



## **Aspiring in a "Bad" Neighbourhood: The Gendered Constraints on Social and Physical Mobility in Urban India**

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### **Introduction**

'I want to graduate,' asserted 21-year-old Geeta, who was studying for a bachelor degree in arts in Delhi.

I want to work, but only in a reputable higher job. Maybe I will study for a higher degree, like law, and then get a career job. And then go roaming with friends to malls and stuff. My older brother doesn't say I should not leave the house. He lets me leave the house, but says "stay within your limits". But tension is always there.

Since India's economic liberalisation reforms in the early 1990s, opportunities for college education and professional jobs have opened up, alongside a rapid increase in consumption of technology and luxury goods, and the creation of new kinds of global spaces and new forms of mobility. This saturation of new possibilities has sparked a surge in aspirational horizons across all layers of society. And while young women from low-income urban neighbourhoods, like Geeta, often hold aspirations towards college, professional jobs and cosmopolitan lifestyles, they must contend with gendered restrictions on mobility and limited access to resources that enable them to develop their merit. This means that goals which are tantalisingly in sight in the global metropolis of Delhi, often remain just out of reach for marginalised people.



The paper pays attention to enactments of aspirations by non-elite young women in urban India, and explores the entanglement of aspirations with issues of class distinction and familial expectations of gender. It expands upon Bourdieu's formulation of social stratification—the complex interplay of economic, social and cultural capital in the process of class formation (1986)—to consider the notion of "mobility capital": the abilities, resources and knowledge that are gained by being mobile (Salazar 2016, 2018). In the neighbourhood of Jeet Nagar, where women are restrained from moving around in public and must undertake college by distance education, gender becomes a social determinant that links physical and social mobility, wherein (im)mobility affects young women's capacity to "move up" in life.

The paper is structured thus: following a short methodology description, Jeet Nagar neighbourhood and its residents are situated within the existing scholarship on class and aspirations in India. The ensuing two sections reflect on the ways in which gendered mobility restrictions and marriage expectations constrain women's efforts to act on their aspirations for college education in Jeet Nagar. Following a brief characterisation of aspiring as a situated cultural practice (Appadurai 2004), I consider the ways in which young women are challenged in accumulating the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984: 1986) that is necessary to move ahead in life. I build on this formulation to show how young women's lack of "mobility capital" (Salazar 2016, 2018) compounds these other constraints, and hinders women from moving into the professional careers they desire. The conclusion illustrates the ways in which women adjust their aspirations within a 'brittle horizon of aspirations' (Appadurai 2004); neither completely 'exiting' their social context (as Appadurai argues), while also not subscribing to the norms that constrain them.

As I illustrate in more detail below, social science scholars have addressed the topic of aspirations amongst other sections of Indian society—such as in the middle class, lower middle class, in slums and marginalised caste communities. Yet this theme has not been considered in an upwardly-mobile lower-class neighbourhood such as Jeet Nagar, which is characterised by particular gender norms and practices—a space or category that is "in between" many scholarly considerations to date.

### **Methodology**

This paper is based on twelve months' ethnographic PhD fieldwork, undertaken in 2015-16 in the low-income neighbourhood Jeet Nagar in New Delhi<sup>1</sup>, with short follow-up visits in the subsequent two years.



While my PhD topic focused on women's health and illness, as I moved around the neighbourhood and conversed with people in their homes as part of my fieldwork, I became acquainted with a number of teenage girls and young women. Of the nine young women foregrounded in this paper, two were key interlocutors for my thesis. Another six were the daughters of middle-aged women with chronic illness who were the main interlocutors of my thesis. As I spent considerable time conversing with their mothers in their homes, the daughters sometimes spontaneously joined the conversation, which then turned to address their concerns in life.

The ninth interlocutor for this paper was my original guide in the neighbourhood, with whom I continued to meet throughout fieldwork. As I interacted with these young women over many months of fieldwork, I was captured by their aspirations to complete studies and to shape their own futures—and these conversations became the spark for this paper. The three years of fieldwork interactions were followed by occasional communication on social media, yielding a total of five years of contact. This extended duration enables a 'long view' perspective of the ups and downs of the women's young adult lives as they undertook college studies and moved into careers or marriage, while navigating the many constraining factors of their social context.

### **Jeet Nagar: an "in between" neighbourhood**

The neighbourhood of Jeet Nagar in east Delhi began as a scrubby wasteland on the city's former periphery. As rural migrants began arriving in the metropolis in the 1980s in search of opportunities, the improvised camp in Jeet Nagar provided an affordable launching pad into the world of unskilled labour work. Over time, people built small houses, and Jeet Nagar evolved into a thriving slum of densely packed houses and narrow lanes. As Delhi sprawled into a mega-city<sup>2</sup> in the next two decades, material conditions and opportunities improved in Jeet Nagar as it became absorbed into the larger city.<sup>3</sup> Somewhat unusually, the neighbourhood survived Delhi's extensive demolition of squatter settlements in the 1990s and 2000s<sup>4</sup>, and the new sense of permanence that came with official recognition of home ownership enabled inhabitants to plan viable futures (Jervis Read 2014: 210; Rao 2013: 764).

Jeet Nagar residents built three or four small apartments above their small homes, and began to moderately prosper from rental income by the time their children were finishing high school. 'We were not in such a bad condition financially back then,' 22-year-old Jaya recounted to me of the time when her father completed building the apartments above



their home, about five years earlier. 'We had a monthly income of around Rs 30,000 (340 Euros) and could afford some facilities.'

This modest economic prosperity meant that the generation of city-born youths were able to consider college as a viable and affordable option. Their aspirations towards college education extended into their goals of "career jobs"—office jobs in professions that offered advancement into "high status" positions and salary levels, ideally in the private sector. While Jeet Nagar youths were generally vague when it came to specifics of their career goals and desired future jobs, the act of holding and moving towards such aspirations was one of the ways in which they actively fostered cosmopolitan "modern" identities that stood in contrast with their parents' regional identities and affiliations with natal villages (Parry 2003; Zabaliūtė 2016: 273).

Youths cast themselves as "Delhiites" with urban aspirations, and sported many of the signifiers of modernity in a globalising metropolis—a common tactic for people perceived as lower in the social hierarchy to stake their claims as equal participants in everyday life (Datta 2012: 22). For example, in contrast to their mothers' traditional attire of sarees, young women generally wore the popular city attire of jeans and short kurtas—kurtas being a nod to tradition, adapted to a shorter length in keeping with urban trends. They spoke a Delhi form of Hindi inflected with occasional English words, which contrasted with their parents' regional dialect. They desired to participate in consumption practices in the new global spaces such as malls and cinema complexes that were proliferating throughout Delhi.

Yet, despite their gentle upward social and economic mobility, Jeet Nagar neighbourhood and its people still occupy something of an uncertain category. While the neighbourhood is no longer a slum after three decades of moderate economic growth, it is also not yet a lower middle-class neighbourhood. This means that Jeet Nagar residents occupy an ambiguous class status in Delhi. They do not define themselves as poor or lower class. Neither do they usually define themselves as middle class, as people moving into the middle classes often do (Dickey 2012).

The social science literature addressing the shifts in India's class landscape over the last two decades contains much slippage around the term 'new middle class'. In order to situate the experiences of Jeet Nagar youths, I make a distinction here between my understanding of India's "new" middle classes—the globalised English-speaking elite (as addressed by scholars such as Brosius 2010; Dickey 2012; Fuller 2011; Gilbertson 2016; Murphy 2011; McGuire 2011; Patel 2010; Srivastava



2015; Upadhyaya 2007), and the "newly" middle class—those people moving from the lower classes into the lower rungs of the middle class (addressed by scholars such as Bowan 2015; Dickey 2002, 2012; Jeffrey 2010; Säävälä 2006; Srivastava 2005).

I use these categories with an awareness they are not homogenous by any means, and include disparities in income and education and other socioeconomic differences (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009; McGuire 2011: 4), and may also overlap or blur into each other. Broadly speaking, India's "new" middle class can be seen as entrepreneurial and cosmopolitan, with the skills to converse comfortably across cultures and space. Call centre workers are exemplars of this new class, often being the children of the long-standing ("old") middle class, who are able to mobilise their pre-existing forms of social and cultural capital to move into transnational contexts. In contrast, the "newly" middle class is comprised of formerly disenfranchised sections of society—such as people from lower castes<sup>5</sup>, rural areas or less affluent urban areas—who have economically prospered under liberalisation and have joined the lower rungs of the middle class.

However, the context and experiences of Jeet Nagar families' contexts do not align with those of the newly emerging lower-middle class. Nor do they align with the experiences of marginalised people in Delhi's slums or resettlement colonies (as addressed by Baviskar 2009; Datta 2012, 2016; Ramakrishnan 2014; Rao 2010; Snell-Rood 2015; Srivastava 2010, 2011; Zabiliūtė 2016, 2020). While Jeet Nagar youths had absorbed the globally-inflected aspirations and values of the "new" and "newly" middle class, and while their aspirations to college education and professional jobs had become more realisable within the context of a rapidly globalising Delhi and the boom in new private colleges, they still experienced different kinds of precariousness. For example, most property-owning families (the focus of this paper) were still paying off bank loans they took to construct the apartments above their homes, and they could usually only sustain a major purchase, such as a scooter, through another loan. When Jaya's mother needed dialysis, the family was forced to sell their rental apartments in order to pay for treatment, and the family subsequently fell into poverty (see Branagan forthcoming a).

It was not merely their economic status that was tenuous. People in Jeet Nagar largely remained excluded from wider Delhi's public life, perhaps due to their ambiguous social status and a perception that they lacked cosmopolitan qualities. The local sphere also offered few opportunities for social advancement. The neighbourhood was characterised by fractious politics and gossip, and lacked community solidarity or any



motivation towards collective political action to improve conditions—a common characteristic of low-income Delhi neighbourhoods (Snell-Rood 2015: 17; Vidal et al. 2000: 16). This meant that many residents remained disenfranchised from opportunities, such as those opening up in middle class areas where residents' welfare associations cooperated on projects for collective benefit. And while the village-born parents of young Jeet Nagar women were willing to nurture their daughters' educational and career ambitions to some extent, their support was tempered by local concerns around mobility and modesty, which complicated young women's efforts to act on their aspirations.

### **Aspiring to education within the mobility restrictions of a "bad neighbourhood"**

The first few times I met Geeta, she emphasised her love of study and learning. 'I love my studies more than my family,' she asserted with a cheeky grin. 'I do not like any kind of compromise as far as my studies are concerned. I don't care what anyone says, no one can stop me studying.' Geeta lived with her widowed mother and older brother on the ground floor apartment of the narrow block they owned, and where she had grown up. Geeta was doing a bachelor of arts degree by distance education, studying Hindi, politics and education. But the correspondence mode of learning had not been her choice. 'I wanted to apply to Delhi University, where I could have gained admission,' she recounted bitterly of the time she finished high school, and her desire to attend college on campus:

I had good marks in 12th grade, but I knew nothing about filling out forms. But my brother did not let me. He wanted me to go to a girls-only college, and do distance education. He beat me up a lot [*mujhe marta bhi tha*], and filled out the form for me to go to Mata Sundari [women's open learning college]. He did not apply for other places.

Geeta's experience was common in Jeet Nagar, where eight out of the nine young women in this ethnography were studying for bachelor degrees by distance education. Their families approached distance learning as a way in which young women could fulfil their ambitions to study beyond high school, while remaining largely in the house and under the purview of the family. Geeta, like most young women in her neighbourhood, lacked access to the wider public domain, and was expected to rely on the household patriarch to lead the family's decision-making processes and to shepherd women in the public domain—her elder brother had taken up this role after her father's death. Such mores rest upon the established notion that girls do not move in the public



realm, and that their broader interests are looked after and nurtured by male kin when they are living in the natal home.<sup>6</sup> For example, when Geeta developed a problem in her anklebone (which later turned out to be tuberculosis), she was not permitted to seek out healthcare by herself, which had disastrous consequences (see Branagan forthcoming b). As Geeta recounted, 'My mother tells me, "You are a girl. How will you go alone? [*akele kaise jayegi?*] Your brother must take you.'" As well as upholding the existing patriarchal kinship hierarchy, this process of male guidance ensures that young women are not responsible for any poor outcomes of their own decision-making, for which they could be blamed. Therefore, while women hold responsibility to care for kin in the mundane daily sense in the home, men are expected to "take care of" specific matters that require women to move outside the house (Broom et al. 2009: 703; Das & Addlakha 2001; Marrow 2013: 349; Mumtaz & Salway 2005; Patel 2010; Pinto 2009, 2011, 2012; Phadke 2013; Wilce 1998).

This tendency to "take care of" women must be seen within wider cultural practices that involve kin's control of women's mobility that restricts their access to public spaces more generally (Chatterjee 1989; Phadke et al. 2011; Ranade 2007; Viswanath & Mahrotra 2007). They are often justified within the context of Delhi's 'dubious' reputation of being among the most unsafe cities in the world for women (Viswanath & Mahrotra 2007: 1542), and the reputation of cities generally in India which are seen as 'locations of vice and violence' (Phadke 2013: 52)<sup>7</sup>.

Jeet Nagar is generally characterised by its own residents as a "bad" or *ganda mohalla* [literally "dirty" neighbourhood] where they never entirely feel comfortable. Mothers particularly expressed a strong sense of the neighbourhood as being unsafe for their daughters—sentiments reinforced by regular media reports following the brutal 2012 Delhi gang rape of Jyoti Singh, that portrayed low-income Delhi neighbourhoods as full of poor north Indian immigrant men who are potential criminals or threats to the safety of women (Clegziabher 2016; Datta 2016: 323; Govinda 2020; Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 11; Philip 2018; Roychowdhury 2013; Zabiliūtė 2016: 274, 2020: 56). Riya and her husband owned a small corner shop in Jeet Nagar, but she did not allow her four daughters (aged from 16-22 years) to work there. 'All my girls are teenagers and adults now. This is not the environment to send girls to work in the shop, because *all sorts of men* come there,' Riya told me firmly one day. 'So, we don't let them.'



The conception of public space as a dangerous "male" space characterised by harassment structures women's lives and movements, with women disciplining their bodies to reflect notions of modest and respectable behaviour (Govinda 2020; Loblay 2011: 37; Ranade 2007: 1525; Viswanath & Mahrotra 2007: 1542). Older women in Jeet Nagar recounted to me that they did not know how to navigate around the neighbourhood beyond the immediate street without their husbands. Young women were expected to tolerate surveillance of different forms, from parental or fraternal protection to husbandly possessiveness (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011: 17). For example, Geeta described how her brother called her regularly 'to check my whereabouts' and warned her not to roam in the streets and get a bad reputation. 'I know my limits [*apni had*],' she asserted, pointing out that she did not want to be like the 'reckless [*avara*] girls' (in her brother's description), who moved around the neighbourhood without a chaperone, her statement reflecting not only how young women easily become the targets of malicious gossip or how they tolerate surveillance in the guise of fraternal care, but also how young women absorb and reproduce connotations of promiscuity and the need for women to stay within their "limits".

The control over the movement of women is heightened in marginalised communities such as Jeet Nagar, where women's bodies and movements often come to be the markers of a community and its boundaries (Donner 2006: 145), as well as 'the keepers of its tradition, and the bearers of its honour' (Phadke et al. 2011: 17). As a consequence of surveillance and neighbourhood gossip, women often restrict their own movements and revert to female-designated spaces, and public spaces become further coded as "male" due to women's absence (Phadke 2013: 51; Ranade 2007: 1525; Viswanath & Mahrotra 2007: 1542). Women are only permitted to access public space when their movement is purposeful—that is, when their presence there is defined and justified by a legitimate purpose, as movement without a validated purpose gives rise to connotations of "roaming", being out of bounds or promiscuous (Bowen 2015: 133; Donner 2006: 147; Phadke et al. 2011: 26; Ram 2009: 140).

College attendance is one of the few ways that provide women with a legitimated access to public space and the world outside the home (Khan 2007: 1529; Ranade 2007: 1525). Yet lower-class Delhi communities, such as Jeet Nagar, generally do not permit their daughters to attend campuses at all, for fear that their movements will spark harassment or neighbourhood gossip that they are being sexually liberal or morally wanting (Marrow 2013: 251). College campuses themselves are also perceived as sites of harassment, and colleges respond to such concerns by applying regulations regarding women's mobility (such as





curfews) and dress codes, that are not equally applied to male students (Gupta 2020). Therefore, most young women in Jeet Nagar undertake college studies by distance education, although this was not their preference.

India's first open universities were developed in the mid-1980s to democratise education and to cater for students who are not able to avail campus learning for various reasons (Panchabakesan 2011: 2; Sahoo 2016: 42).<sup>8</sup> Distance study is now offered by at least 125 government and private institutions throughout India (GOI 2019: i), and is taken up by almost four million students, 44 per cent of whom are women (GOI 2019: 16).<sup>9</sup> In Delhi alone, approximately 380,000 women are enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees by distance education (GOI 2019: T6a, T6b). In Jeet Nagar, most girls studied by distance for arts degrees that included subjects such as history and politics. They studied in their own time at home from print materials posted to them by the college, and they occasionally attended examinations on campus at weekends—when the campus was empty of male students.

Online learning was not offered as a mode of learning, and none of the young women in this ethnography had computers at home. Most of them did not have their own mobile phone, but they instead shared one phone between many family members. Although most of them were tech-savvy and had created their own Facebook profiles and consumed TV and social media, they did not have ready access to technology, information and libraries. They were prevented from participating in extra-curricular activities such as college excursions that offered exposure to alternative spaces and ways of thinking, as well as opportunities to bond with peers (although they often sought out other ways to do this). In sum, they were left largely to their own devices to study with limited support and resources, as well as limited interaction with their peers and college lecturers. This meant the odds were stacked against them maintaining motivation and fulfilling their educational ambitions.

The limited scholarship on distance education in India suggests that the lack of immediate feedback from teachers and tutors disadvantages students and may increase dropouts (Sahoo 2016: 43; Singh et al. 2012: 50; Veeraraghavan 2016: 12), and that distance learning students are 'less serious' and have 'less motivation' (Panchabakesan 2011: 115), but this was not my observation in Jeet Nagar, where the young women were dedicated to their studies and were motivated to do well in their degrees. The young women saw a good "graduation" (final marks) as their entrée to professional jobs, and they worked hard to



achieve this, even when their parents or brothers did not take young women's studies seriously. The young women did, however, keenly perceive the disadvantages of distance learning, and would have preferred to have studied on campus. 'I suffered a lot in terms of my studies and career,' Geeta asserted to me one day. 'If I had gone to a regular college, I would have topped my college. In open learning, they give less marks as well.' They often expressed to me that this mode of learning was not their preference, and that it had resulted in merely reinforcing the conditions of their confinement to the home. Degrees from distance learning colleges are also not recognised in some private and government sectors, and graduates with such degrees may not be eligible for higher posts (Sahoo 2016: 42) or may be discriminated against in the job market (Gowthaman et al. 2017: 6). Distance learning students often experience delayed publication of exam results or receipt of degree certificates.

Therefore, while education was imagined by the young women as a social category signifying status and an avenue to class mobility and good jobs, the distance learning mode limited them on many fronts: from receiving a good quality education, from gaining high marks, access to computers, exposure to extra-curricular learning and to peer networks and role models such as professors and people in leadership positions, and hindered equitable access to the job market. These limitations were entwined with other aspects of their social milieu which also placed them at a disadvantage in reaching their goals.

### **Aspiring to careers within mobility constraints & marriage obligations**

19-year-old Alia was doing her bachelor of arts degree through a distance learning college when I first met her. She was also very involved with extra-curricular activities in the neighbourhood, such as classical Indian dance classes at the local community centre. She aspired to be a photojournalist, and gained a scholarship to do a short photography course in visual documentation at Delhi's Habitat Centre, which her father unusually permitted her to undertake. Fired up with enthusiasm after this experience, she started saving money for a camera by doing odd jobs locally, such as decorating venues for weddings. But her parents would not give her permission to pursue a media career, because it would require her to move beyond the neighbourhood and to sometimes work at night. 'They are scared of this line of work because it involves difficulty for women,' she told me with sadness. 'Other adults say to my parents: "Why are you putting your daughter into this sort of course?"' Through some contacts she met at



her photography course, Alia was offered a place at a six-week leadership camp conducted by an NGO in Rajasthan, which she was desperately keen to attend. But her father would not initially allow her. 'What people will be there?' he asked her repeatedly. Eventually her father agreed to meet the camp organisers, and he then finally gave Alia permission to attend. On her return from the camp, Alia gushed about how 'great' the experience was, even though she had initially been nervous about leaving home for the first time and having to mix with 'people from different cultures and fields, qualifications, lawyers, etcetera...'

I felt very happy and cared for. I was with very educated people. They socialise, they help, they're friendly. It's very different from Delhi where people don't know each other. They connect to each other. They encouraged me to think in different ways. They encouraged creativity, especially my photography. It became a second home, family. I started seeing things from a different perspective, started realising that family is not everything—it's important to have a professional and personal life, an independent life. I can see that development work requires cooperation. Evils such as corruption don't change if people keep to themselves. Rape and harassment will continue unless people do something.

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Alia talked in the following weeks of how she had learned to 'face challenges' such as convincing her parents to support her in her own choices, 'to make them believe that media is a viable career.' She found it difficult to adjust to the constraints and surveillance of life in Jeet Nagar, after the camaraderie and empowerment discourses of the camp. As the months passed, however, Alia's father made it clear that he would never give permission for her to pursue a photography career. As she finished her bachelor degree by distance education and pursued other career options (which I return to later), she always referred sadly to dropping photography 'due to family issues' which stemmed from the 'difficulties of women' (as she put it) working in public spaces.

Alia's narrative suggests how youths' desires and possibilities for education and professional jobs become unevenly configured in Jeet Nagar. While young women were exposed to empowerment rhetoric when they came into contact with NGO initiatives (which was infrequently), they were often constrained from acting upon these ideologies within their family and neighbourhood contexts. When women expressed career ambitions that might take them out of the close purview of the family, families invoked gendered restrictions on women's mobility and concerns for their virtuous reputations. These concerns were intrinsically linked to notions of young women's marriageability.



While Jeet Nagar parents supported, in an abstract sense, the idea of improved educational and career opportunities for their children in the metro, they retained their own strong ties to the village and its *biradari* (community) values and customs. They put significant effort into retaining symbolic capital within the village system that enabled them to return there for rituals and holidays, and to marry their adult children through traditional *biradari*-centred marriage arrangements (Das & Addlakha 2001: 521). Parents therefore had to balance their aspirations for their children's education and careers with village-inflected values concerning women's modesty, mobility, and early marriage. And young women had to navigate these values and concerns of their parents, while attempting to complete their education.

22-year-old Jaya and her younger sister Nalini were undertaking commerce degrees through distance education when I first met them. Their mother Chandra was very weak from kidney disease, so the distance mode of learning enabled the daughters to stay at home and closely monitor their mother's health and diet. As their elderly father became more feeble and stopped, taking Chandra to the hospital for her regular dialysis sessions, this task fell on Jaya's shoulders, so she dropped out of college. 'I have no time for anyone, other than my mother,' she emphasised to me at that time. 'I do a little bit of stitching work at home in order to cover expenses.' Her father had become disinterested in her welfare, and her mother had become focussed on arranging Jaya's marriage before she passed away. 'While I'm alive, it's better that I find a boy for her, because I do not know what kind of boy my husband will find for her,' Chandra asserted to me from her bed one day. 'Just because sickness is here, we can't put aside marriage. It's my duty to marry off the two girls before my death.' Jaya wanted to finish her studies before marriage, but she reluctantly agreed to allow her mother to start searching for grooms, to ensure her mother's peace of mind in her final months. Jaya complained to me that she would never be able to finish her degree after marriage, because her affinal family would most likely forbid it, as the cost of her studies would be 'an added burden' in a family with little income.

Even when marriage arrangements were not imminent, most young women felt the weight of wider societal expectation closing in, and were keenly aware that that their timeframe in which to gain tertiary education was limited. 'When you are 24-25 years old, they [people] just want you to get married,' complained Geeta one day. '[People say] "Girls do not have to study that much, you should stay at home." I feel like telling them, "Go to hell, I am not spending your money."' 21-year-old Anjali, one of Riya's four daughters, pointed out the tensions of her position, saying, 'People in our community [the rural dairy-farming



Yadav caste] marry their daughters early. But our parents are very nice, and they do not want us to marry early. They want us to concentrate on our careers. But when we go to our village, people comment.'

While I will return to these young women's narratives later in this paper, I argue that their experiences show how—when marriage becomes foregrounded due to temporal concerns such as the impending death of a parent or the advancing age of a daughter—education recedes into the background of priorities within the family context. This shifting of parental priorities faces little resistance in contexts where young women are cut off from support networks beyond the family. For example, Jaya, as a distance learning student, was not connected to supportive professors who may have advocated her continuing education to her parents, and she was not connected to college peers who may have encouraged her to push back against her parents' conservative values – isolation from peer networks being a common problem for distance learning students (Ramakrishnan 2016: 57; Sahoo 2016: 43). That is, she lacked "social capital" within Bourdieu's formulation, as I address further below. Therefore, young women's cosseted daily existence, the distance mode of learning, and their isolation from other women facing similar obstacles, left them 'with relatively impoverished capabilities' to reach their goal of gaining a degree and delaying marriage (Marrow 2013). These limitations were intrinsically entwined with challenges of acquiring other the forms of capital that are tacitly demanded to move ahead and obtain a "career job" in Delhi, which I turn to now.

### **Aspiration practices and the limitations of symbolic capital in Jeet Nagar**

The way in which the aspirations of young Jeet Nagar women tended "to quickly dissolve into more densely local ideas" about marriage and women's virtue and mobility suggests the *situatedness* of the cultural practice of aspiring (Appadurai 2004). That is, while aspiring can be seen as a desire for a good life that involves the creation of goals, following Appadurai, it is formed and developed in interaction with one's cultural milieu (ibid.: 69). Social factors—such as friends, schools, family, and the local environment—influence young people's aspirations, and how connected to reality these aspirations are. Since neoliberal reforms in India and the subsequent massive expansion of India's media landscape, images of "new" middle-class lifestyles with their new regimes of tastes and values travel much further than before and now saturate the imaginations of people in lower classes.



For example, young women in Jeet Nagar cited a range of media influences, from the foreign Bear Grylls adventure TV series to Bollywood stories and YouTube clips that conveyed positive imagery of young people successfully reaching their goals and enjoying middle class pursuits. Exposure to such imagery has sparked lower class Indian youths to aspire to middle-class status and leisure practices from which they were previously excluded. These exclusions can be seen as the layered effect of gender restrictions placed on them by their families (which were in turn linked to the customs and values of their own *biradaris*), limited disposable income to spend on leisure, and a broader perception that the new "globalised" spaces such as shopping malls are exclusively reserved for the cosmopolitan upper middle classes — with the ubiquitous security guards being an intimidating presence that discourages the urban poor from entering (Säävälä 2006: 400; Srivastava 2010: 2015).

Despite these restrictions and exclusions, some Jeet Nagar women secretly visited shopping malls, where they wandered and enjoyed the air-conditioned spaces, hiding their low social status as they attempted to perform a consumerist class identity while not actually buying anything—an increasingly common practice amongst disenfranchised urban people (Dickey 2012: 578; Srivastava 2010: 126; Zabiliüté 2016: 278), even though the experience can reinforce a consciousness of their own marginality and their lack of the cosmopolitan dispositions that are assumed in such spaces (McGuire 2011; Säävälä 2006: 404). Jeet Nagar women were not afforded the opportunity to take up other pursuits available to most middle-class young women, such as campus education, dining in restaurants with friends, visiting cinema multiplexes, or dating—new practices that have shifted gender relations to some degree amongst the middle classes in India (Bhandari 2020; Säävälä 2006: 401). Instead, their aspirations became curbed by the powerful "map of local ideas and beliefs" (Appadurai 2004: 68)—that is, beliefs that are intrinsically bound up in the iterative process of class and community determination in Jeet Nagar—which hindered their efforts towards upward social mobility.

When considering aspirational class practices and social mobility, class can be conceived as something that is made in historical time and place through everyday practices of class distinction. I take up Bourdieu's dynamic model of social stratification—a discursive construction in which class is determined relative to others' positions and depends on the overall symbolic capital possessed (1984, 1986). Bourdieu's model builds on Marx's emphasis on economic capital as a fundamental social structuring character of class, and argues that individuals may also possess and accumulate two other kinds of capital:



social capital (networks of durable relationships) and cultural capital (dispositions of the mind, modes of speech, comportment and dress, possession of cultural goods and educational qualifications). Bourdieu considers these three forms of capital as integral to the process of class formation, and under certain conditions, the different types of capital can be convertible to each other. When these forms of capital are recognised and perceived as legitimate, they may also take the character of symbolic capital, which can be translated into a person's overall standing within society or into 'prestige' that may be leveraged to advantage in certain spheres (Bourdieu 1984, 1990).

Considering the experiences of Jeet Nagar women within Bourdieu's framework, it can be seen that their families had acquired a gentle degree of economic capital through their property construction efforts over their 25-30 years of habitation in the metro. Yet, they struggled to convert this economic status into social and cultural capital. Firstly, young women in Jeet Nagar are at a disadvantage in terms of their capacity to acquire social capital—the useful and durable social relationships and networks that Bourdieu argues can serve as currency to support people in pursuing their ambitions (Bourdieu 1984). While social capital is derived primarily from one's social position and status, it is not merely inherited, in Bourdieu's thinking: people need to invest time and economic means to maintain it and develop it further (Bourdieu 1986). However, young women in Jeet Nagar were afforded scant opportunities to do this. Unlike campus-based students who develop significant peer groups over their years of study (Abraham 2002; Jeffrey 2010), distance education students are not afforded the chance to build strong networks that would support them to pursue higher status jobs (Panchabakesan 2011; Ramakrishnan 2016: 57; Sahoo 2016: 43).

For example, middle-class youths from South Delhi whom I knew through my social networks often talked of how they had gained jobs in multi-national corporations through their parents' connections, their "batch mates" from college, or their batch mates' parents. In contrast, young women in Jeet Nagar were not in a position to cultivate peers through their college studies, because they studied at home. The job networks they were linked to were low-status local jobs, such as after-school tutoring of small children or entry-level administrative jobs in nearby small offices. They did not have the possibility of participating in the campus recruitment processes that are avenues to jobs in sectors such as Information Technology (Upadhy 2007), or for internships that open up through campus networks. Additionally, young women in Jeet Nagar were also not afforded the possibility to "time pass" in public spaces in their neighbourhood or further afield—a popular and exclusively male activity (while also constructed as a threatening one) which



enables male youths to build peer networks and exchange important information about job avenues (Jeffrey 2010; Philip 2018). Therefore, young women's lack of strong peer networks placed them at a disadvantage to pursue the kinds of professional jobs they aspired to, and the confidence that came with routine success (Dickey 2002: 224; Jeffrey 2010: 20).

Secondly, access to professional jobs in India is linked not only to one's social connections, but also to cultural capital, particularly as evidenced by communication skills. "Cultural capital", in Bourdieu's conception, is the imperceptible learning acquired from an early age within the family setting and from exposure to peers (1984). This includes the modes of speech, grooming, comportment, dress and manners that provide distinction in social occasions, through which class advantage and confidence is communicated, which themselves become sources of economic power that shape people's futures (ibid.). While it is broadly claimed that the new kinds of merit-based jobs that have evolved in India since liberalisation (for example in IT) do not require social connections and have created the potential for class mobility for lower middle class youths (Dickey 2002: 215; Kaur & Hansen 2016: 272), in reality, lower class youths, such as those in Jeet Nagar, find themselves largely locked out of such jobs (Jeffrey 2010; Murphy 2011; Upadhy 2007; Zabiliūtė 2016).

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Across India, fluent English language skills function as what Bourdieu calls 'linguistic capital' to produce 'a profit of distinction' (Bourdieu 1991: 55)—a way in which people assert an educated identity and claim respect. Less than five per cent of the broader Indian population is fluent in English, yet fluent English skills are often perceived as a sign of merit and therefore give job candidates the edge in the intense competition for jobs or to move up the career ladder (Clement & Murugavel 2015; Fuller 2011; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2009; Gilbertson 2016; Mathew 2018; Murphy 2011). Because employers often recognise ability only when it appears natural and has nothing affected or studied about it (Bourdieu 1984: 68), professional jobs tend to be offered to the adult children of the established middle class (the "creamy layers") who already possess certain kinds of cultural capital—globalised cosmopolitanism, authoritative comportment and fluent English language skills conditioned by elite schooling and family upbringing (Brown, Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase 2017; Dickey 2002: 216; Gilbertson 2016; Murphy 2011; McGuire 2011; Upadhy 2007).

However, young women in Jeet Nagar spoke only very broken English. Like most children from their lower class Delhi background, they had done their schooling at Hindi-medium government schools, and they





therefore did not have the advantages of middle-class youths who had attended English-medium schools and spoke English in the family home (Upadhyia 2007: 4; Murphy 2011: 7). They conversed in Hindi in almost all spheres of life (including their conversations with me), with the exception of their engagement in social media, which was done in very simple English. Although they often studied English as a subject within their Hindi-medium bachelor degrees, the distance mode of learning meant that they did not have the chance to practise conversational English. Therefore, the 'belated, methodical learning' offered in their adult studies was unable to provide the confidence and casualness borne of familiarity acquired through early and imperceptible learning in families and schools in elite contexts (Bourdieu 1984: 66). Therefore, because they lacked the resources to develop their merit, young women in Jeet Nagar were at a disadvantage when applying for professional jobs, where good English expression becomes a measure of capability (Clement & Murugavel 2015: 116). Priyanka, who was completing a bachelor of arts and was applying for jobs, complained to me: 'I applied in many places [for a professional job], but my English is bad. I can write it for exams, but I cannot speak it.' This process of exclusion in the recruitment process (Upadhyia 2007: 2) saw her eventually taking a job as a local *anganwadi*, or child-care worker.

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In this way, employment and other advancement processes become a key mechanism for the reproduction of social inequality in Jeet Nagar, because, as Bourdieu notes, the further one moves away from strictly assessable competence towards the 'extra-curricular' such as language skills and cosmopolitanism, the greater influence a person's social origins have on his or her abilities (1984: 66). For example, when young women did get an opportunity for a trial in an office job, it was sometimes hard for them to sustain the role. Chandra's daughter Jaya, who had never really used a computer, worked for one day in the head office of a telecommunications giant, before leaving the job. 'I didn't like the environment,' she said to me as she wrinkled to nose to mimic a bad smell. 'People were engrossed on their computers.' Her lack of connection with the job could be attributed to not only a lack of computer skills, but also to a lack of a fitting habitus, in Bourdieu's conception, which consists of the dispositions, habits and skills accumulated within life experiences that enable people to successfully negotiate certain social environments (1984).

As a distance learning student, she had had no opportunity to learn the kind of communications skills expected in a professional environment. That is, she had been hindered in acquiring the 'embodied cultural capital' and knowledge about implicit rules, behaviours and 'locally-



shared professional cultures' necessary to access dominant labour institutions (Moret 2018: 18). Finding the telecommunications office to be a fairly alienating environment, Jaya returned to her former casual occupation of doing stitching work at home—a conventional low-status occupation in low-income Delhi neighbourhoods (Garimella 2009). This suggests the way in which youths struggled to symbolically and socially incorporate professional experiences offered in environments from which they had been traditionally excluded, as such experiences did not have 'the qualities of meaningful rooted practice' for them (Säävälä 2006: 410). In this way, youths find that, despite their efforts of self-advancement based on their consumption of middle-class "imaginaries", their possibilities to transform their aspirations into actual opportunities were elusive, and opportunities for upward mobility were limited (Dickey 2002; Snell-Rood 2015: 95; Zabaliūtė 2016: 281).

### **Mobility capital: the challenge of "moving up" amidst immobility**

While I have so far focussed on a consideration of the three kinds of capital articulated by Bourdieu (a formulation that has been widely taken up in the social sciences), I wish to also address another kind of capital that is relevant to young women in Jeet Nagar—that of mobility. The concept of "mobility capital" formulated more recently in the social sciences builds on Bourdieu's formulation, and posits that mobility is not only movement with purpose; it is 'the resources, knowledge or abilities gained by being mobile' (Salazar 2016: 285). Because mobile people are able to accumulate a series of experiences and skills through their voluntary geographical mobility, mobility is often linked to certain kinds of "moving up", be it economic, social, or cultural. Following Salazar, mobility capital can be deployed over the life course for personal, social or career enhancement in two major ways. First, it can facilitate future moves by enhancing people's differential (cosmopolitan) capacity and potential for mobility (Salazar 2016).

Secondly, mobility capital can be actualised, exchanged or converted within appropriate contexts into the other forms of capital. For example, we have seen that Delhi middle class youths who were able to move around and attend college on campus were able to develop strong social networks that supported them in gaining professional jobs and good income. We saw that Alia's participation in a leadership camp in the state of Rajasthan enabled her to build support networks outside the neighbourhood and exposed her to different frameworks of thinking. Therefore, given that mobility becomes an indicator of the variable access to, and accumulation of, various types of capital (Salazar 2018: 2), for Jeet



Nagar women, mobility had an important aspirational component. Mobility was valued by them because of the 'infinity of promised and assumed opportunities' that could arise from their movement (Salazar 2016: 286). They often imagined the way in which mobility capital could turn mobilities into new indexes of prestige, power and symbolic status—for example, through visiting a mall, which they articulated as a new marker of distinction. But more often, they emphasised their own *immobility*.

For, within a context of rapidly increasing mobility for most of Delhi's population in the last two decades<sup>10</sup>, immobility has become a key mode of production of difference and otherness (Salazar 2018: 11). For young women in Jeet Nagar, who were generally sequestered in the home and were not permitted to attend college on campus, this lack of "mobility capital"—or its unequal distribution—became an element of social differentiation from their lower middle class and middle class peers. The gendered and local norms of Jeet Nagar that challenged them in building social and cultural capital, also structured the conditions of their movement and hindered them from accumulating the advantages of mobility. For mobility capital is based on the possession of other types of capital; that is, mobility can only be leveraged if social actors have other types of resources that they can mobilise and invest in—economic, social, cultural. But as these resources were limited to women in Jeet Nagar, their relative immobility meant that they were hindered from valorising or transforming their mobility capital into other kinds of capital to "get ahead" in life. In this sense, mobility capital is as much *for* mobility as it comes *from* mobility (Moret 2018: 107). And while young women in Jeet Nagar were permitted to move around the neighbourhood to a small degree, which enabled them to build (somewhat weak) local networks, this kind of 'location specific capital' was validated only in the place where it was acquired (ibid.: 116). This kind of locally relevant capital did not afford them the kind of cosmopolitan (and even transnational) cultural capital that middle class people were able to more effortlessly acquire through the high degree of movement that is generally naturalised in their sphere (ibid.).

Thus, while young women's (im)mobility was entangled with other forms of symbolic capital and 'prospective affects like aspiration and hope', it was when the possibility of further movement and their aspirations fell apart, the criticality of their aspirational practices 'emerged in fuller measure' (Mathew 2018: 12). For, if aspiration is a 'navigational capacity' that thrives on practice, repetition and exploration, according to Appadurai (2004: 69), the capacity of young women in Jeet Nagar to practise acting upon their aspirations became truncated by their lack of mobility, which hindered their opportunity to acquire the social and



cultural capital necessary to move ahead in life. While wealthy people, according to Appadurai, are in a better position to explore the relationship of aspirations to outcomes 'more frequently and realistically', and to become more adept in navigating the complex steps to their goals, poorer people have a more 'brittle horizon of aspirations' because their situations permit fewer experiments and less easy archiving of alternative futures (ibid.: 12). While this was true to a great degree for women in Jeet Nagar, they also continued to plan and aspire towards better futures. Appadurai argues that the constraints of poor people's cultural regime cause them to oscillate between 'loyalty and exit' from their social contexts (ibid.), yet the life trajectories of women in Jeet Nagar were more nuanced than Appadurai's extremes suggest, as the final section illustrates.

### **Conclusion: "Adjusting" aspirations between 'loyalty' and 'exit'**

As young women in Jeet Nagar finished college studies and started to search for employment, it became apparent not only that they knew little about *how* to go about finding a high status job, but also that their aspirations would not come to fruition within India's competitive professional job market, with its high rates of educated unemployment (Gilbertson 2014; Jeffrey 2010; Upadhya 2007). Some women eschewed their ambitions and brought their expectations in line with those of their parents or the families into which they married—that is, they refashioned their aspirations relationally (Zabiliūtė 2016). Others re-cast their professional job aspirations and moved into the new kinds of jobs that have emerged in globalising cities for the more entrepreneurially-inclined members of the lower classes, including wedding planning assistants, decorators, videographers, beauticians, wellness centre and leisure industry employees, or multiplex attendants (Brosius 2010: 289, 313).

These kinds of jobs generally met with their parents' approval, and were seen to not jeopardise young women's reputations and marriage opportunities. For example, Alia, who was not permitted to be a photographer, became a decorator and planner for local weddings. She also operated a small classical dance troupe that performed at functions, and—five years after I first met her—told me that she was 'creatively fulfilled' in this work. Priyanka, who was unable to get a professional job due to her poor English, gained a job as a child-care worker in a local crèche. 'By chance I got this job,' she told me with resignation. 'I want to go for bachelor of education and join the teaching line. But now my mother says, "We will get you married".' Riya's second daughter took up a part-time waitressing job in an American-style coffee shop chain



while she completed her studies, such new forms of globalised space having become closer and integrated into the nearby spaces of everyday urban life in Delhi (Low 2014: 37; Srivastava 2009: 366).

Geeta—who dropped her studies for two years while she recovered from tuberculosis—completed her bachelor degree, and was determined to do further study on campus. Her brother agreed to allow her to do another degree on campus, as long as she promised to "stay within" her "limits" in terms of respectable behaviour. Geeta acknowledged that her illness had warped the conventional timeline for a young woman's life passage, and had "bought" her extra time for further studies. 'At times I think it is a good thing that I fell ill, now I got a chance to study further otherwise my mom would have gotten me married by now. This is good luck in a way.' By using her slow recovery from illness as a conscious strategy to do more study, she took up an approach that is more generally used by middle-class young women to enhance agency and postpone marriage in India (Sahu, Jeffery & Nakkeeran 2016: 11). While this suggests her ability to extract some agency out of the circumstances that have been inflicted on her (Ram 2013), this interpretation must also be tempered with the fact that her brother steered her to do a teaching degree, rather than Geeta's preference of politics.

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The college studies of Chandra's two daughters were cut short due to their mother's looming death and pressure to get married. Jaya escaped her mother's disastrous attempts to hastily arrange her marriage, and she instead eloped with a nurse from her mother's hospital and moved with him to another city upon marriage. Her younger sister Nalini finished her bachelor degree and then dropped out of her distance-learning master degree when she married soon after her mother's death and moved with her new husband to Bangalore. 'My mother picked a boy for me, he is a nice guy. So I thought, "why not?" Everything is fine now.' Neither of the sisters resumed their studies.

Riya's second daughter Kalya wanted to apply for a receptionist job, but she was still awaiting her final year marks from her distance-learning college, one year after taking her exams—bearing out the claims that distance learning institutions disadvantage students by delaying publication of marks and the awarding of degrees (Sahoo 2016: 43). Riya's oldest daughter Rekha was the only exception (at the time of finishing fieldwork) in gaining a professional job, albeit not a high status one. After finishing her bachelor degree by distance, she gained a local office job where she learnt computer skills. A few years later, she gained a data entry job in a government department through a competitive exam process for the quota of jobs reserved for women. This suggests that while the most desirable private sector professional jobs may be out of



reach for young women from Jeet Nagar, the government sector—with its affirmative action recruitment processes that aim to include more marginalised people—remains a possible avenue for employment and social advancement of educated women from disadvantaged backgrounds, even though it no longer the preferred employment option for middle-class youths (Brown, Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase 2017: 533). Yet, none of the other eight young women managed this kind of professional outcome for themselves, at the time of writing. Most young women found that they had to compromise their ambitions to gain professional jobs, as the life trajectories of Alia (who moved into wedding decorating and dancing) and child-care worker Priyanka suggest.

However, not all young women's lives adhered to this kind trajectory. Appadurai notes that poor people do not always subscribe to 'loyalty' to the cultural regime around them, but that some choose 'exit' instead. While Appadurai perceives 'exit' as 'violent protest or total apathy', the "exits" or alternative avenues taken by women in this ethnography were of a less extreme character. Jaya's elopement with a man of her choosing to another city might suggest a deliberate protest against her parent's plans to marry her off hastily; however, she remained in close contact with her family and returned to Delhi for the last week of her mother's life and organised her mother's death rituals. Within a year of working as a child-carer, Priyanka's parents married her off. However, her new husband and in-laws were violently abusive to her, and within two years of marriage she insisted on a divorce against her parents' objections, and returned to live in her natal home with her infant child, despite the stigma connected to being a divorced woman. While Geeta asserted herself and gained her brother's permission to study on campus and delay her marriage, she still subscribed to her brother and mother's overarching beliefs concerning her future arranged marriage—illustrating that women's aspirations to education and career challenge the power of the older generation and patriarchal norms much less than the desire to choose one's own spouse (Harris 2019: 473).

Riya's third daughter, Vidhya, who was the only young woman in this ethnography permitted to attend college on campus, began a second degree in education (teaching) by campus attendance. It was the specific and somewhat outstanding circumstances in each of these women's lives that reduced generational pressure and afforded them the space to shape less conventional avenues for themselves (ibid.: 472): a dying mother; a violent husband; a serious illness (Geeta's tuberculosis); and the position of a third daughter who was afforded more freedom than her older sisters. In sum, these women's "exits" were neither 'violent protest' nor 'total apathy' as Appadurai suggests. Their trajectories consisted of more nuanced manoeuvrings on this spectrum.



Women trod a fine line between having to modulate their aspirations to "career jobs", and forging some agency to navigate and shape new possibilities for themselves. While their lives did not generally take the path they had aspired to five years earlier, their life trajectories stood in stark contrast with those of their parents, who had settled in a temporary camp on the scrubby outskirts of the metro 30 years earlier to take up unskilled work.

Therefore, while the many constraints of life in Jeet Nagar and the cumulative nature of disadvantage across so many aspects of life functions to create brakes on the already 'brittle horizon of aspirations' held by women (Appadurai 2004: 10), women still do not lose the capacity to aspire. They call forth deep resourcefulness, and a remaking of the conditions of precarious existence. Despite the very difficult circumstances of precarious economic status and damaging family dynamics, they continue to aspire to better lives, more educated selves and for meaningful employment for themselves and their kin.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'Jeet Nagar' is a pseudonym, as the name of the neighbourhood and the names of participants in this ethnography have been changed in order to protect participants' anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> Delhi quadrupled its geographical size between 1951 and 2001 (Dupont 2011: 538). At the time of fieldwork in 2015, Delhi's officially estimated population count was 17 million, although the true number is believed to be much higher (GOI 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Jeet Nagar was one of the many illegal settlements that comprised half of Delhi's overall area (Vidal et al. 2000: 20). The Economic Survey of Delhi 2016-17 estimates that 6.75 million people now live in low-income settlements in the city, in sub-standard housing that includes 695 slum settlements, 1797 unauthorised colonies, and 362 urban villages (GOI 2017). The rapid increases in population has raised Delhi's density of population from 6352 persons per square kilometre in 1991 to 11320 persons per square kilometre in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Delhi undertook extensive demolition of squatter settlements as part of the city's 'clean up' campaign between 1990 and 2007 (Datta 2012: 13; Dupont 2011: 546; Rao 2010; Srivastava 2009: 377).

<sup>5</sup> The lower castes joining the lower rungs of the 'newly middle class' in urban areas can broadly be seen to consist of people who would be designated—within the Indian government's system of categorisation—to be in the Other Backward Caste (OBC) category. Castes perceived to be lower—for example, Dalit/Scheduled Castes—are still, broadly speaking, hindered in their social and economic mobility. In Jeet Nagar, informants were generally from rural castes such as Yadavs (an OBC) or from land-owning Rajput or Jat communities (middle strata caste groups) whose rural power was somewhat dissolved in the city—which led to efforts by both of these groups to be included in the OBC category in order to access government affirmative action measures such as job reservation quotas.

<sup>6</sup> While there is considerable variation in practices and values concerning restrictions on women's mobility and seclusion in India—generally relating to regional norms, caste, class, ethnic and religious variations—Abraham notes that underlying this, 'the preservation of virginity and the maintenance of fidelity constitute the essential features of female subordination' (2002: 3).



<sup>7</sup> Partha Chatterjee traces this gendered delineation of the public sphere to the development of a nationalist ideology during colonial times, where a western-material/Indian-spiritual dichotomy became mapped onto the outer-public/inner-home of everyday practices, wherein women came to be seen as the representation of the home and the inner spiritual self (1989: 239). This impacted heavily on women's movements between home and "outside"; their ventures into the outside world had to be under conditions that did not "threaten" their femininity (ibid.: 247). Such values and practices have been carried into the present day and into other sections of society, and are imposed upon many women in Jeet Nagar.

<sup>8</sup> The Indian government's main objective in developing distance education was to enable a large number of persons to acquire further knowledge and improve professional competence (Panchabakesan 2011: 2; Sahoo 2016: 42). Distance study courses were therefore aimed at: '(a) Students who had to discontinue their formal education owing to pecuniary and other circumstances; (b) Students in geographically remote areas; (c) Students who had to discontinue education because of lack of aptitude and motivation but who may later on become motivated; (d) Students who cannot find a seat or do not wish to join a regular college or university department although they have the necessary qualifications to pursue higher education; and (e) individuals who look upon education as a life-time activity and may either like to refresh their knowledge in an existing discipline or to acquire knowledge in a new area' (Panchabakesan 2011: 2).

<sup>9</sup> This expansion of distance learning options has gone hand-in-hand with the rapid increase in new private colleges in India, which generally cater to the growing rural elite and newly urbanised lower-middle classes (Gilbertson 2014: 218; Jeffrey 2010). Lower class men attend such colleges in the hope of gaining government jobs, while lower class women are generally sent to college to improve their marriage prospects, rather than to try to qualify for employment (Jeffrey 2010). Such colleges, however, are often characterised by mismanagement, corruption, dysfunction and endemic politics, and often do not deliver good quality education (ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> New or increasing forms of mobility include Delhi's new Metro public transport system, the advent of Uber and other ride-hailing apps, a dramatic increase in private car ownership (only more recently affordable to many), the introduction of new domestic airlines and cheap flights, the entry of increasing numbers of women into the workforce who commute to work, and a rise in aspirational leisure spaces that people cross large distances to enjoy.

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