of rejection and nervousness. But when she got engaged, the next day itself her elder brother gave her a smart phone, with a SIM card, and from then onwards, she is continuously talking to her fiancé. What started as an arranged marriage, has almost become a love marriage.

There are two important point to highlight in this narrative. Firstly, the kinds of patriarchal bargains that women make in order to survive. When women are forced to make decisions while adhering to a specific set of restrictions, they engage in what is known as a patriarchal bargain. This strategizing changes with time, depending on caste, class, and religious affiliation. Women's agency is demonstrated through a variety of behaviors, including open and direct bargaining, group opposition, subversive tactics, individual co-optation, acquiescence, or collaboration. Second, the arrival of phones gave women a fresh, discreet way to expand their circles of friends and acquaintances without leaving their neighborhood. Like television, trans-local communication made possible by phones has contributed to the expansion of the outside world into the private domain. With the use of phones, women are

more in touch with their birth families, which are typically a big source of support for them. A decade previously, it would have taken years for parents to learn that a woman was being harassed by her husband or was facing food shortages. The exchange of news over mobile phones is prompt today. The young women might not have a mobile phone all their life, but as soon as the marriage is fixed, they are given a mobile phone. Primarily to develop a connection with the future husband, and to keep in touch with parents, post marriage.

Aspirations, anxieties, and changing gender relations

The dreams and aspirations of young women, as well as their day-to-day survival and future plans, have come under fire from the established social order. Mobiles, malls, and motorbikes are components that initiate a critical distinction between individual choice and community identity, access to public space, and moreover access to public life, all of which were previously restricted to the women of the rural-agrarian society of Muzaffarnagar. Young women from rural agrarian societies are increasingly aspiring to urban lifestyles and trying to emulate a particular type of "middle-class-ness," and we notice that this process involves culture, which is expressed in specific types of housing, social networks, leisure activities, style, and aspirations. The young generation working class women realize that the excitement and wonder of cities is available to everybody who lives there. As they get to taste these possibilities during education and employment, they cannot stop but want to have more of the public space and the perks that come with it.

However, this attitudinal shift has led to the belief that women with aspirations are a harbinger of both, the possibilities and dangers of modern life. People usually claim that the newly educated daughters-in-law are the main source of family conflicts because women are getting older at the time of marriage and more girls are gaining higher education. As one Jat mother-in-law puts it, "*These days they obtain a wife who brings fifty thousand rupees as dowry and says: 'I am not going to do your household work.'*" In response, the young women and wives publicly criticize their future status as housewives: "*The main thing is that men should listen to women, listen and understand what they want. Women should get married when they are a bit older— I want all this, some progress. We can go out only with our husbands. We have enough food and clothes, everything, but that is not all. I like to talk openly, I want to go out, but here I am restricted.*"

However senior men and women complain that young women are always on the phone. Ladli Chaudhary, a senior Jat woman and well respected among her community explains, *“the problem with mobile phones is that women are talking to their parents every day. Even when there is nothing to talk about, they keep on communicating. Because of this regular conversation and communication, they are talking about useless issues. Girls are telling their parents what is cooked in meals, who makes the food, and so on. The small conflicts which used to die down, are now increasing because women are sharing it with their parents. On small issues, they start crying and call their parents. The parents think that their daughters are being harassed. So, what is the point of this communication when it brings no solace to the families?”* Ladli’s narrative highlights that the mobile phone has initiated an everyday communication between married women and their natal families, which has in turn harmed the patriarchal status quo and power relations. The distance that is assumed and given between the natal family and the marital family has been disrupted because of the mobile phones. While the rules of marriage and exogamy are in place to keep the distance between the girl and her natal family, the entry of mobile phones and its increasing access to women has enabled to blur the distances and boundaries that prevail between parents and their daughters.

The other related aspect of this blurring of boundaries due to mobile phones is the ensuing of violence on women. Many respondents recounted that they were scolded and beaten because of the mobile phones. They were either scolded because they were overusing mobile phones, or because they were sharing intimate details of the matrimonial home(sasural). Many a times the long hours on mobile phones led husbands to doubt their wives, and the first step taken to resolve this issue was to smash the mobile phones, apparently the bone of all contention.

Both motorbikes and mobile, have become a source of anxiety, as discussed by the parents and the senior members of the community. Due to the fast and furious nature of this technology, the youth have become unpredictable. Moreover, most of the love stories start when young people gain access to such technology of transportation. The mobility and speed that is offered by motorbike often accompanies several factors, such as access to public space for education and employment, advent of youth, and escalation of choices in a previously ‘limited world’. The result of intermingling factors is love and friendship that often transgresses the social boundaries of caste, class, and religion, thus generating anxieties and threats in the hearts and minds of parents and older generation.

Mobile phones also help maintaining secret and defiant conversations. One young woman, for instance, discussed her own dowry plans with her married sister who resided outside the community. Non-marital relationships in college life are common in the region, and young college students can keep in touch with their boyfriends and girlfriends using personal phones. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, that the region has witnessed out-migration of men as they are living in different parts of the country and working in different capacities to make a living. In this context also, the mobile plays a critical role. Preeti's brother is a BSF official and is posted in a distant part of the country. He got married when he was 22, as soon as he got the job. After spending a few days with his wife, he left for his posting. The distance with the husband led the wife to rekindle the relationship with an ex-boyfriend, which was facilitated by the mobile phone. The family members became aware of the affair, and this led to a divorce. He remarried in 2021 March, and the family took two precautions to ensure that the past story of affair doesn't get repeated. They made sure that the girl had no mobile and no boyfriend before the marriage, and after marriage they sent the girl to live with her husband on his current posting.

The socio-cultural environment has changed due to a shift in identities and aspirations brought on by new mobility and media-dominated culture. There are concerns about illicit relationships, contentious marriages and changing gender roles. When we look at the north Indian rural-agrarian belt, especially with reference to Rajasthan, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, women's access to mobile phones becomes a contested issue because in many of these regions, official bans by village panchayats have been imposed so as to restrict women's access to this revolutionary communication technology. The village elders believed that mobile phones ruined the community's atmosphere and encouraged elopements and illicit relationships (Burke and Kumar 2012). Similar observations have been made in Rajasthan wherein parents wanted to marry off the daughters at an early age to prevent the girls from communicating with boys through the mobile phones (Karki, 2013). In her ethnography of rural Rajasthan, Grodzins Gold found that rural people were skeptical of mobile phones because they replaced face-to-face interactions, which are in essence an antinomy to the close-knit village community ethos (Gold, 2017).

There are other related sources of anxieties and tensions which are reflected in a whole range of decisions that are taken by traditional panchayats, such as bans on women wearing jeans,

tops and short skirts, on dancing at social events, even on eating chowmein, burgers and pizza. All these activities are not in sync with the rural-agrarian ethos of simple living and hard work. Few respondents describe such alien food as tamasic, inducing wild desire in the hearts and bodies of consumers. Such food is considered as the peril of “city life” (shehri zindagi) which destroys the simple living, hardworking people of rural-agrarian society. The cultural importance of doodh-dahi (milk and curd) has been deteriorating, and the consumption of pizza, and chowmein is rising. While agriculture determines the political economy in the region, dairy products often feature as cultural symbols, with many references to Haryana as the “land of milk and yoghurt” (Chowdhry 2007, 282). For people of western Uttar Pradesh, the powdery whiteness of milk represents a purity that can be embodied. Men, especially older men, prefer starched white attire. The purity of this rural-agrarian society of Muzaffarnagar is also articulated in their “simple” needs that are easily met. These simple needs are reflected in food, as the people of western Uttar Pradesh don’t eat anything fancy, but whatever they eat is very healthy keeping them sturdy with a well-built frame. However, this whiteness of milk, which is reflected in attire of men, is getting dusty and dirty as more and more women are challenging the rural agrarian ethos and practicing different kinds of lifestyle that they have acquired through internet and access to the city.

This has led to new ways of reimagining and ‘doing’ gender that are in constant tension with the old agrarian ways that are firmly located in an agrarian economy. Due to agrarian distress and agrarian transformations, it is not possible for the younger generation to continue with the practices that form the core of the rural ‘dehati’ culture that the elder generation takes pride in doing. The new social norms that are increasingly organized around technological transformations (that I have identified as malls, mobile, motorbike), have implications for organization of community identity and gender relations. With new technologies, ways of communication, come new aspirations that lead to intergenerational conflict, and the formation of new class of young people.

Constructions of new Gender Stereotypes: The shift from ‘hard working women’ to ‘hardly working girls’

In Muzaffarnagar society, generational anxiety around the ‘hardly working girls’ is a new gender stereotype. When I asked the older generation men and women, what bothers them most about the present society, among many other anxieties, they also discussed the issue of hardly working girls. Khurshid Parveen, 48-year-old, Muslim, homemaker, wonders, “*Who*

knows what kind daughter-in-law I will get? Will she be social? Will she give us food? These days' girls are always on their mobiles, and don't want to work." What Khurshid highlighted, is a matter that occupies the hearts and minds of many elderly women who are waiting for their daughter-in-law, to come and manage the household. The new generation bride has generated an anxiety because there is an understanding that the new bride, educated and employed, will be assertive, and will challenge the rules of the household.

My interviews with women of different generation suggest that older generation women are identifying these trends by looking at their daughters. Both, mothers, and daughters describe the home as a domain of contestation, and conflict between mothers and daughters. I will illustrate this aspect by highlighting the complex relationship that Preeti shares with her mother. Preeti lives in the city, where she is pursuing her PhD in history. She has recently cleared NET exam and is the first in her village to do. A local daily covered this story, the hardworking daughter of home guard, and sister to a CRPF officer, who illuminated the name of her family and village. To meet her ends, and to sustain her city life, Preeti works at two places: a school where she teaches history to class 9 and 10th, and a college where she teaches history to the undergraduate students; in addition to this, she also gives private tuitions to the neighborhood kids. She is meticulous and hardworking and has extremely busy days and earns about 20 thousand rupees a month; she pays her rent, survives in the city and also gives some money back home, not because they need it, but because she likes to. The money that she contributes to the household family economy every month, and the insights that she brings to her village and her home, from the city once a week, and every day through mobile, has given Preeti bargaining power. The rules which seem to apply to other girls in her village, doesn't seem to apply to her. Once when she took me to her village, I was dressed in regional traditional attire²⁹ while she wore a neon color, cropped sweatshirt, jeans, boots, and goggles. She was a city girl, very different from the women that I had read about while reading on the field³⁰. She shares a cordial and positive relationship with her father, and friendly relationship with her elder brother. The only 'difficult' person in her house is her mother. She says, "*We have absolutely different styles of doing work. My mother fights with me*

²⁹ Traditional anthropology and ethnography teaches us that as researchers, we need to blend in the society that we are studying. As I was researching on western Uttar Pradesh, existing field insights on the region revealed that women wore traditional attire, covered their head and bosom, and practiced veiling. So, in order to blend in, I took salwar kameez, kurta, and with very hesitation, jeans. I also took many dupattas and stoles because it is important to cover bosom and head. That is what I had read. But Preeti and many other women's dressing allowed me reflect over this issue.

because I don't work in the ways that she wants....” When I ask her to elaborate, she says “I live in the city, I am educated, I work in a college, I carry many responsibilities, and many people look up to me. I handle the examination cell and conduct the entrance exam of many prestigious courses such as NEET. I have seen the world. But my mother doesn't understand or recognize any of this. She is 8th pass. She has not seen the world. Her life has been revolving around our fields, and the family. I am not saying that she is not a sharp person, in fact my mother is more astute than my father. But she is unable to understand the new ways of life. For instance, she doesn't like the way that I clean the house, or the ways that I manage my house in the city. She is unable to understand my need to shop. She thinks I am wasting money. She doesn't understand that for me shopping is necessary because I am a working woman. She asks me why I need so many clothes. She always taunts me when I try to borrow money from my father. She asks me that where the money that you earn is. But she doesn't recognize the fact that every week that I come home, I get so many goods from the city, from the money that I make by hard work...”

This narrative highlights the conflict that Preeti has with her mother who has a problem with Preeti spending money on ‘useless’ goods and services. There is a latent understanding about agrarian families and societies that they do not buy anything, because they are the original producers. The past few decades of the agrarian crises have ensured that consumption of anything is not possible. Which is why when young women are going out to buy clothes and make-up, it is unfathomable to the older generation. Young women's increasing familiarity with foreign aesthetics and commodity influences generates anxiety in older generation of patriarchs who had lived in different socio-economic and ecological circumstances. In this agrarian scenario of economic deprivation, we are seeing a rise and number of young women who are consuming goods and services that have been alien to the ‘agrarian ethos’. Thus, new forms of consumption are at the heart of generational and patriarchal conflicts. However, it is not consumption alone that is creating conflicts between the generations but new lifestyles that young women are aspiring towards, that is embedded in self-reliance, financial and relative personal independence that offshoots from women doing paid work.

“But who will do the dung work?”

One aspect of contestation around gender roles is clearly manifested in the shift from ‘choolha’ to gas. Since the region is an agrarian economy, it has resources to support the ‘choolha’ culture, the twigs, and wood and dung cakes. This is an important aspect of agrarian

society, where the day-to-day activities are organized around the agrarian way of life. However, the shift from choolha to gas is an issue that creates anxieties and contestations. A popular saying is that the woman remains healthy if she does her work. By equating health with work, the cultural patriarchs have made work ethos more rigorous. This logic is also used to deny any technology that can help women in household to lighten harsh domestic and agrarian work. If on the other hand woman tries to subvert this logic refraining from work, this behavior is condemned and violently dealt with (Chowdhry, 1993). The idea of proper women still is very much in sync with hard work, and the definition of hard work has not changed from the colonial times. With the rise of new technology that can be used in the household to make the chores easier, there is also a simmering resentment that among the patriarchs that “*aajkal ki auratein kaam nahi karti/ unka mann kaam mein nahi hai*” meaning these days’ women do not like to work/ their heart is not in work.

It’s a widely shared perception among older generation men and women, across Jat and Muslims communities that the young women’s contribution in the domain of household had reduced. Their reference point is that “*even though there is technological advancement in the kitchen, the girls do not want to cook*”. Piyush (male, Jat): “*Fuel in the form of cow dung or wood is not only cheap for us, but it's natural and it is part of culture. For those who are living in village, who are consuming natural food, and pure vegetables. They are eating roti, sabzi which is made on choolha. Choolha is a part of their culture, their life, and they can easily manage that. We have so many trees, so there is no dearth of sticks, many cows so no dearth of dung. That's natural fuel for us. Why should we pay for artificial fuel when we have natural fuel?*”

Thus, the choolha has an economic, ecological, and cultural basis. But during fieldwork, I witnessed something very interesting in the field in the context of choolha: women do not want to use choolha anymore, and this unwillingness to use the choolha has important implications for our discussion on changing gender relations with the advent of new forms of technology in the rural agrarian households/ landscape. Babli Devi recently moved to Muzaffarnagar city from a nearby village, along with her husband whose main motive was to set up business in the city. She forced her husband, Piyush, to install a relatively sophisticated gas connection. Now Babli Devi has a gas connection, but she also must endure her husband talk about the “loss of culture” in the form of choolha, every single day. Piyush says that “*the real issue is that now women don’t want to work, they just want to enjoy and*

use their mobile and waste time. Ten years back, in our own family, women used to make flour from wheat, we used to have chakki in our homes. They were the ones who used to milk the cows. It is now that we have machines, press a button and the flour is ready for you, artificial milk will come in packet, fuel will come from gas. My wife forced me to buy gas when we moved to the city. In village, there are still many homes which don't have gas connection. Even in my extended family, no one, except us... ”

Babli responds to this, *“Those days are long gone when women used to cook on choolha. Even though people might say that someone is using choolha, it is far from true. I know many women who live in the village, and they might not be using gas, but they are also not using choolha, they are using heater for cooking activities, from making roti to boiling milk. In my opinion almost 75 percent women are not interested in doing this kind of work anymore. Now maybe only 25 percent are doing, only the very poor ones. Now the young brides are not even touching the dung, forget about making dung cakes, and using the dung as a fuel..... ”*

(She continues) *“All I am saying is women’s life has changed, and we are made to feel bad about this change. My husband taunts me day and night for shifting to gas, but he does not understand that even though there is technology and development, still women only must do all the work. It’s not a big deal that we have gas or readymade flour. Work is also increasing, so what is the harm if we have some easy methods to get the work done. We are not shying away from work. Time has changed. Now new brides will not do the work which women of previous generation used to do. Women who are using gas are not bad. We should not be made to feel bad for using gas instead of choolha, or mixer instead of okhli, or using readymade flour instead of making flour from wheat. Work is increasing and having a little bit of help is not bad. Society thinks that we don’t want to work, but if we don’t want to work then how come work is happening?”*

The conversation between Piyush and Babli suggest that choolha has been important part of the culture, earlier due to lack of technology, and then due to lack of financial resources, but now, in Muzaffarnagar the issue of choolha has been attached to other issues. For women, working on choolha is a tedious household chore, and for men the idea of choolha is associated with ideal femininity and rural culture, which the agrarian communities do not want to leave behind. This is also an arena of contestation as rules of patriarchy not only dictate what women should be doing, but also, how they should be doing something. Men of

course do not participate in the domestic work. This also shows that culture can persist alongside development. The gas connection, a symbol of development, and positive implications for women's time and work, fails to erode the normative expectations for female subservience and patriarchal entitlement, as manifest through household chores, and cultural beliefs.

Another scenario where gas/ choolha debate becomes important is with regards to the recent marriage negotiations and alliances. Almost all the rural families are shifting to gas, but the initiation happens through the new bahu, daughter-in-law. In fact, it is localized understanding that when the families shift to gas, it means that the bahu is coming in the household. Gulistan Chowdhry says that *“earlier we had choolha, but when my elder brother got married, then we got a gas connection also.”* Sarita says, *“we ourselves don't have gas, but we married our sister to family that has gas. Gas connection is an important consideration. Even I will make sure that they (sasural) have gas. When our Bhabhi (sister-in-law) will come, I will make sure my brother installs a proper cooking system that people in the city have.”*

Conflict between new femininity and peasant culture? Distance from dung work, inclination for education and paid work.

As we noted in the preceding chapter, tending to cattle makes up a significant portion of women's work. However, due to agrarian transformation and ecological crises, reducing common grazing lands, and frequent rural to urban migration, cattle ownership has also reduced in the village (Jodhka, 2014a). I found that the young women of Muzaffarnagar do not want to work with cattle anymore. Chaudhary Shivam, father of Nisha, one of the respondents says, *“Our women do not like working in the cattle shed any longer. The scavengers do not come to clean the dung. The younger generation does not even come close to this kind of work”*. This narrative indicates the crucial link between the agrarian transformation, changing gender roles

When I asked my respondents about their association with cattle, many of them discussed the issue of reduction in common grazing land. Riot victims of 2013, who I happened to interview while I was surveying a refugee colony in Shahpur town of Muzaffarnagar, discussed that their lives had changed substantially in the post-riot scenario. One of the

biggest reasons was the lack of space, living, agrarian, and grazing. Since they had migrated from their villages, and resettled in a colony, it didn't permit people to acquire cattle again.

However, not everyone had forsaken cattle because of riots. When I asked Fiza whether she had cattle, and does she work on the agrarian fields, she denied and almost laughed at the idea of working in fields. Similarly, most of the younger women that I happened to meet and interview, were not involved in any type of agrarian and cattle work. It was different for their mothers, as they had worked on the field. Preeti doesn't work with cattle, but her mother, Meenu had worked on the fields. In fact, now since three members of the family are employed, except for mother, they have given up the cattle also. Now they procure milk from the local milk cooperative, like many other people. However, the structural reasons of why cattle have been given up is rarely recognized, and what is highlighted is that women do not want to associate with cattle, which in turn reinforces some insecurities related to depletion of traditional gender roles and new conflicts within and among communities.

All leisure and no work: Emerging patriarchal concern voiced by senior men and women of both the communities

Ethnographic studies highlight distinct cultural practices that were organized around agrarian calendar. There was a localized knowledge, myths, stories, traditions that were organized around agrarian fields (Chowdhry, 1994; Raheja & Gold, 1994). But the distress in agrarian economy has implications for the kind of leisure that people have. Recent studies show that the new forms of leisure are joining new religious organizations such as Dera Sacha Sauda, which stand in stark contrast to earlier modes of leisure organized around agrarian patterns and practices of reaping, sowing, harvesting, and so on (Kumar, 2018).

Ramesho Chaudhary, Mahila morcha, says, *“Television and mobile has spoiled the younger generation. TV came in front of us. There was no TV before. After my marriage I saw one or two television sets in homes, but it was not common. But since then, the situation has only deteriorated. And mobile has only added to our plight. I don't blame technology, it's useful, but when we overuse something or misuse it then it's wrong. Now television is also showing Sanskar channel and Astha channel and other religious channels, and even arti is happening on TV. But people don't watch this, they watch Bollywood dance and songs. Watching these visuals provokes the mind of people. We should only watch things which help us in knowledge or religion or tell us how to live or tell us how to better our family and homes”*.

Vikas balliyan, a local Jat leader says, *“Our women have changed so much. Earlier women used to take bath 2 times a week, wear 5 kgs of Ghaghra, used to put ghee on the hair and work on the fields. Now things have changed. Boy’s education was never given a preference as they were never interested. They knew that they had land and had to work on that. Girls had no work and they had to complete basic school education and do the household chores. Gender roles and gender expectations were clear and well defined. There were no clashes, everyone was clear on what rules they had to perform for the community and society. There was no issue of love or love jihad. But things changed when TV became a common affordable commodity and women started consuming the media. This also we tolerated as at the beginning the serials being consumed were Ramayana and other religious stories. So, these women used to work 6 days on the field and home and relaxed on the Sunday by watching God and staying with family. But when entertainment replaced religiosity, it was a bad phase, and all the problems of the present day are linked to that.”*

He continues, *“Earlier they worked like dogs, living from home to field, always working and sweating. But when the Ekta Kapoor serial started, they started escaping work. Now these serials are weekly serials, which start at 7 and continue till 11. And suddenly we saw that these women were escaping their work to watch TV. Now they wanted to start cooking dinner by 5 to finish by 7 only to watch these serials. They were thinking about TV, the serials, the saree, the makeup and what not. They started taking more effort to look beautiful and dress up. A parallel development was that the government was advertising on not killing to girl child but to educate them, through schemes like beto bachao, beti padhao. We thought, okay, this is fine, good in fact. We started sending our girls outside to schools and colleges, but we didn’t realize the effects of the TV. These girls started wearing jeans, lipstick, kajal. They were engrossed in fashion to such an extent that they forgot about their basic duties towards family, community and society. If you have seen our traditional dresses for women, you will see that the dress was very proper, no display of bodies. Female and male dresses in our culture are very similar. The women also wore shirt, and trousers like pajamas, clothes which denied any possibility of exposure, and provided comfort to work in the fields. But now girls are researching different kind of blouses design, sarees that the actresses were wearing on TV are imitated by our women. Suddenly our women were outside on the pretext of study, but, they were doing friendships and making boyfriends.”*

Vikas Balliyan's narrative can be understood as an example of ways in which women's gender roles, and their consumption patterns have changed. Secondly, the narrative also reflects the contestations around the 'new practices' of women, which generate tensions and anxieties among agrarian communities. The contestations and anxieties are around the changing forms of food, dresses, lifestyle practices, all of which have developed in stark contrast with the agrarian culture. Moreover, love jihad, a source of anxiety is also being highlighted, thus bringing out the threat with regards to intercommunity romantic engagement. In her studies on the historical origins of the 'Love Jihad', Charu Gupta (2009) contends that these discourses were repeatable tropes to control women and were not only a byproduct of anti-Muslim campaigns in postcolonial India. By looking at these shifts through the lens of gender, the equation changes, the social problems seem much more different than from what is highlighted by previously discussed scholars (Jeffrey, 2010b; Kumar, 2018b)

For instance, 35-year-old Shilpa Sangwan says, *"Now we are at a time where technology is so advanced. I am a working woman, a teacher, and even I am not that aware. The upcoming generation is much more advanced than me, I see it in the kids that I teach. People who are born after 2000, have a different way of thinking. They have no concern for the future, no concern for saving money, and no concern for concepts like honour or humility. When I was a student I couldn't romance with my boyfriend, in the presence of my teacher. But when I see my students, they roam around freely, hands in hands, feeding chocolate to each other. Our generation is not like this. We still are embroiled in the issues that are important to our parents, such as honour, izzat. Thus, gender norms are changing rapidly, and distinctly different for younger generation of women."*

Bringing back the veil: Community control of women. How a community wants its women to be and to behave

Each community establishes its difference from the other via its women. Prem Chowdhry who has worked on the veiled women of rural, agrarian north India, says that the custom of ghunghat is not just a fabric. Rather the veiled woman is central to the ethos of dehati culture. The rural people view a veiled woman as the only one responsible for preserving their culture, along with the concept of ascetic food and simple life that goes with it. The entire rural social structure is thought to collapse as a result of the removal of the veil. It is because of this that the ghunghat emerges as an outward symbol of the patriarchal control which has retained its

hold over women despite dramatic changes as the society moved from colonial to post-colonial period (Chowdhry, 1996, p. 22)

The older generation agrarian patriarchs have identified Mobile, malls and motorbikes education and employment as problematic. How do we make sense of young women pursuing education and employment? In this context it is important to reiterate the point which came across in the chapter on honour, that, young women are constantly made to realize that they can access education and employment as long as they continue to remain honourable. The honour of the women, and thus the communities is more and susceptible to the forces of communication, mobility and consumption.

Another way to understand the generational and patriarchal backlash against aspiring women is by looking at the ways in which community values are reinforced through Satsang, and veiling. Mahesho Chaudhary, leader of Mahila Morcha, says: *“these days’ women are so disengaged with their community values. They are just thinking about having fun. They just want to be modern. Even older generation women have received education, and we have also worked in public spaces. But our behavior was not as brash and sexualized as the girls of today. I used to go to college, I am a graduate. I have been on important political positions. I go to public spaces, and debate with men. But never ever has my family received any complain about me. I have never been without covering my head. Because of my honour, people admire and appreciate me, they give me respect. I have lived my life strongly, in every way, it was a life of strength. I have supported my family; this is my ‘sanskar’ (values)”*

“When I look at the Hindu girls today, I become sad. They go out for the purpose of education and employment and make boyfriends. Then they cover their faces and roam with the boys on their bikes. The dupatta is just a way to gain anonymity, and to hide their misdeeds. Otherwise, who wants to veil these days?” She asks in desperation. How she deals with this, I ask. *“I organise satsang and call all the Jat and Hindu girls to my home. We sing, we dance. Not on the vulgar and sexualized songs of Bollywood, but our own songs, that have good beats as well as good meaning. Then after prayer, and enjoyment, I tell the girls about the important of honour, the dedication to one’s community and religion. I tell the mothers to assess the behavior of their daughters very carefully, if any peculiar changes in our daughters, then we need to be aware of that.”*

“When we were growing up, all men were like brothers or uncles, but now a days girls are making friends and boyfriends. Also, what we eat and drink our food consumption also affects our nature. We used to have cow’s milk, curd, ghee, we were healthy and so was our mind. Those days the atmosphere was such that even if we met any known man or a relative outside, we used to cover ourselves. We still cover ourselves in the village. Cover in such a way that one cannot see your chest or your head. Only face should be visible, and that too of daughters. The daughter-in-law should cover her face. Our community has a different thought, ‘alag soch’. It doesn’t want woman to be too frank, ‘behad frank’, not even now. Reason being that now our society is suffering from cancer. Earlier we used to walk several kilometers, us girls, all friends. Now you send any girl outside, and you will see the consequences. These days girls are obsessed with makeup and spend hours looking at mirrors. I keep telling girls that there is a lot of time for make-up and dress up ‘sajna sawarna’. They should not indulge in propaganda by doing make up. They should try to be simple and transparent, strong with heart and mind. That’s how Jat women have been, hardworking and unbothered by appearance.” These narratives from older generation people from both the communities reflects class-gender-generational anxieties. Because of the increased display of consumption, and influx of western and modern goods and services which stand in stark contrast to agrarian ethos, the older generation people believe that younger generation women are becoming more ambitious, frank, obsessed with looks, self-centered. This has led to loss of tradition, and community values.

Conclusion

Women tend to feel that their lives have improved, because they are comparing their lives to their mothers, who didn’t have the same agency. And so, they said their life is better because of the freedom and opportunities that are available to them. They are thus optimistic and try to change their lives as much as possible through marriage, occupation, and residence. They want to marry into a higher class, want to work post marriage, and want to live in a city. They want to work, and they want to work in a respectable job. This ties in with the economic anxiety that we have seen in the first part of this chapter, and the previous chapters as well. The world of the ancestors is very different from the world that is being experienced by the contemporary Jat and Muslims in the western Uttar Pradesh. This is primarily an insight from the older generation of people who recognize that the ethos and culture of Muzaffarnagar has changed over a period. This is more clearly translated as how public space has been conceived and conceptualized by the senior members of both the communities, today.

Globalization induced technological changes have led the new generation of women and men to reimagine their localized gendered identity in transnational ways. Because of this global imagination, the young women of rural-agrarian Muzaffarnagar are doing gender differently. This has resulted in tensions in the social dynamics, anxieties in the rural-agrarian landscape, both of which can be seen through the generational shift in agrarian societies. Building on interviews from women of different class, community, and generation, and keeping in the context of simultaneous processes of agrarian and urban transformation, and new communication technologies, this chapter interrogates how gender relations have transformed.

In this chapter I have discussed how transformative technologies, and new forms of consumption culture have penetrated the rural agrarian ethos, and that this has altered the nature of sociality and gender relations in totally unprecedented, and unpredictable ways. While it is clear that the nature of agrarian community has changed, the nature of rurality has changed, but it doesn't mean that the rural ceases to exist (Kumar, 2018). Yes, it is true that the nature of village and rural areas have changed, but they have not become cities in entirety. Rather, these locations are mired in complex processes of flux and motion.

The advent of this complex trajectory can be understood through urbanization that has happened in the context of agrarian transformation and agrarian distress. More particularly, the complexity can be understood as an interplay between three factors, which are mobile, motorbike, and malls. These technologies and spaces of consumption not only provide open new avenues of mobility and choice, but also develop a certain kind of techno-mediated sociality that is very different from the face-to-face engagement that was practiced in a traditional rural-agrarian society. Thus, the transformative ruptures have ensued not only opportunities, but also confrontations, risks, and ambivalences. For instance, by examining how women interact with emerging technologies and consumer culture, we can better understand how young women navigate social change and pursue their aspirations, particularly those that involve acquiring middle-class-type status, while deftly interacting with ideas like honour and shame, tradition and modernity and rural and urban. The young, educated, and aspirational women of rural north India navigate with the rural–urban interface in their everyday lives. This entails paying attention to how these young women recreate and reconfigure these locations and values as they negotiate uncertain futures rather than taking

for granted normative meanings connected with the rural and urban, or honour and shame. Malls, mobile and bikes are representative of larger things, such as access to public space, expanding choices and avenues, enhanced processes of communication, movement and mobilities. The historical marginalization and exclusion of women is somewhat addressed by new mobility patterns, which ensure greater individual freedom, better employment prospects, and greater social engagement. But this shift has also transpired intergenerational anxieties, and tensions within and among community.

Conclusion

This study is a sociological analysis of how women become embroiled in processes of change and continuity as communities go through transitions and transformations. In other words, I have examined how processes of social-structural transformations impact community and gender relations. The fieldwork for the study was conducted in a small but significant district in north Indian hinterlands, Muzaffarnagar, western Uttar Pradesh. The district is at the crossroads of agriculture and industry, rural and urban, community interdependency and communal conflicts. The two communities discussed in this thesis, Jats and Muslims, have a shared history around agriculture, and politics. But in the present scenario, their relationship is strained, ever since the communal riots of 2013. Initially I was interested in looking at riots of 2013 and its consequences for women of Jat and Muslim communities, but as I entered the field, it dawned on me that communal riots of 2013 were a culmination of processes that were happening on an everyday basis in western Uttar Pradesh.

Looking back...

The impetus for this study was provided by communal riots of 2013. Before entering the field, I had read the newspaper reports and academic reports on the riots of 2013 that were available in the public domain. The gender question was perpetual in the reports but was not discussed in much detail. To pursue this research gap, riots became the point of entry into the field. However, due to varied methodological, theoretical, and ethical reasons, the nature of my enquiry and research questions altered substantially, and while gender remained intact in the enquiry, communal riot was no longer the central variable. During the six years of engagement with the field, four events, along with several small-scale incidents happened, with consequences for inter and intra-community engagement in region. The first was the riot in 2017 that happened because Baba Ram Rahim, the infamous god man, was convicted of multiple rapes and murder. His followers in the region started a riot in 2017, and several districts in western Uttar Pradesh, along with Punjab and Haryana were under curfew.

The second incident happened on 26 January 2018, in Kasganj, a neighboring district of Muzaffarnagar. Communal clashes broke out in Kasganj and spread to other districts after stones were pelted and young man was killed, while a 'tricolor bike rally' was taken out to celebrate Republic Day. The third event happened in December 2019, when NRC CAA

protest was going on in different parts of the country, and Muzaffarnagar also became a site of protest.

The fourth incident happened in 2020, in backdrop of four controversial farming laws that were proposed in the Indian parliament, and if passed, these laws would change the face of farming, and thus agrarian communities, for the worse. Since western Uttar Pradesh is also an important region in the agrarian landscape of India, and Muzaffarnagar has been a bastion of farmers' politics since the 1970s, naturally the district became a site of protest. As my fieldwork progressed alongside these incidents, which continuously revealed the social fractures, my focus started shifting from the riots of 2013 and I started looking at these incidents, agrarian and communal, in connection to each other. I realized that the region became a site of many communal, political, agrarian and gender-based conflicts and issues. Amidst these developments, it didn't make much sense to focus on a particular event and lose sight of processes. 'Community' emerged as a more pertinent category, to understand social change and gender relations.

New understandings...

Through a review of the literature and my own fieldwork, I arrived at an understanding that despite the 'communal' nature of the riots of 2013, this violent event was embedded in specific socio-economic trajectories. In this context, I revised my understanding of Jat and Muslim communities in rural-agrarian context, who were continuously being reshaped by processes of social and structural transformation. Agrarian transformation, rise of non-farm work, urbanization, blurring boundaries between the rural and urban through increasing physical mobilities, rise of new communication technologies (social media, smart phones), and emergence of new spaces of consumption (shopping malls), have put the rural-agrarian communities in a flux.

Because of migration, and rural to urban mobilities, members of rural-agrarian communities, are increasingly being absorbed into the larger economic, political world. Individuals no longer live in 'primary groups' but aspire to be a part of the wider social and cultural world that exists beyond their localities and communities. With globalization, the rise of information and communication technology, and particularly the proliferation of social media, the territorial understanding of community is getting diluted. Transnational communities are forming without concern for national or regional boundaries. Yet, it still

doesn't mean that the idea of community is perishing. Rather, community has resurged as a more powerful force in contemporary times.

The changing nature of communication, physical mobility, and new consumption culture have affected the nature of sociality (the tendency of groups and persons to develop social links and live in communities) and sociability (liking to be with people). These shifts have significantly altered the nature, structure, and texture of community and gender relations. There is a visible everyday-ness to conflicts, which often happens along the lines of caste, religion, and gender. Whether we talk about the communal riots of 2013, or farmer protests of 2020, these collective actions have emerged from the vantage point of communities that are experiencing myriad of vulnerabilities. In this sense, the community continues to remain an integral part of social, cultural, and political collectivity in a myriad of ways. In this historically informed understanding, community emerges, not as a static entity, but as a dynamic patriarchal grouping that is continuously under transformation.

Reiterating the intersections between gender and community

Women share complex relationship with 'their' community, as they are biological procreators, cultural carriers and reproducers, and economic contributors. These processes explain the centrality of gender to community. But the debates around gender and community become more complicated when the object of analysis is a uniform and ahistorical category of an "average third world-woman" who has frequently been represented as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, devoid of agency and oppressed by community. It is this singular and stereotypical understanding of women's engagement with their community that has been contested in this study.

This study has provided an elaborate context through which we can understand women's negotiation with patriarchal communities. I have examined the lives of Jat and Muslim women in rural agrarian north India, through large scale processes of social and structural transformations. The region is characterized by violent and peculiar forms of gender relations, such as honour-based violence, female feticide, poor child sex ratio, fraternal polyandry, etc. These instances of gender-based violence, and gender peculiarities highlight how communities demographically manage its women, vis-à-vis agrarian land. Yet there is equally compelling evidence in my study, that because of agrarian distress, struggling communities must sustain and survive on paid labor of women and it is vis-à-vis these

economic needs that the younger generation Jat and Muslim women, from rural agrarian backgrounds, are negotiating with patriarchy, and bringing about social change.

By emphasizing the more dynamic and complex negotiations that women take up with their communities, we can see the agency of young people, especially young women. This is a critical aspect to acknowledge while locating agency in a feudal- patriarchal society as young, educated women of rural north India are at the center of large-scale social transformation. Jat and Muslim women are rational social actors who possess capacity to strategize, bargain and negotiate with the dominant power structure of community to ensure their self-interest, and pursue aspirations. As community changes, in response to large scale processes of social and structural transformation, so do gender relations. Following these changes, I have highlighted how reproduction of community involves tensions around gender, class, and generation, as these intersections reveal the complexity of gender and community engagement.

Even though there is an increasing number of first-generation non-agrarian, working class women moving with a newfound air of freedom and mobility, yet there is also evidence that they also must deal with structures of patriarchy that are embedded in agrarian values and rural ethos. This study has not only located and recorded the trajectories of these women, and their aspirations, but also tried to understand the nature of local patriarchy and community, and how women are working through it. Largely, I have highlighted changing gender relations in a rural agrarian society that is marked by structural changes such as that of agrarian transformation, urbanization, consumption culture, distress by convoluted modernity, and rise of communal and caste-based identity and ethnic conflict.

Rise in women doing paid work

I have examined the conditions and the circumstances in which women make an entry in the public sphere. The conditions are rooted in agrarian distress, and a very natural demand of rural-agrarian households to survive and sustain. This is done by developing pluri'active households, where women get an opportunity to enter public spaces to pursue paid work. These are younger generation women who are entering the realm of non-farm, paid work. This shift is historical and consequential for the changing social and gender relations in the region, because this is a feudal belt, where land and land-holding communities control and shape social norms and gender expectations. The move from a predominantly agricultural

economy to an economy in which non-agricultural activities play a major role has been accompanied by change in gender relations. The region has witnessed out migration of young men in search of non-farm employment and a shift from the traditional roles embedded in agrarianism. Since the agrarian work is not as profitable as it was previously, large number of men are shifting from farm to non-farm-based work. This implies a glaring shift in occupational roles and traditional gender roles for men and women. In the absence of men, women are doing most of the work, whether it is the household chores, agrarian chores, or paid work. Consequently, paid work has become increasingly feminized, which implies low skill, low status, and low pay, thus done by women. Even though the feminization of labor has detrimental effects on women's work, this shift also implies that there is a shift in traditional gender roles as more and more women are moving into the public sphere for education and employment.

As the labor becomes feminized, more and more women are entering public spaces to do paid work. They are teaching, doing social work, tailoring; home based cottage industry works such as lace making. Rising female employment did not challenge the local codes of female chastity, since employees were doing 'women's work' in a domestic setting, and they were doing this respectable, feminized labor for the benefit of the household. Since they were doing paid work for the family, this also induced their honour. Indeed, the feminized labor was viewed almost as an extension of the domestic world of women. Also, in the eyes of most of the people, men were still in control of the family and its members. But it also indicated changes in women's agency. Women doing paid work means more and more women are going out every day, crossing the threshold of home, and entering the liberating domain of public space. They start understanding the public space as a space of freedom and opportunities, which can be accessed through education, meaningful employment, and honourable behavior. This tends to influence status, and women's access to employment, and however small the wages, it leads to women becoming less dependent on husbands, fathers, and brothers, and thus exercising more assertiveness in domestic decision-making. The contribution of women's earnings from paid work to the household and intrahousehold power dynamics has positive effects on women's bargaining power.

Changing notions of honour and changing gender roles

The other impact of changing gender roles is visible in the cultural codes underlying notions of female chastity. The stringent understanding of honour that is organized around agrarian

land and female body, is going through shift. Previously, the cultural norms demanded high participation, but did not allocate any worth or value to women's labor. But with agrarian transformation, the younger generation women of both the communities pursue non-farm, paid work, in public spaces. Naturally, this situation is starkly different from what the social world is accustomed to. The shift from veiled women doing domestic work, and women in public sphere pursuing remunerative employment is a huge shift in the feudal, rural-agrarian society of Muzaffarnagar. Previously women were veiled and yet they were doing unpaid work. Now they are not veiled and are working in the public sphere. Yet, even as they are unveiled, they continue to dress in what they think will enhance their distinct identity or positionality. So, their dress is a representation of their aspirations but also doesn't disregard the local moral code in obvious ways. Women are actively 'doing' honour to access public space, and the facilities that accompany the access to public space, such as education and employment. Thus, younger generation women of rural agrarian Muzaffarnagar are indulging in a balancing act as they struggle and negotiate with the inappropriate and the appropriate, the shameful and the honourable and the rural and urban. They position themselves vis-à-vis these opposing orientations based on their aspirations as well as their family's mobility plans, gender norms and economic positioning.

Aspirations of middle classness

In the case of Muzaffarnagar, young women, in their negotiations with migration, education and consumption, are attempting to claim middle classness. This middle-class ethos facilitates movement outside the village and indulges in enhancement of status and the ability to spend and consume. Most of the younger generation women, who I interviewed, were pursuing education to aspire for middle class status and claim proximity to urban consumption and modernity. After completing their education, these young women aimed to secure 'respectable' jobs which were not too far from their homes, did not involve long working hours and were preferably government jobs. But given the high level of competition, *sarkari naukari* (government job) remains a mirage. In the absence of respectable employment opportunities, they keep working at these transient opportunities of paid work.

They aspire for middle classness and consume urban cultures. Their understanding stems from the new urban and consumption oriented facilitates that are now being offered in Muzaffarnagar, such as shopping malls and showrooms of brands like W, Biba, Levis, which introduce global fashion to young and aspirational women. These young women's ideas and

perceptions are also shaped by mobile phones, and social media through which women are consuming global cultures which have also altered the nature of sociality. They are working in schools, colleges, giving tuitions in the neighborhood, working in malls and showrooms, working as social workers. Like their male counterparts, they are also preparing for sarkari naukari, government jobs, and meanwhile working in the city, with some semblance about freedom and autonomy.

Generational anxieties

Younger generation women of both the communities are entering public spaces in new capacities. The avenues of 'respectable', non-farm work, urban dreams and aspirations and the culture of consumption have spread in the north Indian hinterlands, a belt that is mired in agrarian crises, unemployment, poverty, and numerous forms of inequalities. And younger generation women, because of their cheap labor, have not only occupied these spaces, and have subsequently become members of public sphere, but they have also become harbingers of change. But it is also evident that there is a conflictual interplay between rising cultural aspirations and uncertain economic futures. The younger generation women's aspirations, goals, and trajectories are very different from the previous generation. Most importantly, as women are entering public spaces for paid work, this also changes forms of sociability. Women engage, mix and blend with different kind of men and women, from different communities. They consume ideas, products and services which are starkly different from rural agrarian ethos. While older generation of women were working in unpaid capacities, on farms, the younger generation women have emerged as remunerative workers, doing non-farm kind of work, in urban spaces.

Although most women still subscribed to and negotiated with the codes of female chastity, women had acquired more freedom of movement within the villages, towns, and the city of Muzaffarnagar. This was especially true for workers who had also gained in domestic decision-making power. In addition, new educational opportunities, a rising literacy rate, and access to technologies such as television, mobile and motorbike exposed younger women to alternative values and lifestyles, which further facilitated a consumer culture that is alien to rural-agrarian societies. There are many examples which highlight that education has been perceived as a positive phenomenon that has altered the lifeworld of Jat and Muslim women. Yet there are also evidences which highlight that education and employment have emerged as a contradictory resource. For instance, codes of female chastity, which were previously

organized around agrarian land, are now coming into conflict with the perceived economic and cultural benefits associated with higher education. In this context, it is clearly visible that gender aspirations and generational and communal anxieties move together, hand in hand, and most often take a form of conflict.

There seems to be a conflict between ‘new femininity’ and ‘peasant culture’. New femininity shaped by new forces such as education, remunerative employment, urban experiences, consumption culture, dreams and aspirations shaped by social media. These forces pose dangers to honourable conduct by opening the gateway to worldly desire for younger generation women who are carriers of culture and providers of unpaid labor within household. There is an apparent distance from dung work, as the inclination for education and paid work in respectable settings have increased. Dung work, a crucial aspect of agrarian economy, has traditionally been done by women of the household or Dalits who generally worked as waged labor on Jat farms. But now, neither Dalits, nor women of the household are ready to do the dung work. This is one of the causes of gender-generation anxiety. This conflict often takes forms of caste-based violence, and gender-based violence. However, the gender aspect of this tussle is rarely highlighted in the scholarly domain, except with reference to honour killings. Moreover, as the demographic data from the field reflects, the sex ratio is unfavorable towards women, as the region sees poor child sex ration, and sex ratio. As we observed in the previous chapters, honour killings and honour-based acts of violence are an important feature of the field, however we must locate other ways of gender conflict, gender bargains, and gender negotiations that women take up to survive, sustain and strive in the inherently patriarchal society of Muzaffarnagar.

Agrarian transformation and urbanization have led to the emergence of ‘urban modernities’ which offer women exposure to education, socioeconomic empowerment, and employment in urban labor economies. What accompanies this shift is an alternative lifestyle, such as delayed marriage arrangements, and opportunities to experiment with religious ideologies and sexualities. But there is also a rise in regulatory mechanisms to control the choice and mobility of young women identified as subjects and carriers of rural culture and agrarian ethos. It is difficult to separate the issues of gender from the issues of class, community (religious, caste), generation, and rural or urban location. Women’s experiences are shaped and determined by their crosscutting identities, and social locations. Yet it is important to reiterate that while community is reinstating its control over women, women are not just

victims who are suffering, rather they exert agency to recognize, negotiate, and resist the patriarchies and inequalities that stem from each of these intersections. For instance, women from rural communities, continuously try to resist the rural-urban divide and regionally pervasive form of patriarchy. Young women's mobility between the city and the village needs to be situated in the context of social, political, and economic shifts within India in general and western Uttar Pradesh in particular.

Jat and Muslim women

Through the course of my research, several parallels and distinctions emerged between the lives of Jat and Muslim women. These similarities and peculiarities are, again, embedded in their location and positionality as members of dominant community (in case of Jat women), and largest minority community in a communalized context (in case of Muslim women). While looking at women's experiences in domestic spaces, it is evident that community difference makes no difference to women's domestic lives. Historically, both Jat and Muslim women's lives is firmly embedded in the domestic sphere. Both communities assign women to the domestic sphere. Women from both the communities talk about the drudgery of household, too much work, and that families still do not recognise the work done by them. In the region, in terms of child mortality, Muslim families are more egalitarian. Muslim daughters have better chances of survival as they do not have the peculiar gender violence that emerges from landed and feudal forms of gender violence. However, women from both the communities talk about the home as an unsafe space. They have frequently been violated physically by male kin members, and been victims of domestic violence, marital rape, and experienced lack of financial support from the husband. It is evident from the study that both, Jat and Muslim women have violent and hostile experiences in private, domestic, and 'safe' spaces. This is an area that is murky as complaining against family members is a major challenge.

Very rarely women come out of the home, into public space, to seek justice with regards to violence that they experience in home. Yet, it is more difficult for Jat women to come out and seek justice, because Jat community is the dominant community of the region. Jats not only own the land, but also run the Khap panchayats or the local courts. Moreover, Jats follow village exogamy and clan exogamy, which alienates woman from her natal family, thus limiting her capacity for dealing with familial violence. In contrast, Muslim women have better chances of coming out of violent marriages, because Muslim marriage patterns are less

alienating from natal kin in north India as parents tend to get involved in daughter's marital problems, as they are more involved in their daughters lives after marriage due to living in proximity with each other.

Mobility (getting to and from work) physical and temporal mobility (going out when one is expected to stay in) are job requirements, but these requirements are not welcomed in the agrarian community but triggered by agrarian distress. Thus, younger generation women of both the communities are coming out from their homes to pursue education and employment in public spaces, yet it is here, in public spaces, that the Jat and Muslim women's experiences vary. Younger generation Jat women seem more confident in navigating different parts of the city, as compared to Muslim women. While younger generation Jat women have more freedom to navigate different parts of the city, Muslim women's physical movement is restricted to their neighborhoods and Muslim dominated region. This is primarily because the history and everydayness of communalism has qualitatively transformed Muslim women's access, engagement, and mobility in public space. The ability and freedom to drive a vehicle, transverse the public space, explore neighborhoods beyond the confines of one's community speaks immensely about gender equality. Thus because of surveillance from one's own community, Muslim women are unable to pursue opportunities as freely as Jat women who have significant advantages of their social class. For Muslim women, their aspirations and choices are determined and curtailed by everyday harassment and pressures faced by minority communities. Their position as members of minority community limits their membership in public sphere. Gendered experiences in Muzaffarnagar are also structured by communal and class differences with structural implications.

Limitations and scope of further research

One of the limitations of the study is that there is a significant class difference between Jat and Muslim communities. While Jat is a dominant community, owning the land, and most of political power, Muslims have worked in subservient roles, on the agrarian lands held by Jats, and because of the history of riots, they have now emerged as a minority community. This has translated in huge differences in terms of social class, and access. Because of this class difference, which is embedded in land ownership and translates into access to other social, economic, and cultural capital, a systematic and comparable analysis was prevented among women of two communities. This limitation also provides the scope for further research, as a work on Dalits and Muslims of similar social class can be interesting, as both the

communities have history of dependence on Jats, and have followed similar trajectory of upward mobility, which has generated social anxiety. So, it would be interesting to see the trajectory of women of these erstwhile dependent, now upwardly mobile communities. The comparison between Jats and Muslims of the region was not the ideal one but sociologically significant. Research across marginalized communities would surely be something to pursue in the future.

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Appendix 1: Map



District map of Muzaffarnagar.

Source:

<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/uttarpradesh/districts/muzaffarnagar.htm>

Appendix 2: Photographs



Figure 1: Dung cakes in making. These cakes were traditionally made by women of the household, but now hired labor does this task, as women of the household do not want to do this chore anymore. Only the poorest Dalit women make dung cakes for their personal use, because they do not have the resources for gas.



Figure 2: Hookah is an important part of social interaction in the rural-agrarian society of Muzaffarnagar. There is an old saying, "Hookah, Pani band kar dena", which implies excommunication and social and economic boycott. This generally happens when people don't follow the 'honour codes' of the region, such as crossing the norms of Gotra/Clan exogamy, village exogamy, and caste endogamy.



Figure 3 Traditional god of agrarian community in the region, called as 'Devata'. People believe that these gods will protect their land, crops and cattle. It is also believed that men from the family who have passed away, become the devata and protect the agrarian land and crops. But these traditional forms of religiosity organized around agrarian land are declining, and people from rural-agrarian communities are becoming a part of pan Indian religions.



Figure 4 The courtyard, where animals live, grains are stored, and women work in unpaid capacities. Rural-agrarian women's lives have revolved around this space for a long time, however, this is also changing as women are entering the labour force for paid work.

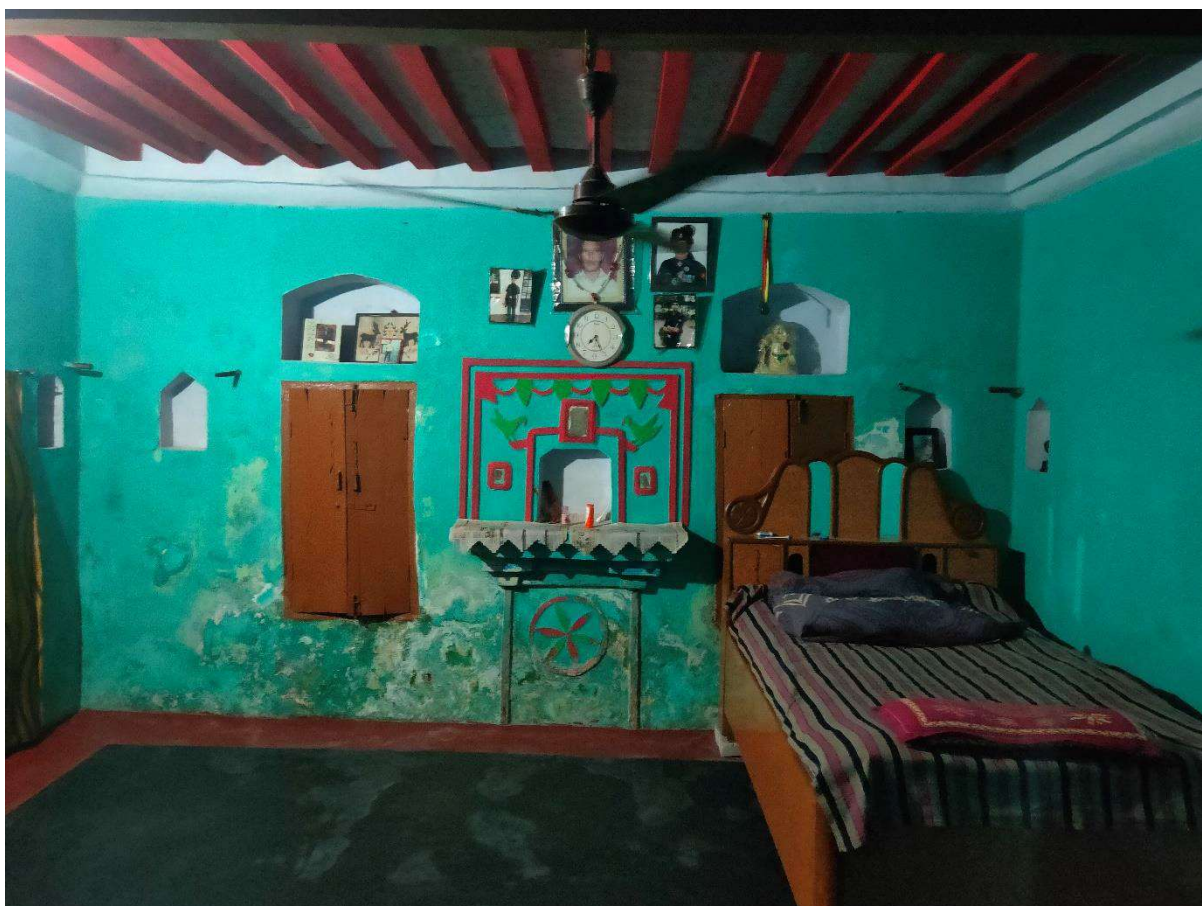


Figure 5 Inside a Jat house. the pictures on the wall belong to three generation of men who gave their life while fighting for the nation. The medals and the uniformed pictures remind us of the bravery of these Jat men.



Figure 6: A young Muslim girl making lace, for a Delhi based business. The scene is from a rehabilitated neighborhood in Shahpur, Muzaffarnagar.



Figure 7: A young Muslim girl making lace, for a Delhi based business. The scene is from a rehabilitated neighborhood in Shahpur, Muzaffarnagar.

बेटी बचाओ बेटी पढ़ाओ योजना, जयपुर मुजफ्फरगनर

शुभ प्रारंभ

मैं, भारत का नागरिक, आज यह शपथ लेता/लेती हूँ कि लिंग चयन जोकि बालिकाओं के जन्म एवं उनके अस्तित्व को खतरा पैदा करता है, उस मानसिकता को त्याग करूंगा/करूंगी, जिससे ये सुनिश्चित हो कि लड़कियाँ जन्म लें, उन्हें सम्मान, प्यार व शिक्षा और देश के विकास में उनके बचने का समान अवसर मिले।

मैं यह भी संकल्प लेता/लेती हूँ कि मैं जन्मपूर्व लिंग पहचान के आधार पर हो रही कन्या भ्रूण हत्या को व्यक्तिगत स्तर से और सार्वजनिक रूप से समाप्त करने की मुहिम में अपना भरपूर सहयोग दूंगा/दूंगी।

मैं यह भी संकल्प लेता/लेती हूँ कि मैं अपने देश की महिलाओं एवं पुरुषों में बेटी बचाओ बेटी पढ़ाओ के सन्देश का प्रचार-प्रसार करूंगा/करूंगी।

जय हिन्द!

1. जो बेटियाँ न कर पाई हैं
बेटियाँ तो आसमान से
तारे भी तोड़ लाई हैं।

2. माँ चाहिए
बहन चाहिए
पतिन भी चाहिए

3. बेटी बचाओ बेटी पढ़ाओ
देश में साक्षरता लाओ।

NAWAH AZMAT ALI KHAN GIRLS' DEGREE COLLEGE

Figure 8 poster from Beti Padhao Beti Bachao Campaign.

Appendix 3: Respondent Table

Appendix 3.1 Jat women

SL No	Name	Age	Religion	Caste	Marital Status	Children	Education	Profession	Individual income (Per Annum)
1	Preeti Dahiya	28	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	Ph. D.	Teacher; Researcher	240,000
2	Meenu Dahiya	47	Hindu	Jat	Married	2	8th class	Homemaker	-
3	Varsha Rathi	28	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	M.A.	Homemaker	-
4	Shruti Rathi	24	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	M.A.	Teacher	72000
5	Indu Kadiyan	28	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	Ph.D.	Teacher; Researcher	96000
6	Shivi Balliyan	29	Hindu	Jat	Married	1	LLB; MBA	Government Officer	240,000
7	Ekta Balliyan	52	Hindu	Jat	Married	2	8th Pass	Homemaker	-
8	Roopa Mallick	36	Hindu	Jat	Married	1	B.A.	Homemaker	-
9	Neetu Chaudhary	20	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	12th pass	Student	-
10	Jivjarin Devi	38	Hindu	Jat	Married	3	12th pass	Homemaker	-
11	Gaura Rathi	20	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	B.A.	Student	60,000

12	Babli Devi	42	Hindu	Jat	Married	2	12th pass	Homemaker	-
13	Sarita Balliyan	24	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	M.A.	Teacher	144000
14	Nisha Tomar	20	Hindu	Jat	Unmarried	-	B.A.	Student.	240000
15	Meeta Chaudhary	45	Hindu	Jat	Widowed	2	12th pass	Anganwadi	1,44,000
16	Shilpa Sangwan	35	Hindu	Jat	Married	1	B.Ed	Teacher	300000
17	Bina Kak	55	Hindu	Jat	Married	2	M.A.	Social work	-
18	Ritu Mallick	28	Hindu	Jat	Married	-	MBA	Homemaker.	-
19	Ladli Chaudhary	60	Hindu	Jat	Married	3	12th pass	Political leader. social worker.	-
20	Ramesho Chaudhary	58	Hindu	Jat	Married	2	12th pass	Political leader. social worker.	-
21	Pinki Chaudhary	48	Hindu	Jat	Widowed	2	12th pass	Anganwadi	1,44,000
22	Swati Tomar	30	Hindu	Jat	Widowed	-	12th pass	Clerk in government office	3,60,000

Appendix 3.2 Muslim women

SL No	Name	Age	Religion	Caste	Marital Status	Children	Education	Profession	Individual income (Per Annum)
1	Shaziya Siddiqui	28	Muslim		Married	1	12th pass	Social worker	-
2	Khurshid Parveen	48	Muslim		Married	3	12th pass	Homemaker	-
3	Nazneez parveen	21	Muslim		Unmarried	-	MBBS	Student	-
4	Nargis	21	Muslim		Divorced	1	Graduate	Student, part time teacher	48,000
5	Nihaz	25	Muslim		Unmarried	-	Masters	Teacher	60,000
6	Zooni	18	Muslim		Unmarried	-	B.A.	Student	-
7	Sobiya Jameel	23	Muslim		Unmarried	-	12th Pass	part time at shop	48,000
8	Shehnaz Hussain	34	Muslim		Divorced	2	B. Ed.	Teacher	2,40,000
9	Shaheen	28	Muslim		Divorced	-	B. Com	Social worker	1,20,000
10	Soofi Jehan	38	Muslim		Divorced	2	M.A	Social worker	1,80,000
11	Dr. Fiza Shaikh	34	Muslim		Divorced	-	Ph. D.	School Principal	3,00,000
12	Farida	24	Muslim		Unmarried	-	B. Ed.	Teacher	2,16,000

13	Dr. Zeba Siddiqui	50	Muslim		Married	2	Ph. D.	Government lawyer	6,00,000
14	Noorjehan	42	Muslim		Divorced	-	B.A.	Social worker	1,80,000
15	Rukhsana	32	Muslim		Widowed	-	12th pass	Clerk	1,80,000
16	Sofiya	19	Muslim		Unmarried	-	B. Tech.	Student	-
17	Gulistan Chowdhry	24	Muslim		Unmarried	-	B.A.	Kabaddi player	-
18	Gulfishan Chowdhry	32	Muslim		Married	1	12th pass	Shikhsha mitra	1,44,000

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

1. Personal details

Name of the respondent:

Sex:

Caste:

Religion:

Place of birth:

Place of residence:

Marital status:

Income:

Age:

Job/Occupation:

Educational qualification:

Access to tv:

Access to mobile:

Access to social media: facebook/ whatsapp

2. About the region

What is your association with Muzaffarnagar? How long have you been here? (Are you born here, brought up, occasional visitor, or a new member i. e. cross regional brides)

Tell me something about your place?

How would you describe the district to someone who has not seen it?

What do you know about the 2013 riots?

3. About social relations

Who are your friends?

Where did you meet them?

How often do you meet them?

Do you know any family who has left their homes during the riot?

What type of relations you had with these families? Was it friendly or cold or avoidance)

Did you try to stop them? Did you ask them to stay back?

Have you lost any friends due to riots? Any weirdness? Any changes that you might have noticed in your friends?

How was the relationship with the people from other communities before the riots?

Was there any exchange, social, economic, cultural, among the communities?

What kinds of festivals you celebrate/ celebrated?

Do you visit the residence of people from other communities?

Do you celebrate festivals and special occasions with people from other groups and communities?

Do people from other communities invite you to their homes?

Do you exchange food? What kind of food? (cooked, raw)

Do you go to their homes when someone dies?

Do they come when someone dies in your family?

How was the cultural life of your village previous village? How is the cultural life in the present location?

Do you have time for leisure time? If yes, how do you spend it?

Do you invite your 'old friends'? Do you get invited to your 'old friends' family functions?

4. Everyday life questions

When do you wake up?

Tell me your morning routine?

How many members in family?

How many hours do you work? What are the household chores that you do? Do you take any help? From whom?

How has division of labour been agreed upon, in the household?

Is there any conversation around household chores, or things are unspoken?

Who cooks the food? What are the available resources for cooking food? Who procures the resources for food? Who goes out to take vegetables, and groceries? Who makes the lists? Who decides what is to be cooked?

Who cleans the house? Who cleans the surrounding of the house? Where do you dispose the waste? When do you go out to keep the waste? Whose duty is it to dispose the waste?

Do you have children?

Do they study? Where? How do they reach the school?

What time do they leave for school? What do you do after they leave?

Who helps them in homework? Who helps them in projects? Who provides what kind of assistance?

What are the kinds of habits that you want to protect your child from? Why?

Are you and your partner equally involved in your child's education?

Where do you spend your money? How much do you save out of it? What are you saving the money for?

What do you do when you don't have any money? Is there any family member who you approach when you need money? If there is a need to borrow, who borrows and from where?

Do you feel free to travel outside for few days, leaving behind your possessions? If you go out, who takes care of your home, and your belongings?

5. **Public space**

Do you go out? For what purposes? Does anyone accompany you?

Do you feel any threat in life? What type of threat?

Do you take risk? What type of risk? How do you take risks?

Any type of control that you have been experiencing?

What do you want to do in your life now? Do you have any dreams, aspirations 'sapne'?

Where do you get your news from?

What are the present threats for Jat/ Muslim women?

Do you think that Muzaffarnagar is unsafe for Jat/ Muslim women?

How do you envision a safe city?

Do you see yourself creating a safe environment for young women in Muzaffarnagar?

What are the problems of young women in Muzaffarnagar?

Do you think Jat/ Muslim women have restricted lifestyle?

Have you ever been questioned about your choice of dressing?

What is appropriate dressing?

Have you travelled alone with friends? Where? ...

Do you go out, to restaurants, movies?

Tell me something about your friends?

Do you use social media to connect with your friends? What kinds? How often? For what purposes?

How do you enjoy your free time?

Where do you meet your friends?

When you get access to TV?

What do you watch on television?

Do you access any other online channels such as youtube? What do you watch? What are the times that you access social media?

6. Family and gender roles

Who cooks the meals? Who decides what is to be cooked?

Who shops for the food and groceries?

Who is bringing in the household income? What does budgeting? Who manages money, and in what aspect?

Who is looking after the children?

Who is disciplining the children?

Who is cleaning the washroom?

Who is mowing the lawns?

Who is driving for family outings?

Who is putting the waste out?

Do you see yourself as a typical woman/ man?

What are the typical jobs and responsibilities of men and women in your place?

How many males/ females are there in your home? How do you engage with them in everyday lives? Are there any rules, any avoidances?

Is there purdah within the home, among family members?

Do you receive gifts? When? Whom? Why?

Do you have any property in your name?

Did your mother have any property in her name?

Will you make sure that is a property in your daughter's name?

How are you saving for your girl child and male child?

Do you send both the children in same school?

Do you scold/beat you children as punishment? Is there any disparity in punishment among boys and girls?

Do you have any savings in your name? any personal savings?

7. Questions around agrarian life

Who is working on the fields?

Do you work on the field?
 Do you get paid? How much?
 When do you leave for the fields?
 Do you commute alone?
 Is there any threat on the way?
 Do you cook before you go? How do you plan your day?
 Do you take something to eat, while on the field?
 Do you give lunch to your husband or father?
 When do you come back from the fields?
 What do you do you do after that?
 When do you take bath? Where do you take bath?
 Do you have a loo? How often do you pee?
 How many hours of sleep do you get?
 Do you go to the fields alone, or with some one?
 Do you have friends on the field?

8. Gender socialization

Do men and women do the same type of activities?
 Do girls go out to play? What type of sports they play?
 What habits are considered good for women and girls?
 What habits are considered good for men and boys?
 Are there any jobs that are appropriate for women?
 What kind of education is appropriate for a man and woman?
 What kind of job is appropriate for a man and woman?
 What type of clothes are women expected to wear outside, in public sphere?
 Do you wear jeans, palazzos, churidars?
 Do you get scolded by your family members? If yes, for what reasons?
 What is the appropriate age for a woman to get married?
 What is the appropriate age for a man to get married?
 What qualities are considered appropriate for a potential life partner for a woman/ man?
 Whose job it is in the family to look for your life partner? How do you look for marriage alliances?
 What are the qualities you are looking for in your life partner?

Should he know how to cook? Should he be educated? Do you want to stay with your in laws?

Do you want to study more?

Do you want to work?

If yes, are you allowed to work in public sphere for paid employment?

If yes, is it conditional? What are the conditions? If no, how do you negotiate?

What does your family expect from you?

How do you fulfil it? What do you do towards it?

Are the family expectations different between you and your brother?

Who is a good wife, who is a good bahu?

Glossary

Awara: vagabond

Azadi: freedom

Bahu beti bachao andolan: save daughter-in-law and daughter campaign

Behen: sister

Bhai: brother

Bhaichara: extended kin group/ brotherhood

Biradari: community

Chhed chhad: molestation

Choolha: earthen stove

Devar: husband's younger brother

Ekta: unity

Ganna: sugarcane

Ghoonghat: veil

Ghuspaithiye: outsiders who enter forcibly

Gur: jaggery

Harit Pradesh: green province

Ittar: perfume

Izzat: honour

Khap: clan-based community organisation

Kharch: expenditure

Kisan: farmer

Maryada: decorum

Muley jats: muslim jats

Parivaar: family

Purdah: veiling

Sarkari naukari: government job

Sasural: affinal home

Shahi: royal

Sharm: shame

Sheher ka mahaul: ambience of the city

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B. B. Mohanty

Managing Editor

12th October, 2022

Dear Dr. Astha Mishra and Professor Aparna Rayaprol,

We are pleased to inform you that your article titled "*Negotiating honour by Jat and Muslim women in Muzaffarnagar, Western Uttar Pradesh*" submitted to *Sociological Bulletin* is accepted for publication.

Thank you for writing for *Sociological Bulletin*.

With warm regards,

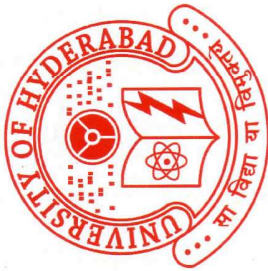
B.B. Mohanty

Negotiating honour by Jat and Muslim women in Muzaffarnagar, Western Uttar Pradesh

Astha Mishra, Aparna Rayaprol

Abstract

In this paper, we critically examine honour as a daily cultural code which is pivotal in organising gender relations and go beyond culture-centric and Eurocentric conceptions of honour. By looking at everyday honour practices of Jat and Muslim women, in Muzaffarnagar, western Uttar Pradesh, we argue against the dominant understanding of honour as a product of religious mannerism and a culturally specific trait. Rather by looking at two religiously different, but agriculturally intertwined communities, we argue that both the communities have an analogous underpinning of honour which is embedded in agrarian ecology. Through empirical evidence, we argue that honour is a regional ethos, embedded and organised around the resource of agrarian land. As anxieties around agriculture and agrarian way of life are increasing because of agrarian transformation, we see a resurgence of the notion of honour in the region. We focus the analytical lens around honour as a negotiated process, and argue that women of both the communities, in the region are 'doing' honour to bargain with patriarchy and negotiate for their upward mobility.



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