The Practically Minded:
Strategizing for Upward Mobility
Among the Punjabi Middle Class of Delhi, India

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Cassandra Summer Markoe

2017
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Practically Minded:

Strategizing for Upward Mobility

Among the Punjabi Middle Class of Delhi, India

by

Cassandra Summer Markoe

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Akhil Gupta, Chair

In this dissertation I reconsider the temporality of modernity by problematizing the idea of progress through an ethnographic illustration of how competitive pressures between middle class families in Delhi, India, striving for transnational social mobility, serve to redouble caste and patriarchal forms of domination and subordination within the family economy. My research intersects mobility and kinship studies with its theoretical focus on the ways that middle class identity is mobilized strategically in a new economic context of neoliberal development, where gains and losses are a constant destabilizing force. I argue that India has become more specialized in its economic contributions to world capitalism, by playing on cultivated strengths, such as informal labor and the extended family. Taking kinship as a focus of my ethnographic study, the following chapters reach from observations of childhood favoritism, to the power struggles of married couples, to the ‘uncles' that smooth over conflicts arising from the state’s
economic monitoring, to grandparents’ transgenerational narratives of the Partition that tore apart the Punjab in 1947-8. The depth of my ethnographic data frees my analysis from the usually obligatory choice between the language of culture and the language of economy, and ties the intimate family lives of the multifarious Delhi middle class to their roles in the world market.
The dissertation of Cassandra Summer Markoe is approved.

Kyeyoung Park

Jessica Cattelino

Joseph Nagy

Akhil Gupta, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Delhi, the Fragmented Metropolis ................................................................. 1

Chapter II: Divisions of Labor within the Kinship Economy ............................................. 42

Chapter III: Childhood Favoritism through Uneven Investments ..................................... 102

Chapter IV: Power and Consumption in Marriage .......................................................... 156

Chapter V: The Double: The Neoliberal Black Market of Delhi ...................................... 224

Conclusion: Transitions to Combined Forms: Rethinking the Temporality of Progress ... 275

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 344
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must begin this work by offering my deepest gratitude to the families that opened their homes to me and cared for my needs in emotional, physical and security terms, through year upon year of fieldwork in Delhi. Being a young, single woman conducting fieldwork in North India can be difficult, but I found such steadfast loyalty, concrete aid, and genuine concern for my well-being among those informants who contributed their stories to my research, that returning each year to live among them has been an absolute pleasure and privilege for me. I will go through my life trying to repay their kindesses, even as I know that I may never fulfill the debt that I owe to them.

I owe my distinguished advisor, Professor Akhil Gupta, a great deal. He has served as my primary mentor during my coursework, my master’s thesis and qualifying exams, and researching and writing of this dissertation, guiding me through every decision with wise counsel. Like the Shadow to his Zarathustra, it would have been impossible to know which wind was good or right for me without knowing where I was sailing; in my journey as a scholar, my advisor’s brilliance has been the North Star.

I am also grateful to Professor Robert Brenner for helping me develop my understanding of capitalism. He indulged even the earliest formulations of my theories and aided me through numerous drafts towards developing those sketches into arguments on the past, present and future of capitalism. I must also thank two other scholars from UCLA’s History Department; Professor Perry Anderson and Professor Andrew Apter, for guiding me at key junctures in my intellectual development.

Professor Joseph Nagy, now at Harvard University, has been as a bedrock of support at every stage in the writing process and has helped me learn to love the English language more
than I thought possible. He edited first and second drafts, pushed me along with deadlines, and lent me his confidence when I had doubts in my own. He has an uncanny ability to understand the emotional needs of his students and always offered me exactly what I needed—sometimes a pep talk and sometimes a scolding—at exactly the time I needed it most.

In UCLA's Department of Anthropology, I thank Professor Kyeyoung Park and Professor Jessica Cattelino, my committee members, for offering me direction on how to improve this work and pushing me to challenge the limitations of my situated perspective. I also owe a debt to Ann Walters and Tracy Humboldt for spending many hours helping me understand, and file properly, the paperwork required for me to complete this dissertation.

I would also like to thank three scholars I met in my early years at Carnegie Mellon University: Professor Richard Maddox, Professor Brian Silverstein, and Professor David Danks. Each of them helped open my eyes to the rich rewards of a life committed to academic research and learning. In addition, my advisor at St. Stephen's College in Delhi, Professor Sanjay Aday, gave himself generously in helping me find my passion for the city early in my career.

I must thank Professor Purnima Mankekar for including me in her instructional colloquium and writing seminar, modeling for me what feminist solidarity looks like in practice. She not only intervened with key insights into my work during the writing phase of this dissertation, but also brought me into contact with a community of extraordinary women. I thank Dr. Nefertiti Takla, Dr. Stephanie Santos, Dr. Esha Momeni, and Dr. Meher Varma for their contributions to this dissertation and for being pillars of strength and virtue that have inspired and upheld me. I must also thank my dear friend, Dr. Veena Hampapur, who from my first to last hour of graduate school has shared her absurdist humor and penetrating insights, giving me such immense joy in our friendship.
I owe so much to my mother Hilary Summer Markoe who has been my greatest teacher in life. The model of committed citizenship, integrity and charity, she has taught me how to give my heart to others and in the service of striving to create a more compassionate world. And finally, I owe a heartfelt thanks to Erik Van Deventer. My partner in our adventures romping around the world, my most profound interlocutor, and the person responsible for editing nearly every word I have written for over a decade, unquestionably, he is my best critic and most ardent comrade.
VITA/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

EDUCATION
University of California, Los Angeles
M.A. Anthropology, 2010
M.A. Thesis: Alienation through Bureaucratic Proceduralism and the Emergent Will of the State

Carnegie Mellon University
B.A. History, Anthropology, English Studies, 2007
Honors Thesis: Requiems and Pyres: A Morbid Cross-Cultural Comparison

St. Stephen's College, Delhi University
Rutgers Study Abroad Program, 2005-2006

FIELDWORK IN DELHI, INDIA
May-August 2006
May-September 2009
May-August 2012
May 2013-May 2014
May-September 2015
May 2016-February 2017

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
University of California, Los Angeles, Primary Instructor, 2016
University of California, Los Angeles, Teaching Fellow, 2009-2015
Chapter One

Delhi, the Fragmented Metropolis

Haft aqleem har gali hai kahin
Dilli se bhi diar hote hein
Are there seven continents in each street anywhere?
Yet they do exist in cities such as Delhi

Dilli thi talismat ke bar jagan Mir
In aankhon se ham ne kya kye dekha
Delhi was a magic house whose every corner, Mir
My eyes behold a lot of wonders

Koochay nahin Dilli ke auraq-e-mussavar the
To shakl nazar aai tasveer nazar aai
Streets of Delhi no streets but a painter’s portfolio
Every face we saw was like a painting

- Life, Times and Poetry of Mir, translated by S.R. Sharma

Perhaps Delhi just feels like it has more than seven continents of people because they are always trying to get inside of each other’s personal space. Sitting in one’s residence in North Delhi, you can hear the voices of people yelling to each other. The sounds of bargaining, pigeons, construction, business deliveries, and married couples quarrelling – each vibration comes floating through the walls and disturbs one’s peace. Only at night, and only if your room is away from a major road, can you actually have a room of one’s own, and only until the dogs start barking out the wee hours. Both exquisite and noxious smells fill the nostrils and cling to your clothing without your consent. Colorful decorations and painted trucks excite the aesthetic
nerve, and fireworks on Diwali can make the city feel a war zone. Once one stands amidst this rerum concordia discors, this discordant concord of things, and learns to appreciate the rich ambiguity of life in this kaleidoscopic metropolis, only then can one write a book about Delhi.

The phone was ringing off the hook. I picked up and heard a tiny voice say, “When are you coming?” I replied, “I have already told you I would come in an hour; why do you keep calling?” The little girl shouted “OK!” and I heard a click on the other end. I turned my attention back to the important interview I was conducting. It had taken three months to arrange the introductions that eventually granted me the trust and time of this former IAS officer. Again the phone rang. I picked up and shouted, “You should stop calling, I will come!” Without a word, other line clicked again. I put the phone on vibrate, and, looking up flustered, I apologized to my guest. But again, the incessant vibration. I hit ignore, but a minute later a new call was signaling. My distinguished interviewee, a svelte older man, clean-shaven with thick white hair and a long, white kurta under his Modi-style vest, was trying to tell me a fascinating story about how he had decided to return to Delhi from Bombay upon his retirement. But alas, I was distracted by the vibrating phone. After three more attempts to reach me in a three-minute span, I concluded that the phone call issue needed to be addressed. I beseeched the former IAS officer to forgive my rudeness, but, I just had to pick up.

On the next ring, I clicked the accept button and heard “Cassandra! Cassandra!” the same tiny voice who asked, “When are you coming? You should leave now!” Exasperated, I replied, “You have to stop calling! I am coming when I said I would, but if you call again I won’t come until tomorrow!” There was a loud click on the other end. I felt a pang of guilt that I may have hurt this little girl’s feelings. The IAS officer and I looked at each other in silence. We
waited for the next call to come but the phone remained still. He broke the air with a light laugh and said, “That is real love, harassing you like that. It shows she really cares. Only when you touched on her emotions, when you said you wouldn’t see her, that was the right way to deal with her. That is Delhi. In Bombay people are politely cool. They let you be. But in Delhi, the people have a rough warmth. They are not polite. They consume your time, they interrogate you, they get into your space because they want to be close. For good and bad, the people of Delhi have a passionate nature. They cannot keep their feelings from spilling over.”

Living with middle class families in Delhi during my ethnographic fieldwork I have learned not to expect privacy. Family members would barge in at all hours, or I would come home to find them sleeping in the bed designated for me. In middle class homes with servants, one is always vulnerable to information being passed on through them to the head of the household. Family members even demand to see the information on your phone. For a while, knowing how thoroughly I was watched made me jumpy, but over time I have learned to appreciate these intrusions. On days that I did not feel up to my usual vigor, concerned family members would come into my room, sit on my bed, and demand an explanation for my inaction. If I were ill, they would provide some remedy and expect me to recover quickly, usually within hours. But if I were confined to my room because I wanted to be alone for any reason, they would mercilessly question me until I conceded into sitting in the main room and talking with the family. The people I lived with understood the desire to be alone as serious sign of mental distress and found separateness unacceptable. Far from wishing to retreat, the closeness by which people lived was fundamental to my ethnographic practice. I was asked invasive personal questions and was shuffled around at the convenience of others, but I was also able to get into
the space of others. As in the last line of Mir’s poem, where every face in the city is a life-painting to a painter, I too have come to relate to the city in this way. As the residents of Delhi stare at you, you can stare back. As they involve themselves in your business, so too you can involve yourselves in their lives.

In this introductory chapter to my dissertation, I wish to give the reader a set of ethnographic stories that convey how the Delhi public is experienced by middle class people, while also situating my own position as ethnographic researcher. In each chapter of this dissertation, the social environment of the city is primary to understanding what takes place inside the homes of the group I have chosen to study. Later, in my theoretical conclusions, I argue for a more place-situated approach to understanding structural relationships of domination and subordination. However, here, I wish to first construct for the reader a picture of this jolie laide city. Or, as Ghalib may have written about his own home:

“Now look at the sweetness of your lips! 
Even when they spout abuse!
Your suitors simply ask for more 
far, far from feeling sore.”

For me, the reason I endure the Delhi smog, immoderate climate, traffic, trash and vermin on my yearly visits is because I have never stopped marveling at its inhabitants. For example, let us take a small incident that happened with a woman who sold vegetables in my neighborhood. The forty-five-year-old woman would push a vegetable cart to the different houses in the morning. She largely made her money from prearranged relationships with families in the neighborhood, but she would sing out her daily specials as she moved through the area. One morning I happen to be awake early and see her on my road. I went down and had a friendly interaction, buying a few vegetables for my kitchen and exchanging little pleasantries. The next day at 7:30 AM sharp I heard my doorbell ring. It rang several times before I climbed out of bed
and looked to see what trouble had disrupted my sleep. I saw the vegetable seller outside my window. She said, “Why are you asleep? Come down.” I asked her to leave because I did not need vegetables that day, but she kept ringing the bell. I did not go down but back to my room, assuming the harassment would stop. She continued to ring the bell for another several minutes. After that, every single day she would arrive at my door. The ringing at such an early hour was a source of stress, and I even took to pleading with her and offering her money to cease and desist her aggressive visits. I was not able to communicate with her well enough to find a way around this routine. One day a friend had stayed over at my apartment the night before and was there for the morning call. She talked to the woman and asked her why, even when I had not bought vegetables in a month, did she keep calling? My friend told me that the woman knew I was living alone and thought I was lonely. The resolution came when my friend told her that she would stay with me from now on and that the woman should not keep visiting because there was already a person to keep me company.

In the following chapters of the dissertation, I will present the perspectives of middle class people, theoretically weaving them into the global economy, but here, in the introduction, I would like address the experience of being middle class in a city full of people living at the boundary of mere subsistence. Social barriers are high, but throughout this dissertation I have tried to show the points where these boundaries become flexible. In the beautiful book Delhi: A Novel (2014), longtime Delhi resident Khushwant Singh writes that to overlook the “blood-sucking vermin” inhabiting the city and learn to appreciate the sensuous beauty of Delhi in order become her lover, one must “cultivate a sense of belonging to Delhi.” Belonging can be found not only through one’s own society—with middle class Punjabis, in my case—but also through a public persona, your public reputation. For instance, in a small area of North Delhi that I have
frequented for years, the men that live on the street of a corner I pass often are now friendly toward me. They used to stare and jeer at me. Now, I actually feel safer from harassment on that corner knowing the men have accepted my right to use the street. In the summer of 2015, I had returned to Delhi after my dissertation fieldwork and had been trying to follow up with my network; but in a city where anyone with a respectable income tries to clear out in the summer, it had been hard to make contact. On Independence Day in August, the streets were emptier than usual. Everyone had the day off and was at home with their families or taking a vacation. On this Independence Day, 2015, after having already lived in the city for extended periods, for the first time, a cow threatened me. I was walking along, and as I passed the corner with the local men a cow’s attention focused on me. This young white cow shook her head in a playful way and then charged in my direction! The men came to my rescue. As a group, they chased the cow away and reassured me when it was safe to walk again. It would not be too much to say that the loyalty of these men, which I earned over a long time just being in their public domain, literally saved my life. Belonging does reveal the rough warmth of this city, and the people and places that at first sight seem menacing, start to reveal themselves overtime. As the Velveteen Rabbit has explained, Delhi only becomes Real after all its finery has been loved off: “But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

In my first months living as a young college student in Delhi in 2005, I was afraid to venture much further than my immediate surroundings. At the time I lived in Civil Lines, and the tall walls that guarded the invisible houses which lined the relatively empty streets gave me a claustrophobic feeling. I worried that a threatening creature, be it person or animal, might
confront me on the road; if confronted, it seemed that the gates would close to me, the walls close in, and there would be nowhere to run or hide. It was this fear that ensured that all my first encounters alone with the Delhi public took place at the small fruit and vegetable stands that occupied the space between my residence and the Ring Road immediately adjacent.

The sliver of dirt between the concrete parking garage of my building and the highway, was a home, location of business and temple. There was a small Hindu temple with a crisp white exterior, marble floors, and orange flowers, which were sold at the entrance by a group of elderly women. Four women in tattered saris would sit next to the flowers, selling them to temple visitors and aggressively begging for charity. On one occasion, I was quite shocked when one of the old women grabbed my ankle and tried to pull me to the ground. After that incident, I made sure to take a wide circle around these women. Next door, the grocer was a stern, mustached man who sat in a storefront made of concrete, with no front window and walls narrower than a janitorial closet. He sat beside a mini-fridge that contained the grocer’s only goods. I purchased cheese, milk, and butter from him. I bought bread a few times from a milk crate he kept on the floor, but he would sell out by 11 AM. Next door, the building did not formally continue, but a makeshift storefront was constructed against the side using wooden beams and what appeared to be dried palm leaves for the roof and walls. Underneath, three fruit sellers and two vegetable sellers would park their carts after making their morning rounds to the homes in the area and mock their customers’ asking prices to each other.

Between the building and the road, there was only about twenty meters of dirt. The major attraction was a twisted banyan tree. The tree was dirty from the smog runoff of the overhead highway, but it had colorful ribbons, tinsel and Tibetan prayer flags–evidence of the Tibetan colony hidden on the other side of the highway. The tree had a crumbling stone encirclement that
provided a seating area to residents and visitors. A few tea-sellers and tea-consumers would circulate around this tree throughout the day. But at night, during the times when I would be driven home and pass the area after 9 PM, there were at least fifty people sleeping in this small space between the road and shops.

As the weeks passed, my daily visits to this microcosm of social life became more comfortable and enjoyable. I would chat with the grocer, discuss which fruits were in season, and occasionally take tea. I came to know some of the locals, but I still felt uneasy. There was a motley crew of rickshaw wallahs and beggars lining the space. I experienced a kind of cognitive dissonance when I would try to reconcile my fears that they would harass me, shame over my unconscionable privilege in comparison, and a devastating feeling of compassion and desire to act appropriately toward them. In 2005, the streets of Delhi were covered in human misery, and for anyone not accustomed to the sight of dying people, the whole situation felt desperately tragic. To understand Delhi, one must first understand that a great proportion of Delhi-ites experience their entire lives in public, on the side of the road. In the coldest part of the winter, if you walked or drove along the road in the early morning, you would see an alarming number of people, lying on the sidewalk and in the highway median, who may not have lived through the night and yet were still covered by their blankets. Now, Delhi is not nearly so bleak, at least in the areas likely to be observed. But at the time, the constant sight of dying people took a terrible psychological toll. I imagine that the camaraderie that I eventually felt toward one of the park’s residents was my first attempt to reconcile these feelings.

I often wanted to venture further in the city, across the Ring Road, and into the Tibetan colony that sits on the bank of the Yamuna. Tibetan food offers a fresh and simple alternative to the heavily-spiced foods of North India. I had visited the Tibetan colony with a classmate once
before who drove us across the road, and although I often looked hungrily across toward the colorful flags on the banks of the river, I could not make it across on foot. I would go to shop in this small area by the road next to my apartment and periodically hang my head out to see if the traffic might make a journey momentarily possible. The Ring Road is the major highway of Delhi. There are few turn-arounds and even fewer crossings, and traffic stops and signals are virtually non-existent. People drive on the roads at high speeds, and in Delhi conditions, you cannot be certain that the brakes will stop the car even if the driver sees you. There is also a fence in the median that prevents crossing. However, government-designated crosswalks are several kilometers apart and almost equally dangerous.

Apparently my ambitions to cross the street did not go unnoticed. At points, out of the corner of my eye I would catch an older man observing me as I looked out onto the road, and he would be smiling. I began to notice him more often. His rickshaw was always in the same location on the roadside, and he would lay in the passenger seat and take in the surroundings. He had a faded orange turban in various states of dishevelment around his head, a straggly untrimmed beard, a translucently-thin cotton navy blue button-up shirt, and loose three-quarter pants. Only one of his feet had a sandal, while the other was covered in a white cloth. Whenever I looked over in his direction, on different days at different times, he was grinning at me.

His attention was unwelcome. The first thing I was told by every Indian woman I encountered at the university was to stay clear of poor Indian men. Indeed, the middle-age Punjabi woman who ran my university program would say, “Don’t let any man touch you!” as I left the apartment each morning, to reminded me of my precarious position. Within the first week I lived in Delhi I was sexually harassed by the men on the street so consistently that I immediately relinquished any hope of moving around in public. As a young college student, I
had yet to develop the harsh exterior that is needed to keep the Delhi public in check. But perhaps also, the city itself is no longer quite as difficult for women in the decade that has passed. However, at the time, observing myself being noticed by this man in the orange turban again and again only redoubled my efforts to seem cold toward him and never walk too close to his rickshaw.

My daily visits to this small slice of public space, the only place in the city that I would visit alone, and my daily observations of the traffic patterns on the Ring Road, continued for another month. One day when I arrived for my traffic viewing, the man in the orange turban, my watcher, hollered to me. I looked up in surprise and saw him about twenty meters away, still in his rickshaw passenger’s seat and wildly gesturing to a spot on the road. I looked, and saw that across from the spot, in the median of the road, the fence that normally prevents crossing was askew. I moved to the location he had motioned me toward and I saw that from that vantage point, one could see how the fence directly across would allow for a person to climb over. I was delighted! It was my first piece of “local” knowledge. I gave a big smile, and, not knowing a more appropriate thanks, I gave two thumbs-up. The man was also smiling and gesturing, glad I had taken his meaning. Content just to see that the fence issue had a resolution, I turned to leave, reasoning that the traffic was still too heavy to cross in the mid-day.

Again, I heard shouts from the man in the orange turban. I looked at him and he was gesturing for me to cross. I was still afraid, so I stood there for a few minutes. I gazed at the man gesturing, the colorful traffic, and the hole in the fence. He turned and started gesturing to his fellow rickshaw wallah. The second man got out of his rickshaw, walked over to me, and stood next to me facing the traffic. He motioned for me to follow him, and at the moment we were to embark, the man in the orange turban, the director of this scene, shouted, “Go!” and I went
across with an escort. We went lane-by-lane, making it unnecessary for the entire road to be cleared; we allowed for the motorcycles to maneuver around us by keeping a steady pace; we did not run. We got to the median, climbed over, and continued to the other side where the Tibetan colony was located. When we reached the destination safely, my escort nodded, turned around and went back to his rickshaw.

My visit to the Tibetan colony was unpleasant due to the sheer number of flies on the embankment of the river. Far from Shangri-La, I felt utterly disgusted by the conditions I found inside the colony. I decided to head back within an hour. However, like climbing up a tree, the journey that had taken me there was not as simple as the return. I stood by the road for some time until, from the opposite side, I was noticed by the man in the orange turban. He indicated that I should wait by putting his palms toward me and patting the air. I waited, until I heard him yell: “Go!” This time I needed to navigate myself. I walked lane-by-lane as I had been taught. I was terrified.

When I successfully reached my home turf I was both proud of my accomplishment and grateful to the men for facilitating such an adventure. I went over to the man in the orange turban, still sitting in his rickshaw, and gave him two hundred rupees. I also gave his friend, my escort, a similar sum. I very awkwardly tried to thank him in the few words of Hindi I knew at the time. He laughed when I spoke to him, and I noticed how kind and jolly he seemed. He had deep symmetrical wrinkles that fanned out from his eyes onto his ruddy cheeks when he smiled. Just under his turban, I could see the sparkle of aged wisdom in his deep-set eyes. Before this I had not approached him close enough to see his eyes or the nature of his smile, and it occurred to me even as I spoke that all this time I had been misinterpreting his attention. To my
astonishment, he spoke back to me in English. He said, “I have seen you here.” I smiled and he smiled. I asked his name and he said, “My name is Sajal.”

That night it was cool outside and I lay in my bed thinking about if Sajal was feeling cold only a short distance from where I slept. There is always difficulty in seeing one’s own cultural conditioning, but I have been told that white people from New England have an unusually aggressive and individualistic sense of pro-active citizenship. I can say this principle was probably at work in me the next day when I brought Sajal an extra blanket, stolen away from a stack provided by my academic program. I also gave him another two hundred rupees. We exchanged only a few words, but he accepted my gifts and I was pleased. I started regularly visiting Sajal’s rickshaw on my trips to the small market.

On my visits I tried to learn more about Sajal. I ask him about his bandaged leg and foot. He winced when he leaned down to uncover the dirty bandage. It was a deeply disturbing site. The injured leg smelled like rotting flesh, was discolored, disfigured and immobile, and had flies crawling in and out of the breaks in skin. He had gangrene. He could no longer walk or pull the rickshaw. This leg was why he was always sitting in his passenger’s seat in the same spot along the road.

He told me that he had come to Delhi when he was already older than most of the other rickshaw pullers. He had only gone to school for five years of his life, but he had learned to speak English from watching movies that were shown at a public bus station. He had a wife and two children still in a village in the Punjab. Sajal exuded pride when he told me that his eldest son had recently passed a test to acquire a government job. Sajal had been healthy when he lived as a farmer in his native village and when he began his career as a rickshaw wallah in Delhi, only two years before our meeting. He had made good money when he moved to the city, supported
his family back home, and even purchased his own rickshaw. However, after a car had cut his leg badly in a traffic accident, the wound had become increasingly infected. Now he could not work and depended on his young son to support the family. He said that if he could sell the rickshaw, he would use the money to travel home to see his wife and children.

On a number of occasions, I urged Sajal to seek medical care for his injury. I could not understand why, but each time he would turn his eyes away, shake his head, and say, “I cannot go there [the hospital].” I bought him clean bandages and would give him around five hundred rupees a week, but I did not know how to help otherwise. In hindsight, I imagine that my concerted efforts to help Sajal, and my donations of what was considered a good deal of money to this man, were part of how I managed the fears welling inside of me that were keeping me indoors. Over the next few weeks this became a pattern with us: I gave him things and urged him to seek help, and he, greeting me with a smile, politely refused to travel to the hospital. Many days I wondered before my trip to the market if Sajal would still be there. Maybe he had sold the rickshaw and had gone home. Or maybe he was dead. But our routine, our exchange, our conventional call-and-answer, lulled me into the daily habit of expecting Sajal. In ways, Sajal was one of my first acquaintances in Delhi. He was one of the first people I felt comfortable around.

Sajal died lying in the passenger’s seat of his rickshaw on the side of the road. He never made it home to his family. The morning it happened I had been at the university and had only managed to visit the shopping area in the late afternoon. Sajal was not there and neither was his rickshaw. I asked the stern grocer what had happened to him. The grocer said, with an entirely blank expression, that he had seen Sajal dead in his rickshaw when he had come open the shop at 8 AM. He knew Sajal was dead because he had seen flies eating his open eyes. Outside I found
that other rickshaw drivers had removed Sajal’s body and rickshaw. I asked other locals, but I never discovered if anyone had been able to call his wife and children with the news. I asked Sajal’s friend what had happened--the man that had escorted me across the road. He was silent; he turned his head away to hide his expression while stretching out his hand in my direction. Tightly clutched between his fingers was a familiar orange cloth. By the following week, even Sajal’s friend had disappeared from that small strip of land just adjacent to the road.

This sequence of events with Sajal was hard to forget. When I started my dissertation fieldwork in 2013, eight years after this incident, I had still not reconciled my experience with Sajal. In truth, I still have yet to understand the personal meaning of the story, but I can relate how my middle class research participants understood this story and the structure of poverty in Delhi.

In 2013, I was out to lunch with Rohit. He was the only son and inheritor of a prosperous business that imports sheet metal and makes it into stovetops, along with owning a concrete manufacturing plant. Rohit is always dressed elegantly and chooses his words prudently. He has delicate features and a sensitive look in his eyes, which he hides behinds his long hair, bushy beard and round spectacles. He told me that people sometimes joke that he looks like John Lennon. In some ways he does treat the public as a kind of paparazzi who is constantly invading his creative thinking space. He travels most days to a coffee shop to daydream and read about places he never intends to visit. He also enjoys philosophizing and dating coeds from Delhi University that were no less than ten years his junior.

On this occasion we were taking lunch in Haus Kauz village. He told me how that week his mother was furious when he had adopted a street dog. He had related to me before how
condition of the street dogs broke his heart on a daily basis. He said, “These dogs cannot speak for themselves, they cannot defend themselves, we need to do something. People are so comfortable with death that they allow such cruelty.” He related how he was intending to take action to improve the lives of these dogs by donating to a charity.

The conditions of Delhi street dogs are truly deplorable. Each day in the city you will witness dogs that are ill, severely malnourished and often dead. During the “puppy season” in September, there are extremely cute puppies on most sidewalks. Sometimes these sweet puppies meet their ends under the wheel of a car and remain on the side of the road decomposing. Within a few months these puppies become sick and mangy dogs. In some ways, the puppy season is a wonderful time when curious, fluffy creatures take their first steps in the world. But in Delhi, one is constantly reminded of the way attachment is always accompanied by suffering. Among my middle class research subjects’, I found that nearly every person condemned the conditions of dogs on the street, and many provided food to the dogs. If the situation with the dogs is not acceptable to middle class people, why was there not a similar concern for the people living on the street? This question had long plagued me and I started to ask around for explanations. With his discussion, Rohit had provided me an excellent opportunity to ask about poverty, and his reply was illuminating.

I asked, “If you care for the dogs in this way, how can you not have a similar concern for the people living on the street? Surely a person deserves your help more than a dog.” Rohit pulled his eyebrows together and stared me down. He said, “Well I will tell you exactly why: the people that come to Delhi from a village have a better life here. They earn more money–they are happy to be here. They would rather sleep on the streets of Delhi than have the best home in their native village. They choose this–they are free to choose to live this way. The animal does not
have any choice. It has no voice to protest or live differently. It knows nothing but its life here. Animals deserve my help because they cannot help themselves. These people on the street know just what they are doing. You see them and you think their condition is bad, but you can’t even imagine what village they came from.”

After this I shared my experience with Sajal, and Rohit said, “That is a very sad story and I can see how it has affected you. I am sorry that you did this to yourself. It is like touching fire—you won’t get involved again now that you have learned your lesson. Anyway it does not matter how you interpret the story, as long at it doesn’t make you go around crying all the time. These things happen.”

“Growing up here we learn from experience to feel detached from these people. I have tried to help and they just lie and cheat you; you cannot trust them. Just think how much money that guy took out of you. Involving yourself like that is never good—just think of the games he could have played with someone so naive. Just last month I felt sorry for this guy who was always hanging outside of my house. He looked sick and he told me he needed a medicine. I even took the guy to buy the medicine in my car. But when I saw the chemist the next day he told me the guy had cheated me and told me the medication cost more. It only cost 20Rs, but he took 60Rs. Here I was helping him, and still he lied. I would have just given the money, but it wouldn’t matter how much I gave. You cannot trust these guys.”

Throughout my fieldwork and experience in Delhi, people repeatedly told me to be concerned about how others might take advantage of me. The reader will observe a recurrent theme of paranoia about being cheated or manipulated throughout all of my ethnographic chapters. Although this cultural tenant is expressed psychologically as paranoia, many of these
concerns are well-founded. But, what is it like to live in a city where every day a new story about a terrible crime against humanity is reported in the paper?

The threat of sexual violence is a major defining feature of Delhi. Many women live with daily harassment. But what is more damaging from the perspective of middle class women are the stories that circulate about acts of extreme violence perpetrated by poor men who have come to the city from other parts of India. Although domestic abuse, date rape, and other forms of sexual violence are pervasive in Delhi, the greatest fear many middle class women have is that the men on the street will collectively act against them. In most circumstances middle class women have a tremendous social advantage over these men, but women worry the men on the street will revolt, and the violence unleashed from this kind of social break is unimaginable. With the prominence of the 2012 bus attack that left a promising student dead, the international community has also come to identify Delhi as a place that is unusually dangerous for women. Delhi is a place where gender and class press up sharply against each other. Indeed, the issue of gang rape was already long known to residents before the infamous bus incident. In July 2005, I first read of the gang rape of a disabled woman on a Delhi bus. In 2012, when the struggle against violence against women in Delhi gained momentum, the middle class of Delhi started to talk about these incidence of violence more often. During my fieldwork between 2013-2014, I recorded a number of conversations and situations where women discussed the disturbing articles they found in the paper each day. I did not introduce these conversational topics. It was part of the daily routine for all the families I stayed with to have a discussion of the events reported in the paper over breakfast.

On October 11, 2015, a four-year-old girl was lured into the woods with the promise of a ₹10 plate of chow mein, brutally gang raped, beaten with stones, and left on the train tracks to
die. Kamela, a sixty-two-year-old Punjabi housewife whom the reader will meet again in chapter four, was sitting at her coffee table with the paper in one hand and her tea in the other. Around her sat her daughter, Seema, a middle aged teacher who was reading a different part of the paper, while her young granddaughter and grandson played games on the iPad. They discussed the rape of the four-year-old.

Kamela: “Here again, every day a new horror. Today a four-year-old, tomorrow what? These people are really sick. They took her innocence, just a small child. This city is a nightmare full of monsters.”

Seema: “These street men are like this. They come from villages and from childhood they are taught that a woman is nothing, not worth being alive. They come to the city and no one knows them so they think they can do anything.”

Kamela: “No. I think they must be born like this – to do this to a child! How is it possible that they were once children, too? It is their nature to kill. They planned to kill this small girl. Some people are born this way and we have so many people here, some will be like this only. They look like humans but they are monsters.”

Seema to her son: “Look here. Read this! You need to change this society. You will respect women and as you grow up you will fix these things, no?”

Seema to me: “You see what city we are living in? You should always be scared in public. The men could turn against you and you will be dead. You remember in January, that Japanese student? They held her for a month.”

Kamela: “Or that Danish woman. The got her in the middle of the day from Paharganj. But for tourists that is one thing, mostly they are too scared of you. For us—everything is
closed. There is nowhere we can go to get away. The only solution they have made is the lady’s car on the metro. On the streets there are no protections.”

Seema: “We cannot even walk. These men think seeing a woman is having an opportunity. They don’t even care if they get away with it. They care so little about life that it doesn’t matter to them if they are hanged. They are nothing like us, punishment doesn’t stop them.”

Kamela: “There are not enough hangmen in India to purify this city. All the trash just pours in and there is no protection for us. We must always be inside. Even our children are not safe.”

In Delhi, class conflict and the sharp contradictions between people can lead to perverse violence in public. To members of the middle class, people of the lower classes may sometimes seem insurmountably different. The fears that pervaded the lives of many of my informants—the fear of theft, of trickery, of sexual assault—blended into each other, as the reader will see in the following chapters. However, the fear of sexual assault in particular seemed to be understood by my research participants as the kind of anxiety felt by the Eloi in H.G. Well’s *The Time Machine*. In the novel, the protagonist travels to a future where two social classes have devolved into different races. The Morlocks had been workers, but they grew to look different and they moved underground away from the Eloi. The squishy and slow-witted Eloi were left free to enjoy the surface of the land, but occasionally, the Morlocks would come to the surface and take one of the defenseless Eloi for their food. While this outlook of fear and paranoia seemed common among women discussing the issue of sexual assault in Delhi, I have tried to show the reader through this introduction that there is no one clear relationship that middle class people have with the
people that inhabit the Delhi streets. In the cow attack described earlier, the men that hung out on the curb actually made the street safer for me because they knew me. In the story of Sajal, far from being threatening, his smiles were truly an act of goodwill. The middle class people of Delhi often do make what may sound like heartless statements about the people on the street. However, like me, they, too, have complex experiences with this population. In chapter two I present the relationships of middle class family members to servants, and in chapter five I detail incidences between middle and lower class people with respect to traffic conflicts. Indeed, throughout this dissertation it will become obvious to the reader that the urban poor of Delhi are intimate actors in the lives of middle class people. The first leg of this ethnographic journey has taken us on a brief trip through the streets of Delhi. I trust that the reader will continue to add to their knowledge of Delhi and the importance of the city in the lives of middle class people, as they meet my research subjects in more depth in the following chapters.

Throughout this ethnography I have tried to show how the social structures that operate as part of the unique cultural character of Delhi are experienced and reproduced in the everyday lives of middle class informants. One of my primary goals in this dissertation is to show how city structures that exist outside the home condition the social environment within the home and of the family. Any family is a complex social organization, but with the Delhi middle class, family relationships are heavily laden with economic interdependence. In the conclusion of this dissertation I lay out a map for thinking about how familial relationship can be understood with respect to class, but the greatest proportion of this dissertation takes place in the homes of my middle class research subjects.
My approach to the Delhi middle class draws its research methodology from the long history of ethnography on North Indian families and households (Beteille 2007; Cohn 1987; Laidlaw 2012). Studying the microhistories of everyday routines and the network of obligations that organize daily life is one way to “translate life worlds into time and history” (Chakrabarty 2008). This study uses a mixed methods approach, including long interviews and participant-observation, with mobility, time-in-action, and network studies, to track trajectories and daily routines.

My field methods were based on observing the same individuals in all their usual social contexts and activities. My research includes: group family interviews, group interviews with men, group interviews with women, repeated interviews with individuals, participant-observation in cafes, spas, gyms, malls, temples, all-female kitty parties and predominantly male drinking parties, participant-observation at family meals, television watching, and family outings, self-reported incomes and property ownership, kinship charts, social network charts, and maps and timetables of daily routines. I have known many of these research subjects for over ten years and was able to live in each of their homes for extended periods, granting me access to most aspect of their lives. In 2005-2006, I began my acquaintance with most of these families, when I spent a year attending a St. Stephen’s College in Delhi and stayed in the home of a middle class family in Old Delhi. After embarking on my graduate studies, I returned to Delhi to engage in participant observation in family settings in the summers of 2010 and 2012. In 2013-2014, I completed twelve months of continuous research in both family and non-family settings for members of a representative six families who live in different parts of Delhi. I stayed in the homes, followed them through the say, and spent countless hours talking with them. Although the period of my dissertation research was the time when I recorded social life most concordedly,
This dissertation draws on my ten-year-long background in Delhi and the long-term relationships I have made there.

This research looks at one very particular group in Delhi, Kshatriya Punjabis from the “trader” or “business class.” The families studied had a monthly household income of between ₹80,000 and ₹300,000. All the families, bar one, owned their homes and drew their income from a family business. The outlying family, described in chapter five, had lost both their home and business eight years ago, and is experiencing downward class mobility. All the families had been of a mercantile class and castes, historically. They were part of the “educated class,” which drew a family income from a petty-bourgeois business under colonialism – businesses that either were dissolved and reestablished, or remained continuous, during the Partition. Due to particular forms of patriarchal inheritance, it was customary that members of these families not directly responsible for the business would become educated professionals. In Delhi, besides doctors and engineers, a large number of professionals from these families have worked as government bureaucrats since the creation of this class niche under colonialism. Today, nearly all members of these families have a BS or BA, and a large number, including older men and women, have advanced degrees. Each of the six primary families has one or more businesses that respectively generate an average of ₹150,000 a month, providing the primary income for most of the family members and income for other relations and concerned parties. This income is more than enough to live well in Delhi. People with an outside income are cut off from family money, but are not usually expected to provide for relatives outside of their nuclear family. The primary members of the property-holding branch of each family also own the family house and regularly own other housing that they rent to tenants. The increase in housing prices in Delhi has greatly enhanced
the value of their commercial and residential property holdings. The businesses are undertaken as an ownership of a storefront that sells jewelry, metals, electronics, and so forth, which incorporates commodities of international trade with small-scale manufacturing modifications, and then their sale through the retail part of the business.

Another major similarity between my research participants is that they all come from Punjabi families that migrated to Old Delhi after the Partition. Some of the families have moved to other parts of Delhi, but all share a particular pattern of movement. As each individual is revealed throughout the dissertation, the Partition and the 1984 riots break into the narratives at critical points. This group of families used to live in Lahore, now within Pakistan, and were forced to flee in the desperate circumstances of the Partition, even when Gandhi had promised them that they could stay in their homes. These families found themselves beginning again in a specific section of North Delhi. Some of these families have rented out their first houses in this area, and while they live elsewhere, they visit this section of the city regularly. Of the six families in my study, four of them are acquainted with each other. My method for gaining access to this group and understanding them as a distinct social unit, and more generally as part of the philosophy that drives my ethnographic practice, I found my research participants through social networking channels.

In my study, virtually none of the participants were regularly employed in the statistical sense, and their greatest economic and social identification is with their family, acquaintances and friends. Therefore, I have used an organic approach, letting the members of the group I already knew introduce me to more people in their own society. In some ways, this method makes my approach less systematic. However, I believe that this method is valuable because it has allowed my research group to form based on local standards of differentiation rather than
having forcefully imposed my own standards of who should and should not be considered middle class. This dissertation does not use "middle class" as an economic category or description, but rather, as a flexible identity category that has only a tangential link to income. However, for the sake of clarity, taken from my informants and as a loose approximation, I estimate that a middle class status for an individual usually requires roughly ₹50,000 a month, while an upper-middle class individual requires approximately ₹100,000 per month for their own maintenance and spending money. This sum does not include rent or the purchases of expensive items like a car.

More generally, I have allowed my research subjects to identify who was middle class for me. As the reader will find, their assessments of each other are far more interesting than anything I might project with respect to social categorization.

A final note on ethnographic practice: the people of Delhi will play games with you. Whatever you may buy in this city and in whatever living room you choose to take your tea, the power-laden conflicts are impossible to avoid. Indeed, my primary activity in obtaining my ethnographic information involved allowing myself to be used as a prop in my research participant’s power games; I became an interlocutor in their alliances, competitions, and antagonisms with each other. To assert this is not to disparage these people or my role as ethnographer—far from it, but rather to point to my own attitude during my ethnographic research. When one of my primary informants would instruct me on how to act, which was very often the case, I would try to follow their directions to my greatest ability. Indeed, for me, the direct, harsh and frank way my social failings were pointed out, typical of Delhi, were tremendously helpful to my practice. Even though I have striven throughout this dissertation to spotlight people’s perspectives, I, too, emerge as a central character. The reader may wonder how I managed to earn the trust of such a diverse group of people, and here I must credit this
skill to following directions. In hindsight, what I have learned from conducting ethnography is to always do what you are told. I am grateful to my research participants for caring enough about me and my project to tell me how to act.

Social scientists are understandably prone to thinking that what they say about the world is more interesting than what they find in the world. As a person who likes to read social science, I find the opposite to be true. I like to know what is being discovered, and with only a little direction, I also like to decide for myself what I think is the significance of the information. This work has been written with the express purpose of not forcing my own conclusions on the reader. I have tried to have a light theoretical hand throughout the ethnographic portions of this dissertation to give room for the reader to interpret the ethnographic evidence for themselves and enjoy the process of accumulating knowledge without needing a background in social science, or, without having to accept the premises of cultural anthropology or any given social theory. My intention in writing this dissertation was to allow the reader to enjoy learning about this distinct social world and the personalities that inhabit this community, without much encumbrance from my theoretical argument. In cultural anthropology, theoretical frameworks are shed at least once a decade. Those ethnographies that persist are those in which the documentation of life transcends the argument of the researcher. Although there are few that would still agree with the theories of anthropologists such as E.E. Evans-Pritchard, his works are still widely read and enjoyed because they continue to give a terribly interesting picture into another world. When we take a historical perspective on the craft of ethnography, we can see that writing ethnography is more about documenting history in the making than providing evidence for claims about human universals.
This dissertation is divided into ethnographic and theoretical sections. In every chapter, the ethnographic material is foregrounded and presented before my analytical conclusions. In chapter two on the family as a social unit, the reader will learn about a family’s history of the Partition and the 1984 riots, how the family is economically and socially interdependent, the politics over the division of labor and resource consumption, the employment of servants and office workers, along with the hopes, fears and dreams of several personalities within one family. In chapter three on childhood, the reader will learn about how individuals are socialized into becoming certain types of cultural beings through a system of childhood favoritism, as well as how the myth of Krishna’s birth provides a unique view into how parents and children interpret parental favoritism. In the fourth chapter on marriage, the reader will learn about the power struggles within four different marriages and come to look at the economic life of Delhi through the eyes of four housewives. In the fifth chapter on the black market, readers will learn about what illicit services are available in Delhi by following the life story and daily activities of a middle class man who provides illicit services such as fraud, police protection, prostitution and drugs to middle class consumers. In chapter six, the conclusion, I will argue for the intellectual framework that I see coming from my research. The dissertation is set up in both the sequence of chapters, along with the ordering of material internally in each chapter, to allow the reader to survey the evidence so as not to prejudice them with my own conclusions.

Or to put it another way, if we allow room for Nietzsche’s assertion that all philosophy (and I would add social theory) is a form of autobiography, then we must confront the idea that our theories are only valuable to our own understanding of social events. While I do not share Nietzsche’s attitude toward the epistemological correctness of social science’s claims about the world, his objection is well noted:
“The evil hour. – Every philosopher has probably had an evil hour when he thought: what do I matter if one does not accept my bad arguments, too? – And then some malicious little bird flew past him and twittered: ‘What do you matter? What do you matter?’”

- The Gay Science

In all likelihood, I do not matter, and that is why I have tried to provide enough holistic documentation on my research subjects that the reader need not accept my arguments in order to find something valuable in my writing. No doubt, my research subjects are far more interesting than myself. I have tried to enact a kind of “gay science” through my ethnographic narratives and left the theory to the end. However, whatever levity and joy in learning I can produce for the reader, I have a central argument. And no, I do not consider them “bad arguments”; in fact, I believe they are profound reformulations of Marxism and offer a promising new way to think about the study of economics and culture.

The Theory of Patriarchal Admixtures

Guided by abiding research interests in kinship, middle class identity, and the re-emergent dialogue between economics and anthropology, this dissertation sits at the intersection of economic informality, critical development studies, and Subaltern and Feminist studies of South Asia. In the following chapters I reconsider the temporality of modernity by problematizing the idea of progress through an illustration of how competitive pressures between middle class families in India, striving for transnational social mobility, redoubles caste and patriarchal forms of domination and subordination within the family economy. I argue that India has become more specialized in its economic contributions to world capitalism by playing on cultivated strengths, particularly informal labor and the extended family.

This dissertation intersects social mobility and kinship studies with its theoretical focus on the ways that middle class families strategize in a new economic context, where gains and
losses are a constant destabilizing force. Before economic liberalization, Delhi’s middling group was not understood to be a strictly “middle” class, but an “educated” class, for they played their most pronounced role as government bureaucrats, educators, and medical professionals. This class, once relatively stable in its activities and generational reproduction, has undergone a transformation into the “new” Indian middle class, now competing internationally for professional jobs, even as it seizes on enhanced trade and property opportunities—flooding advantageously-positioned members of this group with money and assets. My study looks at how families from the "old" middle class manage the new precarity of their situation, wherein they must compete strategically simply to remain “middle class,” and optimally, to continue to rise in their economic and social status. As aspirational as this new class may seem, my work shows that scholarship and media portrayals that extol the “modern” and forward moving character of this class, as “the hope of India,” overlook the ways international competition and new forms of wealth have reified aspects of gender, caste and class. Rather than finding the Indian middle class becoming more "modern" or adopting enlightenment principles, the powerful rise of Hindutva ideology has shown that this newly positioned cultural community is a key national player in activating the ideological current that combines support for neoliberal development and permeable commercial borders with a recast Indian nationalism and cultural-religious essentialism. Neither should these developments be construed as simply a retrograde cultural movement, even where local relationships of domination and subordination are enhanced by global competition. Instead, informalization and network-centered development has shifted Delhi’s economic organization further away from formal employment, historical business practices, the tightly amalgamated state, and conventional expectations of societal consciousness. Instead, the informal labor of women, children, lower castes, household servants,
and business employees, all compensated partly in kind, constitutes a spectrum of unfreedom, and forms one basis for the Indian middle class to pursue its aspiration to competitiveness in the global market.

Why do Indian middle class professionals have advantageous competitive opportunities for international jobs in comparison to their middle class counterparts from both core and peripheral nations? How are familial networks based on kinship used to subvert and appropriate state authority, and why is this tendency persistent, even as a chorus of middle class voices calls on political parties to provide less corruption and greater law and order? In what ways does the rational economic decision to hire informal labor in the home and business promote underdevelopment? Does neoliberalism bring about real development or merely overlay old economic relations with new commodities? To what extent does the famous distinction between old and new middle classes reflect transformations of family practices, or entry of new professional aspirants, and what is the extent of continuity? How are these Indian middle classes differently situated in the world economy and domestic civil society, as compared with middle classes in core countries? How is the Indian middle class distinctly situated in the world economy and domestic civil society? How does the combination of new opportunities for social mobility and kinships practices of parental and marriage market favor and economically perpetuate the preference for fair skin among the Indian middle class? What would lead a cosmopolitan Delhi middle class, deeply integrated in property markets, to so highly value gold and diamond jewelry as a medium of consumption and investment? What explains the persistence of caste privilege as an aid to family reproduction and social mobility, among middle classes that have ample financial and educational opportunities, who need no caste advantage to express their class dominance? How do aspirants to social mobility navigate the turbulence of a
neoliberal economy and find ways to use their backgrounds and the shifting economic currents to their advantage? How is economic insecurity and the potential for downward mobility experienced in the old Indian middle class, and how do their responses to this threat compare to the loss of confidence seen among the middle classes of core countries in the past twenty years? Under what circumstances can a legitimate and professional elite avail itself of a wide range of illicit goods and services, and in doing so, move the black market of Delhi through its own process of neoliberal expansion? All these questions and more are answered in the following chapters using the idea of Marx's patriarchal admixtures as a theoretical guidepost.

The spread and increasing competitiveness and global integration of capitalism’s markets under ‘neoliberalism’ has provided for the extensive rather than intensive penetration of capitalism in India. By focusing on the old Delhi middle class, my research illustrates how this movement is formal (not real) subsumption. This historic petty-bourgeois trader class has seen considerable expansion of the value of their property holdings and increases in profits from their small businesses, due to economic transformations in Delhi. However, rather than accumulate wealth in any of the senses ordinarily considered productive, they have used their augmented income to hire more informal workers in their businesses and homes, and made seemingly peculiar choices over which international commodities to purchase. Through my study of such families, we will see how each member of the family, together with their house and business informal workers, are part of city’s division of labor and reward that is politically negotiated through patriarchal power and kinship. My research ties this proliferation of informal service sector work to the competitive advantages of Indian middle class professionals internationally, through attention to the reproduction of the professional worker based upon the appropriation of
un-subsumed domestic labor in Delhi. Neoliberalism, both in India and the rest of the world, has unexpectedly increased the importance of kinship systems as these changes roll back social services, make employment less secure, and generally lay the burden of the reproduction of the worker more and more on informal economic relationships and between family members. This movement has given the Indian middle class a tremendous advantage, as they are able to harness the slight surplus they can generate from employing unskilled laborers in the home and business and “invest” this in the production of family members who can advance their family materially through the various options of social mobility. My dissertation shows the nuances of this transfer of value through the family system of labor and reward.

The observation that neoliberal development does not transform the relations of production from formal to real subsumption, particularly through expansion of the service sector rather than through manufacturing and in accordance with the increased international competition that constricts demand, suggests we ought to reevaluate some of the temporal assumptions of Marxism. If our economy is moving away from true capitalist exploitation and toward a kind of rentier capitalism, we must reevaluate the assumption that greater incorporation into the world economy leads to the proliferation of worker-capitalist relations of production, otherwise known as real subsumption. In the “Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour to Capital,” Marx argues that capitalism appropriates and deforms local relations of labor and reward to generate some profit for capital upon contact with pre-capitalist economies. However, for him this process is only a precursor to real subsumption when the relations of production are entirely subsumed and class relations undergo proletarianization through the introduction of productive technology that allows for true capitalist exploitation. Marx calls this a “Transitional Form,” because he assumes that these Frankensteinian relations are only temporary and will
ultimately be replaced by the uniformity of the conflict between workers and capitalists throughout the world.

Marx further argues that during real subsumption “the relations of production eliminate all patriarchal, political and even religious admixtures.” I argue that these admixtures are best understood as the relations of production from pre-capitalist formations, which continues to operate in distorted forms. The family is an economic unit that usually includes at least two kinds of patriarchal admixtures, those of gender and age. By this, I mean that these two identity distinctions afford greater political control or power over the division of labor and rewards within the family economic unit. In my study I show a diversity of patriarchal admixtures are indeed at work in the Indian middle class family unit. I have described the admixtures within the family as *patriarchal* even though they are not solely based on distinctions of gender. Rather, the family itself is a patriarchal institution in which even admixtures, like caste, are not primarily characterized by their religious quality but rather by patriarchal domination in the family.

*Admixtures* can be seen as structural pieces of the relations of production at the micro-level, which are not relations between worker and capitalist. In particular, *patriarchal admixtures* are social relations of domination and exploitation constituted as families, between individuals. In short, patriarchal admixtures reflect traditional extra-economic authority, conditioned by caste, gender, age, birth order, etc. However, they are not merely prejudices. For just as when prejudice is combined with power it becomes racism, so too casteism, sexism, and patriarchy ultimately provide economic benefits only when coupled with an advantageous class position and material reproduction. They are indeed a form of political control that allows one individual to exploit another based on individualistic traits, but they are subservient to class, as will be shown.

However, suffice to say, I propose the category of patriarchal admixtures as an analytical tool of
Marxist discourse. The term preserves Marx’s differentiation between capitalism and non-capitalist forms, as in terms such as "pre-capitalist formations" or the "lumpenproletariat."

Patriarchal admixtures are situated in the relations of production in direct contrast to worker-capitalist consciousness and political struggle. They are akin to "traditional authority," but remove the traditional/modern distinction. Removing the temporal aspect in naming these relationship of political and economic power, enabling my argument to remove the implicit directionality in Marx's formulation, using Marx's very own ideas and terminology.

Additionally, calling these relations patriarchal admixtures, as with Meillassoux’s "patriarchal slavery," shows how un-subsumed labor, though not the norm of the dominant mode of production, fuel the reproduction of the family (Meillassoux 1991). Meillassoux’s study of African slavery shows how slavery in the home was part of the economic system of kinship, rather than part of the slavery mode of extraction used in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Using his insights, we can observe that even pre-capitalist formations are not uniform and we likely have no example of a society that did not include diverse admixtures—even if they had never been part of a primary mode of production. In the Indian context, the patriarchal admixtures of gender and age have persisted through the caste mode of production and the Indian variety of feudalism. Why would we expect that even with capitalism, and even in the most advanced core countries, these admixtures would completely fall away? They are woven into all of the different primary relations of production, and patriarchal admixtures are becoming more important during this neoliberal period as the primary, formally capitalist mode, is losing ground in the relations of production. For example, as people around the world become more religious, widely observed in the past forty years, we can see a movement away from proletarianization. Patriarchal admixtures are becoming more important as rentier capitalism encroaches on capitalist
production by slowing down the ability of capitalists to realize profits through investment manufacturing. And where patriarchal admixture are at their most potent, is where they most ready to take on the burden of a receding capitalism. Extra-economic domination is alive and well in the informal economy, the family, and within the economic operations of the lumpenproletariat.

Relationships outside of the formal capitalist-worker dialect, like caste and gender, are most meaningfully reproduced materially, not through ideology but through the political governance of labor and reward in the informal economy. As shown in the following chapters, family members and servants are expected to perform certain labor functions and receive compensation, not usually in the form of regular wages or a claim to patriarchal property, but through the decisions of the individual patriarch over other individuals based on identity distinctions. They are also subject to a range of unfreedoms and physical, financial, psychological and sexual abuse from those higher in the family hierarchy. They are not protected within the family system of exploitation by the state. Marx calls these relationships of “domination and subordination.” These relations of domination and subordination are of a capitalist-worker nature in capitalism and are largely conditioned by the state’s enforcement of property ownership over one’s own labor or capital. However, in the family they are comprised by patriarchal admixtures and extra-economic coercion.

When neoliberalism transforms the economy through extensive rather than intensive penetrations of capitalism, it subjects more individuals to the fickle compulsions of capitalism to procure a livelihood, but it does not transform labor relations through technological changes in production. To take one example, in India the toilet cleaner is a widespread caste distinction. In the village, before capitalist penetration, members of this caste would clean the toilets (among
sundry unclean tasks) of everyone in the village under religious and physical compulsion, with meagre compensation. Now, in Delhi, middle class families hire a member of this caste, who is now under the compulsion of capitalism, to clean their toilets. In exchange, these workers receive a small wage that is supplemented through gifts of food, clothing, and the opportunity to ask for loans. As Marx writes, these relations continue to operate on non-capitalist suppositions, but “their relations are in ruin,” because they have been altered by capitalism to no longer give the livelihood security that these relations once promised. In the following chapters, I show how families choose to buy TVs and air conditioning, and how the enjoyment of these commodities, particularly by servants who have come to Delhi from rural areas, is given as a supplement to achieve a greater wage in use values. On the other hand, these families do not buy dishwashers or washing machines and instead choose to continue to pay a low skilled laborer a meager wage to undertake such tasks for the family. By showing the similarity of the conditions of labor and reward among family members as part of a continuum with the servants, my dissertation explains how un-subsumed labor goes into reproducing the family along with maintaining a system of underdevelopment described by Marx and elaborated by Samir Amin throughout his career. Ultimately, my dissertation shows how all this informal labor is invested into the reproduction of the family and their products—the value of the children as income-earners in international capitalism.

With the American family taking on more of the burden of reproduction of the worker as social services and employment security recede, the value of having a large and intricate economic system to support the reproduction of the family has become more important in the global competition for professional jobs. The kinship economy of the Delhi middle class has given educated Indians with a petty-bourgeois background advantages in comparison to the
fading benefits accompanying growing up in core countries, such as libraries, public sanitation, good schools, access to textbooks, after-school programs, playgrounds, etc. Instead, Delhi children have the undivided attention of their parents for long periods each day and are not asked to do chores outside of studying. Naturally, there are several reasons, such as the colonial language and the strong-state sponsored educational system, for the success of Indian students eventually able to obtain internationally coveted positions but so, too, the informal laborers employed in the home and businesses of middle class families. The material bases of worldwide competition for professional employment can be expressed as follows:

Each of my chapters’ attempts to capture one set of informal economic structures that are materially reproduced within the family. Throughout, I point out how relations of domination and subordination become material through the work of patriarchal admixtures. In doing so, I am able to trace the reproductions of most of these patriarchal admixtures to their benefits to world (or local) capitalism. However, patriarchal admixtures are also where the culture finds its material reproduction and continuity, and patriarchal admixtures can be seen as more diverse than gender, caste, age and so forth. In my study, I show how there are subtler distinctions which have material effects within the family unit and on the broader economy.
In the introductory chapter of my dissertation, my ethnographic evidence has shown that middle class people view the conflict between themselves and those living on the street as part of a patriarchal admixture of native urban privilege. I illustrate how the longer one spends in public, the greater the political right that person has over the public area. While crowds of men can be supremely threatening to a middle class woman, if women are in their regular neighborhoods they gain a greater political right to the space. On the other hand, middle class people negate their possible obligation to help the great number of extremely poor people living on the street by justifying it as a matter of choice to migrate to the city. The attitude of my middle class research participants was that the people on the street had a better life in Delhi, even when they are clearly dying of poverty, and were fundamentally less civilized due to their origin in the village. In understanding how the most obvious class divide in public society, that between the middle class and the lumpenproletariat, is cloaked in subtle rural-urban distinctions that take account of time spent in Delhi. Here we can see how migrations to Delhi have been occurring nearly continuously for at least a century and do not appear to be letting up. This is obviously similar to what Marx describes with respect to peasants being forced off their land. However, this migration does not seem temporary at all, and these individuals are not traveling to the city to find factory work that would subsume their labor. This is precisely why I would like to think of Marx's "Transitional Forms," not as transitions, but as combined forms that include patriarchal admixtures even in formal employment relations and clear class differences.

In my second chapter on the family unit as an economic unit, I detail all the labor, rewards, decision making powers and freedoms of a family unit of thirty-eight people, which includes the servants and informal laborers in the business. In the terms of Meillassoux's discussion of patriarchal slavery, these informal economic relations represent a spectrum of
unfree labor, rewards given in goods rather than money, and the political ability to violently enforce obligations and restrict the movement of family members and informal laborers, as decided by the patriarch. My use of the term "patriarchal" in patriarchal admixtures, is not to gender all power, but rather to remove the distinction between the inequality between genders, castes, ages, and other identity-based categories, based on Marx and Meillassoux's observations.

In chapter two, and throughout, patriarchal power is diffused all the way down, with mothers beating their children, older laborers restricting younger laborers, and allocation of tasks and compensation through divisions of caste, age and gender. In the second chapter I show how the family is a cohesive economic unit where middle class people lose little by allowing their laborers to eat extra food or watch TV, and these benefits are a major reason servants choose to have jobs that pay so little and do not provide protections. The informal relation is mutually beneficial and has plenty of attached economic incentives for both employer and employee, although they are fraught with theft and violence.

In the third chapter I show the micro-economy of sibling rivalry and parental favoritism. I show how parents reward children materially for traits they feel will produce adults that will raise the middle class position of the family. The three favored traits I identify as patriarchal admixtures which provide a benefit within the family economy to certain individuals over others are skin tone, aggressiveness, and being "practically minded," which is an ethnographically produced category. In each, irrespective of gender and birth order, children whom are perceived to have these favored traits are encouraged to dominate their siblings and are given more goods, freedoms, and the ability to influence family decisions. Additionally, I show how these patriarchal admixtures materially reproduce the local culture within the context of capitalism. For instance, I show how girls with fairer skin are able to negotiate better marriage contracts and
raise their own families’ station through their particular and individual characteristics of perceived beauty and potential to fairer children. This makes the perception of fairness an important feature in middle class marriages because families sometimes look for fairer brides from lower middle class background in order that their upper middle class grandchildren will be fairer, and better able to compete with other members of the Indian middle class. Another potent competitive feature of patriarchal admixtures is illustrated through parents’ promotion of ruthless pragmatism among their children, materially reproducing the aggressive culture and economy that has come to characterize Delhi, in comparison to other places in India.

In my fourth chapter, I show how the consumption practices of housewives must go through particular patriarchal channels. Therein, I explain how some of the structural restrictions of the city impose certain gender differences in spending. In this chapter I illustrate how women negotiate spending money, house redecoration, food consumption, and the freedom to leave the house for enjoyment, with their husbands. Through this, I am able to show how women reinforce one another's' patriarchal relationships with their husbands. Exclusively female parties who are focused on buying diamonds and gold create an incentive system among wives to obtain social prestige through negotiating more profitably, or complying more fully with husbands’ behaviors. I illustrate how husbands who beat their wives but give freely are actually considered better, both by their wives and their wives’ female friends, than a husband who is gentle but miserly or controlling. In doing so, I explain in part why middle class Indians choose to buy gold and diamonds as a substantial proportion of their family income, even to the extent of affecting India’s foreign exchange balance. Additionally, I show three other patriarchal admixtures that condition wives’ consumption practices.
In my fifth chapter, I follow a supplier of illicit services through his day and document his activities. He sells guns, drugs, prostitution, along with arranging bank and hospital fraud, car-racing and betting, and appropriates police power and thugs to carry out personal vendettas for the middle class. As neoliberalism has expanded the consumer market, there has been a corresponding effect on the black market. With the individual who arranges these services, I show how he draws on his kinship system to support his business. His three "uncles" provide him with political protections, and his distribution network comes out of the ties he made as a child in prestigious schools. His family experienced downward mobility when a servant stole their money, but this individual has drawn on support from his network, particularly older men in his family, to make a monthly income that will keep himself, his mother and two aunts in middle class circumstances. Had this man sold his labor on the formal market, the family would not be able to subsist nearly so well. However, through the political advantages of his kinship system and his network growing up as an upper-middle class person, he has taken every opportunity to profit from the black market in Delhi.

In the conclusion of my dissertation, I discuss at some length the justification and explanation for patriarchal admixtures and combined forms of social relations, in contrast to other theories of articulation. I argue that these transitional forms would be better called combined forms to dislocate the otherwise implied directionality. I take this term from Leon Trotsky’s idea of combined and uneven development (1931). In his idea, while capitalism moves unevenly it is still moving toward full capitalism. However, in combined forms, seen to this day in India, there is no necessary directionality, at least as it would arise from the local non-investment-centric economic process. Rather, patriarchal admixtures and combined forms allows us to see combinations in the relations of production in both peripheral and core places as simply
different proportions of admixtures and real subsumption, not as fundamentally dissimilar or in
different times or stages. In the end, I argue that we need to rethink our temporal assumptions
when it comes to the relations of production and subsumption.
Chapter Two

Divisions of Labor within the Family Economy

From my perspective, we do an injustice to the complexity of human relationships when we call them simply economic, familial, or loving. In this chapter, I will give a rich picture of the economic and historical basis of a Delhi middle class family, while also giving attention to the emotional underpinnings of these kinship relations. The family presented here owns a petty-bourgeois business in Old Delhi and is consciously planning for their children to obtain employment in the US upon maturity. In this study, I document in detail the six primary family members and eight of their service employees. This family’s hotel and transportation business in Chandni Chowk generates their primary income. They employ eight servants at their home and approximately twenty-five workers in their business. At each point, I document the primary activities and duties of family members and employees, and when appropriate, give salary and benefit levels. While I do contextualize the personalities and specific situations of each member of this enterprise, I also argue that the whole group—family members, servants and business workers—are all positioned in a family division of labor within a distinct family economic unit. This family division of labor has expanded under neoliberal economic change and utilizes patriarchal forms of exploitation to organize the sale of commodities in international markets. The research presented in this chapter is unique because it shows the family division of labor as including a large number of informal workers. To view the middle class family in the context of their employees gives tremendous insight into their local and international economic role. As the reader will observe, this family system is sophisticated in how it translates the small surpluses of its unskilled workers into a value recognizable to world capitalism and enables the family compete with other members of the middle class, both locally and internationally.
This family present, like all the families with whom I worked for this research, comes from a trader caste in the Punjab. They are not Jats, but rather, their ancestors were a merchant class and caste that operated businesses in urban areas. This family identifies as Sikh, but they are not religiously observant: they do not wear distinguishing accessories like turbans or visit the Gurdwara often. In addition, they have kept their caste surname. They have members in their own extended family who are Hindu, and they politically identify with the BJP. Within the caste hierarchy, they possess a high, Kshatriya, distinction, even while their caste name is also being associated with commercial activities. Throughout my three months of research living with them, and my long acquaintance with their family, I never found that they socially associated with people of different caste backgrounds. But in economic interactions—their most frequent interactions—with informal workers in their home and business, they most directly related to people of lower caste backgrounds. I have noted when this was not the case throughout this chapter. Although this family is Sikh, they never spoke to me of their religious practice or belief and rather portrayed to me a rather secular attitude of pragmatism. As with many of my research participants, this family merely viewed Sikhism as a form of Hinduism. In this chapter, the reader will see how their family experience of the Partition and the 1984 Delhi riots against Sikhs has led them to this perspective on their religion. Naturally, individuals widely differ in their religious adherence in all societies, and so, too, is the case with the Indian middle class. However, this particular family is not religious by most measures, although their caste and religious background continues to be important for their business and social network. For these reasons, religion should not be seen in terms of the traditional/modern dichotomy, for as we will see below in the organization of informal labor, contemporary social and economic conditions have favored the reproduction of long-standing practices but often in new ways.
As merchants working in their own shops, these traders could well be called petty-bourgeois in the terms of Western social theory, but their economic location has a rather different historical quality than the small business owners and artisans of core countries. The continuity of their economic caste role as traders under new neoliberal conditions offers a point of reference to the practices of reproduction that merchants found constructive in earlier generations. This trader caste distinction, as observed as part of petty-bourgeois class cooperation in Delhi, is more fully explored in other chapters with other families of the same caste background. These traders are certainly not being replaced by larger manufacturers and retailers, sinking into the proletariat, or alternatively investing in a new industrial revolution. In addition to the organization of their economic interrelations partly through caste, they also differ from archetypal petty-bourgeois in that they have employees to whom they relate through extra-economic relations of domination and subordination, as will be illustrated below. So, I argue, these are not simply small capitalists who call themselves middle class, but city merchants of moderate wealth who actively use their access to patriarchal admixtures to maintain a competitive place in a very competitive economy and city.

The Grandmother

“This house is safe. Don’t go, stay here with me,” the old woman rasped. Her weak fingers squeezed one of my wrists. Her body was tense. Her eyes searched my face for the signs of understanding, and her tone implored me to believe her words. We sat on her bed. Her room was adjacent to the front hallway, making it easy to keep an eye on those entering the house from the large stately door reserved for family and company. Whenever a family member came or went, they would briefly stop in this room to pay their respects. Indeed, she seemed to live
almost entirely in this room, as a perpetually honored guest. Her son, a powerful, intimidating man, could not leave for work each morning without bowing down to touch her feet and waiting for her to caress his lowered head. She was magnanimous with her blessings, and would rarely speak to a family member without kind praise. I, too, had come to partake in receiving blessings, but that day was different. I had been planning to meet a friend for lunch and had only visited her room as custom, but I was caught off guard by the intensity of her expression. I succumbed. “I will stay with you,” I said, which seemed to alleviate her anxiety. She let go of my wrists, her eyes closed, and she fell back against the headboard in a sigh of relief. At the time, I knew she thought the Delhi streets were unsafe for women, but I could not comprehend the feelings that seemed to lay just beneath her words.

Achel was born in Lahore in 1932. Her father was a wealthy merchant, and the family lived in a stately townhouse in the city. However, they frequently traveled to a more rural area of the Punjab where they owned ancestral land. When she spoke of her days in Lahore, her voice was mixed with joy and loss. Achel had loved reading, singing and daily trips to her older sister’s house down the road where she would spend hours talking and sharing secrets. Her sister, Meera, had been like a second mother to Achel. She recalls with glee how Meera loved to eat pudina chutney, covering everything she ate with the green sauce. The family would tease her sister, “Is it the right shade of green?” Achel had been very happy when Meera had married into a family close to home. At 15, and as the youngest, Achel was the only daughter still living in her family’s house when the Partition came in 1947.

Although there had been riots in the city for months, the Partition broke into Achel’s life quite suddenly. Her father had been out all day and had missed the appointed dinner hour. Achel and her mother were sitting at the table waiting for him to return when he suddenly charged
through the door in a panic. He instructed them to pack everything they could in the next three hours, because he had arranged for a van to drive them to Amritsar where they would stay with relatives temporarily. Achel’s question to her father, which seemed to still haunt her after so many years, was “Is Meera coming with us?” As she repeated these words to me, her voice cracked. Her father said that Meera had already left and was safely in Amritsar. Achel packed her belongings and eventually boarded a van with her parents, older brother, and her uncle’s family. The trip between the cities is only 50 km, but the trip that night took over six hours. Achel could not see outside, but she could hear screaming voices as the van slowly dragged through the crowds. After a long, terrifying night, they safely arrived at her mother’s sister’s house, only to find that Meera had not arrived. Achel waited. She waited for six days before her father announced that they would travel to another relative’s home in Delhi. Achel did not want to leave. She begged her father to let her stay in Amritsar for a few more days to wait for Meera. Achel promised to come with Meera and her husband’s family to Delhi, after they arrived safely in Amritsar. That was when her father told her that Meera’s van had been overtaken, and, although he did not know what happened, he told Achel that after six days, it was “unlikely” Meera had survived. Achel seemed to mark this event, six days after they left Lahore, as the moment that defined her early years. When she repeated her father’s word ‘unlikely’ she cast down her watery eyes and rocked gently. She said the word again, ‘unlikely.’ The word had trapped her in uncertainty – she would never know what happened to Meera.

Achel’s family lost their business, house, and land due to the Partition. When they arrived in Delhi, they were a great burden on the relatives who hosted them, and Achel endured insults and abuses. After only two months with her relatives, she was abruptly married into another Sikh family, one that her family had known in Lahore. Although she was only 15, and had never
met her intended husband before the ceremony, she was glad to leave her relatives’ house. Her family could not provide her with a proper dowry or wedding, but made arrangements with her husband’s family that they would give them gifts after they had reestablished themselves. Unlike her mother before her, or her daughters after, Achel was not given a single piece of jewelry on her wedding day. She reports that the time between arriving in Delhi and the birth of her first son, one year later, was the hardest in her life.

Her husband, Amit, carefully guarded both her health and her happiness. He would not let his uncle, the patriarch of the family, criticize her family’s misfortune. When recalling the early years of her marriage, she expressed gratitude toward her husband. He had worked long hours in his uncle’s sari shop, happily leaving her to her own devices. She would be left to pursue her interests or read aloud to the other women of the house in the secluded rooms they shared. Achel’s recollection of her husband’s house betrayed her sadness at its eventual loss. She gave birth to each of her five children in that house until she lost her home again in 1984.

Her life away from public affairs likely added to the abruptness by which historical events seemed to transpire in Achel’s narrative. Her husband’s house had been in a crowded area of Old Delhi near his family’s business in Chandni Chowk. On October 31, 1984, she had been visiting with her married daughter and her five-year-old granddaughter, when they heard an angry crowd tearing down their street. None of her male relatives were in the house and she could not contact her husband. Before leaving the house, without an escort for the first time in her life, she took her two most valuable possessions: her jewelry box and a packet of letters she had collected over the years. When she described the events of that night, she motioned for me to retrieve a bejeweled box she had left open on her dresser. The box was filled with aged paper, folded into a neat stack. She thumbed the pages, selecting one from her living sister to show
me—it announced the birth of her nephew. Her tears swelled, only to ebb again as she moved on in her tale.

On the first night of the anti-Sikh riots, Achel went to her Hindu neighbor’s house. She had been friendly with the family, but had never met their son before. He drove Achel, her daughter and granddaughter out of the city. She reunited with her husband and his uncle in a hotel in Noida. They stayed there for almost a week, never to move back into their old house. It had been ransacked, and their sari shop looted. Her hands gripped the gold encrusted box of letters tightly as she spoke. She said “That is when we started building this house.” She seemed happy when she declared, “I will die here!”

Achel’s role in the family is probably the least economic. She bestows blessings, keeps up her correspondence with the oldest generation of the family, and serves as a kind of memory-keeper or family historian. I began this section with her urging me to stay in the house and not put myself at risk on the streets of Delhi, because concern for my safety was her primary focus of many conversations. She freely and easily brought up the topic of the Partition, which would regularly unravel into tears and expressions of continued fears of political unrest. To my knowledge, while I stayed with them for three months, Achel only left the house two times, both occasions were to attend funerals.

Achel’s role as a grandmother was to warn the younger women of the dangers outside of the house. The house in East Delhi on the left bank of the Yamuna is Achel’s entire realm. Even when the family goes out to eat, she does not join them. I have chosen to begin this chapter with the grandmother because understanding her as an ethnographic subject is fundamental to seeing the relationship between history and the current conditions that women in Delhi face. Achel does not trust the state. She experienced the betrayal of the Partition, when her family had been told
that their home in Lahore would be incorporated into India. In that conflict she lost her beloved sister amongst other relatives. Again in 1984, the Congress-sponsored riots against Sikhs endangered her safety, and she was again forced to flee her home. In that conflict she lost more relatives. Although Achel had been practicing seclusion throughout her life, the failures of the state to protect her, even in her home, comprise the worst events in her life—events from which she has not fully recovered. Although I introduced her story with her warning me in particular to stay inside, she periodically repeated such warnings to all of the women in the house. Although both the men and women in the family would visit her room when they were leaving the house, every blessing she gave to her daughter-in-law and granddaughter had a fearful warning attached.

Throughout this chapter, and throughout the entire dissertation, this particularly female agoraphobia in Delhi will continue to pervade family relations. In the introduction, I present how women view the mobs of men who crowd the streets. Later in this chapter, I outline the various forms of unfreedom that other family members and informal laborers have in this family system that restrict access to the city. However, beginning with the grandmother, we can see how unfreedom is not always, even not usually, actively enforced by a patriarch. Without a male escort, women of all classes find themselves restricted from many areas of the city during a great number of hours each day, for fear of their safety. These are absolutely legitimate fears. However, through Achel, who has lived through nine decades, we can see how the current epidemic of violence against women on the Delhi streets is a product of a long history of gendered violence and the inability of the state to protect even its wealthier citizens from angry mobs. In the following section of this chapter, the reader will meet Achel’s daughter-in-law Sakshi and her granddaughter Vera, and observe how Achel’s experience and daily anxieties
have an inter-generational influence on the forms of unfreedom which are imposed upon women by their families as well as by their own self-imposed restriction, in addition to their views on the threat of violence in public.

The Mother

Sakshi, Achel’s daughter-in-law, paced between her dining room table and kitchen. Her flowing dress had a heavily beaded trim that flapped against itself when she would jolt in the opposite direction. She looked towards the door as she murmured, “Where is he? When is he coming home?” She hit the redial button on her phone. “Why isn’t he here yet?” Redial again. Sometimes her anxiety would overcome her and she would run to the front door to peer out of a small window. After about forty minutes, and forty or so redials, she noticed that I was sitting at her table watching her. She came over and I urged her to sit next to me and take some tea. Sakshi was not comfortable in her chair and she crumbled the tea biscuit in her fingers without bringing it to her mouth. She rubbed her hands together, unconsciously touching the major acupuncture points in her palms; then she pulled her long fingers a little longer. This seemed to soothe her, and she stopped murmuring. I touched her shoulder and said, “I called him, too. He will come.”

It was not unusual for Sakshi to call her son fifty times, or more, in a row. She seemed to live through the movement of people in and out of the house. At her dining table, she could see the backdoor to the kitchen where the servants would enter, and the hallway that connected the elaborate front door used by family and guests to the other parts of the house. Part of her concern about her family members leaving the house was constructed by the media portrayals of crime in Delhi. Her image of Delhi was heavily mediated, as she only left the house under the conditions of her brother or son escorting her to her parent’s house, or her husband escorting her to a luxury
restaurant or wedding. She had very little direct experience with the Delhi public, despite having lived in Delhi throughout her life. However, it was not the danger on the streets which tortured this mother over her son’s whereabouts, but rather the danger at home. Her husband would be home soon.

The most important job Sakshi had was making sure her children were there when her husband arrived home after work. She and her daughter were almost always there, but her son would parade about town well into the night, ignoring both her calls and the severe repercussions that befell both of them, should her husband arrive at the house before her son. Her husband, Akshay, had been trained in law before he inherited his father’s business, and he had retained his practice of ruthless interrogation. When he arrived home, his wife and children would each be questioned, and more often than not, found wanting. If their adult son, Mina, age 23, was not home, no one was spared until he arrived. To make matters worse, Akshay did not keep entirely regular hours. Sometime he would arrive at 5PM, sometimes 9PM, and sometimes he would arrive entirely without warning in the middle of the day. Whenever he did arrive, each family member was expected to report for inspection.

It was 6 PM and Akshay was not home yet. As Sakshi’s efforts at redial were waning, we were on our fourth cup of tea, and I could tell she was becoming exhausted. She said, “Mina is out driving around with that Vishram isn’t he?” I nodded. She asked, “What do you think of him? Is he a good boy?” We both knew the answer, though I took pains to word it vaguely: “You know how men can be.” She agreed, “He is not a good boy.” This admission seemed hard for her. She was not just talking about Vishram, but Mina, too. Whenever Mina came home after spending time with Vishram, he would be drunk. This thought seemed to renew her anxiety, and she resumed her efforts to call him. She was trying to get him home to save him from his father’s
anger, but on the other end of the line, I suspected that Mina was in a chemically-induced oblivion.

Sakshi is a stately woman. She stands at 5’10”, with broad shoulders and sharp features. She usually wears a long flowing dress, akin to a gown. Her eyes are large, and because she usually refrains from articulating her thoughts, her eyes regularly provided the only source of information about how she feels. When she was with her son or daughter, her eyes would sparkle and she would watch them as though they were something miraculous. When neither of them were with her, her eyes would show anxiety and her brow would furrow. She would repeatedly ask about them and try to call them. Many members of her family commented to me on how unhappy she seemed with her husband. When Akshay was in her presence, she would cast her eyes down, and a painful look of resignation—almost despair—would come across her face. She would avoid his attention at all costs, and I never actually saw her speak to him, although I was in their mutual company a great deal. He sometimes talked at her in front of me, but her look of resignation was the only answer she ever gave. Their conversations always took place outside of view in their room, where a large, framed, formal picture hung over their bed. In the picture she was not smiling and her eyes showed the same look of painful resignation as he stood above her, with a hand on her shoulder. During these conversations he usually yelled, and his booming voice would carry throughout the house. The other members of the family would look pained, trying, unsuccessfully, to talk casually over the yelling.

Sakshi moved into this house in East Delhi on the left bank of the Yamuna after her marriage in 1988. She had just completed her baccalaureate degree in English Literature at the age of 21. Since then, she had redecorated the house sixteen times. In its most recent edition, the house awkwardly resembled a Roman villa. Faux pillars lined the walls, and a large statue
resembling a modestly-clad Venus stood in the middle of the receiving area, as though to stand in place of a fountain. A massive winding staircase next to the statue gave anyone descending from the second floor a rather dramatic aura. The bottom floor housed her mother-in-law, Achel, along with her father-in-law, Amit. It also had a formal living room, dining room, and large kitchen, where the servants enter and the female servants sleep at night. Each day Sakshi would organize the activities of approximately eight house servants. There was a guard with a gun sitting outside the massive metal gate covered in barbed wire, which separates the house from the street. Four male servants would sleep between the gate and house. Their female counterparts slept in the kitchen.

Sakshi would wake them at 6 AM, and manage their activities as they prepared an elaborate breakfast. Sakshi always had the servants prepare at least five, and sometimes as many as fifteen, dishes for each meal. The family would not eat even half of the food, so the other half would go to their servants after it sat on the table for several hours. The courses consisted of widely varied foods: American-style frozen tater-tots and Indian-style Manchurian vegetable dotted the table alongside the usual favorites like dal makni and paranthas. During meals, Sakshi and her daughter would both avoid eating as much as was socially feasible. The family regularly comment on their lack of appetite and encourage them to eat more. When other people sat at her table, it seemed as though Sakshi could not eat because she was too anxious that others enjoy themselves. On the other hand, her daughter simply seemed entirely indifferent to the food, and, to the extent possible, her family. Although the servants made the dishes, Sakshi would take care of the special requests herself. One day I asked if they had yogurt, thinking it was already in the house. Immediately, she sent her male servant to buy the yogurt, and less than five minutes later, she was personally spooning it onto my plate. Indeed, whenever she thought of anything anyone
might need, she would immediately send a servant to retrieve it. During the days I spent with her, she consistently stayed in the house when her husband was at work.

After breakfast, around 10 AM, she would retreat to her bath for several hours. Two of the female servants would clean and do laundry, while the others attended to her. The woman who attended to her had once worked in a salon, and Sakshi would emerge downstairs around 2 PM with her hair, makeup, and nails all perfectly done to match the elaborate gowns she would wear. At this time, lunch would be served. She never had company in the afternoon, and indeed, I never saw a single visitor in the house during my three-month stay. On only one occasion, escorted by her son Mina, we all went to visit her parents in Noida. They lived on the upper level of an apartment complex with her brother and his family. During our visit, Sakshi barely spoke, except to protest the number of bread pakoras heaped onto her plate. A bread pakora consists of two slices of white bread, cut into triangles, battered and deep fried, sometimes with a bit of seasoned potatoes between. Sakshi was clearly overwhelmed by her mother’s strong demands that she consume more pakoras. Her mother was so aggressive that we ended up consuming more than an entire loaf of bread between us. Sakshi ate six pakoras, Mina ate twelve, and I ate seven, while Sakshi’s mother, on the other hand, did not eat a single pakora! Neither of her parents seemed particularly approving toward her, and she shrank in their gaze.

But the hardest part of her day was when her husband Akshay came home. He is a regular tyrant of a man and would bellow for at least an hour on arrival. Some nights he would take her out to meet business contacts—a semi-regular event that she clearly disliked. I accompanied them several times, and each time, I watched her become completely excluded from conversation, which usually centered on her husband’s business. One night, we went to meet two Ukrainian women, whom I was told were in business with Akshay, at an expensive seafood restaurant.
Akshay and the women had a great number of drinks, one toast immediately followed by another. This continued until all of the blessings they could think of had been exhausted. I abstained in solidarity with Sakshi, and we talked quietly about a trip she had taken to America while her husband grew louder and louder, laughing with the women. After about four hours, Akshay dictated that we should go home. We were driven home by two male servants. When one of them opened the door for me, I could see he was carrying a gun. Inside the back of the massive, black SUV, Sakshi looked nervous. Our conversation turned toward the issue of safety on the Delhi streets. She said, “There is no law and order here. My sister went to Saudi Arabia with her husband and said there is no crime there. The only hope for Delhi is if they start to cut off hands for stealing.” As we pulled up to the house, I asked why Akshay had not accompanied us home, and she answered, “He will go to their hotel with them.” I did not ask further questions at the time, but in later conversation with her son, I learned that his father regularly sleeps with Eastern European prostitutes, and his mother has known for years. I asked why she does not leave him, to which Mina replied: “Her parents will not support her. Even when I was young and he would beat her, they would not help her. I tell her to leave him, but she will not. He would take everything from her. What can I do?”

On the other hand, Sakshi seemed happiest when she could spend time with her daughter. The room that was temporarily designated as my room, located on an empty third floor where no family member lived, was used as storage for Sakshi’s and her daughter Vera’s dresses. They had matching gowns in slightly different styles which lined the walls of the room. All the gowns shared the qualities of being sleeveless, with a V-neck and a floor-length hem. Most of the dresses were also adorned with semi-precious stones. There were around thirty of them, and I marveled at the remarkable consistency of the dresses, until I discovered their origin.
Periodically, a tailor would visit their house with magazines, and pieces of fabric they might want to buy. Sitting in the living room, the man would lay out the pieces on the floor, and enthusiastically promote specific fabrics and designs, until Sakshi or Vera found something that caught their eye. I noticed that they would choose fabrics and designs through consensus, which no doubt contributed to their formal attire looking remarkably similar. From my understanding, these dresses were only intended to be used once. To appear at more than one wedding in the same dress, I was told, “Does not look good.”

Sakshi primarily contributes to the family division of labor as manager of the household. She is responsible for organizing the activities of four female servants and three male servants at the house. She directs meals, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and other servant's duties. She also attends to the needs of her family members and makes many of the consumer purchasing decisions for the household. Further, she attends business dinners with her husband, visited their relatives, and made sure their inter-family system of gift-exchange and social event-attendance was fulfilled. According to my estimations, based on recording her daily time management over the course of fifteen days, she spends approximately four hours a day interacting with the servants, two hours attending to her appearance and approximately two hours fulfilling social obligations. However, she spends largest portion of her time sitting with her daughter, either socializing or helping her study. Sakshi spends at least ninety minutes supervising her daughter while she interacts with her math tutor and at least one hour tutoring her daughter in English herself. During the summer months when school is out, Sakshi and her daughter estimate that they spend roughly six hours a day studying together. Sakshi recalls that when she would try to help Mina with studying, he would throw a temper tantrum until she relented. She said, “Mina was so naughty, I was always down at his school talking to teachers.”
Sakshi’s role is as manager for both the servants and her children. The informal laborers are woken up, directed, and compensated by her. As we will see, she also keeps watch over those servants who are not allowed to leave the house without a good reason. Over her children she also enforces, or tries to enforce, a curfew. Neither of her children has attended special educational programs, camps or other forms of study groups. As neither is required to do any household maintenance, the only real obligation with which they must comply is to visit the occasional relative. As I will argue later on, the time this mother is able to devote to her children’s needs and studies is important to their reproduction as laborers, able to compete with the middle class in core countries.

Sakshi maintains the different privileges among members of the household with two consistent distinctions. First, she restricts the moral behavior and movement of her female staff and daughter more than for her son and the male staff. However, the men also have some restriction of their movement, as will be explored more fully in the following section. Second, Sakshi does not allow her daughter to neglect her studies, while she admits to letting her son get out of studies. Also, the rewards of freedom, influence, and more expensive commodities go to her son, in spite of his “naughty” behavior. As the chapter progresses, the reader will see more differences in the roles of daughter and son in this family, although both have the sole job to study.

The Daughter

“Delhi has too many low class people. In London everyone is very stylish and clean. I want to live in London or New York City. Here you cannot even walk outside without someone making comments,” said Vera. Sakshi’s daughter primarily kept to two rooms upstairs and rarely
left the house for any reason other than to go to school. Her bedroom was always very chilly, with the air conditioner turned up, and a large flat screen TV that played whatever happened to be on HBO, turned to silent. Her exceptionally long limbs would be strewn about the pillows, and she would lie back against the headboard of her bed while messaging her friends. Although she was largely confined to the house, she rarely interacted with the members of her family besides her mother, spending most of her time with her eyes turned down towards her phone. Unless her father was home, she took her meals in her room on a tray. The only other time she would spend downstairs was when her math tutor would come to the house. He was a young, rather handsome, college student, which warranted her mother’s supervision. Unlike her brother Mina, Vera was a good student, strong in math and science, and she is planning to be a doctor.

At the age of seventeen, Vera was in the process of applying to US schools, and for a few days, we worked on her applications together. This work was frequently interrupted by messages constantly appearing on her phone. After a few attempts to ask who was on the other line, the messages poured in at such a rate that she seemed to feel obligated to share. I asked again, and she started to blush while peering at me suspiciously. I pressed, and her smile widened with embarrassment until she finally confessed that it was a boy she liked. They had meet at a private middle school in Delhi, before his parents had responded to his delinquent behavior by sending him to a boarding school in Australia three years ago. She had not seen him since, but they had messaged on and off over the years. She was excited that in the last few months, he had been writing her messages about how he wanted to marry her. Without her parents’ knowledge, they were planning to apply to the same US schools in the fall. In Delhi, she was largely confined to the house and accepted her parents’ wishes that greatly restricted her movement; in contrast, the US was seen as a portal to many kinds of freedom. Even more than her hopes to be reunited with
her boyfriend, she was excited to wear the outfits she preferred. She often showed me on her computer outfits that she intended to wear. They largely consisted of short-shorts and midriffs. Already, her outfits were much more revealing than customary in Delhi. In many ways, she seemed to already live in the new, more “modern” city of her dreams.

One day she invited me to accompany her to the salon. She was planning to get light brown highlights in her waist-length hair. She had been meaning to change her hair for some time, but had not had an escort until she finally convinced her brother to drive her. The outfit she chose to wear was revealing by any standard—a sleeveless romper with a deep V-neck, and shorts that hung only a few inches below her hips. As we walked from the car into the salon, the only time we were out in public, her brother threatened the men around, bellowing abuses and oaths to the poor men standing in front of the entrance. Vera glided by, unbothered and relaxed, with her usual indifference.

Vera had visited her brother in the US the year before. He lived in a very small town in upstate New York, so she was well aware of the sharp rural-urban divide between New York City and the northern reaches of the state. She had become nervous when she lost a phone signal for the first time among the rolling hills that eventually become the Adirondacks. Vera emphasized to me that although Delhi is dirty, hot and dangerous, she would rather live in any city, rather than with people she considers lacking in cosmopolitan manners. Mina’s American girlfriend, who came from a lower class rural background in Upstate New York, was the primary target of her illustration. She listed the qualities that she found to be “backwards” when she met her last year: her uncouth eating habits, poor geographical knowledge of India, low-class English dialect, and what she viewed as a “pathetic” devotion to her brother. She was quite unkind when speaking about her, and the long list of unappealing attributes ended with a criticism of her
appearance—particularly her short nose, greyish skin and unkempt hair. She would regularly conclude by remarking that Mina’s girlfriend was “uncivilized.” I had the impression that many of those texts she constantly sent probably served to uphold a rather mean-girl approach to her high school social relations. She insisted to me that she would only apply to schools in major metropolitan areas where quality people dwell.

Vera has two primary jobs in her family division of labor. She must study very hard and achieve high marks. She did move between studying and texting almost constantly in her room. Her parents value good grades, but even more so, Vera herself hopes that studying hard and being able to attend college in another country will be her key to finding a life less like her mother’s and grandmother’s. The primary reason for this goal, given on numerous occasions, was the desire to be able to wear revealing outfits in public.

Vera’s desire to be scantily clad is not only an individual characteristic. Her views have been heavily influenced by her family history and her family members. For instance, on one occasion I went out to dinner to an expensive restaurant with her immediate family. She showed me three different potential outfits, all of which included sleeveless tops and short-shorts. After deciding which outfit was most suitable, she turned her attention to my wardroom. I had chosen a modest suit. Vera exclaimed, “You know my father will be there, right? You can wear whatever you want. You won't have any trouble with him there!” On this occasion, and others, her father introduced his daughter to several older male patrons at the restaurant. Her beauty, and the economic wherewithal to provide complete protection and social respect for her in her revealing outfit, seemed to be important to his business networking. Vera’s clothing choices, wholeheartedly approved by her family, seemed to be a representation of this family’s performance of a modern or liberal attitude. Additionally, Vera’s own prioritizing of education in
comparison to Mina and the view that she is the most practically-minded child has made her, the younger female sibling, the favorite of both her mother and father. Vera seems to view her own liberation as a woman to be tied to commodities. In Delhi, she is taken around in private cars to private events, which allows her to wear such clothing while almost entirely avoiding the public. Additionally, her ability to buy the most fashionable styles from Italy and the US (perhaps having made a complete round trip from one part of South Asia to another) is both part of her class position and part of her parents promoting this form of global commodity consumption.

On another occasion, when we were getting ready together, she most eloquently described the value of beauty, or rather, desirability. Once again, she advised me, “You see, those low class people do not deserve to see you. You are more beautiful than what they should see in their lives. If they see you they will want you, and they will be unhappy. They cannot afford to let their imaginations run away. And when they see you it takes something from you, too. You really need to let Mina drive you more.”

Vera’s activities and attitudes provide a valuable picture into the continuity and change among the generations. Vera really has two roles in the family system of labor and reward. First, her primary job each day is to study. She has no other obligations except for sometimes escorting her parents on an outing. However, she also has a second job. She is expected to support the family’s status in local social connections, likely out of concern for her marriage prospects. Unlike her brother, her staying within the house is, in some senses, a way that she increases her value in her ability to raise the family’s social standing. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, largely remaining in the house but wearing revealing clothing is the best way for her to reflect well on the family, because it shows they are able to protect her.
Vera’s clothing choices and ambitions also appear to be deeply connected to her grandmother’s fear of the public. When she is out in Delhi, her revealing outfits serve as a form of class distinction. The most straightforward indication of the class differential is her ability to move in public wearing clothes that would result in a loss of reputation or safety for less wealthy women. Another alternative connotation is that these clothes portray her suitability to live abroad. Vera herself attaches the freedom to wear revealing clothing to her interest in securing a job in the West in a cosmopolitan city. Her clothing indicates her class both in India and the potential to realize a middle or upper middle class status abroad through professional employment.

Further, the reader will notice how Vera’s idea of the potentially threatening men on the Delhi street is that they are “uncivilized.” This is quiet similar to the themes of the introductory chapter of this dissertation on native urban privilege. Here we see Vera extending the rural-urban distinction to Delhi and London. Indeed, it is possible that Vera’s intention to live abroad in the future explains why she is so cooperative with her restrictions about leaving the house for anything other than school. She is cooperative with her mother and grandmother in part due to their fears but also because she is able to carry on an entire social life through her phone. While she is understood to be studying, she is often talking to boys, buying make-up online, and coordinating her social status at school. Throughout my fieldwork I noticed a persistent trend among young people who would formally oblige their parents by not physically spending time alone with the opposite sex or out on the town, but instead would have long-standing, and sometimes multiple, online flirtations and relationships. In the case of Vera, and for many others, access to the internet is a lifeline of social contact. And just as importantly, parents are in a
constant struggle to survey their children’s online activities, as seen later in this chapter. We will soon see how Vera’s father has tried to monitor her use of social media.

The Female Servants

There were four female servants working in the house. One of the servants, Varsu, seemed to be perpetually washing the floor with a rag. She wanted to speak to me one day. Sakshi translated as we sat at the dinner room table with Varsu kneeling on the floor at our feet. The woman was very thin and old, about 70, Sikh, and wearing a sari that was not distinguishable from the cloth that she used on the floor. Sakshi had told me that she worked in the house as a matter of charity. She had worked for Sakshi’s family many years ago, before her husband had abandoned her. Varsu told me this story with extreme anguish in her weathered face and voice, weeping as she struggled to speak. She told me that her only daughter had died twenty years ago. Her daughter had been burned alive by her husband’s family only two weeks after their marriage. There had not been enough money to keep his family happy, and they were greedy people who had tried to take everything she owned. She had gone to the police many times since her daughter’s murder, but the police dismissed her accusation. After that, her husband had left her. Varsu had begged at the gates of a Gurdwara for several years before Sakshi happened to come across her. Sakshi had offered to help, and so Varsu had been living with them for the past twelve years. Sakshi later reported that Varsu should never be seen by Akshay lest she be thrown out. Afterwards, I noticed that Varsu would only clean if all the men of the house were away. Sakshi paid Varsu primarily in food, but would generally give her about ₹20 a day or ₹100 on individual occasions. Varsu was also allowed to sleep just outside of the kitchen some nights and given fresh water for drinking and bathing.
The four servants each have their own duties, rules of behavior, economic rewards, and productive value. In the first example of Varsu, her work in the house is similar to an act of charity from Sakshi. She cleans the floors, but the added value is minimal. Although the oldest, her poverty and inability to contribute more productive work actually mark her as lower than the other female servants. Unlike the other female servants, she is not allowed to sleep in the house. Instead she receives a sleeping spot outside the house but within the gated property. Additionally, she receives some extra food, holiday gifts and clean water, which supplement her wage of only ₹20, or $0.30, a day. The other female servants were also observed cleaning the floor, so it appears that this exchange with Varsu is largely conditioned by charity of a kind.

The second oldest servant was about forty years old, named Kushi. She had a daughter who would come with her to work. She did not sleep at the house but in a nearby slum with her husband and children. Kushi’s husband was demanding and abusive. She would regularly show up to work with evidence of physical abuse on her body. She apologized many times for bringing her daughter, but her husband would not allow the girl to attend school and she could not leave her daughter alone in the slum or with her husband. Her daughter was only six years old, and would spend all her time peering through door cracks or from under furniture. She would try to position herself so she could watch TV but remain unseen. Kushi’s primary job was to cook and clean the kitchen after each meal. She also served tea and snacks, as well as performed other odd jobs on a needed basis. For roughly six hours of work per day, Kushi and her daughter received food and a monthly salary of ₹5,000. During my stay, the family also gave her a loan, clothing, and helped with some of her daughter’s medical bills. She almost always left the house before nightfall to travel back to the slum. However, one night she was kept late at work, and her husband came to escort her home.
Kushi, was able to use her employment in this middle class home as a safe space to bring her child each day. Unlike in the slum where they lived, the house provided her daughter a clean and more entertaining environment. The girl would watch TV or sit behind the furniture in the living room to enjoy the air conditioning. Family members occasionally gave her a toy or sweets. Her mother, beside her regular wage of ₹ 5,000, which is customary for a servant who does not sleep at the house but does a substantial proportion of work, was also granted a loan. Kushi was clearly more involved in her own family economic unit than the other servants. Unlike them, she was married and lived in her own domicile. However, like them, she received a number of extra monetary benefits from employment in the house.

A third female servant was around twenty years old, named Deepa. She had come from Assam four years ago. In the house she rarely spoke to anyone and was obviously shy when I would try to speak to her. Her primary job was to attend to the hair, nails and other beauty needs of the three female family members. She spent most of her working hours on these tasks, cleaning, or serving, but appeared to have a significant amount of free time. Somewhat like Vera, Deepa had a cell phone to which she paid most of her attention. I would hear her in the kitchen or upstairs singing along to the music she played off the cell phone. She was usually cheerful. The only other information I received about Deepa was from a middle class man in the neighborhood. He reported to me that the guard his family employed would sneak out at night and visit Deepa. He was actually quite delighted that his employee was able to “have a little fun with a girl. You know that is why many of them come to this city.” I never explored this issue further, not wanting to inadvertently injure Deepa. However, the neighbor’s observation that people come from other areas to Delhi in order to have clandestine affairs was repeated to me many times throughout my fieldwork. Deepa is supposed to stay primarily in the house. Sakshi
watches her closely, and because Deepa sleeps inside the house, there are strict household rules on her behavior. However, in some ways, Deepa deals with this confinement in the same way as Vera, the daughter of this wealthy family. She spends her time socializing and being entertained by her phone. Deepa works, but at a slow place, for about sixteen hours a day. She sleeps in the house, eats their food, has a cell phone, inherits some of the family’s clothing, and has been given bangles; moreover, the family paid for an expensive operation two years ago. However, she only receives ₹4,000 a month. Sakshi reports that she spends this on her cell phone data plan and “never sends anything to her ailing mother.”

The fact that Deepa comes from Assam and is delegated to the role of taking care of women’s bodies is not coincidental. In the past ten years, the number of young women from Assam who perform labor tasks associated with touching a middle class woman’s body have monopolized the market. Deepa’s employment in this profession illustrates a form of the chain of care where particular groups of women are seen as more nurturing or gentle, which conditions migration patterns (Hochschild 2002).

Additionally, Deepa is close in age to Vera and appears to have a similar phone usage. Deepa tempers the restrictions on her freedom and the unpleasantness of work through social media and access to music through her data plan. As reported, she spends a significant amount of her monthly income on the phone. Also, Sakshi reported that she had bought Deepa three new sets of clothing in the past year. Deepa’s romantic interests and expenditure on her phone indicate an important reason as to why young people travel to Delhi to obtain employment in middle class homes—they are able to enjoy the fruits of city life. While the neighbor indicated that Deepa’s love interest may have come to Delhi in order to take up with a woman, it is just as
likely the case that Deepa has traveled to Delhi in order to enjoy some of the social anonymity that the city can provide.

The youngest female servant, Gita, reports her age to be eighteen, but looks significantly younger, possibly due to malnutrition. She came from Bihar only one year earlier. The family contracted her through an agency that transports workers from Bihar to Delhi, and the family itself took on the cost of her migration. Thereby, Gita actually owes the family approximately ₹10,000. She is primarily responsible for cleaning the floors and furniture, washing and ironing the laundry, and cutting vegetables for meals. She acted differently from the other servants in that she was perpetually in motion. When there was quite obviously nothing left to clean or attend to, she would simply go back to the first item on her list of work duties. I would many times wake up from a nap or in the morning to her aimlessly sweeping an already-clean bedroom. From my observations, she was awake more often and worked the longest hours of any other person in the family or employed by the family. There were some allusions to the idea that the grandfather of the household would make sexual advances toward Gita, and therefore she should not be left alone with him. Sakshi said she was only paid around ₹600 a month while ₹1,000 a month would go to her debt. Gita only had one change of clothing and no cell phone.

Gita’s informal labor contract was the least like those in ideal-typical capitalism, compared to the other servants. She had incurred debt from traveling to Delhi for employment and her economic relationship with the family more closely resembled indentured servitude. Correspondingly, she worked longer hours, was more concerned about looking busy, and was possibly subject to sexual abuse. She was entirely restricted from leaving the house; thus, leaving for an unknown reason would have amounted to running away. On the other hand, her conditions of work had a somewhat greater resemblance to formal capitalist employment, in that
she had to work steadily throughout the time for which she was paid (albeit not necessarily efficiently).

As the reader will have observed, these four women each have important differences in their informal contracts with the family. These contracts are not based entirely on age, caste, or economic position, but rather on the individual circumstances of each woman. The eldest Vasru is not allowed inside the house when men are there, while Gita and Deepa are not allowed to leave the house because of the threat of men. However, even these two restricted women have differing freedoms and ability to get around rules. As for labor, it is likely that Kushi, the woman with the child, works fewer hours but is better compensated because she performs the most sophisticated labor—cooking complex dishes. She appears to be the most focused during her work and the other female servants appear to defer to her judgment. In this complex division of labor and reward, each woman in this family division of labor has a different role. But, this is only one side of the story.

Before I move to describing the activities of the male family members and servants, which revolve around managing a petty-bourgeois business, let us address how much labor actually goes into just the reproduction of this family. Without including any of the male servants working around the home, there are five women (Sakshi and the servants) that actively attend to the cleaning and cooking in the home. If we were to also include the four male servants that attend the cars, there are nine people working only to maintain the home. Indeed, the surplus of these laborers is hard to see. But, when we observe how the female family members spend the time they might otherwise be maintaining the home, it is possible to observe that surplus in time created for female family members was spent acquiring and maintaining the outward signs of middle class status. To these functions should be added Sakshi and Vera’s investment of time in
Vera’s studies, quite consciously in order to get her better professional employment prospects abroad. The sum of these labors is the work the family and its servants expend to reproduce the family, with children able to pursue their own middle class lifestyles, of which the portion done by non-family members constitutes an additional contribution to the family economy and, to the extent it is not fully compensated, a surplus value.

As we turn to the male side of things, it is important to understand the basics of this business. The family that Achel married into upon her arrival in Delhi after the Partition had a large sari shop in Chandni Chowk. This provided the family with an upper-middle class petty-bourgeois income. Amit, Achel’s husband, inherited the business from his paternal uncle, who had no sons of his own. The business was devastated in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984; however, this opened up the opportunity to expand the business. After the riots, the family bought a building in the market that they later rebuilt into a hotel. They now retain the sari shop and run a hotel, and, in addition, have added a taxi service. Since the economy was liberalized in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the family has been running a business that accommodates the needs of businessmen who come to the market to buy specific local commodities (like spices, fabric, paper, jewelry and wedding goods) for the purpose of selling them all over India and the world. Due to the international connections they have made through providing these services, they have also started exporting silk saris that were produced in Uttar Pradesh, which can be found in the shops serving the South Asian diaspora in the West.

Although I was reminded a number of times that the business was not always so profitable, Akshay estimated their yearly income after business expenses to be roughly 6.5 million Rupees, or approximately 100,000 USD. They employ eight drivers, thirteen guides, twenty-eight hotel staff, and four managers. Below I have included the descriptions of some of
these workers, but my access was limited to those who most directly interacted with the family. In this division of labor, there are also male servants who are in charge of eight business cars and four family cars. I have tried to report the incomes of these men as much as possible.

The Grandfather

Amit is an old and delicate man, who wore a sparkling white kurta pajama, a black Modi vest, and a Nehru style hat. His hair was closely cropped and he was almost constantly washing his hands and face over and over again. I once witnessed him wash his hands four separate times before eating. He would spend the days, and many nights, attending BJP political meetings with other men his age. His time in the house was usually spent at the dinner table. He would read the paper while watching the news and making comments to his family members about how India was falling apart. Pounding his fragile fist on the table, he would exclaim, “They are swallowing us whole!” referring to a news clip that portrayed Shah Rukh Khan, in reference to his Muslim religion. Indeed, topics ranging from violence against women to air pollution would evoke anti-Muslim discourse. His favorite audience was his grandson Mina. He would issue a series of overtly political comments, and when Mina agreed, Amit would grip Mina’s shoulders, look into his eyes, and smile with pride. Knowing that Mina’s father was uniformly critical of him gave all the more weight to the look of supreme happiness that crossed Mina’s face when his grandfather touched him approvingly.

Usually Amit did not direct his comments toward me but toward Mina or Sakshi. One morning we found ourselves sitting across from each other at breakfast, without anyone in our vicinity. He started to speak, and then stopped, startled to find that I was his only company. He smiled with embarrassment, switched from Hindi to English, and said, kindly, “You must be a
brave girl to stay in Delhi. As an American, you know the Muslims would love to get their hands on you. But you are safe with us in this house. You are welcome here.” I was stunned into silence. He turned back to his paper, perhaps thinking that I could not understand him. After some minutes, I asked if I could record his life history.

Amit was born in Lahore in 1929. His father was the second son of a wealthy gold merchant in Delhi, and had moved his family to Lahore to expand their family’s business to a major bazaar in Lahore in 1920. Amit’s father had been successful, and after waiting several years for his wife to conceive, Amit was his first and only child. Amit spent most of the years of his childhood at an English-style boarding school located in Lucknow. He had some aspirations to become a lawyer, and at the age of seventeen, had returned to Lahore to study law at the University of Punjab.

When the Partition came in 1947, Amit was living in a university dormitory. His college friend’s father, a colonial government official, had arranged passage for the two of them on a train traveling to Delhi. Amit wanted to take his parents with him. He only had two hours before the train left, and he insisted that he try to reach his parent’s home. Amit tried, but only three blocks from his family's home, he was caught in a large crowd. He escaped through a neighbor’s abandoned house in to a side alley, but he was never able to reach his home. He headed toward the train station after his lucky escape from the mob, hoping that his parents had already left Lahore. He reached Delhi safely, but never heard from his parents again. A few months after the Partition, in a crowded bazaar in Delhi, he saw one of his parents’ neighbor’s sons, who reported that he had seen what happened. He said, “The crowd took them.” Amit said, “I could not reach them. I should not have left Lahore.” In recounting these events, Amit did not look pained like
his wife Achel. Instead, he was angry. His voice grew louder, and he quivered in anger as he proclaimed, “They murdered us!”

After moving to Delhi, Amit went to work for his father’s youngest brother, who owned a prosperous sari shop in Chandni Chowk. Amit’s uncle was glad to have him, as he did not have any of his own children. Amit became the manager of their fifteen employees. Upon his uncle’s death, Amit inherited the business in 1981.

When the Congress-led anti-Sikh riots of 1984 came, his business was destroyed. He had kept a gun in the shop and shot to death the first three looters that entered the premises before retreating through the back. When he recounted this part of his story, he again mixed his anger toward his aggressors with a note of shame or regret, saying that he was not strong enough to stop them. He exclaimed, “If you called the police they would not come; that is what a Congress government means!” When things settled down, he learned that three of his relatives had been victims of the terror: his first cousin and her two daughters were murdered in their home.

His business had been devastated. However, the devastation of other shops in the area allowed him to buy a building that had been badly damaged in the riots. At this time, they moved to East Delhi to their current house. Amit’s first son, Vijay, had left India at an early age and established an electronics import business in Dayton, Ohio. I learned from Mina that Vijay had sent Amit a portion of the money he had used to buy the hotel building. At that time Akshay began to work for the business as well. In the early days, Akshay would attend to the sari shop, while Amit worked on building the hotel and transportation business. In 1995, Amit decided to retire from the business entirely. He still gives his opinion to Akshay, but spends his days socializing with men his own age instead of going to work.
Amit’s role as grandfather is not the most patriarchal role. Although he is accorded customary respect, he has no major role in the labor of the home or business. He appears to view his son Akshay’s violence against his own family and the servants as acceptable and defers to Akshay’s decisions. Of all the family members, he does the least work for the most privilege. He has access to his own car and driver and does not need to check in with any family member in order to move out of the house freely. His primary role inside the house is to sit at the main table and make comments on the ever-playing news. His interpersonal influence over Mina is clearly directed toward convincing Mina to carry on anti-Muslim and anti-Congress attitudes. As we saw with Achel and Vera, Amit spends a good deal of time influencing Mina’s worldview. The reader will see greater evidence of this later in the section on Mina. However, here it is helpful to point out that Achel’s warnings about the dangers outside of the home are also about the failure of the state to protect Mina from Muslim and pro-Congress mobs.

The grandfather of this family provides an important link to political power. Through his strong association with BJP circles, where he and other men his age discuss politics, he places himself in a political network through which to call for support from fellow party members, as well as to organize more drastic actions in emergencies. In Delhi, the BJP have gangs of men who sometimes take an active part in various economic and personal disputes due to the internal politics of their own sub-organization, alongside other groups outside the state that can command organized physical intimidation. If, as Amit’s historical experience reminds him, there were to be a riot, he would likely be able to call on men from his BJP organization to protect him and his property—or, if they were the ones rioting, to leave his house untouched. Likewise, association with such parties serves to protect against individuals or gangs who might pose a threat, but who know better than to offend established networks of power.
The Father

Akshay, Amit and Achel’s son, seems to frighten everyone who comes into contact with him. When his car would pull up to the house, a designated servant would immediately notify the family. Everyone would straighten up and stop any behavior that might compromise him or her in his eyes. Sakshi would whoosh around the house, making sure every surface was clean. Vera would put away her much loved phone, for fear it would be taken and inspected. Mina would sit up in his chair and turn down the volume of the TV. We would all feel uneasy. Akshay would thunder into the house with a ready complaint. He was tall, around 6’2”, with a broad chest and a deep wrinkle in his brow. He always wore a business suit, and I never observed him simply just relaxing in his house. Each minute was scheduled, and it was clear that he viewed his family as he did the servants. Neither was spared his wrath, nor were his formal employees, who would slink around quietly, trying to pass off documents while remaining unnoticed, even during meals. In this way, Akshay was working for nearly all of his waking hours, and one of his main criticisms of his wife and children was that they were lazy. His brutish behavior was almost democratic in its universal application.

I shared the family’s fear of Akshay and had to rely on them for his background information, rather than trying to propose an interview, which might have been considered suspicious by him. Indeed, in speaking to Akshay I always had the distinct impression that he was much cleverer and more cunning than me. I would worry about falling into a verbal trap from which there would be no return. However, I did have ample opportunity to witness the public spectacles he would make when disciplining members of the household.
One day, Sakshi and I were upstairs watching TV and talking in her room. Suddenly, we heard screaming coming through the window from the street outside. Sakshi’s face turned pale with fear and she ran to the window. Looking outside, we could see that Akshay was beating a man in the street below. Sakshi sighed with relief, presumably because the man screaming was not her son. Akshay was yelling “thief” as he kicked the target repeatedly in the head, while another man stood helplessly next to the scene, which by now had gathered a crowd. The standing man was pleading with Akshay to stop. Sakshi explained that one of their male servants had been letting his cousin sleep on the patio of their house. The cousin was suspected of taking a glass serving dish. She said, “That is why it’s better to get them from a village. You must train them; but if they are from Delhi, their families always make trouble.” At this point the primary target, now lying motionless in the road, was left, and the male servant employed at the house became the target of Akshay’s anger. He turned around suddenly and struck the man’s leg with the metal pole he had in his hand—an action that appeared to fracture the bone. The man cried, and no doubt fearing another blow, curled into a fetal position with his arms over his head. Akshay issued a final warning and went inside. About two weeks later I was surprised to see the man washing one of the cars at the house. When I asked Mina about the man’s return, Mina said: “Oh don’t worry, you are safe. He won’t try anything again.”

Akshay’s treatment of his son was only slightly more restrained. One night I was awoken by Sakshi’s screams, coming from downstairs. I went downstairs and saw Mina, with his long limbs and strong build, trying to make himself as small as possible, curled into a ball on the floor partially under the dining room table, covered in blood and crying hysterically. I did not see anyone else at first, and I ran over to Mina and found the source of the bleeding from a cut just above the eye. Akshay could be heard yelling at Sakshi in their room. I asked Mina what
happened, but he could barely speak. When I looking into his bloodied eyes, I could see that Mina was not in his right mind. Akshay came back downstairs, leaving Sakshi in the room, and I am sure I must have looked terrified when I saw him. He looked surprised to see me, and my presence seemed to shock him out of his fury. He wrinkled his bow deeply and turned around to go back up stairs. As he did he muttered, “You should not be down here.” The next day Mina reported that he had slipped out of the house that night—a regular occurrence for which he pays the servants for their cooperation and silence. He had been out with his friends, drinking and taking drugs as usual. However, when they dropped him off at the house, he was too intoxicated to stand, and he had inadvertently knocked over a chair when trying to get to his room. His father had awoken and the expected results had ensued. Mina said, “It was my own stupid fault.” It took three weeks for Mina's eye to heal, during which Akshay regularly mocked him, saying that I (a woman) was Mina’s protector.

Although Akshay made a number of offhand comments alluding to his sharp hatred of Muslims, our most illuminating conversation occurred at a restaurant. I had accompanied the family to a meal at a new restaurant that specialized in grilled shrimp. After consuming at least, a pound of shrimp and drinking four whiskeys, Akshay became bored with teasing his family. He had taken Vera’s phone and used the dinner as a platform to question her about her contact list. He had noticed that there were fewer texts saved on her phone than those he had seen her receive. She looked down and gave one word answers as he asked again and again, “Who where you texting?” Seeing her so deeply embarrassed, I interceded. I asked if he was pleased with Modi’s recent success. Although this provided an opening for a cascade of genocidal remarks, it was a great relief of tension at the table. Akshay articulated his position, stated as a definite fact: “Modi understands the real crisis facing India. We must take our country back from the Muslims
if we want to become like your States. The problem with India is that the Muslims are uncivilized. They sleep in the street and beg like dogs. They breed more than dogs.” I interjected that he could not possibly think all the poor people in Delhi were Muslims. He agreed, “No, there are backwards castes too, but the Muslims are why there are poor people. They block development projects, they commit crimes, and they riot. They are animals. They should be wiped off this continent. It would go a long way toward helping the population crisis, and I promise you, the streets would be clean and safe for you. We should round them up and gas them, like Hitler. I read his book *[Mein Kampf]* and he has a lot of good ideas. We must take back the land they stole in Pakistan if we want to be complete.” With this he smiled and laughed. He had previously questioned me on my Jewish heritage, but I could not tell if he was connecting the issues. He continued his harangue until he finished on the topic of China. He said, “Modi is going to stand up to China. They’ll know they can’t cross our borders without being shot. They will know that we will have a nuclear war.” At which point I finally interjected, “You know that if there were a nuclear war, Delhi would be the first target.” At this point, he became angry and raised his voice to say, “Well then let them do it! Do it and see what happens. We are not afraid of them!” Even as he spoke, Akshay was becoming exhausted. He sent us home while he stayed out to continue drinking.

I visited their business two to three times a week and usually only saw Akshay through a window that connected his office to the lobby of the hotel. The hotel was not particularly well-kept, but its central location in the market ensured that it was almost always fully occupied. On my visits, I met patrons of Indian decent who operated businesses in Sydney, London, New York and Johannesburg. Each day, the hotel would arrange for each business man to have a car and driver, along with a guide. The guide would bring the businessman through the market, stopping
at individual stores that had some connection to the family business. In this way, connections with other businesses in the area provided patrons to those establishments, while sometimes giving better deals to Akshay’s customers. There were also areas behind the hotel that provided space for the bulk purchases of customers.

When I was invited to their workplace, Mina was my guide. It was Mina’s job to count the cash that came into the office from the transportation and hotel business. He would sit behind a desk with stacks of thousand rupee notes wrapped with elastic bands in front of him. Mina abhors work of any kind and would condemn his father’s ability to call on him at any moment; nevertheless, when visiting the office, it was evident that Mina enjoyed the attention that counting cash could bring in an office place where five thousand rupees was a common monthly salary. However, nothing important was ever left up to Mina. Akshay seemed certain that Mina was not responsible enough to take control of any part of the business, and there was no indication that Mina would inherit the business after his father.

Akshay is the person most firmly embedded in a recognizable class structure. He is the owner and manager of the business, and he makes all the important decisions for everyone in this family division of labor. He does not just police his workers but also his wife and children. In my three-month stay, I was told about Akshay physically harming another person eighteen times. However, let me pause here and say, Akshay was not violent simply because it was somehow necessary for his job or social position. Rather, Akshay as an individual had an angry disposition and also possessed the power to harm others without consequence. Akshay is both economically and socially domineering, but this is not always the case with family patriarchs. Naturally, the disposition of an individual is important, and there are plenty of gentle husbands in Delhi that defer to their fathers, mothers, wives and children. Akshay merely shows what is possible for the
reach of patriarchal power, not the rule. On the other hand, Akshay’s position in business places
him in a position of authority over more men than the norm, even for business owners, and his
quick temper, at the very least, has not hindered his success in this arena.

Besides standing as enforcer and decision maker, Akshay is also the member of the
family who contributes to the most labor to maintaining the businesses, and thereby also
economically maintains the entire family. He works nearly all the hours of the day. Many times
he pointed to his labor contributions to the family to justify his power over his family. His wife
and children, by contrast, were characterized as lazy, even where they dutifully attempted to
fulfill his expectations of them. There is no question that Akshay does not want his wife to
undertake any other activity besides what contributes to family reproduction; still, he views her
role as essentially a lazy and simple endeavor. Akshay never seemed to make an explicit gender
argument about his superior position to his wife, but rather posed his case in terms of his position
in the division of labor. Additionally, he also views his son as useless even though he has spent
at least 100,000 USD a year on his son’s US college education and living expenses.

The Son

How I came to know this family, and eventually to live with them, began in a small town
in upstate New York. I was visiting an old friend for the better part of a month, and I happened to
attend a party given by Mina’s girlfriend. At the time, it was already evident that Mina was
socially skilled. He sat on a couch, holding court among those sitting around, legs and arms
extended, speaking English in an accent that was in very close proximity to the distinctly lower
class, white, and rural dialect of the crowd. He was the only non-white person at the party, and as
I later learned, the only person from Asia in the town. He was attending the nearby college and
lived with his girlfriend. She had recently moved in with him from her family’s trailer on the outskirts of town, and their party was to celebrate the new apartment, which I later discovered was purchased by Akshay.

Eschewing the loud music, I followed my friend out of a window and onto the roof. Mina came out for a smoke, barely fitting his large body through the small window. We were introduced. Long after my friend went inside, Mina and I shared embellished tales of the best Delhi street foods and eventually debated the point. Mina weighed in on the side of Kachori. After that night, Mina and I quickly became friends. We would meet at a coffee shop to compare Delhi and upstate New York, argue about politics, and share small town gossip. When we were with his other friends and girlfriend, he would stick to topics that interested them, which among other things, included monster trucks and heavy references from the cartoon *The Simpsons*.

One night before I left New York, Mina walked me home from a party. He became serious and stopped me from walking up the front stairs. He said, “I worry about my mom. Will you go see her when you get to Delhi?” I said yes, I could visit her in the summer. He opened his bag and withdrew a necklace. It was a small, gold heart pendant, and as he showed it to me, this large, imposing man searched my face for approval. “Do you think she will like it?” he asked. I answered in the affirmative. I never quite understood why Mina sought my approval, but it became a consistent theme during my fieldwork with his family in Delhi.

I had visited Sakshi a few times before Mina came back to Delhi for three months of the summer. He had failed three of his five courses, but had forgone summer school to visit his family. When asked why, he brushed off the university, saying that it did not matter, because after he eventually graduated he would go into his paternal uncle’s family business in Ohio.
Sakshi asked me to accompany their family to greet Mina at the international terminal. All the women and Mina cried at the reunion.

Mina is a tall man, roughly 6’3”, and has a dominant brow line that gives the impression of anger, even when he is quite content. On his second day back in Delhi, we had decided to go for an outing. When he picked me up for our first Delhi outing, we had our first in an ongoing series of political arguments. He was wearing a tee-shirt with a large Nazi-style swastika and red streaks that mirrored dripping blood across the front. I said I would not escort him unless he changed the tee-shirt. He argued at length that the swastika is a Hindu symbol and I should not be offended. Eventually he folded to my stubborn insistence and compromised by turning the shirt inside out. Our first outing was to Haus Kauz village. In a dark café, we met with Kuran. Only 20 years old, and noticeably muscular, he wore a Cowboys football jersey and spoke English with a distinctly Texan accent. He had attended high school and then a university in the Lone Star State but was visiting family in Delhi for the summer.

The conversation was relaxed, and they caught up on the activities of old friends. They drank whiskey and smoked until Kuran said he needed to meet a friend outside. When he returned, he asked Mina if he wanted to take a drug whose name I could not place. I abstained, sitting at the table while they went outside to buy the drugs. Within an hour, both men were sweating profusely and rambling on about the “weird looks” other men in the café were giving them. Kuran seemed to sense that Mina was looking for a fight, and suggested we leave the café.

We walked to the adjacent park, which was so lush and wet that it felt like stepping into an oil painting before it has dried. The scene uncannily resembled a Mughal painting and the grass poked through several inches of fresh rain that day. The sounds of birds filled the area, and I exclaimed how spectacular I thought the gardens and ruins looked. Both Kuran and Mina
immediately jumped on my words, replying in the negative. Mina said what he saw was not the same picture as the one I saw, but that the surroundings represented the long history of Muslim domination in India. What he saw was occupation. He angrily exclaimed, “When will we be finished with them?” Kuran seemed to want to support Mina but instead was immobilized with the expressed concern that he might unwillingly jump into the pond and drown. At this point I suggested that I might take a taxi home, but Mina got very upset and demanded that he drive me. Our trip was uneventful, although I was rather afraid for our safety with him at the helm.

After this encounter, I was more broadly accepted into Mina’s all male social circle. I had not criticized them for their undoubtedly irresponsible activities (this being a point of more delicacy than political sympathies) and, in doing so, perhaps had marked myself as something other than a full-fledged woman to them. It only took a few nights of drinking to convince Mina’s friends that it was safe to talk openly in front of me. Several of them had spent time in the US, and they related to me as though I shared none of the qualities that they found so problematic with Indian women. Their negative generalizations about women were endless: women cannot drive and cause most of the accidents in Delhi; they have sex with their male servants, pay the men at their salons to have sex with them; manipulate men with sex for money and never actually care about their relationship partner; levy false accusations of rape if their consensual sexual activities are discovered, will not work, are lazy, and expect their husbands to do everything; nag constantly, and will throw a fit if you come home drunk; etc. When I would raise a word of protest, they seemed to be genuinely sorry that I had misunderstood, because they were not talking about me. They were all unmarried and, besides Mina, were not looking forward to the imagined ball and chain that would be shackled round their necks.
The group consisted of five primary members, with cousins and acquaintances sometime joining the drinking circle. Each seemed to contribute something toward facilitating their nighttime activities. Mina had the use of his father’s US-made SUV. He would drive around the city endlessly, picking up friends and dropping them off, chatting with them while parked, as they smoked hash supplied by the rather unsavory Vishram.

Deepak, another member of the group, owned a liquor store, which he bought with his father’s money. His father owned four stores in an East Delhi shopping complex. Deepak was significantly heavier than the other men, and would rush into the jokes, readily supplied by friends, mocking his own appearance before they had the chance. He brought liquor to these gatherings. Due to their regular inability to find a suitable house or apartment, they would conduct their parties in Mina’s parked car in the parking lot of the shopping complex that Deepak’s father owned. They acted as though they owned that parking lot and would harass both the poor men that milled around outside as well as the police that would periodically confront them about their illegal activities. Deepak and Mina took the lead in this threatening behavior, and I once saw them slap an auto rickshaw driver several times until he begged them to stop while on his knees. At first I interceded, but I was cautious. If I left the vehicle, I became an object of interest to the surrounding people, which was viewed as cause for Mina to turn his anger on them more intensely. When Mina or Deepak would lose their temper, their friend Harish would intercede. His father was a high ranking civil servant, and if the boys ever got in real trouble, his father would rescue them. Harish’s father kept an apartment in East Delhi where he would conduct his extra-marital affairs. These nighttime gatherings would often take place at this apartment.
The other member of this group, Raj, had a rather different character. He would laugh along with the others, but his temperament and social position bore a marked difference. Raj was affectionately called Barfi, in honor of a very sweet desert. He was remarkably sensitive to the needs of others, and always kind to me. He would smile when Mina ranted about politics but privately confessed to me that he had several close Muslim friends. After the summer, when Mina left for school in the US, Barfi opened up to me more, and eventually also confided to me that he was gay. I suspect Mina knew and was accepting of this, although Barfi was often infantilized and feminized in their rather cruel joking. Barfi worked in his family’s small factory that produced garments locally for international brands. He did not have a car nor connections nor even money to buy liquor or food. Mina generally paid but expected Barfi to act in a serving capacity. For instance, when we would drive to get street food, Barfi would be required to stand outside and bring the food to the car, so Mina would not have to expend even the smallest effort. Unlike the other men, Barfi never shouted, and always pleaded with them to let their victims go.

Mina, on the other hand, had been a bully his whole life. He told me that when he was in grade school there was a custom of hitting a person on their birthday. He had spent the year terrorizing the school, so on his birthday, the other kids organized against him. One of his primary adversaries had initiated a trap, and six guys held Mina down while the kids lined up, to each take a whack or two in the spirit of revenge. Mina, too, had his revenge. The next day, Mina beat his adversary badly. The boy told the principal, and Mina was threatened with expulsion until his father paid a bribe on his behalf. Mina then went around the neighborhood in East Delhi that the boys shared and told everyone who would listen of the injustice he had endured from his opponent. He gathered a large crowd, and confronted the boy’s father outside of his house. Mina demanded that the boy be called, and his father was forced to publicly chastise him. Mina
laughed with true enjoyment as he recounted how the boy had been forced to hold his earlobes and do an embarrassing dance that is common for apologizing children in Delhi. He ended his story with the triumphant statement that the boy “never showed his face in school again.”

Indeed, the crimes of Mina’s youth were widely alluded to at the dinner table by his father, Akshay. One day Gita, the youngest female servant working in the house, bent over the table to serve Mina, and his father caught him looking at her. Akshay said, “You know, we can’t keep replacing them,” and chuckled. Later Mina told me the history behind his father’s comment. Mina had impregnated one of the servants when he was only 13. His father had pressured her to have an abortion, only to send her back to her village with strict instructions not to return to Delhi. Mina’s behavior had evidently carried into adulthood. One night Mina was late to meet me, and I pressured him into admitting that he had been with one of the girls that worked as a maid at his father’s hotel. No doubt, counting wads of cash and being known as the owner’s son were the attributes that made him desirable. He regularly paid an underground parking lot attendant thirty rupees to let him have sex with women in his parked car. He urged me to see these activities as distinctly separate from his commitment to his American girlfriend and was petrified I might tell her. His friends visited prostitutes rather often, but Mina preferred the illusion of a romantic encounter and would carry on with several women at once. One night, while drunk, Mina reported to me that some years back one of his father’s female workers, a maid in the hotel, had tried to “trap him” (meaning she wanted him to marry her) after he had broken off their sexual relationship. His father was angry, immediately firing the girl, but there was still a concern that she might use legal recourse. The next day, Akshay had the police publicly arrest her for prostitution by taking her out of her family’s home and humiliating her in front of her neighbors. No charges were brought, but Mina never heard from the girl again.
In my time with Mina, driving around, we came across the police many times; however, one night a confrontation erupted. Mina had a very mild accident on the road with another car. The other car was small and run down, and its driver was an older man in plain clothing, and the passenger was his teenage son. Immediately, everyone, except me, got out of their vehicles and a shouting match began. Initially the driver tried to assert himself, but Mina quickly lost his temper. Deepak pulled out a knife and also threatened the man. From the window I could see Mina punch the man and then kick him in the stomach. At this point, the police had noticed the commotion on the street. When they arrived, Mina composed himself and began talking to the policeman who seemed to be in charge. After about two minutes, the police walked over to the other driver, and gave him a slap across the face, after which the driver handed over some money to Mina. As Mina got back into the car he was happy. The policemen had forced the man to give Mina ₹500, only ₹200 of which Mina had needed for the policeman. Akshay closely regulated the cash Mina had on hand, and although no damage was done to Mina’s vehicle, he walked away with a profit of ₹300. He laughed as he showed me the money and said, “You know, for ₹300 rupees I could have that guy killed.” Later that night, he spent the extra money on drugs.

Mina serves several roles in the family division of labor. Mina spends roughly two hours at his father’s business a day when he is on college vacation in Delhi. He also spends around three hours a day driving his mother or sister to different appointments and social events. His job counting money in the business and escorting his female relatives both have a protective quality to them. Besides his father, the other members of his family largely cater to his needs and regularly protect him from punishment from his father. Additionally, his future role in the family is also important. Notwithstanding his poor academic record and even failing his college courses,
he attends a university in the US. He intended to get his start in his paternal uncle’s business in Ohio, become a small business owner himself, marry a white American woman, and live primarily in the US for the rest of his life. In contrast to his sister, with Mina it becomes more obvious that intellectual aptitude and a solid work ethic are not the only keys to a middle class life in the US. Instead, his family simply being willing to pay for a community college in order to establish his visa and having a kinship network already in the states has been enough for Mina to envision himself becoming a citizen and small business owner in a core economy.

Significantly more attention will be given to the illicit services Mina utilizes in the fourth chapter of this dissertation on the black market. The reason I have given such a detailed account of Mina’s friends is because Mina spends more time with them than his own family, and because his social conduct outside the household constitutes his practical contribution to the reproduction of society when he is in India. Additionally, I would contend that the violence Mina wreaks on people outside of the home has a direct relationship to the family’s view of what life is like outside of the home. Indeed, Mina behaves with the qualities of masculinity, such as violence and lechery, that his grandmother, mother and sister associate with men in general. His political conversations with friends, political actions in committing violent acts against the public and appropriating the power of the police are all evidence of his belief in his own authority to impose order—in contrast to the state. Just as the people inside the home believe young men out in public are lawless, Mina acts in accordance with this belief.

In addition, Mina’s sexual exploitation of young women working in his home and family businesses is another point of continuity of gendered practices across generations. His grandfather was rumored to molest their young servant, his father is widely known to sleep with Eastern European prostitutes, and Mina has had multiple affairs that ended very badly for the
women. Throughout this thread of three generations, each man appears to take advantage of his position over informal laborers. These female laborers are not protected by the state. As seen in one example above, Akshay actually hired the police to humiliate a girl over which Mina had already exercised his sexual advantage. Interestingly, the informality of these employment relationships in the home and business are laden with sex as an expression of power. While Mina openly says that he feels as though he is being manipulated by women with regard to sex, when all these stories are portrayed together, it becomes clear that he is taking a patriarchal privilege over these women. The fact that he had sex with both a home servant and at least two women in his father’s business shows how informal laborers in the home and business are both part of the patriarchal structure of the informal family economy. In turn, it also shows how women’s position as employees, or in general public life, may be regarded by their mothers and their male relations, who will know most directly what may transpire.

The Male Servants

Although there are many male servants and workers involved with the business and home, I will describe the four men with whom I had regular contact. The first was the oldest, named Raj. Raj was about fifty years old and had worked for Amit, before Akshay had taken over the business. He was entrusted with the management of the sari shop. At night he would come to the family house and give the daily earnings to Akshay. It seemed as though this inefficiency, as the sari shop was close to the hotel in Chandni Chowk but far from the house in East Delhi, was to ensure Raj was personally responsible for profits from the sari shop. Raj had come from Utter Pradesh in his youth in the 1970s. Now he had his own house in Delhi, and had
a wife and six children. Akshay told me that Raj’s income is roughly ₹30,000 a month. This makes Raj the highest paid employee in this family system.

Raj is a manager in his own right. He did not attend school in his childhood, but rather labored in this family’s business for his entire working life. He has never been employed or paid formally and Mina reported that when the sari business did well in a particular month Akshay would give Raj a bonus. The length of time that Raj has spent in his family division of labor gives him seniority and is undoubtedly the reason Akshay trusts him to manage other informal laborers. However, as seen from his daily visits to the house at night, Raj is still not entirely trusted with the daily profits from the business, nor is a formalized accounting practice considered reliable.

Akshay's primary driver was Veeru. His job was to attend to the family cars and drive Akshay throughout the day to different locations. Veeru came from Bihar five years ago and had worked for the family for four years. Veeru often made jokes and sometimes managed to induce even Akshay to laughter. He was also in collusion with Mina. Mina would give him a small quantity of hash in exchange for his silence on Mina’s nighttime activities. Because Veeru cleaned the cars and would sleep outside the front door, he would regularly catch Mina in compromising situations. Mina would pay with drugs or money to keep Veeru quiet. In some ways, Veeru had a good deal of power over Mina because of his job and close relationship with Akshay. Veeru made approximately ₹8,000 a month for his driving duties, but also received a variable amount from blackmailing Mina, who suggests something in the range of ₹2,000.

Veeru’s main task is taking care of one car in particular—the black SUV. The family has four cars and most days only two were used. This meant that Veeru’s primary job just was to sit next to his assigned car during the day and sleep next to the car at night. He cleaned the car,
refueled it, and drove Akshay—but only if Akshay chose the SUV for transportation that day. Veeru’s labor position is terribly revealing in understanding how informal labor accompanies neoliberal consumption. Akshay bought this SUV from the US and then hired a full-time informal laborer to accompany the commodity. Unlike the way commodities are purchased among the middle class of the US, the Delhi middle class incorporates informal labor into consumption. The time it would take a US middle class man to attend his car is supplemented by Veeru’s employment in this family economy. This is only one instance of how informal labor, although extremely unproductive by almost any standards, actually contributes a small value to the family reproduction. Thus, the time Akshay might otherwise spend on his car he instead invests in his business or spending time with his family, and he also avoids the frustrations of driving or negotiating transport. Later in this chapter, I will also point out the other benefits of having Veeru sleep outside of the house at night.

Next, Kuran was originally from Nepal. His family were farmers who could not pay their debts and sent Kuran, at age sixteen, to Delhi. Kuran works as a guide in the family’s hotel business. When I saw Kuran, he was often eager to practice his English. He worked for non-Hindi speaking hotel guests. He had been in school until sixteen and was loquacious, illustrating his strong language skills. He had worked for the business for three years. He reported that when he started, he had worked for food and basic housing, and only received money through tips from his grateful customers. However, now that the business had expanded to include more English-speaking customers, Kuran had become a more valuable employee. He said, “Two months ago they raised my salary to 7,000! With tips I must get around 11,000 a month. I could have never imagined that much when I first got here. I have almost paid off my family’s debt, and when I do, I will go home.”
Kuran viewed his time working in Delhi as temporary. When he first arrived he struggled to find adequate employment. At first, Akshay had only given him basic necessities in exchange for his labor. However, over time his linguistic abilities distinguished him, along with his enthusiastic personality. Now he is the highest paid guide in Akshay’s employment. The business caters to a number of clients who do not speak Hindi, and through the expansion of consumption of traditional commodities due to neoliberal economic changes, Kuran’s aptitude has been recognized as able to produce a large enough surplus for the business to justify his relatively high salary, which amounts to between 104 and 163 USD a month including tips.

The final person I would like to present is a young man named Pradash that works in the home. While family members told me he was fourteen, he looked much younger. I found that living in a house where a child so young was working to be a matter of concern, and I aired my worries a number of times. However, the family assured me many times that he was old enough to work. His caste was obviously Brahmin from his ponytail and the string that hung around his bare chest. He had come only a year earlier from Bihar. His primary job consisted of buying small commodities from the market. However, Sakshi expressed her concerns many times over the potential of Pradash running away. She said that it had taken a long time to train him, and if he ran away, her time would have been wasted. She scolded Pradash most often, and on occasion, she would also report his behavior, primarily characterized as lazy and uncooperative, to Akshay. Akshay would badly beat the boy on a weekly basis. Unlike their other servants, the family paid an agency that transferred money to Pradash’s family in Bihar. Not giving Pradash any salary directly was probably why Sakshi was worried about him running away. Mina reports that Veeru was responsible for watching Pradash, and would sleep next to him outside the house at night.
Unlike the youngest female servant, Gita, Pradash’s salary did not go towards a debt, but directly to his family. In a way, his own family had hired him out as part of their family’s economy and survival strategy. Pradash’s situation as a Brahmin is particularly revealing in how caste has been reorganized with respect to class. Pradash is the only male given food-oriented tasks, such as shopping and helping serve, likely in relation to ideas about religious purity. However, he is one of the lowest members of a family who is technically of lower caste than himself. This arrangement is not unusual. In several other families in this study, there were Brahmin servants, invariably from Bihar. While I cannot explain this particular location of origin in association with caste and migration, Brahmin servants, particularly those hired to handle food, illustrate how caste and class intermingle. The middle class Delhi family system of economic interdependence is similar to other kinship configurations, which include caste as an important feature of cooperation between families. In this family business, many of Akshay’s business associates that also have shops in the market are of his same caste. However, part of this family’s division of labor and inter-family cooperation that is based on caste, includes a Brahmin in a low position. While the caste system has been conceptualized in various ways, Pradash’s situation shows how caste can serve to place individuals in informal and familial relationships of economic exchange, even to the extent that a caste status from one hierarchy takes on an entirely different status in a different patriarchal hierarchy.

There are a number of reasons for having so many servants in the home, one of which is closely tied to this family’s expectation that the state will not fully protect them. First, there need to be a number of people in the house at all times to protect property from theft. There are so many non-residential workers coming and going, delivering groceries, cleaning the toilets, etc.,
who could abscond with something of value. Indeed, this family’s possessions are stolen with some regularity. Having a number of female servants in the house provides social surveillance of the male workers and among each other. However, a thief could overpower any of them, so having men around is an additional necessity. The second factor is the requirement for a fair number of men to stay around the house at night, sleeping at strategic points. Besides two guards outside the gate, four men regularly sleep between the gate and the house, often in the garage. Although these men are employed to tend the cars, they also provide protection for the house and family. They make it impossible for anyone to break in at night, and they would defend the house in the event of a riot.

Now that I have presented the male side of the family economy, it is important to also note how history has contributed to the politics of the present. The experience of the Partition and the 1984-riots has led this family of men to believe that they must take the protection of their property into their own hands. It is not so much an irrational, historically-specific preoccupation as it is a reasoned appreciation of the conditions in the city, the capacities of the state, and the importance of guarding against unlikely but severe eventualities. All three of the men—grandfather, father and son—expressed the political desire for Modi to bring greater law and order to Delhi. However, ironically, it is these very men who consistently operate outside of the state’s legality to secure their own property rights. They do not so much wish for a BJP government to stop all use of violence, intimidation and coercion in the city, as they benefit from some of the violence in actuality. Rather, they want a state which executes law and order in a way that complements their own use of coercion and that of parties with whom they are allied. It is not to take private coercion out of the equation, but to create a powerful second line of defense that they feel is acutely lacking.
In viewing the different ways history has been transmitted through this family, it is interesting to note that both genders express an anxiety that the state will not protect them differently. The grandmother, mother and daughter all viewed men as the primary danger to their safety. The grandfather, father and son all viewed Muslims as the primary danger to their safety. The grandmother went about transmitting her concerns by warning the women of the house before they left each day about the sexual violence they might face on the street. Instead of expressing fear, her granddaughter expressed frustration that she could only wear revealing clothing under restricted circumstances, and a desire to move to a country where her rights to wear anything she liked would be enforced. On the other hand, the grandfather went about influencing his family by commenting on the news each day to disparage Muslims and supporters of the Congress party. Additionally, he cultivated political contacts within his own group of BJP supporters. His son expresses the influence of his family’s history by bullying poor people in traffic and threatening anyone that looks at women he is escorting. All three men express their BJP support on a daily basis, both to one another and acquaintances. However, to take a perspective that includes how these views are historically conditioned, and look at them in conjunction with the women’s fears of sexual violence, it become obvious that this family is reacting to the inability of the Indian state to monopolize violence in the society and bestow protections to property and persons. In many ways, this house I have described is under siege, or rather, it is understandable that they feel under siege and that they take actions to make themselves more secure.

These are actions that reproduce the existing condition of watchful peace backed by the threat of force. Men maintain their security by reproducing the kind of private violence that makes the city insecure in general. Men also privately uphold the security of female family
members by restricting their movements and maintaining means of private violence, so that as a rule the streets are dominated by people disposed to exert coercion, including against women. Moreover, by intimidating women both inside and outside the family, these practices reduce the presence of women on the streets and, thereby, their vulnerability. The men, meanwhile, have structural power over the women while in the household, because women cannot easily leave and risk facing intimidation if they do. In the workplace or in the sex trade, men also have access to women, whose vulnerability is again conditioned by male coercive power, connections to police, and threats of exposure to potentially coercive relatives. In all regards, men employ a set of actions that preserve power dynamics which work to their advantage, while also increasing the potential for competition and conflict, disempowerment women and the poor, and prevention of the state from attaining a monopoly on the use of force or protective function.

Conclusion

This ethnographic exploration of a single family, their history, culture and economy, has shown how the family economic system and its patriarchal characteristics have been strengthened by its expansion under neoliberalism. These patriarchal admixtures have been perpetuated and are reinforced in three distinct ways. First, pre-capitalist economic relations have been reinforced through the economic practice of trading food and shelter for labor instead of paying wages which would have been used for such purposes on the free market. For example, the excess food that the family buys, which might otherwise be thrown away by this middle class family, is instead used to supplement lower wages for unskilled servants. Second, these familial and employment relationships include an element of violence, or the threat of violence, which enforces both property rights and social norms. In countries where the state is more intimately
involved in property rights, domestic abuse and labor relations, the state takes over the ultimate recourse to violence. However, in the situations such as those described above, being the patriarch of a family, the informal employer of a hotel worker, or simply a wealthy man with a nice car on the road, is a position that may involve interpersonal physical punishment. Third, the political attitudes of both the men and women of the family display a recurrence of earlier historical tensions. Men are preoccupied with the conquest of Hindus by Muslims centuries prior, and directly tie their current political affiliations to this interpretation of history. The women are all concerned over the danger of public spaces outside of the home, a concern that has been sharply conditioned by the grandmother’s experience in the Partition. I have tried to account for these three elements, the economic, the coercive and the historical, in my ethnographic account. In showing these three elements together, I hope to convince my reader that neoliberalism has not had the effect of “removing the patriarchal admixtures” from labor through formal subsumption. Instead, we require a theory of articulation to explain how the family economy may actually expand in response to an increase in international trade along with a closer tie to the core economies of capitalism.

This ethnographic evidence has shown how tightly informal labor is connected to middle class commodity consumption and the reproduction of the home and business. Not only are home and business reproduction intermingled, but for both home and business, the manner of social reproduction is not confined to the efficient exploitation of labor capacities. Additionally, these employment contacts make use of the social relations that can be engendered from dependent and partly-unfree labor. As discussed, each car has its own informal laborer to attend to its maintenance. Wages would seem to be so low that adding a dedicated member of the entourage, partly paid in kind, is worthwhile. For Sakshi, the expensive cosmetics she buys are
applied to her body by a servant and the dresses she and her daughter buy are brought to the house by a tailor. The labor that accompanies consumption in core countries is relegated to the servants by these middle class Indians. This is only a small expenditure of labor that does not increase the value of the good. The consumption of services in this way means that many hours of informal labor will be used waiting, traveling, or training, but at little monetary cost. What is so unusual about middle class consumption in Delhi is how tiny a surplus in the form of extra time is extracted from informal workers yet with such consistency and from such a large number of laborers. In countries like the US, service providers and retailers economize on the amount of labor time devoted to the consumer, while consumers themselves may find themselves performing administrative paperwork or even scanning goods to be checked out. This extra labor involved in consumption is an important feature of the neoliberal economy. As the burden of family reproduction becomes more laborious for the US middle class, these labor functions are fully taken over by informal workers in India. With regard to commodities, neoliberalism has placed a greater burden on family reproduction for the middle class internationally; however, the Indian middle class is more equipped to handle these requirements for the production of professional workers due to their increasingly complex system of labor and reward within the family economy.

Another major interconnection between informal laborers and commodities is the use by laborers of family consumer goods like the TV and air conditioning. Sometimes servants also use the family’s iPad and music system, and all of these luxuries cost the same to the family whether or not servants use from them in between family members’ use. The value of these accommodations depends largely on the very poor living conditions prevailing outside the middle class home. The house provides a clean and pleasant environment where servants have
access to food, shelter, clothing and highly desirably electronics – particularly considering the village conditions from which servants usually originate. Being allowed to sleep outside in a space secure from theft, assault and possible traffic accidents is a large benefit for most of these servants. Clean water is also a scarce resource for migrants to Delhi. These servants appear to accept low wages in part because working for the family allows them a small part of the luxuries (and necessities) that the middle class of Delhi consumes. However, this arrangement is deeply paradoxical.

While laborers accept low wages because of access to international commodities, along with the benefits of living in a more developed place than wherever they originated, this cheap labor actually promotes underdevelopment in Delhi. This family, and the five other families I conducted research with, did not buy services from waged workers in the formal economy who would be able to pay for their own quality housing, goods and services. The middle class families also purchased few household commodities that might reduce the need for such a broad use of informal labor. If families bought dishwashers, washing machines and driers, vacuums, and so forth, potentially from Indian manufacturers, there would be less need for informal workers. The household of a middle class family in Delhi has not mechanized their own reproduction as have middle class households in core countries, or even rapidly developing countries in East Asia, due to the abundance of informal labor available in Delhi. Already, this family has bought four cars from the US, so there is clearly no question that a vacuum cleaner or automatic mop is within their ability to purchase. This relationship between underdevelopment and informal labor is more greatly explored in the theoretical conclusion of this dissertation. Nevertheless, the ethnographic data in this chapter supports the argument made by Marx, elaborated by Amin, on a micro-scale inside the homes of my research subjects. What my
ethnographic research shows in this chapter is how a large lumpenproletariat delays real subsumption by economically de-incentivizing investment in technology that would make labor more productive.

Although studying the economic parameters of kinship is a customary concern for cultural anthropology, this is the first study of of the Indian middle class family which includes informal workers in the family unit. This approach has expanded the potential for analyzing the middle class in three important ways. First, it allows family members to be understood in relationship to their employees on a continuum of unfree labor and patriarchal control. The family members besides Akshay have different roles than servants, but the family members’ division of labor exists only in conjunction with their informal laborers. In this way, it is possible to see how Akshay’s expectations of labor, distribution of reward, and application of punishment, comprise an economic system which does not strictly distinguish between being a middle class family member and an informal laborer. This is due to the fact that they belong to the same patriarchal economic unit, even though they have a different position in that division than those of their employees. The labor performed by the whole aggregate serves to capacitate the development of certain key individuals, classified by kinship; but beyond a certain point, the development of any individual will be left aside in favor of the advancement of particular family members. In this way, one individual can benefit from and in a certain sense embody the labor of many, and the family can discover ways of making this possibility useful within their social context.

Observing the way patriarchal power is individualistic within the family through Akshay’s example is important to understanding patriarchal admixtures. By Meillassoux’s
particular definition of patriarchal slavery, all the members of the family except Akshay are under this form of economic extraction (Meillassoux 1991). They have different positions, but all members are ultimately answerable to Akshay. He is an individual who has power over the entire economic unit. This makes his power political with respect to patriarchal admixtures. The admixtures of gender, age, caste, location of origin, and kinship membership are all at work in influencing his decisions over his financial and social dependence. For instance, he openly stated that he would never hire a Muslim and periodically imagines himself running them down on the road with his car. In a personal sense he may benefit more than others, but it is also characteristic that his decisions concentrate the power to socially reproduce the family along the lines of his cultural orientations, which also dispose him to use that power patriarchally.

The third perspective gained from including informal laborers in the family economic system is to see how informal workers and the old middle class of India are in a dialect with each other. Both family members (apart from Akshay) and the informal workers in the home and business can be fruitfully compared to the lumpenproletariat. Within the lumpenproletariat’s informal economic activities, patriarchal admixtures are at there most potent. As we saw with the different economic contracts of the employees, they represent a spectrum of labor contracts which do not follow the parameters of relations that have undergone formal subsumption. This economic situation, which produces both children who intend to work in the US and (though not observed here) inheritors of the patriarchal family business, is nevertheless essentially a form of labor extraction that is not technologically developed and only produces a small surplus. The informal laborers are exploited by middle class people, not by capitalists, although they contribute to the capabilities of the children of this family, who in turn contribute to capitalism. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I argue in greater detail that middle classes in the periphery
participate in a system of patriarchal admixtures along with the lumpenproletariat, unlike their middle class counterparts in core countries. However, these small exploitations still contribute to capitalism.

The expansion of this family’s hotel and transportation business is a direct result of neoliberal policies in India. First, the location of their business in a major market of India, which has become more closely connected to world capitalism, has increased the property value of their holdings. Second, the reduction of export tax has made bulk purchases more profitable, resulting in profitable high-volume customers and bringing traders from all over the world to stay at the hotel. And third, these exports are sold to NRAs (Non-Resident Indians) abroad. The movement of middle class professionals abroad has increased the profitability of selling locally-produced commodities which cater to this demographic such as saris, wedding decorations, jewelry, and so forth. All these supplements to profits have promoted the hiring of more informal laborers in the business and more informal laborers in the home to attend to their new possessions. Unquestionably, with this family and with many other petty-bourgeois businesses in Delhi, neoliberalism has sustained and extended informal economic relationships, and made local patriarchal admixtures more important as contributors to international capitalism.
Chapter Three

Childhood Favoritism through Uneven Investments

“Home is not home unless it holds the turmoil of strong feelings
If there are cries of grief, not songs of joy, then be it so.”
— Ghalib 72

There is no parent who does not sometimes divide his or her attention and resources unevenly between the children. To compound this, most children are highly sensitive to cues indicating that their parents may prefer one child over another. These early perceptions and interactions often set into motion the dynamics between siblings that will continue into adulthood and additionally lay some of the fundamental building blocks of identity. These early impressions suggest to individuals which attributes and behaviors are socially preferable and directs their development toward a particular type of cultural being. In the following chapter I will show how certain cultural particularities of the Delhi middle class are fostered among children through parental favoritism and sibling rivalry. However, even more significantly, I reveal how the system of childhood favoritism in this specific cultural and economic context represent economically motivated forms of family strategizing for middle class mobility. The families I will describe below specialize their children into a division of labor and reward within the family economic system in order to ensure the continuation and advancement of the entire family. Social mobility is not a choice for the middle class, as a secure station has to be achieved with each generation as conditions change constantly (Katz 2004). Simply to be included in the middle class represents a level of success in producing and reproducing champions of social competition, especially since although many are called to the restricted paths to material comfort, few are chosen (Dickey; 2012). If resources can have their say, the chosen will not be left to
chance. Here I will show how families maximize their chances of middle class inclusion through inculcating a division of social expectations among their children.

**A Picture of Favoritism**

I lay on Khushi’s bed. She had just gotten home from a long day spent visiting with her husband’s distant family members. Her feet and legs were swollen under the weight of her pregnant body. After turning on the air conditioning and TV, she went into her walk-in closet to change from a sari into sweatpants and a tank top. She then joined me on the large bed, strewn with pillows of every shape and size. It was the early evening, and she had a young female servant lay out a clear mat to cover the bed between us. This mat was then loaded with ten or twelve snacks to accompany tea. When the woman left, Khushi hung her limbs over the pillows and sunk down among them—settling into a comfortable position so that she might instruct me on the proper way to view her family members.

“Aunty [Khushi’s mother’s sister] is trying to fool you. It wasn’t just Saanvi’s [the first daughter] marriage—her parents never liked her. When she was young they would abuse her a lot and never let her leave the house. But they loved her sister Priyanka [second daughter]. Priyanka got to drive, she got a phone, and she got to go to America. Saanvi is dark, not fair like her sister, and her mind is always wandering. She would read a lot to avoid her mother. They [her parents] knew she was not practical by nature. It was her fault for marrying that man, and if he is bad [he is a violent alcoholic], it’s her own fault. Priyanka is practically minded. Her husband is not fair but earns well, and now you can see she is doing well. They [her parents] were right not to favor her [Saanvi]—they knew how she would turn out.”
In my study, I was surprised how explicitly family members identified favored siblings and the extent to which accounts by different family members, in different social contexts and over time, overlapped and merge into consensus. In families with multiple children, there were virtually no contested accounts of which child was the favorite of the father and mother. Sometimes different children were the favorites of different parents, and sometimes both parents favored the same child. Additionally, the favored child was neither always the eldest nor always male, as might be expected given the typical ‘Hindu’ family structure that bases hierarchy on age and gender (Chowdhry 2011; Gupta 1992; Newbigin 2013; Chowdhry 2011; Sarkar 2001). I have attempted to give special attention to those features of favoritism that extend beyond age and gender—the two most predictable features of sibling differentiation. As this chapter progresses, the reader will witness how fairness, aggressiveness and being practically-minded, coupled with the timing and circumstances of births, oftentimes transcends more obvious formulations of gender and birth order in the competition between siblings for parental favoritism.

The following is an ethnographic description of a single family with four siblings. We have met this same family, as described by their cousin, one paragraph above. This family’s story and the meaning of childhood favoritism to them appeared within my ethnographic record to be closely tied to the myth of Krishna’s extraordinary birth and childhood. I have preserved that intersection in my description, as I see the story of Krishna serving as a lens through which these individuals create meaning out of their life circumstances and childhood experiences. As I will discuss in more detail below, the Krishna character as a child can be understood as a kind of ideal-type of hero-child in this cultural context.
The traffic had been particularly bad that day. I was told the congestion was because this day was Krishna’s birthday, Janmashtami. Shortly before dinner, Saanvi explained to me that that night we were to tour a variety of celebratory sights in the neighborhood. She had a smile and a relaxed air as she recounted with some delight the colorful antics of the mischievous young god. “When Krishna was a baby he would trouble his mother a lot. He loved to eat ghee, and wherever she would hide it, he would discover the pot of ghee. He was a very clever child. So she put it into a pot that she hung from the ceiling so he could not reach. He came up with a plan to eat the ghee by stepping on the back of a cow. But the cow moved and he was left hanging there. When his mother saw him, she could not be mad at him and ran over to help. Whenever he was naughty she would gaze at his beautiful face and she could not be mad.”

As Saanvi recounted this story, we lay on a large bed in the only air-conditioned room of her parents’ house looking up at the pictures that lined the interior of the room. The largest picture was of Krishna as a baby. Compared to other paintings of this style, this one of a child had a roundness in the eyes—an innocence not normally depicted in the flirtatious almond eyes of adult gods or the depictions of Krishna as a man. His checks were heavy—but not rounded or high on the face, with a greater heft of experience than a baby could possibly have endured. He sat with one of his pudgy legs bent, the other outstretched, among illustrations of diamonds, gold coins and strings of pearls—all casually strewn into the foreground of the painting. In the room, there were other pictures as well. There was one family photo that included all the members of the immediate family. Each of the family members looks stern, and in a dramatic departure from the US-style of picture taking, only one member, the eldest son, seemed to have even made an effort to look happy. If anything, in the group picture, the family members looked both caught off guard and suspicious of the photographer—or any future observers of this portrait. The other
pictures were all of their eldest son, Saanvi’s brother, Vihaan. There was a picture of him smiling slyly, handsomely, with a notebook in his hand at around the age of 17, now about 15 years ago; and a picture of him in a business suit, this time exuding an innocent youthful energy—a light in his eyes that has not been dimmed by experience. The other two framed pieces werepseudo-professional drawings of him: one was a caricature with exaggerated facial features and a tiny body; the other, a rather poorly-penciled portrait of his profile, starting from above the shoulders. The other three children were strangely absent from the room, save for in their one family photo, where all the members were as stiff and stark as the white background of the picture.

That evening we had tea and then dinner with Saanvi’s parents. Her mother, and Vihaan’s mother, recounted more tales of Krishna’s youth to me, and instructed me on the particular recipes that were used on this day. One slightly rare delicacy was a fried pancake made from rice that was to be eaten with a saffron cream. As a group, eight people in total, all the family members and I toured the neighborhood around 9:30PM after our meal. Most of the streets were comparatively empty, while others were filled with people celebrating—they followed floats of gods, on which Brahmans sat conducting prayers and offerings, flanked by large bands whose bright red snare drums could pierce the ear if one stood too close. The large crowed of colorfully dressed people gathered on all side, dancing and enjoying in high festive spirit. Our first stop was the new mall that had recently been constructed in the Chinese-modernist style. On the walls, printed banners depicted scenes from Krishna’s childhood. There were also symbols, such as pots hanging from the ceiling, associated with his childhood stories. There were extraordinary designs made with flowers around a small swing that symbolized the crib in which his mother would rock him to sleep by gently pulling a string.
Our second stop was a tiny park that comprised a roundabout in the nearby market. Some years ago, the government had wanted to rebuild the traffic pathways, which are abysmal, but the community had declared the singular inhabitant of the park sacred—a large tree. The park had become half temple, half roundabout, in a political compromise. Tonight, around the tree sat eight children, each a figure in a story about Krishna at different ages. As is the norm in India, when children are dressed up as gods, in a temple or during a holiday, they often seem quite put-upon. These children seemed both bored and tired. Saanvi and I noticed that the children sparked up, and held their dramatic poise more carefully while trying not to smile, when they saw me, a foreigner, taking pictures of them.

Our third stop was a major temple in the area. The line to get in was long, and we waited about fifteen minutes before we were able to enter and make the rounds. Circumambulation involved bowing and giving flowers and other offerings as the family greeted the eighteen different gods portrayed. In the temple family members were solemn and organized, making sure not to overlook any one god, nor hold up the line. But the fourth and final stop was more relaxed. A family in the neighborhood had made a practice of collecting sculptures and scenes of Krishna’s life. They opened up their shop on this one day so people could come learn about the different myths that comprise Krishna’s character and worship their personal collection of idols. At the shop-cum-temple, Saanvi told me of how Krishna had stolen the clothing of some milkmaids, the Gopi girls, while they were bathing. She said, “They had to run naked! He was a very naughty boy.” As she said this she tilted her head back and laughed.

Saanvi’s mother pointed out another scene. It was Krishna’s mother. There was a statue with a figure in a brown woolen cloth. The small figure was in a box that resembled a rat trap. The figure herself, Krishna’s mother, had pain in her painted face and her arms outstretched in a
gesture longing for freedom. Saanvi’s mother explained to me of how Krishna’s mother had an evil brother, a cruel king that had imprisoned her and murdered her children with his own hand for fear of a prophecy which foretold that his sister’s child would destroy him. When Vihaan’s mother said “Krishna took revenge for her”, her eyes flashed with anger. At the time, I perceived that she was not just describing the myth of Krishna but had attached an additional personal meaning to the story of how his mother was freed. Later she described the circumstances in which her first son, Vihaan, was born.

“My mother did not care about my education; she wanted to marry me off immediately. She thought, ‘What use is it to educate girls?’ I finished my B.A., but at twenty I was married to these people. My mother’s sister was a friend with his (her husband’s) mother and she told them about me. She said I was a fair girl and that the two families should become related. They married my sister to his cousin and arranged my marriage a few months later. They didn’t even check to see what a family this is, what his mother was, what his brothers are. Anyone in the neighborhood but that aunt would have told them how bad these people were, always yelling. When I was married they expected me to cook but I had never cooked. I had only studied. But they would scream at me and slap me if I did anything wrong—I had to learn everything myself. His mother [her mother-in-law] burned me with a hot pan once for burning the food. Look do you see this scar? After six months, I was pregnant [with Saanvi] but I could not endure his [her husband’s] brother’s abuse. He would scream and beat me every day and abuse even his parents. I thought I would die if I stayed there. I went back to my father’s house, but after Saanvi was born they [her parents] demanded I return to Delhi. If I had not had her, I would have never returned. Twice his mother forced me to have an abortion because they were girls. They abused me a lot. But Priya [her second daughter] was saved because his mother died shortly before she
was born, and he [her husband] thought it was her reincarnation. One year later Vihaan was born. After that this family tormented me less. His brother became more afraid, and eventually when Vihaan was fifteen, he managed to beat his brother [her brother-in-law]. After that he [her brother-in-law] would not even talk to me. Vihaan protects me still from him [her husband]. He [her husband] will do anything he [Vihaan] says but nothing I say.”

Vihaan’s childhood was described by his parents and siblings as follows:

Vihaan’s father: “Vihaan is by nature a warm-hearted person with a practical head…he always thinks of his family first. When he was young, I would give him chocolate and he would share with them [his siblings]. Sometimes he is upset and argues, but because he loves everyone.”

Vihaan’s mother: “When Vihaan was a child he was very naughty. When it was time to take them to school, I would get all the children dressed, but he would hide; and when I found him he would cry, tear off his uniform and run around the house trying to escape. Most mornings he would terrorize me…we were always late.”

Vihaan’s older sister Priyanka: “Vihaan would be playing pranks on his classmates and never did his work. They changed his birth certificate so he would be in my class, to trouble me. I did his school work for him; he hated to study.”

Vihaan’s oldest sister Saanvi: “My father will do anything he says. When we were young, if they bought us ice cream or a new toy depended on if Vihaan wanted it. He would be relentless until they gave in, and then we could have some ice cream, too, but only if Vihaan decided.”

Vihaan’s younger brother: “You should not argue with him. Whatever you say to him will come back on you. It’s better to just agree to everything he says. When he gets in a fit he’s not in his mind. He cannot stop yelling.”
There are two axioms of favoritism within this family. The first is his father’s preference for Vihaan over his younger brother. His younger brother is considered the favorite of their mother, while Vihaan is the clear favorite of their father. His younger brother used to share a bed with his mother into his adulthood, and was considered a “fair and sweet child” by his mother. Additionally, Vihaan’s temper and bad childhood behavior was hard for his mother to endure, while her youngest son has a mild, quiet and cooperative personality. However, Vihaan’s father’s preference for him over his brother was a much stronger force in this system of favoritism. Not only did his father have the final say on which commodities and resources the children had access to, but even more importantly, the only way for his wife to influence his dictums was through her children, primarily through Vihaan. As an adult, Vihaan yelled at her often, and aggressively, which regularly brought her to tears during my fieldwork with her. I asked her why she still talks to Vihaan every day, and she reported: “He [her husband] talks to Vihaan before deciding anything, so I have to keep him [Vihaan] happy,” and, “When he [her husband] is dead, I will have nothing without Vihaan. They will chase me from this house.” Vihaan’s younger brother seems resigned to this inequality of power between them. He reported, “I just go along…whatever he wants, it’s only small things not worth arguing about.” Here, we can observe an example of how mothers and fathers may have different preferred children but the inequality between parents creates an inequality even between two favored sons.

The two daughters in this family are the same women as described by Khushi at the beginning of the chapter. Khushi identifies that the second daughter, Priyanka, was the favorite because she is fair and ‘practically minded’ compared to her older sister Saanvi. However, it appears that there were several contributing factors to her favoritism. Their first daughter was born eight years before the birth of their first son, while their second daughter was born less than
a year before Vihaan. In the earliest years of Saanvi’s life, the family was insecure without a son and thus resented her sex. Conversely, Priyanka was so close in age to Vihaan that they were considered to be almost twins, and she was afforded extra privileges due to his privilege. But, more importantly, the second daughter was born only seven months after her father’s mother’s death. Their father’s affectionate feelings towards his mother were, in part, transferred to the daughter, whom he feels embodies his mother’s reincarnation. While his first daughter was restricted from leaving the house, beaten often, and given few commodities, his second daughter was a daddy’s girl that could easily touch the heart of her father when making requests for freedom and goods. To both parents, their first daughter was treated, and is still treated, as a burden. Conversely, their second daughter is treated like a baby or a princess. But overall, in this family, the less-favored son still had a greater proportion of privileges, parental affirmations and material rewards than his favored sister.

The Portrait of Krishna as a Child

Three events within the story of Krishna’s childhood appear to speak to the culturally-specific meaning of favoritism among these siblings and within the several families described throughout this chapter. The positive associations this family has with Krishna’s birth and childhood myths are first, that Krishna’s ‘naughtiness’ and whimsical nature in childhood was evidence of his superior personal qualities and extraordinary destiny; second, that Krishna’s beauty as a child made his mother unable to punish him; and third, that Krishna ultimately avenges his parents and restores their social status. Krishna embodies a kind of charismatic type within this society. He is willful, beautiful and will ultimately advance the cause of his parents in their quest for social mobility. In the following ethnographic descriptions of favoritism between
siblings, the reader will observe that the three major traits identified as positive and contributing to parental selection are aggressive personality characteristics, a fair complexion, and the quality of being practically minded. These qualities have a correspondence to Krishna’s charismatic child-character.

First, Krishna, in his naughtiness transcends social standards of acceptability in order to achieve his own pleasure. For example, when he steals the clothing of the bathing women, he violates their rights for his own delight. Not only is his behavior socially unacceptable under normal circumstances but it could also even be characterized as sadistic; nonetheless, instead this action is light-hearted, amusing, and sweetly forgivable to Krishna’s admirers. The favoritism of children who are more willing to dominate their family members seems closely tied to their cultural view that naughty behavior in childhood, particularly among boys, is forgivable and sweet. As observed in Vihaan’s story, his propensity to yell and scream until his parents gave into his demands both was afforded by, and maintained, his favored status. Each of his siblings, and both of his parents, passively accept verbal abuse from him on a regular basis now that he is an adult. When he was younger—at this point I have known him for ten years—he would use affection and diplomacy more often to influence his family. Whereas now, living away from home in the US, he largely just abuses them over the phone them until they submit. Vihaan’s socially-destructive and manipulative behavior in childhood and as an adult has been accepted by all his family members and extolled as “caring and emotional” by his father. Vihaan is currently living away from Delhi, but I have overheard him on speakerphone yelling at his own father. Vihaan’s favored status was largely due to his father’s attention, and part of their interpersonal relationship includes Vihaan speaking angrily at his father. Tolerance, patience, and forgiveness
are easily granted to Vihaan—just as the naughty son archetype evidenced in the myth of Krishna is met with love and affection.

Second, Krishna was too beautiful for his mother to punish him for his bad behavior. Within these families, the issue of possessing lighter skin is important in the favoritism of parents, particularly toward girls. As observed between Vihaan’s sisters, the favoritism of one daughter over the other was attributed by Khushi to their differences in fairness and practical mindedness. While there were other contributing factors as well, the issue of fairness was identified by many family members as being of critical importance to explaining their different treatment in childhood. Whereas their parents were strict and harsh toward their eldest daughter, they could not refuse their younger daughter’s requests to drive, own a new phone and take a trip to the US. While the Krishna story is not about light skin, the overlap of fairness and beauty within this cultural context bares on both the myth and the family system of favoritism. The mother-child relationship in the myth is explained by the mother’s recognition of beauty in her son and her inability to punish him due to the strong feeling of love his beauty elicits in her. In Vihaan’s family, identifying one daughter as more beautiful than the other also displays a willingness of parents to grant favorable treatment to the more beautiful child.

Third, Krishna brings advantages to his family and restores their social stature. Vihaan’s mother’s description of Krishna’s mother’s plight and social restoration after his birth betrayed her strong attachment to this story of redemption. She says that her life before Vihaan’s birth was a “hell” created by her brother-in-law. With his birth, Vihaan gave his mother a higher social status among her in-laws. During his eventual ascension into manhood, at the age of 15, he fought her brother-in-law and ended her brother-in-law’s reign of terror over her. However, this story has an even greater bearing on favoritism than the rather structural formula articulated by
Vihaan’s mother. Krishna ultimately heightens his parent’s social position. The label of practical or practically minded is a major item in descriptions of favoritism throughout this chapter. This locally-produced ethnographic category means something closely akin to “ruthless pragmatism,” “objectification for gain,” or “utilitarian narcissism.” Being practically minded means shrewdly using one’s social position to attain the greatest wealth and social stature possible. In one sense, it is the more diplomatic version of aggressiveness. However, being practically minded is distinguished from aggressiveness because it is not about overt domination but primarily about keeping one’s eye on the prize—in this case, social mobility. Being practically minded is about having the right materialistic goals and doing whatever necessary to achieve those goals. We will continue to explore how being practically minded is connected to social-family strategies for social and economic advancement and is perceived as advantageous by parents in the distribution of goods, privileges and affections among their children.

Before we dive to a greater depth in this ethnography, I would like to call attention to three important aspects of favoritism as they reoccur as themes throughout the following family stories: 1) aggressiveness, 2) fairness, and 3) being practically minded. After presenting the stories of four different families below, the analysis of this information will use the narrative contexts in which these words and themes occur to gather together the concepts as part of an ethnographically-produced analytical framework. We will see how relations of domination and subordination between siblings are integrated or articulated as patriarchal social relations within the larger globalizing capitalist economy. All three categories come through as conceptual categories that are widely shared within this social milieu.

The first story for the following section does not proceed along the eldest-brother pattern of favoritism. While several of the stories will deal with the eldest inheriting son, this next
narrative will illustrate how socially-dominating personality traits, in part a matter of temperament, are in some cases a stronger indicator of favoritism than a strictly structural perspective. While these narratives sometimes illustrate the rule, I find that the exceptions tend to offer greater insight into parental determinism. Additionally, I have organized the following narratives across three generations moving from oldest to youngest. I will begin by describing the sibling relationship of three men, ages 75-55, and end by describing a sibling relationship between siblings under the age of 18. I have organized the material as such in order so that the reader may observe the historical change and continuity more clearly.

The Story of Yash

Yash was born in 1942 as the second son, the fifth of thirteen children, to Hindu-Punjabi parents in Lahore. Yash’s family, along with every family in this study, belongs to a level of the Kshatriya caste that has traditionally been economically positioned at a trader or business caste level. This family endured violence in the Partition and was forced to flee to Delhi. However, unlike the family from the second chapter, this family had generous family members already established in Delhi. These kinship bonds were able to help them quickly restart their family business. When they relocated to Delhi, they bought a small workshop in a major bazaar in North Delhi which specializes in relatively small statues of Hindu gods made for shrines kept at home. They bought a house in the Old City only four kilometers from the shop. Many of members of Yash’s father’s family had been killed in the Partition, and the family members who described Yash’s father to me usually noted this fact before saying that he was a hard man to please. Nothing anyone did was good enough, least of all his wife.
From an early age, Yash’s older brother, Manish, was the only child to which his father paid any attention. The female children were relegated to the back of the house, and Manish alone was able to sit in the main room while his parents entertained friends and family. Manish was not a handsome child, too dark to be considered beautiful in his parents’ eyes, but he was considered smart. Having first had Manish described to me as a child by Yash and then meeting him now, at 75 years of age, I did not think he was unusually bright, clever or capable. Instead, during his two week visit to India from his home in Canada, he hollered orders at everyone in a rather boorish way. Regardless, Manish was assigned to be scholar of the home. Possibly in a somewhat demeaning juxtaposition, his father dictated that Manish was the thinker, while he, his father, was a practical man. It can be inferred that Manish’s perceived impracticality made him unsuitable to take over the business. Manish’s education was prioritized over the other children. By the time Manish was 22, and had graduated from a prestigious undergraduate college, it was obvious that he did not intend to maintain the family business. His drive towards another profession and his eventual migration to Canada appear to have been, at least in part, a reaction to the heavily critical gaze of his father. By the time he was 24, he was a practicing dentist in Delhi, and by 28, he lived with his wife and two children in the upper level of his parent’s house—built just for him and his new family. By the age of 30, he moved his family to Canada where he practiced dentistry, though he maintained ownership of the upper level of the house, which was then left empty. Today, he still calls the house every day to talk to his younger brother Yash, which gives him continued influence on the matters of the house and the business. Manish’s younger son, having returned to India at the age of 18, currently lives in the upper area of the house owned by Manish.
Yash grew up as his mother's favorite. While she was rather cruel, with respect to criticisms and beatings directed at her daughters and daughters-in-law, but she favored Yash above both his other brother, Manish, and eventually his younger brother, Shivansh, as well. When Yash discusses his mother, whom he actively invokes in casual conversation, he describes her in religious terms. She is a goddess, spiritual protector, and meditative guide. His family members report that when Yash’s mother was alive he would dutifully do whatever she instructed with his brothers, sisters, wife and children. Yash’s mother did not have a great deal of control over Manish, who she may have considered more difficult to manipulate. However, Yash was deemed to have a sweet temperament that was in constant need of protective mothering. The cross between a naturally passive temperament, along with a propensity for feelings of emotional guilt, made Yash—the son whom eventually inherited the family business—a prime figure between his mother and her influence over other family members, including her husband.

From an early age, Yash’s father and mother undermined his confidence in his intellectual capabilities. Both his parents made it clear that they thought Manish was much smarter than Yash, and his father ridiculed Yash. Now, even at an old age, Yash thinks of himself as neither practical nor shrewd in business matters. On one occasion, I witnessed a tenant at a flat he owned ask to have a large birthday party on the roof. He was not able to say no, but later, after consulting numerous family members including Manish in Canada, Yash sent his daughter to instruct the tenant that she did not have permission for the party. This pattern of avoiding conflict and consulting others on each and every decision is a firmly established habit. His wife often attributes her unhappy married life not to him but to his mother. His wife reports that his mother was the person who would constantly encourage him to ignore his wife’s needs
and be attentive to everyone in his family except her. When Yash slights her, after forty years of marriage, she attributes it to his long-dead mother’s bad nature and undue influence over him.

Yash’s younger brother, Shivansh, was their father’s favorite son. He is eight years younger than Manish and six years younger than Yash. Shamash’s daughter reports that her father was the favorite child of his father because he is the fairest, arguably the most handsome, and the most practically minded. Shivansh was eventually given a third of the house and a monthly income from the family business run by Yash. Shivansh became a mid-level government bureaucrat who makes his way by taking bribes for government-funded construction projects. Shivansh lived on the same block as me for nearly a year, and he was prominent on the street: He would openly beat his servants on the road, threaten the neighbors and people passing by, and I could overhear terrible screams from his wife and children inside their house on a daily basis. One day, I raised my concerns for his wife and children to Yash, as well as Shivansh’s sister’s daughter, who replied: “Don’t worry about her [Shivansh’s wife], she is a practical woman. Anyway, it is his nature…he used to beat my mother when they were kids.” Shivansh eventually made enough money—through bribes and extorting his family members—so that he and his immediate family could move away from the block in North Delhi to a beautiful, new white marble house in Gurgaon.

The strongest critics of Shivansh were Yash’s two sons. They would complain that Shivansh was bulling their father, Yash, into giving him a large percentage of their immediate family’s monthly income from their father’s inherited business in statuettes. I asked them to explain why Shivansh was able to intimidate his older brother, and why Yash did not stand up for himself in the conflict. His oldest son said: “These things were decided long ago. My
grandfather wanted them like this. He preferred Shivansh. We cannot go back in time—the thing is set now.”

Of these three brothers, one migrated to North America as middle class professional labor, one inherited and continued the family’s petty-bourgeois business, and one became a government official. How do we characterize a middle class family, and middle class in general, that fulfills all these roles? As we can see in this story, the division of labor between the brothers was created early in childhood through the parental recognition of particular attributes in their children and their guidance in making these traits useful for social mobility. The bully with aggressiveness became a middle class man who makes his living taking bribes; the gentle person easily persuaded by other family members was put in charge of the family business; the aloof intellectual was helped to migrate to Canada to perform dentistry. The complexities of this class encompass all three of these distinct middle class economic positions. Part of the diversity of these roles, as seen through this story, is due to family differentiation in how children may complement one another in bringing a higher economic and social status to the family. They are encouraged to compete for the kind of attention that will lead to different roles, so that as adults they will not compete for the same resources but attain high incomes in their own diverse ways.

The Story of Parth

Parth’s family are Sikhs who moved to North Delhi during the Partition. His grandparents once had a home in Lahore where they ran a prosperous sari business in a central bazaar. They kept their caste surname, and, like the other Punjabis described, they are from a Kshatriya caste. When they fled Lahore they lost four of their immediate family members in the violence. When they came to Delhi they were precariously incorporated into the family life and sari business of
their extended relatives, namely, that of their father’s older brother. Parth’s grandparents had two sons, while their extended family members were childless. Their sons were raised to inherit their uncle’s business. One of these two brothers was Parth’s father. Parth’s father was the eldest brother, and until the age of 15, was expected to work in the sari shop business. However, their relatives had their own son, and Parth’s father was no longer inherited through his father’s line.

In response to a question about his childhood, Parth’s father said: “Indian men don’t need school. I didn’t. I learned business from my uncle. Men work, they should work, without work and money, men are nothing. Today kids are so weak, they don’t have a job till they're 25! You must protect your family. How can you protect your family without money, without work? What will happen if sons don’t work? School is good for girls. They are the ones teaching the children so they should do more studying, too. Like you, it is good for you to go to school and learn to teach. You will educate your children. Women should go to school, and if they want to work as a time pass, they should become teachers. For men, everything you need to know is out in the world.”

Parth’s father, in conjunction with Parth’s uncle, started a second business in Chandni Chowk. Parth’s father bought a chaat shop that sold specialty sweets, rarely found outside of this market. Now the shop also caters large weddings in Delhi, ships specialty sweets to diverse places within India, and the store front has become so popular that people line up around the block to buy bejeweled boxes of sweets as gifts. Parth’s uncle’s sons still run the sari business, which has now expanded to exporting saris to the US and Australia. Parth’s father runs the sweets business with his two sons, Parth and his older brother Sajal.

Parth’s father had deep and permanent wrinkles in his brow line that made him appear angry all the time. His brow is heavy and dark, his eyes barely perceptible except for their
flashing reflections. He seems like a world-weary man: When he would come home to slump in 
his chair, his large frame and muscular shoulders gave him the appearance of a battle-worn 
warrior. Parth’s father often bellows angry comments to his wife and children, but somehow it 
seems like it doesn’t fit him, like a put-on, a performance—a performance that drains him badly. 
Parth’s mother’s family was also involved in the Partition but initially moved to Hyderabad in 
the South. She is almost twenty years younger than her husband, and although her sons are 22 
and 24, she is a young-looking 41 years of age. Their daughter, Parth’s sister Priya, age 18, is 
Parth’s mother’s constant companion.

Parth and Priya assert that from the first day of their lives, their father has largely ignored 
them except for the occasional disciplinary treatments. Since childhood, their father would take 
Sajal with him to the office, on trips and to parties, excluding his younger son and daughter. He 
bought Sajal a car, the latest phone, video games, a trip to Europe, and gave him the money 
needed for Sajal’s extravagant nights on the town. Parth and Priya were expected to cater to 
Sajal’s needs and give over anything of theirs he fancied. One night while we were having 
dinner, Sajal with that same angry look that punctuated his father’s brow, noticed that Parth had 
a new pair of shoes. He commanded Parth to hand them over. Parth was calm and seemed happy 
as he graciously obliged his brother. Later I ask Parth about the incident, and he said, “There is 
no use fighting with him. You can see how unhappy he is; if the shoes make him happy, then let 
it be. I don’t mind.” Another night, after dinner during tea and desserts, Sajal recounted an 
incident he had with an employee at the sweets shop that day. He reported that the employee had 
come to work three hours late and hung over. Sajal gave him three slaps across the face, one of 
which caused a great deal of blood to pour from the man’s nose. “It was nauseating. It was his
mistake; why bleed on me?” Mother and father laughed. Parth’s mother said to Sajal, “You did a right thing. You are very clear in your mind, very practical, your lesson will teach him.”

Sajal recently married his long-time girlfriend. She is very fair by Punjabi standards and undoubtedly a beautiful woman. Priya told me that her new sister-in-law is a “very practical woman” because she was able to sexually manipulate Sajal into marrying her. Although she came from a good family, they had little money. Since marriage, the family complains that their new daughter-in-law spends extravagantly. But on the other hand, they seem relieved that Sajal has moved into his own area of the house, seemed happier, and was more capable of controlling his temper in front of his wife.

Parth was not considered practical and probably for this reason neither the favorite of his father or mother. He has an artistic disposition and has taught himself to play a number of instruments. He would sing and play the guitar for us after dinner, which seemed soothing to the entire family. Parth describes himself as a “peacemaker” and appears to understand his role as clearly secondary, but complimentary, to Sajal’s angry temperament. Parth told me that when he was a teenager, Sajal and their father would sometimes get into major physical fights. He would come between them, preferring to be hit by both rather than let them harm each other. Also Parth protects his mother from his father. His sister told me that he often is beaten by their father in place of their mother. She said: “Parth cannot raise a hand to him [their father], but when he beats her [their mother], Parth turns it on himself.”

Being neither the favorite of their father nor in Priya’s position of protection through their mother, Parth receives the worst treatment of his siblings. His mother said, “He is a dreamer. What will he do? He cannot live without Sajal.” This seemed to echo the common understanding of Sajal and Parth. One was practical, a hard man, prone to anger, violence, and violation, while
Parth was a sensitive artist that cared about everyone’s feelings. To this family, Parth could not exist without Sajal’s protection, because the world itself was understood by this family as too hostile for Parth. I was cautious of Sajal, but one night I mustered the courage to ask him why he took Parth’s shoes. He replied, “I protect him from the world, let him play music, what could he give that would return my gift?”

If we view Sajal and Parth as two sides of the same coin—the peacebreaker and peacemaker—we are actually looking at them through the lens of their own family’s parental assignments. Both Sajal and Parth work in the family business, but Sajal is given more power and recognition by his family due to his aggressive behavior and temperament. This family feels the need to have a son designated as the protector, probably due to a myriad of factors such as a violent historical experience, the harsh conditions of doing business in Delhi where intimidation is often useful, and the belief that each family needs at least one practical and aggressive child. However, Parth’s role as a counterbalance utilizes his own traits for family purposes. In business matters he, as stated by his mother, “cools Sajal’s passionate nature.” At home, Parth plays music at night for the family, which is their primary bonding activity and allows all members some relief from Sajal’s frequent angry outbursts. It appears that in this family they would rather be subject to Sajal’s outbursts and feel protected than protest their own verbal and emotional abuse. In this story, even as an adult, Sajal has the right to directly demand anything from his brother, and all parties appear to agree that this is generally a profitable arrangement for the family.

The Story of Arjun
When Arjun’s maternal grandparents came from Lahore to Delhi, they first rented, and then owned, a house in the Old City of North Delhi. Only a few years later their petty-bourgeois fruit business was prosperous enough to move to a nicer home in Civil Lines. They had two boys, Arjun’s uncles, and a daughter, Arjun’s mother. Arjun’s mother was unattractive by her parent’s standards. She was dark with a short nose, and they greatly favored her brothers over her. Her son and sister-in-law both describe her treatment as deeply eroding to her personality. She was treated in most regards as a servant—as the lowest member of a family of refugees. Her parents decided early in her youth that she was somehow mentally handicapped. It is impossible to know if it was this designation that made her adult behavior unusual, or if she had a natural mental difference compared to other children. Arjun suspected that her mental difference would not have been important to her family if only she had been beautiful.

The architecture of the house, along with the architecture of the family, changed as the children were married. The brothers both received new extensions on the house and jobs in the family business. When it came to marrying their daughter, Arjun’s grandparents offered her future husband a job for life in their family business and their old house in the Old City. It was the house they had before they were fully established in Delhi after Partition. They had an understanding with the prospective husband, Arjun’s father, that his wife was mentally disturbed. Her behavior throughout her married life until her early death was primarily characterized by her husband as being unresponsive. She was deeply withdrawn and could not perform normal daily tasks or bond with her husband or, eventually, her children. Her husband, Arjun’s father, is a handsome and healthy man even at the age of sixty-two. He is the second eldest of four brothers, and did not inherit family property. When he married, he had completed his bachelor degree but had few job prospects or a house. Even after his wife had been dead for ten years and he no
longer worked, he received money every month from shares in his wife’s family business. His family members also describe him, as a father, brother-in-law, brother and son as, in some regard, distant, a non-actor, without the ability to impose his will on his own situation. Hearing family members talk about him and his wife gave me the impression that they felt her disorder, characterized by detachment, had in some sense rubbed off on her husband – a *folie à deux*.

When Arjun was born, he was a handsome and lively child. For the first six months of his life, he lived with his parents. His father’s brother and his father’s brother’s wife had moved into the house given by his grandparents, and his father’s brother’s wife was the primary caretaker of Arjun—that is, as his mother was unable to care for him, he’d been given into his father’s brother’s wife’s care. Arjun’s material grandmother decided that instead of having him “wasted by those people,” she would take him under her care. His grandmother took him from his parents and raised him with the help of her daughter-in-law in his mother’s family house. Arjun’s mother continued to live with his father, and his father’s family took care of her, while Arjun was primarily under the care of his mother’s brother’s wife and grandmother.

Arjun was the first boy born in the family. His mother’s older brother had two girls, and his mother’s younger brother was married, but childless, for the first five years of Arjun’s life. For five years, his material uncle and aunt raised him as their own, under the strict supervision of his grandmother, until they had their own child. At the age of six, Arjun was, in many ways, abandoned by his aunt. She had cared for his needs, spend her time with him, filled out his paperwork for school, and so forth, until she had her own child. She had two boys within three years, and Arjun was transferred from his uncle and aunt’s section of the house to the downstairs level with his grandparents.
Upon meeting his grandmother, I found it hard to imagine that she was the perpetrator of such crimes against Arjun’s mother and himself, although I later confirmed these stories with other family members. She is a very active older woman. She teaches yoga every morning and still cooks a large proportion of the family food. Our conversation primarily consisted of her questioning my background, but the stories of her attitude towards Arjun in his childhood are chilling. He was greatly disparaged for being the son of a daughter she was ashamed to have created. Every fault of his was attributed to his mother’s bad genes, although his being her daughter’s son was simultaneously the only claim he had to his maternal family and his presence as a child in their house. His grandmother also physically beat him. When he did something wrong, she would punch and kick him, then run through the house finding other, stronger members of the family to partake in a group beating of Arjun. Although Arjun’s uncle, who served more as a father figure than his own father, is a relatively peaceful man, he would beat Arjun almost every day on the demands of Arjun’s grandmother, his own mother.

Arjun’s aunt and uncle favored their eldest son, Aryan, a first cousin to Arjun and five years his junior. They would undermine Arjun’s confidence in order to illustrate how their own son was superior. While Arjun was still involved with his family’s daily lives, his position became a negative reflection of their son. For instance, when Arjun would get in trouble at school, his aunt and uncle would take this as evidence that he was a bad child descended from a bad mother; on the other hand, if their first son was in trouble at school, this was understood as his asserting independence through his naughty behavior. The younger son of Arjun’s uncle recounted to me how a major falling out between Arjun and Aryan caused Arjun to move out. When Arjun was 18, and had already been comfortably driving in Delhi for several years, his uncle and aunt began to question his driving ability. They said he was nervous when driving, that
his judgment could not be trusted with a car, and that Aryan, only 13 at the time, was a much better driver to spite the fact that Arjun had been the person who taught Aryan how to drive. More and more, Aryan was selected to drive the family or allowed to take a car out while Arjun’s access to the cars became increasingly restricted. Aryan began to mock Arjun for his “bad driving” in front of his family and friends, to spite the fact Arjun had never been in a collision. There was a double insult in that Aryan was five years junior to Arjun. Eventually, when Arjun was 21, and Aryan 16, Aryan told Arjun that he had no right to use any of the family’s cars, because he did not belong to the family. Arjun took this as a grave insult and moved to his father’s house. Arjun’s younger cousin, in recounting this story and others, seems rather grateful to Arjun for shielding him from the torments of his older brother during their childhood.

Arjun did visit his parent’s house and his father’s family in childhood, but always viewed them as lower class than himself. Even now, Arjun talks to his father’s brothers as though he is socially positioned as higher than them, using their first names rather than the appropriate kinship terms. Before his mother’s death, his parents had a second child, Arjun’s sister. His grandparents did not intervene, and his sister was left with her paternal family—a family whom Arjun and his material family viewed as lesser than themselves. A very hostile resentment was created between Arjun’s sister and himself, because he was saved from growing up with his parents while she was left largely alone, neglected and in a lower class position. While Arjun was sent to the best boarding schools, his sister attended an inexpensive local school; while Arjun eventually inherited the house from his father, his sister was married to a schoolteacher at the age of 18 and never finished her degree. In her teenage years, she would periodically run off with older men, and recently, at 26, she left her husband for a lover.
Now that Arjun has become established as a married lawyer in Delhi, he only associates with his relatives if necessary. However, he still responded to his grandmother’s phone calls to eat at the house. Arjun’s continued reverence towards his grandmother confused me, as she seemed to appear as the arch-villain in his childhood stories, and the family’s stories generally. When he meets her he bows, touches her feet, and patiently and respectfully endures her suspicious questioning of his activities. In trying to understand how Arjun could still act so lovingly to her and, indeed, profess his love for her to me was a great challenge to my sensibilities. For months I held back the question, but one night when Arjun was driving me home after a dinner at his grandmother’s house, he told me of how admirable it was that she still cooked meals for him even though there were many servants to do such work. I blurted out, “How can you still love her, see her and take food from her after how she treated you in childhood?” Arjun’s answer was very revealing to my understanding of the meaning of family among this group of people. He said, “You Americans always think of things in black or white, it’s either good or bad, you decided about people and it’s final. In India, nothing is black or white. Love is a gray. Love is across time. She would beat me, but she was also the person who looked after me. Sent me to good schools, made sure I was fed and healthy and clean. I had no mother, I was like an orphan, it was her that took me in…she always fed me and she still does. How can I hate her? How can I not see her? If I refused to see her it might kill her in her fragile state. She is the one who gave me the ability to speak to you in this nice English accent, my law degree. Without her I would have grown up with my father’s family and I would be ignorant like them. She gave me everything.”

There are two generations of sibling relationships presented in this story. First, Arjun’s mother and her brothers were sharply differentiated. The perception of her parents that she would
not be a good marriage candidate—that she would need to marry down—made them particularly unkind toward her during childhood. Fairness is important in both generations of this story. First, Arjun’s mother was deemed less worthy of parental support because she was a dark girl. Meanwhile, her two brothers, no fairer than she, were not discriminated against on this basis. This issue of fairness and marriage will be more fully explored below. However, here it is important to point out how Arjun was recused from his father’s house in part because he was fair and lively as a baby. At the time there was no male heir for the maternal family so he received a great deal of attention until he was cast aside as the family favoritism moved to his first cousin, Ayran. On the other hand, his sister was considered less valuable to Arjun’s mother’s family, even as a baby, and left with her unwell mother. In both cases, the family privileged those children they found more useful to their future prospects in the competition for class mobility.

The Story of Anika

Now I would like to discuss a contrasting example to the preference for male children observed above by discussing a situation in which a daughter was the favorite child of her father, in opposition to her mother’s preference for her brother. This story will explain how a little girl became able to dominate her family. In this family there is no question of inheriting property, which may be a part of why a girl was chosen as the favorite by her father.

Anika’s mother married her father against the wishes of her parents. He was poor and uneducated and had no job prospects upon marriage. He also came from the same caste background, and was only slightly lower class, but he did not expect to inherit property or even a job in the struggling family business. Anika’s mother was part of a well-educated and prosperous family. Her mother reports that they had numerous advantageous marriage proposals for her.
However, as a young woman she had strong, idealistic, ideas about love. Now she laments her young passions and regrets marrying Anika’s father bitterly.

Eventually Anika’s maternal grandparents, both refugees of the Partition and petty-bourgeois business owners, helped Anika’s mother find a good job as a teacher in Australia. Anika’s mother left India with her son, now 15, when he was only a year old. At that time her husband was unemployed and they had no place to live. While she was in Australia, her husband, through the help of his in-laws, did obtain a managerial job in construction in Delhi. When Anika’s mother came for a visit to India, she conceived Anika. Unable to care for two children on her own, she moved back to India. Indeed, Anika’s mother and grandmother both stated clearly and often that had Anika never been conceived, her mother would have never returned to India nor her husband.

Anika’s father is an alcoholic and the most alienated member of the family. Anika’s mother’s family could not forgive her father for being lower middle class, and Anika’s mother and her children are physically abused by her husband. His inferior economic position seems to drive him more strongly to assert his patriarchal rights as a husband and father; and he splits between being either sincerely loving and sentimental or violent and prideful in both social positions. He tightly controls what Anika’s mother wears, threatens to kill her and their children if she leaves him or calls the police when he is beating her, and spends most nights drunk and most mornings hung-over. Anika’s mother has told me that she is just waiting for the liquor to kill him, “and then I’ll be happy again. You are right to wait to marry, or not marry at all. When I married I knew nothing about him, I was not practical. What crime did I commit in my last life that I deserve this husband? Let it be; he will die soon.”
Anika’s older brother, Parnav, is sensitive and excellent at math and science. He spent nearly all his time studying—he devoted approximately 17 hours a day to school work during my fieldwork. He did not like to talk or to be talked about, especially by his parents. He spent the first ten years of his life in Australia with his mother, and has only been subject to his father for the past five years. His father’s abuse has clearly taken a toll on him. In one instance, I witnessed his father ask Parnav to get a glass of water, and when Parnav did not return with the glass fast enough, his father gave him a powerful smack across the face. He cried into his mother’s arms. Anika’s mother screamed and cursed her husband, saying, “why don’t you just give us all poison and be done tormenting us?” Parnav was often the target of his father’s anger, and, over the years I have known him, he has become increasingly reserved.

Parnav’s personality is in sharp contrast with his sister, Anika, who is a fireball of a person. Even as a small child she was fierce. When her father would yell and beat her other family members and even when he would hit her, Anika would scream at him and jump around in anger. When her father did hit her, she would seem unaffected by his violence, and her anger would take her over completely for about fifteen minutes. Shortly afterward, she would be happy and move on to her next child-project. In general, she was very naughty, and so her mother had a hard time managing her. Her mother compared her unfavorably to her brother, but this only enhanced her father’s affection for her. Through sheer personality, she dominated her maternal family members by taking money without permission from their purses or pockets, and leaving the house to buy herself a treat, or demanding they allow her to pick the TV station. Her father’s clear approval for her naughtiness may well be a kind of projection of his own power over the family and his latent desires to dominate his in-laws and wife the way Anika dominated them all.
Anika’s maternal kin openly resented her for being born. Her grandmother said, “You should have never been born” to her in my presence on a number of occasions. They blame Anika for chaining her mother to her father. However, this has put Anika in her father’s camp, so to speak. Unlike her brother, Anika’s legitimacy in her mother’s family is tied to her father’s, and she was the only person who ever defended him. She would yell at him about his drinking, but because she genuinely cares about his health. Her mother reported that sometimes Anika cried at night before bed because she worried that her father would drink himself to death.

As the sole member of his family who appeared to have genuine feelings of love for him, Anika’s father showered her with affection. He would buy her gifts, take her with him to his own family’s parties, and take picture after picture of her darling face. He arranged through a favor to have his and Anika’s picture in the newspaper in a photo spread that said, “Daddy’s Little Girl” and contained other photos of fathers and daughters. The photo depicted in the paper was taken on his birthday. On his birthday that year, there was a family strike against him. His wife, son, in-laws, and even his biological sisters refused to wish him a happy birthday, nor feed him cake from their hand, a customary gesture of love in this cultural context. Only Anika gave him food from her hand. The picture depicting Anika and her father in the newspaper was of the two of them that night at the party. I, too, was at the party with them: It was a different relative’s birthday. I had been on-strike with the family about his birthday, in solidarity with her mother. However, on the ride home, Anika sat on my lap and asked me earnestly to please wish her father a happy birthday. How could I deny such an earnest request from a child who only wanted her father to be happy? Her mother, witnessing this interaction between us, said to Anika: “You are lucky you are beautiful. No one would spoil you if you didn’t have that face.” In the end, I conceded and wished him a happy birthday.
There is a clear division between Anika and her brother, in that her brother is the favorite of his mother and her family, while Anika is the favorite of her father and his family. However, Anika’s strong personality is respected by everyone, even her maternal relatives. Anika is fearless, rash, and does not seem to suffer from cruel words or actions taken against her. Her grandmother explained to me:

“She [Anika] is like that man [her father]. She has his temper. Do something she doesn’t like and she will scream and scream. She is always bad and troubles me a lot, but there is no use punishing her. Even if I beat her, an hour later she will do the same. Whoever she marries, she will make his life a hell. She is like a man only.”

With Anika, the reader can clearly see that force of personality, aggressiveness or even ruthlessness, appears to be an even more important determinant of favoritism than gender in this context. In the other examples, the most privileged children share the attribute of being able to intimidate their siblings and take what they want without remorse. In one way, it is counterintuitive that Anika would be more powerful within the family than her brother. Her brother is ten years elder, always behaves well, and is exceptionally gifted and hard working in his scholarship. Anika, on the other hand, would make trying to force her to study so difficult that it regularly devolved into screaming fits on her part and slaps from her parents in response. However, because she was born in particular circumstances relating to her own parents’ marriage, she has absorbed some of the patriarchal authority of her father through his favoritism. In addition, she is fair and a ruthless pragmatist. Not only does she loose her temper, but she also seduces people, myself included, to cave into her whims through sweetness. Of course, Anika is not unique in her manipulations, as almost all people have methods for persuading others that they use heavily as young children, and which become tempered or abandoned after moral
sensibilities develop with maturity. What is interesting about Anika is how her forceful manner, likely in-born, conforms to the cultural preferences for a naughty, fair, and practically minded child. Her conformity to the cultural ideal of attributes associated with Krishna, in this case, managed to transcend gender and age, in order to secure her a more powerful place in her family in comparison to her older, obedient brother.

Fairness

The first time I encountered the conversational topic of fairness, and the socially acceptable application of that term to individuals, was during a tea and cigarette break at a college in Delhi. I was invited to sit with a small group of my fellow female classmates. The goal of the conversation was to identify which of our male classmates were attractive. There was no intent of romantic action behind the topic, but it elicited enjoyment from the women nonetheless. Introducing the names of unattractive men at the college was met with cries of disgust, while the more favorable men mentioned produced a glowing admiration, smiles, and giggles. At the time I was rather surprised at how open the women were about their preference for light skin men and how fairness seemed to correspond closely with handsomeness in their evaluation. Now, after having spent years interacting with middle class people, I can safely assert that fairness does have a great deal to do with an individuals’ complexion but also encompasses a wider array of evaluations of beauty. For instance, in this particular conversational context among college age women, fairness does generally denote handsomeness, but handsome means light skin, tall, and wealthy taken all together in the measure of a potentially fair man.

This ethnographic description of a discussion that happened on a college campus among women of nearly the same age is only partially applicable to the way fairness operates within the
system of favoritism within the family. In the most casual kinds of conversations, such as the one described above, the term fairness applies more generally to a higher class and caste background; but in the family, fairness is more directly about congenital skin tone. There are two components as to why I term the family view one of genetic fairness. First, the evaluation of the favored child is based largely on their complexion at birth and in their early years—before their features are evident or their activities have altered their appearance. In the context of families and favoritism, as opposed to casual conversations among relatively distant acquaintances, the term fairness quite literally means skin tone. As illustrated by the family life of Arjun, one of the primary reasons his grandmother gave for taking him from his mother’s care was that at six months old he was an unusually fair child. And in the case of Arjun, his skin tone, along with his gender and birth order, were among the deciding factors of his fate, namely, his upbringing by his maternal family. The second reason fair skin is valued by families is that within the terms of marriage, fair skin commands value in marriage exchanges for the perceived potential for creating fairer children. Below is an ethnographic example of this genetic view.

I was invited to attend a wedding with Vihaan and his younger brother. As we drove to a lavish townhouse for the first night of the wedding, they explained the circumstance of marriage to me. The groom’s family’s business had become wildly successful in the last ten years, and while the bride’s family was of a similar class and caste background, they had run out of money. On the other hand, Vihaan said: “His [the groom’s] family just wanted a fair bride. They didn’t ask for anything from them [the bride’s family].” While his younger brother, who knew the bride as a classmate in high school said: “She just wants material things. She doesn’t care that he is dark. She will be happy with him; he will take her on trips abroad.” At the wedding itself, our group joined a table with six other people, all middle age and presumably distant family
members of the couple. The conversation there was focused on how fair and beautiful the bride looked. After several hours of almost continuous consumption of various sorts of foods and a variety of performances undertaken by both professionals and family members, the bride’s dance for her husband was the last of the night. The bride came out in an intricate bright pink lengha and a popular song played, “Chittiyaan Kalaiyaan” (2015). The title means “white wrists,” and in the song, the singer tells her lover to take her shopping and put jewelry on her white wrists. The words “chittiyaan kalaiyaan” are repeated throughout the song as a chorus after each verse that describes commodities the singer wishes her lover would buy her. Every time those words were sung over the speakers at this wedding, this bride would do a particular wrist motion from the music video toward her groom. The groom and everyone at the party seemed delighted with the performance. As we were driving home, Vihaan and his brother had a good laugh at the choice of song. They were not particularly attentive to the issue of fairness, but rather they interpreted the song as representative of a new kind of Indian woman. A practical woman who knows how to use male desire to her material advantage and is not ashamed to blatantly sell herself in marriage for material commodities and luxuries. They interpreted the response of the crowd in a similar manner. They said: “No one was surprised, everyone is so comfortable now,” meaning, this kind of public is comfortable with women being open about trading fair beauty for material gain. Vihaan’s younger brother said: “She’s practical, of course she would marry him—if she could, she would marry money itself!”

In this example, the bride exchanged her fairness for the groom’s superior economic position. They became, in a sense, equally valuable marriage partners through an exchange of money for beauty. However, I interpreted this situation differently than these brothers. First, this is not a sex-for-money situation, and the manipulation of male desire seems to play a small role
in this arranged marriage. As Vihaan stated, it was the groom’s family who wanted a light-skinned bride. It seems to me that the family, in all likelihood, preferred a light bride so they would have fair grandchildren. I asked Vihaan’s aunt, who knows the groom’s family, and she replied: “He [the groom] is too dark. The family needed a fair bride so their son will have good children. They are clever people.” This situation was the clearest example of the use of fairness as currency in marital exchanges for the purposes of social mobility. Nevertheless, there are a number of other examples I could have chosen from my research where this principle, fairness not as beauty but rather as a genetic skin tone, seemed to be at work. This observation suggests a preference for lighter-skin children within the family leads to favoring children based on fairness, which has a strong connection to the potential benefits of fairness in those children’s future marriages and reproduction.

As a woman, understandably, I had a good deal of conversations with women about their partner preferences, but I have only indirect inferences on evaluations of attractiveness among men in my ethnographic record. However, my data does support the argument that examples of favoritism toward female children between siblings in childhood had a greater dependence on the issue of fairness. This preference appears to be connected to the value of female children in advancing the family through an advantageous marriage. Based on the system of inheritance found in this cultural context, men inherit and women receive a dowry upon marriage. The woman’s life and social status as an adult depends largely on the social status of her husband’s family. Although beauty does play a role in her prospects for marriage, being valued within the context of marriage for light skin has a greater connection to her potential reproduction of light children than her sexual desirability. Through understanding the family system of childhood favoritism, we can observe that the objectification of women’s bodies along the axiom of a
preference for light skin starts at the earliest possible age within the family, is connected to the family economy, and has the potential for exchanging fairness for material and social benefits within a marriage exchange.

Now let us to connect the two kinds of fairness: the general and the familial. Fairness, as used for a synonym for beauty in casual conversation, generally indicates that the person is middle to upper class, upper caste, North Indian, and is physically attractive on a number of levels. Fairness within the family is determined between siblings and within the context of marriage; as such, the term has a much greater tie to being physically light-skinned. This difference is due to the fact that everyone either within the biological family or a family joined by marriage is already middle class and upper caste. Therefore, within the family, fairness sheds its other characteristics and becomes primarily about skin tone. However, we might logically conclude that this pattern exists within the family because lighter skin is generally associated with being of higher caste and class in the greater society. The two views of fairness interact and coincide but only at particular points of contact.

The ethnographic description of Arjun’s mother is a painful example of how fairness can operate in the family system of favoritism. As described earlier, Arjun’s mother, now deceased, was badly abused by her mother, because, as her sister-in-law reported: “She was dark and ugly…she was useless to them…she was like a servant before marriage.” However, the family found for her a light skinned but lower-middle class husband, and contributed a large dowry, house and job for life, in exchange for marrying their “dark and ugly” bride. In turn, one of her children was fair, and the other was not, and so the upper-middle class maternal family took in the fair child, while the lower-middle class paternal family raised the other child. This case, the
most obvious and extreme I have encountered with respect to the issue of fairness, exemplifies the cultural currency of fairness within the family system of preferential treatment.

Skin tone is one form of patriarchal designation that gives individual members of the middle class either an economic advantage or disadvantage, both within the family system and within the larger society. Skin tone is one form of patriarchal admixture at work in the kinship economy that has increased in significance through its greater integration into the global economy as new aspirations for social mobility and Punjabi kinship systems have merged. Skin tone is an admixture as a relation of domination and subordination rather than just a prejudice or culturally-specific standard of beauty, because it has a material basis in marriage contracts, prepared through childhood favoritism. Children, both male and female, but primarily female, receive or are denied material benefits, powers of decision making, and freedom based, in part, on differences in skin tone. In addition, the children that are favored are placed in a position of domination over their siblings through this patriarchal admixture; this creates the relational aspect of domination and subordination through the patriarchal admixture of skin tone. The skin tone admixture does not just provide benefits to children, but has a larger significance when put into the context of neoliberal economic changes.

Middle class families from this particular caste and geographical background are in competition for social mobility with other middle class families, both locally and internationally. First, within their own kinship structure, women who benefit from the social valence of skin tone as an expression of patriarchy are better able to secure more profitable marriage contracts than other women who are also suitable prospects based on caste and class backgrounds (Fuller and Haripriya 2014). Second, it seems quiet likely that there is some relationship between families wishing to have lighter children and their strategies for sending the children to work abroad as
adults or having them deal with international customers in their Delhi businesses. As well, there are a great number of possible contributing factors for the persistence of this preference for fair skin, such as the associations of fairness with being of Persian descent during the Mughal era in Delhi; or the association of lighter skin with being Punjabi in contrast to people from more southerly or easterly parts of India; or, a legacy of colonial racism that has been absorbed; or, the portrayal of rich and beautiful movie stars and models with fair complexions. It is virtually impossible to say which historical configuration of political and economic power differentials led to this preference for a lighter skin tone within the Delhi middle class. But whatever it may be, it is recognized as an asset in marriage that can be transmitted to children, and as such, will be acknowledged even by individuals in this society who would not choose to value this characteristic (Blumberg1990). Indeed, my research has shown how this cultural preference is materially reproduced in middle class families. Under current economic and historical conditions, the skin tone admixture can benefit individuals from this group in their quest for higher social mobility in both their inter-family kinship system and as a desirable attribute if the children do become professionals in core countries where racism is acute (Mapril 2014). On one hand, the patriarchal admixture of skin tone is quite different from racism as it is understood in the West, which I hope my ethnographic descriptions and analysis has made evident. On the other hand, the skin tone admixture is more important within the Punjabi middle class kinship system, in part, because of the prevalence of racism in core countries and the increasing economic integration of the Delhi middle class into the core of capitalism.

Aggression
Selection for favoritism within family is for a particular personality type, the aggressive bully. In every family presented there was at least one sibling who habitually violated the rights of their family members and was favored by their parents in response. To illustrate these phenomena ethnographically, let us turn to another member of this Punjabi-upper caste-petty-bourgeois group. The man whom conveyed this story, Laj, is 26 and a law student at DU. He does not know the families described above, and I have never had the opportunity to meet his family. However, his description of his own family’s views on disobedient children portrays this point on favoring aggressive personality traits well. Laj recounted to me an exchange between his father’s grandfather and his grandsons:

“He was an old man, but still very active, the head of the family. He wanted some work done on the floor in the courtyard and had his grandsons working on it. But he wanted things done just the way he wanted. He came out to correct them, saying this and that were wrong with their work. My father’s oldest brother said to him ’Go stick your thumb up your ass.’ He [the grandfather] left with a chuckle. He went into the kitchen. My father heard him happily saying to his wife, ‘These are the kind of grandsons I wanted.’”

At first, this account might seem surprising. On one side, the grandsons were extremely rude to their grandfather, a much older patriarch; but on the other hand, their grandfather was pleased with their disobedience. Laj interpreted this disjunction as a distinctly Punjabi appreciation of masculinity, inherited through a bloody history (Das 2003; Zakaria 2015). He said: “My grandfather wanted grandsons that would protect the family.” This theme of protection is closely associated with dominance in my ethnographic record. Conceivably, Laj’s great-grandfather thought that rudeness within the family context and blindness to the respect normally
afforded elder people indicated that his grandsons would be powerful protectors of the family within the greater society.

Gender relations were explained to me on similar terms by Arjun. He said, “When I was younger I used to think women were a burden and only useful for sex. I thought that it was right that they serve me because I protect them. They needed me and I did not need them, they were just toys to me. I did not have a good conversation with a woman until I was 30, because I didn’t care what they said. Now I just feel bad for them. All they have is their bodies and they have to become like this…now all they want is money.” In this statement, Arjun captured a recurrent idea throughout my fieldwork: Men traded protection and money with women for love and sex, and that that trade was an unfavorable trade for men. Indeed, protection is perceived as possessing an extraordinarily high value as social currency to both men and women (Das 2006). This aspect of gender relations and protection with respect to adult relationships, and even the realities of actually needed a man’s protection in some contexts in Delhi, is more greatly explored in the next chapter of this dissertation on marriage.

In the case with the dominant male children described in this chapter, and with Anika, their overt aggression and unseemly behavior within the family appears to promote the families’ favoritism toward them. One of the purposes for my inclusion of Anika’s story, the young girl who is domineering toward her family, is to show that selection for a dominating personality is not restricted to men, although it has masculine connotations and a patriarchal character. This form of selection appears to be a result of a culturally specific worldview which sees aggressive personalities as more advantageous to advancing the status of the individual and family. Why and how this group of people formulated this worldview is open to interpretation. One interpretation would be that the social conditions of Delhi in general are sufficiently hostile and
dangerous; just living in North Delhi is enough for families to feel they must protect themselves and their property in the absence of state or civil protections (Kakar 1996). Another interpretation, often proposed by members of this group, is that the history of Punjabis, particularly those histories that bore the Sikh faith and lived through the violent partition of the Punjab, is responsible for families selecting for aggressiveness among their children (Pettigrew 1991). In my view, both Punjabi history and the current conditions of Delhi likely have an effect. Along with the myth of Krishna, and no doubt many other avenues of social pressure, exert their influence, but that is outside the scope of this study. The question of why parents prefer aggressive personalities is unanswerable. This research is limited to simply showing that this preference occurs and materially benefits those individuals who are able to use this quality for their own advancement. In a situation of competition for advancement, aggressiveness, among other qualities, can become increasingly critical for success among a group that pursues such dispositions. There is indeed a patriarchal admixture at work in Delhi that materially favors those more capable of socially dominating others in an overt and aggressive way. This patriarchal relationship is a form of domination and subordination which can be termed as a form of tyrant-terrorized dialectic.

The preference for aggressive individuals appears to be the most local of the patriarchal admixtures I have identified so far in this dissertation. Just as New Yorkers are known for their tough exterior in the US, similarly Delhi is known as an unusually aggressive environment within India. However, while I give this comparison as a point of reference to my readers, aggressiveness in Delhi has unique attributes, particularly among Punjabis. Anyone who has witnessed a bargain take place in a competitive but informal market in Delhi has seen a form of theater. In Delhi, showing emotions, making wild hand gestures, greatly disparaging or
fantastically magnifying the value of a desired commodity, yelling, faking the possession of exact change, walking away only to be called back, mocking and sneers, can easily all accompany a relatively ordinary (and underneath rather friendly) exchange. What from the outside may look like a fully-fledged conflict is more often than not merely a form of theater with no actually hostility intended. The reader will see in the fifth chapter of this dissertation on the black market, that being able to intimidate others has wide-ranging economic benefits even for middle class men.

In this chapter, I have shown that being aggressive toward one’s siblings is materially rewarded by parents. This attribute, recognized as important to the family’s survival in the greater society, has become a kind of cultural ideal. As shown in the myth of Krishna, being naughty is often seen as charming. Parents allow their children to take things from each other in overtly aggressive ways. This tyrant-terrorized admixture benefits individuals within the family, in part, because having at least one aggressive child is seen as necessary to protect the family’s material interests in the future. This worldview, which sees aggressiveness, domination, and the willingness to break certain social rules in the pursuit of selfish goals as advantageous, contributes strongly to the kinds of child-rearing practices of this group and the kinds of cultural subjects whom these families create. Indeed, the everyday practices of child socialization are embedded within, reflect, and reproduce the types of behaviors, personhood, and moral foundations that are valued in a given community (Lancy 2008, Montgomery 2008, LeVine and New 2008). Later on in chapter five, the reader will observe how these aggressive and favored children come to interact with the public and the public good as adults.

In the previous chapter, I argued that interpersonal domination was a critical feature of the informal household labor economy in Delhi, largely due to the absence of the state in
protecting either persons or property rights. In the following chapters, I will illustrate a number of other examples of how the state has not entirely subsumed private violence into a state monopoly. Instead, middle class families must go to elaborate lengths to protect both their bodies and possessions. In this chapter on childhood, I argue that the patriarchal admixture of aggressiveness, or tyrant-terrorized, is instilled through the rewarding of aggressive children, even to the detriment of their own parents’ peace and autonomy. From this ethnographic evidence on childhood, it appears that parents condition their children to promote aggressiveness because they anticipate that the state will continue to be unable to ensure their property rights without a protector who serves the families’ interests; thus, this practice ensures the family’s continued survival.

**Being Practically Minded**

Each human inherits the circumstances of their birth and early family life, over which they exert only limited control. In North Delhi, in the homes of middle class people, over an array of delicious meals and jovial conversations, it was widely agreed that the most effective method for enjoying the fate of one’s birth, marriage and death, and not suffering because of their limitations, was to be practically minded. In the broadest sense, to be practically minded in this specific cultural context means to have materialistic goals. Unlike how aggressiveness or fairness is used to meet material goals, being practically minded is about an attitude and desire to reach these goals to the exclusion of other interests. Being practically minded is about using the social advantages that one is afforded at birth to maximize material gains, while internally being happy and existentially satisfied with the social power that comes from wealth, political power, and beauty. The middle class people I studied in Delhi attributed being practically minded to
innate temperament. And perhaps, the notion of what it means to be practical in a given cultural context is broad enough to say that most people are probably practical given their widely differing worldviews. However, in this society, to be practically minded is a rare and wonderful trait that allows the family to rest easier knowing there is at least one member of the future generation who is practical, or shrewd, but this gift is bestowed upon sons and daughters differently.

Let us here review the contexts in which being practically minded was considered a positive personal attribute. In the first story, one of Vihan's sisters is considered more practical than the other. As described by Khushi in the first section of this chapter, the elder sister Saanvi was not practical because she would read too much, avoid her family responsibilities, and chose her husband poorly. In contrast, the younger sister Priyanka was practical because she had a financially advantageous marriage despite the fact that her husband is unattractive, and because she was happy with the material gain her marriage brought her. Khushi says that her parents could detect this practical quality and compare it between them in early childhood, long before the women were married. In the second story, Manish, the eldest, was considered not practical enough for his father to favor him. He was considered too much of a thinker, meaning he had a quiet, bookish disposition. Meanwhile, Yash was not favored by his father but for different reasons; Yash could not commit to his decisions and was easily bullied, and thereby he was also not practical because his ultimate life goals were unclear to his parents. Thus, Shivansh, the third son, was the favorite child and deemed practical because he was willing to take every advantage in both overt and covert forms of objectification, domination, and corruption that increased his power over the family, neighborhood, and the all of citizens of India through his adult role as a bureaucrat. His wife was also considered practical because she was able to enjoy the luxuries of
his practical nature in spite of being subject to her husband’s abuse. In the third story, Parth is not considered practical because he loves music and wishes to avoid arguments, while Sajal is deemed practical because he abuses his employees with the express aim to make them more economically productive in his business. Sajal considers himself the protector of his brother and the primary inheritor of the family business because Aryan is practical. In the fourth story, Arjun is considered not practical by his aunt, because he is a “nervous driver” who cannot make decisions. Arjun is compared by his family to his first cousin, Aryan, who is considered practical because he is a decisive driver. As we have seen, being practically minded is about cognitive clarity, decision-making, and ultimate goals. The criteria for practicality among men and women is different, although in both cases it is associated with being materialistic and being willing to make decisive choices.

For women, being practically minded often means using sexuality, reproductive capacity and affection for the greatest possible material gain within the constraints of marriage, while for men, being practically minded means dominating other men and making firm choices that advance the family’s status, particularly in business. In both cases, being practically minded means that an individual is existentially content with the comfort material wealth can afford a life, and has no other, more idealistic pursuits, such as music, romance or reading literature. To be practical means to always make wise decisions which advance you and your family’s financial security. However, these practical individuals are the minority among even a family who raises all of their children with this goal in mind. To say that families favor practical children is not to say that parents do not encourage their children in the arts or undervalue education. Parents seem to see children as complimentary to each other, and a wide array of traits and interests can be harmoniously maintained in conjunction with a least one practical head of
the family. Being practically minded is essentially about absorbing the mindset of competitive social mobility. Notwithstanding, it also has associations with a religious idea of following one’s own destiny, as seen in the story of Krishna; the child was the parents’ rescuer, because he fought for his family’s honor and righteously restored his parents’ high social position.

In the US, parents often say they hope to raise each of their children to be the same kind of self-sufficient adult. However, in Delhi, children with musical, academic, and creative pursuits, who are generally considered not practical, are put into a different, lower position in the family division of labor and reward than their practical counterparts. This socially-recognized attribute with a material basis in reproduction has become an integral part of how families strategize in the pursuit of middle class mobility locally and internationally. Practical mindedness is a form of patriarchal admixture in that it creates a hierarchy of domination and subornation that is materially reproduced as a dialectical process of practical-idealistic, which feeds into the international competition for social mobility among middle classes.

In some senses, being practically minded is merely the reflection of the ethics and personal attributes of capitalism which are rewarded. Of course, capitalism rewards materialistic aims and views. However, the greater incorporation of this local version of a capitalist mentality has occurred within family kinship structures with the middle class, due to both the changing economic realities and changing ideations. These new aspirations and possibilities empower this class to believe that decisive action and clear materialistic aims are critical to raising the position of the entire family. When a daughter marries for materialistic aims rather than for emotional or sexual desires, the family benefits socially. When a son is able to overlook any potential legal or ethical sanctions applicable to his government position and instead take large bribes, the entire family benefits socially and economically. The preference given to these children is due to the
perception that children with clear materialistic aims will be more beneficial to the family in the long run. This is the absorption of the ethic of capitalism but in the form of a family strategy rather than an individual stratagem. The family is the first benefactor of the practical child and creates particular cultural beings that have become part of a local admixture of practical-idealistic that benefits capitalist ideology generally, promotes materialistic behavior, and is closely aligned in this cultural context to the perceived potential for the entire family’s mobility within the middle class.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has assembled ethnographic narratives that highlight aspects of favoritism within the family which have a clear material foundation for their social reproduction and are based on the division of labor and reward between siblings (Chowdhry 2011; Seymour 1999). I have attempted to convey these stories as an ensemble of concise vignettes, joined with longer histories that I pieced together over many hours spent in conversation with different family members. I have broken down the elements appearing to influence parental favoritism which do not directly correspond to being the oldest male child. These elements—aggressiveness, fairness and being practical—are an intimate link between viewing the family as a cohesive economic unit and understand the familial sphere as a womb of the cultural subject. Within the family system of favoritism, as the reader has observed in this chapter, parents seem to evaluate their children based on specific cultural criteria that revolve around their perception of the world, their projections of the future, and with the ultimate goal to enhance the family’s economic viability as a unit.
Favoritism is a potent avenue for observing the connection between the emotional and economic lives of these families. The favorite child is allocated more material resources, more political power in family decisions, more freedom, and usually, more affection and affirmations from one or both of their parents. In my analysis I have consciously attempted to substantiate my research findings by describing themes in the narratives and assigning names and attributes; as is typically the organizational job of the anthropologist. However, these stories should not be understood as objectifiable artifacts. To the people who generously shared with me their intimate family histories and offered their views on their parents’ preference for siblings, their family portraits were also vulnerable self-portraits. In these narratives, the reader has already seen how what we call child abuse in the US is usually par for the course in this cultural context (Fernandez 1997; Kannabiran 1995). These families are consciously creating the types of people who can withstand what they see as even harsher conditions out in the world. I began the chapter with a quotation which was translated from the original Urdu by Ghalib, conveying the melancholy acceptance of the home as a place of conflicting interests and conflicting feelings (Husain 1977). One’s childhood home can be either a sanctuary of joy or the most dangerous place on Earth, depending on the family, and sometimes a childhood home is both simultaneously. Most people have mixed feelings about their homes and childhoods and that mixture was the affect that I witnessed in the faces, tones and sentiments of the people who told me these stories. In the couplet, Ghalib writes that:

“Home is not home unless it holds the turmoil of strong feelings
If there are cries of grief, not songs of joy, then be it so”

- Ghalib, 72

Ghalib finds his home in the sheer strength of emotional ties without judging their effect as either positive or negative, but merely, as facts of existence and identity. My research participants appeared to share this attitude of mindfulness and non-judgment with respect to parental
treatment, and I have tried to adopt their perspective in my role as an ethnographic researcher and writer. I argue that it precisely the unquestioned emotional and economic strength of family ties that makes a family-centered view of Delhi middle class society both appropriate and illuminating.

What is particular to this Delhi-Punjabi culture is the intricate system of labor and reward that treats the entire family as comprising the economic status of each individual. This kinship economy comes into articulation with the economic interests of the Delhi middle class under new neoliberal conditions. In neoliberal conditions, as oppose to the period direct proceeding, there is indeed more potential for social mobility within the middle class (Brosius 2013; Fernandes 2006). However, what seems to be an even stronger force is the absorption of the ideology that mobility is primarily dependent on how the family devotes their surplus to children and how they use their positions of privilege in competition with other middle class families (Katz 2004). They seem to be both conscious and unconscious in their assessments of a limited family surplus and the potential advantages to dividing that surplus between children unevenly. Perhaps counterintuitively, the children who tend to leave as professionals abroad are often not the favorite children but the impractical, scholarly children. Favoritism is connected to the necessity of having at least one child who can succeed within Delhi when they inherit the business and at least one that will protect the family from the lawless conditions of the city. These goals appear to be even more important to families than educational accomplishments. However, this evidence also supports the theory that this kinship system of specialization within the division of labor between children, and from early life, fosters a narrowness of interests and imagined avenues of success for even these scholarly children. They are often not favorites among their parents, but
they are directed by parents to exclusively focus on succeeding in school for some practical purpose as part of their fundamental family identity.

The family with whom I began this chapter perfectly illustrates this point. Vihaan was the slightly younger, aggressive, and favored brother of Priyanka. Priyanka was forced to take care of Vihaan, cater to his whims and do his school work for him. She grew up to be a hardworking and successful woman. As an adult, she has a Ph.D. from a university in the US and works as a biomedical researcher for an upper-middle class salary in New York City. Her experience in her own family’s division of labor as the scholar and the responsible child was not a favored position, but it did influence her ability and drive to have a flawless academic record and success as an adult in the US. I will go into greater theoretical detail about Priyanka’s migration to the US as a professional in the theoretical conclusion of this dissertation. However, this chapter on favoritism has shown that the family division of labor itself lends to forms of specialization which are suitable to the global neoliberal division of labor.

Under neoliberalism, where individuals within the economy need specialized skills acquired over long juvenile periods, it has become more valuable to capitalism that families specialize children’s socialization within the family. In the US we have seen a cultural shift in the declining economic and social value of a well-rounded education. Now, children and young adults are pushed toward developing themselves to fit particular niches in the economy at earlier ages. This is due to the greater competition that has been seen among both capitalists and workers as financialization and neoliberal state policies have opened up borders. When barriers to trade dissolve, capitalist competition itself becomes more competitive, and therefore, also more specialized (Brenner 2002). For middle classes throughout the world, molding their children into more and more specialized social actors requires the accumulation of abilities from
an early age, and it takes a long time before the value of those abilities produce economic rewards. Under neoliberal conditions, professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, and scientists are often supported by their middle class families, both in periphery and core economies well into their thirties, but more often support themselves through loans in the core countries where these are available. With this knowledge, it makes a great deal of sense that the Punjabi kinship system of sibling specialization from the earliest ages and the shrewd decisions on the part of parents about how, and how much, to support individual children based on their natural attributes has given the Indian middle class a competitive advantage in international capitalism.

The patriarchal dialectics of skin tone, aggressiveness, and being practically minded, all ethnographically produced categories, work through the patriarchal admixtures of the family to contribute specialized labor to capitalism. As shown with Yash’s story, one brother became the inheritor of the petty-bourgeois business, another became a bureaucrat, and the last became a professional in Canada. The specialization of these children at an early age was beneficial to this family in their ultimate objective to place all three sons into prestigious middle class positions as adults. The family did indeed achieve its aims at social mobility through childhood specialization. As time progresses, it would make sense that these patriarchal admixtures would become increasingly important as the kinship system becomes a more important economic configuration under the increased competition of capitalism.

To understand how these patriarchal admixtures of peripheral capitalism, reproduced through kinship fit into a theory of articulation and subsumption it is useful to compare the strategies of family reproduction among middle class families in the US to those in Delhi. In the US, each individual child is expected to find his or her own way in the economy without the help
of any siblings. The more individualistic culture in the US is in part due to greater industrial transformation where individuals have become increasingly expected to earn their own money and families have acknowledged diminishing social obligations to help one another. In the US, we often view ourselves as citizens or individuals, rather than placing our primary identity on our families and places of origin. Because the Delhi middle class family system I have described is more economically interconnected than in the US, even among adult siblings, methods of reproducing labor are now actually more attuned to the economic needs of contemporary capitalism.

While the US middle class is on the whole successful in promoting its progeny to the higher echelons of professional employment, the sheer competitiveness of all of the desirable careers, and the psychological stress associated with them, make the successful development of an US child into a privileged adult an uncertain prospect (Heiman 2015). US families of means therefore allocate vast resources to the cultivation of accomplished and emotionally secure children, and even so often despair at the results. But this US middle class lacks two things that might be of use. One, discussed in the previous chapter, is the opportunity to use ample informal, poorly-compensated labor. The other means of priming children for success is subtler and involves incorporating competition into their very upbringing, emphasizing conflictual interdependence over the alienated independence of the US young adult. In a world where outcomes are always uncertain, properly disposing children to fight for success in their careers can become an essential practice in the reproduction of middle class professional and petty-bourgeois families. And, because the resources of interpersonal domination and extra-economic influence can become key resources for personal competitiveness in contemporary labor markets, I would contend that we must reassess the directionality, either backward or forward, of the
Weberian transition to more rational modes of personal and career advancement (Weber 1978).

In addition, we should recognize the basis of our social life in combined economic-cultural forms, rather than transitional forms, because they are not going anywhere.
Chapter Four

Power and Consumption in Marriage

Hazaaaron khwahishen aisi ke har khwahish pe dam nikle
Bohat niklay mere armaan, lekin phir bhi kam nikle
Thousands of desires, each worth dying for,
many of them I have realized, yet I yearn for more

Daray kyon mera qaatil? kya rahega us ki gardan par?
Voh khoon, jo chashm-e-tar se umr bhar yoon dam-ba-dam nikle
Why should my killer (lover) be afraid? No one will hold her responsible
for the blood which will continuously flow through my eyes all my life

-Ghalib, A Thousand Desires

How does a Delhi housewife fulfill her desires? How does that bangle, so widely admired
among her friends, actually come into her possession? And, where does Ghalib’s philosophical
idea that to live is to have one’s desires multiply and be perpetually fulfilled by a lover/murderer,
come together with the capitalist consumer and the institution of marriage among the Delhi
middle class? In this chapter on the politics of marriage from the perspective of middle class
Delhi housewives the reader will come to understand how the structural features of both the city
and the family, make negotiating with husbands a material necessity in the daily realization of
their consumer desires and middle class identities.

Before we come to see marriage from the perspective of these housewives, the first
ethnographic vignette of this chapter will illustrate a perspective on marriage and women from
the young men that we will meet in greater detail in the next chapter of this dissertation on the
black market. However, the conversation of these unmarried men provides an epitomizing
negative stereotype of Delhi middle class, Punjabi, Kshatriya, housewives—or in other words,
the women these men intended to marry. The following conversation took place in the social
context of an apartment used for hosting outside of the house, where these men drank, smoked, played cards, and enjoyed social time with each other. The conversation proceeded as follows:

  Arjun: “I’m bored. Let’s go look for some fun outside?”

  Mohit: “You want to go to those women [prostitutes] every day. Don’t you get bored playing with them?”

  Arjun: “Only you could be bored between a woman’s legs”

  Barth: “What about your girlfriend? I don’t even know why you call her girlfriend. All Indian women are whores, even wives. All they want is money to show off to their friends. My family is so stupid to want me married. Any wife takes all the money from the family and demands more. They are never satisfied with the time you give them, they always call when you are out and nag you. They are so angry when you get home.”

  Deepak: “Really. I already have one mother; why do I need another? She [a wife] would just hound me day and night. They do no work but expect time and money from you. How can give both? It must be one or the other.”

  Mandeep: “I bet your wife won’t care if you go out. Just as long as she doesn’t have to fuck you! She will send you out to the brothel herself.”

  (Laughter)

  Deepak: “Maybe, but what will you buy her? Money is the only happiness for women. Whores don’t care what I look like, my wife won’t either.”

  These jokes and jests share a common perspective: that middle class wives in Delhi constantly nag men to come home, demand hard-earned money, and only fain the tender feelings that are ideally the foundation of marital accord. These men wanted to delay marriage as long as
possible so as not to take on another family obligation that required their time and money; moreover, they seemed emotionally sensitive to the idea that their wives would never care about their well-being. In another encounter Barth said, “No woman is capable of what they show in Bollywood. The films look fake because these women are fake. They are just pretending with you until you are at their mercy.” And in another instance, Deepak said “How much effort can you give for a tiny little hole? Whatever you put into it gets lost!” The men viewed emotional and sexual manipulation for economic gain as the key distinguishing factor that characterized middle class women in Delhi. In this chapter I will systematically dismantle the stereotypes of Delhi housewives by showing how structural features of the city, family and social networks, create a marital institution where the path to consumer commodities, freedom of movement, the admiration of peers and protection from in-laws force women into an unusually heavy dependency on their husbands for the realization of their desires and attainment of middle class identity. Although the perception that others will take advantage of one’s emotions for economic gain is pervasive in the social life of Delhi, men were recurrently focused on how marital relationships were the area where men were most vulnerable to these tactics. This chapter will attempt to address the issue of emotional manipulation within the economic arrangement of marriage by portraying the marriages of four middle class couples in Delhi and examining how the structural constraints of the city and the institution of marriage play out inside the home.

While attempting to contextualize these negative stereotypes of women, this chapter will show how relationships of domination and subordination are materially reproduced along gender lines within middle class marriages as patriarchal admixtures articulated into capitalist consumption. Below in these narratives of marital politics, the diversity of temperaments and personalities among husbands and wives will illustrate how their relationships of domination and
subordination, these patriarchal admixtures of consumption, are both structural and interpersonal. One of the primary methods used to understand gender inequality within low-income families in India has been to evaluate the sites of economic contestation within the house as they affect women’s health (Das 1996; Kannabiran 1995; Vindhya 2007). Such studies have observed that control over space, shopping and food are some of the most critical vantage points by which to view patriarchy as an economic relationship of power maintained by the family (Blumberg 1990; Donner 2011; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014). At the lowest levels of income, these material differences are obvious and manifest themselves convincingly through significant statistical differences in morbidity and morality between genders in North India (Chaudhuri 2014). One significant study on Punjabi households combines such statistical analysis with ethnographic examples of how those differences are created through certain perceptions of women in a Punjabi village (Chowdhry 2011). I have used Chowdhry’s insights into the important components of contextualization to frame my study around four sites of marital conflict: space inside the home, food, luxury commodities, and the freedom to make purchases around the city.

Throughout this chapter I will identify how four different types of commodities are channeled through the patriarchal admixtures of marriage. In this configuration, I have attached each form of middle class consumption to the terrain of unequal power a wife must negotiate with her husband to obtain and maintain her economic and social status as a middle class consumer. These commodity dialectics of unequal power are home-territory, commodity-domination, food-distribution, and freedom-duty. Through ethnography I show how the social pressure to maintain a high social status among other middle class housewives of the same age through the comparison of consumption activities doubly reinforces the patriarchal character of marital relations by making women’s relationships with each other dependent on successful
negotiations with their individual husbands. The middle class consumer is a gendered category in Delhi, and consumption decisions both in their desire and attainment are channeled through the unequal structures of gender (Mathur 2010; Van Wessel 2004). In Delhi, the freedom to consume and the choices surrounding that consumption are different for middle class husbands and wives.

This chapter will describe four marriages. As is sometimes the case with ethnographic material gathered in North India, my ethnographic record displays a common problem of only having access to one side of these gender interactions. While I have extensive information on the daily activities and views on marriage from the wives, have witnessed all four couples described interact with one another on many occasions, as well as discussed their marriages with their neighbors, friends and families, I have limited access to these husbands’ perspectives. The first couple begins with the husband’s perspective of the story of Abishek and Kamala. However, this was the only married man I was able to spend time alone with in order to discover his personal views on his own marriage. The reason I was able to spend time with Abishek is that he is over thirty years older than myself. In contrast, strict rules governed my interactions with other, younger, men in this chapter, usually imposed by their wives. I was never able to discern what was the primary motivation for this vigilance, save for a combination of protecting the reputations of all involved and a mistrust that I might do or say something untoward if left unsupervised. Although this presented numerous frustrations in gathering research, I believe the results have been valuable. Although there are studies on the economic arrangements of North Indian couples with respect to the subsistence of farmers and the urban poor, and the arrangements of marriages as an economic system in the Indian middle class, there are very few studies that look closely at the negotiation of resources within a marriage among Indian families with means to live comfortably (Mathur 2010). Additionally, I compliment this imbalance in
gender representation with the following chapter, which is primarily from a man’s perspective and concerning men’s activities outside of the home.

All the couples that I have worked with have a monthly income of between ₹80,000 and ₹600,000 and own their own homes, which allows them an affluent lifestyle in Delhi. What is interesting in studying the power dynamics between middle class couples in Delhi as opposed to those poorer or richer is how a wife’s ability to persuade her husband has major economic incentives and differential outcomes. In other cases, where the family is struggling to subsist or is comfortably rich, the differences in the wives’ influence over the spending decisions of the household have less variation. In the middle class, particularly the new Indian middle class where the social meaning attached to purchasing power extends well beyond the use value of those commodities, the ability to influence one’s husband to buy certain goods and allow for certain freedoms of movement, are shown in large differences in the resulting economic consumption. For instance, some wives are allowed to take their new cars on unescorted jaunts around the city, while the pleas of others to enjoy that same privilege do not persuade their husbands; thus, this results in the choice not to purchase an extra family car or patronize the primarily female establishments of Delhi. Although most groups of middle class people throughout the world share these variations in how each household chooses to allocate its resources, what is unusual about the families with whom I worked is how much control men have over their wives’ decisions regardless of their individual personalities.

To understand how this is a social phenomenon in Delhi even more so than other places in India, let me give a personal example of a situation where the gendered space of Delhi was almost exclusively the cause of an interpersonal conflict. When I first returned to the city for fieldwork in 2010, I had some trouble arranging for accommodations from the US. I asked a
friend I knew from the university, an Icelandic professor, to host me for a day or two until I found more suitable accommodations. I chose to stay with a male friend rather than at a hotel, because I have been told many times how unsafe the inexpensive hotels are for unaccompanied women. My host was a professor in one of the local colleges and married to another friend of mine who happened to be away from Delhi when I needed the room. When I arrived at their faculty housing from the airport we had a long talk on his observations of Delhi after working there for two years. The next day we planned to continue our conversation that evening at 9 PM when he would return to the apartment after a dinner meeting. In Delhi, I have a strict rule for myself to be home before 5 PM if I am staying in an unfamiliar area, so I returned to the faculty housing at 5 PM that day. I knew it would be five hours before my friend’s return so I occupied myself by reading.

By 9 PM, the electricity had gone out and I could no longer read or amuse myself, I sat in the dark hot room without a fan, being attacked by mosquitoes, because the electric plug-in no longer worked. I became increasingly angry at his delay. I could not believe my friend would be so irresponsible to have agreed to be back and not followed through on his promise. I stewed, brooded and waited in the uncomfortable room in silence for another two hours until he returned. When he did return he apologized and had the very legitimate excuse that his car had become entrenched in a traffic conflict. Although intellectually I realized that a) his delay was outside of his control, b) he had no stake in controlling me, and c) all my other interactions with him gave me confidence that he was passionate about feminist issues, I was still unable to accept his apology. I said, “You get to do whatever you want, and I have to just sit here! What do you think it feels like to wait on someone else like that?” He apologized again, and after a few minutes, my temper left me and we proceeded to have the interesting intellectual talk we had planned.
I give this example to show how a US woman and Icelandic man who have no other relationship except a collegial friendship and do not normally stay together, can still argue over the same types of issues as middle class Indian couples. Many aspects of inequality within the home are conditioned by the patriarchal quality of public space in Delhi. *The conditions outside lead to structural inequalities between genders within the home.* Other feminists have observed how patriarchal conditions outside the home influences politics inside, but this analysis has yet to be applied to the notoriously bad conditions of patriarchal domination on the streets of Delhi (Dasgupta 2014; Harriss 2006). In my research that follows, all four husbands have different characters and temperaments, but the similarities between how their wives view them is unmistakable.

As I have argued in all of my chapters, the confinement of women is a major issue within the homes of the Delhi middle class. In all the examples below, my female informants were rarely given the freedom to leave the house and regularly constructed elaborate deceptions to get even a few hours to themselves. On the other hand, every single married woman in my study, including those presented in this chapter, expressed anger and frustration over her husband’s outside activities. In these wives’ estimations, their husbands would drink, gamble, eat meat, and go to prostitutes with their friends when they were not at home in the evening.

Indeed, we can easily place the freedom to spend money outside of the house (and therefore to leave the house in general) on a continuum with other consumption activities (Mathur 2010). Along with the negotiation for the freedom to patronize outside establishments for entertainment, I also observed three other points of contestation in my ethnographic research that bore on consumption practices among women. First, the space inside the house was often physically reconfigured based on marital circumstances. In these cases, husbands tended to argue
with their own parents on behalf of their wives’ preferences for home redecoration (Saavala 2003). Second, most major commodities were purchased through some system of marital negotiation. In these cases, husbands were needed to allot a significant proportion of the household budget toward luxury commodities such as jewelry, handbags, and clothing in order for women to maintain their status among each other. And, lastly, the consumption of food aroused conflict (and resolution) throughout these stories. With these food commodities, wives needed husbands to collect specialty outside foods to be eaten inside the house due to the structural conditions of food distribution and women’s safety in the city. As a result, the four consumption practices which I will address here are the organization of space within the house, the ability to buy luxury commodities for individual use, the decisive control over food, and the freedom to partake in the entertainment activities in public. These themes underscore sites of marital conflict in all four stories.

In the first story of Abishek and Kamala, Abishek primary exerts his authority through dictating the consumption of food for his entire family. In particular, he pressures Kamala to eat meat, which conflicts with her sense of morality. In the second story of Lakshmi and Laj, Laj gives Lakshmi a great deal of power to buy expensive luxuries and show off to her friends in return for her tolerance of his abusive behavior. In the third story about Bhavana and Raj, Raj allows Bhavana to continuously orchestrate construction projects in the house in exchange for her staying home and accommodating his mother. And finally, in the fourth story of Sonya and Manu, Manu allows Sonya the freedom to drive herself around Delhi in exchange for her exceptionally pleasant personality, which has made her the indulged darling of his own family and increased his own reputation through association. As this chapter moves through ethnographic stories of these eight people, the reader will notice the diversity of different
personalities along with the four themes of food, luxury goods, changes made to the house, and the right to leave unescorted as they are uncovered through the narratives of these four marriages.

**Abishek and Kamala**

The first morning light comes into this compact residential area of Old Delhi through a tiny window of clear space—a park surrounded by tightly packed eight story buildings. Every balcony faces the park to soak up sunlight and take in the view. Although the desolate park boasts only two benches and no vegetation, and is not a particularly attractive sight, it has become the centerpiece of the neighborhood. Abishek and Kamala knew the family who had lived in a house on that plot where the park is located before the riots of 1984 and before it became a public plot. Abishek has been disturbing his wife in bed by thrashing around for forty years and this morning was no exception. He greeted the day optimistically with loud, very loud, yogic breathing, to the dismay of his tired wife. Kamala does not sleep well, and the couple sleeps apart in the winters, but, like many married couples in Delhi, their desire for air conditioning is the one compelling motivation to share a bed.

Abishek’s habits are unusually consistent. I never saw him wear anything other then what amounts to a uniform, weddings excluded. Come rain, shine, blistering heat or damp chilling fog, he was always in the same outfit: Black high top sneakers, white athletic socks, brown polyester paints cut high well above the ankle, a black belt, undershirt, and a rotating selection of faded cotton button-up shirts. The only possible addition to his wardrobe is a windbreaker that, along with his sneakers, was a gift from his sons in the US. He is the shortest member of his family standing at only 5’3” and his physique is remarkably spherical, which is accentuated only by the
tightness of his belt. His bald head and circular face further round out his jolly appearance. He is a gentle and honest person, and it is immediately obvious in his eyes and demeanor. When children from the neighborhood see him walking they run up, since he often gives them small candies. He has lived on this block since he was born, and 65 years later, he is widely known as a good and generous man.

Abishek leaves the house by 6 or 6:30 AM to walk to the park. For someone who likes to walk, 6 AM is the only hour available. After 7 AM the streets fill and there is too much foot traffic to enjoy the relatively cool climate that has been broken by the sun by 9 AM. Before 6 AM, too many dogs are out in packs and there are not enough people around to make it safe on the street for middle class people. Thus, 6 AM is the only hour, and if you miss it, you’ll have to wait for tomorrow. For me the hour also held the possibility that I would get to spend time with Abishek. I would meet him outside his house, and we would walk to the Ridge Road Park. On the journey to the park, we walked past the Delhi University colleges. Within many of the colleges there are sitting areas and gardens to explore. Sometimes after dinner, when the park was not available, we would stroll around the gardens of the university. On our evening walks Abishek would give me fatherly advice, philosophical insights, and recount beautiful moral tales about Hindu Gods. But in the morning, he was always energetic and focused, and he would walk with purpose without much conversation.

Abishek would bring leftover food on his walks to give to the animals. In the morning, outside of the university walls, cooking scraps, bowls of grains and seeds, and pieces of bread soaked in milk are placed in these areas for animals to eat. The creatures who responded to these gifts are countless: birds with long legs and large black wings openly compete with the vultures, chipmunks risk meeting the rats that pop in and out of the pavement, and dogs get their meal
only after the cows have plowed through. Little traffic and the animal noises filling the air create a sense that North Delhi is truly an urban jungle.

On the way to the park, the sidewalk narrows and the tall concrete walls that separate the park from the road only allow a tiny space between you and a particularly dangerous road. As one gets closer, an increasing number of monkeys appear almost directly above on the wall. Because of the narrow path, you must walk close to the wall uncomfortably single-file, keeping your gaze down and carry a stick. Hawkers sell sticks meant for this purpose—as though one has been caught out in the rain and needs protective gear on the go. Having been chased by gangs of monkeys several times before in this area, I felt safe with Abishek, who is very effective at threatening monkeys.

At the gates of the park fruit-sellers abound. They sell the seasonal fruit, along with bananas at varying prices. Fruit sellers have no peace and must vigilantly defend their territory against daring monkeys. Abishek would never buy fruit here because it is slightly more expensive than in the central market. This fruit is expressly sold to middle class people to offer to Hanuman through feeding the monkeys. Selling offerings outside a temple is common throughout Asia; but this is a public park, primarily used for exercise. To enter the park, we would weave through about 30 parked motorcycles and autos to reach the entrance. Throughout the parking area, although I doubt it was intended as such, monkeys interact with each other in what could be described as thirty-second melodramas. We walked through a corridor-like gate designed to keep out cows, and we were in the “Central Park” of North Delhi.

The area is on a hill, dense with flowering trees and deep green bushes, possessing a pillar dating back to the period of Ashoka. It has the sweetest air in North Delhi, but it is not advisable to go, especially alone, in the afternoon or evening. However, at 6:30 AM, the middle
class is out in full force. The typical outfit consists of sweatpants and sneakers with a kurta and scarf on the top. Primarily middle-age Punjabi people amble about, representing a wide range of ages and types of exercise. Older men walk in pairs, middle aged and older women walk with one man, young couples giggle together in the fringes, groups of college athletes do sprints. Although people are out with their friends and family, and clearly enjoying the fresh area, there are not many smiles. Abishek shares a determined look with the other middle-age people and walks with purpose.

A 50-ft tall Mughal tomb has become the point that joggers and walkers touch before they turn around at the end of the path. The round structure, in a brilliant red sandstone, has been boarded up. Unlike gardens in South Delhi, there is not a stitch of manicured lawn. Instead, just off the footpath vines hang from a dry, thin canopy of trees and shrubs growing arbitrarily in the tightly packed, almost grayish dirt. The vines would be impenetrable if the people who live in the park did not cut them to make temporary housing structures and cooking fuel. The wildness of the park is striking, and—bearing no resemblance to the English model—this space is clearly designated as a home for monkeys.

On our way home, Abishek usually visits the small temple near his house. It only takes him a few minutes to walk around in a circle in order to briefly acknowledge each of the 33 gods featured. By 7:30 AM he arrives home. Before his bath, he surveys his property. He walks around his house, checking in on everyone still sleeping, loudly fixes things, and makes sure he looks in each area of every room. Then he goes across the street and looks in on the apartments he rents out. Having rented an apartment from him, I know that I should never expect privacy or hope to sleep uninterrupted past 8 AM. He checks the water, the lights, the walls, everything. Dare you leave something personal out before falling asleep, you will wake up the next morning.
to his standing over you investigating it, including your phone and wallet. Luckily I was able to persuade his wife Kamala to discuss this with him, and after the first few weeks I was spared. He likes to do yoga in one of the empty apartments in the morning, and I would join him sometimes, when he would wake me up. He loved to teach and took the job seriously. He would compare me to his favorite daughter, who now lives in the US, and I could tell on those mornings how much he missed his children.

The house and apartments he owns have been falling apart for at least ten years. He is notoriously cheap and the only thing holding the building together is his constant attention. Every morning he needs to clear out the pipes, turn on the lights and so forth, because they break daily. At one point, for no apparent reason, a large piece of my bedroom wall just crumbled to the floor. Within a day, three workers fixed just that section. He hires people at the lowest possible rate to do a large variety of jobs in the apartment building, and the quality of the work reflects the low wages.

His attitude toward his buildings closely resembles his attitude towards his car. His car is a boxy, blue 12-year-old minivan. During his morning tour of his property, his car also receives maintenance. Every morning he turns it on to make sure it is still working and usually has a servant wash it. After owning the car for 12 years, he went away for only a month to visit his children; When he returned to Delhi he found his car had been badly damaged. The car sat parked on the Delhi street where the rats ate all the wiring. He had it rewired, but from the look on his face when he told me what happened, it was as though he had lost an epic war against the rats. He had failed to keep the hordes at bay. He has fought them for so many years, knowing that if he wavered, they would take the car. Just one trip to see his beloved children, and they had their victory! His youngest son has been earning well in the US and came to visit for three
weeks. His son pestered him to buy a new car, offering to pay for it. The five of us—Abishek, Kamala, their son and granddaughter and myself—all piled into the old car and went to a car depot. Even then, Abishek would not buy a new car. Kamala begged her husband, but whenever the topic was mentioned he would get very stony and leave the room. He clearly wants his sons and daughters to have nice things, and has spent lavishly on his children, but he denies himself and his wife. Of each of his possessions, from his shirts to his house and his phone, only the oldest items will do. His wife has never accepted this about him. When we arrived home from the car dealership Kamala cried in the main room on and off for about two hours. She said, “What did I do in my past life to deserve this husband! He listens to everyone else but me and does not care how embarrassed I am. From the first day [of the marriage], he has never done what I ask.” When I inquired further about the car issue with their children, his son said that Abishek is “nostalgic” about his old car and has trouble accepting change.

He spends at least two hours, from 9 AM to 11 AM, getting ready for his day. He bathes, changes, and sits in the parlor reading the paper and eating his breakfast. He talks with his wife, the servants, and often calls his children on Skype. They sent him an iPad which he uses solely for this purpose, although his ownership of the iPad allows him to dictate its near constant use among his family members. Breakfast is the only meal he eats with just his wife, over a low coffee table with numerous papers scattered about. They both read large sections of the paper, interrupting each other with comments on the news. Additionally, this is a time when they discuss issues pertaining to the management of the house, although more often than not, these conversations are conflict-ridden.

Between 11 AM and 2 PM, Abishek goes to the tin shop. It takes at least forty minutes in traffic each way, and he is rarely at the shop for more than an hour. He used to stay all day, but
in the past five years, he lets his trusted servant run the business. Some years ago, this servant, Kuran, used to live and work in their home. For many years he was Abishek’s right-hand man. He would wash cars, drive the family around, fix the house, and manage the other servants. Kuran also accompanied Abishek to the tin shop every day for nearly 20 years. Since Abishek’s heart attack five years ago, Kuran has taken on the daily operations of the business. However, like the rented apartments, house and car, he checks on the shop once a day. He spends only an hour on business at the brick and mortar store, but he also visits with clients, pays staff, and negotiates with contractors in his living room with his wife present throughout the morning and early afternoon.

He returns to the house for lunch at 2:30 PM. His daughter, who works as a teacher, also returns home and makes roti for the family meal. He sits with his grandchildren and wife to eat, letting his granddaughter crawl over him while she playing games on the iPad. Sometimes relatives come by and visit. Typically, he and his wife travel in the car to run errands in the afternoon. These errands include viewing new properties to buy, shopping for particular items, and visiting relatives or business acquaintances. They own plots of land that take nearly two hours to reach from their home. Visiting these and scouting new properties is time-consuming. Shopping in South Delhi also takes at least an hour in each direction. Usually they set out around 3:30 PM, and return by 8 PM. On days that they have no errands or the weather is too hot to leave the house, they nap between 3 and 5 PM, and return to the living room for tea and snacks at 5 PM. If they are home, visitors continue to come by until about 7 PM. Between 7 and 9 PM is outside food time. With his grandchildren in tow, Abishek walks around the neighborhood sampling the delicious street foods and buying some to bring home to his wife. Every evening he buys the seasonal fruit and sometimes pieces of cooked meat to have with dinner. He always
brings home a large bag of fruit and cuts it up for his family. Indeed, there is little choice about eating the fruit. Each piece he cuts, he grunts and nods at the family member intended for that piece. I have never seen someone refuse him. Mangoes are his favorite. During the early evening, he also takes fruit juice and almonds.

Before dinner is ready he sits with his family members on the bed and watches TV. He usually selects between three types of entertainment; black and white Hindi films, a program featuring a guru, or the news. Whatever program is picked, he enthusiastically instructs everyone around on the value of its content. Dinner is ready by 9 PM and everyone sits around the low table. Abishek is always served his roti first and takes it upon himself to serve everyone else out of the three or four bowls of food on the table. I have never shared a meal with him where he did not dictate what every person at the table ate. His eldest son also shares this characteristic. After dinner, he talks to his children on Skype for about an hour and then goes to bed.

One evening, I was fortunate enough to get some time alone with Abishek and his son-in-law. Kamala had earlier told me she was angry with Abishek who had refused to allow her to host a *kitty party* in their home. A kitty party is a social gathering of a collective of middle-age women where each member must host a party at her home. Additionally, that evening, their daughter had told me she was angry with her husband for coming home drunk the night before and locking them out of their apartment. The men and I sat together right outside the kitchen and Abishek asked me: “Why are they always so mad? We try to make them happy.” His son-in-law added, “To us, in India, your wife is your goddess.” “Yes,” agreed Abishek, “They always seem to make a problem, why? We are only trying to make them smile.” I said, “You know why they are mad.” In this conversation the two men seemed to want to tell me their side of the story so that I would support them in my conversations with their wives. At the time, I wondered why
they needed to justify themselves to me. However, at this time, and in some of their other statements to me, they emphasized that I should understand the anger of their wives within a particular cultural framework. They would say the women were “goddesses” to them, and that I could never understand why they acted as such with their wives without sharing their religious framework. During this conversation outside the kitchen, Abishek said, “I just want her to be happy,” although this seemed to conflict with the argument I saw between them earlier that day. Kamala had been crying in front of all of us, and Abishek stormed out of the room. To end our conversation, Abishek said, “We make mistakes. Why can’t they let them pass?”

I had just recently returned to Delhi and was sitting with Kamala on the couch over morning tea, catching each other up on the events of the last year, when she mentioned that her 40th wedding anniversary had taken place a few months ago. I said, “Oh that is nice. What did you do to celebrate?” Kamala replied, “We didn’t do anything.” “Really?” I said, “You didn’t go out to dinner or have a party?” Kamala said, “No there was some talk of it, but I decided not to.” Then, a sly, sarcastic smile crept onto her face. “You know, [long pause] I have never liked him!” At which point she laughed. I laughed, too, because I understood that she was poking fun at me for feigning ignorance of her feelings toward her husband for politeness sake. This particular joke is an example of a topic that was often touched upon by Kamala. She has an absurdist humor that accentuated the sharp juxtaposition between the outward appearances of marriage as based on love and affection and what she, in turn, sees at the cruel reality of marriage.

Kamala grew up as the child of Punjabi refugees in Lucknow. Her father held an officer’s post in the military and Kamala was one of six children. She completed a Masters degree in
Education before her marriage was arranged to Abishek. She had never met him before they married, and from the start, she did not like the match. She said of her wedding day, “He was so short! My mother didn’t even check his height before the day, but I couldn’t do anything to stop it. I did not have a say even after I saw him. She [Kamala’s mother] just wanted to get rid of me.”

Kamala also still regularly talks about her mother-in-law, now dead 28 years. The first years of her marriage were extremely hard, and she suffered daily abuse at the hands of her mother-in-law. She said that when her in-laws were alive she had no place in the house and was not allowed to speak or show her face in their presence. Her mother-in-law physically and verbally abused Kamala and forced her to work long hours doing menial tasks. While discussing this, Kamala said, “He always let her [Abishek’s mother] decided everything for me. He never stood up for me. Even now, he still thinks it is his job to keep me from what I want.” Other telling statements made about their marriage include the examples below.

While we were discussing the issue of the new car that Abishek would not buy, she said, “I can cry and cry, and there is nothing I can do about it. How can he humiliate me like this? He doesn’t care that I have to ride in that car, too. I have to be seen in that car by the society. But there is nothing to be done about it. I could never persuade him to do anything. Whatever I say, he does the opposite.”

On another occasion, I accompanied them to Chandni Chowk to look at wedding cards for their son. Kamala wanted to buy the more expensive cards and told me that her son would yell at her if they purchased cheap cards. Abishek tried to argue with Kamala for less expensive cards and became increasingly angry as we went from shop to shop without reaching a decision. The tipping point was when Kamala had gotten several people in the store on her side, myself
included, and he stormed out of the store in a rage. We walked out into the crowded market where Abishek was nowhere to be seen. Kamala said to me, “He always does this. Whenever I have a case, he just leaves. You will see, when he comes back he will just act like nothing happened. He is always humiliating me in this way.” When Abishek did meet us again a few minutes later, it was indeed as though nothing had happened.

Kamala and Abishek also have periodic conflicts about food. When I have accompanied them out to dinner on special occasions, like a birthday, Abishek orders a meat dish and insistently services Kamala. She was a vegetarian before her marriage and she views eating meat as morally reprehensible. To this effect, she once stated to me, “You are good to not eat meat. I wish I could, but since I was married these people have forced me to. I had to cook it for him.” Out to dinner, or sometimes at home when Abishek brings meat for the meal, he would insist that she also eat. She would look extremely unhappy and take a few bites, before his gaze would move to eat his own portion and she would be free of having to continue eating. She said after one such event, “I really hate him. He is killing himself with chicken and killing me, too.”

To summarize their relationship, in Kamala’s own words, she said: “This family is very bad. They are mentally ill and all they want is to abuse. My mother should have asked around the neighborhood before she married me to them. Anyone would have told them how evil these people are—his whole family. And he is like that only. He lives to make me suffer.”

The marriage between Abishek and Kamala is characterized by antipathy, even as they seem to choose to spend most of the hours of the day together. Kamala is deeply unhappy. She spends much of her time sitting in her living room talking to her family and visitors about the details of her mother, mother-in-law and husband’s unfair treatment of her. Her primary
complaint is about her lack of autonomy. I observed her powerlessness, as she tried to influence important matters of the household on several occasions, and also her accompanying depression and anger. Kamala often takes out her frustrations on her daughter, granddaughter and servants. Her retaliation for being restricted from buying certain goods, like the new car or wedding cards, is generally carried out through spreading gossip to family and neighbors. The only emotional weapon that she can direct openly against Abishek are her tears. He does seem to feel unhappy when she cries and usually leaves the room. However, her tears probably seem less genuine to the entire family when it is obvious that she is crying in order to influence his economic decisions. Unfortunately for Kamala, even her genuine expressions of despair are not effective in changing Abishek behavior.

Serving food is emblematic of the complexities of power within this family. Abishek is not confrontational. He abhors open conflict, and when the more outspoken members of the family fight, he is the first to plea with them to resolve their differences. However, Abishek has a controlling hand. It has always been hard for me to understand how he is able to compel such a strong, outspoken woman such as Kamala to eat meat with a stern look. More often than not, Abishek brings the cooked meat home right before dinner. He opens the package, takes some, and then throws a piece onto his wife’s plate. She always looks unhappy, with an incredibly deep frown and scrunched nose. But he seems unbothered and looks down at his food to avoid her gaze. I have witnessed this scene many times, but I have never seen her refuse or either of them speak to each other about this issue. Clearly, serving food is one of the ways Abishek exerts control. Additionally, the roti is served in a clear hierarchical order: first Abishek is served and his granddaughter served last. However, these food relations are not straightforward.
However, his act of distributing food highlights his service and love toward his family. On one hand, this behavior can be seen as controlling, but on the other, Abishek serves food as a nurturing act (Appadurai 1988). He paid for the food, and he is making sure each member of his family has enough. He seems to view his job as making sure his family is provided for, and each meal is an assurance that he is doing his job well. The physicality of serving food should also be addressed. In one sense, Abishek is turning himself into his family’s servant (Appadurai and Mills and Korom 1991). Juxtaposing this form of feeding with his sacrificial acts of feeding animals in the morning provides an interesting connection between feeding, sacrifice, and the religious elements in both contexts.

Through the detailed example of this couple, I aim to show that a particular patriarchal channel of food consumption is part of marriage in this social context. This structural theme of food-distribution, is a compelling way to view patriarchal power. The desired street food, which must be obtained through capitalist exchange in the city, is expressed through the structural, society-wide, powers of men to dictate the terms of food consumption for their families. Some husbands in Delhi do not make this mode of power primary within their marital relationship, but in the following stories you will continue to see how the patriarchal structure of food-distribution is still manifested among different personalities and where food is not an apex of conflict. In the conclusion of this chapter, I give additional context for understanding how the structure of the city itself influences these power differentials within the home, and show how some of the specialty foods that my middle class informants enjoyed could only be purchased by a man and brought into the home when women wished to consume them.

Lakshmi and Laj
As I returned home from my walk with Abishek one morning, I was passing by Lakshmi’s bedroom when I heard her voice say, “Did you marry yet?” This form of not-so-gentle mocking was Lakshmi’s favorite kind of banter. I had visited with her at her house the evening before and had been interrogated into publicly defending my single status. Indeed, in almost every meeting I had with Lakshmi, she advised me to marry immediately. On this occasion, her humor came from implying that I should have been married between the hours of 8 PM the night before and 7 AM that morning. I could see her through a gold curtain from the street as she called to me. I took this as an invitation and went up to her door. She greeted me with unusual cheer, undoubtedly still happy over the delivery of her joke, and offered me toast and tea. When I accepted, she allowed me to sit on her bed while I ate my breakfast and watched her apply a thick layer of makeup.

Lakshmi’s bedroom was shared by her son. Her youngest son had slept in her bed for years to keep her husband from trying anything sexual with her. Lakshmi is 55 years old and usually bears a grim expression. Unlike most women of her class and age, Lakshmi is never out of a formal sari. Even on the hottest or coldest days of the year, at home or out to dinner, her outfit was always appropriate for the most sophisticated social events imaginable. She preferred pastel colors and heavy beading, and by 8 AM, she has on a diamond earring and necklace set, eight bands of gold around her wrists, and dark red lipstick and rouge—all of this without regard to what events where planned for that day. I have seen her on a number of occasions dress in an overblown, ornate ensemble, only to see her sit around the house all day without any plans to leave or receive important visitors.

Lakshmi and her husband Laj live in a relatively nice area of North Delhi and they should be understood as upper-middle class. Their street has a mix of older buildings that look rundown
from the exterior and shiny new houses, the surfaces of which are often being cleaned by servants. The neighbors commented on how out of place Lakshmi’s house looks among the rest of the Old City surroundings. The house comes out of her vision of what it would mean to “stand out” in this neighborhood (Saavala 2003). Her house is four stories high and the exterior is crafted by opaque blue glass, while the floors are all white marble. Each floor has a balcony but Lakshmi does not let her family sit out on balconies. She believes “balconies are only for old people. Anyone sitting on the porch has nothing better to do but be seen by the street people. You look low class on the balcony.”

Lakshmi is part of three different kitty party groups. Between these groups and her own relatives, Lakshmi usually leaves the house for her rounds of shopping and visiting between 11 AM and 5 PM everyday. The kitty party is a social organization for housewives. I have visited these parties with Lakshmi many times. The food at kitty parties includes all the most indulgent offerings, such as fried sweets and ice cream. The presentation of the food and sitting area are important to the social status of the hostess (Donnor 2012). Regularly the conversation of the women would include evaluations of the house where they sat and food they ate, which were quite obviously a form of social evaluation for the hostess. The kitty party was a time when women would eat chaat and desert foods together, share stories, and play games. One conversation I had while accompanying Lakshmi to a kitty party touched on the issue concerning women’s food. A fellow kitty party participant was eating her second bowl of ice cream while she made this remark: “I am trying to reduce [my weight]. I work out all the time and I don’t take more than one chapatti at dinner. I don’t even use ghee on my chapattis. But still. I guess it’s age. But you know, I do love ice cream. Sometimes I think I just come to these parties to eat ice cream, but don’t tell my husband that!”
Often the kitty party is actually a two-part affair. First, housewives gather a one of their homes. They play betting games for small sums of money. The most popular game closely resembles Bingo. Cards are handed out, and as numbers and letters are read aloud, the women frantically look over their cards. The concerted effort and fever by which these ladies try to uncover the winning numbers on their cards has often surprised me. The excitement in the possibility of winning a small pot of money, usually around ₹1,000 or roughly 15 USD, would send the diamond-encrusted women into hoots and hollers when the winner was revealed.

Another game was in the form of a raffle in which the prize was usually a coupon for a discount on diamonds. When Lakshmi would win these coupons, I estimate at least twice a month, another entire day would be devoted to a second kind of kitty party at a diamond store in GK market. Our visits to the store would start with a full takeaway meal from McDonald’s or Pizza Hut, and the group of five housewives who normally went shopping together would take about 45 minutes to eat the fast food. One time I estimated the timing of the journey progressed as such:

1 hour to reach GK market from North Delhi
45 minutes to park and walk to the store
35 minutes waiting for food
45 minutes eating
3 hours playing a raffle game for more coupons
2 hours for everyone to pick out which jewelry to buy
1 hour for the jewelry to be wrapped and tea and snacks served
2 hours getting home, because the traffic is worse in the evening

Without shopping or buying anything else, the visits to the diamond shop appeared on average to take around 11 hours of the day! Lakshmi would leave at approximately 9 AM, only to return at 8 PM or later, depending on the traffic. But these were some of her favorite days. She said to me: “What use is it buying jewelry if your friends aren’t there with you? They can help you pick it out, and they know about it when they see it later. I love to get a new set [matching
necklace and earrings]. New things are only new when you share the excitement of them with other people.”

Lakshmi’s friends resented how she flaunted her wealth. At the kitty parties some of the women would gossip about her. One of her rather close friends announced to a group of five other people that: “Lakshmi earns every rupee with that husband of hers. She could own a diamond mine, and I would not trade places with her. You know, he is the one that gave her a heart attack. What are material things compared to that? But that is her fate. She is a practical minded person.”

Her family relations were less philosophical about pointing out Lakshmi’s enthusiasm for showing off to her peers and its unsavory associations with her husband. I was sitting with some of her relations at a wedding, when she and Laj arrived. We watched as Laj, Lakshmi’s husband, tunneled his way into the middle of the wedding party and awkwardly stood in the center of the group. He was only a distant relation, and this juncture was clearly inappropriate. As everyone made his or her way around to avoid him, Lakshmi glided up. Her pink sari shimmered brilliantly with heavy gold embroidery, her iPhone carelessly sticking out of her Chanel clutch, her mouth puckered and stained with dark red lipstick, and her head tilted back as to look down on the crowd. She took husband’s arm with pride and stood in the midst of the crowd with him. Her sister-in-law saw me watching the couple and leaned over to whisper something in my ear: “You know she just got back from a trip to America. I bet that is where she bought that clutch. I think she doesn’t mind what a crazy person he is because of moments like this.” While in a similar circumstance, an older male relation was a little drunk at a wedding and said: “Look at them! They suck all our blood for that money. What? Do you think he bought that watch with clean money? What I would buy if I were corrupt like him!”
I also learned from family members that Lakshmi’s two sons would somewhat try to divert her husband’s abuses onto themselves. Although they are both tall and muscular and could easily have fought back against Laj, they would only passively help her. They would not hit their father back but would instead try to shield their mother with their own bodies. Lakshmi’s daughter said of the conflict, “He is their father; they cannot raise a hand to him. So they stay with her and let him beat them. They love both our parents a lot.”

To understand Lakshmi’s marriage in her own words, here are a few statements she made when asked directly.

When I asked her about the beginning of her marriage: “I came here from Hyderabad when I was eighteen. I did not know this family, and only my parents came to my wedding in Delhi…you don’t understand what it was like for me here until I adjusted. I was like a rat underfoot that could be killed with one step…but later I came to like life in Delhi. I got to know my friends.”

When it was her 32-year-old son’s birthday she said: “Yes, look at my new bag! He [Laj] promised to buy me one every year after I gave birth to Gautama [her first son]. And he has always given me such a good one, too. You know, it is impossible to go to parties unless you have the latest season. But this way I am always sure I have the proper one.”

When discussing my potential for a better marriage than her own: “You think he [Laj] is bad? Just see when you get married, all men are like this only. What man does not yell? You think men don’t hit their wives in America? I was in a dressing room there and I could hear a man slapping a woman. Americans just say they don’t do it, but even those men are like this. No man will help his wife; no man will be good in the long run. To live with them is to suffer
them—they are a hell. In the beginning they pretend to be good or loving, but just wait a year or two. All men are like this and they will show themselves in time.”

And in one incredibly morbid and cynical conversation with her sister-in-law where they each compared the positive and negative consequences of their husbands’ deaths, she said of her husband: “I am sure I would live longer if he died. He gave me a weak heart and every time he yells it gets worse… But I would have to live with Gautama in Gurgaon, and I wouldn’t be able to come into the city often. I would be stuck in the house and have nothing to spend. Gautama is not making much and his wife takes everything… No, I would rather stay where I am. I try to give him good food, but you know, there is no use saying anything.”

Lakshmi’s husband Laj is a terrifying man. He looms large over his family, servants and the people in the neighborhood. He never misses an opportunity to throw his weight around. He is around 5’11”, and by my estimation, weighs approximately 320 lbs. The exact number of his weight measurements was widely speculated about in passive but resentful jesting among his subordinates. On most days, he wears crisp purple or green pastel dress shirts that he orders from Italy and khaki pants with a belt. He is a middle-level government official that received his Masters degree in civil engineering. Members of his extended family often made angry statements over the commodities that Laj displayed in connection to his involvement with government corruption.

One such instance was right after Laj bought a large, bright red car that must have cost at least ₹2,300,000, or 35,000 USD. His government salary was estimated by his family to be roughly, ₹60,000 per month. Laj had a video screen installed on the dashboard, directly between the driver and the windshield. He would park the car in fount of his house, sit in the AC, and watch movies. He was always desperate for an audience, and if you happen to pass by, he would
either try to engage you in friendly banter or question and abuse you, depending on your social status. This was unwelcome attention and crass behavior in the eyes of every single person that discussed him with me. His neighbor said: “That man [Laj] is the terror of the neighborhood. He parks that car so no one else can pass in the road. He thinks he owns the road and everyone here.” His niece said, “Everyone knows that he got that car from taking bribes. He is a nasty person but what can we do? He is always rewarded for his evil.”

However, his boorishness was not the worst of his public offenses. He would beat his servants and family on the porch, beat up local men sitting in the park, and bring low-class prostitutes to the house without much discretion. His neighbors all complained about these behaviors and there was universal delight when a gang of men from the park, the same ones that Laj often bullied, ransacked his house one night while the family was away. Of the event, Laj’s daughter-in-law, of whom some things had also been taken in the theft, said, “The necklace was a small price to pay to see him like this. I don’t do anything against him, but I smile when karma comes to him.”

I never formally interviewed Laj and perhaps that represents a hole in my data. However, the reason I did not interview him alone will itself be telling. I first came to know this family while I was a student in Delhi, now more than ten years ago. I met Laj on numerous occasions with his family present. I, being a friend of his niece, was invited on several family outings with them. One day, my friend and I had been using the internet in the main room. She went upstairs, and I continued to check my mail. Laj appeared in the doorway and said, “You are sweet, just like a daughter. I would like to kiss you.” As he said this he held my head firmly in his hands and kissed my check. I recoiled with disgust and horror and started screaming. He looked worried and left the room. A few minutes later, while I was still recovering, he came back into the room.
with two candy bars. He shoved them in my hand with a nervous smile and left. In later years, I discovered that he had molested his own daughter, and that all the women of the family, including his own wife, go to great lengths never to be alone with him.

Lakshmi’s marriage could be characterized by a form of quid pro quo, where her ability to impress her friends with the goods bought through her husband’s corrupt income-generating activities is understood as an exchange for his abuse within their marriage. Lakshmi’s own daughter said of her parents’ marriage, “She cares too much what other people think. She would let him kill her before she would leave. A few times the police have come, or neighbors, but she just sends them away. She was so embarrassed. It’s ok, you shouldn’t worry about her. She is happy with him.”

Lakshmi carefully avoided talking to me about her marriage expect for the examples given above. In contrast to Kamala, Lakshmi rarely spoke badly of her husband in public and sometimes defined his actions by excusing them as an inevitable result of his gender. To further compare the women, Kamala is ineffective at getting her husband to buy the commodities she desires, while Lakshmi is the most successful among her friends in acquiring those desirable commodities. Once again in contrast, Kamala is not physically abused by her husband but is unhappy about her marriage, while Lakshmi is physically abused on a regular basis but seems content with her marriage.

I hope that through giving such detail about these marriages I have helped the reader suspend, not reinforce, a common belief among my informants that housewives only care about their husband’s income or that money is their only source of happiness. Rather, with Lakshmi we see how social recognition, her relationship with her friends and the other women at kitty parties
and marriages, are deeply meaningful to her. She takes joy in chatting, joking and sharing confidences with her friends, not necessarily only the use of the commodities themselves. As previously shown, she primarily enjoys her new possessions if they are socially recognized as new. For her, the newness of her personal adornments is both socially and emotionally rewarding in her perpetual rebirth as an upper-middle class consumer.

Additionally, there is another kind of social perspective that can help us further understand the nuances of Lakshmi’s arrangement with her husband. Lakshmi seems to believe that Laj’s abusive behavior within the house benefits the entire family when those same qualities are directed at people outside the house for financial gain. Laj regularly bullies people on the street, shop clerks, and members of their extended family. This same behavior has been observed by neighbors and relations as connected to his corrupt practices as a government official. It is possible that Lakshmi claims to be “happy” with her husband to her daughter, because she believes it is better to have an aggressive man who is abusive toward her but successful in dominating other men. Although she might sound in the above passages as condemning all men for being domineering, it may also be understood as a desirable attribute in a husband within her social context. The connection between Laj’s ability to buy her commodities and his abuse toward her may be less of a trade than a trade-off, as anyone’s personality traits tend to be in a marriage. For example, one may respect their partner for always being organized, but resent that same quality when the partner reorganizes their own possessions. Likewise, perhaps Lakshmi sees her husband’s boorish behavior as advantageous in most situations and continuous in contexts where she is the target of his abuse.

The complex relationship between marital harmony and the purchase of diamonds and gold jewelry was observed throughout my interactions with all four of these women. In
Lakshmi’s case, her enthusiasm for shopping and attending kitty parties was unusual. However, in the other cases with different personalities, the purchase of jewelry seemed to represent a consistent avenue of my women informants’ evaluations of the emotional tie between two married people. The reader will continue to observe the complexities between emotional sentiments and jewelry as we progress, but before we move on let us pause to reflect on the kitty party within private homes and at the diamond store.

The kitty party has a hedonistic component. Women eat foods they would not otherwise make or consume with their families, they gamble, and they have the opportunity to display their buying power in front of their acquaintances and friends. Lakshmi devotes a great deal of time to these activities compared to other women her age, but these gatherings are widely enjoyed by many women I met throughout my fieldwork. One recurring complaint about gossip I heard concerning the kitty parties was synthesized in a statement by an unusually dour housewife. She said, “I stopped going to those things because everyone just complains about their mother-in-laws. Why do I want to hear about everyone else’s relations?” The kitty party, for better or worse, is unquestionably an important site for women’s interactions. While it does provide a space for women to enjoy themselves and share their lives with each other, it is also one of the avenues through which patriarchal domination over commodity consumption is socially reinforced. In my fieldwork, marital relations and the social status associated with having a favorable or unfavorable marriage was evaluated by the group of women at kitty parties based largely on the commodities that husbands gave to wives. I noticed three aspects of how this was evaluated by other members of the group. First, all the women were expected to buy diamonds with the coupons and wear them to the party. If an individual did not buy jewelry when awarded a good coupon or wear appropriate accessories to the party, she was negatively evaluated. All the
women were required to contribute ₹1,000 at the beginning of the party, but this did not seem as important as using the coupons to the women. Second, the food that was served by the host generated a great deal of conversation among the women and the extravagance of the food was reflected positively or negatively on the host. And third, the interior design of the living rooms where the parties were held also generated conversation and social evaluations. The kitty party rotates through different individuals’ homes, and the women each have their equal turn in the prestigious but socially precarious role of host.

Success in this realm of social life is no small feat and requires time, money, and attention. Lakshmi’s social success in these all-women circles depended on her relationship with her husband. If she had left him or even argued with him, it is likely that her ability to attend these parties would jeopardize the opportunity to be viewed by the other women in a positive light. Her social success with these women required the constant purchase of jewelry, an attractive home, and maintaining the facade that she is happily married.

In this chapter I have designated the channel of power that conditions some aspects of capitalist consumption with respect to new clothing and jewelry part of a commodity-domination relationship. The commodity is purchased as part of a power game that is maneuvered between a woman and her husband, and between a woman and her friends. The desire to show the commodity to friends can only be realized through the channels of power within the marriage. Which commodities were chosen (such as gold and diamonds) bore the material mark of the patriarchal admixture that conditioned its purchase. This example shows how the structure of commodity-domination within marriages is influential in the outcome of purchases. In other words, the gold bangle bares the inscription of the conversation the wearer had with her husband in order to purchase the bangle.
Bhavana and Raj

Bhavana never really asked if I wanted to go swimming so early in the morning. She would text message me the night before, and even if I missed her message and did not reply, she would be outside my door waiting for me at 5 AM. I kept my swimming clothes packed in a bag, and when she rang, sometime repeatedly, I would throw something on and be in her car only two minutes after waking. I sometimes pleaded with her to make our appointment a little later in the day, but she assured me that was impossible. By 8 AM her husband would be awake and she would need to be home. They thought she was at a yoga class.

One morning in particular, Bhavana looked melancholic. I noticed it the instant I got into her car. Sad Urdu ghazals came from the radio and her eyes were puffy. I asked what was troubling her but she was not ready to talk. She said, “Oh just the same things.” She drove us to an extravagant hotel in South Delhi. In the morning traffic is not bad, and while the journey would have taken an hour each way from our North Delhi homes in the day, we reached the hotel in just twenty minutes.

The particular hotel we would frequent had a Japanese themed interior and a restaurant that included several Japanese dishes. The pool area resembled a Japanese Zen Garden, complete with a goldfish pond, intricate stone designs, and cherry-blossoms. We did not usually encounter anyone else at the pool, and the silent, sweet air and calm water were a beautiful way to start the day. We swam, but when we grew tired we sat together in a small whirl-pool. Normally Bhavana is warm and gregarious towards me, but that day she seemed despondent. I did not want to push her for information, so I asked her advice on a situation that had arisen within the family home where I was residing at the time. She is a fountain of prudent advice on social affairs, and
through her malaise, she told me how to apologize to an older woman for a perceived slight. She said, “Tell her, ‘You are my mother, I was completely wrong.’ You have to extinguish your pride, otherwise she will know you are not sorry from the heart. Your ego has no place in the home.” Later that day when I apologized to the matriarch of the family: Kamala, the women previously described in this chapter. Bhavana’s advice was invaluable in reconciling our argument. But giving this advice put her back into a thoughtful state of detachment. She suggested that we take a small breakfast before heading back.

We ate breakfast in the restaurant adjacent to the pool. When we ate out, Bhavana would inevitably order significantly more food than humanly possible to eat and then aggressively insist on paying. This morning we had six brimming dishes placed before us for our small breakfast. Our conversation proceeded as such:

Bhavana: “Do you think husbands have to cheat?”

Cassandra: “I don’t think so, but I don’t know. I have never been married.”

Bhavana: “I think they cheat. How can they not, they are men. Men are like that only. When they leave the house—that is the trouble. That is when they become bad. Their friends make them drink and smoke. They eat meat and unhygienic foods. They roam around. Their friends take them to prostitutes. They cannot say no. Wives can only try to keep them inside, because when they leave the house they become like street dogs.”

Cassandra: “Maybe, but aren’t some men good?”

Bhavana: “Men are only good when they are with you. I used to think my husband was different, he is sweet towards me, but now I see what he is. He has to show his friends how he doesn’t care about me. That is how all men act with their friends. What is a friend to them but a bad influence? Inside the house he is good, but outside he is like other men.”
When we married I threatened him. I said, ‘If you go out, I will, too.’ He was scared for a few years that I would take my old school friend as revenge, but now he doesn’t care. He goes out almost every night. I know what he is doing. It is those friends! But what can I do? All men are like that. We [women] are not like that. We cannot do such things. He knows he can do what he wants. What can I do to stop him? [long pause] Let it be. There is no justice for women.”

The morning was a tranquil and philosophical time for Bhavana. It was the only time she seemed relaxed. I would visit her house, but even upstairs away from the rest of the family, she would only speak to me in a whisper for fear of her mother-in-law’s persistent eavesdropping. We met on just three occasions outside of her house in the mid-day since her marriage. I would see her for a mere few minutes before her mother-in-law’s constantly calls would start. When Bhavana did not pick up, her mother-in-law would call her husband and have him ring her to instruct her to return to the house. She always left our meetings immediately after Raj called.

Bhavana is the only person in this chapter that I had known before her marriage. I was invited to her wedding by her family and attended the event with them. On the first night of the wedding there was a great deal of gossip about her drinking. Her first cousin later said, “Everyone knew she was drunk. Her parents were so strict but then all of a sudden she was drinking. She was happy to get away from them [her parents], but did she need to do it [drink alcohol]?”

Indeed, alcohol seemed to be an important feature of Bhavana’s marriage to Raj. When she was living with her own family she was restricted from leaving the house for anything other than work or school. At the time, she would often talk to me about how she wished she could go
out to night clubs, have a boyfriend, drink, and wear revealing clothing. When she first started
seeing Raj during their year-long engagement period, after the wedding was already agreed upon
but before they were married, they would regularly go to a club in South Delhi. These were
likely the first times Bhavana drank alcohol. She told me, “With me he can drink so there is no
need to go out. Look [she gestured to a bottle in her bedroom closet]. He should be drinking with
me not his friends. I am fun!”

Alternatively, Bhavana is militantly against smoking. When she and Raj were seeing each
other during their engagement, he told her he did not smoke and never smelled of cigarettes.
Conversely, after marriage, Raj revealed that he was a heavy smoker. He started by smoking on
the balcony, but over time, he started smoking in their room, sometimes while sitting in bed next
to her. She is still disgusted by cigarettes and has trouble forgiving him for hiding this habit from
her.

Bhavana had worked as a school administrator after completing her Masters degree in
English. She was given a car in her dowry, and for three months, she drove herself to work after
her marriage. It had previously been arranged with Raj and his parents that Bhavana would work
after her marriage. However, when she became pregnant, her husband and in-laws claimed it was
detrimental to the fetus for her to traverse the Delhi roads in her car. She was pressured to quit
and restricted from leaving the house. After her son was born, she again wanted to work and
argued with her in-laws. Raj offered a compromise. Bhavana had been making ₹35,000 a month,
which had previously been allocated as her pocket money. Her husband said he would give her
₹70,000 a month as spending money without any questions attached if she would agree to stay
home. She accepted. She would regularly brag to her female relatives about the amount allocated
to her. Over tea, while sitting with her paternal aunt and her aunt’s daughter, she said, “Can you
believe how much he gives me? What husband is so generous as that? He is good. He doesn’t even ask me a single question on my spending.”

When Bhavana was first confined to the house while pregnant, her in-laws’ home entered a period of continuous transformation. The first addition Bhavana organized was to construct a door between the upstairs and downstairs areas of the house. She had a large number of bad fights with her mother-in-law after she found her spying and arranged with her husband to construct the door. Her husband also arranged for his mother to stay in the lower half of the house so Bhavana could be left in peace during her pregnancy. Bhavana told me, “He only made her stay down there because I made a deal with him. He was always spending time with her [his mother] and never paying attention to me. I told him to visit with me, but he prefers her. He is always down there. So I said, fine, leave me in peace at least! So he made her stay down there. But she still presses herself against the door to hear me.”

Another complaint Bhavana often leveled against her mother-in-law was the conflicting family pressures to eat high caloric foods, remain inactive in the house, and criticism of Bhavana’s expanding size. Every afternoon her mother-in-law insists that Bhavana drink a large chocolate milkshake in front of her and Bhavana credits her weight gain to this daily practice. However, at other points, Bhavana’s mother-in-law chastises her for her bulky appearance. While Raj is an undeniably handsome man, his mother cannot seem to view Bhavana as worthy of her son even after she had a hand in arranging their marriage herself. She says to her, in this example in my presence, “You are becoming fat. If you don’t want Raj to ignore you, you should do something about it.”

Next, Bhavana arranged a rooftop garden and sitting area to be built onto the house, presumably also to escape from her mother-in-law. To be more accurate, Bhavana had installed a
bench and some planters, but the swing, gazebo, and path, remained less than half completed for over two years. She had many ideas on different flowers to plant, particularly different colors of roses, but these ambitions were never realized. After two years, the half-built projects were cleared away and only the bench remained.

The most invasive project Bhavana undertook was to add an extension on the house. These plans were drawn by Bhavana herself, without consulting an architect, and undertaken by poorly paid workers. Whenever this construction seemed to be coming to an end, Bhavana would decide to change the plans and insist on the new design. The construction filled a large section of the house with dust from the concrete. The construction most obviously reduced the air quality of the house, while the only room untouched by the nauseating dust was her bedroom. The door was always closed and she had an air filter and air conditioner running most of the time, leaving her in-laws to fend for themselves in the dangerous environment.

Bhavana also redecorated constantly. She had the living room retiled and changed all of the living room furniture three times in one year. On Sundays, Raja's day off, he would escort her shopping for home décor. She had a budget that enabled her to be fickle with her choices. For instance, in one phase of retiling she selected a dark brown geometric design that bore a resemblance to Andalusian tiles. She had taken three months to decide on them, visited the shop with her husband on numerous occasions and asking others their opinion on the tiles many times before committing to have the entire living room wall retiled. It took a week for the operation to be completed, but within a day of the completion of this iteration of interior tiling, she was dissatisfied with the pattern. The dark brown geometric shapes she had adored only days earlier became repulsive to her. She said, “It looks like cockroaches crawling on the walls. I cannot stand to be in that room.” She pressured her husband to have them removed, and after less than a
month of the installation of the brown tiles, they had been taken down and the unfinished wall remained unfinished for another six months as she chose new tiles. Each consecutive time she would scrape the titles she had previously picked seemed to make it harder and harder for her to decide on the next set.

One of my most revealing conversations with Bhavana on marriage was in her bedroom. Undertaken in a whisper, she was feeling upset about her mother-in-law but chose to direct her anger toward me. This was the third occasion that Bhavana had shown me the diamond and gold jewelry her parents and in-laws had given her for her wedding. She had also received, as mentioned, a car, bedroom furniture, a large flat screen TV, a mini fridge for her room, an AC, air filter, laptop and phone. Additionally, she had been given a closet full of saris, which she only wore to attend weddings. We lay on her bed and examined her jewels. She slipped on a tennis bracelet and admired her cleverness. She said, “Do you see why I couldn’t go out when we were younger? If I had been like you I would have never gotten such a good husband. A man like him would never marry you. All that time I spent at home while you were out, that is how I got him.”

And in a different conversation while we were looking at her wedding album she said, “I was very happy when we were finally married. That night he was so uncomfortable that I knew he must have been a virgin like me. I am glad we were at least equal in that. You know, most men these days expect that you only go out with your parents, but they have been out with their friends for many years. Boys have more freedom.”

Unfortunately, I never had a conversation with Raj alone. In fact, Bhavana strictly forbid me from ever speaking to him without her present. From our few dinners together, I was able to gather these observations. Raj is thirty-two, 5’11’, fair, uncommonly fit and has a handsome face with large eyes. In conversations with both Bhavana’s extended family and in-laws, women
would comment on Raj’s attractive features and how Bhavana was lucky to have such a dashing husband. Her first cousin said, “Bhavana was always so shallow. She told her parents that she would marry the best looking man they found for her. Her father is so ugly that I guess she was worried she would end up like her mother. But I guess she doesn’t need to worry anymore...before they were married she would sneak him into her house. We all knew. If he hadn’t gone through with the marriage she would have been ruined. She is lucky he stayed with her.”

From Bhavana’s perspective the worse component to her marriage is Raj’s mother and his mother’s influence over him, which she credits to the restrictions on her movement. Her social limitations were largely imposed by Raj’s compliance with his mother’s demands for Bhavana to stay in the house. He gave her a large monthly income, allowed her to continuously redecorate the house, and seemed to passively cater to her demands, except the freedom to come and go from the house as she pleased.

In her career, Bhavana had been an effective manager of thirty-two teachers at a girl’s day school. It appeared to me that her desire to feel productive and organize others when confined to the house had the effect her organizing construction workers’ activities within the house. The structural effect of Raj offering Bhavana so much money to stay home is also noticeable. She made ₹35,000 at her job, but received ₹70,000 from her husband for her consent to stay home. While Raj may have enjoyed many things about her staying home, it was clearly unpleasant to have the construction of his house constantly underway. The dust alone was an irritant, not to mention the many workers coming and going, noises, and unfinished and dangerous areas of the house. Bhavana is well-educated and had a relatively good professional job as a school administration, but her salary was dispensable to Raj. Raj’s business makes
roughly ₹600,000 per month, so losing Bhavana’s salary of ₹35,000 in addition to allocating her ₹70,000 from the household budget was a worthwhile trade to have her home.

Her salary was enough to live as a lower-middle class person in Delhi without family support, but it paled in comparison the income generation of her husband’s inherited business. If she had inherited her own father’s business instead of been given a dowry, she would have commanded roughly the same economic power as her husband. However, in the relationship between inheritance and marriage, a structural issue emerges. There is no professional opportunity, even given Bhavana’s prestigious education, that would allow her to control as much money as her husband commands. Even her job in the school is conditioned by the social perception that women intending to be middle class housewives should only work with children. Although Bhavana does not like teaching children and was relieved when she was appointed as an administrator, she was channeled into this low-paying feminized job through structural inequalities. While her market value as a laborer and the system of inheritance that she was born into both condition the extent of economic power her husband wields, her husband and in-law’s perception of the public space of Delhi as a place that is too dangerous and morally compromising for a female member of their family seems to be the determining factor in Bhavana’s marriage and life experience of familial inequality.

Bhavana’s family kept her completely indoors for nearly the entire duration of her pregnancy under the reasoning that the bumpy roads of Delhi would harm the unborn child. After the birth, they did not allow Bhavana to go out for any reason other than to exercise at her morning yoga class. While I was allowed to visit Bhavana at home, our conversations were always under watch in the house by the potential of her mother-in-law overhearing an untoward comment. Although Raj was by most other standards a good and kind husband, his one
restriction on her movement was, to me, clearly related to the mental distress I witnessed when she would discuss her inability to decide on the tiling. The constant reorganization and territorial claims over space within the house appeared to be closely related to the tension created between them by his ability to move freely in contrast to her limitations.

The channel of material power in this context is that of home-territory. Bhavana’s desire to make the house her home, to buy those goods that would imprint her mark on the space, was conditioned by the territorial power Raj had to agree or disagree to her demands over space. Raj’s mother, not Raj, was the primary subject of contestation with Bhavana. However, Raj, although having a passive personality, was still the referee between the women. This power given to Raj, and all the husbands of my informants, is the right to decide how space will be used. This is a material power, not just an emotional or strictly familial association. As discussed in the context of the kitty party, among my informants, a middle class woman’s home is an important marker of her individual identity as a middle class consumer and legitimate presence in her husband’s families’ home. Structurally, a woman’s husband becomes the only person who can make economic decisions concerning changes to her home. This is a form of patriarchal admixture, wherein a relationship of domination and subordination emerge along gender lines between these middle class married couples based on political power over consumption decisions. Below I have referred to this patriarchal admixture as a home-territory dialectic, where women must negotiate with their husbands in order to call their house a home that represents their specific personality as a middle class consumer.

Sonya and Manu
At 5 AM Sonya climbed out of bed trying not to wake her husband. It had taken nearly five years to orchestrate the construction of the master bedroom to her specification, but she was satisfied at last. When she told me about how the room was finally complete, she seemed disappointed to have reached the end of the creative project. The room had the minimalist, shiny, white futuristic style commonly found in high-end Chinese hotels. The few contents it had resembled the types of objects Andy Warhol might have picked out: A giant, furry, neon pink chair in the shape of a stuffed bear; disco ball light fixtures; framed fashion photos embellished with paints. As big as the room was, her changing room and closet were no less than half the size. Hundreds of dresses, shoes, bags, and so forth each had a place. When she showed me the changing room she told me about how she designed each part of the shelving, but the carpenters took months trying to copy her plans exactly. She had to watch over their shoulders in order to get it right. She was intoxicated with pride at having filled the closet. She modeled several designer dresses, bought on a family vacation to Japan, that we both agreed were too revealing to be worn in India.

Over the years in Delhi, I have learned that when a middle class woman shows you her closet, it is a kind of turning point in the intimacy of the relationship. In this case, Sonya asked for my approval of her rather sexy western clothing. In other cases, the display is more about how many saris they received for their wedding or things recently purchased. Sonya, like others, had a naughty look when she introduced the activity, as though she was simultaneously embarrassed and filled with pride. She laid out more dresses and jewelry, and even I was ceremonially adorned with gold and diamonds from the safe she keeps in her closet. As she displayed her objects, she became increasingly forceful in her conversation that adornment was truly a pleasure in life and she had worked hard to find the things that represented her
personality. For Sonya, the closet also seemed to represent how valued she was by her husband. About the Japanese dresses she explained: “Can you believe? He bought eight, eight dresses. In Japan!”

By 5:30 AM her driver brings her to the temple in a very loose and plain kurta. While Sonya cares a great deal about her spiritual life, attending temple is not primarily about worship. She goes early in the morning so that her husband, Manu, will still be asleep. She must return to the house before he wakes, or he will know that she is with her mother and sister-in-law. They live only 15 minutes away, but since her marriage 15 years ago, it has been a negotiation with her husband about how important a role they play in her life. At temple, they are able to see each other most days, and so Sonya’s arguments with her husband have lessened. On the two occasions I had to visit with her family at the temple, and then also once in their home, they gave me numerous gifts of clothing. At temple we sat together, Sonya taking my hand and leading me through the situation. Once we were seated in an area devoted to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, the five women, Sonya, her mother, her paternal grandmother, her sister-in-law, and I, had almost an hour to gossip.

When Sonya comes home around 7 AM it is time for morning worship. Of the four rooms that make up the downstairs of her house, one entire room is dedicated to a meter tall Durga statue. The room was built for this purpose with a slight platform, again in the shiny white hotel style, and there are two smaller statues and a few decorative objects. The statue of the goddess is changed into different gowns each morning and night through a ritual process Sonya orchestrates, with the servants as her audience. The goddess is bathed and handled with extreme care. The statue’s face is beautiful porcelain, her dress intricate and fine, and when Sonya talks to her, or even in front of her, she manifests love and respect.
Throughout the day, Sonya comes into the room and sits with the statue. When I accompanied Sonya, we would sit on the floor by the statue’s feet. Sonya would take on a different demeanor in that room. She reports talking to the goddess every day, and when I was with her, she would confess to us both her deepest worries and concerns. In every other context I ever interacted with her, her face would beam with enthusiasm, positivity, and confidence that everything in life is explainable. By the shrine she told me about how she is worried about her father’s heart condition, wished she could do more for her son’s education, fought with her husband, and other such somber matters. The situation in the shrine was different than our other conversations, including those in temple, and the goddess acted as powerful force within her house. Sonya wanted to help me find god very much, and often told me she wanted to influence me. She would say, “Whatever you want, she [the goddess] will give you, but you must ask.” She credits her easy life, good husband, son and family, to her prayers to this goddess.

By 8 AM, she makes sure the servants are awake and starting breakfast. While they prepare things, she goes into her son Malak’s room and gets him ready for school. He is fourteen and is likely capable enough to get himself ready without her constant attention. She does things like brush his hair and organizes his books, while he passively cooperates still half asleep. Manu comes down, ready for work. He and Malak sit at the table for about 30 minutes, while Sonya stands in the kitchen and listens to them talk. Manu is driven to work by one servant, while she goes with another servant to drop off Malak at school.

Her husband, Manu, is a straightforward man. However, he is usually silent in my company, and, I suspect, he is usually silent when he is with his wife. Sonya lives to talk expressively, and when I was with them in social settings, both inside and outside the home, she does all the talking. They went to college together in Delhi. They were distant friends, but when
Sonya’s family announced they were arranging her marriage, Manu had his parents call hers. Sonya’s parents were not initially enthusiastic, not because he was an ill-suited choice, but precisely because they already knew each other. However, Sonya and Manu had been talking over the phone at great lengths once he revealed his interest, and Sonya pushed very hard to arrange the marriage. She told me that when they were at school together she wasn’t attracted to him. But after talking so much, she couldn’t imagine marrying someone else. Her parents reluctantly agreed. He was the only boy of eight siblings, and came from a good family with a chain of jewelry stores he would inherit.

Then tragedy struck. Sonya went to an astrologer to have them predict the success of their marriage, and the astrologer said it would be terrible luck for them to marry. That devastated her, she said, “That was the worst moment of my life. I was afraid of marrying someone I didn’t know.” She was forced to stop talking to Manu and her parents had her meet another set of potential in-laws. She asked her goddess to help her and she credits this with changing the situation. Through some contacts, she got an appointment with a more prestigious and expensive astrologer. This one gave them a good chance at a happy life. By 18, Sonya was married, and she was pregnant only weeks later. She never finished her education. Her sisters-in-law initially did not accept her, but, she proudly told me, “I never opened my mouth to defend myself, not even once, and they could not keep it up.” While saying these words Sonya held her slender index finger, with its long magenta nail, up to her lips in a hushing motion, and smiled maliciously. She had conquered them.

Because she was so young when she gave birth to her son, Malak, she repeated many times “we grew up together,” while squeezing her teenage son tightly, or that “we [herself and her son] are his [her husband’s] kids!” and then laughing hysterically. Although her daily routine
and her story have a great deal in common with the other Delhi housewives with whom I worked, Sonya’s energy, enthusiasm, joyfulness and ability to make anything into a fun adventure are truly unparalleled.

Since her in-laws died ten years ago, she gets the hours her son is at school completely to herself. By 10 AM, the day takes a turning point. The next six hours, between 10 AM and 3 or 4 PM, will be decided by her. It’s not that she is free to do anything, there are always servants at home, and she warned me numerous times that they will tell on her to Manu. Her neighbors will also give her away. However, she is allowed to drive one of the cars herself. If she wears a modest outfit out the door and gives the servants a respectable reason for leaving, she can do whatever she pleases in other areas of Delhi.

Her husband does not approve of activities like going to the gym, taking a makeup course, or seeing friends. However, these are activities that make up almost half of her day. Most of her interests and hobbies are about learning something new like makeup or interior design, going to religious retreats, or making herself healthier. Her health and beauty regime was impressive. In a week she would have: two types of massages and steams (3 hours), yoga and the gym (9 hours), hair, skin and nail treatments (4 hours), and the greatest consumer of time, shopping (15 hours). At the gym and at the spa, she would wear revealing clothing. Although other women usually wear large tee shirts, Sonya is proud of her body, particularly her flat stomach, and wears a hot pink sports bra and bicycle pants. Of the difference between her and the other women she said, “They would wear this if they could. I feel bad for them; they spend all day eating at home.” Any day of the week, I was welcome to accompany her to the gym, and often after, the salon. Our other daytime activities, and eventually my staying with her for some
time, came months after. These beauty-oriented activities were the times I was most welcome to join her. Along the way, we also would meet up with her friends.

Her closest friend was a rich and handsome man of 32, named Harish, who is an interior designer and was undoubtedly gay. They would meet roughly three times a week for a shopping trip. Although I was eventually able to pass into the realm of acceptability and met her husband and family, Harish would obviously never cross the barrier into her family life. Sonya and Harish often discussed the problems of being unable to express themselves to other people. In one of our outings, around noon, Harish drove us to a shopping center. In the car, I was used as a counter example to show how “being Indian” was about “being in a society” that constrains your behavior, where as I was, apparently, entirely “free” and in some sense without “a society.” Harish said to me, “Maybe you will never marry because your parents won’t make you. But we have to show ourselves to the society.”

When Sonya introduced me to Harish some weeks before it seemed straightforward that she was using each of us to show off her cosmopolitan identity. She would wear short Western dresses and pink stilettos, and the three of us would go shopping in a nice mall. They would buy something in almost every place we went. Sometimes they would buy me things too, but usually I would make myself useful by telling them what I knew about how the brands were perceived in the US. That day, Harish had spent about ten minutes in the car asking us to rank Indian actors in regards to attractiveness, and showing us pictures on his phone, while we waited in traffic. I was rather convinced that his sexuality was not a secret. I mentioned this to Sonya, and she became excited, telling me that she had never thought about it before. Then she laughed and giggled, clutched my arm, and dragged me off in the direction of another store where Harish was waiting. I doubted that she was telling me the truth.
Waiting in traffic between our North Delhi homes and the suburban locations of the large international malls provided long periods of conversation. Later, again waiting in traffic, Sonya asked Harish in a half joking voice, “So if you like those actors, does it mean you like boys?” Harish smiled coyly and said, “Yes,” and then more confidently, “I go on dates with boys!” Sonya again burst out laughing. Harish said that he could not tell his family about his desire not to marry and he hopes that someday he will make enough money to move to San Francisco. Sonya agreed, saying “You have to do what your parents want. You have to show a good face to the society.” Harish told me that he would have to leave India to pursue his dreams. When he talked about moving to San Francisco, it was always framed as an economically motivated goal—wanting to move there in order to become a better interior designer. However, the conversation was also about the unacceptability of his sexual orientation in Delhi.

By 3 PM Sonya is on call for Malak. Occasionally he goes to a party or event after school, but Manu expects Sonya to pick him up. If she does not come home in time, it is reported by the servants to her husband. She goes home to change, and then has the driver take her to pick Malak up. The afternoon is the time for mother and son to be together. Usually they stay in the house. On days I joined them, Malak and I practiced English together with Sonya lovingly interjecting. I suspect that without me, she normally helps him with his homework. When we had finished the lesson she would pull us on either side of her and show us pictures. We looked at her trip to Japan and at different photos of her at weddings. We spent a long time discussing the merits of each outfit. The afternoons with Malak were also a time to sit with the goddess and discuss the history and trajectory of our lives. She would frequently touch Malak and repeat, “You are so handsome and smart, you are my life.” When talking about the future, she would say how Malak, not Manu, was destined to make her happy. When we were alone, she said, “I don’t
know what will happen with him [Manu]. He doesn’t take care of his health. But Malak will outlive me. I will be with him always.”

Manu is home by 7 PM. He prefers her cooking to their servants’ cooking, so she manages the preparation of the meal for about an hour. He rests and also talks privately to Malak. When I was there, dinner went until 9 PM. After, Sonya would propose they go out, and Manu would decide if he wanted to take her. I ran into them several times at a local establishment serving hookah, desert and coffee, frequented by upper-middle class Punjabis in North Delhi. The first time, I saw her across the room dressed in a pink jumper and heels; she dragged her reluctant husband away from the two other couples they were sitting between. Rather aggressively, she interviewed the man accompanying me, who, fortunately, met the acceptable criteria. Her husband only gave a formal greeting to my companion. Sonya then grasped my arm, with her husband in the other, and marched us over to introduce us to the other couples. After some uncomfortable formalities, we were granted our pardon by Sonya. A similar occurrence happened a number of other times when I saw her out with her husband.

Some nights, after dinner, her husband would go to sleep early, and she would go out to nightclubs, fashion shows, and art exhibitions. I accompanied her on a number of occasions. At these times, she would drink a little and be escorted by male friends from her school years. She planned our visit to a fashion show with Harish, where she brazenly walked up to a fashion designer she admired and hugged him.

Sonya’s nighttime activities, and her life as a wife and mother, had a self-conscious separation. Her clothing in different settings signaled different aspects of Sonya’s personal expression as well. In the morning at temple she wore an oversized pants suit; dropping off her son she wore a nicer, more expensive suit; when she went to the gym and the spa she wore tight,
designer workout clothes; shopping at suburban malls during the day she wore short western skirts and tops; her afternoons were spent in ornate suits or sometimes a sari when she visits relatives; and her evening, going-out clothing are best explained as a cocktail dress. Of her numerous wardroom changes, she said, “I change shape all the time. Every piece of clothing has its own shape and size and where you wear it is important. To some people I look one way and a different person sees a different thing.”

I asked her several times about the idea of secrecy. She reported that when she was younger, she never left the house. Not until her son was older, and only now at age 33, is she able to take the car out. For years she lived under much more scrutiny from her husband, but after 15 years together, he allows her some privacy. She is also perfectly happy for her husband to have a secret life. She told me that she would not mind if he cheats on her. To her, what is perceived by other people in your society is the only kind of morality worth thinking about and the only hindrance to desire. Her evaluation of “the society” was mixed. Sonya is a strong, sometimes domineering person, who appears in most contexts to take what she wants without hesitation. However, though she clearly has desires to live a different life as an interior designer, makeup artist, or fashion designer, she always maintained that to be Indian was superior to other ways of living and what it means to be Indian was to follow the society’s prescription. She credits her success in life to following the rules. To Sonya, being Western (i.e., going out to night clubs, wearing revealing clothing, having friends that are unacceptable to her husband) represents a kind of freedom. On the other hand, she believes that society cannot function on that basis, and if we were all free to do as we pleased, it would result in anarchy.

Sonya’s different faces and personas were not so different than others. These descriptions of change and flexibility in her clothing, demeanor, and attention, could perhaps be identified in
most people. However, the changes in her demeanor became obvious to me after seeing her across many social fields. For instance, one day we took the subway to Haus Kauz, an activity expressly forbidden by her husband. When we left her house, we had to pretend to be going somewhere else. She made sure to give the servants a great number of tasks before we went. We took a rickshaw several blocks out of our way until we got out and walked. While we were walking, she acted like a girl, giggling with excitement and clutching my arm very tightly. She said she had never taken the subway and asked me several times if it were safe. In the subway car, a young man was sitting while an older lady stood. Sonya took on her self-described “mama voice,” and publicly shamed him into getting up. The other people in the subway seemed intimidated, and so we also received seats. Far from being afraid on the subway, as she had been posturing earlier, she was the primary controller and authority in the subway car. In fact, it was very common for Sonya to scold people effectively. Whenever unknown men would try to speak to either of us, she would immediately shut them down with a withering criticism. In the context of the gym, she would smile at and joke with the male workers at the gym, but if they tried to talk to her, she would publicly shame them.

Apparent through her boasts, the ease by which Sonya managed to fluidly maneuver social opinion in her favor was impressive. This may help explain how she reports and displays being submissive in the context of her husband and his family. She told me “For the first few years we were married. I would never say anything around him. I was afraid of him!” She would set up these stories with a system of conformities and rewards. She never went out as a young person, and never stood up for herself early in her marriage or with his family; as a result, she has a nice house, a car she can drive, a happy family and a respectable place in society. It is only now that her son Malak defends her choices to her husband Manu that she is free to pursue her
own pleasures. She has told me how she was restricted in her youth, and “now is the time to be young.”

This description of Sonya’s life experience and daily routine has been given to show how she compartmentalizes her wardrobe, hours, and social personas in a fluid and routine manor. The equation that Sonya has appeared to work out with Manu is based on her previously being cooperative and submissive with her in-laws before they died. When she and her son were younger she was not allowed to leave the house without her husband or father-in-law. In this way, she was also restricted from seeing her own family because they were not welcome at her house except for special occasions. She has repeatedly credited her natural cheerfulness to her success in winning the respect and trust of both her husband and his family. Now that her son is a teenager and her in-laws are dead, her husband does not monitor her as much and allows her to take the car out by herself. Manu also allows Sonya to spend freely. He takes her on vacation, to the coffee bar at night, and to some of the cultural events that Sonya loves. It would be dishonest not to relate my own judgment, which is that Sonya’s success at being perceived as a good wife to her husband, good mother to her son, and also being perceived as chaste but sexually desirable, were all departments in which she excelled. Her fulfillment of her role as a wife, I believe, lead her husband to slowly remove the restrictions that had been placed on her when she was younger.

The activities that Sonya enjoyed on her off hours were widely varied but could be categorized under the category of consumption activities. The gym, spa, makeup class, art gallery, fashion show, coffee shop, restaurants and so forth, are all places to enjoy one’s leisure time. While Sonya did go shopping often, her habits bear a contrast to the emphasis given to purchasing power in Lakshmi’s story. Instead, Sonya’s going to the modern mall and carelessly
throwing goods into a basket without even looking closely at the labels, had a very different social quality to it than Lakshmi’s kitty party or buying expensive jewelry. On one particularly humorous occasion, Sonya had been complaining to Harish and I that her skin felt dry. She bought an expensive moisturizer in a department store without a second look at the label or price tag. While we were driving home Sonya decided to put on her new moisturizer. But then something went wrong, she said, “Why does my skin feel so hot and tight? It is burning! Oh no, I bought face soap instead of moisturizer!” Harish and I almost died of laughter and she insisted that we immediately pull over at the most expensive restaurant we could locate quickly, in order that she could wash off the soap. For several months there were many jokes about the moisturizer incidence. I hope this example will illustrate to the reader how much of Sonya’s activities were more about having a good time, or specifically, a fun adventure, than buying luxury commodities.

The clearest structural relationship we can find between Sonya and her husband is how they have negotiated the issue of reputation. Sonya’s success maintaining her good reputation with everyone who would speak to Manu is why she is allowed to leave the house more freely. Additionally, the false but plausible excuses given to her husband, servants and neighbors insure that her outside activities always have the cover of legitimacy. I once watched her recount to a neighbor in gruesome detail an entirely untrue account of an illness experienced by her mother and her obligation to tend to her dying mother in her most desperate need. These untruths roll off of Sonya’s tongue with ease; she is a convincing liar. However, I hope that contextualizing Sonya’s life path has enlightened the reader to the structural reasons Sonya is compelled to lie. She would not be allowed such freedoms to enjoy the fruits of Delhi if anyone knew of her other life outside of the home and within her immediate society. Indeed, after being kept from
exercising her freedom for fifteen years in her marriage and eighteen years before that with her parents, it is comprehensible that she lies to maintain the freedom she now enjoys so wholeheartedly.

In this fourth and final ethnographic picture of the marriage between Sonya and Manu, the avenue for consumption which she desired the greatest was for the freedom to undertake consumption activities associated with entertainment. Her ability to maneuver in her relationship with her husband was a prerequisite for her consumption behavior. I have chosen to term this relationship of domination and subordination freedom-duty, because the restriction of seeking entertainment outside the house appeared to be based on a husband’s estimation of the potential repercussions of those activities to the family’s reputation. The reputation of Sonya as a chaste, religious, attractive, and happy wife to her in-laws, neighbors, extended family and classmates from her years in school, was the key to Sonya’s success in subverting the structural restrictions on her movement. While nearly all women in Delhi have some structural restrictions on their movement due to the prevalence of sexual violence in public, in Sonya’s narrative, her harmonious relations with her husband, along with the death of her in-laws, were enough to unlock the city and her upper-middle class credit card. She attends gallery openings, fashion shows, make-up classes, and so forth, because she is able to compartmentalize her duty to be perceived as the chaste and obedient wife by her husband on one hand, particularly through winning over his sisters, and her life as an upper middle class consumer on the other. Her freedom to buy and partake in the consumeristic activities that appeal to her individual tastes and desires is restricted or unbridled by her husband’s opinion of whether or not she is fulfilling her “duty.” This relationship of patriarchal power, freedom-duty is a form of patriarchal admixture that centralizes control over consumer activities, even primarily woman-centered consumption
activities, such as the spa, based on a husband’s decisions. Sonya is not a middle class consumer exclusively; she is an upper-middle class consumer only under the discretion of her husband. This structural relationship of domination and subordination, which places her husband in the role of judicator, is a patriarchal admixture to the capitalist consumer who would make purchases as an individual. Sonya is exemplary in illustrating how this patriarchal admixture to entertainment consumption can be subverted, and through its subversions, reveals how the patriarchal assignment of chaste wifely duty is important to all these women’s restrictions on consumption.

Conclusion

The four themes that each of these stories represent are: Abishek and Kamala’s conflict over food, Lakshmi and Laj’s arrangement to provide her ample purchasing power, Bhavana and Raj’s conflicts over space, and Sonya and Manu’s negotiation over the rights and privileges he allows her in response to her good reputation. Each of these stories is centralized around a particular theme, but the reader will observe that most of these themes are present in all four of the stories. The reason these forms of conflict are so pervasive is because they stem from the social limitations that are essentially material and structural. These structures are patriarchal admixtures in capitalist consumption that put these married couples into a relationship of domination and subordination with each other.

In my first ethnographic example, with Abishek’s discerning distribution of food and Kamala’s inability to motivate him to buy more extensive commodities, we can witness within their individual affairs a certain structural element of the patriarchal marriage. Abishek’s role as food-provider in a religious context when distributing food for animals on his morning walk and
buying treats for the children of the family, corresponds to his morally domineering stance that his wife should eat the food he enjoys regardless of her own ideas of appropriate religious restrictions on food. Her reasoning for giving up vegetarianism was that she had to cook the meat for him. Additionally, my informants would agree that the most delicious foods, at least by Punjabi middle class standards, are the street foods that can be bought between the hours of 5 PM and 9 PM. Food cooked inside the home is usually much healthier, simpler, and more repetitive. When Abishek goes around to the vendors to collect these snack foods while Kamala stays in the house, he is also enacting a power to decide where a large proportion of the family food budget goes. He also selects a fruit to buy and dictates exactly how it will be consumed by the family each day. The reason this displays a structural relationship imposed by the specific social conditions in Delhi, and not only a particularity of a particular man, is because it represents a theme of differential authority and free movement throughout the marriages in this study. In Delhi, the way street food is sold in locations too crowded to be comfortable for women, and at times in the evening in which they cannot freely move around without fear of violent attack, within the home it has become the job of husbands to collect foods from street vendors to bring home to their wives.

Meat, but also other specialty street foods, is exclusively cooked outside of the home in all four marriages portrayed in this chapter. A reoccurring complaint of these four women was that their husbands were eating unhealthy foods when they left the house. For instance, Lakshmi described her husband’s bad eating habits as having the potential to kill him and therefore reduce her social status. While Bhavana complained that her husband would “eat meat and unhygienic foods” with his friends and become “like street dogs.” Bhavana also said that her willingness to partake in drinking alcohol with her husband should make him willing to stay home with her or
take her out with him. Further, Bhavana’s tension with her mother-in-law over drinking chocolate milkshakes in the afternoon was a daily struggle for her. In a similar vein, Sonya expressed the difference between her daily activities outside the house and the other women at the gym by observing with pity that other wives are “forced to stay at home and eat.” While alternatively, an older housewife who attended one of Lakshmi’s kitty parties communicated that she leaves the house in order to eat the scrumptious foods that are restricted within her home by her husband. With all these different observations on the gendered struggle over food and its intimate connection to the freedom to buy foods outside of the house, I hope the reader feels comfortable concluding that food is closely connected to marital power in this cultural context.

We can see in these ethnographic observations that the food culture of Delhi, the different access men and women have to outside foods, the moral-religious assessments of eating unhygienic foods bought on the street and meat became a contentious issue within my informants’ marriages. The power differential these gendered difference creates between couples sometime became a major element in their relationships and in others less so. Certainly individual personality characteristics play a major role in each marriage, as I have attempted to portray with my descriptions. However, the structural elements of these gender disputes within the home are most likely a result of conditions outside of the home. For instance, a favorite food of mine is frozen chocolate paan, a delicacy only sold after 9 PM by street vendors. Without orchestrating the services of a helpful man, this food might never be eaten by the middle class women of Delhi. Regularly women will send their male servants to collect outside foods, but the servants are usually confined to purchases that can be made within walking distance of the house. Perhaps this seems like a small restriction, but the stereotype presented by the men in conversation at the beginning of the chapter—the same men we will meet in more detail in the
following chapter—on the emotionally manipulative qualities of women might be in part explained by how certain goods are entirely inaccessible without the services of a man to collect the good. The middle class women must cajole their husbands to bring home outside foods and persuade them not to ruin their health by eating compromised food outside of the house with their friends.

The second structural relationship that has been observed is the social prestige won by women with other women of their own age based on their buying power, as given to each woman by her husband. Interrelationship between admiration from peers and social mobility, but particularly among the middle class, is a feature of Weber’s “Status” and Bourdieu’s observations on the relationship between cultural capital and distinction (Bourdieu 1972; Weber 1978). In the story of Lakshmi, there was a clear relationship between her social success among her female friends and her willingness to accommodate and excuse her husband’s abusive behavior. In that story we saw how the state of her marriage was closely related to her activities at kitty parties and attend marriages with her friends. While in contrast one of Kamala’s primary complaints was that her husband “humiliated” her when he displayed “cheap” behavior. Bhavana on the other hand gained her social reward with the other women of her family by bragging that her husband gave her a great deal of spending money “without a question attached.” Sonya also partakes widely in the social recognition available with her husband’s “no questions” spending policy. However, Sonya seemed to take for granted that buying anything one fancies is a privilege. Instead, we can see her reflection on the relationship between commodities and her marriage when she recounts with great enthusiasm her purchases on their family vacation, saying, “He bought eight, eight dresses. In Japan!” As we saw with Lakshmi’s Channel bag
purchased on a family trip to the US, the goods bought on vacation took on an extra significance within these marriages (Van Wessel 2004).

The reason that negotiations over purchasing power are important even among families who live well above the subsistence level is that they produce an external structure of peer reward that becomes a nexus of conflict or reconciliation within marital relations. Peers the same age, whether friends, acquaintances, or relatives, assign higher status to women through peer-consumption-networks that depend on the marital relation. To allow one’s wife to spend without interrogating her on the usefulness of her purchases was one of the primary evaluations that women made of other people’s husbands. When women would get together this marital power dynamic was possibly the most important factor for evaluating another women’s husband and their social status. These social prestigious markers within the society of women influenced the negotiations which wives made with their husbands. In this case the structural imposition from outside the home, or to describe it more accurately, the structural relationship that moved in both directions simultaneously, shaped the emotional contentment of the marriage for each of these women. The influences women had on each other in these all-female interactions clearly shaped the dynamics of power at home.

The third element seen throughout these stories but most exemplified by Bhavana’s confinement and reorganization of the home is the issue of space. The territoriality of space inside Indian middle class homes has been shown by others to be fundamental in the symbolic achievement of middle class identity (Brosius 2013; Dickey 2012; Fernandas 2006). With Bhavana we can see a clear relationship between her agreement with her husband to stay inside the house and their agreement that she should orchestrate home improvements. First she put a door between her and her mother-in-law, but later she continued her territorial expansion by
redesigning the entire living room, roof and constructing extra rooms on the side of the house. Indeed, to an outside observer, it might seem irrational to start construction on your home without consulting an architect or committing to the plans, but it seems that the construction was a way to exert her control over space inside her in-laws’ home. This contest was primarily with her mother-in-law, but her husband along with both her in-laws were subject to the constant disarray of construction. Likely in an unconscious way, Bhavana’s forestalling the completion of her projects allowed her a territorial form of power, or at least the semblance thereof, in her married home.

This was not uncommon behavior for the housewives among my informants. At the kitty parties a major topic of conversation was ongoing home construction projects. Like Chinese temples, the living rooms of middle class homes in Delhi are constantly being rebuilt. During my kitty party tours with Lakshmi, it was important for the host to point out the changes in the living room since the other women had last visited. Like other consumption activities, redecorating the home was also important to portraying how one’s husband allowed for such indulgent reconstructions and tolerated the petty annoyances that accompany construction. All four women expressed an emotional connection to the decisions made to change the interior of their houses. For instance, Sonya’s major reconstruction of her bedroom began almost immediately after her mother-in-law passed away. Territorial power and self expression appears to be closely tied to marital relationships in that redecorating the house is usually a matter of convincing one’s husband to assert his power in defense against in-laws. The communal space of the living room is an important location where young wives often struggle with the domination of their in-laws. To convince one’s husband to allow one to change the space to suit one’s own tastes and presence in the house is largely constrained by the other members of his immediate family.
Redecorating the house is part of a structural relationship within the extended family that appears to exist between the married couples I encountered in my fieldwork, without respect to their individual personality differences.

The final theme that becomes apparent in Sonya’s story of traveling around town, indulging in a variety of entertainment activities, and meeting friends that would not be approved of by her husband displays the structural limitations on those women confined to the home through contrast. I will call this power freedom, in contrast to “unfreedom,” but by that I mean, it is evidence of the absence of patriarchal constraints on women’s movement (Laidlaw 2014). Sonya followed the social rules so carefully that she has an impeccable reputation as a wife and mother at the age of 35. Through lying, Sonya is able to wiggle out from under the oppressive gaze of the society. The activities she enjoys and views as part of her self-actualization such as the makeup class or shopping in the mall with cosmopolitan friends, represent the desires she had for freedom when she was confined in her youth and early marriage. She is proud of her choice to wait to “be young” until she had secured the support of her husband and family. Sonya credits her freedom to her ability to command trust from her husband after many years of acting in a socially appropriate way while confined.

On the other hand, Bhavana offers a counter example to Sonya’s freedom. Both women are roughly the same age, but while Sonya accepted her husband’s potential affairs, when the topic of infidelity arose, Bhavana was indignant and exclaimed, “There is no justice for women.” Sonya is free to drive herself around, while Bhavana is restricted from using the car she was given in her dowry. Here is where I see the material difference that likely conditions their differing attitudes toward their husbands. Bhavana’s protest of her husband’s potential affairs seems closely linked to a resentment that he is able to leave the house at all. Alternatively,
Sonya’s verbal acceptance of her husband’s potential infidelity took place in a hotel while she drank wine with her friends. At the time she was relaxed and happy, and she said she did not begrudge her husband his own happiness. As the reader has seen throughout every chapter of this dissertation, the restraint on women’s movement outside of the house is a major element of social conflict in the marriages presented in my research. However, here with these two women, Sonya and Bhavana, I argue that the ability to leave the house unescorted is a primary component in marital happiness among the Delhi middle class couples in my research group. The resentment created by one person being free to roam the streets at night and the other being confined to what are sometimes unpleasant circumstances within the home is the source of a great deal of marital conflict and negotiation. As I pointed to in my own example with an Icelandic male colleague in the introduction to this chapter, the gendering of space outside the home in Delhi has social implications for even two people who are neither married nor Indian. In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the structural difference between genders that are imposed outside of the home shapes the emotional politics between married people.

In conclusion, I suggest that these structural conditions reproducing and reproduced by male dominance, have an impact on the gendered distribution of power within marriages. Domination and subordination persist within the family as structures of power outside of formal legal, political or economic authority. These social relations are patriarchal admixtures which are articulated, not subsumed, by capitalism, which means they can be complimentary and do not necessarily tend to fade away. These relationships of domination and subordination with respect to consumption within marriages are not the immediate result of capitalism but its uneasy counterparts and complements. Instead, these small-scale power struggles serve as an important
key to older patriarchal forms of exploitation that are expressed even among educated and financially secure individuals in Delhi. The patriarchal admixtures, here detailed as the home-territory, food-distribution, commodity-domination, and freedom-duty dialectics represent some of the most important forms of economic-social conflict for these women.

In my research, all four types of consumption activities must be first mediated by their husbands’ decision making power, before the woman is able to pursue her goal of attaining middle class status through consumption. These focal points of patriarchal admixtures within the institution of marriage are culturally specific to this economic class in Delhi. However, they could easily be placed along a continuum of broader Marxist theorization of how the family is first and foremost a social intuition based on structures of property and unfreedom (Engels 1884). Marx himself wrote that the family is an early form of patriarchal slavery in Ancient Rome, and the embryo of what later became an entire system of ancient slavery (Marx 1987). Although the notion that these affluent housewives have an economic similarity to a household slave in Ancient Rome may seem strange at first, this idea will be explored in the conclusion of this dissertation that elaborates on Claude Meillassoux’s expansion of Marx’s ideas through articulation theory which differentiates ‘patriarchal slavery’ from the ‘slavery mode of production’ (Meillassoux 1991).

Before I conclude in this chapter, I would like to make one thing clear to the reader. My study on the marriages of middle class women and their personal feelings of marital contentment (what might seem like petty economic concerns to the reader) has been undertaken in order to show what gendered social constraints look like within the economic institution of marriage when there are not strict limitations on family resources. My goal is not to be seen as comparing the economic institution of slavery to the utter luxury these women are surrounded with, but to
tease out what forms of economic-social structures are maintained by couples who are articulated to, not absorbed by, the constraints of capitalism, or, to use Marx’s idea of patriarchal admixtures, those economic contradictions that have not completely undergone the formal subsumption of labor. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I argue for the categorization of family power dynamics as part of the culturally and historically specific articulation of capitalism to previous forms of family exploitation, or patriarchal admixtures.

When we can conceptualize both patriarchal structures and capitalism as articulated to each other, we are able to explain how educated, confidant and clever women such as the four described above, can display the same kinds of resistance tactics that are common among marginalized people. For instance, lying, concealing abuse, laboring inefficiently and eating food that is beneath the standard of one’s own acceptability are all tactics used by these women to gain favor with their husbands and power within their circumstances. These tactics have also been examined as part of political and economic resistance among Malaysian peasants and Bedouin women (Abu-Lughod 1986; Scott 1985). Pointing to these specific patriarchal admixtures in the Delhi middle class context of home-territory, food-distribution, commodity-domination, and freedom-duty, makes these women’s resistance tactics explainable and reasonable. For these housewives, their primary economic relationship to society is as a consumer, and their consumption is undertaken through the political structures of their marriages, instead of directly through capitalism as an attribute-less free consumer. As I presented in Ghalib’s verse to begin, the desires of these women are always multiplying and they must persuade their husbands to fulfill them each day.

Uncovering patriarchal admixtures through the work of obtaining good enough ethnographic data to see small power struggles, I have tried to provide an avenue for explaining
cultural differences in economic behavior on a larger scale. For instance, the problem of why the gold market is unusual in India has troubled economists (Newbigin 2013). Rather than attributing this peculiarity to a widespread cultural irrationality that gold is more stable than other commodities, which by economists’ standards is not the case, I argue that patriarchal admixtures are at work. While the patriarchal admixtures I have pointed to do not explain entire sections of the Indian economy. As with gold, there are landlords in Utter Pradesh buying blocks of gold in another patriarchal admixture that may be entirely unrelated to marriage, but is perhaps a patriarchal admixture more similar to a gang, mob or cartel. However, here I have aimed to show how one set of patriarchal admixtures is at work in the lives of my informants. Attempting to uncover the local patriarchal admixtures and seeing how they are articulated to the world economy through channeling economic behavior and rational is an exciting new way to think about economics.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the patriarchal constraints of the family and those imposed by the larger society, compel housewives to buy jewelry. Diamonds and gold often represent a major area of investment each month for these families. The relationships of power describe, commodity-domination, where a woman must ask her husband for the products that will impress her friends, we can observe how the preference for gold and diamonds that we see among middle class Indian urban households may stem from a material difference in power relationships within marriage and as conditioned by the local circumstance. These cultural peculiarities are actually evidence of patriarchal admixtures within the institution of marriage as they have been articulated to capitalist commodity circulation and household investment decisions.
This chapter began with the question of why the unmarried men of the Delhi middle class appear to hold a number of negative stereotypes about their potential wives and marriage in general. These men characterized Indian women as deceptive and materialist, and claimed that women are abusive in their exploitation of the emotional and sexual desires of men in pursuit of monetary advantage within the institution of marriage. Their commentary on the frustrations and disputes of these relationships reflects a cognizance, and at the same time a willful avoidance of seeing the structured dependence and control within interpersonal relationships, of the reproduction of inequality within the family and through the dynamics of the Delhi streets. After the reader has surveyed this evidence from the perspective of a Delhi housewife, I hope they will agree that there is enormous social and economic pressure for most wives to successfully manipulate their husbands when they live in this idiosyncratic city.
Chapter Five

The Double: The Neoliberal Black Market of Delhi

The first day Mandeep offered to bring me to his family’s house was also the first time I invited him into my South Delhi apartment. He arrived at my door to collect me, and I offered him tea and rusk biscuits. Although we were still in the early stages of negotiating our researcher-subject relationship, I invited him in because I felt obligated to reciprocate the invitation to his home along with taking the opportunity to show him that I trusted him in a private environment. However, once he was settled the pleasantries we had exchanged quickly evaporated and I felt his demeanor change. Intently, he looked me up-and-down, eyeing my movements around the room. In a feeble attempt to cut some of the tension this change in mood had created, I sat down at the table with him and asked what I naïvely assumed was a rather “safe” question: “How is the culture of Delhi distinct from other places in India?”

With that, Mandeep took on a strange and menacing expression. His furrowed brow and scrunched nose looked angry, but he had a slight smile on his tightly pressed lips. He fell silent for a moment and reached into his pocket. As he produced a piece of paper and held it up, he said “The people of Delhi are like razors.” At first he lay the paper against the table, and said, “Mostly they are laying flat, and you can even step on them and nothing will happen.” He represented this by pressing the flat of his hand against the paper on the table. He continued, “But if you get them at a certain angle, where they can take their advantage;” and he held the paper with one edge against the table while drawing his finger along the top; “they will cut you!” The moment he completed his statement he made a whooshing sound and drew his finger across
his neck while looking ferociously into my eyes. I must have looked unnerved, and when he
recognized my reaction, every trace of anger left him and he let loose a resonant laugh full of
schedenfreude. His laughter signaled our departure and we left for my first visit to his middle
class home.

Since neoliberal economic policies were adopted in India in 1991, the “new” Indian
middle class has been portrayed in public culture as a symbolically significant social group for
having undertaking the cultural work of “Indianizing modernity” (Brosius 2010; Fernandes
2006; Mazzarela 2000). In other words, they have been used as the primary example within the
context of the nationalist public discourse to represent the section of society most capable of
reconciling the competitive labor demands and consumer rewards of a globalized economy with
quintessential “Indian” family values. Scholars too have looked to the specific cultural practices
of this group to explain the complex roles of educational credentials and international
commodities in the symbolic attainment of middle class identity in India (Brosius 2013; Mathur
2010; Srivastava 2012). Others have focused on the ethos of this cultural group in their desire,
attainment, and careful negotiations of these forms of “cultural capital”, in order to explain how
this group has become the “hope of the nation” (Fernandes 2006). The political power that this
group has recently gained has been conceptualized as type “consumer-citizenship,” in which the
symbolic attainment of middle class identity grants its barer a greater political voice in the
society (Brosius 2010; Fernandes 2006; Schindler 2014). Studies that focus on the newly
acquired wealth of those entering the middle class due to an expansion of professional
employment opportunities under neoliberalism, have used a Bourdieusian analysis of “cultural
capital” that focuses on the attempt of the “new” middle class to impress the “old” middle class
with their appropriation of specific Indian middle class forms of cultural capital (Desai and Temsah 2014; Donner 2011). But if their political position as a class, or as it is conceptualized in the literature as “consumer-citizenship,” is closely tied to the outwardly prestigious markers of middle class identity, like international consumer goods and education, then it appears that these social prestigious markers and their relationship to the political privileges they afforded members of this class is not obviously in the directionality from consumer to citizen, or even from economic power to political power.

In her ethnographic work, *India’s Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* (2010), Christine Brosius observers, “The constant pressure to perform conspicuous consumption and be up-to-date with the latest lifestyle trends is also a way of securing oneself from falling down and behind.” This ethnographic observation, along with others, argues that middle class Indian people perceive the quest to acquire cultural capital as a strategy to provides a kind of class assurance that the individual will not fall into the lower classes, even in the face of increased economic instability and mobility both up and down. Indeed, most scholars have ascribed the hopes and fears of mobility within the Indian middle class to cultural penetration of the speculative logic of the global economy, which has infused the spirt of risk and entrepreneurship into the national culture of the Indian middle class as they “hang between high and low” (Lietchty 2003; Saavala 2006; Mazzarela 2005). The anxiety produced by being in the middle, and therefore more greatly subject to the potential for both upward and downward mobility, has drawn attention from notable scholars, such in Anne Allison’s recent ethnography *Precarious Japan* (2013) and Rachel Heiman’s ethnography *Driving After Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb* (2015). In both works, the concern over downward mobility among the middle class is intrinsically tied to the loss of economic
stability among working professionals produced by the financialization of both core economies since the mid-1980s. The economic character of these changes in core economies shares little in common with the economic shift of India since neoliberalism, although middle class testimonials from India, Japan, and the US have a number of similarities in their narrative arcs and moral assessments of risk. In the case of the US and Japan, it appears that the anxiety over downward mobility is tied to their decline as an entire class, while in India, the “fear of falling behind” is anxiety producing because they witness other members of their own class rising without them. However, in both cases, there is an assumption that greater national integration into the world economy in the case of opening markets in India to the stagnation of Japanese production to the expanding financialization of the US economy, is the cause of middle class instability. In all cases, this instability is attributed to national economic shifts in response to greater competition and participation in the world economy. The second question I wish to answer through providing a detailed ethnographic account of one family’s experience of downward mobility, is: Does the fear of falling ascribed to the Indian middle class have local economic characteristics that are merely articulated to neoliberal changes, not the cause of them?

In order to answer this question, this chapter will explore the life conditions of one family that experienced the dissolution of the economic-material basis of maintaining a middle class lifestyle and have used their identity position as middle class to subsist on black-market trading and illicit activities through their extensive networks. None of the family members receive a steady paycheck or own any income-generating property, as they lost their small business ten years ago. As an alternative, the thirty-year-old son of the family, Mandeep, provides the household with around 120,000Rs. per month or $21,000 per year, through his illicit business
ventures. By their own estimation, this sum allows them to maintain a middle class lifestyle. These illicit ventures undertaken by Mandeep include: selling drugs, guns, imported liquor, car parts, and the labor of sex workers, along with coordinating fraud, corruption and bribery, with respect to hospitals, universities, banks, apartment complexes and law enforcement. This list does not exhaust his illicit income-generating activities, and the second part of this chapter will give much greater detail to the extent of his dealings. Through connections Mandeep made at prestigious schools and through the family, with the help of an educated English and Hindi accent, and using the manners, tastes, and culture that come with being middle class in Delhi, Mandeep has maintained his class position by using his social connections as the basis of his illicit business. Rather than holding a professional job or owning a business, for the past ten years, illicit services have been the economic basis for this family’s class status. With Mandeep and his family, we can witness the growing fissure between middle class identity and the economic basis of that identity – providing us with a picture of downward mobility. Downward mobility presents us with a good bridge between ‘middle class’ as a social class, and the parameters of the petty-bourgeoisie economic class and thus allowing for theorizations of their interrelationship, by providing a historical timeline to the lived history of those fissures between a family losing their economic position, the fluidity of self-conception, and their increased reliance on utilizing their remaining positions of social power to secure a livelihood.

The doppelganger, or the double, is a potent symbol of the contradictions that underlie identity. The double looks the same, he wears the same clothing and uses the same voice, but he is different, uncanny, otherworldly. In this chapter, a portrait of a kind of double will become clear. Here will be presented a man, Mandeep, who has taken a life trajectory of downward mobility within the Delhi middle class, and uses his social privileges to run illicit businesses, in
service of maintaining his family’s middle class lifestyle. He is like other sons that work to support their families and come from privileged backgrounds; but unlike those golden boys of the middle class, Mandeep has neither reputation nor the threat of punishment to constrain his behavior – he is a man with nothing to lose. Mandeep’s perspective can contribute valuable information on that shadowy double of formal capitalism, the informal economy, and shed light on the market created by increased middle class consumption since neoliberalism — which has clearly extended into the informal economy. Mandeep boasts most nearly all of the middle class cultural attributes and prestige markers that adorn the middle class men of Delhi; indeed, at times he closely resembles an elite prep-school kid. However, with Mandeep, the markers of a prestigious background are dislocated from their legitimate economic class basis and depend on an illicit informal economy. Through sharing Mandeep’s perspective, this ethnography will give a glimpse into a violent world of fraudulent double meanings, double dealings, and double identities; and attempts to portray, a least in the life of one man, how the economic and social contradictions of his environment have shaped contradictions in his expressions of consciousness. The illicit pervades his economic foundations and imbues his worldview with the cultural signifiers that share a distant quality of paranoid concern of the counterfeit. He is also young, smart, well-educated, well-dressed, speaks English with ease, is entrepreneurial and practical, and his big dreams of a private plane and Aston Martin are built on the same optimism for the future that has often been ascribed to the new Indian middle class (Brosius 2013; Fernandes 2006; Donner 2011).

Mandeep and his family will not provide a ‘typical’ portrait of a downwardly mobile family in Delhi. However, there are three good reasons for focusing on an extreme example of illicit dealings in the middle class. First, as a means by which to explore the boundaries of
middle class privilege with respect to the state, Mandeep is unusual in how heavily he relies on his political connections to protect his business dealings and violent conduct. Second, his example helps in understanding how social prestige markers of middle class identity can be disconnected from typical “middle class” activities, due to the dissolution of his family’s petty-bourgeois business, which ended the economic basis for their maintenance of a middle class economic status in a socially and legally sanctioned way. And third, while Mandeep is an extreme example of a middle class person taking part in illicit activities, he is connected to many of the other, more economically stable, participants of this study. His role is often as facilitator to the illicit activities and consumption behaviors of the middle class, but most of his consumers only partake of such behaviors occasionally. Therein, trying to understanding Mandeep’s perspective, motivations, and behavior gives us a view of an entire sphere of middle class life in Delhi that only shows up intermittently in the lives of other individuals in this study. With Mandeep, we can see the world from the perspective of a ruthless pragmatist - a man for whom the perpetuation of his family’s middle class status, through which his individualism is refracted, justifies the violent seizure of every possible advantage afforded to him by his privileged place in the society as an upper-caste, originally upper-middle class, educated, light-skinned, and intelligent young man. Here however, I will argue that the informal economy of illicit activity in this case poses a kind of mirror image, negative reflection, or even, uncanny Doppelganger, to studies that focus on the legally and socially legitimate forms of middle class consumption.

**Mandeep the Ethnographic Subject**

Mandeep was about an hour late for our meeting by the time he walked into the cafe. He was soaking wet, angry and theatrically cursing the monsoon. Flustered, he sat down across from
me, and after taking a minute to regain his composure, he said: “My car broke down in the flooding by Kashmiri Gate. I had to abandon it there and take a rickshaw. Six months ago, I gave my car for service and the guy really cheated me. He sold the parts of my car that were from the manufacturer and replaced them with knock-offs. When I went back to beat it out of him, everyone there said he had run off. Since then it’s always breaking down. With the rain, I can’t even drive for work and I don’t have money to get a new one. It’s my fault, why wouldn’t he take the parts? I should have made the guy fix the car at gunpoint. You can’t trust people.”

In the above example, we can see that Mandeep chastises himself for not threatening the car mechanic with a deadly weapon even before the mechanic cheated him. In this case, simply taking one’s car to the shop for service potentially includes violence, theft and the risk of being tricked. Only three months later, Mandeep did in fact assault the next mechanic to work on his car. He told me, regarding the second mechanic: “That guy didn’t know who he was dealing with till I cracked him on the head.” This example highlights a key theme that emerges in all my dealings with Mandeep. His assumption that others will necessarily try to take advantage of him if they are allowed, as we will see, pervades his entire worldview.

I met Mandeep in my first year in Delhi, in 2005. I was with three college friends, and on our way to a party, they said they needed to make a stop. Eventually we pulled to the side of the road, alongside another car, and parked. Mandeep climbed into the car next to me, shook my hand, and then traded a package with my friend in exchange for money. Few words were spoken, and he was off as quickly as he had come. I found this became a regular event with my friends, and I later discovered what was in these packages: hash. Mandeep had a reputation for dealing drugs on campus, and he was seen by students as a bridge to another world — a world of frivolity and debauchery. He was formally enrolled in a military college at the time, and his
family has influential relatives in the military, Delhi police force, and government of Uttar Pradesh. This was reported as the reasons students felt safe to contract illicit services through him. At one point, a friend even suggested that I ask Mandeep to help me extend my visa. The extent of his activities at that time were unknown to me, and I kept clear of him as much as possible.

However, when I returned to collect research for my Master’s thesis on informal labor in 2010, I contacted him for an interview. He agreed, met with me a few times, and offered me an invitation for tea at his family home in Defense Colony. On that occasion I sat with him, his two aunts, Vera and Chira, and his mother, Abed. We sat in a lovely walled garden, full of blooming flowers and insulated by trees, sipping tea, and nibbling Petit Fours and Madeleines. Among these enchanting surroundings, the three sisters, all in their early forties, expressed lamentations. The conversation was focused on listing the social slights of others, but particularly, the failings of those that had abandoned them in their time of need. While breaks and punctuations would occur when one sister would mention their recently deceased father. At these points they would scream out and beat their chests, or, hide their faces and quietly sob. The tea lasted for over three hours, and ended with Mandeep profusely apologizing to me for their behavior as he drove me home.

When I returned to Delhi for my dissertation research in 2013, I asked Mandeep to help me explore the workings of black money. Mandeep is a curious man, and with respect to my intellectual proposal, he said: “You and I we have a contract. I will tell you and show you and you can write it down, but you must always be aware that you are nothing compared to me. You are the one that needs to trust. If you go against me your life is mine.” Upon reflection, this moment did include something of a Faustian bargain, but the truth is, in time I did come to
believe that Mandeep believed in my anthropological project. Over a six-month period, we spent three to ten hours together, three to four days a week. I was able to observe him in nearly all of his usual social contexts and he appeared to answer my questions openly and honestly. I have checked the content of this chapter with him on several occasions and I am confident that Mandeep feels that this account is accurate and the dissemination of this information cannot harm him in anyway.

Part one of this chapter describes Mandeep’s physical characteristics, temperament, family history, birth story, the dissolution of his family’s business, and his entry into a career of providing illicit services to his social network. In this section on Mandeep’s history, I have striven to give enough background context, without becoming tiresome, to give the reader a clear description of the formative events in the arc of his life narrative, as they have been pieced together by me in conversations and interviews with him and his family. As the history of this man unfolds, the reader will observe that Mandeep’s life choices have strict limits. The limits imposed by the legacy of his birth, family life and devastated business, have left him with the family inheritance of providing for three unemployed middle age women, his mother and two aunts, from an early age and without finishing his college degree.

**Part One: The Family History**

The circumstances of Mandeep’s birth were recounted to me by his mother, aunts and Mandeep himself. Here I have compressed the narratives into a single story, primarily relaying on his mother, Abed’s, account. The circumstance of Mandeep’s birth do appear to hold a religious significance for his family members. If we take on the perspective of this family, Mandeep’s birth seems to mark a beginning-of-the-end for the three women.
In 1984, Abed married Mandeep’s father, Basu. The marriage lasted less than two years, and began, rather than simply ended, with a deception. Bride and groom were both upper-caste, upper-middle class, fair skinned people whose families originated in the same area of the Punjab. However, his father’s family was keeping a secret. Basu was a severe alcoholic, whose doctors had already diagnosed cirrhosis at the time of his marriage. He had a life expectancy of just over a year. His family was worried that he wouldn’t have a child before his death, and so they arranged his marriage to the middle daughter of wealthy jeweler. Abed was 21 at the time, and had just finished a Bachelor’s degree in English Literature. She lived with her parents, grandparents, and two sisters, Chira and Vera, in the house I had visited in Defense Colony. Her father was a successful businessman who believed in educating his daughters and not forcing them to marry. Her older sister, Chira, had already become an Ayurvedic doctor. However, Abed decided that married life would be best for her, and after only knowing Basu through one supervised meeting, agreed to marry.

From the first day after the wedding, when Basu’s mother fired their cook, it was clear that Abed’s place in her in-laws’ home was to be a domestic servant and child producer. She recounts that her in-laws never spoke to her other than yelling abuses. When she recounted her life as a married woman to me, she spoke as though she were recounting her memories of war. Basu drank heavily and abused her for about a year, until he was bedridden. She almost immediately became pregnant but had a miscarriage after four months when her brother-in-law threw her from a balcony for waking him while cleaning his room. Her days consisted of grueling housework, primarily overseen by her mother-in-law. The latter would abuse her constantly for perceived imperfection in her work and for losing her first pregnancy. She became pregnant again, with Mandeep, right before Basu became bedridden with his illness. She spent
her pregnancy providing Basu round-the-clock care as he slowly and painfully died of alcoholism. Her in-laws told her that she’d better keep Basu alive, lest they murder her upon his death and keep her child as their own. When she recounted their threats she said repeatedly, “What could I do? What could I do?”

Basu died less than a month after his son was born. Abed was by his side when it happened, in the wee hours of the morning. She did not tell her in-laws but crept silently into their room where her mother-in-law had kept Mandeep. She told me that until then, she had only seen him twice before — so jealously was her mother-in-law guard over him. She picked him up, and walked out the door.

Very few women in their right mind would venture onto Delhi streets at 4 AM unless compelled by a desperate circumstance. Abed was such a woman that night. She told me that the night Basu died was the first and only time she has ever been out late. Although her in-laws house was only 10 km from her family’s house, she had never traversed the space before. She had neither seen nor spoken to her family throughout her marriage. She wandered through the deserted, foggy streets, amidst half-awake dogs. She describes the trip as though it were in an ecstatic trance. As she left her in-law’s house, her prayers had only been a whisper, but on the street she was yelling the prayers that would help her safely find her way out of the fog. She saw a ray of light emanating from her forehead and followed it until she safely reached her father’s house several hours later.

Abed: “When I left that house I put myself in the hands of god. First it was a spark in the distance. I thought it could be (fire)crackers. But clearly it came out, a light on the street. I knew that this was the test. My years of prayer to learn to see. I focused only on what was right before me. Doubts were gone. I followed and it brought me out of the fog with my baby in my arms.”
Before she told me this story, I had already known her as a deeply religious person. Twice a day, before her job and after, she spends over an hour at her local temple, and often talks about spiritual concerns. When she finished reflecting on her journey, she credited her religious life to the “gift” given to her that night. In the dense clouds of fog, a unique phenomenon of Delhi’s winter sunrises, she was reborn as a mother and devotee.

When she arrived at her parent’s house, news of Basu’s death had already reached her family, as her in-laws had arrived to come collect her and her newborn an hour earlier. Her father decided to protect his daughter and grandson, and did not turn them over to Basu’s family. For nearly ten years Abed and Mandeep lived behind her family’s fortified gates, for fear of her in-law’s reprisal. The effect on Mandeep, living out much of his early life indoors, for fear of his own family, was likely formative.

Growing up, Mandeep lived in a time of peace and prosperity. He had all the luxuries of a spoiled upper-middle class only child. However, he and his family feel that they lived in war-like conditions. Mandeep’s childhood home was in a sense “under siege,” due to the potentially deadly conflict with his father’s family. In my interactions with his maternal family, their home environment seems to cultivate a kind of hyper-vigilance among all its members. However, this painful family conflict is only the first in a series of misfortunes.

In order to provide a fuller story of Mandeep’s family life, I will describe the family members he has lived with since childhood: his mother, Abed, elder aunt, Chira, and younger aunt, Vera. He regularly groups the three women in his life together, expressing his anger at them in terms such as: “A pack of vultures, picking my bones clean.” However, their economic maintenance has become Mandeep’s life goal. Indeed, his weighty obligation to support them...
and the seriousness with which he treats that obligation, is likely why he feels free to speak to them, and about them, in a disparaging way.

Chira is Abed’s older sister by three years. She was trained and certified as an Ayurvedic medical doctor when she was in her twenties. However, she never worked, and has been living off her inheritance and Mandeep’s income since her father died eight years ago. Mandeep urged her to invest her share of the money in his business prospects when they sold the house in Defense Colony five years ago, but now the money has nearly run out. Mandeep and Abed feel hostile toward Chira, because she is argumentative and angry, harassing them for money while not even doing light housework in return. Mandeep believes she is mentally ill, because of her “fits.” Some nights, as reported by both Mandeep and Abed, Chira runs around the house screaming and crying at anyone she can find, until she collapses several hours later. If they are not able to keep her inside, she will go to the neighbors’ houses to scream and rave – only half-consciously making statements warning others that someone is pursuing her. Abed told me that Chira has a kind of sixth sense about people around her having ill intentions, and it comes out in this hysterical way.

While Abed and Mandeep had already been forthcoming for several months, Chira avoided my requests for an individual interview. I had visited with her, in their home, about five times before she showed any interest in addressing me directly. I knew that she did not disapprove of me per se, but she was suspicious at first. However, after spending months having tea with her, and a few days after Mandeep had privately told me a particularly bad story about her, she summoned me.

Previously that week, Mandeep had recounted, visibly upset, how Chira had called the police on him. I knew they had arguments before, but one day he revealed to me the extent of violence
in their relationship. When he arrived home that night, Chira was in a “fit”. She had been screaming at Vera, the youngest sister, for hours. Vera had been calling Mandeep to come home and help her, but he could not come until he had completed a business deal. He came home and Chira physically attacked him. She was angry about his illicit activities and hit him across the face. He admitted to hitting her a number of times and slamming her head against a wall. She called the police. There is little point in calling the police on Mandeep, as he is politically well connected. In fact, one of his avenues of illicit activity is arranging police protection for others. Nevertheless, he viewed her call as a betrayal. He could not understand why not she could see that he had to make money this way. He asked, “Is she so stupid that she would harm herself like this? I am taking all the risk, so just let me be. I am the one who won’t even live to fifty.”

The first private audience Chira granted me was the very next time I visited their house, after I heard this story. From the outset, it seemed pretty clear that she intended to counter Mandeep’s depiction of her to me. She explained her history, but did so by primarily highlighting Mandeep’s debt to her. She said that even as a child, she had known that you could not trust men. Her father being the only exception, her descriptions of him removed all blame she ascribed to the rest of his gender. By her account he was a gentle and loving man. Her mother had died when they were young, and her father kept them all close. Through his benevolence, he did not force her to marry. She loved being a student and received two certificates in medicine. Although she had been trained as a doctor, Mandeep’s birth had taken her away from her calling. She had to help Abed raise him, so she had given up life as a doctor – the life that she had chosen for herself. She said this regretfully. I asked her, being still young, and with Mandeep grown up, why not take up medicine again? She answered abruptly, “That life is past.”
Chira then described how, when Mandeep was in high school, she had bought him an expensive motorbike using a part of her inheritance. Before he was even allowed to drive, at 14, he was already the envy of his peers, with his own transportation. He used to beg to get her “outside” goods (commodities bought outside of the home and immediate area around the house) by daringly facing the Delhi traffic with his friends in tow. She asked me if he remembered her gift. I said that I did not know, but would ask him. Later he confirmed what a large sacrifice she had made for him, and how having the bike fostered a lifelong love of cars and driving. After recounting her kindness, he again emphasized that he was trying everything he could to help her. Later that month, Mandeep told me two more stories involving his physical violence against Chira during one of her “fits.”

Vera is Mandeep’s favorite aunt, preferred by him over even his own mother, because she is endlessly sweet and accommodating. Of the three sisters, she does nearly all of the housework and cooking. Additionally, she rarely forces her opinion in family decision-making and does not tell Mandeep how to behave. To express his feelings, more than once he has said he would abandon the other two, but he cannot even think of abandoning Vera. “She would die without me.” Vera never married, like her sister Chira.

It was hard for me to read Vera well. She always lavished a nurturing affection on me when I visited, but still at a distance. She did not talk about herself, and mostly smiled shyly when I would try to engage with her. To this day, she is the least known member of the family to me, although I spent more time with her than Abed and Chira. Her passiveness, loyalty and chastity were highly praised by Mandeep. To Mandeep, Vera is the only person in who world that truly deserved his devotion.
Vera has a small part in informal economic activities. She would make pickles and chutneys; which she would then sell to the middle class women she knew personally. She would only make a small sum from this endeavor, not nearly enough to support herself, but Mandeep thought this gesture was more than enough to raise her far above the other sisters, in his own esteem.

As mentioned, Abed, Mandeep’s mother, is an intensely religious person. This frustrates Mandeep greatly, as she sacrifices her own health to pursue religious objectives. For instance, she will fast until she needs to be hospitalized, which comes as a great expenditure of energy and money for Mandeep. He is also concerned that she may be killed by a cow, because she appears so oblivious to their mood when she approaches to feed them on a daily basis. On three separate occasions she has been saved from being gored by neighbors. Mandeep strongly suspect that her religious activities are somehow directed against him.

Another area of Abed’s life that Mandeep takes personally is her sex life. She has been having an affair with a married man for five years. Even though this is an ongoing relationship, the mere thought of the relationship can send Mandeep into a blind rage. He has, repeatedly, threatened and assaulted his mother’s lover. On one occasion when he was so angry he literally ripped out some of his own hair as he spoke to me, he said: “He should take her then! Take her away from me. He is responsible now!” Other times, Mandeep told me that the sight of his mother disgusted him, and that her current predicament was only slightly better than if he threw her out. He said: “She would be a whore, not much different than now. But if it comes to that I will kill her. Dead would be better. Anyway, she will kill herself soon.”

The story of downward mobility in this family, their sale of the family home, the dissolution of their business, and how they came to reside in a poor UP suburb of Delhi and subsist on
Mandeep’s income, is a story about death. Not just the physical death of a patriarch, Mandeep’s maternal grandfather, but the death of their family honor, and the dissolution of the economic basis by which that honor had been preserved. The downward mobility that takes place in this story has undoubtedly colored the worldview of everyone touched by a single event: a theft.

This family did not run out of money—a trusted servant stole it from them. Mandeep’s grandfather owned a jewelry shop, which passed to Mandeep, his mother and aunts, upon his death. At the time, Mandeep was still young, and his mother and aunts were ill equipped to handle the business. They had a middle-aged male servant named Ajay, who had both worked in their house and at the shop, for over forty years, continue the daily operations of both the business and management sides of their operations. Ajay had inherited nothing, although he had worked for Mandeep’s grandfather since childhood. When Mandeep told me the story of Ajay, his eyes were so piercing in their intensity, burning with a question: why did I trust him? Ajay stole all of the family’s money from their safes in the store and at home, withdrew a loan on the business from bank accounts, took the jewelry in the store, and fraudulently sold the storefront to another business. This all occurred within two months of the patriarch’s death. Mandeep’s family was devastated. They had only their house and possessions, and none of them worked.

When Mandeep’s family lost their jewelry business he asked his uncle, a politically connected landlord in Uttar Pradesh, to have Ajay tracked down. After a year, they found him in Kerala and brought him back to Delhi. The police called Mandeep and asked him what to do. Ajay had spent all of the money, and they could not recover even a single rupee of his grandfather’s legacy. Mandeep paid the police to beat him, and at one point during the torture, Mandeep confronted Ajay for wrongdoing his family. He went home and woke up the next morning to the news that later that night, the policeman in charge of Ajay’s captivity had beaten
and raped him to death. Mandeep said he never asked them to kill or rape him, but they had bought liquor with the reward money and gotten too drunk. Mandeep was not regretful, but rather contemptuous of the lowliness of the constabulary he had paid off.

Mandeep explained the full story of Ajay to me only once. Conversely, it was alluded to in everyday conversation with both Mandeep and his family. Their patriarch’s death and Ajay’s betrayal nearly coincided, and both marked an end to the life they had always known. There was a distinction before and after, a time of innocence and a time of decay. On their happier days, sitting with the three women at teatime without Mandeep, we mostly discussed how they used to live—the possessions they used to have, the trips to the US and UK that they used to take, how holidays used to be magical, how beautiful they were when young and how full of promise, and the people they used to know—the people they would now not dare to contact.

Before the family’s economic collapse, none of the women worked. Now, Abed works informally for a few hours a week, as a clerk in an office, which provides ₹3,000 a month under the table. Vera sells Tupperware and some specialty foods informally, and makes approximately ₹3,000 a month. Chira does no work of any form. The rent on a two-bedroom apartment shared by the four family members is ₹30,000 per month. Their shared food budget is roughly ₹6,000 per month. The cost of fueling and maintaining one small car is approximately ₹10,000 per month. The family medical costs were on average ₹14,000 per month. However, Mandeep’s income from illicit activities ranged between ₹20,000 - 120,000 per month. On average over twelve months, he made ₹75,000 per month. Therefore, the maintenance of his home and family subtracted, he had approximately ₹15,000 per month for his own spending money (or roughly
222 USD). He used this to buy electronics, alter his car, and take short vacations. He rarely gave his mother and aunts any spending money beyond the most necessary expenses. Each of the women still own some jewelry from their earlier years that they sell when they need extra money. Abed also received some spending money from her lover.

After being forced to sell their familial home in Defense Colony, they moved to an apartment in another area of South Delhi, before coming to their current residence in an inexpensive area of Noida. Their current house offers a sharp juxtaposition. It overlooks a dirty strip mall that is usually packed with underemployed men sitting around and shoppers. Conversely, on the inside, their apartment still holds all the aesthetic charms of a colonial bungalow. Fine wooden furnishings, velvet pillows, tasteful paintings, and fine china light up the interior. Their possessions from a luxurious past are at once transformative and somewhat awkwardly misplaced, against walls and floors that betray their own cheap construction. Providing ₹ 30,000 of cash each month for the rent is most likely Mandeep’s most pressing financial concern.

Although the members of his immediate family are bankrupt, Mandeep’s more distant relations occupy influential positions in society. There are three ‘uncles’ who protect Mandeep from work-related problems. The closest to him is the second cousin of his mother. The man owns a sugar plantation in Uttar Pradesh and is closely tied to the government in that locality. He said, of visiting his uncle’s home: “The peasants will split you down the middle if they have the chance. We took armed guards with us...you know if you hit one of them (peasants) in the dark, they will all come out of the fields and chop you. I brought ALL my guns.” When I aired the view that perhaps the peasants were justified in resisting his family, he said: “Don’t you know how stupid they are? They can’t even do what is good for themselves.” The evidence of this was
that they add large rocks to the load of their sugar, because it is measured before being pressed, and that weight-measure determines how much the farmer will receive. Thereby, it is advantageous to increase the weight of the crop for an individual farmer. However, when sugar mixed with rocks is loaded into the grinder, the rocks break the grinder, and other farmers are unable to use the machine during prime harvest time. This way, perhaps one person gets a slight advantage at the weight station, but everyone still waiting to crush their cane can lose their crop – being unable to use the broken machine in a timely manner. To end his story, he said: “Delhi is nothing like there. The men of Delhi are fags. Even a knife scares them. But the UP men, they are something else. That is why I can always call my uncle, and I don’t worry about these jokers.”

His second important relationship to authority is through a man that is positioned in a relatively high post in the Delhi police hierarchy. This man is only a distant relation to Mandeep. However, some years ago, Mandeep arranged a number of illicit services for him over a period of time and has blackmailed the man into protecting him for the past several years. Mandeep reports that his services to this man have included: arranging for an apartment where he could throw parties, providing prostitutes and cocaine, and eventually needing to force one of the prostitutes to have an abortion. He has bragged that only he knows where she lives, but he could “bring her back” anytime. Anyone would have a hard time believing such a story, however, I have seen this influence operate with my own eyes. On one occasion, I was with Mandeep when he was pulled over by the police. He calmly handed them a card with a name and number, and they allowed him to drive away within minutes without further discussion. Additionally, when he tells stories with his friends, this ‘uncle’ from the police department seems to regularly enter as a
deus ex machina. Whatever trouble they encounter, as will be further explored below, this uncle has consistently saved the friend group from legal repercussions.

The third important member of Mandeep’s network of influence is his maternal grandmother’s sister’s son. The elderly man had served in the military throughout his working life and has since retired in Delhi. He is the person that obtained admission to a military school and college for Mandeep, in spite of an extremely poor academic record. Furthermore, he would get Mandeep out of trouble at the schools, which was a primary factor in enabling Mandeep to start his illicit occupation at an early age. He remembers: “I was the worst of my friends. In ninth (age 14) there was this stuck up guy. He told on us sometimes, small things like smoking. Well, we caught him passing a girl a note. I made copies and passed it out. Real embarrassing stuff, you should have seen. After school he confronted me in front of some people. He had to really, I guess, at least for the girl. It only took one hit and he was down. I pulled down his pants and spanked him as he screamed. No one would have said anything, but I guess I broke his nose. They wanted to expel me…what did it matter? They couldn’t. My uncle came down and set them straight. I did get it from him, but that was the last I heard.” However, since the family’s economic downturn, this uncle has offered less and less help.

Physically, Mandeep is a small person. He is not taller than 5’6” and he must weight roughly 160 lbs. He is fair by local standards, and has unusually pointed facial features. His neck, arms and hands are all adorned with numerous charms, which betray some of his philosophical ideas on luck. He has thick, black waves of hair that fall onto his forehead, often obstructing his eyes. He prides himself on good hygiene, is always clean shaven, and usually wears jeans, a nice watch, white sneakers, a belt and button-up shirt. One part of this man’s
accoutrements is hidden, but regularly appears in the open - his large knife. I was shown the knife on numerous occasions, to, in his own words, “make me feel safer.” Mandeep speaks in an assertive manner with a strong voice and a clearly articulated, educated, British-Indian accent.

If you are on friendly terms, Mandeep behaves with remarkable cheer and joviality. Unfortunately for most people who interact with him, his jokes regularly have a darker side. I noticed that he would be in an exceptionally good mood if he was able to make a spectacle of his power. For instance, we were on a long drive to Noida and the traffic was even worse than usual. Mandeep seemed frustrated, and when another vehicle committed a slight infraction, he sprung out of the car. He hurled abuses at the other driver, who had the good sense to lock his doors and roll up his windows. He ridiculed the man to the other drivers, saying that his family should be ashamed of his cowardice, and that no doubt he terrified them as he beat on their car windows. After a few minutes, Mandeep got back into his car and he was in a good mood - a marked departure from his temperament before the confrontation. He smiled and joked about the incident, and for the rest of the long ride, he was relaxed. Mandeep’s temperament is that he builds up frustration, seeks an anger-fueled release, and feels content when the other party is harmed more than himself. In the following stories you will see how this system of emotional release dominates his interactions.

**Part Two: Illicit Activities**

This section of the chapter will provide an outline of the forms of illicit behavior in which Mandeep generates his family’s primary income. In some cases, I was able to gain information on the exact measurements of his economic gains, while in others, Mandeep did not share with me the exact numbers of his income or gave different estimations at different times. As you will
see, Mandeep’s primary method of generating income is to circumvent legitimate authority by finding one or two individuals that can be bribed into taking part in a scheme. One of his more devious tactics is to covertly make a film recording of someone taking a bribe or engaging in another form of socially taboo behavior, and later use that footage as leverage against the person to insure that they will not betray their arrangement. He routinely makes credible threats when others will not acquiesce to his wishes. Through the details of Mandeep’s illicit activities, the reader will come to see the edges of where corruption, fraud, prostitution, and other areas of the informal economy, intersect with the economic demand for such services as created by middle class interests and tastes.

For clarity, it is more accurate to report that Mandeep deals in informal economic services almost exclusively with men. While I have described his behavior toward his three female immediate family members in part one on his history, I wish to further supplement my descriptions of his position with regards to women in this section, by providing the only two examples of any kind of long-term relationship Mandeep chose to have with women outside his family: his ex-girlfriend, and I, in my role as ethnographer. Why I have including myself in his social network at the conclusion of this section is to give the clearest possible picture of the conditions by which I undertook my fieldwork, and illustrate some points about Mandeep’s socially performed and observed attitudes on race, gender and sexuality, as they were performed in reaction to my specific identity characteristics.

1) Transportation of Drugs

Mandeep provides drugs to interested members of Delhi's middle and upper classes in two ways. First, he takes regular trips to the Himalayas and Goa to bring back quantities of hash,
and then throughout the month he sells his stock to other dealers and middle class customers. He also arranges the sale of harder drugs, such as heroin, LSD and cocaine, within Delhi. However, his monthly or bi-monthly stock of hash is one of his primary, steady sources of income. The stock is divided into units, or “Ts”, that cost him ₹1,500 to purchase outside of Delhi. This represents a large investment each month as he is only able to sell his product intermittently. He charges ₹4,000 to his middle class customers, or ₹3,500 in a bulk order of over ten Ts. Much of his daily routine revolves around this business, and was his primary means of regular support. His mother and aunts all knew what he did for a living, at least with respect to drugs, and they knew that he both kept and did drugs at their apartment. He struggled to make them accept his chosen mode of obtaining a livelihood, and constantly reminded them that they live off the income he generates through these activities. He conveyed anxiety to me about selling enough of his stock to make ends meet, saying on one occasion: “My mom is sick again from fasting. I had to get her many medications, which I need to pick up for her right away. But I need to sell three Ts to get the cash for the stuff, so I have to go do that first.”

It would be naïve to assume that only characters like Mandeep consume drugs. In fact, most of Mandeep’s customers are middle class college students that only dabble in the illicit economy to procure hash to share with their friends during leisure hours. As the disposable income of college students in Delhi has risen, it has expanded the illicit economy in Delhi such that these middle class students that may only buy hash on the black market, are the backbone of Mandeep’s consumer market for his illicit business services.

2) Organizing Car Races
One of Mandeep’s income generating activities is racing cars. Throughout my research with other young middle class Punjabi men it appeared that owning a vehicle and driving recklessly was an aspect of masculinity that repeatedly presented itself both consciously and unconsciously among men. One entertainment activity some of these men enjoy is race their vehicles at night on the open roads. They often buy cars that never have the space to reach top speeds in normal traffic conditions, and so they find stretches of road at night to race their cars against each other and bet on the outcome. While some people drive their own cars, others arrange for someone else to take the physical risk of racing. Mandeep regularly arranges these meetings, taking bets, and sometimes races the cars himself. He has been in a number of bad accidents but has repeatedly told me: “I am happy to give my life for just one moment of pleasure.” Mandeep does not just make money in this way but also among the greatest passions of his life. One day, after a successful night of racing, Mandeep said: “I have the best job in the world! Who else gets to race a nice car for money? I get paid for what I love!” In Mandeep’s words we can see the close association of pleasure and economic reward in his enthusiasm for risk.

In sharp juxtaposition to Mandeep’s excitement on this occasion, racing often has deadly outcomes, particularly as so many of the poor residents of Delhi sleep on the roadside at night. One day I was having a conversation with Mandeep and his longtime friend Deepak, and I asked them to talk about the times they had injured someone while driving. They said:

Deepak: “Our school days, those times were crazy, we were wild. We used to have a party every day.”
Mandeep: “Yea, remember our last day at school? Our graduation? We all piled into my car. We drank all day, even at school we were drinking. That night we were racing on the street against all the other cars. I miss racing like that.”

Deepak: “You always loved racing. But you still race?”

Mandeep: “Yea, but not as much. Not like then. Remember when we hit into the traffic point. They ran!”

Deepak: “They were so mad. They cursed us. Till you got your uncle on the phone.”

Mandeep: “Yea that night we were wild.”

In this conversation they were discussing an incident in which they drove their car into a structure that shelters traffic police. On this occasion, they reported that no one was hurt. However, the narrative illustrates how Mandeep’s ‘uncle’ was able to get them out of trouble.

In another conversation on driving, Mandeep and Deepak said:

Mandeep: “We hit a rickshaw on our way home. We dropped him off at the hospital with some money. He was happy. Last year I was driving home at night and I hit a man crossing the street. They have no care for their lives you know. They just go across whenever — they think you have to stop if they put themselves in front of you. I hit another guy just a year back. He went over the top of the car and I heard everything crack.”

Cassandra: “That is terrible, did he live?”

Mandeep: “I don’t know. I kept driving. If I stopped, the people around would have attacked me. I would have been killed. My family needs me. If it’s a choice of him or me and my family, it is no choice.”
Deepak: “That is true. He would have been killed or gone to prison. You can’t stop when that happens.”

While it may be shocking to the reader that Mandeep views the lives of others with such casual disregard, this was not the only story in my ethnographic record of a middle class person killing a member of the urban poor with their vehicle at night. Although a number of young middle class men do race on the streets at night, far more often, the stories of hitting people on the road at night involve alcohol. In 2015, the case of Salman Khan, the actor that was charged with killing one homeless person and injured four others in a drunk driving accident, became emblematic of the class struggle against privileged people that kill others with their cars and suffer no consequences as a result of their political connections. Although Khan was finally convicted in May 2015, his conviction was overturned in 2016. With Mandeep, we can see how causing the death of another is regularly shrugged off by politically well-connected members of the Indian middle class. Further conceptualization and contextualization of this dubious social phenomena will be addressed in the conclusion of this chapter.

3) Bank Fraud

Mandeep has a connection with a person who is in charge of approving loans at a bank chain in Delhi. On a few occasions, Mandeep has gone into the bank to apply for a loan with his associate and been granted an immediate cash withdrawal in return for showing false documents bearing a false name. He has predicted that forms of bank and credit fraud are the new frontier of illicit activity, and wishes he could take a greater role in this type of venture. He said he envied my position as a US citizen because: “In the US they just throw money after you, and they can’t
do anything to get it back. No one is going to come to your house and shoot you if you take their money and you can just walk away. If I were in your place, I would be a very rich man by now.”

Although I do not have examples of other members of the Indian middle class undertaking bank fraud in my ethnographic evidence, Robin Banerjee’s book, *Who Cheats and How? Scams, Fraud and the Dark Side of the Corporate World* (2015), gives a detailed account of the widespread practice of bank fraud in India. However, even for those outside the cooperate world, the use of fraudulent financial documents among the middle class is a common practice often undertaken to avoid taxes. In one instance, another family in this study, their altered their son’s birth certificate so he was considered to be old enough to attend school with his sister. Although this had no monetary gain attached, it illustrates the casualness by which members of this study appeared to modify official documents. The recent push for PIN numbers, largely equivalent to social security numbers in the US, has been in response to the swelling trend of fraud.

4) Hospital Fraud

Mandeep has a network at a local hospital that enables him to generate income. He knows and has bribed several members of the hospital staff to circumvent the hospital’s charges for the use of their rooms and equipment, in addition to avoiding potential taxes and insurance costs. He finds clients for two doctors at the hospital and channels them through a series of false paperwork trails. These clients usually come to Delhi from other parts of India and pay slightly less to Mandeep for their hospital treatment than they would be otherwise required to pay to the hospital. The doctors are paid as a percentage of each client’s payment for treatment. By arranging this scamming system, Mandeep receives between ₹5,000-80,000 a month, depending on his ability to get new clients. He regularly visits the hospital, under the guise of providing
help with filling out English and Hindi paperwork, and communicating with the doctors and staff on behalf of his client’s wellbeing.

Mandeep’s ability to call on the expertise of a doctor in his social network was also helpful to the people in his life, since he could provide free and reliable healthcare. Because of their business arrangements, the doctors in Mandeep’s service would take his calls at any time of night, diagnose friends and relations over the phone, and call in prescriptions to alleviate any ill health. Mandeep’s connections to the hospital enabled his mother, aunts, and himself, to receive round-the-clock medical care. Mandeep’s reliance on his connections to get safe and reliable medical service is not uncommon among the Delhi middle class. Indeed, it was a common perception among most of the families included in this dissertation that having a pre-established social relationship with a medical professional is necessary insurance that you will receive quick and effective care.

5) Police Services

On some occasions, although it is unusual, Mandeep arranges a bribery exchange between the police and a middle class person that would like some “justice” to be taken against another person in connection with a personal vendetta. In this service, Mandeep is notified that a person in his network is interested in having the police become involved in some situation and act on behalf of his client. Mandeep received payment, and uses a portion of that sum to bribe corrupt police officers to carry out his client’s bidding. As described earlier, Mandeep’s own revenge against Ajay, the man who had stolen his family’s money, was carried out through hiring policemen to apprehend and torture, and subsequently, also rape and kill the man. This is certainly not to say that all the police under Mandeep’s influence engaged in such violent
behaviors, nor that middle class people regularly utilizes this potential service, but only to
conclude that such actions are available for a price, and Mandeep is in the business of arranging
such services. Mandeep reported that arranging a “proper” murder, meaning an untraceable
murder, costs roughly ₹20,000 for an “unimportant” person. Here we can see that having a few
connections and a little disposable money in Delhi, is all that is needed for a middle class person
to use their political power to subvert the state’s monopoly on violence.

6) Providing Party Spaces

Mandeep has arranged with a realtor to be informed of vacant properties, in order to
fraudulently rent those spaces to middle class people who desire a private location to be used for
illicit behaviors – or in layman terms, a place to party. In its mild form, Mandeep makes
available apartments or even underground parking spaces where young or married men can take
their girlfriends or prostitutes to have sex. At times, a group of middle class men will rent an
apartment from Mandeep, entirely unknown to its owner, and throw a weekend-long event that
includes a motley of “bachelor party” services. In some situations, Mandeep arranges for foreign
prostitutes of Eastern European origin to attend these parties, and takes a percentage of what they
receive for their sexual services. Mandeep views the sexual situations he encounters in this work
with disgust. He says, “These men are just pigs. They eat up women like they eat up everything
else. They have no respect for their own bodies. So let them kill themselves!”

As many middle class people in Delhi live with their families, their nighttime consumption
and sexual practices regularly require dipping into the informal economy. Hotels do not provide
the same anonymity, will not allow for such loud behavior as the apartments Mandeep provides,
and are more expensive than his services. Providing apartments is one of the most common
activities Mandeep provides to his middle class clients, and the purposes for renting such spaces is almost surely because middle class people desire to preserve their good reputations while still exercising the freedom to engage in illicit activities.

7) Deadly Services

During my time with Mandeep, he informed me that he had sold two guns, which he had obtained through his uncle in UP, and other kinds of weapons like brass knuckles, to his "friends." Mandeep himself did sometimes carried a gun, particularly to his daily business exchanges that involved money and secrecy. But even on casual outing, Mandeep always had a knife on his person. By my account, pieced together from different conversations, it seems that Mandeep was connected to a group of drug traders that carried out murders for a price. Mandeep told me that over one summer, he spent three weeks in a small town in the Himalayas, with a man that the Delhi police were looking for in connection with a murder. Mandeep reported: "We had a good time up in the mountains. I was in a position to do a favor for someone that can help me, am I rich? Am I in a position to refuse? Anyway the guy would not hurt me because of the people we both know." Mandeep has on numerous occasions made me aware of violence he has committed against others, but I cannot go further into detail without compromising my commitment to do no harm by publicizing his activities.

A day in Mandeep’s life consists of hectic transitions as he drives through traffic and talks on the phone, punctuated by long periods of relaxed social interaction with his ‘friends,’ which includes clients and contacts of all varieties. He eats a breakfast prepared by his aunt Vera and leaves the house dressed and clean shaven by 11am. On a typical day, he will then go meet
several individuals in their cars or at a residence and sell them some illicit substances. Then he usually makes a stop at the hospital to arrange things for his clients there. In the middle of the afternoon, around tea time, he would often visit his childhood friend, Deepak, in Deepak’s family’s home. Deepak’s mother fed Mandeep on a daily basis. By the evening he would usually need to arrange one of the nighttime activities that he organized, such as racing or party organizing. He would only have a few hours off, most of which he reported as spent alone. By my estimation, going with him throughout many of his days, he would spend many hours in traffic and texting on the phone. Having a comfortable car, with air-conditioning, good speakers and system for talking on the phone hands-free, is his most utilized investment in his business, along with being his most outwardly obvious prestige marker as a middle class man. For his personal security, Mandeep changes his phone number and license plate regularly. He had thirty-two different numbers that he called me from over a six-month period. He is highly aware of the risks his job entails.

**Mandeep and Women**

Mandeep was late arriving to pick me up. When I got into his car, five hours after the original meeting time, he gave me this explanation: “These whores are so confused by what is between their legs that they can’t drive. You remember when there were no women on the road (in 2005) and that was much better. I have been in traffic because one of these bitches smashed up her car. The traffic used to be a little here and there but when they started to drive! All hell is out on the road now. You wouldn’t believe it!” I asked, “It seems like there are many fewer women driving than men, how could they possible be the cause of the traffic? Probably it is because people have more cars now.” He answered, “No. The problem is, if you get in an
accident with one of them you can’t beat them or even yell. Men just finish the issue right there. But women always cry to everyone around and pretend to be the victim. Then you have a crowd, everyone is angry and they totally shut down the road. It takes forever to get through a jam where one of these bitches has rallied everyone up. It’s not equal with them. You can’t fight with a woman.”

As discussed earlier, he held different opinions about different women in his family. He avoided his mother for whom he had little respect, condemning her religiosity and sexual relationship; there was his younger aunt, the blameless Vera, toward whom Mandeep felt immense love and loyalty; and his elder aunt, Chira, whom he would physically abuse in reaction to her psychological fits. Mandeep’s views on women in general will be given greater exploration in the last third of this chapter, which relates more directly his ideology and statement of consciousness. However, here I would like to describe the relationships Mandeep had with the only two other women I know he chose to interact with - his ex-girlfriend and me. Although I had only a research-subject role to play with Mandeep, including myself on the list of women in Mandeep’s life will allow for a more dynamic description of Mandeep’s political views. Additionally, I hope my exposition of my own relationship with Mandeep and the ‘rules’ of that relationship as I came to know them, will make explicit my role in this research and the particular perspective from which I viewed Mandeep. However, first, we will look at Mandeep’s only romantic relationship that he reported to me.

Mandeep met Ana through a mutual friend at his military school and had a two-year long romantic relationship. I first hear about Ana through Mandeep’s mother Abed. She told me, perhaps unaware that Mandeep had not told me about Ana previously, “I hope he [Mandeep]
marries someone soon. It’s not good to have girlfriends. I had come to really care for that girl [Ana], and after all that business, I saw her yesterday and she didn’t even greet me! It breaks my heart. I can’t go through it again!” On our next private meeting, I pressed Mandeep for the story and this is what he told me:

“I know you don’t believe me, but all Indian women are whores. All they know is how to spread their legs for things. They want a phone? They will always know who to get it from. That is how Ana was, to herself she was some magic body…she spread her legs and material things would come out. That is all she every wanted from me. And I was so stupid. That is why I don’t go out with women. She was enough to learn about. If I told you about her you would lose all respect for Indian women like I have, and you should.”

Later that day, he said: “She [Ana] was not rich. But she couldn’t live without phones, rides and material things. So, when I met her I didn’t know how she was. I was a virgin. I wish I hadn’t been with her, but she tried with me for a long time. I gave her everything, I threw it away. She would call late at night and I would drive her around. It was good sometimes but I paid for it all. I shouldn’t have spent my money on that bitch. A lot of times I would go to her house at night. Her family would just pretend I wasn’t there. But I talked to her friend, and her friend told me Ana was with a bunch of men. I was a fool to think she was normal. She told me that she had sex with her uncle when she was a kid. I am sure it was her idea! She was like that only. I hate her a lot.”

“I was going to kill her. I asked her to meet me at night in my car and I really thought I would do it. But I just couldn’t. I loved her so much. I know she was just using me, but I really felt for her. But I was not going to let everything be. The next day I went to her father’s house with a bunch of guys. He came out so scared and said “Sir” to me. By then the neighbors had
gathered around…I accused him of prostituting his daughter to me in front of the society and he just begged for forgiveness…he was the one to blame in the end, he let everything happen.”

On another day he said: “Ana is the reason I will never marry. She ruined everything for me and I don’t ever want another woman in life. I already have the ones at home, what more burdens and new hell could I have with a wife? I loved Ana and I can’t have feelings for anyone else. Sometimes I still want to kill her.”

As we can see in Mandeep’s own words, he is confident in his condemnation of Ana’s behavior. Although he professes to love her, he does not even open up the possibility of either not believing her friend, or, the possibility of forgiving Ana for her supposed sexual transgressions. As the only woman Mandeep reports to having slept with, part of his animosity for Ana seems to come from his idealization of his own virginity and the notion that he “threw it away” on her.

Apart from portraying his views on sexuality, the story illustrates a deeper issue about class. Mandeep’s social position was significantly stronger than Ana’s social position. His family, before their business was stolen, was middle-upper class, while her father owned a small paper shop that put them on the lowest end of the middle class spectrum. Mandeep was a student at an expensive school, while she did not attend any school, and spent her days in her father’s house. In his interpretation of the events of their relationship, Mandeep seems to have understood his financial support of her as given in exchange for her sexual favors, which he perceived as having been arranged by her father in order to trap him into supporting her. He assumes that a good father would not allow his daughter to have premarital sex and justifies the usage of his social privilege to harm the family on moral grounds.
On several other occasions I saw Mandeep round up a group of his ‘friends’ to take care of some problem, and I also confirmed the events of the confrontation with Ana’s father with one of Mandeep’s friends, Anuj. Anuj reported: “That was a fun day. He [Mandeep] came over at night and he was so mad. We drank a lot and had a party. After staying up all night we decided on a plan to confront him [Ana’s father] …You should have seen him [Mandeep], he was in a rage. We had been taking drugs [cocaine] with whiskey that whole night before, to stay up. In the end he totally lost it, hitting the guy that day. The guy was lucky his aim wasn’t better because we were all there too if he fought back. But that guy [Mandeep], you have never seen anything like that day!”

Why was Mandeep able to rally so many young men to fight for his interpersonal cause on behalf of his hurt feelings? Why did the neighbors just watch the incident and why was there no interception from law enforcement? Why did an older man, Ana’s father, who had acted as Mandeep’s potential father-in-law, bear the physical brunt of Mandeep’s anger? My interpretation of this story leads me to believe that many of the answers for these kinds of questions lays in Mandeep’s more powerful social position with respect to Ana and his ability to manipulate a number of social structures, such as the social rules of the family, law, neighborhood and his own network, to take revenge against Ana and her family.

In stark contrast to Mandeep’s treatment of Ana, was Mandeep’s relationship with me, which in my opinion, was largely characterized by his own brand of chivalry. There are three distinct elements of my social identity that allowed me to gain such intimate access to Mandeep’s world, in addition to his physical and social protection in situations that would have otherwise been potentially unsafe places to conduct fieldwork. The first is my racial and national
identification as a white American. The second is my seemingly non-threatening position as a woman. And the third is my portrayal of my own sexuality to Mandeep, and in front of his friends and family, as being characterized by a kind of scholarly celibacy. In short, I was fortunate enough to recognize that chastity in women is one of Mandeep’s most important indicators of social worth, and I acted accordingly.

I have no doubt that my position as a white woman largely explains his favorable behavior toward me. As frequently observed in ethnographic research that involves a post-colonial element, Mandeep did seem to think I was somehow ‘special’ and more deserving of his respect than other people. He suspected my motives less and told me on numerous occasions how he trusted me precisely because I was not Indian. In a concise and telling statement, he said: “Indians are capable of anything. You fall asleep and they can cut your throat if there is anything in it for them. You can’t hurt me. There is no real interests in you, you are just studying.” Naturally, even at the time I could see the irony of his statement - in some sense I am exploiting him by divulging his information for some professional, and potentially financial, profit. In part, the respect and trust I was able to gain with him resulted from his identification of me as Not-Indian, and his assumption of positive personality traits associated with my otherness.

However, Mandeep seemed to feel more comfortable with this this power differential between our national and racial backgrounds, because, additionally, between us existed another power differential - I am a woman. Living as a woman in Delhi, I was aware that I needed to be escorted by a man in the evening or in private situations that included men I did not know. This meant that Mandeep had a great deal of power over me in most of our interactions, as he was the person I trusted to ensure my safety in otherwise dubious social spaces and private gatherings. Additionally, I believe Mandeep let me into his life because he found the combination of my
education, financial independence and gender a strange mix of attributes. In a particularly concise, and humorous, statement, he said: “Your brain is like a man’s brain. Otherwise we would have nothing to say to each other….when I say that all women are irrational, I don’t mean you—you are like a man to me.” I believe that Mandeep was trying to compliment me in this interaction, but more interestingly, this statement also betrayed his main identification of me as worthwhile company — in contract to other women.

My sexuality was also an important indicator of my social worth to Mandeep. On my fifth visit to Mandeep’s house, his aunt Chira, public questioned my personal romantic history, intentions for marriage, and views on pre-marital sex. My self-portrayal to Mandeep and his family at all points, attempted to mirror what I hoped they would want me to say. I told them, not without many elements of truth included, that from an early age I have been committed to the rather chaste life of a scholar. This view that I eschew men in favor of scholarly pursuits earned me a good reputation in Mandeep’s, and his family’s, estimation. I was lucky I was able to maintain this perception of me, though Mandeep tried at many points to check on my chaste behavior. Repeatedly he would call while sitting in his car outside of my apartment, try to lure me into lying about being at home alone on the phone, and then rush up the stairs and surprise me with a knock on the door. I was always home whenever he would check, and I made extra sure never to lie. Once when he surprised me at the door, he also looked surprised, and said: “I can’t believe you are really here. I thought for sure you would be out with some man. Are you always alone in your room? You are just reading? You are really something!” I attribute this praise to his view of my non-sexuality as that of a “scholar.” Additionally, Mandeep saw my lack of financial dependence on men as a key feature of my sexuality and as something that distinguished me from ‘Indian women.’
Mandeep’s allowing me into his life can be attributed to many factors of my identity that have little to do with my individual attributes. I only explore his respect and willingness to participate in this ethnographic research with reference to myself in an attempt to be completely open and explicit about how I was able to gain access to this social network and family history.

**Part Three: On Consciousness**

In this section of this chapter, I will present a medley of the ideas and reflections that Mandeep related me on philosophy, religion, and politics. A major bridge still to be satisfyingly crossed in social science exists between most studies of economics and those of consciousness. This crossing can be built when we observe how an individual exists in totality - simultaneously as a historical-conditioned being, a history-making being, and a reflective being. This third section on Mandeep will address the reflecting component of his totality. For good reason I have waited to give his most explicit views in this account, placing them only after a substantial contextualization, in order that his ideas may be viewed as understandable products of his particular history and environment. However, it should be here noted that Mandeep’s views do have much in common with those views expressed to me by a good number of other, non-criminal, members of the Delhi middle class.

Due to the pithy nature of Mandeep’s own word-choice, is the genre of aphorism has provided this section with organizational structure. I believe this tactic of creating aphorism is relatively unheard of in the presentation of ethnographic material, but it is a common format for expressing philosophical observations and the language of consciousness. Therefore, I have experimented with this format by providing the cue to contextualize topic of conversation, and
given Mandeep’s own words to provide the main content of each of the phrases, as taken from my notes.

1. On the destruction of others — “Why should I trouble myself about one man? Destruction is part of life as things are always changing. He will be born again, maybe this time something better than before. He was that, a beggar, and now he is something else. There is nothing unusual. Maybe he would have died a day later from cold. There is nothing in me that holds on. I am a force of nature.”

2. On doubling pleasure— “You see, there is no question of getting out of suffering for me. No use in trying either, when every day brings new pains. When I had all the money I suffered for small things, but what did I know of that then? Now I must have my small enjoyments or I would lay down and die. If I can have a little fun racing, even for only one minute, I more than double my good in life. I will never be happy as you say – for me there is only the thrill.”

3. On systemic corruption — “You see, whatever I did, even if I was a government minister, I would need to go around the law. Even if I was a laborer, anyone. I know that about this society, so I can do what needs to be done to survive. If I was stupid, my family would be on the street…if I got a job only, we would starve. Anyone would say it’s always better to make more money.”
4. On losing money — “I saw how people treated us after we lost the business. The more you need people the more they use you. They make you do tricks in a mocking way, because they can have a bit of fun. You should never trust anyone - they will pick out your eyes for a laugh.”

5. On genocide — “There are too many people in India already. Can’t you see them lying in the street, piling up? If we had any sense, we would finish these people in a clean way. Even street children…they live in such a poor way it would be better for them to be dead, better for everyone. The trash of this city is what keeps us back. We need to clean out the dirt and start over.”

6. On the comparison between animals and people— “There is nothing so good about people that I should care what happens to them. I care about the dog as much--no, more. At least I know what the dog wants. Humans are worse than dogs because they pretend to be something they are not.”

7. On the privilege of a protected reputation — “It didn’t matter if he had taken it. With someone poor like that, they accused him and that was all that mattered. Later they caught him and broke his back. The whole society was against him then. Eventually he died. There are no chances for a mistake with the poor people, not like with us.”

8. On trusting murderers — “I let him stay at my place in the hills until things settled down. I had a good time those weeks. I do trust the guy, because, you know, with people like us, there is no trust at all unless it is complete.”
9. On assaulting someone to recover a debt — “The fate of some guy is not my concern. I am just a part of his fate. I can hardly be bothered to look at these people, what do you think if they get in my way?”

10. On democratic liberties — “I must live under those criminals in government. If I take from the society too, I am only creating an equality. That is democracy in India: everyone takes as much as possible.”

11. On those that threaten your reputation — “If I didn’t beat him, what would he think? The next day he would bring a gang to my house and rape my mother in front of me. I have to do these things for my family. I cannot just forget some insult.”

12. On one’s obligation toward others — “Yesterday I didn’t know this man. What does it matter if I know him today? Why do people always think the other people they know matter more? There is no reason.”

13. On religion — “There are many kinds of forces and I have seen things I cannot explain. But for me, I am good with knowing that I will be punished with a short life and bad death now, and more torture after. I am fine with that, so I don’t concern myself with religious things.”
14. On prostitution — “Once a woman falls like that, there is no use in pretending her body is worth anything to her. They are stupid when they try to back out. After the first, second, or third time, then they feel nothing and they don’t care.”

15. On the passions — “It is my nature to become angry, so what am I to blame for the outcome? If seeing his face pressed against the windshield makes me feel good, who wants to dare to give their opinion? You?!”

16. On superstition — “What advantage do I lose from wearing these charms? I once knew a man that no bullet could kill because of his charm. If I had one of those, oh the hell I would rain down on everyone.”

17. On nationalism — “We are Hindu. You cannot understand, but we Hindus carry our blood inside. The Muslims know they are Hindu, and inside they are ashamed. We just have to force them, like the Muslims forced us.”

18. On dreams for the future — “I want to own a private plane and an Aston Martin. Are my dreams not as good as any others? They push me to be better in everything I do.”

19. On the potential of India — “In the future, India will be the most powerful nation. We will take back our land and keep going all the way to Briton. Until we have those ghostly fuckers crying under our thumbs, we will never be free. Until then Hindus will never feel proud of their past.”
20. On domestic abuse — “Once you catch a few good beatings, you aren’t scared anymore. I didn’t care when my grandfather would hit me for being naughty, and now I never worry to lose a fight. I can’t even feel a hit now, so I am free.”

21. On sex and power— “No one should have sex. In sex a person loses all of their power. It does not make sense for anyone to compromise their position. Everyone wants power but their urges just make them forget for a minute. Not me.”

22. On the family need — “If I fail to provide for my family, I would be better off killing them than letting them live on the street. We all agree really, if my businesses fail, the only alternative is to die. I would have to kill them first.”

23. On making India a Hindu nation — “If it were up to me I would solve the issue quickly. I would just put the Muslims in camps, like Hitler, until they died off. The problem is they keep having children. If I was in charge, India would be a Hindu nation again in only a few years.”

24. On women — “Women are like dead bodies or flies or trash. We have too many of them in India. They are entirely useless.”

If the reader will please remember the first vendetta of this chapter where Mandeep told me that “The people of Delhi are like razors.” Some days after he performed this elaborate metaphor for me, I asked him to explain his meaning in greater detail. He explained to me that in
his metaphor, the different angles by which a blade might touch the skin, flat or against a sharp edge, represent the different social contexts in which people may find themselves. Most of the time razors and people they are harmless, as they lay flat without harming you. That is, until a person, or razor, is in a context where they are positioned to harm you. Then, Mandeep believes, that every Delhi-ite, like himself, would “take his own advantage” and murder you for any slight advancement. In beginning the chapter with this metaphor, I hope that the reader has come to see that for Mandeep, “the razor” is the image that best captures his worldview.

**Downward Mobility**

Mandeep’s life story can enhance our understanding of the Indian middle class by upsetting two assumptions scholars make when focusing their studies on the newness and connectivity of this class to global capitalism in the era of neoliberalism. First, the assumption that narratives that express fears of economic fluctuations, the “hang between highs and lows” that ethnographic subjects report, and their associated moral attributions of risk and reward, are not necessarily produced by fluctuations in the globalized economy. When we look at the the fear of downward mobility in core economies, we see that issues like fluctuations in the credit rate and the rise of short-term contracts on the job market, creates the affect of precarity (Allison 2013; Heiman 2015). Although the narratives of the Indian middle class may sound similar in their perception of economic instability, the precarity of neoliberal India is quiet different from a post-industrial decline.

In the case of Mandeep’s family falling, their vulnerability was due to their choice to keep their money in safes, under floorboards, and in the form of jewelry, which opened them up to the thief of Ajay, their trusted servant. Throughout my research on middle class families in
Delhi, I found that they kept a large proportion of their wealth inside their homes and businesses, and avoided placing their wealth in banks in order to avoid taxes. In this way, their property rights were also not guaranteed by the state, and so the burden of guarding their wealth fell into their own hands. It is common, and more greatly explored in my chapter on the family division of labor, to need family members to stay at home to guard possessions from possible thief by servants, workers and other members of the urban poor. In two cases in my research, families went on a vacation and leaving their houses locked but empty, only to return home and find a large number of their valuables missing. The daily anxiety expressed to me by all six families in my study over the urgent need to “watch the house,” appeared to be a much more meaningful connected to the potential of downward mobility than the very few conversations I had with them on topics of relevance to the world economy. Living with these families, I took it as a sign of belonging when I was occasionally trusted to sit alone in the main room and instructed to watch the servants and doors for short periods, until they returned from some urgent business and could presumably take over the work of “watching” once again.

With Mandeep’s example, we can also see how the punishment for transgressing the property rights of this social organization is enforced by the middle class family themselves, regularly with the help of corrupt police. The example of Mandeep’s revenge against Ajay is the outside edge of these practices, but as you will note throughout my chapters, there are many examples of extra-judicial punishments carried out against servants by middle class individuals in retaliation for stealing. When scholars focus their studies only on what is “new” and “neo” about the Indian economy and middle class culture, they consistently reinforce the assumption that the anxiety of downward mobility shared by people within the identity category of “middle class” globally, is caused by the instability of formal capitalism (Chetterjee 2008; Chowdhury
Instead, with Mandeep, we can see that his downward mobility was both caused by, and resulted in the proliferation of, informal economic practices. Mandeep and his family views downward mobility and the struggle against falling as associated with lawlessness and an older form of violent class struggle specific to the urban history of Delhi.

The second assumption that the focus on neoliberal economic changes and the newness of the Indian middle class obscures is: that consumer power to display conspicuous consumption to middle class peers is the source, and not the result, of political connection and power. The attainment of symbolic membership in this identity group through commodity consumption appears, at least in my study, quiet secondary to the family connections and childhood acquaintances that Mandeep is able to draw on to prevent him from falling out of the middle class. With Mandeep, the political power to corrupt the polices, commit fraud, and act violently without repercussion are all granted to him through his network, which provides the material bases of his ability to buy socially prestigious commodities. Here the causality implied by previous studies is reversed – Mandeep’s inclusion in the political power afforded to those with a middle class identity depends, not on obtaining commodities to gain acceptance into that group and thereby political power, but possessing political power through family connections and childhood associations which then grants access to the commodities that are the most outward signs of this class. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the middle class of India is far from uniform in its economic class character. For those on the upward trajectory, it is likely the case that their acquisition of middle class identity and its associated network of political influence is most squarely dependent on the consumer power required to attain these identity symbols. However, in Mandeep’s case, and I content in the section of the “old” middle class of Delhi that has watched some of their competitors prosper as they themselves have experienced
economic decline, political inclusion in the middle class is based largely on family ties, which provide the commodities and daily needs of many middle class individuals that are not engaged in the formal economy in virtually anyway but as a consumer.

**Hindvuta Ideology**

As we have seen, Mandeep justifies his actions by using the moral language of family obligations. He insists that he works in his illicit business only because it provides the sole avenue available to him through which he may support his family. He views his role as the only man in the family as coming with the moral obligation to provide for his dependent mother and aunts. Mandeep consistently frames the ultimate morality of his decisions on the fulfillment of his role within his family structure. In his radical work, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (1996), by Kancha Ilaiah, the author argues that the rising political significance of Hindutva ideological beliefs are closely tied to a nationalist fetishization of upper-caste North Indian family practices that have been essentialized to represent “Hinduism” and “Indianess” in general. Ilaiah’s penetrating critique can help explain why Mandeep’s moral universe, which include both his political sentiments that all Muslims people should be euthanized and his tender loyalty to his aunt Vera, appear so intimately tied to his patriarchal role in the Hindu family structure. As Ilaiah rightly points out, the nationalist idea that Hinduism means the upper-caste North Indian family structure, and the nationalist placement of their legitimacy in their vision of a “Hindu nation” to strict social adherence to the family practices of one or two particularly prestigious castes, has inextricably linked “Indian family values” to the legitimization of caste-based hegemony in the democracy of the nation.

Given Ilaiah’s insights, perhaps we should not be surprised to find that Mandeep, a man from the
much praised golden middle class of India, has goes about “Indianizing modernity” by reconciling the moral obligations of his family with his enthusiasm for ruthless entrepreneurialism.

Mandeep’s biography illustrates how the cracks in the state come to offer advantages to well connected individuals with middle class upbringings, networks, and identities, and how these vulnerabilities are used to subvert the organs of normative state authority and its presumed monopoly over violence. Within my ethnographic narrative emerges the connection between the rhetoric of racialized caste and religious identity that embodies Hindutva ideology and the social currency of this discourse among powerful men. This chapter has shown that scholarship and media portrayals that extol the “modern” and forward moving character of this class, as “the hope of India,” overlook the ways international competition and new forms of wealth have reified aspects of gender, caste and class (Desai and Temash 2014; Fernandes 2006; Mazzerala 2005). Rather than finding the Indian middle class becoming more "modern" or adopting enlightenment principles, the powerful rise of Hindutva ideology has shown that this newly positioned cultural community is a key national player in activating the ideological current that combines support for neoliberal development and permeable commercial borders with a recast Indian nationalism and cultural-religious essentialism. Neither should these developments be construed as simply a retrograde cultural movement, even where local relationships of domination and subordination are enhanced by global competition. Instead, informalization and network-centered development has shifted Delhi’s economic organization further away from formal employment, historical business practices, the tightly amalgamated state, and conventional expectations of societal consciousness.
To me, Mandeep can best be viewed as a doppelganger to the characteristics described of the Indian middle class in other ethnographies. His similarities to other middle class people that operate primarily on a legitimate economic foundation ensure that Mandeep’s character and worldview do give us insight into the hidden identity characteristics of this “new” Indian middle class. I hope that documenting Mandeep in the academic record of ethnographic studies of the Indian middle class will help unsettle some of the assumptions scholars have made about this group, and perhaps also, that middle class people have made about themselves. To reconcile this uncomfortable comparison, I will leave the reader with a passage by Fyodor Dostoevsky in *The Double*:

“The one now sitting opposite Mr. Goliadkin was Mr. Goliadkin’s horror, he was Mr. Goliadkin’s shame, he was Mr. Goliadkin’s nightmare from yesterday, in short, it was Mr. Goliadkin himself…no, it was a different Mr. Goliadkin, completely different, but at the same time completely identical to the first — of the same height, of the same mold, dressed the same way, with the same bald spot — in short, nothing, decidedly nothing, had been overlooked for a complete likeness, so that if they had been taken and placed next to each other, no one, decidedly no one, would have undertaken to determine precisely which was the real Goliadkin and which was the counterfeit, which was the old and which the new, which was the original and which the copy.”
Conclusion

**Transitions to Combined Forms: Rethinking the Temporality of Progress**

The depth of ethnographic data presented throughout the preceding chapters of this dissertation frees this closing analysis to move beyond the typically obligatory choice between the language of culture and the language of economics, by having already tied the intimate family life of the Delhi middle class to their role in the world economy through ethnographic practice. This study exposes the intricacies of how family relationships, at once economic and deeply personal, underlay the economic position of the Delhi middle class in their articulation into global capitalism since neoliberalism. Before economic liberalization in the early 1990s, the small “old” Indian middle class was largely called the “educated class” and did not garner much attention from the government, media, or social sciences (Varma 2007). As new white-collar jobs appeared in Delhi after liberalization, the “new” Indian middle class grew rapidly, and quickly found a prestigious place on the national stage. Part of the attention given to this new Indian middle class is because of its close association with modernity and globalization, and the hopes that this class would revitalize political participation in India (Fernandes 2006). Attention to these neoliberal, or “modern,” elements of this shifting class articulation, has also found its way into the scholarly material. Indeed, many anthropological studies on the Indian middle class have looked most closely at their expanded role as luxury consumers (Brosius 2010; Dickey 2012; Gilbertson 2014; Mathur 2010). Others have looked at a different kind of consumption through their attention to the Indian middle class’s political claims to urban space (Schindler 2014; Srivastava 2012; Waldrop 2004). Scholars heralding the increasing importance of the
Indian middle class have consistently pointed to their role in “public cultural imagescapes,” and attempted to connect these “modern” images to politics and economy (Mazzarala 2005). These scholars, in all cases, insistently ask: How is the Indian middle class changing the political culture of India through their incorporations consumers of commodities, public space and media, in the neoliberalism economy? Unfortunately, trying to answer this question is impossible without taking a much harder look at the economy – a task that I will commence upon in this conclusion chapter.

The informal economy is neglected in discussions of class because the focus is usually on the primary mode of production in each area, in each epoch. However, if we wish to describe the conditions of exploitation and discrimination that stem from distinctions of religion, caste, gender, family, sexuality, age and so forth, which are widely observed today, we must turn our attention to those economic relations that are not reported to government agencies. The role of the informal economy differs in its analytical importance in industrialized countries where the formal subsumption of labor has radically transformed most relations, and underdeveloped countries where the vast majority of humanity still labors unproductively. Throughout my chapters, and within this conclusion, I have striven to paint my analysis using the best conceptual paintbrushes provided by Marx and his interpreters. The reason for situating my terminology in this way has been with a view to this conclusion, where I will argue against temporal assumptions of progress by showing how Marx's own reasoning allows for a reimagining of a future with less, not more, capitalism. I argue that we should view transitional forms as a kind of articulation between the economic-social forms of differentiation specific to a place and the current movements of world capitalism in this time period. We could conceptualize theory as the
theory of patriarchal admixtures, and we could understand the dynamic modality of material relationships of power as neither stagnate, nor moving progressively in one direction.

With neoliberalism, we have, yet again, seen how the economy develops unevenly. The constant shifts of combined forms – in which patriarchal admixtures are articulated into the capitalist economy – do not always move in one direction. All the more so, when neoliberal development itself does not necessarily result in real subsumption through technological improvements in capitalist exploitation, nor necessarily transform the primary industries of manufacturing, with any consistency. Instead, neoliberalism glosses the economy with formal subsumption by finding more and more remote areas for the reach of the market – a kind of extensive rather than intensive capitalist transformation. Although in many cases neoliberal changes have precipitated certain forms of industrial development, more often, liberalization has altered only a few aspects of production while leaving the largest part of the relations of production intact.

Influential economist C.P. Chandrasekhar has argued that the real development witnessed during the neoliberal period in India is actually based on the thirty years of internal development beforehand, and represent a kind of “cashing out” of the real development undertaken by the state between the early 1970s and 1991 (Chandrasekhar 2010). Dislocated from tenuous claims to real development, it seems that neoliberalism may well have the effect of slowing down industrial development and deeper capitalist subsumption. Rather, as the reader has observed in my previous chapters, Delhi’s new articulation of the economy to the unrewardingly competitive international economy through liberalization policies, only wedded the city’s patriarchal admixtures more closely to the production and reproduction of capitalism. This is because this movement has been one primarily of formal subsumption. The consumer markets and some areas
of the economy have been subsumed, but the relations of production have not in most instances. With the section of the Delhi middle class that derives its income from the ownership of petty-bourgeois businesses employing informal workers, it is almost entirely incorrect to assert that their class, or the class of informal workers they hire, have undergone real subsumption. If real subsumption had taken place, with either economic group, we would have witnessed some form of proletarianization, or perhaps even a meaningful increase in the number of labor laws governing such work, or their enforcement, since neoliberalism. Instead, what my dissertation has shown is that the increase in income and avenues for consumption that neoliberalism has brought to my research subjects has only increased the reach of, and reliance on, patriarchal admixtures to generate labor surplus in the Delhi economy. However, in order to appreciate the analytical value of my theory of “patriarchal admixtures” in their “combined forms” it is necessary to dive much deeper into Marx’s writings and the theories of dependency and articulation that have followed.

**Marx**

To begin the theoretical argument of this dissertation that pulls each piece of ethnographic narrative together, I can only begin with Marx. There is a curious passage by Marx in the “Formal and Real Subsumption of Labor to Capital,” one of his latter unfinished works that was meant as an outline for the expansion of the larger book, *Capital*. When the piece was written, Marx’s thinking was at its most structural in his career. In the common English edition of *Capital* it follows the discussion, “On Primitive Accumulation,” a chapter where he discusses the violent forms of expropriation and exploitation that accompany colonialism, and these sketches of what he intended as a chapter to round out the first volume, concerning the “Formal
and Real Subsumption of Labor to Capital,” provide clues into how he might have more fully conceptualized the material structures of non-capitalist relations, which he describes as “patriarchal, political or even religious admixtures.”

In Marx’s framework, the distinction between the formal subsumption of labor and the real subsumption of labor is essential in conceptualizing the transition to capitalism – both initially in England and as it spread across the globe. Capitalism has been seen to benefit from "bourgeois" modes of extra-economic social relations, characterized by individualism, citizenship, Enlightenment attitudes, and worker/capitalist consciousnesses, in order to continually and autonomously self-perpetuate. However, in situations where capitalism has not yet been fully established—or otherwise understood, has not transitioned from formal to real subsumption—we can clearly observe capitalists making substantial profits without the adoption of the narrowly economic capitalist relations of domination and subordination. They may engage in usury, trade for commodities below their market value, extort goods through taxation, set up quasi-feudal haciendas, and the like. For Marx, capitalism cannot simply take down its sails, row ashore, and start a capitalist mode of production. Instead, global capitalism expands its reach by altering the native forms of domination and subordination, reconfiguring local structures in order to feed capital’s profits, but does not transform the most fundamental element of these relationships – the relations of production. Native forms of domination and subordination, or patriarchal admixtures, include: slavery, serfdom, castes, marriage, age classifications, tribal or ethnic rivalries, religiously based social hierarchies, and so forth.

Marx gives us the example a newly emancipated person after the American Civil War going to work for a meager wage as a day laborer for the landowner that was once her slave-owner. In the Reconstruction Era American South, in accordance with how development is
always uneven and partial, the wage a day-laborer would receive *does* make the economic relationship between the landowner and the laborer formally part of the free labor market, and contributes directly to the capital’s profits. In this movement, the slave-master relationships are formally subsumed and have become more closely articulated to world capitalism. But, the actual political and economic relationship between the landowner and laborer still closely resembles the pre-emancipation dialectic. If the class relation of the emancipated person were completely subsumed into the capitalist relations of production, distinctions of race would not be important to class power, as economic mechanisms would adequately organize the provision of labor. The patriarchal admixture of race would be eliminated, and the social-economic relationship of the laborer to the means of production would be solely through the entirely abstracted sale of their labor power to a capitalist. In addition, to use this example of the American South, I hope the reader is also able to see how even current day employment relationships in a core economy are not entirely free of these patriarchal admixtures, as will be address more fully later in this chapter.

One final piece to understand before we see Marx’s own views on the subject is the issue of transitional forms. A major theme of my theoretical intervention is to argue that “transitional forms” should be replaced with “combined forms,” as a more useful way to describe change without implied directionality or the idea that different economies are fundamentally different. Alternatively, in Marx’s formal subsumption, previous relationships of domination and

---

1 Real subsumption of labor would transpire when the capitalists begin to invest and transform the production process. As such a point, they are not merely exploiting workers within a new format, but exploiting a new productive force and social relationship, capital, which will impell them to continue to invest and transform production according to the dynamics set out in the earlier chapters of Marx’s book. It was out of an interest in when these transformative tendencies of capitalism would come into action that Marx described the earlier trajectory of non-wage labor being formally subsumed as wage labor, prior to a capitalist transformation of technique.
subordination, or patriarchal admixtures, have been altered to contribute to the capitalist economy, for example by allowing intensification of exploitation of wage laborers, or by yielding profits from working people not employed for a wage. In such cases, in spite of their importance to the production of capitalism, the relations of production more closely resemble other structural forms of domination and exploitation, be they personal, political, religious, etc. When such arrangements occur, the economy is said by Marx to be in a “transitional form.” Marx’s very definition of how capitalism may work through admixture-based relations as “transitional forms” assumes that these Frankensteinian admixtures will not endure the test of time. I argue, and this dissertation has consistently point to, how these supposed transitional forms are not transitional at all. Marx understood them as transitions to capitalism within particular areas of labor, but he was more concerned with identifying local points of the emergence of capitalism rather than defining the full set of transitions that capitalism would engender. His ideas of the transition to capitalism are still widely debated. Indeed, “The Formal and Real Subsumption of Labor to Capital” is an unfinished work. Marx believed that at some point in the future, previous antagonisms and distinctions rooted in previous forms of exploitation would fall away, such as those of race, family and gender, and only capitalist relations of production would remain between people.

It appears that capitalism has not taken the clear trajectory Marx prescribed. This has become all the more obvious as financial rents have impinged on industrial development in even the worlds most advanced economies since neoliberal structural shifts (Brenner 2002). What this theory of neoliberalism proves, is that while transitional forms may be constantly shifting, they are not always going in one direction toward the real subsumption of labor. A patriarchal admixture may lay dormant while impersonal, wage-based economic relationships are taking
precedence, and yet continue to be available within economic and political contestations. As we have seen with the proliferation of new commitments to older forms of religious identity around the world in the recent past, the contemporary political climate may call upon these admixtures and increase their importance as material and political forms of domination and subordination, rather than force them to wither away. Without question, none of this takes place away from the economic consequences these patriarchal admixtures impose on individuals with unfavorable social distinctions. In a transitional form, when relations have not been fully subsumed, a person’s class in capitalism is fed through the patriarchal admixtures that are usually local to the region in which the person belongs. To understand this more fully, let us look at what Marx said in the “Formal and Real Subsumption of Capital” and the following passage, “Transitions”: “The capital-relation is a relation of compulsion, the aim of which is to extract surplus labour by prolonging labour time — it is a relation of compulsion which does not rest on any personal relations of domination and dependence, but simply arises out of the difference in economic functions.” In this passage Marx is describing how capitalist relations rest solely on the compulsion to sell one’s labor time in exchange for the resources for self-reproduction, i.e. food, shelter, and so forth. In relationships such as those of patron-client, parent-child, husband-wife, or distinctions of caste or religion, characteristics of any two people identities are important. It may also be that the possibility of an economic or exploitative relationship is personal, an individual extra-economic coercion, or a power of one person over a certain other person, which they would not have to others of the same class. Unlike relations in capitalism, which work entirely on systemic principles, Marx is communicating that relationships that are based on “personal relations of domination and dependence,” have not been entirely subsumed by capitalism.
I have stuck to Marx’s terms “patriarchal admixtures” in this argument for two reasons. First, my dissertation is most fundamentally about family admixtures. With they at times resemble caste or other forms of distinction, they are always primarily about the patriarchal family structure. When I designate patriarchal admixtures within parent-child relationships and between homeowners and their servants, I am not saying this structure is primarily about gender or only upheld by men. As the reader has seen, the patriarchal family contains an array of admixtures, but I have consistently rendered the term throughout this dissertation as ‘patriarchal admixtures, for several analytical reasons, which I will explain in more detail later in this conclusion with reference to Meillassoux’s “patriarchal slavery.” Nevertheless, I do point out places where other categorizations might also be possible. The second half of the term, "admixtures," is meant to indicate that these relationships are a heterogeneous catalogue of concrete forms of domination. Rather than limit analysis to the terms of particularly conflictual admixtures such as caste, sexual orientation, ability, age or gender, I have retained Marx's expansive use of admixtures because I believe it is inclusive enough to allow for the varied forms of social prejudice that might affect an individual. For instance, a person who has a very specific problem which does not mean placement in any specific social group, such as having something unusual about their appearance, might be subject to a patriarchal admixture that accounted for their relatively unique difference. In social theory I realize this term may seem antiquated, but as I argue in detail below with reference to race and gender theories, the term is surprisingly more inclusive of different forms of oppression than other possible terms.

Marx makes only the most basic differentiations between admixtures, depending on the many forms of pre-capitalist relations. Some are easy to identify such as the political admixture of patronage that usually accompanies feudal relations between landlord and peasant. In the
Indian case, at some points the caste structure is a religious admixture, and in other instances a patriarchal admixture. We could draw this distinction by saying that traditional gift exchanges which were a religious admixture, not a necessarily consequence of feudalism, where a religious admixture that has largely fallen away as the economy has changed. Whereas, the compulsion to marry within one’s caste, could easily be categorized as part of a caste structure, but more properly termed a patriarchal admixture that has articulated to capitalism. If we manipulate Marx’s terms, we might say of both situations, of marriage and traditional gifts, caste admixtures are at work. While it is apparent how, e.g. arranged marriage limits individual freedom, and how it reproduces patriarchal structures, what interest it could serve in the economy of capitalism is not quite so obvious.

To take a common example from Delhi middle class homes, an individual from a low caste often comes to the house once a day to clean only the toilets. Their employment by a middle class family based on a wage, is only formally subsumed by capitalism. The dialectic between the middle class home owner and the toilet cleaner is two fold. First, they have a religious distinction between upper and lower caste, that translates into a division of labor and social difference. Second, the toilet cleaner is compelled by the capitalist economy to seek employment, so they are formally part of capitalism, but the relationship they have to their employer more closely resembles caste. In this case, a distinction of certain persons becomes both a matter of exclusion from certain kinds of work, for members of each caste, and the opportunity to do undesirable work in an employment relationship mediated not only economically, but also in terms of the personal characteristics of those involved. Elements of patronage tend to announce the presence of some lingering personal domination.

To Marx, the “personal relations of domination and dependence,” or otherwise described
	  
as patriarchal admixtures of domination and subordination, have been deformed by capitalism
but persist as the most meaningful way to describe the dialect. Marx gives plausible reasons why
capitalists would eventually prefer to work with their more rationalized impersonal power—but
there are reasons that would not always hold:
“With the formal subsumption of labour under capital, the compulsion to do surplus
labour — and therewith on the one hand to create needs and the means to satisfy those
needs, and on the other hand to produce in quantities which go beyond the measure of the
worker’s traditional needs — and the creation of free time for development,
independently of material production, merely take on a different form from that of earlier
modes of production, but it is a form which heightens the continuity and intensity of
labour, increases production, is more favorable to the development of variations in
labour capacity and accordingly to the differentiation of modes of labour and gaining a
living, and finally dissolves the very relation between the owner of the conditions of
labour and the worker into a pure relation of purchase and sale, or a money relation, and
eliminates from the relation of exploitation all patriarchal, political or even religious
admixtures. To be sure, the relation of production itself creates a new relation of
domination and subordination (and this also produces political, etc., expressions of
itself). The less capitalist production goes beyond the formal relation, the less is the
formal relation itself developed, since it presupposes small capitalists alone, who are only
marginally distinct from the workers themselves in their training and mode of
employment. To be sure, a relation of domination and subordination enters the relation of
production itself; this derives from capital’s ownership of the labour it has incorporated
and from the nature of the labour process itself. The less capitalist production goes
beyond this formal relation, the less is this relation developed, since it presupposes small
capitalists alone, who are only marginally distinct from the workers themselves in their
training and mode of employment.”
It is from this passage that I have draw the term “patriarchal admixtures.” In my research
for this dissertation I could not find a signal instance of a scholar drawing on this term, given by
Marx himself in Capital! Here Marx is saying that as capitalism transforms different parts of the
world economy, capitalists finds that certain forms of labor can be more reliably obtained
through unrestricted labor markets. In particular, the development of skilled labor and
advancement of labor productivity into the "real subsumption" phase, as it was observed in
Britain, went along with the freeing of labor and the eventual increase in standards of living and

  

285  


education. Yet capitalism has also, and much more widely, extended its exploitation without finding a need for conventionalized labor markets to obtain sophisticated labor. In fact, many fine differentiations of the labor provided—and commensurate wide differentiations in compensation—can be gotten through leveraging the more personal kinds of domination, and also the work of small and semi-capitalist producers.

Hence, as will be seen below, Marx also predicted that capitalism will sometimes intensify pre-capitalist relations of domination and subordination. Still, he does tend to suggest that over time, these patriarchal, political and religious admixtures are eliminated as they are replaced by capitalist relations. The important distinction to make is that the potential for capitalism to benefit from a workforce that is more free or has a higher standard of living does not necessarily outweigh the advantages of personal subordination, and so it may not be in the interests of dominant classes ever to affect the change. This includes much of the peasant economy and also its household (i.e. female) economies, together likely more than half of the world’s working population:

“The difference in the kind of relation of domination and subordination when the mode of production is not yet affected, is most apparent where rural and domestic subsidiary occupations, carried on just for the needs of the family, are transformed into independent capitalist branches of labour.”

In these quotations we can more fully see Marx’s idea about domination and subordination. I argue that we can find the largest bulk of what we call culture in these differences between local forms of domination and subordination. Marx puts his formulation into a distinct timeline, but I argue that we should look at these relations of domination and subordination not as previous forms, but instead enduring aspects of particular locations in the economy. For Marx, distinction between economies is often about time, as he has a clear idea of what human progress might look like. However, for those of us that are skeptical that these
relations of domination and subordination are on their way out, we can use Marx’s structural ideas without reifying the trajectory.

To return to the US example, Barbara Fields’ work on race in the first years of European colonization shows that there has been at least one other historical example where the capitalism of Britain did not produce more purified capitalism (Fields 1990). In the early years of the US colonies, slavery based on a clear categorization of race had not been instituted. Rather, laborers had a range of different types of employment and bondage as part of indentured servitude. Over the course of a few decades, laws and practices changed, especially the emergence of a concept of race that entailed an association with a reinforced slave system particularly for people of African descent. In this case of settler colonialism, we can observe that some laborers actually lost personal rights and were placed into an economic system that became less, not more, based in the relation of wage laborer to capitalist. In evaluating the "transitions" of capitalism, we can see that when it increases returns or competitiveness to institute what Marx called "pre-capitalist" relations, and thereby effective to divide the working force politically with an identity difference, capitalists will absolutely do so. Although the worker-capitalist relationship is the most economically productive over long spans of development, it is not always preferred for the extraction of profits by capitalists. I would argue that the antebellum period in the US was a "combined form," not a transition or full capitalism.

If we were to take the structure of the transitional form as described by Marx, and fix it more firmly to place, we could come to see these patriarchal admixtures of domination and subordination as the aspects of culture which materially reproduce social inequality. Once we have taken transitional forms as a set of structures out of a distinct timeline, we may also compare this structural approach to Marx’s early ideas on consciousness and alienation. In this
dissertation I take pains to give a literary, phenomenological and agency-centered view of my subjects. This allows the reader to see what is structural and what is individual about how each person undertakes the decisions of self-making. As described later, this ethnographic practice allows for my analysis to attend to both the culturalist approach and the Marxist approach. In doing so, I hope to help these areas of human study come to a higher degree of integration. However, with respect to Marx, this practice also stems from my argument and theoretical background that attempts to see how the feelings of alienation and political attitudes reported by my research participants stem from those relationships of domination and subordination that are part of Delhi’s combined form. In my argument, I propose that scholars draw from Marx’s insights into transitional forms and attempt to locate these forms through understanding their structural impact on the material and conceptual life of individuals.

It is interesting to consider how the persistent aspects of personal subordination would articulate with the more directly economic compulsion that is now the norm even for the most subordinate positions. As Marx writes,

“If the relation of domination and subordination replaces those of slavery, serfdom, vassalage, patriarchal, etc., relations of subordination, there takes place only a change in their form. The form becomes freer, because the subordination is now only of an objective nature; it is formally speaking voluntary, purely economic.”

In this passage Marx is saying that when the formal subsumption has already happened, economic compulsion emerges as the final, unavoidable type of subordination. So, as previously discussed with the toilet cleaner, the laborer is not forced to take a job as a toilet cleaner. If they had enough money not to work, or could find employment in another occupation that was more favorable to them, they are free to stop cleaning toilets. Thus, when relations are subsumed in capitalism, subordination becomes a clear result of economic subordination rather than coming from ideological or historical factors. So, rather then be forced to clean the toilets of one’s entire
village and receive compensation through non-wage channels, as with less deluded form of this caste-patriarchal admixture, the individual is compelled by capitalism to seek work. However, within this context of economic compulsion, extra-economic and personal subordination can still affect the kinds and degrees of exploitation that occur. Even though free, for low caste workers the objective form of the admixture remains and they are only able to find wage labor as, e.g., a toilet cleaner. Marx writes that “formally speaking” this arrangement is voluntary. But, what has happened is that the relationship of domination and subordination has become part of a transitional form where the exterior formalities of the caste relation fall away, and only their objective economic character remains, yet still on a caste-structured basis. These objective forms of subordination are what I have termed patriarchal admixtures. They are transformed through their articulation to capitalism, but their objective economic character remains.

Throughout this dissertation I have pointed to instances where domination and subordination occur, and attempt to explain how and way these “voluntary” forms of subordination are materially reproduced through their articulation to capitalism. Further, Marx was able to observe exactly this possibility, as a way in which capitalism could reproduce and secure itself:

“I am not speaking here of forms transitional between the formal subsumption of labour under capital and its real subsumption under capital, and thereby of forms leading to the specifically capitalist mode of production; but of forms in which the capital-relation does not yet exist formally, i.e, under which labour is already exploited by capital before the latter has developed into the form of productive capital and labour itself has taken on the form of wage labour. Such forms are to be found in social formations which precede the bourgeois mode of production; on the other hand they constantly reproduce themselves within the latter and are in part reproduced by the latter itself.”

In this last section by Marx, we might infer from his statement that he thinks these social forms are constantly reproduced on a material level even when capitalism has been well established. There is little question that Marx though these forms would eventually wither away, but here in his thought we can see his recognition of the reproduction of patriarchal admixtures
even in relations that have undergone a large degree of real subsumption. To come back to our example of the toilet cleaner, his work has taken on the form of wage labor. His previous form of domination and subordination, caste, has become articulated to capitalism, in that the person works for a wage and is compelled to work by the property conditions of capital, but the dependence of this worker on this form of niche work is what the transitional form represents. What is the most interesting part of what Marx saying here, is that these patriarchal forms become part of the very process of capitalism reproducing itself. With the toilet cleaner, the low value of their labor, which comes from the social distinctions of their caste, makes it economically viable to continue employing them in a middle class home. It would be possible to buy products that kept the toilet clean or hire an employee that was educated and open minded enough to clean the toilet, but the economic incentives of capitalism remain weighted on keeping this arrangement. In another passage of this piece by Marx, he writes that the low wage given to unskilled workers actually makes for an economic disincentive to modernize the technology.

In chapter fifteen of Capital, Marx writes that the cost of maintaining workers of the urban poor, such as a toilet cleaner, were “below all calculation” while the cost of importing technology was a known cost. It was this logic of profit making that actually serves to perpetuate underdevelopment, but also, it is in this way that patriarchal admixtures become part of the reproduction of capitalism itself and escape real subsumption. Only the crudest observers would assert that the practice of employing informal working in the home among middle class families in Delhi was exclusively a “cultural” issue. Instead, by examining the channels through with economic behavior and rationalization are based on patriarchal admixtures, we are able to see the bases for their material reproduction. By attending to details, in my second chapter I show how the toilet cleaner has a slightly different form of patriarchal admixture at work than the driver or
maid. Maids for instance tend to be of different castes and are largely differentiated in their division of labor by age, gender, and education, while toilet cleaners were exclusively of one caste, not differentiated by gender, age or education, and undertook only one task in the household. The maid was also part of subtler caste dynamics that are deeply interwoven into the family division of labor, as illustrated in chapter two, but were not restricted in their employment strictly through caste identification. My goal for this dissertation has been to show social scientists how productive this line of reasoning is when trying to understand the transitional form of a specific place. Rather than discussed issues relating to the “caste mode of production,” or some such infinitely abstract picture of what happened in the past, if we look simply at the patriarchal admixtures that we can currently observe we can avoid falling victim to unprovable claims and generalizations of Indian culture.

In showing the articulation of patriarchal admixtures to neoliberal capitalism, I have focused on areas of economic activity that are rarely formal. I have shown the economy of childhood favoritism, marriage, networks, and domestic laborers, or in short, the economic aspects of kinship within the petty-bourgeois Indian family. Naturally, no one expects that most of these aspects of intimate family life will be entirely subsumed. Indeed, it is almost unimaginable to believe that the Indian family as an economic unit will be subsumed by capitalist relations in the next century. However, what I have shown is not simply that these forms of economic interdependences and relations of domination and subordination have endured, but rather, that these patriarchal admixtures have increased in importance within the context of neoliberal developments. To give an example from the US, the neoliberal rollback of public services, as when Clinton dismantled welfare, forced Americans to rely on their kinship systems more often for material support. In the US, obligations like caring for the elderly or sick,
once a concern of the state, have now shifted further into the informal economy of kinship. Rather than witnessing the withering away of the family, even in a core economy like the US, the patriarchal admixtures of kinship have become more deeply integrated into the reproduction of capitalism under neoliberalism. This has occurred even as still other “traditional” characteristics of the family have simultaneously become weaker under this pressure. In India, the movement has been significantly different than in the US, and the economic structures of kinship are dissimilar. But that fact that neoliberalism does not engender real subsumption by restructuring the economy on the basis of increasingly developed manufacturing, and instead calls into being larger and larger service sectors, tends to increase the reliance on patriarchal admixtures for capitalism’s reproduction. In this, neoliberalism is consistent in both India and the US.

As an observer of neoliberal shifts, I argue that we should no longer employ the misleading concept of “transitional forms,” but rather think in terms of “combined forms.” As previously described in in some detail, transitional forms were understood by Marx to be a time-bound period when capitalism was transforming an economy through primitive accumulation to formal and real subsumption. In a transitional form, a local economy is altered to the needs of capitalism without undergoing the technological innovations necessary for full capitalist accumulation, and thereby contributing to capitalism globally without having pervasive capitalist relations of production locally. Marx called this a transitional form because he assumed that capitalism would eventually “eliminate all patriarchal, political and even religious admixtures.”

On the world stage, we find that this sort of ideal-type capitalism –based on the ever increasing sophistication of the exploitation of labor primarily through manufacturing – has been receding. Instead, the era of financialization has made financial and positional rents a major feature of the neoliberal economy. This movement toward rentier capitalism, and away from manufacturing,
provides some base-level explanation of why real subsumption has not been more successful in India. Financialization in fact represents a degradation of capitalist development and a powerful argument against understanding transitional forms as necessarily moving towards greater real subsumption and the withering away of the family.

Instead, if we call the articulation of these patriarchal admixtures, such as those of kinship to international capitalism, “combined forms,” we can avoid an unconscious assumption that these forms will follow a clear directionality throughout time. This term is taken from Leon Trotsky’s “combined and uneven development” (1931). However, as indicated, Trotsky’s own term also possesses a directionality with the word “development.” The notion of combined and uneven development does not allow for the possibility that capitalism might decay, even as Trotsky ultimately maintained, and only indicates that the development towards capitalism may be uneven – but unevenly advancing. With these two observations on Marx and Trotsky’s terms, I propose that we expel explicit directionality in our terminology. Marx’s transitional forms are often understood as transitioning through uneven and combined development. If we identify the characteristics of intermediate or insular subsystems and expel the presumption of directionality, we are left with combined forms. By combined forms I mean the ever shifting articulation of local admixtures to the needs of international capitalism. In order to argue for this version of articulation theory, I will need to outline the history of the articulation debate below. I draw on aspects of theory and categorization from several authors, but the theory of patriarchal admixtures and of their combined forms, is my own synthesis.

Articulation Theory
Articulation theory itself requires drawing on a number of conceptual categorizations to understand how different aspects of social life interact with each other. A basic form for the use of cultural anthropology was provided by Raymond Williams, before the terminology of “articulating” these structures came into focus (1958). Williams framed the old base-superstructure dichotomy in terms of a structural articulation of cultural attitudes to the system of production. His division looks like this:

```
Superstructure (law, culture, religion, kinship, etc.)
  ↓
Base       (technology, natural resources, class relations)
```

For Williams, the superstructure only very lightly touched upon the base. Instead, and in accordance with materialism, the base is primarily responsible for the development of society and for altering the superstructure to its own needs. Indeed, Engels had already expostulated the reciprocal effects of the superstructure on the base (1884).

Instead, the “theory of articulation” in its more developed form, has had several iterations in social theory as the concept of an “articulated” Marxism has been imagined in more complex ways. Articulation most generally means interrelationships between social structures. The idea was first developed during the 1960s, a time period when there was a debate over the differences between Marx’s early writings, particularly those on alienation, and his later work, particularly the structural certainty of the first book of Capital. The greatest proponent of this shift in focus to Marx’s most structural ideas of Capital was Louis Althusser (1965). Althusser focuses on abstracting Marx’s later writings even further to manipulate the structural concepts present in Marx’s “mode of production” in order to devise the first comprehensive social theory of articulation. Althusser argues that a mode of production is not a solid totality, but rather a set of articulated structures within a society. Most famously Althusser argues for articulated ideological structures, or “ideological apparatus,” such as education, bureaucracy, voting, and so forth, that
compliment production. However, this compliment happens through the “relations of production,” not directly between ideology and the forces of production. Althusser’s formulation looks like this, again drawing on Marx’s 1859 *Preface* and then-orthodox interpretations of it:

Ideological Structures (religion, civics, law)

Relations of Production (property ownership, division of labor, class)

For Althusser, these structures are articulated to each other, along with having internal articulations, such as those of ideological apparatuses. For Althusser, the area of “culture”, or ideological structures, influences the relations of production level, where class struggle takes place. For Althusser, the possibility of influencing the relations of production is where human beings have some historical agency to direct their forces of production and historical trajectory. Ultimately, Althusser understands articulation as occurring between social structures internal to societies that have already undergone real subsumption. For example, Althusser might argue that what a social group is taught in school about history (education as one of many ideological apparatuses) is articulated to the willingness of that group to unionize (workers’ solidarity as one aspect of the relations of production) which is articulated to the advancement of technologies (one aspect of the forces of production) that makes factory work safer for workers. Nicos Poulantzas, following Althusser, made a similar point about the interactions of economic forces and the state, with the contesting classes represented on both levels (1968).

What is interesting about Althusser’s idea of articulation is that he makes room for unevenness within a mode of production. Althusser’s theory allows for theorists to see how aspects of ideological structure actually influence the base through their political effect on
political struggle the relations of production. My analysis takes the theory of the relations of production, the structural position of class where labor and ownership are struggled over, conceptually as the location where patriarchal admixtures are articulated, rather than necessarily entirely subsumed and subordinate to capitalist relations of production. In my argument, the relations of production are where ideological inequalities are reproduced materially through a combined form of patriarchal admixtures that are conjoined with class. Another major difference between my theory and Althusser’s is that my theory takes into account the different forms of peripheral articulations and looks at how combined forms interact with each other without reifying Marx’s assumed directionality.

Toward a more space-oriented approach, Samir Amin contributed an entirely different way to conceptualize articulated structures through his contributions to development theory (1971). The theoretical framework of development theory rests on a spatial-structural understanding of imperialism and the distinction between core and periphery economies. Amin argues that as capitalism touched down on different shores through imperialist conquest, peripheral economies were incorporated into the world economy in a way that lead them to develop different niche economies designed as tributaries to world capitalism and core countries. Amin argues that these peripheral economies had different modes of production, such as feudalism, tribalism, etc. which became articulated to capitalism. Amin understands articulation as between modes of production, such as between British capitalism or imperialism and Indian feudalism or the caste mode of production. For Amin, the result of such a conjunction is the unfavorable incorporation of the Indian economy as an international producer of luxury goods such as tea and spices. Amin argues that this deformation of the peripheral economy inhibits the possibility of industrialization or self-sufficiently, and creates conditions where capital flows into
core economies perpetuating underdevelopment. For Amin, articulation would look like this for India.

Pre-capitalist mode → Imperialist Conquest → Peripheral-Articulated Economy
(slavery, caste, etc.) (primitive accumulation) (specialized for unequal export)

Periphery-core articulation:
Peripheral Economy (exporting iron)
Peripheral economy (exporting cotton) → Industrial Core Economy (manufacturing) ← Peripheral economy (exporting labor)
Peripheral Economy (exporting luxury goods, like tea)

To extend his theory to the issue of subsumption, Amin might argue that India will never become industrialized and undergo real subsumption because the entire economy has, from the beginning, been incorporated into capitalism through articulation in a way that does not allow for its internal development. For Amin, much hinges on a form of national liberation in which an anti-imperialist government transforms society and makes possible authentic capitalist development, shorn of pre-capitalist articulations. While these ideas are interesting, they have largely fallen out of favor as some peripheral economies have managed to develop, while many national liberation governments have failed to expunge “backward” types of exploitation. Alternatively, the theory of patriarchal admixtures applies equally to core and peripheral
economies, and allows for the analysis that core economies sometimes move “backwards,” as in the case with neoliberal financial rents.

Nevertheless, I do agree with Amin that in the articulation to capitalism different societies do not undergo a uniform process. If we were to dissolve Amin’s core-periphery distinction, we can see how capitalism has always developed unevenly, even in Early Modern European history. The needs of the global capitalist economy at the time of contact, even in places like Germany, incorporated and developed those economies in a distinct way based on international accumulation at the time (Frank 1979). It is erroneous to say that peripheral economies, such as India, underwent a completely different form of articulation than Germany. In both cases, capitalism entered the local economies through exchange, and each location shifted their economic basis to produce exportable commodities that they could trade with the British. However, Amin’s point is well taken that the pre-capitalist mode in India was significantly different from the European feudal mode that both Britain and Germany had before capitalism. Amin’s theory of articulation is useful in two ways. First, it correctly points to the historical origin of why different economies have been articulated in different ways to capitalism. Second, it allows us to see how relationships of domination and subordination that exist on an international level, such as that of colonialism, affect the relationships of domination and subordination on the local level. In Amin’s theory, the reason caste has not died out in India and India has not developed on the industrial path of Europe, is because patriarchal admixtures of caste were incorporated into both the system of production and ideological system of racial and national distinction that perpetuates productive, or structural, inequalities between the colonized and the colonizer. Unfortunately, more factors than colonization alone are responsible for their continuance.
What I find most valuable in Amin’s theory of articulation is how it opens up the idea of space-specific structural factors in capitalism. Amin argues that capitalism in one place is not necessarily similar to capitalism in another place, due to geographical and political differences that shape local forms of capitalism. Amin’s argument rearranges the trajectory of development for peripheral countries. Amin argues that colonized places will not be able to follow the industrialization paths of core countries, the UK, US, Japan, Germany, etc. because from first contact their economies were deformed in their articulation. This unsettles the trajectory of development, but it leaves our conceptualization of core economies untouched, except for pointing out that they are run on the continuing unequal exchange with peripheral countries. Amin’s conceptual split of core and periphery renders his analytical system less sophisticated than a theory that can see non-capitalist elements of structure in even the most advanced economies, as with patriarchal admixtures. Amin might well agree to the elimination of directionality in the concept of combined forms toward the future, but he is too rigid in placing patriarchal admixtures squarely into a uniform pre-capitalist mode of production. Indeed, as Althusser showed, the mode of production is itself unevenly articulated internally, and may well included diverse patriarchal admixtures in the relations of production. Although Amin might agree to limiting our understanding of directionality toward an entirely industrialized capitalist future, we require Claude Meillassoux’s research on slavery and articulation theory to see how patriarchal admixtures do not come from an entirely consistent pre-capitalist mode of production from the past.

Meillassoux proposed a systematic theory of articulation in his work *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (1986). Meillassoux showed how slavery had many subtle economic distinctions in Sub-Saharan Africa before colonization, and how the slavery mode of
production became integral to the hold of capitalism in Africa after colonization. Meillassoux shows that slavery is not uniform in either case and that very different political and economic processes were at work in different forms of enslavement. To take an example, he argues that a person enslaved by a family and delegated to clean their house, such as with the domestic form of slavery, has an essentially different economic role, both as a worker and as someone owned, then a person enslaved on a large plantation that is producing for international sale – as was the case in the US pre-emancipation or under colonial organization in colonial Africa. He argues that the domestic form is actually carried out as a kind of kinship relationship, and terms it “patriarchal slavery.” In patriarchal slavery, the enslaved person basically becomes a member of the economic family unit and works toward reproduce the family. This comes with certain political rights as well, such as in an Islamic form of patriarchal slavery where the enslaved woman has the right not to be raped or forced to produce a child out of wedlock. In plantation slavery designed to produce as surplus that will be traded on the international market, the enslaved person typically has no such rights. The forms of domination and subordination are different in these two types of slavery, and Meilassoux shows many more distinctions as well. Meilassoux’s revaluation of historical materialism points out the analytical failing of proposing a consistent pre-capitalist mode of production that is articulated to capitalism as in Amin’s formulation. Since patriarchal slavery is obviously of a different economic character than plantation slavery, how can there be a unified slavery mode of production existing as a coherent structure in articulation to capitalism?

Meilassoux asks us to replace our understanding of the mode of production with two concepts: the mode of production and the mode of reproduction. He argues that the person enslaved under patriarchal slavery is engaged in the part of the economy that is a “mode of
reproduction.” The person under patriarchal slavery is conditioned by patriarchal ideology and the decisions of their *individual* master. While, the enslaved person that works in the field to produce internationally traded commodities, like the contemporary production of chocolate in Cote d’Ivoire, or cotton in the pre-emancipation US South, are part of a slavery mode of production. However, when the products of labor are not traded through commodity exchange, the laborer should be understood as contributing to the mode of reproduction. The mode of reproduction also encompasses most kinship relationships, and indicates the other economic aspects of society that do not directly produce for capitalism; but do contribute to capitalism by reproducing the people in the society through the family, as well as through other avenues of human development and socialization. He argues that all the superstructural elements, such as ideology, politics, the law, and so forth, are part of the mode of reproduction. Indeed, Robert Brenner observed in a conversation with me, that it “takes a person to make a person.” In other words, the mode of reproduction cannot be fully subsumed through technological means the way other aspect of the mode of production could undergo full subsumption.

To extend Meillassouox's argument, the enslaved person that works in the house is not terribly distinguishable from the relationship of domination and subordination that are usually between a wife and her husband. In both cases, the patriarch is given individual property rights over their ward’s labor and has the right to depose of the products of that labor that create a surplus not consumed by the family. Meillassoux writes, “So-called ‘patriarchal’ slavery should not – because of its ‘accidental’ character – be identified as a class relation and does not in itself lead to a slave system of production. As I see it, this is not, strictly speaking, slavery, but rather an isolated phenomenon of subservience” (Meillassoux 19). Here we see how he does not observe a separate analytical category for the relations of production. To Meillassoux patriarchal slavery,
along with kinship, ethnicity and law, are all parts of the mode of reproduction. For him, culture is materially reproduced largely by merely continually recreating cultural attitudes through socialization. This reproduction does provide a critical element to the reproduction of capital by maintaining the lives of those that do produce, but he does not envision a separate category for class struggle that would allow for some historical agency.

Meilassoux argues that:

“The fact of procreation cannot, in any society, be considered a ‘natural’ starting point for the elementary social relations of motherhood, and still less of fatherhood. These relationships can be created only through active material exchanges between adults and children. Between slaves, these parental relationships depended on the masters’ goodwill. They existed only slightly, and precariously, in the context of the functioning of the institutions which, as far as the slavers were concerned, replaced kinship: capture or sale” (Meilassoux 330).

Here we see Meilassoux arguing that the sphere of culture, such as what attributes and powers comprise a culturally specific idea of motherhood, is economically reproduced in the same way patriarchal slavery has a material basis of reproduction. In both cases, marriage and patriarchal slavery, the individualistic relations of domination and subordination, or patriarchal admixtures, have a material basis of reproduction within the home economy through kinship structures, and based on the ideological attitudes, or “goodwill” of the dominate party.

With respect to class, Meilassoux writes that, “In expressing the slave relation as individual, the law fixes the limits within which the authority of the master over the slave can be exercised; thus the individual relation masks and neutralizes the class relation. The individual relation merely reflects a personalized and individualized conception of authority, based on patriarchal ideology” (Meilassoux 10). This is Meilassou’s justification for releasing patriarchal admixtures in the mode of reproduction from the confines of antagonisms that generate a class. These individualistic patriarchal admixtures actually neutralize the formation of class. Such a conception allows him to characterize exploitation within a society based on the bodily
ownership of a laborer, without characterizing slavery as a fundamental axis of class division.

As most would agree, Meillassoux’s argument may be extended to argue that women are not a class unto themselves because of the *individualistic* nature of their oppression. In his study, Meillassoux shows how kinship and patriarchal slavery can only be understood as occupying the same structural level. In the context of pre-colonial Africa, the kinship system a captured person is taken from, is replaced by a similar system as they are incorporated into the hierarchal kinship system of their master’s family reproduction. Just as the child is placed in an individually dictated position of subordination to her parents, so too the enslaved person is placed under a similar, if not identical, system of individual domination and subordination when they are bought by a family. In my study, and particularly in the chapter on the family division of labor that proves how servants are economically and socially adopted into their middle class employers’ kinship system, is closely tied to this observation about the relationship between slavery and kinship in Meillassoux’s study on African patriarchal admixtures.

Meillassoux stresses the *patriarchal* nature of this form of slavery in his choice of terms for such a system of domination and subordination. He writes that patriarchal slavery is a form of isolated patriarchal domination, meaning that it does not contribute to a slave mode of production. Patriarchal slavery is confined to individual relations of domination and subordination, where one master may control the fate of one enslaved person. In this context the enslaved person does not become part of a class with other enslaved people as the foundation of surplus production, but instead part of the cultural fabric, or mode of reproduction, that supports the entire system of production. His comparison of slavery with the material relationship of domination that comprise parenthood, reveals the most unsettling and penetrating of his insights – *that kinship is a patriarchal form of domination that supports the deepest levels of production*.
by reproducing the ideological structures of the culture and reproducing individuals as the next generation of economic actors. This conceptual configuration will, later in this analysis, be used to illustrate how the Delhi middle class contributes educated professionals to world capitalism by concentrating informal labor in the kinship system to produce internationally competitive professionals.

But first, before moving on, let us more fully explore Meilassoux’s theory of articulation. He writes that what governs the master-slave dialect in patriarchal slavery is “a personalized and individualized conception of authority, based on patriarchal ideology,” rather than a fundamental aspect of Althusser’s relations of production.

Meilassoux’s modal:

Mode of Reproduction
(kinship, patriarchal slavery, and gender as part of master-slave individual dialectics)

Mode of Production
(export oriented, class, and technology, as part of a class-wide dialectic)

Meilassoux offers the theory of patriarchal admixtures excellent evidence for a broader theoretical applicable to societies where slavery is not a major feature of the economy. The first major insight of Meilassoux is to break “slavery” into multiple distinguishable forms that combine different kinds of admixtures. Through this, he can see how slavery is also part of the non-slave family unit, and how slavery itself is full of different forms of domination and subordination, some of which support, but do not directly contribute, to the primary mode of production. Slavery is an aspect of even kinship relationships that are not directly juxtaposed with direct slavery, because kinship can bestow the legal and customary right of one individual to exploit those other members of the family which are producing for family reproduction, along with giving them the political power to decide on the allocation of domestic surplus. In my study,
I show how the servant-homeowner patriarchal admixture is strikingly similar to both patriarchal slavery and kinship. Meilassoux labels kinship a form of patriarchal domination even though it is based not only on gender, but on age and other distinctions of birth. To Meilassuox, and as I argue later in this conclusion, the idea of “patriarchal” domination encompass aspects of traditional authority that extend well beyond gender, through the whole patriarchal reproductive household. I have chosen Marx’s phraseology, “patriarchal admixtures” to mean diverse forms of non-capitalist admixtures that include, but are not limited to, gender. Like Meilassoux, I argue that traditional authority, be it based on age, gender, caste, or capture, is a patriarchal construct.

Another major insight of Meilassoux is to identify some forms of slavery as between individuals based on personal attributes and others between a slave class and a slave-owner class. In the individual form of domination, the conditions of work and reproduction for the enslaved person is subject to the “goodwill” of the patriarchal master. On the other hand, in plantation slavery, the conditions of enslavement depend on the struggle of the entire slave class with the entire slave-owner class. For instance, slave rebellions, like those that eventually overthrew the Haitian slave-owners, are part of a general class movement and those rebelling people were united based on class solidarity. While, in an instance of patriarchal slavery, the enslaved person might be given a similar lifestyle to the family members or be locked in the basement without food, based on the discretion of the individual master. This second form of slavery is not based on a unified slave class, but the particular, or “accidental,” circumstance of that individual enslaved person. If we extended Meilassoux’s insights, the housewife that is subject to exploitation by her husband and expected to reproduce the family through her sexuality, is under a kind of patriarchal slavery. In contrast, the Korean comfort women who were kidnapped and sexually exploited by the Japanese military were part of the war-time, slavery-oriented, economy.
of Japanese imperialism. Comfort women share a great deal with respect to their working conditions, as they lived and worked together in military brothels, and their subjection was based on their largely shared race, gender and economic origins (Min 2003). The situation with comfort women is undeniably patriarchal, but it is not a situation of patriarchal slavery. Instead they more closely resemble plantation workers in their class unity because of their place in the imperialist economy of Japan. Patriarchal admixtures are not confined to the home and family, but they are always a form of individual domination. They include domination of a man over his wife, a mother over her daughter, or an individual master over an individual slave, rather than class-wide systems of exploitation. I have used the example of the comfort women because they most closely resemble what patriarchy would look like as a class-wide issue. But even they could not be properly understood as a class, although we have seen in the past decades that comfort women have indeed had some effect on politics through the expression of historical agency through one form of political solidarity against both the Korean and Japanese governments in their demands for reparations and public apologies.

The brilliance of Meillassoux is his careful documentation of different forms of slavery in conjunction with his conclusion that slavery is not a single form of exploitation and does not always operate on the same level of the economy. I argue that as Meillassoux has shown how these differences are at work in slavery, they are also at work in gender, caste, and Punjabi kinship systems. Rather than focus on the past, toward some unknown point in time when India was supposedly “tribal” and patriarchy was the most powerful relationship of domination and subordination in the economy, or when there was a caste mode of production that was somehow distinct from Indian feudalism, Meillassoux is persuasive in asking us to relinquish the urge to
look for uniform modes of production that may or may not influence the individual relations of domination and subordination or explain the pre-capitalist origin of patriarchal admixtures.

If we apply Meillassoux's insights to the modern Indian family, the nuances of domination and subordination become more apparent. As my study shows, the Punjabi middle class family is a patchwork of patriarchal admixtures. The family has elements of caste, religious ideology, slavery, serfdom, gender, and age. My study shows how even fair skin, a physical attribute, can become a source of domination and subordination between siblings. These kinship admixtures are unquestionably diverse, and become important or unimportant to material reproduction, based on individual attributes and relationships. Again, I have termed these diverse kinship admixtures “patriarchal admixtures” because, like Meilassoux, I believe systems of kinship are more accurately described as patriarchal, rather than as religious or political, or another indicative form.

My research shows that the differentiation between patriarchal slavery and slavery for production drawn on by Meilassoux can be equally applied to caste. Caste is closer to the system of production on a village level, where tasks like tending cows or sweeping the streets are based on caste distinctions and create solidarity between caste differentiations, as well as surplus extraction. By contrast, with the middle class Delhi families I studied, the caste distinctions between labor tasks were closely incorporated into the family division of labor. The individual members of castes were hired to perform reproduction tasks for the family, like cleaning or cooking, and compensated based on their individual relationships. Caste within the urban family has little resemblance to the way caste operates in villages. Additionally, even within the urban middle class family the operations of caste are diverse. On one side, caste distinctions are still important for arranging marriages in Delhi middle class families; in another way, caste is still
important in terms of which labor tasks and forms of compensation are given to different
servants; while caste is also still important to these middle class families within the context of the
temple or lifecycle rituals. It appears that caste too is diversely incorporated into the economy on
distinct levels and contributes to capitalism in different ways. With Meillassoux, we can
understand how it is unnecessary to posit a caste mode of production in order to see how caste
works with gender, kinship, and religion to reproduce material inequality and extra-economic
relations of domination and subordination.

A complimentary branch of social theory that can give Meillassoux's "patriarchal" society
greater pertinence comes from the Marxist-Feminist Patricia Hill Collins' theory of
intersectionality, primarily with *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981). In
intersectionality each identity feature of an individual that is relevant to the structural system of
oppression, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, disability, illness, age, and so
forth, overlaps, perpetuates and accentuates the others. To continue the example of Korean
comfort women from earlier, Pyong Gap Min's "Korean ‘Comfort Women’ The Intersection of
Colonial Power, Gender, and Class. Gender and Society" (2003) applies intersectionality to the
historical example of comfort women, and concludes that being lower class, rural, female, and
Korean, created the vulnerability of these women, which was then exploited by imperial Japan.
My argument is that incorporating the idea of patriarchal admixtures and combined forms would
strengthen the theory of intersectionality, by allowing for an analysis that the comfort women
underwent a dramatic shift in their incorporation to capitalism when they were enslaved. When
the women were peasants their exploitive relationship to Japan was one primarily based on
taxation; they were first incorporated into a family economy, a village economy, and the colonial
Korean economy, before profits from their labor reached the Japanese imperialists. When the
women were enslaved, the Japanese imperial army was able to use their labor to provide a reward, in lieu of greater wages or working conditions, to their soldiers. When they worked as comfort women, their labor was directly benefiting Japanese imperialists by subsidizing wages and quelling decent and desertion in the Japanese military. If we think of labor as a stream, a rural Korean peasant woman has her stream flow through her father or husband's family channel, and then through the villages' channel where elders, priests, or specific families might be important exploiters, and then through the channels of colonial government bureaucrats, all the way up to the Japanese imperialists. In her situation as a peasant the individual decisions of her father or husband might be the greatest factor if she is confined, abused or rewarded for her labor. Her exploitation is primarily carried out within individual relationships of domination and subordination. A peasant woman might have a sadistic patriarch or one that believes women are superior to men, or any degree in between, based on his individual personality and the cultural norms of that specific village and family. On the other hand, when she is taken by the Imperial army, her treatment is carried out based on the needs of Japanese capitalism, although in a very specific politically mediated form of unpaid labor. In that case, her labor flows directly into social reproduction of Japanese imperialism through the incorporation of soldiers’ sexual behavior. In that case, the Japanese did not need to preserve her even as a worker, and her labor would have been deleterious to her health. Indeed, many women died or suffered horrific injuries while exploited as comfort women. In the case of Korean comfort women, the theory of intersectionality is absolutely correct in showing why these particular women were seen as so expendable.

However, intersectionality does not pick up on how capitalism is able to draw on these patriarchal admixtures on an ad hoc basis. The patriarchal admixtures pointed out by Min, social
class, nationality, and gender, where always at work during the colonization of Korea by Japan, dating back to 1910. It was not until 1932 that the comfort women system started and not until the 1940s when it was based primarily on the kidnapping and enslavement of Korean women. Between 1910 and 1940, the political and economic needs of Japanese imperialism changed, not only suffering under the strain of war, but also as the war effort enhanced industrialization and the powers of the state. As their needs changed, the Japanese state and the capitalists profiting off of imperialism and the war economy utilized the patriarchal admixture these women already suffered under, and transformed them. Instead of transforming these women into soldiers or factory workers, thereby bringing them closer to a worker-capitalist dialectic, these women were articulated into the core economy through the Frankensteinian patriarchal admixture of sex slavery in a combined form. Just as in the example used earlier from Barbara Fields' work, where settler colonialism in the US became less capitalist and more deformed by the closer association between race and slavery, likewise the comfort women became enslaved due to a preexisting identity-based form of marginalization that served the political and economic needs of capitalism in that specific area and time. In both cases, the transition is not a transition to the capitalist-worker dialectic, but rather a form of primitive accumulation that takes profits in a condition of unfreedom and underproductivity.

In all cases, the closer connection to core capitalism changes the class nature of the exploitation. As Meillassoux argues, domestic slavery in Africa is different in its class nature compared to export-based slavery in the US or Africa where the enslaved people form a class, so too, are the comfort women more of a class than peasant women exploited in their homes and on their family plots. This example of Korean comfort women provides an ideal example by which to understand how the theory of patriarchal admixtures and combined forms can add to the
Marxist-Feminist tradition of intersectionality, by enriching the theory with a greater reach by including the "transition" to capitalism within feminist theory as theorized through the concept of combined forms. When we look for which intersections make the greatest impact on lived experience and the nature of class and oppression, intersectional theories should observe the nuanced details of how material exploitation is orchestrated. Combined forms are not only applicable to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but can also help account for the different ways exploitation may occur with reference to the penetration of capitalism in any one region. For instance, approaching a study on race in an underdeveloped part of the US like rural Mississippi without assuming it had completely "transitioned" to capitalism and was instead a combined form might prove fruitful to Marxist-Feminism and the theory of intersectionality.

One way of conceptualizing an intersectional theory that gives a greater primacy to class and the family than intersectionality tends to, is Donald Donham's "productive inequalities." The anthropologist Donald Donham has offered some interesting extensions of Meillassoux’s theory as applied to the family economies in societies that might have been characterized by Marx as “tribal” – meaning that the vast majority of their economy is geared toward domestic consumption of households. In his book, *History, Power, Ideology: Central Issues in Marxism and Anthropology* (1991), Donham outlines the academic debate over the economic system of kinship in societies where kinship is the major organizing force of political differentiation. He writes that historical materialism has left these economies unexamined and unrecognizably Other to the capitalist economy or only recognizable but reified forms like feudalism or slavery. Some anthropologists, like Marshal Sahlins, have argued that the domestic economy on the village level is analytically separate from those aspects of economy that produce to sell surplus and increase wants (1974). While historical materialists like Perry Anderson have argued that in pre-
capitalist economic formations the superstructural elements are intertwined into the base of the economy, whereas in capitalism the economy abstracts itself from social context as an entity unto itself not influenced by superstructural factors (1980). Donham argues that using separate analytical tools for the inter- and intra-family economy and capitalism is a mistake that mystifies and essentializes both capitalism and other economic formations. Instead, he argues for a theory of “productive inequalities.”

Donham argues that relations of domination and subordination in class and in other forms like gender, operate on a continuum. Something like gender is articulated throughout the economy, and not only in the home or the mode of reproduction. However, how it is enacted in the factory, compared to in the family, might well have a greater impact on production because, for Donham, class has a weightier impact than other forms of difference. He writes,

“If this way of proceeding be accepted, it will immediately be clear that an influential version of Marxism – that class is “economic,” whereas ethnicity reflects “cultural” factors, that class resides in the base for capitalism whereas gender and race are the result of superstructural factors – is wrong. All of these inequalities occupy the same analytical level. All are constituted in superstructures, sets of meanings and practices that tend to reproduce productive inequalities. It may be that all are actually required in order to reproduce capitalism, even if one – class – provides the dominant inequality, the low note that anchors the chord” (Donham 204).

For Donham, class is the low note, but is only recognizable, and works as music (or as part of the social totality), because the note is in harmony with the rest of the chord – the patriarchal admixtures that govern non-class distinction. Meillassoux rendered the superstructural elements as distinct when he argued for the mode of reproduction. However, with Donham, we see the reincorporation of the mode of production with the mode of reproduction. Or in contrast with Althusser, Donham reincorporates the ideological system with the relations of production, and ultimately with the mode of production.
The arrows in this chart offer points where relations of domination and subordination are articulated into the overall mode of production on every level. Although distinctions of class are usually more important in the deepest levels of inequality in society, there are a number of “productive inequalities,” such as gender and kinship, that support the entire system including production. Donham argues that these productive inequalities may be fundamental in capitalism’s reproduction of itself.

From the first departure of Althusser, who privileged structuralism and Marx’s later work, Donham has managed to reincorporate issues of consciousness and alienation back into a theory of structured articulation. For Donham, productive inequalities are simultaneously about economic and social alienation. He argues that all forms of productive inequalities, class, gender and race included, produce a conscious effect and are experienced as alienation. In line with intersectionality's focus on identity, Donham sees how the feeling of alienation experienced in the realm of ideology, such as instances of discriminatory micro aggressions, is related to the productive inequalities of racism, gender, caste and so forth, which extend all the way down. To Donham there is nothing separate or distinct about class domination, besides that it happens to be the dominant mode of inequality in our society. However, he can conceptualize similar issues with race as part of the articulation to capitalism in some locations. Race is integral to the articulation of capitalism in the Americas, while caste is a significantly more descriptive admixture in the Indian context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ideology: micro aggression carried out on an interpersonal basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Police profiling and brutality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>The profits capitalists make through racial wage differentiation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through Donham’s theory of articulation, we can see how the feelings of interpersonal relations of domination and subordination may be related to the economic incentive of maintaining those productive inequalities in capitalism. Productive inequalities are articulated into the fabric of capitalism, but are only very loosely based on previous modes of production. Like with Amin, Meillassoux and Donham argue that these previous forms are altered, sometimes unrecognizably, to fit the needs of world capitalism. For instance, racial productive inequality in the US persists because it has been reproduced within the fabric of capitalist exploitation since the slavery period, not because it resembles the master-slave relationships of when slavery was the primary mode of exploitation. In the antebellum South, the enslaved person was primarily defined by her class as a slave, not by her race, however closely this was associated in practice at the time. In that context, by Donham’s reasoning, the enslaved person’s class was most definitive of her alienation, not her race. In the less uneven economy of the US today, the population is also primarily distinguished by their class position, but they still may suffer from the historical legacy of slavery in the ideological, political and economic spheres. While the key to understanding the antebellum South and its economic viability lies in the surplus produced by slaves during that period, the system-level reproduction of the subsequent US society rested on different class relations of surplus extraction, even while the form of that reproduction was altered by admixtures of racial hierarchies, among others.

In application, the theory of productive inequality can also see the structured interconnections between the way caste operates on all levels of the articulated structure of the Indian family.
Ideological: interpersonal remarks and hostilities; religious conceptions of cleanliness

Political: negotiation of the rights of servants; the powers of employers to confine or physically coerce them

Production: negotiating salaries on caste distinctions (the maid vs. the toilet cleaner); how the exploitation of low wage labor on a caste basis leads to underdevelopment by creating an economic disincentive to import technology and industrialize

The distinction between Donham’s productive inequalities and patriarchal admixtures is only slight, but in the articulation theory of patriarchal admixtures, this distinction is important. Unlike in Donham’s productive inequalities, I argue that patriarchal admixtures operate through the relations of production to effect both the ideological structures and the base. These patriarchal admixtures are properly understood as operating as political power structures, within the relations of production. It is only when prejudice is combined with power does it become political, as in the cases of racism, sexism and casteism. If a person is not in an economically strong position through their class already, they cannot use patriarchal admixtures to advance their individualistic economic aims. It is the widespread use of the powers of domination in patriarchal admixtures for economic purposes in the market that affects the base. Class relations indeed dominate, but not in terms of a direct axis of conflict between workers and capitalists. Instead, it is in the relations of production, which are really the political interactions of all classes including those Marx puts together in the lumpenproletariat, where the rules of labor and ownership are decided and our historical agency dwells.

In addition to restricting patriarchal admixtures to the relations of production, the term patriarchal admixtures, does two other kinds of conceptual work that are lacking in the concept of productive inequalities. First, while patriarchal admixtures are often made productive through their appropriation by capital, Donham’s insistence that they must be “productive,” overlooks some of the arguments of subsumption that show how some patriarchal admixture, such as those that form the material basis of the lumpenproletariat, may be entirely left to non-capitalist
sectors of the informal economy. For instance, there is no pressure to technologically develop the labor of prostitutes or popes, or other members of the lumpenproletariat, as explored in greater detail in the following section. By using the term “productive inequalities,” Donham’s analysis includes an implicit assumption that patriarchal admixtures must always be productive to capitalism. The way in which Marx uses the term patriarchal admixtures indicates that he did not think they were productive to capitalism – even if they could be transformed into Frankensteinian articulations that would ultimately contribute to primitive accumulation and the formal subsumption of labor. For Marx, it would be hugely more productive if these “productive inequalities” underwent real subsumption, such as seen in his discussion of the “latent surplus population” (1867). Second, the word “inequality” is too oriented toward the market economy and actually serves to obscure unequal political power. Marx calls these inequalities, “domination and subordination,” to indicate that there is more than just a market force at work, and include a political component. Indeed, as my previous chapters have shown, these forms of difference are often enforced through extra-economic coercion.

In my study, I have illustrated how extra-economic cohesion is fundamental in maintaining and enforcing these relationships for Delhi middle class people. Throughout my chapters, husbands often beat their wives, mothers beat their children, homeowners beat their servants, and people well connected to the government through kinship networks beat up pretty much anyone they want. The lack of physical force usually depends on the “goodwill” of the dominant party, as is typical of individualistic patriarchal admixtures. By calling these relationships “inequality,” we loose Marx’s designation of the force involved in maintaining these relationships. Although I have shown these patriarchal admixtures are materially reproduced, they are also politically reproduced on an individual basis. Therefore, the term
productive inequalities, masks the political force and struggle of their reproduction. In my own term, the conceptual work of “admixtures,” is to distinguish these relations from capitalist uniform class relations. In Marx’s own system of thought, he discusses capitalism in great detail, while what is not capitalist, he lumps together as the “lumpenprolitaritat,” “pre-capitalist relations,” and “admixtures.” In all cases, the split is between capitalist relations and a mass of Others. I have preserved Marx’s own analytical split by calling the relations of domination and subordination that are location specific “patriarchal admixtures.” In order to more fully appreciate this form of analytical distinction, we must turn to Marx’s ideas on informal labor and the lumpenprolatariat. As we will see, for Marx, the servant, housewife, child and members of the urban poor, are all discussed as part of patriarchal admixtures throughout the dissertation, should be understood as lumpenproletarians.

**Informal Economy**

The method of this study has been to seek patriarchal admixtures in informal economic exchange first, and then to follow these trails to the role of the patriarchal admixtures in supporting the reproduction of capitalism and responding to neoliberal economic shifts. The reason this study is situated in the informal economy and not in the formal workings of capitalism, is that patriarchal admixtures are strongest in the informal economy. Marx argues that individuals within the capitalist economy that are not part of the worker-capitalist dialectic are instead part of the lumpenproletariat that parasitically feeds off the surplus of capitalism. For Marx, the lumpenproletariat include everyone not directly involved in capitalist production. This category is not a class, but rather a designation that an individual or social group lives off of the surplus of capitalism without contributing to its reproduction. For Marx, the lumpenproletariat is
only defined in contrast to the proletariat, and in polemical language he writes “From whore to pope, there is a mass of such rabble. But the honest and 'working' lumpenproletariat belongs here as well; e.g. the great mob of porters etc. who render service in seaport cities etc” (Marx1939). The reason that the whore and pope are cast together, even humorously, in their economic role is because both are articulated to the capitalist economy through extra-economic characteristics. Further, Marx argues that the lumpenproletariat always have individualistic political aims rather than pulling together with any one class. Studying the lumpenproletariat and their role in the informal economy almost inevitably reveals what is culturally particular, because it is essentially the absence of property rights and capital. Or, rather, it is distinguished by those elements of power in society that are not dependent on the conflict and cooperation between workers and capitalists that characterizes capitalism. Here Meillassoux’s insight that people enslaved under patriarchal slavery do not unite as a class is applicable. For Marx, the lumpenproletariat do not contain distinct classes because they are not incorporated into production. If we understand these two conclusions together, we can see how servants, housewives and children might all be categorized as both lumpenproletariat and under patriarchal slavery through their means of economic reproduction.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx writes, "In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality." Though the thought of having “no individuality” would most likely alarm sympathizers of capitalism, it is ironically what makes the relations of production in capitalism more humane than extra-economic coercion of patriarchal admixtures. The relations of production in capitalism confer rights to property, not persons—hence the lack of individuality, because all capital is equal. Capitalism obliterates the particularistic characteristics of labor through its socialization, making
the sociological distinctions of the laborer unimportant. By removing the patriarchal admixtures in relations, an ideal form of capitalism would contribute to the emancipation of marginalized groups like women, scheduled castes, ethnic minorities, etc. with respect to their particular forms of oppression. Therefore, it is with those groups where their relations of production have not been subsumed, or the lumpenproletariat, where individual characteristics of both the dominating and subordinated parties are most important. For the pope, his unique identity is the basis of his dominant position in a particular patriarchal admixture with Catholics. While the prostitute is also distinguished by her personal attributes of gender in her subordinated role in a different patriarchal admixture with her pimp. As pointed out earlier, there is no necessary economic incentive to make either the religious labor of the pope, nor the sexual labor the prostitute, more productive by capitalist standards. Therefore, neither has ever undergone real subsumption.

Marx also includes the shipyard porter in the lumpenproletariat as a group that does labor but unproductively. Another way to understand the lumpenproletariat is through Kaveri Gill’s ethnography Of Poverty and Plastic (2010). Gill’s ethnography is on the social group that organizes and disposes of the trash produced by the very people described in my research – the Delhi middle class. To understand the articulated position of trash pickers better is to also understand the economic position of the middle class lumpenproletariat and petty-bourgeois owners in the Delhi economy that use their services. Gill describes a situation where trash pickers are dependent on, and usually indebted to, the vendors that provide an area for sorting and buying the collected trash from the producer. These vendors have a collective so that trash collectors in debt must sell to their particular debtor until that debt is paid off or sold to another vendor. The vendor-trash picker dialect could be understood as one variety of a usury capital type patriarchal admixture. Although it seems apparent to the casual onlooker that these trash
collectors are living at the very lowest rung of society and subsistence, Gill argues that their consumption needs are largely met through their patron-client relationships with debtors. The author goes to great lengths to promote these laborers as entrepreneurs that do not confront “unfair” contracts with vendors. Rather, she argues that caste-based divisions between trash pickers over what types of trash are collected and what areas are appropriate for collection by individual producers, are the “deepest” level of exploitation experienced by these individuals. There is no doubt that caste patriarchal admixtures between trash collectors are important to their economic lives, but by overlooking usury capital as the economic mechanism of their exploitation by their patron vendors, Gill cannot see the deepest levels of exploitation. Although caste is a predictable patriarchal admixture that controls much of informal labor in India, a deeper understanding of exploitation might emerge from Marx’s own discussion of informal labor in India. Marx writes:

“Thus even the formal capital-relation does not take place, still less the specifically capitalist mode of production. And yet the usurer appropriates not only the whole of the surplus value created by the Ryot, i.e. all the surplus produce over and above the means of subsistence necessary for his reproduction, but he also takes away from him part of the latter, so that he merely vegetates in the most miserable manner. The usurer functions as a capitalist in so far as the valorization of his capital occurs directly through the appropriation of alien labour, but in a form which makes the actual producer into his debtor, instead of making him a seller of his labour to the capitalist. This form heightens the exploitation of the producer, drives it to its uttermost limits, without in any way, the introduction of capitalist production — even if at first with the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital — introducing the resulting heightened productivity of labour and the transition to the specifically capitalist mode of production. It is rather a form which makes labour sterile, places it under the most unfavorable economic conditions, and combines together capitalist exploitation without a capitalist mode of production, and the mode of production of independent small-scale property in the instruments of labour without the advantages this mode of production offers for less developed conditions. Here in fact the means of production have ceased to belong to the producer, but they are nominally subsumed to him, and the mode of production remains in the same relations of small independent enterprise, only the relations are in ruin (Marx 1957).

Marx is specifically discussing peasant labor in this passage, not trash picking, but the same analysis can be easily applied to the trash collectors in Gill’s ethnography. The vendors use their money capital, outside of capitalist production, to appropriate the products of the collector’s labor without actually buying her labor-time. Their situations are similar in their relationships of
exploitation – and it would only make sense that these relationships would closely resemble locally specific pre-capitalist systems of political hierarchy, like the caste system. The vendor-trash picker relation and usurer-ryot relation both become articulated to capitalism within the relations of production. Marx himself argues that through that articulation their “relations are in ruin” but are maintained in some form. In the above quotation, Marx is not only describing an Indian situation, but also the general deformation of patriarchal admixtures through their incorporation into formal capitalism without having undergone real subsumption.

My own place specific study, undertaken through similar methods of ethnographic collection as Gill, and in roughly the same period and city, is more capable of showing why informal labor is still so widespread in India through the incorporation of Amin’s articulation theory. To understand Amin’s spatially articulated theory better, and why India continues to use informal and labor intensive methods for public trash disposal rather than mechanizing the process, let us turn to Marx’s views on the subject from Capital:

“The Yankees have invented a stone-breaking machine. The English do not make use of it, because the “wretch” who does this work gets paid for such a small portion of his labor, that machinery would increase the cost of production to the capitalist. In England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus-population is below all calculation. Hence nowhere do we find a more shameful squandering of human labour-power for the most despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery.” (Marx, Capital vol. 1, chap 15)

Naturally this was written when England was still industrializing, but the logic is the same. In situations where labor is almost worthless, importing machinery is not economical. In his quotation he is also indicating that is was possible to pay women of the surplus population even less than men of the same group, likely due to a gender dynamic at work in the lumpenproletariat. Using Marx’s logic, those areas that are further from the capitalist core—thereby increasing the cost of shipping machinery and lowering the cost of labor—would make greater use of this form of incalculably low cost labor. Correspondingly, countries that are more peripheral often have
the largest segment of informal laborers. However, because the cost to maintain an informal laborer is “below all calculation” it is unlikely to be a critical expenditure or benefit to capitalism. Instead of advancing capitalism, it actually appears to delay industrialization.

Ideology/Superstructure
(what people believe)

Relations of Production/Political
(how labor and reward are decided)

Forces of Production/Base
(what economic system supports population and creates trade surplus)

In this dissertation I have shown how the reliance on informal labor delays the mechanization of middle class household work in Delhi. In my second chapter on the family as an economic unit, I show how servants are, in part, often rewarded for their labor through their ability to use the family TV or iPad. Some of the reasons people from surrounding areas choose to come to Delhi and work as a servant for a middle class family are because this usually provides them with some portion of the use of luxury items this family consumes. It costs the family close to nothing to allow servants to watch TV, benefit from the air conditioning, or eat
high quality food that might otherwise be thrown away. Providing access to these commodities is often a major component of the reward for informal labor in the home of a middle class family. Alternatively, the cost of importing a washing machine or dish washer is a known cost. Buying such goods is significantly more expensive in Delhi than paying someone to clean your clothing and dishes by hand everyday. On the other side, the reason many informal workers in Delhi seem to agree to be paid very little to wash clothing or dishes is because they receive other forms of compensation besides their wage, such as clothing, food, access to the iPad or TV, air conditioning and so forth. This system of underdevelopment, which as shown in the second chapter is closely tied to kinship and caste admixtures, gives economic incentives to middle class families to purchase luxury items instead of new products that would reduce the need for servants. This is a small scale situation of underdevelopment that happens within the Indian middle class family home. When my research subject by a new luxury commodity rather than a vacuum (which are virtually non-existent in Delhi), it is a symptom of underdevelopment, not a sign that they are more connected to core capitalism as previous studies of middle class consumerism have implied (Brosius 2013; Donner 2011; Fernandes 2006).

Situating the theory of patriarchal admixtures within the informal economy has enabled this research to clearly show location-specific patriarchal admixtures. However, placing this study within the Delhi middle class rather than with informal laborers like the trash pickers, has allowed for greater insight into how these patriarchal admixtures, like caste, age and gender, are indeed articulated into world capitalism through primitive accumulation concentrated within the mode of reproduction. The Delhi middle class under neoliberalism has access to a great deal of income and the opportunity to use that income to purchase both internationally traded commodities and informal labor. The petty-bourgeois families I studied have also guided their
businesses through the neoliberal period, with differential success. I have tried to show how patriarchal admixtures are used by this group to gain personal advantages, as well as extend the political privileges and economic rewards afforded to the middle class. Unlike Gill’s trash pickers, the Delhi middle class are significantly articulated into world capitalism and many of their patriarchal admixtures have been utilized through primitive accumulation to reproduce capitalism – particularly by helping fill the need for educated professional labor internationally. As a class, they represent those families that have been able to use their social privilege to maintain or increase their luxurious lifestyles and keep themselves out of the working class. Real capitalists have no need to draw on patriarchal authority to maintain their political privileges and economic position. Instead, it is the middle class that is most subject to the upward mobility that patriarchal admixtures can help provide. Although my study has shown how these relationships exist between family members, where both people are middle class, more often the middle class are the dominating party over other classes, like the working class and urban poor.

Understanding the categorization of the lumpenproletariat, and how it is distinguished solely on the basis of being non-capitalist, provides a much greater understanding into the economic position of middle class people by illustrating their primary modes of domination through patriarchal admixtures within the mode of reproduction.

**Conclusion**

Informal workers, such as the trash collector, toilet cleaner and domestic servant, are subjugated, yes, but by whom? I have given an intimate portrait into the lives of the middle class people that benefit from these forms of informal labor. I have shown how being petty-bourgeois in Delhi is closely related to being a petty-tyrant – in the position of small scale dominator –
through patriarchal admixtures of kinship and caste. While it would be inaccurate to say that the middle class are the primary dominators of these informal workers, and in all likelihood capitalists in core economies have earned that distinction, but they are often the most obvious dominators of informal laborers through patriarchal admixtures. Additionally, as I have shown throughout my chapters, these patriarchal admixtures are often enforced as extra-economic coercion, outside the reach of the Indian state’s monopoly on violence. Instead of the state being the primary protector of middle class property, both in their business and at home, the middle class themselves are primarily responsible for enforcing their own property rights. This has been shown as a kind of “paranoia” among my research participants throughout the dissertation. My research group, as upper-caste Punjabi petty-bourgeois Delhi-ites, are usually on the dominating side of patriarchal admixtures as petty-tyrants. And ultimately, they use their political privileges, often in an individualistic and coercive way, for the purposes of upward economic mobility in their own articulated class position as educated labor internationally in neoliberal capitalism.

Why then, in the era of upward mobility of the Indian middle class since neoliberalism, would anyone expect this group to advocate for the elimination of patriarchal admixtures? One of the most profound reasons why the “new” Indian middle class has been propelled to the national stage is because some of these patriarchal admixtures have come to represent India’s national identity, such as in the patriarchal construction of the “ideal Hindu family” (Ilaiah 1996). As explained, the study of informal labor always reveals what is culturally particular—what is more associated with the economic structure of a place than of world capitalism. The very class that is usually on the dominating side of these these patriarchal admixtures has also come to represent what is particularly Indian about neoliberal economic and cultural shifts. Yes, the Indian middle class has become more politically powerful, but only because through these
patriarchal admixtures they have found more intimate ways to tie themselves into the reproduction of global capitalism. The cultural and political shifts toward the middle class and within the middle classes globally and in India, are a response to this economic change. With this understanding, is it not almost silly to ask again, the question I started with: How is the Indian middle class changing the political culture of India through their articulation as consumers into the neoliberalism economy? Their articulation as consumers is based on their consumption of international commodities, but also, very much, on their consumption of local informal labor. As I have shown, when they purchase a car they hire an informal laborer to tend the car as well. Much of their economic power is derived from their individually privileged positions in patriarchal admixtures. With this understanding, can anyone still believe that their greater political voice would advocate for democracy, real development, or an Enlightenment ideology?

As I have shown in my chapters, upward mobility is the primary economic motivation for my middle class research participants to lean on their patriarchal privileges. This dissertation does not specifically address technical education because it takes place under formal economic exchanges. Instead, throughout this dissertation, the reader has seen how much informal labor, outside the scope of formal education, goes into reproducing an educated professional worker from the Indian middle class capable of finding employment on the international market. In the US, a great deal of economic resources are funneled into creating workers that can fill the highest levels of professional employment. India is rather extraordinary in how its educated professionals from the middle class are able to secure positions in core economies that are internationally coveted by the global middle classes even in core economies. One reason for this is because the Indian state devoted significant resources toward developing technical education in the pre-neoliberal era (Resnick 2006). Additionally, the widespread use of English in India as
compared to other post-colonial nations has added a competitive edge to the Indian middle class international. However, my study has also shown that the particular forms of middle class family reproduction in India are labor intensive. The creation of these petty-bourgeois princes and princesses, who have a command over a rather large labor force inside their homes, sometimes as many as twenty informal workers, and are the primary beneficiaries of the informal labor that goes into reproducing the middle class urban family, is also a reason the Indian middle class has been competitive in the international professional labor market. Just as Indian middle class homes are adorned with beautifully intricate objects that bare the mark of the intensive labor process that created them; so too is the labor of individuals developed within the system of Indian middle class family reproduction marked with the stamp of the intensive concentration of unsubsumed labor. This accumulation of the material benefit of informal labor within the individual as they are produced by the family, in the mode of reproduction, makes the market value of their labor as a professional worker more competitive on the international market.

Drawing insight into Meillassoux’s understand of patriarchal slavery, and its contributions to the mode of reproduction, while still departing, I argue that the concentration of labor that goes into reproducing the Delhi middle class family has an important economic role in global capitalism. To understand the connection to global capitalism, we shall need a thought experiment. Let me compare myself, a 30-year-old US middle class woman, with a woman of the same age that grew up in the home of one of the families I researched – Preeti the favored second
daughter from the third chapter on childhood. Indeed, her value as a worker in international capitalism is currently more than my own potential as an anthropologist. My childhood consisted of good schools, after school programs, camps, dance and piano lessons, public libraries and safe playgrounds. Additionally, I was not subject to unhygienic conditions, violence, or most deadly diseases. Preeti was subject to all of these things. As discussed in chapter three on childhood, Preeti was favored by her parents because she was fair, born in particularly favorable circumstance with the death of her grandmother directly preceding her birth, and exceptionally devoted to her studies. However, Preeti was subject to the underdeveloped circumstances of growing up in Old Delhi, reoccurring malaria, physical abuse, and had responsible for caring for her disobedient little brother by doing his homework. Indeed, Preeti still has a slight scar on her lovely face from where her uncle kicked her head into the cement steps connecting their houses in anger. Preeti was able to leave Delhi ten years ago through her scholarship, and has since become an extremely productive worker in global capitalism. She has received a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering from a good university in the US. And now works in New York City as a biomedical researcher at the edge of cancer research. She is the owner of several patents and makes over $200,000 a year as a salary. Why is India able to contribute professional workers to the core of capitalism? What gives these professionals a competitive advantage in the labor market for the global middle class?

When Preeti was growing up, she was pretty much either at home or at school. She had no afterschool programs, camps, safe parks, and few visits to friend’s houses. Instead she was in charge of tending her brother at school and when she came home, and she spent nearly all her hours doing both of their school work. Unlike with me, the US example, Preeti had neither chores nor distractions from her studies. Her mother was almost always home with her and her
father spent only a few hours away each day. Her mother had an M.A. in Education, although she had never worked, and her father had an M.A. in Mathematics, both from Delhi University. Of her three siblings, her two brothers have an L.L.M. and Ph.D. from the US, and her sister has a M.A. in Education and English language instruction. Both of her brothers also live in the US and have middle class jobs as a doctor and lawyer. What was the economic basis for creating all these educated professionals in the family mode of reproduction?

Preeti’s father is a petty-bourgeois owner and employees twenty-three semi-skilled metal workers in his shop that imports steal from China, modifies it into stove tops, and sells the stove tops whole-sale. Her father has informal contracts with his workers –evidenced by his having his wife pay the shop workers outside the house each week, because he is afraid to be moved by their pleas for greater compensation. Inside the home, Preeti’s mother has four regular servants that stay in the house, and a roughly another eight daily visiting workers, to manage. In both the business and the home, labor is extracted from a large number of informal workers. The surplus from these workers goes directly into the reproduction of Preeti’s family. She and her siblings, as the products of such a labor system of reproduction, have a competitive edge in the global middle class labor market. This is not to say that Preeti herself is not a remarkably smart and hard working individual. However, there are people such as herself in the middle classes all over the world, particularly in peripheral economies, that were not able to become such valuable professional. Unquestionably there are many more factors that go into reproducing an individual beside the family, such as the state. But why Preeti was able to grow up in Old Delhi, an underdeveloped location, and eventually live well in New York City, was at least in part due to the concentration of informal labor in the family system of reproduction in Delhi. Both her parents had a great deal of time and energy to devote to her studies because of the surplus from
informal labor in their home and business. Most parents in the US have one or more of them working full time. And, even then, when they come home they must clean, make dinner, go grocery shopping, etc. In the differences between Preeti’s reproduction as a worker, and the childhoods of most middle class Americans, it appears to me that this excess of informal labor gave Preeti a major competitive advantage in overcoming the obstacle of peripheral disadvantage to professorial employment.

**Chapter Arguments**

In each chapter of this dissertation I have illustrated how patriarchal admixtures operate within the informal economy for the old Delhi middle class. My focus on the informal economy has restricted this research to addressing how patriarchal admixtures, at once social and economic, operate outside of formal employment or capitalist exploitation. This is not to argue that patriarchal admixtures are not present in the formal economy, they likely are, but only to point out that they need not be incorporated into formal capitalism to have a solid economic basis for their reproduction. In my study, I show how something as simple as consistently allowing one child to use a toy over another, or a man buying snack food to bring home for his wife, economically reproduces inequality and shows the subtlest operations of patriarchal admixtures. Through these small gestures undertaken through the family division of labor and reward, kinship systems reproduce patriarchal admixtures. Some of these patriarchal admixtures are culturally particular to the location of Delhi, such as that of preferring aggressive children, and some are culturally particular distinctions of class, such as the display of diamonds in all women parties, but all are types of social-material domination and subordination, or patriarchal
admixtures. I have attempted to locate places where these culturally particular of domination and subordination materially reproduce themselves throughout my dissertation.

In the introduction I present different dimensions of how class struggle and tension has a distinctly urban-rural quality in Delhi. The differences that middle class people drew between themselves and the people living on the street, where not primarily about differences in class, but instead, they gave a description of how the people on the street had been “raised in a village,” while asserting that the condition of the village and the perceived psychological damage from that form of socialization was “unimaginable.” Although there is no question that the primary difference in quality of life between middle class Punjabi people and the people living on the street is class, they framed this difference in terms of an urban-rural difference. I do not explore the conflict between middle class people and people on the street in more detail because my study is primarily about the home. However, I set the stage for my research inside the house by showing how even the most obvious class divide has another patriarchal admixture at work, the urban-rural distinction. This admixture is recognizable as part of what Marx’s called transitional economies. Undoubtedly mass migration to the cities on pain of extinction is a common phenomenon when capitalism disrupts rural economies. However, Delhi has been experiencing rural-urban migration throughout its history. In the past hundred years at least, there has been a steady stream of people unable to make a living in the rural economy coming to the city. The issue of rural-urban migration as part of a “transitional form” is most obviously undermined when there seems to be nothing transitional about this migration. Yes, population increases through advances in medicine, the mechanization of agriculture, and the consolidation of land rights by capitalists, are all primary reasons people are driven into the city. However, these forces have, and will continue, to push people into Delhi. There is no imaginable end to this
movement. Instead, it is useful to apply the patriarchal admixture of rural-urban to understand as a combined form rather than a transitional form.

Native urban advantage—in this context the historical legacy of people migrating to Delhi along with the reliance of capitalist and middle classes on the cheap labor this movement provides—has created a relationship of domination and subordination that is based on distinctions of where that person was born and how much time he has spent in Delhi. In my ethnographic evidence, middle class people used the difference of the people on the street being “from the village” to justify their extra-economic coercion of this group, most obviously seen in chapter five with Mandeep. As described in an example from the introduction to this dissertation, the men living on the street I had come to know over a long period actually saved me from a cow attack after having spent previous years sexually harassing me. In that example I show how just being observed spending time in the city over long periods enhance one’s political rights to the public space. It was not only class, but also native advantage, that allowed for a greater political claim to the public area. Class difference is experienced by both middle class and lower class people, through the lens of an articulated form of the rural-urban patriarchal admixture in the Delhi public setting.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I address the division of labor and reward within the family. Through the presentation of this evidence, I identify how the household economic unit is expanded in its neoliberal articulation, through the hiring of more servants in the house and more informal workers to run the petty-bourgeois business. I give detailed information on the forms of labor required of informal workers and family members, and give just as detailed information on their forms of compensation. Both informal workers and subordinated family members receive compensation for their labor in the form of food,
commodities, shelter and spending money, rather than receiving a standard, regular, or reported wage, or a proportion of patrimonial inheritance. I also show how laborers, women, and children are not free to leave the home. In some cases, the laborers are not even free to seek other employment contracts. These observations are understood in this chapter through Tom Brass’s theory on how unfree labor is indeed part of articulated capitalism (1999).

The result of these patriarchal admixtures that govern labor and reward within the family are that dependent family members such as women, children and the elderly, are economically indistinguishable from servants in the home and informal workers in the petty-bourgeois business. Rather, they are all incorporated into an economic system that privileges who they are, over what they contribute economically. The individual distinctions of each member is decisive in what rights they have over commodities and which freedoms they may exercise. Like in Meilassoux’s patriarchal slavery, the labor and rewards of each member of the family largely depend on the “goodwill” of that particular patriarch and the patriarchal ideology agreed upon by that particular family. In this chapter I argue that patriarchal admixtures of age, kinship, caste, gender, location of origin, and ideological constructs like the “ideal Hindu family,” all play a role in the relations of production of the family economic unit. Particularly, the servant-homeowner patriarchal admixture comes to prominence in this chapter for its explanatory value concerning articulated forms of patron-client and employer-employee relationships. I call this admixtural dialectic “patriarchal,” because, although it is not primarily based on gender, it resembles the interpersonal relationships of the kinship system and caste, and also distinguishes based on gender and age.

Additionally, in the second chapter on the family unit, I show how historical narratives about the Partition and 1984 riots condition the patriarchal ideology of the family. The
preference by both men and women for women to stay inside the home, was clearly connected to the political events in the family’s history. This chapter shows how transgenerational narratives preserve patriarchal admixture through historical memory, where the stories of struggle endured by elders gave them political influence over the younger members of the family, and the accepted right to restrict family members from leaving the house or dictate the terms of political conversations. In my analysis of the grandparents of this family, I show how they are given preferential treatment as the “memory keepers” of the family and the city’s own history. This patriarchal admixture of age as articulated to the particular history of Delhi, strengthens the legitimacy of the kinship system shapes ideology, and is fundamental embedded in the historical continuity of the family as a distinct political and economic unit. The grandmother uses her influence to reproduce the system of female seclusion, and oversees its extension to the female servants; while the grandfather still exerts some political control over how young men express themselves political and as employers. These incursions extend the patriarchal admixture of Muslim-Hindu tensions that were experienced by him during the Partition, as well as the preference for hiring informally in the petty-bourgeois business. The operations of the transgenerational power dynamic inside the home was shown to reproduce the belief that Delhi public space is dangerous for women and that Muslim members of the urban poor were politically antagonistic to the middle class.

In the second chapter I also show how the housewife and mother of this family works as a manager, organizing the activities of both servants and family members. In this family division of labor and rewards, or otherwise stated, in this family’s relations of production, the mother has authority over the children and servants. In most cases, the mother can dictate the movements, labor and rewards for the servants and children. In my ethnographic example, the mother of this
particular family usually sits between the front door and the kitchen, so she can observe the movement of everyone in the house. However, her authority too is patriarchal. As seen, her labor is inspected by her husband when he returns home each day, and he imposes a number of physical and psychological abuses as punishments for perceived imperfections. Her power over the others, and the duties assigned to her, are at the discretion of her husband. As Meillassoux mentioned when discussing patriarchal slavery, the patriarchal admixture pertaining to husband and wife is largely based on the “goodwill” of husbands. As this chapter on the complete family shows, the marriage relation dictates the labor conditions of the wife. With this family, those conditions include a kind of unfreedom, physical abuse, and restrictive evaluation of her social adherence to preconceived notions of a good wife and mother. In chapter four, which further discusses the husband-wife dialectic, I address the issue of the wife’s consumption rather than labor. In that chapter exclusively on marriage, I show how wives only have access to certain kinds of commodities through the approval of their husbands. The patriarchal admixtures that I find through this method are four fold. First, I show how certain aspects of food consumption are decided by husbands. Second, I show how the preference for gold and diamond jewelry is conditioned by this system of patriarchal patronage and how women reinforce this system with each other. Third, I show how redecorating the house is actually a complex fight over space with in-laws that is carried out through appropriating the power of husbands within their own families. Fourth, I show how, in the unfreedom for wives that is part of the articulated relation of middle class marriage in Delhi conditions, women are able to negotiate with their husbands for the freedom to patronize entertainment establishments in Delhi. The patriarchal admixtures are articulated to capitalist consumption in these examples. The wife is only a consumer in most regards, through the approval and allocation of surplus for her personal use. In this chapter, I
show that women evaluate their own husbands and the husbands of others on the basis of his attitude toward their consumer spending, rather than on the pleasantness of his personal attributes. In one example, I show how a woman evaluated her own husband as a “good husband,” and he was also evaluated by others as a “good husband,” on the basis of his proving her disposable income to impress her friends, rather than based his husbandliness on the near constant domestic abuse of his wife. In this chapter on marriage, I ultimately show that patriarchal admixtures must be navigated by women before they can participate as a consumer in capitalism.

Taken together, the chapter on the family that shows how patriarchal admixtures condition a housewife’s labor and authority over children and servants, with the chapter on marriage that illustrates how a housewife must also pass through patriarchal channels to be a consumer, proves that the most economically meaningful way to describe these middle class women that stay at home with the family is as part of her distinct husband-wife dialectic. Like Meillassoux’s description of patriarchal slavery, again, this is an individual patriarchal admixture that does not create housewives as a class. Rather, it is merely that in both cases the division of labor and reward is decided by a single patriarch in conjunction with a specific patriarchal ideology. This patriarchal admixture is not “patriarchal” because it is between a man and a woman, but because it is part of kinship distinctions. There is not a large distinction to be made between the husband-wife dialectic and the father-son dialectic. There are different expectations in both, different forms of labor and reward, but both are relations of domination and subordination that take place within the material contracts of the patriarchal family economy. In the second chapter on the family unit, I show how the mother of the family is subject to similar, if not almost identical, forms of abuse and control as her son. I repeat, the use of “patriarchal” in
the theory of patriarchal admixtures, does not indicate a situation exclusively of gender. Gender does enter into all kinship relationships in the context of the Delhi middle class, just as gender is an integral part of caste divisions of labor. However, the idea of patriarchy is not based solely on gender. Indeed, the strength of the term patriarchal admixtures is that it includes all patriarchal distinctions such as those of age, gender, caste, religion and so forth.

With the theory of patriarchal admixtures, our understanding of gender can become more nuanced to include more culturally particular forms of domination and subordination. In the third chapter of this dissertation, on childhood, I argue that female children are more strictly subjected to the evaluation of skin tone. In this context, female children are given preferential treatment if they are perceived by parents as having the potential for good marriage contracts. The differential treatment of children, and the relations of domination and subordination between them on this basis, invokes a patriarchal admixture that is a culturally specific preference for lighter skin. Families see light skin as associated with higher class status, better marriage prospects, and overall beauty. Therein, they privilege all children, but especially girls, who have fair skin. The skin tone admixture is economically reproduced through childhood favoritism. In addition, the skin tone admixture has become part of how middle class Indian marriages are articulated to capitalism and the social mobility capitalism offers to the middle class. While the skin tone patriarchal admixture works on both male and female children through parental preferences, the hope that a daughter would more greatly advance a family through marriage due to patriarchal inheritance structures, makes the skin tone admixture more important for women. One middle class woman may have some forms of interpersonal dominance due to her fair skin, while another middle class woman may be evaluated negatively. This would remain as an interpersonal issue, but instead through the dowry and arranged marriage system, there may well
be better marriage prospects for the fair woman, which may well lead to a wealthier life for her and more prestige for her family. Indeed, as I have shown in my chapter on parents and children, the prospect of arranging the marriage of one’s son to a fairer woman that is lower middle class and has less of a dowry than wealthier middle class woman, for the express purpose of having fairer children that might better compete as middle class individuals, is not a taboo subject. Here we see that the skin tone admixture has a material basis of reproduction and is articulated, often in a prominent way, for individual middle class women as both part of their competition in capitalism with their fellow middle class, and part of their competition with other women of the same age within a particular kinship system. Competition between siblings, and the power an individual sibling gains over other siblings based the preferential treatment given to fair children, clearly reproduced this skin tone admixture as a cultural preference from early childhood. While evaluations of beauty may seem to fit well into the “ideological” component of a Marxist structural theory, I situate this patriarchal admixture with the others, in the relations of production. The most meaningful contact this ideology has with the economy is through how it operates to place individuals in a Punjabi kinship system that includes the skin tone patriarchal admixture. It is through preferential treatment in marriage contracts and among siblings that skin tone becomes an important obstacle to navigate in the acquisition of consumer goods and social power.

An even subtler patriarchal admixture that is materially reproduced in the system of childhood favoritism is the cultural preference for aggressive individuals. In Delhi, a person can gain certain political and economic advantages by being aggressive. This is most obvious in the particularly aggressive system of bargaining that is common in informal economic exchanges. The informal economy of Delhi promotes aggressive behavior by allowing a form of domination
and subordination to be economically rewarded. In the home, with socialization, favored children
were encouraged to be aggressive and take what they desired from their siblings, by force if
necessary. I show how parents reward this behavior. From the earliest age, many years before
they will bargain for goods in an informal sale, aggressive behavior in negotiations is materially
rewarded through parental favoritism. These favors consist of buying sweets, allowing use of an
iPad, dictating which restaurant will be patronized, and allowing the child to attend events
outside the house. Favored individuals are given material resources, along with more freedom
and the ability to influence family decisions. These things are withheld or given to a lesser extent
to unfavored children. In this way, within the division of labor and reward of the family, children
are socialized as particular cultural beings from a particular location. The dialectic of tyrant-
terrorized, pervasive throughout the informal economy of Delhi, is first reproduced inside the
home with socialization. This patriarchal admixture is the most particular to Delhi of any I
identify elsewhere. For contrast, in Beijing, if you get angry when you negotiate with someone
over the price of a good, they will become less and less willing to come to a compromise.
Whereas in Delhi, arguing angrily over prices, or pretty much anything, provides a type of
privilege to the more aggressive arguer. Here is a subtle relation of domination and subordination
that is materially reproduced as part of the operations of the informal economy in Delhi.

In the fifth chapter of this dissertation on a single individual that runs an illicit business,
I more fully explore the patriarchal admixtures of the black market. In the chapter I show how
the main character, Mandeep, has drawn on his family network to provide him opportunities for
illicit dealings. In his dealings he sells drugs, fraudulently occupied apartments, the sexual labor
of prostitutes, and weapons, along with arranged different kinds of hospital and bank fraud,
racing cars, and hiring thugs and police to carry out personal vendettas. All of this illicit activity
is undertaken through his use of his networks. Mandeep primarily uses the political connections of some of his older male relatives to escape trouble and appropriate the state’s monopoly over violence. In this chapter, I show how Mandeep is afforded certain political privileges through his kinship network. The patriarchal patron-client relation within the family economic system is common with distant male relatives. For Mandeep’s family, as well as for most of the old Delhi middle class, distant, older male relatives, often provide an avenue for a younger member of the family to generate their own income when they come of age. In cases with more legitimacy, a younger man will go to work in his distant kin’s business. As was the case with the son from the second chapter on the family unit, his family had decided that after he graduated college he would go work for his paternal uncle. Instead, with Mandeep, extended kin networks did provide an opportunity to generate income, but through their influence in the state machinery. Mandeep has three “uncles” that all provided him, and his immediate family, an income through their political patronage. The kinship patron-client relation, shows how these admixtures are materially reproduced primarily in the informal economy. Only through a system of favors, which are given on the basis of interpersonal favoritism, can many young men of the middle class find employment. With that employment is formal, or informal as in the case with Mandeep, the method for assuring that employment is based on an informal system of individual relationships. When Mandeep does run into trouble with the law, which is often, he must contact one of his uncles to escape sanction and continue to carry on his illicit business. It is through the patron-client relation as it is materially reproduced as a patriarchal admixture in the family economic system and the relations of production within, that Mandeep undertakes his labor and is rewarded for that labor.
In the fifth chapter on Mandeep, I also show how this patriarchal admixture of patron-client is articulated to capitalism. First, Mandeep’s reliance on his family network comes as a result of the economic decline of his family’s business. This is why Mandeep’s case is ideal for understanding this admixtural form, as he has no legitimate means of income otherwise. Due to the compulsion from capitalism, he must draw on his networks to their greatest ability in order to participate in capitalism as a middle class person. He draws on his relations to stay middle class, rather than through selling his labor power at its free market value which would reduce his family income to subsistence. His networks prevent him from falling in his class status.

But most importantly, Mandeep’s entire business is largely a product of the increased middle class consumption in India since neoliberalism. Because Mandeep sells “party items,” like drugs, his market has expanded as Delhi college students have a larger disposable income. I show how this increase in consumer spending actually enhances and reproduces patron-client relations as they are utilized in order to import drugs and arrange for other illicit services. Capitalism has intensified the importance of patriarchal admixtures in the informal economy by relegating to the black market, large areas of middle class consumption. This is a situation where the patron-client admixture has been articulated to capitalism’s consumer economy and assists in its reproduction.

In the conclusion of this dissertation I have tried to show how the theory of patriarchal admixtures and their combined forms is situated in theories of articulation and the informal economy. Unless we can show how inequality is materially reproduced, we have neither an economic nor cultural leg to stand on. Cultural preferences for certain kinds of individuals do not take place in a vacuum. They do not continue to persist unless a force acts upon them. Instead, they are reproduced again and again because they have a material basis for their economic
reproduction. In very peculiar patriarchal admixtures like that of skin tone or aggressiveness, I have tried to show how aspects of the culture that are usually only visible from the greatest distance, like that of fair women in the media or the experience of visitors to Delhi angrily arguing with someone over a price, are actually reproduced inside the home through material inequality between members of the kinship group. While for more widespread patriarchal admixtures, like that of the husband-wife dialectic or the patron-client family network dialectic, I have attempted to explain larger scale economic phenomena like the predilection for gold in the Indian economy and the ease by which the authority of the state may be subverted in India. At every level, in labor, political rights, and consumer power, I have shown how my research participants move through patriarchal admixtures in order to participate in the capitalist economy. They are part of combined form, and in all likelihood, neoliberalism has only secured patriarchal admixtures more firmly within capitalism. As with the base of the neoliberal economy, the realm of culture too is rolling away from a direct trajectory toward real subsumption and proletarianization.

What I would like to see coming out of my theory of patriarchal admixtures is greater interest in the petty-tyrant. My research participants were petty-bourgeois and enacted petty-tyrannies, while capitalists are petty in neither their economic nor political interests. Throughout the world, scholars research national middle classes with respect to their consumption and privileged identities, and informal laborers with respect to their small economic contributions and the forms of discrimination against them, but without tying the two groups of research together into a dialectic. In looking for which culturally particular patriarchal admixtures reproduce the conditions of exploitation for informal laborers, scholars may more penetratingly uncover the articulations of the dominating and subjected groups on their individualistic basis.
These structures operate not only between classes, but even between people closely associated like siblings. Previously, ethnographers have observed these forms of domination without having an encompassing theory to put different forms of prejudice against individuals on the same level as one another within a historical materialist schema that privileges class, but still takes into account the disfigurement of uneven penetration of capitalism. With patriarchal admixtures, though they may be as diverse as the diversity of culture, they will always point an analysis toward seeing how these materially reproduced structures are articulated into the totality of world capitalism and the geography of its expansion.

When we look for the petty-tyrant, the person that uses culturally specific privilege in a domineering way for some material advantage, we can also see what is economically particular about a specific location and set of social institutions. My argument has remained within the realm of the intimate networks in kinship, the black market, and the exploitation of informal laborers in Delhi. In this dissertation I have shown how individuals in the old Delhi middle class uses petty-tyranny through their kinship system, and in conjunction with their class power, in order to economically compete for upward mobility with other Indian middle class families and the global middle classes. This form of family competition in international capitalism is undertaken through the intensive use of informal labor and a dependence on patriarchal admixtures. In extension, I hope that other scholars will add to the theory of patriarchal admixtures and their combined forms by finding them through ethnographic practice in the formal economy. The petty-tyrant lives in both the bedroom and the boardroom, as forms of culturally specific domination occur in all facets of life. Verily, for most of us in the middle classes, we are ourselves petty-tyrans at times.
Bibliography

A


B


D


E


I

J


K


L


