

**ACROSS SEVEN SEAS, I FOLLOWED YOU HERE: CASTE,
MARRIAGE MIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM IN
THE INDIAN DIASPORA**

HARSHITA SAI YALAMARTY

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Harshita Yalamarty
Graduate Program in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies
York University

ABSTRACT: This dissertation explores the experiences of marriage migrant women from India to Canada in relation to migration policies and changing expectations of education, employment, and domestic and care labour. I engage with the narratives of twenty-four Indian marriage migrant women who arrived in Canada as international students, economic immigrants or as spouses of economic immigrants. Using an intersectional and transnational feminist lens, I unpack their complicated agency in decision-making processes around marriage and migration to Canada, inflected by structures and processes of caste, class, race and gender. Neoliberal and Canadian multicultural discourses consider these twenty-four mostly Hindu, Telugu-speaking, middle-class and upper-caste women as the 'new Indian woman', 'model minority' and 'designer migrants'. However, I put these discourses in tension with the challenges presented to the women by the Canadian immigration system and the pressures they face in navigating conjugal, familial, community, and caste norms. I further this analysis with multi-sited and mixed methods, using interviews with bridal grooming schools and critical engagement with diasporic pageant competitions for married women, and media and cultural portrayals of marriage migration.

This dissertation further examines caste practices in the Indian diaspora in Canada to understand the intersection of race, caste, class and gender across the transnational space of India, Canada and the Indian diaspora, and the replication of caste discourses in the practices of diasporic communities at various levels – domestic, professional, and at the community level. I argue that the horizontal culturalization of racism within Canadian multiculturalism, in

conjunction with an understanding of caste as cultural practice rather than a hierarchical structure, enables a particular privileged configuration of Indian economic immigrants to assume the 'model minority' mantle within Canadian society.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables and Figures	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Research Problem space	5
Conceptual Keys	7
Gender and Agency.....	7
Caste.....	9
Class and Caste	14
Diaspora and its heterogeneity	17
Race and Racialization.....	20
Multiculturalism.....	27
Marriage Migration.....	32
Marriage Migration and Family Reunification Policies	37
Changing Canadian ‘Ideal Immigrants’	39
Contemporary Canadian Immigration System.....	42
South Asians in Canada	44
Chapterization and Contributions	50
Chapter 2: Methods and Reflections	56
Intersectional and Transnational Feminisms	57
Transnational Feminism.....	58
Intersectionality.....	59
A Transnational and Intersectional Research Framework	61
Research Methods.....	64
Data Analysis – Feminist Grounded theory	71
Reflections and Shifting Positionality	72
Multi-lingual interviews and authenticity.....	75
Perceiving the young researcher	78
Caste in Everyday interactions.....	80
Limitations and dilemmas of representing “migrant women” in research	84
Conclusion	89
Chapter 3 - Contextualizing marriage migrants in Canada: the ‘new’ Indian woman in the diaspora	91
Introduction.....	91
The ‘New’ Woman of globalizing India.....	94
Self-fashioning and Gender	99
The World Before Her (2012).....	103
‘Grooming’ to be the Ideal Bride.....	107
Made in Heaven	107

Teaching ‘self-fashioning’ and grooming.....	112
Diasporic Beauty Pageants	125
Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019	129
Conclusion	135
Chapter 4 - “Adjustment”, Class, Caste and Gendered Agency in Marriage Decisions ...	138
Introduction.....	138
Technologies of Marriage and Adjustment.....	139
Arranged marriage	143
“Parents know best”: Choosing arranged marriages.....	144
Adjustment and Risk-Mitigation.....	146
Love marriage	156
Inter-Caste marriages	157
Seeking approval from ‘enlightened’ parents	164
Marital issues	176
Conclusion	179
Chapter 5 - Choosing Canada: Migration Strategies and Class aspirations.....	182
Introduction.....	182
Pathways to Migration	184
Caste-ing the points system?.....	190
Impetuses	196
Natal Family.....	196
Husbands and in-laws	199
The Role of Intermediaries	205
Planning for Canada.....	210
Choosing Canada	213
US	213
Australia and the Middle East.....	221
Conclusion	224
Chapter 6 - Gender, Labour and Class/Caste Mobility: Model minority and migrant success in Canada.....	227
Introduction.....	227
Starting life in Canada	229
Initial Days.....	232
Ethnic Enclaves and Caste in Housing	234
Waged work	240
Deskilling and Lack of Canadian Job Experience	242
Canadian workplaces in comparison to India and the US	251
Domestic work	265
Paid Domestic Workers and Class in India.....	266
Gendered Division of Domestic work in the Canadian household.....	269
Cultural and Religious identity	277
Children – second generation identity	280
Advice to new migrants	287

Migrant Gratitude.....	290
Conclusion	293
Conclusion	296
Bibliography	307
Appendix A Information Sheet and List of Helplines	356
Appendix B Interview Guide for Respondents	359
Appendix C Simple Interview Guide for Grooming school teachers.....	360

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Details and information about respondents' identities, marriage and migration.	67
Figure 1: Tax-filing economic immigrants, principal applicants with India as recorded birthplace (Statistics Canada, 2019)	45
Figure 2: Tax-filing economic immigrants, spouses with India as recorded birthplace (Statistics Canada, 2020)	45
Figure 3: Study permit holders in Canada from 2000-2019 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020)	49
Figure 4: Poster advertising 'Dulhan Course' (Bridal course). Source: Twitter image (Amena, 2019).	113
Figure 5: from the webpage of a school of etiquette with branches in Ludhiana and Gurgaon. On the right side of the image, we see the titles of the courses targeted specifically at women	119
Figure 6: Outside Canadian Consulate, Chandigarh. Caption on the middle easel reads “Did you know that it costs about Rs. 5200 INR to apply for a visa to Canada? Some immigration agents charge a lot more than that. Do not waste your money. There are other ways to apply. Visit the official Government of Canada website: unjab.ca/india-visa . Same information is provided in Punjabi on the easel on the right. Photograph H. Yalamarty	207
Figure 7: Recreation of Anuj’s drawing. Photograph: H. Yalamarty	228

Chapter 1: Introduction

“So, are you married? What’s your plan after the Ph.D.?” Saira¹ asked me as our interview in a downtown café in Toronto was winding down. Saira and I are the same age, and over the course of a couple of hours, we had shared our experiences of studying and living abroad, and of enjoying our independence and feeling lonely at the same time. A year and a half ago, Saira had met her now husband through a matrimonial website, and six months later due to the persistence of their respective mothers, she had married him. As her husband resided and worked in Toronto as a Canadian permanent resident, Saira had joined him a few months ago as his spouse, also as a Permanent Resident. Her question about whether or not I was married was quite familiar to me, an Indian woman in my 30s, having heard it many a times from well-meaning relatives and family friends. I answered Saira with candour: I was not married, and I planned to look for jobs in multiple places after finishing my Ph.D. in Toronto, including in India.

“Oh, yeah, it’s best not to make too many plans. You never know,” Saira replied. “You’ll have to go where your husband is. And what if you meet someone here, and you both get jobs in Canada? It’s easy with a Ph.D. – you’ll be the biggest brain around!”

In this articulation, Saira and I were the typical ‘New Indian women’ who were modern, cosmopolitan – we were ambitious and career-oriented, highly educated and skilled, conversing in English. Her ideas were not new to me, as my upbringing in India as a caste Hindu cis-woman was infused with the understanding that where I live would depend on my future husband and his family. After being married, I would be expected to follow and move to live with him, or them,

¹ All participants’ names have been anonymized.

as my rightful. But what was striking in this exchange was that Saira allowed for the possibility that I might ‘meet someone here’, as opposed to her experience of having an arranged marriage with a man working in Canada while living in India. For Saira, this came hand in hand with the idea that the Canadian job market, oriented towards a global knowledge economy, would be my oyster with my advanced degree. Her words evoked a fluid sense of crossing transnational borders from India to Canada while upholding specific region, religion and caste-based gendered norms that structured my mobility and agency.

After we said our goodbyes, I took a walk southwards to the shores of Lake Ontario as a way to unwind and process the interview in my mind. On the way, there was a sign indicating the ‘Fort York National Historic Site’, and I instinctively veered away from what I understood as a celebration of Canadian colonial and military histories, and a reminder of the settler-colonial project of the Canadian nation. At Fort York, I could see the flag of Canada, and of Ontario which still bore the Union Jack, a reminder of the British colonial heritage of India² and the current colonial presence of Canada on stolen lands.³ As I walked on, I remember thinking through Saira’s notion that it was easier to obtain Canadian Permanent Residency as a married couple, and her idea that I would meet someone here. My own status was that of an international student on a study permit – would Canadian ‘settlerhood’ as defined by permanent residency or citizenship only come to me once I entered into a marriage, as it did for my respondents?

The title of this dissertation draws on a common metaphor for migration/diaspora in

² Himani Bannerji refers to this as ‘recolonization’ – the phenomenon of people from formerly colonized nations or regions migrate to countries in Europe or North America and find themselves under white rule (Bannerji, 2000, p. 163).

³ Fort York is a 19th century military fortification for British colonial forces to defend the Toronto harbour from American armed forces. The website for the Fort York National Historic site proclaims it to be the “birthplace of urban Toronto” (City of Toronto, 2017). This is a far cry from the origins of the name ‘Toronto’ derived from the Mohawk word tkaronto, meaning “the place in the water where the trees are standing”, and the invocation of Toronto as a meeting place or gathering place in land acknowledgements (Mills & Roque, 2019).

Hindi, “saat samundar paar”, which translates to “across seven seas”. The phrase frequently appears in poems and songs, signifying geographical and emotional distance from one’s home, as in the case of love songs or songs about women leaving behind their natal homes to follow their lovers or husbands; or from one’s homeland, as heard in songs about migration of workers and indentured labourers in the Caribbean.⁴ Indian sculptor and artist Subodh Gupta’s series of paintings titled ‘Saat Samundar Paar’ depicts scenes of migrant workers from the Indian state of Bihar with their baggage at the airport, ready to depart, and draws a connection to the migration of indentured labourers from the same place.⁵ The full phrase in the title is taken from the lyrics of a popular Hindi film song from the Bollywood movie *Vishwatma* (1992, dir. Rajiv Rai). The female love interest in the movie, performing at a nightclub in Nairobi, Kenya, sings, “saat samundar paar main tere peechhe peechhe aa gayi” (across seven seas, I followed you here) to the protagonist, declaring that her love for him had compelled her to follow him from India to his work mission in Kenya.⁶

At the same time, this metaphor is laden with meanings and histories of labour and caste. As Charu Gupta writes, “The sea was borderless and unidentifiable, and in its certainties of place, nationality, and identity were dissolved” (p. 250). According to Hindu scripture, the traversing of

⁴ Hassankhan (2013) and Sebastian (2018) refer to these songs in their discussions of the emotional aspects of migrants’ journeys. “‘Saat samundar paar karike, ek nava des ke sapna dekahike...Le gaye dur suriname bataiye ke’ roughly translates as: Took us across seven seas, selling a dream to us ... They took us far away.. giving us hopes and dreams” (Sebastian, 2018, p. 250)

⁵ See Subodh Gupta (2008). In 2008, one of the artworks from the series – Saat Samundar Paar V – set a record at British auction house Christie’s for fetching a bid of over 1 million USD (Nag, 2008).

⁶ Even after nearly 30 years, the song remains popular enough that articles are devoted to the composition of the song and the performer, actress Divya Bharati (Cinestaan, 2017; Gaekwad, 2015). The picturization of the song is striking in how it positions the light-skinned Indian woman surrounded by Black African male and female dancers – as well as Indian dancers who appear to be in blackface – whose garb and dance moves display stereotypical anti-Black racist imagery. In this, the song does not stand alone, rather it is one of many instances of anti-Black racism in the Bollywood, the Hindi film industry and its depictions of desire, sexuality and danger (Ramakrishnan, 2015). More recently, a video on Tiktok featuring the Tanzanian sibling duo Kili and Neema Paul of the Massai tribe lip syncing and dancing to the song went viral on social media, even prompting an invitation for them to visit India from Indian Prime Minister (Haksar, 2022).

large expanses of water was associated with the loss of caste as it caused a “dispersal of tradition, family, class and caste classifications and to the general loss of a “purified” Hindu essence” (B. Mehta, 2006, p. 24). For indentured Indian labourers who were taken across the ‘kala pani’ or ‘black waters’ to work on colonial plantations in Fiji, Mauritius and the Caribbean, the journey has been variously characterised as a ‘loss of caste’, impeding the possibility of return (Bahadur, 2013); for lower-caste and women workers as a potential opportunity to escape the caste system and its oppressions (C. Gupta, 2016), as well as a ‘disruption of caste’ and the possibility of a society built on the ethics of jahajin or ship-brothers who had survived the hardship and trauma of the journey across the seven seas (Mohammed, 2002). It is a testament to the resilient elasticity of the caste system in conjunction with global and geopolitical developments that not only is there a substantial Indian diaspora across the world today, but that caste associations continue to be a feature of Indian diasporic communities as well as the continuation of caste-based practices of marriage and migration.

This dissertation project engages with the narratives of 24 marriage migrant women from India to understand how their marriage migration to Canada is deeply intertwined with issues of gender, class, caste and agency when migrating from India to Canada (Anthias, 2008; Mahler et al., 2015; Purkayastha, 2012). Palriwala and Uberoi (2005) argue that, in India – owing to patri-virilocal customs dictating that the wife must move to the husband and his family’s residence after marriage – married women are the ‘epitome of the permanent migrant’ (p. 28); because from the ‘psycho-social perspective of the women involved’, the move after marriage represents migration no matter what degree of distance is involved (p. 51). When taken into consideration on a transnational scale, this translates to marriage migration across borders becoming a given cultural practice for Indian women who marry men living and working abroad, or for Indian

women to migrate if their husbands want to do so; albeit a practice that sees complexities and transformations in the process.

My respondents represent a heterogeneity of identities based on language, caste and region in India, enabling me to paint a picture of the complexity of the Indian diaspora in Canada, as well as migration journeys and strategies to Canada. Some respondents like Saira had married men who were already residing and working in Canada and migrated to join them, representing the classic ‘trailing spouse’ who follows the patrilocal norm; and others had been married before their husbands found jobs in Canada, precipitating the couples’ migration. Yet other respondents strategized in concert with their husbands to ‘lead’ the migration process by applying as international students who could then bring along their spouses; or as primary applicants for permanent residency.

Research Problem space

The guiding research questions that this project seeks to answer are - how are the experiences of Indian marriage migrant women’s immigration to Canada shaped by 1) the Canadian state’s immigration requirements for economic immigrants and family reunification, 2) the gendered, casted, classed and racialized structures within Indian communities in Canada and 3) expectations of education, employment and division of household and care labour in Canada?

I utilize a transnational intersectionality framework to understand the pre-migration context and the post-migration experiences of marriage migrant women. Transnational intersectionality here allows for a nuanced and multilayered understanding of how gender norms, and privileges accruing from social hierarchies ‘travel’ and shift in the process of migration. My aim is to evolve a transnational understanding that holds in tension the different constellation of power hierarchies of gender, caste and class in the different social and institutional spaces of

India and Canada. Through the stories of women's decision making around marriage and migration, as well as their experiences post-migration, I examine the shifts in gendered power dynamics during migration as seen in how women negotiate these decisions with their husbands, families and wider communities. Further, I engage with women's changed circumstances of household and care labour, as well as participation in the workforce.

This dissertation also offers a representation of the Indian diasporic community in Canada from the women's point of view in terms of their roles as workers, wives, community members and mothers. Engaging with the model minority narrative around immigrants from Indians within the multicultural milieu of Canada, I map out the power hierarchies of caste operating within the diasporic community spaces and within interpersonal relationships. Canadian multiculturalism requires that model minority racialized immigrant-citizens embody Canadian values while at the same time holding on to their heritage and cultural practices, in order to enrich Canada's diversity (as long as these cultural practices are not defined as 'barbaric' by the multicultural state⁷). Indian diasporic communities' portrayal of a hegemonic identity based on upper-caste middle-class Hindu identities and practices fits comfortably into this idea of multiculturalism, but this hegemonic identity is in fact based on caste hierarchies, Islamophobia and homophobia, among other forms of exclusion. Through this, I hope to advance an analysis of caste in the diaspora, to understand the place of dominant-caste Indians as preferred 'designer-migrants' and model minorities under the current Canadian immigration regime, which I argue is useful in discerning the working of intersectional power relations on a

⁷ I use the loaded word 'barbaric' here in reference to the 2014 Bill S-7 "Zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act" which sought to regulate immigration to Canada by demonstrating that "Canada's openness and generosity does not extend to early and forced marriage, polygamy or other types of barbaric cultural practices" (cited in Olwan, 2013, p. 545). See Gaucher (2018), Olwan (2013), Mattoo and Merrigan (2021) for analyses of how this Bill sought to demonise racialized immigrants, particularly Muslim communities, under the guise of preventing gender-based violence. In 2019, the Canadian Parliament passed an act to remove all mention of 'barbaric cultural practices' from legislation.

transnational scale.

Conceptual Keys

In this section, I present a few interlinked ‘keys’ that form the conceptual vocabulary I use throughout the dissertation to analyse my data.

Gender and Agency

The theoretical approach to this project is grounded by the concepts of power geometries (Massey, 1993) and social reproduction (Kofman and Raghuram, 2012) that enable me to analyse transnational journeys, migrant identities and community formation, institutional actors and affective forces operating within and across multiple spaces. While examining how and why gender relations are ordered and negotiated across transnational contexts, how gender organises relations between spouses and families, as well as how gendered agency operates or is constrained within these spaces, Mahler and Pessar’s (2001, p. 445) conceptualisation of ‘gendered geographies of power’ is useful in understanding how gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains. At the same time, it underscores the “social location” in hierarchies of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and gender that people occupy. People’s ability to act is not only given meaning by their “spatial and social scales” but it is also determined by their social location (pp 442-445). In thinking through the social location of agency, Mahler and Pessar look at two aspects – substantive agency emerging out of the migrants’ social location, but also the role of cognitive processes in shaping this agency, factors such as individual initiative, desire, as well as the role of imagination. When discussing the questions of constructing desire and aspiration for migration and mobility, it is this idea of imagination that can play a pivotal role. To extend this

conceptualization, gender is also understood as shaped by the intersections of various power hierarchies, based on race, class, caste, sexuality, age, religion and status – factors that become differently important based on context (V. Patil, 2013). Gendered agency therefore needs to be considered within this intersecting matrix of power and subordination. Activities of social reproduction which encompass physical, social, material and symbolic processes that reproduce human beings on a daily and generational basis within the family and community, such as domestic and care labour, must also be understood within this matrix, especially for migrant women (Bakker, 2007; Kofman, 2012; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). As Uma Chakravarti points out, in a patriarchal and caste-based society,

... while [non-Dalit] women lose in relation to their own menfolk, within a patriarchal situation, they derive certain benefits from the system of which they are a part. Further, these benefits are available to them only if they conform to the patriarchal codes of their families and communities. *Compliance brings them gains, both material and symbolic.* (2018, p. 137, emphasis mine)

The question of agency has been an important concern for feminist scholars, especially in considering what the capacity to act is oriented *towards*. Within literature on gender and migration, there has been a turn away from characterising migrant women, both workers and otherwise, as ‘victims’ of violence; rather, scholars seek to examine the forms of agency that they are able to exercise within structures, as resistance or subversion (Parreñas, 2001). In her book *The Politics of Piety*, feminist scholar Saba Mahmood questions the notion that women’s agency or autonomy is necessarily defined by the capacity to enact resistance; as well as the universal nature of “the desire to be free from relations of subordination and *for women, from structures of male domination*” (Mahmood, 2001, p. 206, emphasis mine). For Mahmood, the notion that this ‘universal desire’ is necessarily oriented towards progressive freedom from

restrictive norms is problematic.⁸ If *desire* is socially constructed, then surely different forms of desire which may not seem to be ‘natural’ to feminist politics – that is, the desire for resistance to norms – must be given consideration. To bring back in caste in this analysis; women’s compliance to norms that uphold caste structures and reproduce them need to be understood as facets of their agency. I keep in mind this complication of agency when considering the intersectional locations and transnational journeys of migrant women who may be disadvantaged by their social locations as racialized migrants, but carry advantages of caste, class, religion and skill and actively seek to reproduce and enhance these advantages in migrating, in their household and community building practices.

Caste

In looking at ‘caste’ in scholarly literature, we first encounter the scriptural basis of caste as an organizing principle of Hindu society, denoted by the word ‘varna’. ‘Varna’ derives from the Sanskrit word for colour or class, and is used in Hindu scriptures to denote society’s division into four groups: brahmins (priest caste), kshatriyas (ruling and warrior caste), vaishyas (agricultural and trader caste) and Shudras (craftspeople or service providers to the above three castes) (Teltumbde, 2009; Chakravarti, 2018). The fifth group that falls outside this system are termed as ‘untouchables’ for they perform ritually impure or polluted tasks, such as tasks related to sanitation.

The other word, ‘jati’ – meaning community – denotes regionally specific communities which may be subdivisions of ‘varnas’ and may have traditionally assigned occupations; these communities function as endogamous units within which members of the jati must marry. Uma

⁸ See Nadia Hasan’s work for a nuanced critique of Mahmood’s characterization of Muslim women’s agency within the context of ‘Islamic norms’ (Hasan, 2015).

Chakravarti, in her definition, elaborates that, “each jati also has its own cultural traditions with its own food habits, rituals, dress codes and even art forms and may thus ‘appear’ to be merely functioning along an axis of difference” (2018, p. 9).

The other, more pertinent, understanding of caste looks at it as a social category of power, inequality and violence not only in Hindu society, but more broadly within the South Asian subcontinent and its diasporas. The stalwart anti-caste thinker and activist, Dr B R Ambedkar, characterised the caste system as a coercive system of ‘graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt’ (qtd in Chakravarti, 2018, p. 7). This formulation captures the pyramidal nature of caste society, wherein each group holds the group below it in the hierarchy in contempt – precluding the possibilities of solidarity and common cause. To capture the complexity of the caste structures, scholars V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai propose the idea of ‘the varna-jati complex’ to encompass the interplay between the two registers (1998, p. xiii). Subramanian Shankar even contends that the use of the single word ‘caste’ to understand the two structures of varna and jati is a colonial imposition, geared towards simplifying a complex phenomenon for the purpose of governance (2012, p. 30). For ease of understanding, I use ‘caste’ in the dissertation but specify where my intent is ‘jati’ or subcaste.

With these conceptions in mind, we can understand the definition given by the 2001 Human Rights Watch report on Caste discrimination:

Caste is *descent-based and hereditary in nature*. It is a characteristic determined by one’s birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual. Caste denotes a system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Under various caste systems throughout the world, caste divisions also dominate in *housing, marriage, and general social interaction*—divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic boycotts, and

even physical violence (p. 2, emphasis mine).

Ambedkar argued that endogamy – the practice of marrying within communities – is a pillar upholding the caste system in India. In his speech ‘Castes in India’, he quotes scholar Ketkar as saying “as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem” – drawing a crucial link between endogamous marriage as a means for caste to continue within diasporic Indian settings. These words are borne out most starkly in the documentary *Meet the Patels* (2014, dir. Geeta and Ravi Patel), which follows Ravi Patel, a second-generation Indian-American man, as he navigates the landscape of endogamous marital match-making within the diasporic Patel caste community in the USA. The documentary explores Patel castes and subcastes (jati) tied to specific regions in his parents’ home state of Gujarat, as well as the organizations that connect Patels in the US that maintain caste-kinship links across the diasporic community. The documentary humorously positions this as a unique feature of the diasporic Indian-American cultural life, as caste-identity and affiliation do not feature in Ravi Patel’s life in any other sphere. Nevertheless, his parents strongly encourage him to attend the “Patel Matrimonial Convention” organized by a diasporic caste association, a ‘speed-dating’ style event where young Patel men and women meet each other and each others’ parents, in an attempt to find a suitably caste-endogamous match.

Pandian (2002) and Rege (2010) argue that in the process of colonial state-making, public-private was split along the axis of class/caste, wherein the question of caste was sought to be suppressed into the ‘private sphere’ by nationalists in order to create the public sphere of secular categories. The public and political expression of caste was construed as a backward ideology, and denounced for being a betrayal of the nationalist struggle. Similarly in the

postcolonial period, “upper caste elite who disavowed caste in public while reinventing it in private could claim to be modern Indian secular citizen” (Rege, 2013, p. 29). We see hues of this ‘nationalist betrayal’ in the national outrage at the inclusion of caste as a topic at the Geneva “World Conference on Racism” in 2009 (Saxena, 2009). It is important to note that there have been various forms of anti-caste assertions and movements observed in pre-colonial as well as modern India. As the Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly of independent India, Ambedkar regarded the Constitution as a moral document that captured his vision of an egalitarian society – accordingly, the Constitution outlaws the practice of untouchability, promises freedom from discrimination as a fundamental right, and enshrines reservations or affirmative action for the most disadvantaged communities in education and employment (S. Jha, 2002; Kannabiran, 2013). In the 1960s, the Dalit Panther movement sought to take inspiration from the Black Panther movement in the USA to mount a radical militant resistance to caste-based oppression. The term ‘Dalit’ – deriving from a Sanskrit word for ‘ground-down’ – became widespread as a reclaimed term of self-assertion and dignity for lower-caste communities.

Though Ambedkar advocated for religious conversion out of Hinduism so as to escape caste discrimination, the presence of caste structures has been noted in most major religions in South Asia. Teltumbde (2009) states that caste-based discrimination can be witnessed against converts from lower-castes within religions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism.⁹

Though caste and occupation in contemporary India are not as closely linked as they once were

⁹ Jodhka (2004) outlines the emergence of caste hierarchies within Sikh communities, despite the anti-casteist principles that formed the basis of the foundation and doctrines of Sikhism. The Ravidassia movement represents one form of anti-caste assertion by lower-caste Sikhs against the dominant Jat Sikhs, originating in diasporic Dalit Sikh communities in Europe (Lum, 2010; Ranjan, 2019). Similarly, Sanober Umar (2020) notes the construction of the ‘casteless Muslim’ within the larger discourse of Islam as ‘foreign’ in Hindu-dominant society, thereby invisibilizing the marginalization of lower-caste and Dalit Muslims (see also Ahmad, 1966; Ali, 2002). James Taneti (2013) and Fuller (1976), among others, give an account of the roles of caste and gender in the histories of conversion to Christianity in southern India.

(except for particular occupations associated with sanitation), the caste system is still responsible for the continuation of inequality of opportunity and outcome in employment and education (Desai & Dubey, 2012; Thorat & Neuman, 2012).

For the most part, this dissertation is concerned with the workings of caste in everyday interactions in diasporic life, following Charu Gupta's formulation around everyday life as "the site for the social reproduction of a hegemonic caste order as well as an enabling ground for generating practices of dissent" (C. Gupta, 2016). Gupta further argues for an understanding of caste through the lens of intimacy, understood as embodied relationships of the senses of touch, clothing, food, scent:

Intimacy provides us with a new way to talk of caste, not only through identity categories, politics, and structural and institutional inequalities, but also as an idea made material through the physical body. It allows us to see the subtle manner in which caste functions as body history and body language, the politics of which permeates the most intimate spaces of our lives (p. 15)

It is necessary to add a dimension of understanding difference and relationality into this approach to caste. Balmurli Natrajan proposes the idea of 'culturalization of caste' to understand how caste and casteism continue under the guise of a benign mode of difference – the hierarchical organization of caste identities is passed off as mere horizontal cultural 'differences' within a multicultural context (Natrajan, 2011). This is an important to understand not only the ways in which upper-caste communities maintain and legitimate their caste identities, and their attendant power and privilege, with the façade of cultural customs and specificity; but also how customary practices continue to perpetuate patriarchal and exclusionary practices within caste communities. Further, as Natrajan argues elsewhere:

Whereas we seemingly encounter empirically 'different' practices between castes

in terms of (say) food, dress, music, marital customs, speech or jokes, any analysis which takes these ‘differences’ as the *reason* why different castes exist and as an unproblematic basis for their separate ‘cultural’ identities, fails to account for the production of these differences (Natrajan, 2018, p. 289, emphasis mine).

What remains foremost in this analysis is Ambedkar’s injunction that the caste system is built on and perpetuated through the separation of different caste groups, and this separation is enforced by not only by violence and marginalization but also through practices such as endogamy, justified on the basis of community-difference. Taking Gupta and Natrajan’s approaches together, this dissertation is concerned with the production of selves, identities, relationships and communities in the Indian diaspora through caste-based difference, as it is articulated within intimate spheres of marital decision-making, friendships, food, and household work.

Class and Caste

I explore the understandings of class within Indian society and within diasporic settings more closely in chapters 3 and 6. Here, I want to explain the close imbrications of caste and class within the Indian context. Teltumbde, among others, have criticized the lack of caste in Indian class analysis, and have sought to establish the linkages between caste and class analysis while cautioning that the two cannot be collapsed into each other (2009). Indian sociologists, drawing on the work of MN Srinivas, use the concept of ‘dominant caste’ to signify the caste community that has the most economic and political power, to understand caste and class structures in the rural Indian context (Chakravarti, 2018; Srinivas, 1984). As Chakravarti puts it, “there are two kinds of caste – those who have land and those who do not” (p. 13), demonstrating the way in which class power is a factor within caste hierarchies. She further argues that while economic

exploitation is the dominant feature of class; caste-based exploitation encompasses not only access to material resources but also cultural oppression and dehumanization, especially for Dalits and Dalit women in particular (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 7; Jangam, 2017). Illustrating the ways in which rural and urban contexts are interlinked, Fuller and Narasimhan's book *Tamil Brahmins: The Making of a Middle-Class Caste* (2014) demonstrates how the upper-caste privilege of access to knowledge and education for rural Tamil Brahmins led them to be able to transition into knowledge-based occupations in urban contexts in the colonial and postcolonial era in India. Their work thus reveals the upper caste-based underpinnings to the notions of the urban middle class in India.

Osella and Osella (2000), and Ali (2007) among others bring to light the economic and social mobility afforded to Dalit groups in India as a result of migrants sending remittances home, enabling lower-caste communities to leverage wealth and improvement in class status against the marginalization they face because of the caste system. Nevertheless, Osella and Osella (2000) point out that Dalit communities in Kerala have predominantly accessed lower-skilled work migration streams to Gulf countries, and have been shut out by other migration streams, such as the skilled workers required by North American and European nations (p. 77). I explore this with a caste-based analysis of the Canadian points-based system of migration in chapter 5. Rajan et al. (2017) argue that despite the higher number of Dalit migrants from a region like Punjab, as well as diasporic anti-caste assertions such as the Ravidassia movement, there has been no significant impact on caste inequalities within Punjab (p. 314). Thus, there is a complex interaction between migration and caste, both in terms of access to migration as well as the changes to caste inequalities within India as a result of migration. Amit Sarwal studies the representation of caste and class in the Indian and South Asian diaspora in Australia; and argues

that despite the fact that caste is not practiced publicly in Australia, caste practices have “merged into class consciousness and a demonstration of social status in relation to others” (Sarwal, 2013, p. 14), which he posits is central to the study of diaspora and migration.

In their study of private-sector employers in India, Jodhka and Newman (2007) find that the language of hiring based on merit and meritocracy within competitive capitalism is built around caste, regional and class-based stereotypes. They find that the notions of merit and hiring qualifications get articulated as ‘background’ or ‘family background’ – for instance, if a candidate comes from a ‘good and educated’ environment, this shapes his personal attributes like ‘behaving well in a professional setting’ (2007, p. 4127). Jodhka and Newman argue that this is basically the language of caste being “dressed up” as family background in assessing meritocracy in a globalized economy (p. 4131), while at the same time, private-sector employers decry reservations or affirmative action on the basis that it would negatively impact productivity by advantaging ‘incompetent’ candidates. They argue that in the case of India, the origins of merit need interrogation: “The distribution of credentials, particularly in the form of education, is hardly a function of individual talent alone. It reflects differential investment in public schools, healthcare, nutrition, and the like” (2007, p. 4132) which sets up institutional disadvantages for lower-class, subordinate-caste Indians.

Along similar lines, Ajantha Subramanian in her book *The Caste of Merit* (2019), analyses prestigious institutions of engineering known as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in India, and demonstrates the overlap of caste and class in these upwardly and outwardly mobile settings and institutions. Subramanian’s work draws attention to how upper-caste groups’ consolidation within educational institutions, allowed them to claim their hold over technical knowledge institutes not as a caste status but a marker of individual merit (p. 17), and thus efface

caste-identity in claiming middle-class status as a result of education, hard work within a supposedly democratic 'meritocracy'. Her work goes on to demonstrate how it was Indian engineers from IIT who migrated en masse to the US in the 1970s onwards, and helped to fashion the Indian technical worker as a 'model minority' in Silicon Valley (Subramanian, 2019, p. 280). Thus, Subramanian's work helps us to draw a connection between caste and class not only in India, but within the diaspora as well, by understanding the dominant-caste and middle-class bases of the model minority Indian immigrants in the North American diaspora.

Diaspora and its heterogeneity

An ambiguous term, diaspora stands for dispersion or scattering, and has been said to denote "communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through migration, immigration or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion" (Brazier & Mannur, 2003, p. 4). Though historically used to describe the experiences of the Jewish and African Black diasporas, the term is today used much more widely. Definitions of diaspora are often preoccupied by questions of home, homeland, return and exile. In his striking formulation, Clifford (1997) argues that diasporas articulate or "bend together both roots and routes" to create a new public sphere.

Arguing that diasporas need to be understood in their relation to historical contingency, Lily Cho (2007) writes that "(d)iaspora emerges as a subjectivity alive to the effects of globalization and migration, but also attuned to the histories of colonialism and imperialism." In a similar vein, Brazier and Mannur argue that theorizations of diaspora need to be historically, politically and culturally specific; and that diaspora can offer a way to comprehend cultural constructions of identities inflected by nationality, class, gender, race and sexuality (2003, p. 2-

5). The guiding question they offer, most relevant to this project, is “*how are these diasporic identities practiced, lived and experienced?*” (2003, p. 9, emphasis mine).

The term ‘diaspora’ carries with it intimate connections to nationalism, transnationalism and transmigration. Despite a considerable overlap, there are distinctions between what these terms describe. Transnationalism and migration denote more tangible journeys and contemporary connections between people in societies of destination and origin. The “transnational turn” in migration studies urged an examination of the processes and networks that create and structure transnational social spaces, rather than thinking of migration between sending and receiving states (Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004, p. 2-3). Empirical research on the construction and maintenance of transnational social fields and social spaces examines the role of institutions, technology, migrants as well as non-migrant actors to understand the lives of diasporic communities (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

Seeking to recoup the specificity of ‘Indian diasporas’ as opposed to ‘South Asian’ in their introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Indian Diaspora*, editors Hegde and Sahoo claim that “[t]here are multiple Indias that are reproduced, normalized and mobilized by the diaspora and by the nation(s) they inhabit. These representations of India are claimed to unite communities around cultural practices and also to impose hegemonic beliefs and values.” (2018, p. 2). Following the work of Vijay Mishra (1999), they further mark a distinction between the ‘old diaspora’ comprised of indentured labourers that migrated to British, French and Dutch colonies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the ‘new diaspora’ that signify mainly skilled migration to industrially developed countries of Europe and North America during the postcolonial era (Hegde & Sahoo, 2018, p. 5). The distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ is also marked by the end of British colonial rule over India, as well as the birth of Pakistan and

Bangladesh, necessitating a specificity in the study of ‘new diaspora’ when it comes to ‘Indian’ diaspora.

Naming and specificity are a preoccupation when it comes to diasporas, and indeed a matter of concern within this project. Purkayastha (2005) has written of the evolution of the term ‘Asian Indian’ in the US census to differentiate from American Indian. In the Canadian census, for instance, ‘East Indian’ distinguished immigrants from India from Caribbean immigrants, who were termed ‘West Indian’ – both in turn different from ‘Indian’ meaning Indigenous peoples. The prevailing norm to describe new immigrants is ‘visible minority’ in Canada, and immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are grouped under ‘South Asian’. Das Gupta (2017) rightly points out that “the category of ‘South Asian’ obfuscates different experiences among the many sub-ethnic groups contained within it” (p. 217). Ameeriar (2017) finds that Pakistani-Canadian women in Toronto reject the term ‘South Asian’ for its cultural homogenization wherein ‘South Asian’ comes to stand for ‘Indian’; trying to fit into the multicultural construction of ‘South Asian’ further invisibilizes their experiences and identities as Pakistani and/or Muslim (p. 102-104). With these concerns, as well as the composition of my sample of respondents, in mind – this dissertation explicitly engages with the ‘Indian diaspora’ as a heterogenous group.

While I engage with this heterogeneity in terms of linguistic and regional identities in this work, I make special note of the role of caste within the diaspora. Caste has been studied in both kinds of diaspora, with scholars suggesting the transformation of caste relations in the ‘old diaspora’ (Ayyathurai, 2021; R. K. Jain, 2004; P. P. Kumar, 2012) – noting that this is outside of the scope of the discussion here. There have been multiple studies of upper-caste groups in the ‘new’ diaspora and the reproduction of caste networks of mobility and privilege (Manohar, 2019; Mooney, 2006). In her study of Kammas, a dominant caste group from Andhra Pradesh, in the

US, Roohi argues that interrelated networks of kinship and caste sustain pathways to migration (2017, p. 2759).

In keeping with the scholarly attention paid towards upper and middle-caste groups within the diaspora, Thenmozhi Soundararajan argues that the homogenized, hegemonic figure of the Indian diaspora is always assumed to be a Hindu and upper-caste figure (2012). Arguably in the case of Canada and the UK, this figure may be Sikh as well. This hegemonic figure obscures the presence and histories of lower-caste groups like the Dalits as well as Ravidassias in the US and Canadian diaspora. In Adur and Narayan's work to bring to light stories of a Dalit diaspora, they find that for Dalits, "the struggle to belong is multifaceted; as double minorities, their bid to assimilate is thwarted not only by racism in the mainstream US but also by casteism within their own ethnic communities" (2017, p. 244). A survey on caste in the US conducted by anticaste collective Equality Labs in 2018, found that one in two Dalit respondents and one in four Shudra respondents lived in fear of being 'outed' as lower-caste (Zwick-Maitreyi et al, 2019). With this understanding in mind, I hope to engage the idea of the 'Indian diaspora' by considering the power inequalities and gendered, racialized hierarchies not only within Canada, but in India as well.

Race and Racialization

Writing as migrant scholars of critical race and theory in the United States, Mohanty and Alexander poignantly put it: "We were not born women of color, but became women of color here" (1997, p. xiv). Omi and Winant proposed the concept of 'racial formation' as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Robert Miles gave the concept of 'racialization',

moving away from essentialized or biological understandings of race, and by focusing on the social construction of raced meanings and discourses, allow for an examination of the mechanisms by which racial inequalities come into being and are perpetuated in societies around the world (Gonzalez-Sobrinio & Goss, 2019). In this way, racialization is also useful in moving beyond the ‘black-white paradigm’ of racial understandings to address other racial groups, as well as new forms of racism such as Islamophobia. Indigenous scholars such as Jodi Byrd, Megan Scribe and Eve Tuck and Black scholars, including Tiffany King and Stephanie Latty, study the ‘incommensurabilites’ of racialized processes inflicted upon Indigenous peoples and Black peoples in the Americas (King et al., 2020; Latty et al., 2016). Claire Kim (1999) in her formulation of ‘racial triangulation’ proposes that Asian-Americans are racialized in relation and interaction with white and Black communities, offering an understanding of the processes of racialization of various racial groups that are deeply enmeshed.

Multiple scholars have drawn a comparison between structures of caste and race. At the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Dalit groups sought to include caste-based discrimination as a category of discussion. This move received ‘fanatical’ opposition from the then ruling government in India, contending that caste was not race, and that caste was an “internal matter” for India (Teltumbde, 2009). More recently, the book ‘Caste: The origins of our discontent’ by Isabel Wilkerson (2020) drew attention for its parallels between the institutions of white supremacy in the US and caste in India as entrenched in descent-based hierarchy and marginalization.

The case of Bhagat Singh Thind’s arguments for citizenship in the United States of America represents one way in which race, racialization and caste have interacted with each other in the context of the South Asian diaspora (see Bald, 2013; C. Bhatt, 2018; Koshy, 1998;

Thobani, 2021). Presenting his arguments to the US Supreme Court in the 1920s, when citizenship was only available to persons deemed ‘white’, Thind’s lawyers argued that because he was a “high caste Hindu of full Indian blood”, this proved that he belonged to “Caucasian race” and thus qualified for citizenship. In doing so, Thind’s lawyers drew on theories of Aryan heritage of upper-caste Hindus which brought them closer to the white Caucasian race. To analyse this, Susan Koshy cites the work of Indian historian Romila Thapar, who argues that this association was a result of misinterpretation of the Sanskrit words ‘varna’ to refer to skin colour, as well as the use of the word ‘arya’ in key texts: “This association was reinforced by references in the ancient Sanskrit text the Rig Veda to the initial division of society into two groups, the aryas and the dasas. The dasas were described as being dark-skinned and thick-nosed, from which Indologists inferred that the aryas were their racial antithesis” (Koshy, 1998, p. 295). Through the work of Orientalists, this theory gained widespread currency, and enabled Thind and his lawyers to establish the connections that as a ‘high-caste Hindu’ he was Aryan, therefore Caucasian, therefore ‘white’ and thus was entitled to citizenship in the US. Despite this, Thind’s arguments were dismissed, and South Asians lost the right to be full citizens in the US.

In analysing the Thind case, Sitara Thobani points out that Asian appellants like Thind and others had to work within the legal vocabularies and categories imposed upon the struggle for citizenship in the US, and thus reified the racist logics of the American state’s exclusion of non-white peoples (2021, p. 81). She further argues that the racialization of religion is evident in this case, as Thind’s lawyers called him ‘Hindu’ despite his religion being Sikhism. Other scholars like Koshy (1998) point out that Thind traded on the caste hierarchy and segregation in India to present a parallel between caste and race, and present himself as high-caste and therefore white. The Equality Labs report, for instance, points out that:

... Thind's lawyers stated that Thind had a revulsion to marrying an Indian woman of the "lower races" asserting, "The high Caste Hindu regards the aboriginal Indian Mongoloid in the same manner as the American regards the Negro, speaking from *a matrimonial standpoint*." They felt that expressing "disdain for inferiors" would characterize Thind as being white and would characterize Thind as being someone who would be sympathetic to the existing anti miscegenation laws in the United States (Zwick-Maitreyi et al., 2018, p. 12, emphasis mine).

I want to draw attention here to the arguments around the supremacy of high-caste Hindu being predicated on *endogamous marriage*, drawing a parallel and equivalence to the illegality of interracial marriage in the US at the time. Marriage thus emerges as a mechanism by which exclusivity, and exclusion, are and have been practiced within the structures of caste and racial segregation.

On the other hand, sexuality – particularly female sexuality – is another ground on which the structures of caste and race interact in complex ways. The work of Shefali Chandra (2011, 2020, 2021) is instructive here – working with colonial texts in vernacular languages, Chandra argues that for upper-caste men, the sexuality of white women became a potent ground upon which to build their authority as critics of colonialism and whiteness. She takes up the example of texts in Marathi that characterise white women's sexuality as excessive, non-reproductive and disruptive. These texts then advocate for caste endogamy as superior and more civilized, as it prevents race-mixing, or caste-mixing.

While Chandra agrees that this was a ground of criticizing colonial empire on similar grounds upon which colonial authority was deployed – namely, the scrutiny and control of sexuality – she draws attention to how this anti-colonial critique was nevertheless strengthening the upper-caste project of caste endogamy, segregation and marginalization: "Aligning whiteness

with sex, the anti-imperial critic enshrined upper-caste cultures. Caste was obscured and [upper-caste critics of colonialism could be] absolved of the very charge that was levied against white racial supremacy” (2021, p. 147).

It may appear that in thinking about the various constellations of intersectional analysis across a transnational scope, ‘race’ as a category of analysis and difference is not as salient in in ‘post’-colonial India as it is in Canada. This is a notion challenged by the experiences of members of the African diaspora in India, who have been harassed, beaten and subjected to anti-Black racist stereotypes (Loomba, 2017). In their exploration of the ‘sensory contours of racism’, Prasad and Raghavan (2020) look at various accounts of Black female travellers in India to analyse the intersectional experiences of anti-Blackness in India. The experience of a ‘haptic gaze’ – being stared at with shock, curiosity, sexual intent – renders Black women in India hypervisible in the context of racist violence against Black people. Prasad and Raghavan argue that this gaze exists on a spectrum with the hypervisibility of Dalit and Bahujan women’s bodies that are subject to violence and dehumanization within Indian society (2020).

With regard to the experiences of people from the Northeast states of India,¹⁰ Papor Bora argues that within colonial historiography, India and the Northeast were portrayed as opposites and “the Northeastern tribes emerged as the ‘Mongolian other’ of Aryan India”, which carried into the postcolonial state as well (2010, p. 346). Out of the 8 states, four have been placed under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), ostensibly in response to militant movements that protested the Indian state’s appropriation of land and resources in the northeast states and

¹⁰ The eight states in the north-east of India are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. These states have a complex history of interaction with the British colonial state as Indigenous tribes in this area sought to maintain their independence, leading the British state to characterize these tribes as “savage”. In the postcolonial period, some of the Northeast states have seen ethno-nationalist movements that seek to gain independence from India – leading to the militarized response from the Indian state, in the form of Armed Forces Special Powers act (AFSPA) (Bora, 2010).

sought to secede from the Indian state. In practice, the designation of these states and communities as ‘disturbed’ has enabled the impunity of the military armed forces to commit extra-judicial killings and sexual violence against women (Gaikwad, 2009; Kikon, 2009). As Thangkhanlal Ngaihte (2014) argues, in the case of people from the Northeastern states of India, the racism they experience every day in mainland India as a result of their ethnic/racial appearance is magnified by institutional racism where their Indianness is in doubt (McDuie-Ra, 2012; Rai, 2021; Samson, 2017). Bora further argues that in understanding contemporary experiences of people from Northeastern states in mainland India, subsuming race-based difference and marginalization under the analytic of ‘cultural difference’ leads to race being understood as a ‘problem with no name’ (Bora, 2019). Dolly Kikon (2021) draws a linkage between racist treatment of food from the state of Nagaland to the binary casteist understandings of food as pure (by conforming to Brahminical standards of vegetarianism) versus polluted (all other foods that are not).

Racialization is also evident in the way being light-skinned and light-eyed are held up as ideals of beauty and desirability – this is closely linked with the key misreadings of Sanskrit texts of ‘arya’ as upper-castes, North Indian, as not dark-skinned or thick-nosed that I refer to earlier in this section. Shadeism in the South Asian context is commonly attributed to colonialism and white standards of beauty but caste and class mobility undeniably feature within fair skin-colour preference – I discuss this further in chapter 3. The ideals of being fair-skinned and beautiful are turned to misogynistic and settler-colonial ends in India as well. For instance, after the repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that guaranteed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, the chief minister of the state of Haryana claimed that among the many ‘benefits’ of this action was the fact that mainland Indian men could now marry ‘fair-skinned Kashmiri women’ (The Wire

Staff, 2019), which for him was of a piece with the ability of mainland Indians to now buy land and invest in businesses in Kashmir. This sexualization of Kashmiri women is of a piece with the gendered and sexual violence Kashmiri women experience as a result of AFSPA (Batool et al., 2016; Zia, 2019).

Discussing the ideological bases of contemporary right-wing Hindu nationalist or Hindutva movements in India and the diaspora, Chetan Bhatt connects the colonial-era Oriental notions of ‘race’ in Sanskrit texts discussed earlier to an analysis of ‘race-thinking’ within these movements.

If the opposition between biology and culture has often been used to analytically situate western racisms, it is important to consider how “*culture*” *already contains powerful epistemic resources* that can provide for a sentimentalist racism that is never obliged to take actual biology or science seriously but can still contain a hereditary or genetic core, the latter frequently articulated through primordial origin myths, and the tropes of breeding, cultivation, blood and lineage (C. Bhatt, 2018, p. 166).

Based on the ideal of ‘superior’ notions of Aryanism, proponents of Hindutva seek to create an absolutist ‘Aryan’ civilizational history that erases all variations and vernacular Hinduisms, and attributes any ‘faults’ within Hinduism – such as caste discrimination, gender violence etc. – to the medieval rule of Islam. All people belonging to ‘India’ are understood as Hindu, and those who are indigenous tribes, Muslim, Christian or bear other religious identities are characterized as traitors or coerced into conversion (C. Bhatt, 2018, p. 171). Within the ideal Hindutva nation, the superior civilization and society is based on racial-religious organization, where the ‘Aryas’ are fair-skinned upper-caste Hindus that are given authority. This superior society includes a caste hierarchy that operates along occupational lines defined in scriptures and maintains social cohesion by preventing ‘race-mixing’ through rules of endogamy; other religious minorities or

tribal communities are brought back into the ‘fold’ of Hinduism through processes like re-conversion.

What emerges from this brief survey of the conceptualizations and experiences of racism in India is that it is inextricably linked to caste practices, as well as ideas of Indian nationalism, in terms of who is understood to be a part of the Indian imaginary and who is ‘different’. A similar lens of national belonging and othering is evident in analyses of racial citizenship in Canada.

Multiculturalism

In 1971, multiculturalism was adopted as national policy in Canada, committing the country to the protection and promotion of a diverse society. In her recounting of the history of multiculturalism’s emergence in Canada, Himani Bannerji reminds us that unlike in the US, multiculturalism in Canada is a state-imposed project from above and not a demand that arose from grassroots politics. Its intended purpose was to resolve the tensions between French and English Canada within a ‘bicultural’ framework, and only later did multiculturalism expand to encompass all issues of Canadian diversity, including immigrants and Indigenous nations (Bannerji, 2020, p. 328). With the positioning of Indigenous nations as the ‘third founding nation’, scholars note how Indigenous claims to sovereignty over land are brought into the fold of ‘Canadian diversity’ and multiculturalism becomes instrumentalized towards further appropriation of Indigenous land and resources (Chazan et al., 2011, p. 2; Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Chazan et al. go on to suggest the meaning of multiculturalism in Canada has always been subject to change, or as they put it, “unsettled”. In times of strife and tension, especially as in the aftermath of 9/11 and the attacks against Muslim immigrants, multiculturalism has been

deployed as the language of ‘tolerance’.

Even as the Canadian state relied on racialized immigrants from countries in the third world to fulfil the labour shortages in its economy, Bannerji argues that multiculturalism as a state policy involved the translation of issues like racism, discrimination at the workplace, social and economic injustice into issues of ‘culture’ (2020, p. 354). Thus, multiculturalism involved an elision of the structural hierarchies of race and class into a seemingly horizontal understanding of culture and diversity. Accordingly, scholars have argued that multiculturalism was, and continues to be a tool for declawing critique and depoliticising issues of racial equality and justice in the Canadian context (Ameeriar, 2017; Chazan et al., 2011; Mackey, 2005).

Further, the designation of certain immigrant and racialized groups as ‘visible minorities’ also serves to assign them to ethnic/cultural groups and obscure issues of inequality and hierarchy under the garb of racial difference as ‘visibility’. Racialized groups are then incorporated into the national imaginary of Canada as evidence of its ‘mosaic’ of diverse cultures, wherein these diverse cultures are tolerated, homogenized, sanitized and commodified for consumption as inclusion. Sherene Razack terms this as the “culturalization of racism”, highlighting in this context how racism operates covertly and through its own denial: “If we live in a tolerant and pluralistic society in which the *fiction of equality within ethnic diversity is maintained*, then we need not accept responsibility for racism” (1998, p. 60, emphasis mine).

In her work discussing the lived experiences of Pakistani-Canadian women in Toronto, Lalaie Ameeriar argues that, “[t]here is an inherent power differential in multiculturalism, with some having the power to determine inclusion and exclusion and others who must remain subject to such judgments” (Ameeriar, 2017, p. 111). The limits of this inclusion are decided by the ‘core’ cultures – the ‘Canadian-Canadians’ (Mackey, 2005) in terms of how much ethnic

difference can be accommodated within European modernity – see for instance, the attempted bans on veiling practices of Muslim women in Quebec, or the attempt at passing a bill against ‘Barbaric cultural practices’ of immigrant communities in Canada, consigning violence against women to the realm of ‘culture’ (Mattoo & Merrigan, 2021). In this manner, multicultural discourses take a ‘managerial approach’ to decontextualized cultures, erasing certain kinds of difference while recognizing and replicating other kinds of difference to showcase “a Canadian national identity imagined to be predicated on inclusion” (Ameeriar, 2017, p. 112). This national identity is then put into service of attracting immigrants and racialized workers to shore up the Canadian economy.

The construct of the ‘model minority’ within white-dominated multiracial societies represent one way for racialized communities to navigate this exclusionism. The work of Iyko Day (2016) and Claire Kim (1999) provide a historical perspective of multiracial formations in North America that brought in Asian labourers to perpetuate white settler-colonial practices, and in the process positioned Asian communities as “model minorities” against Indigenous and Black communities.

According to Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, “this model minority construct is predominantly a reference to economic exceptionalism, upward class mobility, and educational excellence, but [has] its specific gendered, racialized, and national components of difference” (2004, p. 78). Speaking in the context of heightened securitization in post 9/11 US and the racist association of South Asian Muslims and Sikhs with ‘terrorism’, they argue that the ‘model minority’ construct allowed for South Asians has narrowed and contributed to a growing polarization, and right-wing Hindu movement among diasporic communities. Thus, the ‘model minority’ South Asian community in North America is dependent on an erasure of Muslim and to a lesser extent, Sikh

groups, contributing to the dominance of a hegemonic Hindu-Indian immigrant, and the rise of right-wing Hindutva conservatism in the diaspora. Further, they point out that Sikhs and Muslims “tend to be a larger percentage of working class South Asian populations (as consolidated through family reunification immigration policies that eventually shifted focus from labor to kinship)” (Puar & Rai, 2004, p. 82). Thus, they assert that the ‘model minority’ norm is constructed around elevated worker status, as well as middle-class immigrant family norms – which bear out conservative religious and gendered norms.

Carrying this analysis forward, Rita Dhamoon discusses the conditions under which the model minority construct in Canada can potentially stretch to include groups (in her study, Muslim women workers): “when the minority confirms to hegemonic gendered, heterogenous, class-based, ableist and racialized norms simultaneously, she is deemed to be the model Other” (2010, p. 136). Dhamoon further argues that the construction of the Muslim model minority worker takes place in reference to Indigenous and Black women; in this comparison, Muslim women are understood as ‘positive’ for being “pliable, obedient”, desirous of education and heterosexual family norms (2010, p. 137).

Nishant Upadhyay’s work with Indian Hindu skilled workers in Canada argues that it is the “intersections of settler colonial capitalism, white supremacy, antiblackness, and brahminical supremacy shape ‘model minority’ dominant-caste Indian diasporic formations” (2019, p. 155). Their work highlights how skilled upper-caste Hindu Indian economic immigrants position themselves as belonging to the Canadian society on the basis of their ‘merit’ and hard work, as opposed to Indigenous communities in Canada that receive social welfare from the state; and equate these to the reservation and affirmative action policies in place for lower-caste groups within India (Upadhyay, 2019, p. 163). Demonstrating the presence of caste structures in the

self-articulation of Indian diasporic communities as ‘model’, against ‘unmodel’ Black-Indigenous and Dalit-Bahujan Others, Upadhyay argues that any critical understanding of Indian diaspora needs to take a critique of caste into account.

Caste-as-culture within Multiculturalism

When caste is constructed as culture through the process of culturalization glossed as ethnicization, it signals the arrival of an "Indian multiculturalism" whose units are different communities of castes whose differences (cultural) ironically derive from their prior (caste) identities. (Natrajan, 2011, p.189)

Natrajan’s words in the Indian context, as well the preceding discussion, highlight some significant resemblances between my use of caste-as-culture that suppresses the hierarchical violence of the caste system through its depiction of castes as cultural communities that are merely *horizontally* different from one another; and the culturalization of racism within Canadian multiculturalism as a policy to ‘manage’ racial inequalities under the rubric of inclusion and diversity, and deny the oppression of ‘visible minorities’ by dominant white groups.

Gajendran Ayyathurai (2021) argues that the ‘attacks against caste’ in the US, for example in the form of right-wing Hindu groups seeking to eliminate the study of caste from school textbooks in California, have led to the entrenchment of privileged upper-caste groups as the sole voices of Indian Hindu diasporic groups in the US. This is evident in the caste-based tensions arising around lawsuits against caste discrimination being filed in the US, which Ayyathurai reads in concert with race-based tension as well. He argues that privileged upper-caste Indian diasporic groups have thus utilized “[t]he philosophy of multiculturalism, purportedly celebrating diversity and pluralism, advocating state and civil societal recognition of the categories and practices” in a concerted manner to represent their own interests (Ayyathurai,

2021, p. 3). Thus, Ayyathurai and scholars like Jangam (2016), Patel (2016), Upadhyay (2019) among others, argue for the urgency of studying caste in the diaspora as it intersects with continuing processes of settler colonialism, Islamophobia, neoliberalism and racism.

Both multiculturalism (culturalization of racism) and caste-as-culture seek to obscure the power hierarchies of race and caste, respectively in the interest of presenting ‘difference’ as a benign and horizontal structure and shrouding the violence of these hierarchies. What happens when these two phenomena intersect and overlap, as in the case of ‘model minority’ Indian diasporic communities in Canada? This dissertation interested in unraveling the workings of caste in the Indian diaspora in Canada as a way to understand the workings of race, caste, class and gender across the transnational space of India, Canada and the Indian diaspora, and the replication of caste discourses in the practices of diasporic communities at various levels – domestic, professional, and at the community level. Using the narratives of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada, this dissertation is interested in exploring – what is the role of caste in the creation, expansion and the lives of Indian diasporic communities in Canada? What enables them to occupy the position of ‘designer immigrants’ and ‘model minorities’ in Canada? And who is it among the Indian diaspora that can claim these positions?

Marriage Migration

Let me trace my steps back to the story of Saira from the beginning of the chapter. Based on her own portrayal of the process of getting married, the “someone” she had sought for herself was male, an Indian by heritage or citizenship, belonging to the same regional and linguistic group as her, as well as the correct and compatible caste. This someone possessed comparable or more educational qualifications as her, had an income equal to or greater than hers, and thus was

acceptable to her parents, wider family and community. Perhaps most importantly, this someone would have to be supportive and encouraging of her academic and professional ambitions, as well as perform romantic ideals for a ‘companionate marriage’ (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). In her own words, she described her situation as an ‘arranged love’ marriage – which I describe further below. However, in keeping with the virilocal norm, there was no question in Saira’s mind that once she was married to her husband, she would quit her job in a major metropolitan city in India and migrate to join him in Toronto. For Saira, this caste endogamy resulted in a readymade community space for her in Toronto – as her husband was an active member in a regional diasporic association in Canada, she found that members of her own linguistic and caste community were available to socialize with her, enabling her to access ‘caste capital’ in her new home. Further, she was able to connect with professionals in her own field among this community, as well as among her husbands’ colleagues, and leverage these resources in her own networking and search for employment.

For a majority of women in India, marriages involve an aspect of spatial mobility in the form of patri-virilocal norms, as women are expected to live with their husbands and/or their in-laws after marriage. Within India, married women make up for the largest number of internal migrants – according to the 2011 census, 46% of all migrants within India moved for marriage, and of these 97% were women (Krishnan, 2019). Palriwala and Uberoi (2005) further draw attention to the fact that women take on a different subjectivity when they move from the natal household to their affinal or marital household, while maintaining close links across the two households well. While it is commonly expected that women will change their surnames to the husbands’ surname, in some community customs in India, brides are even expected to change their first names to signify her new identity and break with her old (Agnes, 2012, p. 105;

Sharma, 2010). It is important to note here that while these residence practices may hold true for a majority of middle-class and upper and middle-castes in India, they are not universally practised.¹¹

When it comes to transnational marriage migration for Indian women, existing arranged marriage and patri-virilocal practices for Indian women involve crossing national borders. In Canada, for instance, in 2016, spousal migration from India constituted 21.9% of all migrants, and women formed 65.9% of this group of spousal migrants (Government of Canada, 2016). This trend is broadly observed in other countries as well. This form of virilocal marriage migration – with or to join their husbands – seems to overlap with the long-standing and much critiqued perspective within migration studies where men are understood as primary migrants and women as secondary and associative (Morokvasic, 1984).

Ali (2007) argues that “[m]igration, in the Indian context, transforms traditional social relations” (p. 41), especially when it comes to marriageability and upward social mobility. Grooms and to a certain extent, brides who live and work abroad are more highly desired as marital partners as compared to non-migrants, for the perception that they are more qualified, have access to higher incomes (particularly considering currency exchange rates) and standards of living.

Family reunification and sponsorship policies for migration to western countries enabled women, once they had migrated and/or acquired citizenship, to create further avenues for their family members to migrate as well. Studying the Punjabi Jat Sikh community, Mooney (2006) argues that transnational marriages became understood as ‘fully modern means of negotiating the

¹¹ For instance, the Khasi tribes of Northeast India practice uxorilocal residence where the husband comes to live with the wife and her family, though this does not mean that there is an absence of patriarchal domination over women. See Nongbri (2000, 2013).

boundaries of citizenship imposed by states’ and fulfilling ‘family aspirations and mobility strategies’ (360). Other dominant caste communities, such as Brahmins in Tamil Nadu (Kalpagam, 2008) and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh (Roohi, 2017) have also taken up the transnational marriages of women to enable chain migration of families and communities. In the case of Muslims in Hyderabad, Ali (2007) notes that a ‘culture of migration’ in the city has led to young Muslim women being presented with *no choice but* to marry men who live abroad, in the interests of their own and their families’ upward social mobility (p. 46).

Within this mode of seeking citizenship, what re-emerges as significant is the institution of arranged marriages. This consists of compulsory heterosexual marriages, sought within acceptable parameters of class, caste, religion, region and language; and decided upon primarily by the respective families (or at least with the families’ involvement and approval) (Tamalapakula, 2019). On the other hand, ‘love’ marriages or marriages of choice that transgress these bounds – particularly of caste, religion or sexuality – or take place without parental and community approval are considered less than respectable, inferior, and a threat to social organization. At times these love marriages are punished with violence against the woman, the man or both – even to the point of murder, euphemistically termed ‘honour killings’, sanctioned by families and caste associations (A. Yadav, 2014). One example of how the threat of social ostracism and violence acts upon young gay and lesbian couples is through ‘suicide pacts’ in which these queer couples take their own lives (Mokkil, 2019; Vanita, 2005). The notions of violated community honour and respect also drive parents of transgressing couples to threaten to commit, or die by suicide if their children do not desist (IANS, 2020).

Arranged marriages are organized around reproductive heteronormativity, as well as caste endogamy, as described above. We see the tropes of arranged marriages thriving in

diasporic Indian communities even when marriage is not geared towards migration, like the ones seen in the widely popular TV-show *Indian Matchmaking* (Netflix 2020) featuring a matchmaker who follows a supposedly unique ‘Indian’ process of matchmaking amongst Indian and diasporic South Asian single people on the basis of class, caste, ‘family background’, physical and characteristic preferences. While linear notions of modernization may have predicted that with greater transnational reach, the parameters of caste, class, age and skin colour would decrease in importance in marriage decision-making, we can see that this has not been the case either within India or in the diaspora (Aguiar, 2018). Instead, technologies such as matrimonial websites geared towards community-specific matches have transformed the terrain of seeking and contracting marriage alliances, both in terms of identity formation as “Indian” or belonging to one specific caste-group, but also in perpetuating religion, region and caste specific selection criteria in marital choices (S. Gupta, 2020; Netting, 2006).

Studies do report that arranged marriage practices have been changing, especially among educated urban Indians, wherein young people play an increased role in their parents’ selection of their partners. However, there seems to have been only a limited increase in total self-selection – or what we would think of as marriage of choice; or the choice to not marry and remain single (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016; Netting, 2010). Therefore, ethnographers of marriage, family and kinship in India find that the binary of arranged and love marriages is untenable in describing the modern strategies adopted by various groups, as well as in accounting for the agency of women of different classes and castes (Donner, 2002; Grover, 2017; Mody, 2008).

The “arranged love marriage” is a match between families of equal social status where sexuality is sublimated in the acquisition of goods and the maintenance of traditional hierarchies; where free market meets the hierarchies of caste, class, and gender; and all contradictions of capital are happily resolved by a voluntary return to

patriarchal tradition (Kapur, 2009, p. 228).

Sociologists like Jyotsna Kapur (2009) and Patricia Uberoi (1998) have coined the term ‘arranged-love marriage’ to describe a new formation emergent in neoliberal India, wherein ‘tradition’ becomes rearticulated within a neoliberal paradigm of choice, bolstered by the idea of caste-as-culture wherein horizontal difference of caste communities positions endogamy as an expression of agency. The ‘voluntary return’ to patriarchal tradition explains the enduring prevalence of virilocal customs that expect women to move, or migrate, to live with husbands and/or their in-laws. I explore this further in chapter 4.

Marriage Migration and Family Reunification Policies

The community-specific trends around using family reunification policies as chain migration demonstrates the contemporary presence and importance of arranged marriages and caste communities in the diaspora. In the case of transnational, as opposed to domestic, marriage migration, the norm of patri-virilocality is mapped across national borders: the woman’s role is transformed to one who migrates to join her husband and/or his family. This constrains women’s agency in how they strategize and navigate decisions around migration and marriage.

The push towards migration has seen the patri-virilocal norm flipped at times – where the husband moves to join his wife or his in-laws' families abroad. This strategy has enabled male migration within communities, despite the husbands being termed a ‘ghar jawai’ or househusband (understood as an emasculating insult) (Chopra, 2009). As Charsley (2005) points out, “living in the father-in-law’s home can undermine a man’s authority over his wife and children” (p. 24). Indian husbands that joined their wives who led as labour migrants have been found to perceive a loss of social status and have sought to regain authority and power in their

communities through different means, such as church activities and acquiring respectability in their countries of residence (Gallo, 2006; George, 2005).

Though women's solo migration for studies or work has been on the rise, this seems to dovetail with the goal of marriage. For instance, Roohi (2017) finds that women from the Kamma community plan and migrate to study abroad in the US as a group, and ultimately aim to settle down and marry US-based husbands. Sheel (2005) observed that South Asian male migrants in Canada preferred brides who were qualified enough to migrate as workers, in order to mitigate the socio-economic insecurities of the Canadian job market for immigrants and set up double-income households. Thus, changing standards of women's marriageability seems to be determined in part by their suitability for immigration preferences and policies in effect at the time of migration.

Some of the ways in which we see marriageability and motility (the potential to be mobile or migrate) (Sheller & Urry, 2006) come together is in the changing qualities considered suitable for an arranged marriage. With English language proficiency becoming a stringent requirement for migration to countries like the UK and Canada and high scores on proficiency tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) boosting visa prospects, these indicators have made their way into newspaper and online marriage advertisements. Varghese & Rajan (2015) have noted that in regional newspapers in Punjab, benchmarks of IELTS scores were featured alongside preferred caste, region, age and other desirable attributes in matrimonial advertisements (p. 185) – making the orientation towards migration explicit. The inversion of the patrilocal norm is also evident in Punjab, for 'the boys, who are unable to crack IELTS but are crazy to go to Canada' who opt to marry women with high IELTS scores, reasoning that 'once a girl reaches Canada, then within three to six months,

she can call her spouse easily no matter what his qualification level or IELTS bands are' (Kaur, 2019).

There have been a few studies about the challenges and barriers facing South Asian women entering Canada as wives (Dyck, 2006; Merali, 2009; Merali et al., 2015; Mooney, 2006), as well as about the dynamics of arranged marriage in the South Asian diaspora (Aguiar, 2018; Brettell, 2017; Netting, 2006). Interrogating the actors involved in transnational marriage migration opens up various avenues of inquiry – from making meaning of 'home' through everyday routine activities (Dyck, 2006, 2018; Vallianatos & Raine, 2008) to enabling family reunification and creating transnational communities (Charsley & Shaw, 2006; Mooney, 2006) to the study of the shift towards migration or mobility around intimacy and attendant securitization (D'Aoust, 2013, 2014; Groes & Fernandez, 2018).

Researching the experiences of marriage migrant women enables scholars to puncture the distinctions between migration for labour and marriage (Constable, 2009; Piper & Roces, 2003; Williams, 2010) which also serves to highlight the economic contributions of marriage migrants, as opposed to the state's privileging of skilled economic migrants over family reunification policies (Bragg & Wong, 2016). Studies on women-led labour migration (Gallo, 2005; George, 2005), where men are sponsored to come to Canada as marriage migrants by their wives, have also explored how gender relations within the household change as a result of men being disadvantaged by spousal visa conditions.

Changing Canadian 'Ideal Immigrants'

A settler-colonial state, Canada is built on unceded land and land under treaty agreements

with Indigenous nations, which are routinely violated.¹² It presents itself as a nation composed and built by immigrants, and migration forms a positive component of the national self-narrative (Daigle, 2016). In the 19th century, the ideal immigrant sought was ‘white, particularly British-origin, Protestant’ (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002, p. 37; Dua, 2000). Migration of non-white male labourers was controlled and restricted by acts such as the Continuous Journey Act of 1908 and the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, which levied a head tax on every Chinese immigrant seeking entry (Government of Canada, 2020; Mongia, 2018).

Migration was also governed on gendered lines. In her work on the debates around the ‘Hindu Women’s Question’, Enakshi Dua demonstrates how South Asian women, being seen as creators of ethnic communities, were discouraged by the Canadian state from migrating in the early 1900’s as a policy of discouraging permanent settlements by South Asian labourers (Das Gupta, 1994; Dua, 2000). Following the debates, which raised concerns of interracial mixing between Indian men and white Canadian women, women from India were allowed to migrate to Canada only as wives as a way to keep races separate (Dua, 2000). Similarly, an agreement in 1908 between then Canadian minister of labour Lemieux and Japanese foreign minister Hayashi reached after anti-Asian riots in Vancouver, limited Japanese male immigrants but increased the number of Japanese women arriving as ‘picture brides’ to join their husbands (Ayukawa, 1995; Ng, 1998). Women also migrated as labourers to Canada, especially under specific care labour programmes. There were also time-bound specific labour-based migration programs such as the West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955), ‘cases of exceptional merit’ for nurses from the Caribbean (1950s), and Live-in Caregiver Program (1992-2014) which brought in racialized women to specifically provide care labour.

¹² At the time of writing, traditional fishing rights belonging to Mi’kmaq lobster fisherman were being violated by non-Indigenous fishermen (Forester et al., 2020)

With the adoption of multiculturalist policies in the 1960s, Canadian immigration policies moved away from explicitly favouring migrants based on race, place and labour towards a system based – at least on the surface – on labour and skills (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013, p. 10). However, scholars have analysed how even within such a system, structural and systemic disadvantages for migrants based on class, gender, and race persist (Das Gupta & Iacovetta, 2000; Thobani, 1999). Lawrence and Dua (2005) criticize multicultural frameworks of governance and immigration that focus on equal inclusion and recognition as these frameworks obscure Indigenous presence in Canada (p. 135). As Sunera Thobani argues:

The central contradiction of Canadian citizenship, deeply rooted in its earliest stages of development, is that the citizenship rights of settlers, nationals, and immigrants remain based in the institution of white supremacy ... Citizenship emerged as integral to the very processes that transformed insiders (Aboriginal peoples) into aliens in their own territories, while simultaneously transforming outsiders (colonizers, settlers, migrants) into exalted insiders (Canadian citizens)... Immigration policy became central to the process of generating a national population and regulating its access to resources... As racially excluded immigrants sought to expand the institution of citizenship to accommodate their own demands for inclusion, they left largely unchallenged the role of this institution in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. The extension of citizenship rights to these racialized immigrants thus resulted in their qualified integration into the political community, but at the cost of fostering their complicity in the colonial domination of Aboriginal peoples. (2007, p. 74)

I mention this here to ground the forthcoming discussion of immigration policies in an understanding of the settler-colonial nature of the Canadian nation-state, as well as the unequal global economic structure that creates conditions for people to seek migration to countries in the Global North.

Contemporary Canadian Immigration System

The major categories of immigration in Canada are economic-class, family-class and refugee/asylum seekers (Government of Canada, 2016). Though Canada's refugee policy presents a fascinating study in the gendering of borders (see Gaucher, 2018; Murray, 2016), my focus here is on non-refugee migration. Arguing that the Canadian immigration policy has been geared towards labour market needs, Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) state that the ideal immigrant, for inclusion in the national polity as a citizen, is one who is "economically productive and can contribute to Canada's national and global competitiveness" (p. 175). This is demonstrated by the points-based system for immigration, which assigns points to hopeful migrants based on language ability, education, work experience, and later 'Canadian experience' as well. According to Elrick and Lightman (2016), this system is geared towards male immigrants who can more readily demonstrate evidence of 'high skill': "work experience criteria in Canada favour male-dominated managerial, professional, and technical occupations as well as the skilled trades" (p. 378). Work that is deemed 'low skill' is channelled into the temporary labour migration programs that offer limited opportunities for permanent residence, or into specific programs for care work such as the Live-In Caregiver Programme which is predominantly accessed by women (Government of Canada, 2016).

Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002, p. 50) also draw attention to the gender dynamics of the Canadian immigration model in terms of the public/private division between paid work and economic activity/domestic labour. The points system only recognizes paid work performed in the public sphere; it does not account for unpaid care and domestic work, the brunt of which is still borne by women. Thus, we see that most women who migrate to Canada do so as spouses or dependents, whether in the economic class or family class. For instance, in 2013, 54.1% of total

female permanent residents were admitted under the economic class, but of those, only 19.7 percentage points (or 36.4%) were admitted as principal applicants while 34.4 percentage points (or 63.6%) were admitted as the spouse or dependent of a principal applicant. Another 34.3% of total female permanent residents were admitted under the family class, and the remaining were refugees (Government of Canada, 2016).

Analysing the continuities and changes between the immigration approaches of successive Canadian governments, Dobrowolsky (2017) points out that reforms to immigration policies in 2013 valorised economic-class migrants over refugees and family-class immigrants. These reforms sought to align family-class migrants, who were characterized as undue burdens on taxpayers, closer to economic outcomes. The shift towards economic migrants also meant there was a huge increase in the number of temporary migrants – for work and for study – over permanent residents (Ellermann, 2020, p. 2523-26).

As of 2021, the criteria for the points system to apply for Permanent Residency in Canada are grouped under Language skills, Education, Experience, Age, ‘Adaptability’ and a category referred to as Arranged Employment in Canada. When an applicant receives the invitation to apply for permanent residency, one of the things they are expected to provide is ‘proof of funds’ sufficient for the applicant and their family to settle in Canada. The CIC website provides a calculation of funds required for number of family members. As of July 2021, a two-member family is expected to demonstrate possession of/access to CAD \$16449 (roughly equivalent to INR 970,000). I explore the class implications of this further in chapter 5.

South Asians in Canada

South Asians in Canada constitute a significant group of ‘non-European ethnic origin’¹³ – 5.6% of the total population, and the largest visible minority group at 25.1% of the visible minority population (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to the 2016 Census, India was the second largest ‘source country’ for recent immigrants (2011-2016) to Canada, making up 12.1% of all newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2017). Within the group of Indian immigrants, secondary applicants/accompanying dependents¹⁴ and family reunification migrants represented the majority. The majority of family members sponsored to come to Canada by Canadian citizens or permanent residents have been spouses, with a disproportionate number of them (58%) being wives (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Thus, we can infer that a significant number of Indian immigrants to Canada are wives, or marriage migrant women.

When we look at these trends mapped on to immigrants from India, the gendered distinctions appear even more pronounced:

¹³ This is a descriptor of the ‘visible minority’ group used by analytical documents produced by Statistics Canada. South Asians in Canada report different ethnic or cultural origins – this includes ‘East Indian’, Pakistani, Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali and Sri Lankan. See Statistics Canada (2007), *The South Asian Community in Canada*. South Asian as a descriptor is not without its challenges – Scholars such as Mukherjee (1998) argue that “‘South Asian’ is a bureaucratic...umbrella term [used] to produce a unitary community that is not actually there” (p. 29).

¹⁴ According to Statistics Canada (2016), “Secondary applicants’ includes immigrants who were identified as the married spouse, the common-law or conjugal partner or the dependant of the principal applicant on the application for permanent residence.”

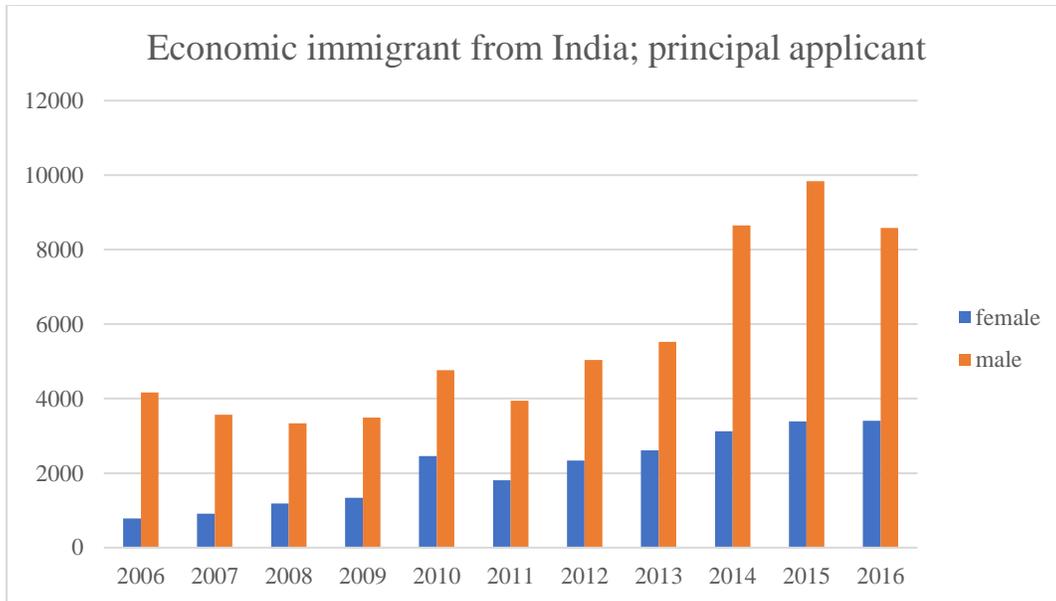


Figure 1: Tax-filing economic immigrants, principal applicants with India as recorded birthplace (Statistics Canada, 2019)



Figure 2: Tax-filing economic immigrants, spouses with India as recorded birthplace (Statistics Canada, 2020)

The dip in numbers of spouses in 2011-13 corresponds to the then Canadian government's anti-marriage fraud campaign, which alleged that unscrupulous immigrants were entering into 'marriages of convenience' in order to gain permanent residency in Canada and put a freeze on spousal reunification marriages. This campaign was based thus on a normative idea

of conjugal relationships, and in turn, enabled the government to claim to protect the conjugal family unit and the institution of marriage (Gaucher, 2018, p.144). Gaucher further argues that the campaign relied on the characterization of the ‘bad’ migrant as the ‘marriage fraudster’ out to cheat their way into Canada through marriages of convenience: either the ‘foreign queue jumper’ or a participant in the organized marriage fraud originating from one of the countries of suspicion – overwhelmingly from India or China (p. 149-151).

Though particular South Asian diasporic communities in North America are held up as ‘model minorities’ placed in opposition to, and in competition with, Black and Indigenous communities (Upadhyay, 2019), we find that the same communities were subject to suspicions of defrauding the Canadian migration system. In particular, the practice of arranged marriage through long-distance matchmaking came under scrutiny as these marriages did not exhibit sufficient evidence of ‘conjuality’ as defined by evidence of a romantic relationship (or at the very least, contact prior to marriage). This meant assessing the legitimacy of the conjugal relationship through text messages, call logs, photographs of marriages and court marriage registration documents. As Gaucher points out, such sponsored spouses were disadvantaged “by their geographical location and then further scrutinized to determine whether their relationships are consistent with the Canadian relationship narrative for arranged marriage” (2018, p.151).

What is evident is that the ideal conjugal relationships, and future citizens, were being constructed at official levels: the campaign against marriage fraud was carried out by visa officials who held the power to decide and evaluate what counts as a ‘valid’ legitimate marriage eligible for citizenship and/or residency. Sheel (2005) analyses how Canadian multicultural policies have enabled a certain display of ethnic identity and solidified community boundaries, both of which are conducted through marriage practices and ceremonies. In such a scenario, she

deduces that there is a homogenization of wedding ceremonies, not only among the Indian community, but also in the eyes of the Canadian state as proof of marriage and viability to immigrate: “Lavish and ostentatious display is considered so much a part of the Indian wedding scene that Canadian immigration officials in New Delhi are known to reject applications for an immigration visa for a spouse on the grounds that the applicant has not been able to demonstrate the grandiose marriage ceremony that *they considered* to be the local norm” (2008, p. 345; emphasis mine). Satzewich (2014) finds that visa officials in India constructed inclusion and exclusion criteria for relationships to be classified as ‘real’ or ‘fake’ largely based on local cultures and norms; any evidence of deviation from these norms was seen as suspect. For instance: “one [official] explained that conformity to certain rituals is important in Punjabi culture, and implied that it would be irresponsible for a visa officer to overlook nonconformity” (p. 14) – leading to the aforementioned homogenization.

This presents to us an example of the two bordering practices coming together in the lives of Indian women – the gendered, patriarchal norms around marriage in India, including patri-virilocality, become incorporated, unchallenged, into the criteria to decide whether one can migrate to Canada as a spouse or not. The Canadian state thus comes to play a part in the lives, practices and performances of rituals of Indian women and men who aspire to migrate. As Walton-Roberts asks, “how applicable is the Canadian concern with policies that perpetrate gendered inequities when the policy is exercised beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation, and on people who do not possess the privilege of the 'right' state membership?” (2004, p. 275)

Dobrowolsky (2017) outlines how the 2016 Liberal government in Canada took a step away from openly targeting undesirable immigrants; however, despite the resumption of

immigration through spousal sponsorship, there may exist continuities at policy and practice levels. The economic justification of immigration is now “the admission of highly-educated and 'self-reliant' immigrants who would make Canada economically competitive whilst at the same time remaining 'self-supporting' during periods of economic upheaval” ([Ellermann 2020, 2527](#)). Thus, the family formed through reunification and spousal sponsorship policies is designated “a unit of privatized interdependency” (Gaucher, 2018, p. 17) which may be a burden on taxpayers. The requirements of permanent residency applications of spouses as the principal applicant and dependent requiring a combined total of points based on education, language skills and work experience, belie a vision of a conjugal unit where both partners are self-reliant and independently skilled – ‘designer migrants’ who meet the specificities of a “neo-liberal nation intent on productivity, cost recovery, and immigrant self-settlement” (Simmons, 2010, p. 85).

Further, what constitutes the ‘desirable’ migrant in the current global knowledge economy has shifted towards attracting the highly skilled, and “best and brightest”, particularly international graduate students (Ellermann, 2020). For Canada, this has taken the shape of encouraging international student migration, which have trebled according to figures available from 1995 to 2015 ([Kim and Kwak, 2019, p. 5](#)) This is borne out by numbers from India, which ranks 2nd in the top ten source countries for international students:

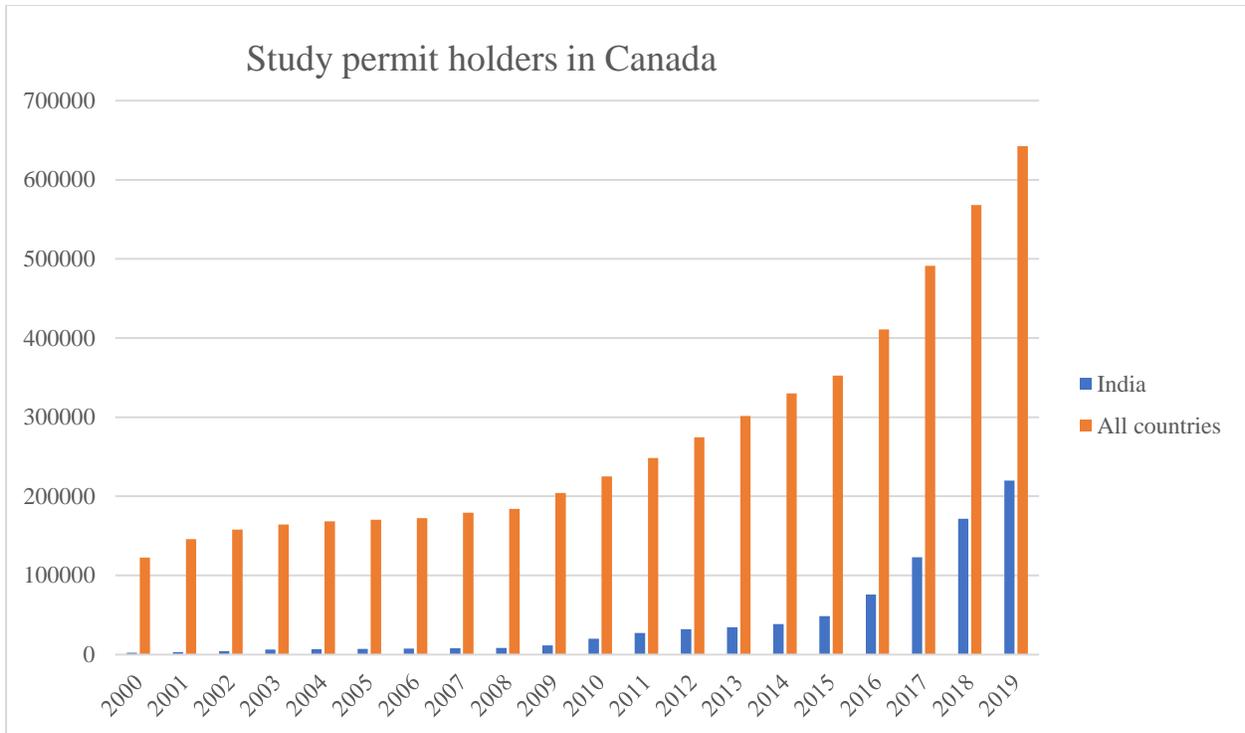


Figure 3: Study permit holders in Canada from 2000-2019 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020)

As permanent residency qualification requirements have gotten stricter, international student migration has shot up, indicating a rise in temporary migration that meets economic needs and does not burden the taxpayer while also providing relatively easy access to residency and citizenship. International students are also a growing and considerable source of revenue for Canadian colleges and universities (Global Canada Affairs, 2017). Study permits in Canada allow for the student to bring their spouse on an open work permit, which enables spouses to migrate together: while one studies, the other one works to earn, a self-sufficient and productive unit. As mentioned above, for respondents who found the ‘proof of funds’ requirement of permanent residency an insurmountable barrier, applying as an international student was a much more accessible route to migrate to Canada. This is becoming a growing avenue of spousal migration, according to Canadian reportage (Todd, 2017). For respondents who found the ‘proof of funds’ requirement of permanent residency an insurmountable barrier, applying as an

international student was a much more accessible route to migrate to Canada.

Chapterization and Contributions

This dissertation intervenes in existing scholarship around Indian migrant women, Indian diasporic communities in Canada and Canadian multiculturalism in two broad areas. Firstly, by focusing closely on the textured narratives of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada, I explore their complex negotiations and decision-making around the processes of marriage and migration, structured by caste, class and gender. This pushes back against the dominant stereotyped depictions of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada as facing abuse within their families and being isolated in a wider Canadian context – as depicted in films like ‘Heaven on Earth’ (dir. Deepa Mehta), and books by Indo-Canadian writers Anita Rau Badami, Uma Parameswaran and others. My findings also complicate the picture of Indian women migrants as ‘trailing spouses’ who are tied to their husband’s migratory trajectories – on the contrary, my respondents took an active role in strategizing around migration, even leading the migration as primary applicants which positions them as ‘leaders’ of the migration process. The second contribution of this dissertation traces the workings of caste structures and relations in my respondents’ narratives and lives in India and Canada. In her review of Charu Gupta’s book ‘The Gender of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print’, scholar Shailaja Paik notes that: “Moreover, just as gender is replaced by women, albeit with a token inclusion of Dalit men... Dalits stand in for the ‘caste question’. But even notable scholars forget that caste is everywhere in the hierarchy and cannot be simply applied to Dalits, just as the study of race cannot only concern ‘Blackness’, but must also analyse ‘Whiteness’.”(Paik, 2017, p. 926). While this dissertation has focused on women’s narratives as subjects of gendered norms, in this study I am inspired by Paik’s

injunction that caste needs to be studied at all levels in the hierarchy, not only in relation to the experiences of subordinate castes.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical and methodological considerations for this project, which employs a transnational and intersectional framework to understand women's decision-making processes and their experiences as immigrants. I bring attention to the interplay of power between myself and my respondents around questions of marital status, age and their trust in the interview process. I also outline how respondents sought to help me find respondents and, in the process, outlined their conceptions of the 'ideal marriage migrant woman' – one who has succeeded at fitting into the Canadian economy with her skills and qualifications, while upholding 'Indian' traditions and associating with fellow Indian community members. In my interactions with respondents and other members of the Indian diasporic community, attempts to identify my caste through food practices, my accent and my appearance were a regular occurrence. I discuss these to illustrate how caste features into the discussions of everyday and bodily practices, as well as structuring relationalities between diasporic Indians.

In chapter 3, I sketch out the discourse of the 'new Indian woman' in the neoliberal Indian economy which obliges women to uphold and perform 'traditional' Indian identities while simultaneously practicing neoliberal rationality in decision-making around consumption and professionalization. I explore the transnational journey of the 'new Indian woman' to become a 'model multicultural subject' through two sites – bridal grooming schools in India that offer courses on preparing women to migrate abroad after marriage, and diasporic beauty pageants in Canada that feature married women as contestants. The 'model multicultural' migrant woman emerges as one who performs her Indian traditions and culture, while also establishing herself as a good Canadian subject – meaning that she has successfully integrated into the Canadian

economy and society, while embodying the liberal values of Canadian multiculturalism. She represents the ideal ‘designer-migrant’ – the economic immigrant who is provided with a fast-track to permanence in Canada; she also functions as a gendered symbol of the upward socio-economic mobility of the Indian diasporic community in Canada. At the same time, I discuss how caste privileges and marginalization are woven into the class-based practices of bridal grooming and personality development classes. I argue that the dominant hegemonic figure of the Indian marriage migrant woman who is also held up as the model multicultural figure signifying the upward social mobility of the Indian diasporic community, also bears the marks of upper-caste privilege. In neoliberal India, the confluence of caste and class privilege has resulted in an ‘unnaming’ of caste into class-based practices of ‘family background’; the rising ‘new middle class’ in India may be composed of a multitude of castes but class-status is defined by markers such as English-speaking, being groomed for professional, multinational corporate speaking and at the same performing a dominant upper-caste ‘Indian’ identity.

Having mapped out these interconnected discourses, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on how my respondents interact with these discourses, while also facing familial and institutional pressures. Chapter 4 delves into respondents’ narratives around marriage decisions, and places their agency as ‘new Indian women’ centre stage as they navigate questions of ‘adjustment’ and compromise in choosing caste-endogamous arranged marriages or convincing their parents to agree to inter-caste or inter-regional love marriages. I understand this agency through the lens of the ‘patriarchal bargain’, where women seek to make informed choices that minimise potential conflict and compromises around their personal and professional ambitions required of them in their marital lives, with regard to caste, class and gender. I argue that caste remains important even in love-marriages, even though class-considerations supersede caste in parental assent to

the marriage. I use the lens of ‘caste-as-culture’ to analyse my respondents’ choices regarding arranged caste-endogamous marriages or inter-caste love marriages. To minimise the ‘adjustment and compromise’ required of them in their marital lives, some respondents chose to enter into caste-endogamous marriages, approved by their parents and with similar family composition, so that they would not be asked to give up their personal and professional ambitions. However, these women still found themselves facing gendered restrictions as daughters-in-law; I thus argue that the ‘patriarchal bargain’ in terms of caste-endogamy does not *guarantee* them an easy transition and adjustment to marital life. Women who chose inter-caste marriages had to work hard to overcome their family’s objections, by demonstrating the class-parity of their husbands, in order to obtain parental consent and maintain family ties after their marriage. Thus, we see how caste features into each respondent’s marriage decision on different registers.

In Chapter 5, I focus on my respondents’ migration decisions and how they strategize for migration to Canada along with their husbands, as permanent residents or as international students. Women migrated not only in response to familial, more specifically their husbands’ desires, but at times despite their opposition as well. These negotiations became an emotional burden in cases where families perceived women to be leading the migration and serve the women’s own professional and personal ambitions. Further, women who led the process of migration also felt an increased burden to live up to their husbands and families’ expectations of ‘migrant success’ while upholding gendered expectations around nurturing their family life alongside navigating the challenging milieu faced by new immigrants. Lastly, this chapter discusses my respondents’ reasons for choosing Canada over other possible destinations, which range from personal, professional to political, and reveal a nuanced engagement with the various

dimensions of the process of migration. Though I was not able to elicit data that connected caste consideration to respondents' migration trajectories, I argue that the overlap of caste and class in India, as well as workings of transnational 'caste capital' provide a way to understand the agglomeration of upper or dominant-caste migrant communities in the diaspora through economic-class immigration.

In Chapter 6, I explore the experiences of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada in terms of housing, finding employment and waged work, as well as their experiences with domestic and care labour and community spaces. Here, I emphasise the importance of their connections to friends, family or acquaintances from India to help new migrants find housing, employment and learn to navigate Canadian everyday living. Further, I contextualize my respondents' experiences with race in the workplace, both in terms of facing racist discrimination for being Indian women, as well as adopting a racial and hierarchical understanding of racialized labouring bodies, which I argue is central to the 'model minority' myth. Finally, I lay out my respondents' hopes for their own children growing up in Canada and their creation of community spaces, particularly religious spaces, as well as their advice to other newcomers. Through this, I discern their pragmatic understanding of 'migrant gratitude', understanding their subordination within racial and class structures in Canadian society as a feature of life that they accept on their way to achieving migrant success. Through this nuanced exploration of life in Canada, I place Indian marriage migrant women's aspirations – in this case, a largely Hindu, Telugu-speaking, middle-class and upper-caste group of women – towards migrant success and become designer-migrants and model multicultural subjects in context with the challenges presented by the Canadian immigration system, at the intersection of gender, class, caste and race structures.

In this chapter, my argument around caste in the diaspora proceeds through the analysis

of caste in the workplace and within the domestic sphere. The horizontal culturalization of racism within Canadian multiculturalism allows for a particular, privileged configuration of Indian economic immigrants to assume the ‘model minority’ mantle. Immigrants from India access caste-based diasporic groups and networks to connect with others, and search for housing and jobs. Middle-class Indian women lament that they can no longer outsource domestic work to working-class women as they did in India. The fact that they have to perform tasks around cleaning and sanitation by themselves in Canada contributes to a sense of downwardly caste-mobility which overrides aspects of migrant success. In the workplace, respondents express how they are seen as favoured ‘model minority’ workers, especially in relation to other racialized labourers, which brings them closer to white superiors. This parallels the notions of ‘meritocracy’ for upper-caste workers which unnames caste and class-privilege. Following Upadhyay’s formulation, I find that the figure of the ‘designer-migrant’ ‘model minority’ Indian is constructed in relation to the ‘unmodel’ Black-Indigenous other in a multiracial context as well as the ‘unmodel’ Dalit-Bahujan other when it comes to domestic and community spaces, as well as workplaces with fellow Indians.

The conclusion brings together these threads on gender, class and caste in the lives of marriage migrant women from India to Canada. I pose the question here towards Canadian multiculturalism – in enabling the ‘flattening’ of ethnic/racial identities, does it also provide a ground upon which discourses of caste-as-culture can flourish, and perpetuate caste discrimination in the diaspora? Finally, I consider how to build on my research and findings into the future.

Chapter 2: Methods and Reflections

In 2014, I shared with my friend S that I had been accepted into a PhD program in Canada. As we were involved in activist organizing around violence against women, and anti-communalism especially around the 2014 election of the Hindu majoritarian right-wing political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the government of India, I expressed my regret that I would no longer be able to participate. “I know you PhD-types,” S replied. “You go to North America and Europe saying your degree will take 4-5 years but you’re all back in India within a year for your fieldwork. Then it’s like you’ve never left. Tell me something, Harshita, what’s the point in going all the way there to get a degree if you’re going to get all your data in India?”

Her question was rhetorical – we were both well aware of the prestige carried by a foreign PhD degree within Indian institutions, as well as the politics of data collection, for the autonomous feminist collective we both worked with maintained a resource archive that was frequently accessed by researchers, some from universities abroad. But her provocation on ‘going all the way there’ only to return ‘home’ for data stayed with me – I didn’t have an answer for her then, and I still do not.

However, it set me down a path of problematizing that easy trajectory I had envisioned for my research project which involved conducting research in India, and my relationship with knowledge production. Her question made me reflect on what it means to be a part of a North American academic institution, produce knowledge while funded by and using the resources of these institutions; while treating India as a site of data collection. For those of us who come to North American universities and find our work siloed as part of area studies, ethnic studies, South Asian studies, what does it mean to ‘return’ to the field or the academy in India where these distinctions do not necessarily hold – but where a degree from Europe, North America or Australia carries

special cachet? Further, while conducting fieldwork in Canada may present a situation of ‘researching up’ for an international student (Sehgal, 2009), it is not as if fieldwork for an Indian woman in India is uncomplicated. Despite the potential familiarity with the context, distinctions of caste, class, religion operate alongside gender in determining our access, safety and strategies while conducting fieldwork (Chacko, 2004; Purkayastha et al., 2003; Sehgal, 2009). Additionally, being an international student in Canada carries specific challenges: for instance, I am blocked from applying to certain scholarships for which my domestic colleagues can compete. Nevertheless, in Canada unlike other countries like the UK, the promise of a PhD degree is sweetened by the possibility of residency and then citizenship. This exercise of knowledge production would place me as a ‘designer migrant’ nurtured by the Canadian multicultural state to be a desirable future worker and settler-citizen (S. Lowe, 2010; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). This chapter explains my methods, and my own positionality in my research.

The first part of this chapter builds up and explicates the ‘transnational intersectionality’ framework as a methodological underpinning of this dissertation and goes on to explore the research methods that I have used. The second half of this chapter offers reflections on my embodied experience of conducting research with Indian marriage migrant women in Canada, and the relational construction of gender and caste in these everyday interactions (C. Gupta, 2016). Finally, I outline some of the dilemmas around representing the respondents in my research as agentive subjects who are simultaneously marginalized and privileged.

Intersectional and Transnational Feminisms

Intersectionality and transnational feminism are both seen as remedies for imperialist, undifferentiated narratives of “global sisterhood” and the violence of white feminism (Falcon

and Nash, 2015, p. 4) and thus come to be objects of hope invested in as comprehensive, inclusive frameworks for feminist analysis, politics and praxis (Wiegman, 2012). Nash (2008, 2017) and Falcón and Nash (2015) highlight how within the US academy, intersectionality has been made to stand in for 'black woman' and transnational feminism stand in for 'woman of colour outside the US', tokenizing their presence within women and gender studies. As a result, non-western work falls out of intersectionality and gets taken up within transnational feminism within the academy. Falcón and Nash (2015) argue that this is a strategy of dividing women of colour in the academy as a way to 'manage diversity' and the positioning of intersectionality and transnational feminism as mutually exclusive, in terms of concepts, sites and methods. My goal here is to show the convergences between transnational feminism and intersectionality in constructing a framework for this dissertation.

Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism seeks to destabilise binaries of North/South, first/third world and global/local in thinking about feminist knowledge, praxis and resistance (Swarr & Nagar, 2012) often in an effort to challenge global capitalist domination and build anticapitalist feminist solidarities (Mohanty, 2013). It emerges from various genealogies, among them the transnational feminist network advocacy through institutional structures such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Community Based Organizations (CBO) facilitated by United Nations' meetings (Chowdhury, 2009; G. Rajan & Desai, 2013); through the struggles of Indigenous women, women of colour, postcolonial feminisms and anti-racist feminism (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010), as well as 'borderlands' epistemology, cross-border Indigenous activism in Mexico and Latin America (Blackwell, Briggs, & Chiu, 2015; Camp, 2011).

However, this movement of transnational feminist work has also been called into question in different ways. Transnational frameworks are critiqued for assuming that because “capital moves across borders, the nation doesn’t matter anymore” (Mohanty, qtd in Dua & Trotz, 2002, p. 73). Shefali Chandra (2011) and Vrushali Patil (2013) have pointed out how in paying attention to movement and mobility across borders and solidarity across borders, transnational feminisms tend to lose sight of local, national patriarchies and their roles in women’s lives. They draw our attention to the role played by local configurations of power and how they are co-constructed by global processes. In a similar vein, Tina Campt (2011) calls for the use of the transnational as an analytic that opens up questions about social and historical processes in order to avoid assigning fixity to the ‘local’ in comparison to the ‘global’. Similarly, Trotz (2013) argues that a historicised and reflexive transnational feminist lens can be used to ‘track how power is spatialized’ (p. 7).

Providing a useful definition of transnational feminism as a set of tools that incorporate these concerns across various scales, Nagar and Swarr (2012) propose that:

transnational feminisms are an *intersectional* set of understandings, tools, and practices that can: (a) attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination; (b) grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which these processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency; and (c) interweave critiques, actions, and self-reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time. (p. 5, emphasis mine)

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the understanding that structures of race, class, gender, sexuality,

ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as simultaneously interlocking formations (Collins, 2015). It is important to note that this understanding emerges from a larger collective process of struggle and praxis by Black feminists in the US (Collins, 2015; Combahee River Collective; Falcon & Nash, 2015), though the term ‘intersectionality’ is commonly attributed to Kimberle Crenshaw (1990). Intersectionality has been understood simultaneously as a field/object of study, analytical lens, and/or critical praxis (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2015; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Scholars have also highlighted the various ways in which activists, thinkers and practitioners across different contexts have used intersectional ideas and principles without necessarily using or having access to the term ‘intersectionality’ (Collins, 2015; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006).

Critiques of intersectionality emanate from its operationalization in various contexts. As mentioned above, feminists have pointed out the deployment of intersectionality – as well as transnational feminism – as a way to tokenise Black women and women of colour within academic spaces as markers of difference, and diversity. This tokenization has been borne out through job ads and the politics of hiring, as well as the administrative work faculty of colour are expected to contribute to within the academy (Falcón & Nash, 2015). Bilge (2015) and Erel et al. (2010) caution against the depoliticization of intersectionality through the decentering of Black feminist work and analysis of race from intersectional work. Scholars have also critiqued intersectionality as an additive framework in UN-based policies that freezes and essentializes identity boundaries (Mohanty, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2006), thus losing its radical potential for critique of the structural problems of racism, sexism and other intersecting power hierarchies.

Indian feminists have also debated the hegemonic imperialism of western-evolved concepts like intersectionality and its application in the Indian context (Gopal, 2015; M. E. John,

2015; Menon, 2015). The debate between Menon, John and Gopal gives us a glimpse into the challenges to intersectionality outside of Euro-American contexts. Menon asks how there can be a seemingly near-universal applicability of a western-evolved concept such as intersectionality, contextualizing her critique of the concept within the hegemony of western theory in the study of non-western countries (Menon et al., 2021). Menon's critique of intersectionality is located in its institutional itineraries, such as its operationalization through UN discourses as 'governance feminism', drawing our attention to the co-optation and depoliticization of radical feminist concepts and tools.

Mary John responds to these critiques by invoking the position of marginalization from which intersectionality emerges within the west which Menon elides in her account. John reminds Indian readers of the legacy of radical critique of mainstream western academy and activism by Black feminists like the Combahee River Collective (1977) that led to the formulation of the concept of intersectionality, precisely to bring to light the identities and struggles of those who are lost in the cracks of multiple marginalizations (Crenshaw, 1990). John and Gopal also argue that Menon erases the debates and fractures within the Indian women's movement along the lines of class and caste, in her portrayal of Indian women's movements as having been intersectional in addressing difference along the axis of religion, caste and sexuality. For John, the value of intersectionality within the Indian context lies in the continued illumination of the problems of marginalization, as well as a vocabulary to build solidarities across feminists and activists on the margins (2015, p. 7).

A Transnational and Intersectional Research Framework

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) argue that for any project to have an

intersectional methodology, it must take factors such as social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice as guideposts to thinking through intersectionality (p. 140). For a transnational methodology, Trotz outlines “thinking backwards and outwards” (2013, p. 6) as a way to historicize our inquiry and puncture universalist categories of ‘gender’, ‘woman’ and feminism.

Bandana Purkayastha observes that intersectional analyses frequently seem to stop at the national border, but many communities and people lead transnational lives with different degrees of connectivity with their homelands, where they can be simultaneously part of the majority and minority. The task then for transnational intersectional analyses is to account for differences in power and status across geographical locations as well as in virtual spaces (Purkayastha, 2012). Similarly, Vrushali Patil (2013) argues that understanding a complex, globalized world requires that we “approach the production of various patriarchies as intersectionalities emergent from multiple histories of local-global processes” (p. 863) that exist in relation with each other. This necessitates incorporating new categories into transnational analyses on the basis of the context as well as being attentive to how the contexts may alter or change the content, meaning, and relevance of older categories (Patil, 2013, p. 857). For instance, with their historical analysis of gender, caste, race and sexuality in colonial India, Shefali Chandra (2011) powerfully argues that paying attention to the role of caste in transnational and local formations is necessary for a fuller understanding of South Asia in a transnational context.

In thinking of a “decolonizing anti-racist *feminist* approach to power and identity”, Rita Dhamoon (2015) argues that transnational feminisms must take into account Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty in opposition to that of the nation-state; understandings of intersectionality must understand marginalization along different axes of privilege and penalty

such that there is no subject outside of complicity. For Dhamoon, these are necessary underpinnings for an understanding of settler colonialism as an ongoing activity instead of a meta-structure of explanation, which is always already intersecting with global forms of capitalism; for instance, in the form of driving migration for labour and nation building in Canada.

Attempts to bring transnational and intersectional analyses together are reflected in ‘scaling intersectionality’ (Mahler, Chaudhuri, & Patil, 2015) through thick descriptions to see how power, privilege and oppression travel across different elements and sites; translocal positionality (Anthias, 2008) which looks at intersectional identity construction and effects in a context- and time-related way, taking shifts and contradictions into account; and a recuperation of ‘third world feminism’ to link intersectionality and transnational feminism through looking at the local and global as transnational locations (Falcón & Nash, 2015; Herr, 2014). Davis (2010) has argued for the relevance of intersectionality to transnational analyses as it is able to:

[link] gender to a network of disciplinary regimes, normativities, sexual ethics, class apartheid, and racialised effects... [and] locate transnational gender contexts within and across intersecting circuits of race, class, and sexuality moving in multiple and simultaneous political economies, histories, and culture formations (p. 143).

Taking all the above into account, I put together a transnational and intersectional feminist framework that positions my respondents as agentive subjects with richly textured, multi-layered identities and lives, positioned at the intersections of multiple local and global co-constituted hierarchies of power. It follows that any such project may then be mired in intersectional and transnational “complexity, unrepresentability, inaccessibility, and general user unfriendliness” (Blackwell et al., 2015, p. 21) as opposed to the premium placed on ‘simplifying, reducing, and

streamlining' to maximize efficiency; yet I posit that longwindedness, complexity and thick descriptions are necessary to do this topic justice.

Research Methods

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 24 marriage migrant women from December 2018 to September 2019, seeking to learn about the lived experiences of women and their 'subjective' understanding of the processes of marriage, migration and their experiences in Canada (Hesse-Biber, 2007). During this time, I also attended community events in Scarborough and Hindu religious gatherings in respondents' homes. Prior to these interviews, I had also joined Whatsapp groups for Telugu people in Canada and had brief conversations with the moderators of these groups, to gauge whether I could send out my call for participants over the group. Next, between October 2019 and January 2020, I conducted background research in New Delhi, Chandigarh and Hyderabad in India, where I interviewed three teachers at grooming and personality development schools. I selected these schools as they offered short courses that were geared towards women before they got married, and specifically advertised that their modules helped women prepare for social and interpersonal situations in a 'cosmopolitan' context. These schools and teachers offered a unique viewpoint to understand the experiences and motivations of women who anticipated upward social mobility and migration as a result of their marriages. I also attended a Canadian government-funded pre-departure information session in New Delhi for applicants who had been selected for Canadian Permanent Residency (PR) from India and interviewed the three facilitators who conducted the session. Following this, I was invited to visit the Canadian consulate in Chandigarh for a discussion on marriage migration and family reunification processes. Alongside interviews, I have interspersed discourse analyses of popular

cultural documents like documentaries, television episodes, advertisements, YouTube videos as well as websites to provide more context for respondents' narratives or ideas, drawing upon an 'unlikely archive' (L. Lowe, 2015) of engaging discourses around caste, gender, marriage, migration and diasporic life.

My call for participants in Toronto and GTA was initially aimed towards women who had arrived in Canada on spousal visas as part of family reunification policies, or as secondary applicants on the permanent residency permits. However, I found that the women responding to my call were either the lead applicants on PR, or had led the migration process in other ways, such as by applying as international students and then sponsoring their husbands on open-work permits. After a few initial conversations with respondents who did not 'fit' into the original sample, I decided to restructure my research expectations and shift my sample altogether. Further, I stated in my call for participants that I was comfortable conducting interviews in three languages – English, Hindi and Telugu. This, combined with my use of personal networks to disseminate the call and the snowball sampling that followed, has led to a largely Hindu (92%), Telugu-speaking (58%) sample. Three respondents declined to disclose their caste identities and the remaining all identified as belonging to various regional dominant castes and sub-castes, the largest group being Brahmin (38%). This composition may not be reflective of the Indian diaspora in the Toronto, GTA or Canada as a whole; but nevertheless reflects the spaces within which I anticipated positive responses to my research, as well as the lines of socialization among my respondents.

The table below presents some pertinent information about each of my respondents.

Table of Information about Respondents								
<i>Pseudonym Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Age at Marriage</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Region; Language</i>	<i>Caste</i>	<i>Love or arranged</i>	<i>Migration year</i>	<i>Migration Strategy</i>
Falak	35	25	Hindu	Punjab; English and Hindi	Hindu Khatri	Love	2018	PR Primary applicant
Manya	32	28	Hindu	Rajasthan; English and Hindi	Brahmin	Love	2018	PR Primary applicant
Meena	33	late 20s	Hindu	Tamil Nadu; English	Brahmin	Love	2018	PR Primary applicant
Niharika	32	27	Hindu	Haryana; English and Hindi	did not disclose	Love	2018	PR Primary applicant
Sirisha	33	24	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Brahmin	Love	2017	PR solo applicant
Frida	32	26	Hindu	Kerala; English	Nair	Love	2016	International Student
Vibha	41	early 20s	Hindu	Gujarat; English and Hindi	Khatri	Love	2015	PR Primary applicant
Madhuja	38	25	Hindu	West Bengal; English	Baidya	Love	2013	PR Spouse
Saira	30	2018	Hindu	Chhattisgarh; Hindi and English	Marwari Baniya	Arranged	2019	PR Spouse
Anupriya	24	22	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu and English	Telugu Komati	Arranged	2018	International Student
Jasmine	26	26	Sikh	Punjab; Hindi	Jat Sikh	Arranged	2018	International Student
Shailaja	25	24	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Telugu Reddy	Arranged	2018	PR Spouse
Surabhi	30	20	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Vaidiku Brahmin	Arranged	2017	PR Spouse
Gargi	33	26	Hindu	Tamil Nadu; English and Hindi	Brahmin	Arranged	2016	PR Primary applicant
Pravallika	35	26	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu and English	Telugu Reddy	Arranged	2016	PR Primary applicant
Crystal	36	30	Christian	Telangana; Telugu and English	did not know	Arranged	2015	PR Primary applicant

Roja	34	23	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Brahmin	Arranged	2014	PR Spouse
Ila	32	24	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu and English	Kapu	Arranged	2011	International Student
Mythili	35	19	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Brahmin	Arranged	2008	PR Spouse
Aishwarya	38	early 20s	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Brahmin	Arranged	2006	PR Spouse
Prabha	41	Late 20s	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu and English	did not disclose	Arranged	2003	PR Spouse
Samira	40	2010	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Brahmin	Arranged	2002	PR Spouse
Ramani	51	early 20s	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Telugu Kamma	Arranged	2001	PR Spouse
Lalita	51	Late teens – early 20s	Hindu	Andhra Pradesh; Telugu	Telugu Komati	Arranged	1983	Spouse of international student husband

Table 1: Details and information about respondents' identities, marriage and migration.

A majority of my interviewees (75%) arrived in Canada within the last 10 years under different categories. Women who had come on spousal visas (42%) were largely wives of IT workers who resided in the US with their husbands, before moving to Canada; they were largely housewives (A. Bhatt, 2018b). Where the couple qualified to apply for permanent residency (PR), the primary applicant was decided on the basis of whoever had more extensive or applicable work experience or higher scores on the English proficiency tests; 37% of the women among my interviewees were the primary applicant. 17% arrived as international students, and their husbands with the open work permit available to spouses. In total, around 54% of the women led the migration process. While the couples seemed to have taken this in stride, in that this was a strategy to help the couple achieve the larger goal of migration; the decision or the perception of the woman actively leading or participating in the drive to migrate caused conflicts

within their families and in some cases, between the spouses and within women's minds as well.

With any new interview contact, I first asked for a 10-minute phone conversation where I shared information about myself, the project, a brief overview of my interview questions and the time commitment I required. Only when respondents seemed interested did I go on to fix up appointments, while remaining open to any rescheduling they required. Each respondent received a copy of the interview guide/questionnaire before the interview, for their reference. The location of our interview was decided upon by the respondent according to her comfort – either at her home or at an outdoor location. Out of 24 respondents, I was able to conduct two or more interview sessions with 10 women, based on their availability and interest in continuing conversations that were truncated by time or other commitments on their part. In some cases, interviews, including follow-ups, were conducted over phone or video call as per respondents' preferences.

When I shared the information sheet and interview guide with my respondents either in person or via email or Whatsapp message, I also offered a pre-prepared list of helplines, legal clinics and walk-in mental health services. I took this step anticipating that talking about marriage and migration as critical events/turning points in their life stories might bring up experiences or memories of uncertainty, “acculturative stress” (Samuel, 2009) and/or domestic violence for my participants, and I wanted to be prepared in those situations, recognizing my responsibility for their wellbeing. Though some of them refused to keep the list, declaring that they did not need such resources, a few respondents had more questions about this list, and sought my help in connecting with services ranging from their options under tenancy rights to mental health counselling. In one case, a respondent pointed out that the resources I had listed were clustered around one particular geographical area in the GTA located at the opposite end of

the city from her home and workplace and were thus inaccessible to her; I followed up with her to share resources in her area and updated my list accordingly (Appendix A). I also provided a duplicate copy of the interview questionnaire to have as easy reference during the interview for the respondent and myself.

Apart from two respondents, all agreed to be recorded. As part of a reflexive approach to interviewing, I invited participants to choose their own pseudonyms for the recorded interview. My intention behind this practice was to open up a space where my respondents could enter into confidentiality required of the interview while still claiming some ownership. Though this practice was not part of my methodological examination, it helped to ease the respondents into the interview space and provided some moments of levity when I addressed them by the chosen pseudonym. In some cases, the choice of names by the respondents also opened up avenues of conversation across memories of their friends or other loved ones whose names they had chosen, or whichever aspect of pop culture was on their mind because of their preference, or what their children were currently watching (R. E. S. Allen & Wiles, 2016).

I also chose to record interviews on my phone as opposed to an external recorder, as the quality of recordings on my phone was high. I stored the recordings on my phone's internal memory and transferred them to a password protected external hard drive as soon after the interview as possible. Using the phone had the effect of the presence of the recorder being largely unobtrusive, sometimes lying in the space between me and my respondent alongside my respondent's phone. I offered to pause the interviews when respondents seemed to need a break, were distracted by other chores, or grew emotional, and I wanted to respect their privacy. A few respondents interacted with my phone by taking it into their own hands to pause and restart the recording themselves when they were ready to share on the record. They did so seemingly

without any conscious intent or thought, but rather as an extension of their interactions with me and their own phones.

In one case, this action indicated to me a high level of trust built between myself and my respondent; even as her handling of my phone made me mildly anxious during the interview as it felt like a loss of control over the recording and the interview overall. However, I curbed my concerns during the interview and did not object to my respondents who interacted with the recording and instead viewed it from the lens of ceding some of my power as a researcher. When respondents asked me to pause, or chose to pause the recording when sharing intimate or painful memories or details of their experience, it served as a reminder of their ownership of their narrative and the qualitative difference between pain disclosed and shared between two people, and pain recorded for a research project.

During these moments, I often struggled to switch between interviewer-mode and what I came to consider as witness-mode – a silent but sympathetic listener to the stories women shared with me – as the two modes seemed contradictory. Over the course of this project, I have come to accept this contradiction as a necessary evil of conducting research *about* a group of people, instead of *with* them (Jiang & Korczynski, 2019). When it came time to go through my recordings, transcripts and notes, the data that I could ‘use’ seemed a lot less rich than what it would have been with the ‘unrecorded’ interactions with my interviewees. However, the feminist ethic of *refusal* and silence as a mode of power, as well as my institutional ethical obligations towards confidentiality, meant that what was off the record needed to be respected. If my approach helped my respondents trust in the interview’s ethics and created a space of open sharing at all, that will have to be worth it.

Data Analysis – Feminist Grounded theory

My project grounds itself in a feminist research praxis and a commitment to adopting an intersectional lens to understand my respondents' constructions of and understandings about their lived experiences. As Patricia Hill Collins powerfully articulates, feminist standpoint theory is “an interpretive framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (Collins, 1997, p. 375). According to Dorothy Smith, “the standpoint of women is the starting point for a methodology that situates inquiry in the actualities of people's living” (D. Smith, 1992, p. 90; Collins, 1997; also Harding, 1997). Taking my cue from Smith, I approach South Asian marriage migrant women as “the knower who is actually located; she is active... hook(ed) into extended social relations linking her activities to those of other people and in ways beyond her knowing” (1992, p. 91).

As mentioned above, I conducted my interviews in three languages – English, Hindi and Telugu – and often the interviews would be a combination of English and Hindi, or English and Telugu, sometimes even a combination of all three. This posed unique challenges when it came to transcription as I was translating from Hindi and Telugu into English as I transcribed; I discuss some of the unique challenges and spaces opened up by these translations further in a section below. I maintained detailed notes in my transcriptions regarding which language my respondents used to enunciate a key phrase or word, and indicate in each quote which language the interview used. I manually coded themes around marriage and migration decisions, as well as questions of labour, education and cultural identity.

In order to interpret and analyse my data, I turn to a feminist and constructivist grounded approach. Grounded theory methodology was articulated by Glaser and Strauss (2009; also Glaser, 2002) as a way to develop theory that is grounded in the gathering and analysis of data,

instead of an imposition of theory onto data to understand it. Kathy Charmaz's (2006) concept of 'constructivist grounded theory' places an emphasis on the voices of the interview participants as a way to displace the sole authority of the researcher's voice, while also understanding the process of theory building as an interpretive process. This methodology is well suited for the research, as it evolves qualitative data in a manner that is "collaborative, inductive, iterative" (M. Allen, 2011, p. 28). As Hesse-Biber and Flowers argue, "by employing grounded theory, feminist research can understand and address the neglected concerns of women and other oppressed groups with an emphasis on the lived experiences of the research participants" (2019, p. 514).

However, there are potential issues with the relativism inherent in constructivist grounded theory, as well as an overemphasis on mutual constructions of reality, instead of an engagement with the flows of power and structures that enable the constructions of material reality, as well as strategies for change. Here, I found that an intersectional feminist lens that has a focused understanding of power dynamics that underlie the material realities of marriage migrant women's experiences was necessary.

Reflections and Shifting Positionality

The questions and issues of positionality were central to my methods, choices and experience of conducting research. In most senses I would have been considered an 'insider' to the community I was researching, being an Indian migrant woman myself, but there were significant and contingent axes of difference that positioned me as an insufficient 'insider'. The most salient difference in each interview was my marital status of being unmarried, which positioned me as more inexperienced than my respondents. In most other cases, it was my status

as an international student in Canada unlike respondents who were Permanent Residents or Canadian citizens. With respondents who were from states like Rajasthan, Punjab or West Bengal, my name, appearance and my linguistic identity marked me as ‘South Indian’. With respondents who were Telugu speaking like me, there were differences of caste identity and in one case, religious identity. In the space of our interviews, the relational construction of identities and meanings between myself and my respondents were intimately shaped by power hierarchies.

The issue of control over the interviews and interactions came up in different ways throughout my fieldwork. With snowball sampling, some of my very proactive respondents who shared contacts with me also indulged in some amount of gatekeeping, exercising control over the project (Manohar, 2013).

Samira thinks I should be selective about who I interview, because not everyone qualifies as ‘Indian’ for her. She told me she could introduce me to her Indian neighbours for interviews, but the problem is ‘they don’t interact with other Indians’. According to her, her neighbours “didn’t even decorate their house for Diwali!” Samira thinks they think they’re too good for us, and that I shouldn’t talk to people like that. She thinks the better people to interview for my degree are her ‘Lakshmi sahasranamam’ group because they are all married Indian and Telugu women. (Field notes, August 2019).

In this way, Samira was concerned with whether the respondents I sought out were authentically ‘Indian’ or not – expressed through their patterns of socialization and celebrating ‘Indian’ festivals. Though I asked Samira why they did not decorate their house for Diwali, including that perhaps they were not a Hindu Indian family, Samira brushed off my curiosity saying that she knew her neighbours to be ‘too busy’ to associate with fellow Indians like her. She dissuaded me from pursuing them as interviewees not only because of their perceived unsuitability in her eyes,

but also because she was concerned with the representation of the Indian diasporic community in my project as one that retained, practiced and performed the rituals and symbols which marked us out as ‘Indian’, even in the Canadian diaspora. This, for her, was a marker of the success of the Indian community in a multicultural context like Canada.

Another respondent, Anupriya, would tell me that she shared information about my project whenever she met fellow married Indian women at her workplace or her husband’s colleagues’ wives. She would ask my permission to share my number with them if they showed interest.

... I met her and she reminded me of you so I told her about your project ... Here are some women like you, highly educated and independent, and you can speak to them because they would be interesting for you to talk to. (Anupriya, Scarborough and Halifax, February 2019, Telugu and English)

I was always interested and sheepish whenever she sent me a message alerting me to a potential new contact, and despite my reminder to her that I was open to interviewees across education levels, employment status and class background, she seemed to view that my project would benefit most from interviewees ‘like me’ – educated and independent – despite the fact that I was not married. This, in combination with Samira’s concern that I interview Indian immigrants who were ‘like us’ in carrying and performing markers of ‘Indian’ identity, whether it was speaking in an Indian language or publicly celebrating ‘our’ festivals, betrayed the way my respondents understood my project and my concerns, and their preoccupation with the representation of Indian women in the Canadian diaspora as socially well placed, highly educated, professional as well as ‘good’ multicultural subjects who retained and shared their heritage in Canada. These concerns with being seen as upwardly-mobile, well-adjusted and adapted to Canadian

multicultural society and being confident and demonstrative with one's Indian identity and tradition were key recurring themes throughout this work, as the following chapters will explore.

Overall, quite a few of my respondents were generous in sharing my call for papers through their social media, in their networks, in personal interactions. As part of my ethics, I would assure new contacts that they were not obligated to speak with me, and I would not share with my respondents which of their contacts had or had not agreed to speak with me.

Multi-lingual interviews and authenticity

Nearly all my interviews involved switching between at least two languages – most commonly, Telugu and English or Hindi and English. For each interview, I carried and shared a list of questions in English (Appendix B), but I would make an effort to carry our initial conversational tone into the interview and ask follow-up questions in Hindi or Telugu. A general pattern that emerged in my transcripts was that most respondents used English to describe their experiences once in Canada, especially regarding looking for employment and describing their workplaces. When it came to questions of family, community or their lives in India, most used Telugu or Hindi words and phrases.

These uses of language became sharply outlined in my interview with my respondent, Pravallika. We had spoken in Telugu a few times on the phone before I visited her home, and we had been speaking in Telugu through lunch before our interview. Once the recorder was on and I began asking her questions from the interview guide, however, she started responding in English. A few minutes in, I remarked that she was welcome to answer in Telugu if that was more comfortable for her. Though my questions in the interview guide were written out in English, I verbally asked them in English and Telugu and specified that she was not required to respond in

English. I made this assumption keeping our previous conversations and Pravallika's comfort in mind.

Pravallika's response was unexpected. Just before I had intervened, she had been speaking of her personal approach to the major decisions in her life, including marriage, where her switch to English had been striking:

When I am ready, then only I decide... I'll never give into pressure when it comes to my decisions. People will say so many things but I said, I know that I'm not ready. It's not that I am depressed, I know I can do it. (Pravallika, Scarborough, August 2019, English).

When I suggested that she switch to Telugu, she demurred, saying that expressing her individual values and convictions came more naturally in English. "Saying 'I know what I'm doing' sounds good and meaningful in English. If I say it in Telugu makes me laugh, and that just changes the emotion behind it!" I suggested that it might be because making those philosophical pronouncements like that in Telugu made them sound like bombastic movie dialogues. Pravallika agreed, and continued the interview switching in and out of Telugu at her own initiative.

Later in the interview, when I misunderstood a common idiom and inadvertently made a double entendre, Pravallika made fun of my Telugu and reminded me of how some things that came easily in English were not so easy in Telugu. Rashmi Sadana, in her examination of the political-cultural questions behind Indian writing in English, observes that with the introduction of English as the lingua franca by the British colonial government:

From the beginning, there were certain ways of thinking and being that could only be expressed in English; conversely there were entire realms of history, experience and affect that were more difficult or even impossible to be expressed in English (Sadana,

2012, p. 125).

Sadana goes on to quote Indian writer Shashi Deshpande who “chose” to write and express herself in English; and yet, like her readers, conducts her personal and emotional lives in different languages (Deshpande, qtd in Sadana, 2012, p. 135).

Across multiple interviews, respondents and others commented favourably on my Hindi and Telugu accents, despite having been away from India for 5 years at that point, implying that being in Canada had not affected my ability or tone in speaking my languages. This was often combined with surprise that my English was ‘so confident’.¹⁵ Telugu speakers would ask me where or which district I was from in Andhra Pradesh, and often that led to a conversation about my upbringing and learning to speak Hindi in New Delhi but maintaining a distinctly Krishna district or Vijayawada-based dialect and sentence construction in my spoken Telugu. As these respondents were similarly raising or hoping to raise children in an atmosphere where the dominant spoken language was not Telugu, my ease and fluency with speaking the language with them added to an air of authenticity of my presentation as a Telugu-speaking researcher.

Similarly, my facility in speaking Hindi with a clearly Delhi accent despite being a ‘South Indian’ would often surprise interviewees. At a respondent’s house attending a ‘navratri’ pooja meant for married women, the gathering fell into a language-based separation, with Gujarati neighbours chatting in the living room and Telugu women congregating in the pooja room and helping with serving food and communicating with the Telugu-speaking host. Sensing the general air of confusion among the group in the living room, I chatted with the Gujarati women in Hindi more fluently than the host, and they were pleasantly surprised. I then found

¹⁵ I discuss this further in relation to my respondents’ struggles to find employment in Chapter 6.

myself in the position of translating and explaining rituals with more clarity in Hindi than the host could/did. In both languages however, I miss out on specificities, jokes and regional colloquialisms. I could not clearly distinguish between accents and word choices, and the caste and class associations of these often escaped me. I attributed this to my upbringing in Delhi being dislocated from local hierarchies in Andhra Pradesh; and in Delhi, I was often not privy to these caste associations as my name and 'South Indian' identity rendered me illegible.

Perceiving the young researcher

Much like Saira, nearly all my interviewees asked if I was married. This was to be expected as a result of my interest in their marriage decisions, which represents an intimate and emotional milestone in their lives (S. Smith, 2016). This question often seemed to serve as a confirmation of their assumption that I was not, as I visually did not embody a married woman with markers like an engagement or wedding ring, gold bangles or any other such jewellery. I did not wear a bindi on my forehead (a product of my upbringing in north India where it is not the norm for young unmarried women) and neither did I wear sindoor (red powder along the parting of the hair), or mangalasutram (necklace signifying marriage). This was further enhanced by physicality as a petite woman with short hair which conveyed a sense of young student girlhood, as I was either younger than my respondents or the lack of markers of marital status rendered me 'young'.

Some interviewees went on to ask me about my plans to marry. I replied truthfully that I was waiting to finish my PhD degree, become a doctor before thinking of marriage. A couple of interviewees admonished me, and some expressed concern that it might get 'too late' for me to wait so long. These concerns seemed to be underwritten by the ticking biological clock, or even

perhaps the concern that with a doctorate, I would be too highly educated to find a suitable husband, and might struggle to ‘adjust’ to my husband and his family's lifestyle as I ought.¹⁶ The assumption here was that the dynamic in the marriage must always be one where the husband is superior. My advanced degree would significantly reduce the pool of suitable boys to those who were as educated as me, if not more (somehow). As Manohar points out in the context of her own research with Tamil Brahmin women in the US, “shared social location complicated the researcher-participant power relationship such that power was multidimensional rather than binary” (2013, p. 200). Along with the above discussed concerns of authenticity and relatability, my status as an unmarried woman was also prominent in the interview context.¹⁷

Most interviewees, however, were satisfied with my answer that I had postponed marriage in favour of building my professional career independently, embodying the modern middle-class Indian woman who benefited from being financially self-reliant, at least before marriage.¹⁸ I was also asked about my career plans and where I planned to work – I said often that my dream was to return to India, or be closer to home than Canada, so that I could be closer to my family and my parents as they aged.

In an hour-long car journey with Samira as she drove us to her acquaintance's home and our conversations turned to these questions, I became more effusive about these hopes and dreams to teach in India and be close to my family. Samira gave me a patient hearing, and then

¹⁶ I explore this notion of ‘adjustment’ further in Chapter 4.

¹⁷ Manohar (2013), in a similar context as an unmarried researcher interviewing Tamil Brahmin women about their married lives, found that “While the researcher's power might not be completely negated, shared social location enables participants to temporarily equalize and invert the power inequities between them. Tamil women did this by deploying those categories of difference - age, marital status, professional background - that positioned them superordinately to me, to assign me the roles of student, daughter or sister.” (p. 200)

¹⁸ According to men’s rights activists, this same woman is to be blamed for the rising rates of divorce and the ‘breakdown of the family’ in India (Lodhia, 2014). To present a contrast – at the time of writing, a judicial body in India was receiving petitions arguing that marital rape should be removed from the list of exceptions of criminal offences against women (Poddar, 2022).

gently advocated for flexibility in my plans. “You're not married yet, so why fix on this path?” she asked in Telugu.

In turn, I asked Samira to elaborate why she thought I should be flexible, as a way to question the shared understandings between us and render them explicit. “Well, you can have all the plans you like,” Samira said, “but when you get married you’ll have to go where he goes. What if his career brings him to Canada? You can’t just stay with your parents then... your parents wouldn’t want that for you.”

Even now, recounting this conversation, I feel the echo of young girls through the ages rebelling against their patri-virilocal destinies, *no I will not leave my fathers’ home!*¹⁹ – a common refrain in folk songs depicting young unmarried women. In those songs too, the inevitability of departing for one’s husband’s or in-law’s home looms over the young women’s assertions (Dube, 1988, p. WS-13). In the car with Samira, I listened quietly as she told me more of how she had followed her husband from a large city in the south of India, to a Southeast Asian country, to Dubai to Canada. Even though things were changing ‘these days’, in her case she rued that she had no other choice, saying, “That's just how it is.”

Caste in Everyday interactions

The question of my caste identity inevitably came up in my Telugu language interviews. While I asked respondents about their caste community as part of my questionnaire, respondents

¹⁹ ‘*Baabul ki galiyan na chhad ke jaana...*’ (I won’t leave these streets of my childhood home...) ‘*Nee paapanu nanna...*’ (I’m your beloved daughter father, don’t send me away). These songs may be interpreted as laments and farewells to childhood etc., and these are different from ‘*bidai*’ songs sung at the end of the weddings, which involve parents lamenting the departure of their daughter (Bhattacharjya, 2009; Dube, 1988). My personal interpretation of these songs has always involved an element of anger at having to leave one’s childhood home behind while there is no such expectation for men. The popular thumri ‘*Baabul mora naihar chooto hi jaye*’ uses the metaphor of the bride’s farewell to her father’s home for the songwriter, the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh’s exile from his seat by the British colonial government.

asked me about my identification in different ways, some of which I could only grasp later.

In one case, visiting a respondent's home, her husband asked me multiple times if I was related to the Telugu film star Chiranjeevi. After explaining that I grew up in Delhi, and had relatives in Kostha Andhra, and did not have any known association with Chiranjeevi or his family, I received further questions about the nature of my Telugu dialect. Her husband repeated his comment about my resemblance to Chiranjeevi's daughter multiple times, puzzling me. Further into the conversation, her husband mentioned that he was a huge fan of Chiranjeevi for he was more than just a movie star, having started a political party, run for electoral office and done a lot for "the community." In my ignorance, I asked which community that was – my upbringing in Delhi here was my excuse for not knowing these things off the top. The husband seemed to understand the reason behind my confusion. He explained that Chiranjeevi, and now his brother Pawan Kalyan, was the only representation for the Kapu community in Telugu politics. I finally understood the subtext of the conversation and said that I couldn't be related to Chiranjeevi as I was not Kapu. This finally brought an end to the comments on my appearance. When the interview finally began with his wife and I was asking the opening biographical questions, I learnt that they belonged to the Kapu community themselves and understood that the previous line of questioning was intended at discerning if I belonged to *their* community.

In another instance, before our interview began, a Telugu-speaking respondent asked me to repeat my last name to her and asked if I had any relatives in Toronto. When I said I didn't, she asked if I did elsewhere in Ontario. I told her that I had no immediate family anywhere closer than North Carolina, USA and joked that in 5 years of being in Canada my family had not managed to dredge up a single distant connection in Toronto for me. To this, my respondent just said, "oh so you're not related to the Kamma Yalamartys then?"

At that moment, this was a big revelation for me. Upon further reflection later I realised that my last name is not a caste-name since my family does not use caste titles. Rather, ‘Yalamarty’ signifies place, potentially a natal village of my forefathers in keeping with southern Indian naming customs (Jayaraman, 2005; V. Prabhakaran, 1999), and thus it follows that people of different castes can have the same place name as their last name. Caste-identification cannot be as straightforward in these cases, and so my respondents needed more information about my familial connections, resemblances and food practices to identify my caste. When asked outright, I would usually share that I belonged to the Arya Vysya-Komati community, a sub-caste/jati that was classified under the ‘Vaishya’ category of merchants, third in the varna hierarchy.

However, in the moment, I exclaimed that though I was not related, perhaps I should meet that family anyway. “Why?” she replied, “They’re Kmmas, not your people. What is your caste, anyway?” With that question, the intent behind this line of conversation finally became clear to me. My respondent, who was Kamma herself, wanted to elicit my caste identity and more specifically, see if I was the same caste as her. She then assumed I would not want to socialize with the other Yalamartys because we were of different castes, and once my caste was revealed and understood, this was no longer an element of connection she wanted to pursue with me.

Caste and food practices

Food was also an area of covert enquiries about caste. Out of 24, 8 participants invited me to their houses for a meal, and five of them asked me whether I eat vegetarian food in our initial conversations (out of the other three, one was an upper-caste vegetarian herself and did not ask after my preferences; one was a respondent from my own caste who must have assumed I was vegetarian, and the other was a friend with whom I had eaten before so knew my preferences). Though this can appear to be a thoughtful question about food preferences and

choices, amongst communities of Indians this choice is loaded with connotations of caste.

As I will explore further in chapter 4, one of the primary considerations my respondents articulated around ‘adjustment’ when it came to marriage decisions – whether to opt for an ‘arranged marriage’ within religious, class and most importantly, caste boundaries – concerned the potential dissimilarities in food habits, especially with non-vegetarian or meat eating, which were portrayed as insurmountable and inhibited a comfortable relationship with one’s husband and/or in-laws.

In their survey of vegetarianism across castes in India, Natrajan & Jacob (2018) find that there are considerable variations in food practices (what they term as ‘meat-avoidance’) within each caste-group, which leads them to argue that essentializing caste identities around food practices is problematic:

There exists considerable variation of food habits across scale, region, group, class, gender; each complicating generalised characterisations of India based on meaningless averages... The considerable spatial variations within social groups ensure that almost no group-specific claims about food practices can really pass muster (2018, p. 55).

In the case of my interactions with respondents as a researcher, while I heartily appreciated their generosity and could envision the importance of sharing food in setting an atmosphere for a candid and in-depth interview, the question of whether or not I was a vegetarian was nonetheless a complicated question for me.

[Ila] has invited me to stay and have dinner after the interview. She asks if I am a vegetarian. It’s this dilemma again. By caste I am a vegetarian, but I eat and enjoy meat and fish on occasion. To me it’s a question of whether I should put her at ease, because I can’t tell if she and her family are vegetarian or be honest about my personal choices which are at odds with my caste identity. I’m already such an anomaly. What does it

mean when the question is “are you vegetarian?” versus “do you eat non-veg or veg food?”. Should I just say, “I’m okay with veg food!” It was so much easier with [Crystal] because we knew each other from before and she knows I enjoy food and wants me to try her special chicken curry and olives pachadi [pickle]. (Field Notes, April 2019)

For most respondents who had only spoken to me on the phone a few times before our interview, my reticence in specifying one preference or the other was befuddling and must have contributed to any confusion they may have had over my caste identity. Saunders (2007) argues that food plays a communicative role in the community-building practices of transnational Indians, further stating that “Hindu transmigrants use discourse about diet as a way to maintain connections with India, as well as to construct Indian, Hindu and caste identities” (p. 204). With their initial questions over the invitation to eat, and subsequent discussions over our meals, respondents constructed their mental images of me as an Indian or Telugu woman and researcher, as well as their own identities as diasporic Indians able to offer homecooked meals to a young student interested in their lives.

Limitations and dilemmas of representing “migrant women” in research

This research is limited by its sample – though my focus is on Indian marriage migrant women, the variety of regional identities among the women means that there are no easy generalizations possible when it comes to women’s practices and performances of their cultural identity. Similarly, the split in the sample between women who led migration and women who did not, enables a fuller picture of marriage migrant women’s routes to Canada but also discourages a deeper analysis and complexities within each mode of migration. Further, the predominance of upper-caste and Hindu respondents is not representative of religious and caste

identities within the Indian diaspora. Further, my limited participation and attendance at community events in Toronto and the GTA may detract from a fuller understanding of community dynamics. My lack of attention to the impact and influence of ‘time since immigration’ on various aspects of my respondents’ and their families’ lives, including gender roles, cultural identities and attitudes towards race, religion and caste etc. has taken away a valuable and critical dimension of analysis (Robertson, 2015).

The preceding section has talked about the ways in which my respondents were reacting to my visual and oral presence. In this section, I want to discuss some of the dilemmas of representing my respondents in this research and limitations of my project. My attempt here is not to fall into what Audrey Kobayashi (2003) terms the dilemma or the trap of reflexivity, where “reflexivity can act as a shallow of legitimation and a back door for the god trick claiming to understand not only the lives of our research participants but even our own relations and limitations within the field” (S. Smith, 2016, p. 139) . Being self-reflexive about the research process does not absolve me of complicity in benefitting from and perpetuating these power structures, nor do I seek to position myself as somehow a more knowing subject than my interlocutors. Rather this is, to my mind, partly a response to the calls from ethics boards or scholarship and funding applications that ask, “what makes you uniquely positioned to conduct this research?”

Being an international graduate student from India in Canada has necessitated a tricky navigation of academic, political and feminist debates. Hae Yeon Choo (2012) discusses the dilemmas of being an ‘outsider’ diasporic grad student in the US and being caught in the cultural nationalist trap of “downplaying and seemingly defending undoubtedly patriarchal cultural and institutional practices in our "home" countries, in our attempts to counter the colonial

representation of “Third World Women” (p. 41-42). Mary John for instance talks about the subject positions available to diasporic graduate students in the western academies as being between native informants and anthropologists (John, 1996). My own experience of Canadian academia has consisted of episodes like sitting in a classroom in a course about postcolonial theory and being addressed by the professor only when it came to subaltern studies, assuming that I knew the readings beforehand – when in fact the field of subaltern studies had barely featured in my education in political science in India. I have also faced white western audiences while presenting research on violence against women in India and been told that I should not speak about rape culture in North America, since rape was a bigger problem in India because of India's larger population; and similarly, while talking about the problems faced by Indian women in Canada, being asked to describe how it was religion that caused the marginalization of women in Indian communities in the diaspora.

In her essay ‘Under Western Eyes’, Chandra Mohanty excoriates the binaries inherent in western feminism that represent all third world women as a homogenously victimized. The essay was widely well-received but also received criticism for falling into the same trap of homogenization and further ignoring the claims of Indigenous women and feminists within the larger banner of women’s solidarities (Mohanram, 1999; Mohanty, 2003). Despite this, the anxiety of being a racialized scholar representing racialized women to a first-world audience within a western context endures within me. I cannot ignore the larger dominant cultural context which paints racialized immigrant women as victims of racialized patriarchies who are also in competition with each other. Within liberal multicultural societies like those of Canada, racialized communities are also painted as the repositories of backward, illiberal values. For example, racialized and new immigrant communities are often assumed to be conservative and

homophobic, and thus targeted by conservative parties in Canada for political gains (Kwak, 2019). At the same time, measures such as Bill S-7 or the ‘Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices’ Act introduced by the Conservative Canadian government in 2015 found public purchase in denouncing the violence against women and girls within immigrant and racialized cultures as “barbaric”, “in comparison to the presumably “nonbarbaric” culture of mainstream Canadians” (Mattoo & Merrigan, 2021, p. 128).

And so, when it came to the work of data analysis and discussion, at times I found myself hesitant to represent my respondents in their complexity. One aspect was ultimately an easy ethical decision – stories of private pain, regret and memories of being bullied or censured by family members that respondents shared with the recorder off, or claimed as ‘irrelevant’ after, I have left out of my analysis. In this, I include the instances where I shared similar stories in return in the flow of the conversation.

The other aspect was trickier. While it is one thing to note that ‘within a society structured by white supremacy, racialized peoples can be racist too’ and in particular that ‘Indians can be racist’ (for instance, see Mazumdar, 1989), it was quite another to grapple with the specific racist expressions made by my respondents. More often than not, it was the assumption of my ‘authenticity’ as an Indian and the closeness of our subject positions that seemed to enable respondents to express stereotypical and harmful racist views against refugees, other fellow migrants, and Black and other non-Black people of colour coworkers and/or neighbours. In other instances, respondents expressed Islamophobic and casteist views about Muslims and Dalits or people of other lower castes, both in India and in the diaspora. I should add that these views were not uniformly held or expressed across my sample, yet these views were prominent. Listening to the recorded interviews and noting my own verbal responses and

non-responses to these statements would always evoke the sensation of bodily discomfort, of suppressing my instinctive response to debate in the interest of continuing the interview, mingled with the memory of all the times that I have been scolded and silenced within familial or community contexts for being loudmouthed and opinionated throughout my life.

When it came to transcribing and quoting these instances, I decided to not quote my respondents verbatim, firstly so as to not perpetuate the harm of racist language and pronouncements. Secondly, in this age of ‘bite-sized quotes’ circulating out of context, I imagined that this would also protect my respondents from being made into representatives of all Indian migrant women and/or communities holding racist or homophobic views. The challenge then was to portray my respondents’ narratives and views accurately, without smoothing over the complexities and contradictions in their statements and opinions. Here, my consideration was not only that I did not want to ‘fudge’ or manipulate my data, but also that I did not want to take away the agency of my respondents in holding and justifying the views that they had. The solution to the victimization and demonization of Indian migrant women could not be that I portrayed respondents as sainted or in perfect solidarity with other groups that also faced marginalization-- in other words, I had to resist ‘moves to innocence’ for this non-Indigenous and non-Black racialized group (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

With this in mind, I have tried my best to represent my respondents’ views accurately while contextualizing them within the perspective of Canadian multiculturalism, white heteropatriarchal supremacy and Hindu/caste supremacy, in a context where we have “simultaneous experiences of privilege and marginalisation across national and transnational contexts” (Purkayastha, 2010, p. 29). It is my sincere hope that, to the best of my abilities, I and all my respondents are regarded and represented as complex, messy and agentive human beings

constituted at the intersection of multiple power structures within this work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out the theoretical and methodological framework of the dissertation and sought to locate myself within the research process. I outlined a transnational intersectional methodology to approach the experiences of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada, which ‘scales up’ intersectionality in order to understand how power structures across transnational borders may affect women differently, while at the same time paying attention to how local patriarchies continue to play an important role in shaping their lives. Next, I outlined the research methods used in this project and presented some insights on feminist negotiations of the power imbalance between researcher and respondents, as well as reflections on respondents’ agency and refusal.

An important aspect of my reflections has been understanding how I – as the researcher, as Indian, Hindu, South Asian, Telugu and Hindi-speaking, Komati-caste, middle-class, unmarried, student – am embodied within my project, and how I was read and received by my respondents. By sharing some key moments of interaction and conversation with my respondents, I have sought to unpack the relationality of gender and caste-based cultural practices between us as Indian immigrants and members of the diasporic community in Canada. In seeking to learn more about me and place me in the social landscape of India, Canada and Indians-in-Canada, as well as in taking an interest in my project and trying to help me with research, my respondents shared their preoccupations with portraying an image of Indian women in Canada as upwardly mobile, educated and accomplished while also maintaining and publicly performing ‘Indian’ traditions within this project, as idealized within the ‘mosaic’ of diversity

encouraged by Canadian multiculturalism. At the same time, the curiosity around my caste identity and food practices, especially among my Telugu respondents, also demonstrated that caste remains in the foreground of interactions among members of the Indian diasporic community, as opposed to received notions that caste structures and relations are no longer relevant or practiced in the diaspora. I unpack these themes further in the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 - Contextualizing marriage migrants in Canada: the ‘new’ Indian woman in the diaspora

Introduction

At the start of the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 beauty pageant, held in Scarborough, Ontario, the audience stood to sing along with the Indian national anthem as the screen projected a video of a fluttering Indian flag. When the anthem finished, I looked around in confusion as everyone kept standing, and the hosts of the event placed their hands over their hearts. The screen transitioned to a Canadian flag, and the audience, without missing a beat, intoned with ‘O Canada’. I later gathered from conversations with my tablemates that this was a usual practice at big Indian events, and so most of the attendees were bodily attuned to this sequence of events.

The first pageant of its kind for the burgeoning Telugu community in Canada, the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant distinguished between the contestants on the basis of their marital status. However, the rounds of competition for both the Miss and Mrs. Telugu categories were the same and took place at the same time. For the first round of ‘traditional’ outfits, the contestants walked the stage in a dazzling array of glittering silk sarees, *langa-vonis* (half-sarees) and embroidered lehengas. They briefly introduced themselves and answered ‘ice-breaker’ questions from the judges. The hosts of the events, who spoke in Telugu and English, praised the women for evoking the quintessential Telugu beauty, or the ‘*acchamaina Telugu adapaduchu*’; the length of one contestant's braid and the flowers woven into her hair ‘took them back to the streets of his hometown’. The nostalgic and affective force of these pronouncements cast a spell on the audience and brought us all into this idealized Telugu community space, marked by

women's specific appearances and the audioscape of spoken Telugu.

Parvati,²⁰ a Mrs. Telugu contestant introduced herself in what sounded to me like highly Sanskritised²¹ Telugu, that I struggled to understand. She made a literary pun with her name to introduce her professional identity as a social- and environmentally-minded project manager. She evoked her authentic Telugu family in India, and her husband and child in Canada in the same breath as her professional accomplishments. One of the judges asked her, in Telugu, “You are so far from India, how does it make you feel?”

“Obviously it's not the same,” she began, and went on to share that she felt lonely during her first days in Canada. But each country has its pros and cons, she said; and now with more of “our people” in Canada, she had met and befriended other Telugu families and adjusted to life here. “It feels good here, it feels like this is my country, this is my home,” she concluded, to rapturous applause from the audience. In defining her life in Canada in relation to not only her own migration but those of other families like hers, forming a diasporic community that helped her feel ‘at home’, the spectacle on the stage seemed to embody Avtar Brah's words: “At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey” (1996, p. 176)

Rupal Oza argues that beauty pageants are sites that successfully link conceptions of gender and sexual identity, beauty and femininity with group identity and particular places (2006, p. 80). This figure of a marriage migrant woman, in the context of a region-specific diasporic beauty pageant that brought together the two identities of ‘Telugu’ and ‘Canada’, seemed to me to present a reaffirmation of Canadian multiculturalism through this model immigrant – one who has ‘retained’ her heritage and culture while embracing Canadian life

²⁰ All names are anonymised

²¹ I use this to indicate the literary nature of her speech which differed considerably from everyday, conversational Telugu – high Telugu is ‘Sanskritized’ in that it uses complex Sanskrit grammar structures and vocabulary.

despite the initial struggle to acculturate (Ameeriar, 2017, p. 94). Standing up on the stage in her gorgeous saree, switching between speaking Telugu and English, Mrs. Telugu Canada glowed as the representation of the model-minority migrant who had arrived in a multicultural society and successfully established her hybrid identity and place within it.

In this chapter, I seek to establish a thread connecting the diasporic Indian woman, specifically the marriage migrant woman to the construction of a ‘new Indian woman’ who came into being alongside the liberalisation-privatisation-globalisation reforms of the Indian economy in the 1990s. This chapter is a contextual piece for the following chapters analysing narratives of marriage migrants from India to Canada, who are steeped in discourses of the new Indian woman. I seek to make this connection through the sites of beauty pageants at various levels – in India and the diaspora – as well as grooming or finishing schools that offer ‘bridal grooming classes’ in India. Analysing the documentary *The World Before Her* (2004), directed by Indo-Canadian director Nisha Pahuja, as well as an episode from the Amazon Prime television series *Made in Heaven* (2018), I look at the role of grooming and beauty pageants in shaping or fulfilling women’s aspirations in India’s globalising economy.

Next, using data from my interviews with teachers who run grooming schools and personality development classes in India, as well as Youtube videos about beauty pageants and grooming schools, I argue that middle-class young women (and/or their parents push them to) invest in economic and social mobility, in part through marriage migration, by way of attending these grooming schools. Finally, I discuss various diasporic beauty pageants and their contestants, including Mrs. South Asia-Canada, Miss Punjaban-World, and the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada beauty pageants in greater detail. I bring together my arguments around women’s self-fashioning for upward and outward mobility – as well as marriage migrant women, class,

nation and race – as they operate in this space between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ within the diaspora. I argue that marriage migration – the preparation for it in India and the performance of it in Canada – provides us a site to observe the working of the ‘new middle class’ in India that is geared towards mobility, and the performance of a racialized ‘model minority’ in multicultural Canada. These are class-based practices geared towards consumption as a means of self-fashioning; and in the process, they invisibilise heterogeneity of caste and religious identities, and exclude marginalized communities.

I find it important to establish this context of the changes in gendered expectations Indian women growing up in the 1990s onwards faced, forming a crucial part of the pre-departure subjectivities (Pandurang, 2008) of a majority of my respondents. My intention is not to suggest a sweeping generational shift in Indian migrants, but rather to give a textured background to the stories that my respondents shared with me.

The ‘New’ Woman of globalizing India

The idea of the ‘New Indian Woman’ gained traction in scholarly literature that engaged the shifting gender norms in Indian society and economy after the telecom revolution of the mid-1980s, and the economic reforms of liberalization, privatization and globalization imposed by the Structural Adjustment Plan in 1991 (see for instance, Belliappa, 2013; Mankekar, 1999; Munshi, 1998; Rajan, 2003). However, most of this literature links the emergence of the ‘new Indian woman’ to the idea of ‘India’ itself coming into being under colonial rule. The following brief overview is to show that the return of the concept of the ‘new Indian woman’ post-1985 is perhaps evidence of the paradigmatic shift in economic and social organization and their effect on gendered norms. My objective within this section is to examine the construction of this new

woman and new middle-class of the post 1990s India, locating itself on a global stage.

Most scholars writing about the 'new' Indian woman of globalizing India refer to the discussion of the late 19th century nationalist movement's approach to the 'women's question' by Partha Chatterjee (1990) in response to colonial social reforms, which was to consign women's activities to the 'private' sphere of spirituality, culture and tradition beyond the purview of colonial intervention. This fragmentation further buttressed women's role as "the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour" (Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 45) which had to be held up in their public self-presentation of being untouched by western or 'modern' colonial ideas, as well as an integration of traditional 'Indian' values and modern western education to ensure that the position of women in Indian society was beyond western colonial reproach. Chatterjee has, however, been roundly critiqued by feminists and historians for the narrow basis of this conceptualization, as he only focuses on the activities and writings of elite Bengali, Brahmin, middle-class men and women for his formulation. Nair (2011) among others have pointed out that different regions in the country saw different iterations of this development, and Kasturi and Mazumdar (1994) point out that women's movements and actions in service of their empowerment, social reform and participation in the nationalist struggle are not accounted for in this formulation.

What is of use here is the idea that with the developments in the late 19th century, "the 'new' woman... was subjected to a new patriarchy" (Chatterjee, 1990, p. 244); the 'new patriarchy' being constituted by the colonial enterprise as well as nationalist men. Raheja and Gold (1994) discuss the orientaling construction of the Indian woman as passive and subservient in colonial texts; popularly distributed books such as Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927) justified colonial rule over India on the basis of social ills suffered by women and

children, which Gayatri Spivak has famously articulated as the project of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (1985). These books and discourses did not go uncontested by Indian, upper-caste men (Chandra, 2021); they faced stiff opposition from Indian women’s movements as well (Sinha, 2006).

By 1949, the Constituent Assembly enshrined the principle of gender equality in the newly-independent India’s Constitution and granted women the right to vote (Arya, 2000). In 1974, the Committee for the Status of Women in India released their first comprehensive report titled ‘Toward Equality’, and noted that universal suffrage for women had not led to significant improvement in the socio-economic conditions of women, nor had they gained political presence (Sarkar & Mazumdar, 1999). Scholars have marked the release of this report as a turning point in the history of women’s movements, particularly the autonomous urban women’s movement in India, as well as the setting up of women and gender studies departments in Indian universities (Arya, 2000; M. E. John, 2017)

The Indian economy’s shift towards consumer goods production after 1985, and the subsequent neoliberal economic reforms in 1991 that opened Indian markets up to global producers and vice versa, were accompanied by a reorientation towards consumerism as the strategy to achieve ‘modernity’ (Mankekar, 1999, p. 75). This led to the construction of a “new middle class”, marked by a relationship to the politics of the nation-state constituted around the ‘right to consume’, which Lukose terms as “consumer citizenship” (Lukose, 2009, p. 7). Simultaneously, the promise of liberalization and globalization constituted the new middle class as a site of ‘hegemonic aspirations’ (Fernandes & Heller, 2006), which played out in the consumerist practices of the middle-class family, positioning the woman in her role as a wife and/or mother as the consumer poised to make informed decisions for herself and her family.

As Rupal Oza points out:

The emergence of the “new liberal Indian woman” as the self-assured, independent, rich, and fashionable woman during this time became the mimetic trope of the nation in globalization. Through her subjectivity, this woman represented modernity as an entitlement of middle-class upper caste citizens who enthusiastically embraced the emergence of the nation onto the global arena. At the same time, however, her modernity was also tempered so she would not become “too modern.” It always remained tethered to Indian (usually Hindu) tradition (2006, p. 13).

Thus, we see a return of the consignment of women to the ‘private’ sphere of family and tradition, albeit now with the added responsibility of ensuring, through their individual choices of consumption, to balance ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ within their personal lives, families and communities. In rural areas, this took the form of women in poverty being targeted for microfinance and microcredit schemes to ‘empower’ them and encourage socio-economic development through ‘self-help groups’. The rationale behind targeting women was that they were understood as the ‘best managers of scarce resources’ – investing poor rural women with neoliberal self-responsibility to make the right choices with their microloans (Keating et al., 2010). In the case of the urban middle classes, the nation-state invested ‘the new Indian woman’ – her body and her choices – with the duty to embody and perform a particularly ‘Indian’ modernity on the global stage.

The ‘new middle class’ in India is composed of a multiplicity of castes competing to belong to it, having expanded with the 1991 economic reforms (Lakha, 2005). D. L. Sheth, for instance, in his article titled “Secularisation of Caste and making of New Middle Class” (1999) argued that post economic reforms, caste had lost its social and economic power and survived merely as a kinship-based cultural community. There were differentiations within each caste

group along social and economic lines, making it difficult to have an easy equation between any one caste group and class status. These differentiations resulted from variable access to reservation (affirmative action) in public educational institutions and government employment that created avenues for upward social mobility for people from marginalised groups, as well as access to political power. However, he pointed out that caste was being re-energized in the political arena – the neoliberal economic reforms were accompanied by a rise in the political organization and mobilisation of lower-caste groups in the electoral arena, described as the ‘second democratic upsurge’.²² Thus, while caste was being contested in the political arena, in the economic arena it appeared to lose any relevance, and become a source of “controversy and embarrassment” (Mosse, 2018, p. 423).

At the same time, the ‘new middle class’ and its associated knowledge-based professions and practices of consumption was also constituted around particular class-based ideas, which Carol Upadhyia argues led to a “subterranean reproduction of caste in the middle class” in the professional arena (2008, p. 83).²³ In the context of Dalit groups’ access to middle-class status, for instance, Clarinda Still (2014) argues that middle-classness is “a matter of ‘educated-ness’, demeanour, manner, way of talking, fluency in English, ‘exposure’, confidence, dress, body language and even attitudes. Now taught in private schools and on *expensive ‘personality development’ courses*, these attributes are becoming characteristic of the privileged (high-caste), middle, and upper classes, meaning that the forms of distinction that lead to economic success

²² My account of the political upsurge of Dalit and OBC (Other Backward Classes) groups in India is woefully inadequate here, omitting the effects of the Mandal Commission report and the expansion of reservation quotas for OBC castes, as well as the growing number of dominant castes lobbying for OBC status in order to access reservations. See:(Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2016; Jaffrelot, 2003; Jaffrelot & Kalaiyarasan, 2019; Y. Yadav, 1996)

²³ Upadhyia says this in a footnote and does not explore this further in her article. She refers to this reproduction of caste in the professional or economic sphere, not in a social sense – I discuss the endurance of caste endogamy among urban, educated middle-classes in the next chapter.

are out of Dalits' reach all over again" (p. 15, emphasis mine). As this chapter goes on to discuss the personality development classes in the context of 'bridal grooming', it is important to keep in mind that the ideals of the cosmopolitan, confident, English-speaking Indian woman are inflected by caste as well.

This period also witnessed a transformation of the Indian state's attitude towards the diaspora. Whereas earlier, highly educated and skilled workers who migrated abroad were lamented as 'brain drain'; by the late 1980s, diasporic Indians, or Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) were being seen as part of the 'global nation' who could be enticed to invest in the Indian economy and whose skills could be harnessed for the new economic model and the country's development into the twenty first century (Menon & Nigam, 2013, p. 10). Events like the 'Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas' (Overseas Indians Day), sponsored by the Indian national government, became ways to celebrate the achievements of NRIs as well as people with Indian heritage in their respective countries. The event was framed not only as the motherland acknowledging the contributions of its children in the gathering of the 'global Indian family', but also calling to said children to invest and 'give back' to the motherland (Mani & Varadarajan, 2005; Raghuram & Sahoo, 2008). Though the lives of NRIs had always enjoyed an exalted status within India, it was these economic reforms, emphasis on consumption and the entry of global producers into Indian markets that played a role in creating the high aspirational status of NRIs, especially as marriage partners, for they promised not only outward but upward mobility as well.

Self-fashioning and Gender

An advertisement for the fairness beauty cream 'Fair and Lovely' from 1995, is

emblematic of the confluence of consumption for beauty and achieving success on a global stage.²⁴ The ad stars two highly sought-after female models of the 1990s – Aishwarya Rai (who went on to win beauty pageants such as Miss India and Miss World 1994) as the married older sister, and Mahima Chaudhary, a model turned actress, as her younger sister. At the start of the advertisement, Mahima and her family are at an airport arrival’s terminal, made evident through the announcements on the loudspeaker, establishing it as an aspirational space not widely accessible. Catching sight of Aishwarya, who is dressed in a bright purple pantsuit and sporting a glamorous hairstyle, Mahima is in raptures and embraces her sister eagerly. She comments that Aishwarya has become beautiful, with fairer and glowing skin – and wonders aloud, in a teasing tone, that it must be because of her marriage. With this, we can infer that Aishwarya was not quite so groomed and glamorous before her marriage, or before she travelled abroad. She also appears to be travelling alone, so it is not a triumphant return from a honeymoon with her husband; and Mahima’s comment implies that Aishwarya has transformed after commencing her married life abroad. In the ad, Aishwarya laughs off the idea that marriage has beautified her; rather it is her application of ‘Fair and Lovely’ beauty cream, which she then offers to Mahima with an admonition to “listen to your older sister, and try it!”. Mahima happily accepts and exults that she will be a beautiful bride, just like Aishwarya.

With remarkable economy – under 30 seconds – the advertisement brings together discourses of fairness and beauty through consumption, to enable a successful marriage and migration. Though the standard of fairness as beauty predates this ‘new Indian woman’ what is interesting is how it is redefined to incorporate marriage migration as a marker of success as a ‘beautiful bride’. Fitting that this is portrayed by Aishwarya Rai, who with her light skin, thin

²⁴ “Fair and Lovely commercial with Aishwarya Rai and Mahima Chaudhary” (anasdalvi1, 2012). Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mB7K3M8Ub0w>

nose, full pink lips, and uncommon light eyes, “captures the standards of contemporary Indian beauty that can travel both within and outside the nation” (V. Reddy, 2006). This is evidenced by her win at international beauty pageants, her career as a top Hindi film actress, and her brief success in Hollywood productions, leading famous American talk-show host Oprah Winfrey to name her ‘the most beautiful woman in the world’.

It is also important to acknowledge here that advertisements for Fair and Lovely fairness creams, along with its competitors in the vast Indian and diasporic market for skin-lightening products, have changed over the years (Timmons, 2007). Where initially the end goal for women was to achieve lightened skin in order to be competitive in the matrimonial market,²⁵ advertisements gradually shifted to focus on women achieving their dream jobs and professional success, through a self-transformation (Karnani, 2007; Shevde, 2008). In one such ad, a shy or downcast young woman, who overhears her parents’ bemoaning her gender decides to “take charge of [her] destin[y] and transform into “modern” independent beaut[y]” (Rice, 2018). This is accomplished through a use of the skin-lightening cream, which is accompanied by a different body language, confidence as portrayed through an upright posture. The confidence of being a modern light-skinned beauty leads to professional recognition and in some cases, love in the workplace. These advertisements are calculated appeals to “women’s dual aspirations for desirability and economic equality” (Rice, 2018, p. 250) within the neoliberal globalized market and workplace, positioned as achievable through the consumption of beauty products. The beauty products promise an Indian yet global appearance and outlook, as borne out by international beauty pageant winners and successful movie actresses, such as Aishwarya Rai and Priyanka Chopra Jonas as brand ambassadors. Reddy argues that this is how such advertisements

²⁵ See Jha & Adelman (2009) and Dhillon-Jamerson (2019) for an analysis of the language of Indian matrimonial advertisements’ preference for light skinned, beautiful brides.

and other consumerist discourses such as magazines position the new Indian woman as the ‘tether’ between India and the west, “appropriating ‘Indianness’ and ‘Westernness’ in contradictory ways” (Reddy, 2006, p. 78).²⁶

The aspect of skin-lightening as a beauty ideal bears special mention here. Shehzad Nadeem (2014), in their article discussing skin-lightening creams advertised towards men, argues that “the fairness fetish” does structure job and marital markets along the lines of gender, class, and caste discrimination. As mentioned in the introduction, the association of colour to caste is based on key misreadings of Sanskrit terms; thus fair skin does not denote a person of upper caste nor dark mean lower caste. However, the effects of this association of upper-casteness with lightness, and lower-caste with dark skin, manual labour etc. have had lasting impact in the creation of light skin as a beauty ideal. Nonetheless, the impact of colonialism cannot be understated here. Nadeem argues that “the enduring preoccupation with fairness owes to a shifting constellation of regional, caste, and class relations over time as well as to cross-cultural contact and conquest, as the Dutch, Mughal, Portuguese and the British all made their way through the region”, attributing a majority of the impact to the British colonial regime (2014, p. 226). As Shaista Patel writes in the context of South Asians in the diaspora speaking out against skin-lightening creams and racism: “shadeism won’t end without a serious disruption to caste hierarchies” (2016, n.p.).

²⁶In late 2020, ‘Fair and Lovely’ fairness creams were rebranded as ‘Glow and Lovely’ as a result of social media users focusing their ire on these standards of beauty as ‘colourist’ – a reflection prompted by the Black Lives Matter protests over summer 2020 in the United States, demonstrating this tether through a transnational exchange of ideas and reevaluating the role of fairness creams in accessing a global economy. However, the re-branding was cosmetic, as there were no substantive changes reported on either the chemical composition of the beauty creams, nor in the advertisements which relied on the same visuals and fair-skinned models (K. Sharma, 2020). At the same time, social media users were seen ‘slamming’ Rai and Chopra for their past participation in ‘racist’ advertisements that denigrated darker-skinned women.

The World Before Her (2012)

However, the position of the ‘new Indian woman’ herself within Indian society is not uncontested. The centrality of beauty pageant queens in my discussion of the ‘new Indian woman’ thus far is nuanced by the 2012 documentary *The World Before Her* (dir. Nisha Pahuja) which follows two parallel storylines of gendered agency in contemporary India – one is the story of beauty pageant contestants and the other of women attending militant right-wing Hindu training camps. The documentary presents these storylines as two distinct ‘faces’ of contemporary India – one that is globalizing, westernising, modernised and angling to take its place on a global stage while the other’s agency is caught up in a morass of ethno-cultural and sectarian hatred. However, it goes on to suggest that neither form of ‘empowerment’ is free of constraints on women’s autonomy. An example of the existence of “multiple overlapping patriarchies” (Sangari, 1995) in contemporary India, the two ‘faces’ of India represented by beauty pageant contestants on the one hand and right-wing Hindu nationalist women on the other, are nonetheless intertwined and define themselves against each other in competing ideas of progress, development and ‘modernity’. As Huma Ahmed-Ghosh argues:

A rapidly globalizing Indian middle class, partly the result of the Indian government's economic policy of "liberalization," has strengthened the coding of the upper-caste Hindu as the secular- modern self, defined by "modern" woman as transcending caste, class, and religion, and hence legitimizing her participation in the global agenda of international politics and consumerism (p. 218).

The documentary follows the contestants of the Miss India beauty pageant in Mumbai as they go through a 30-day “beauty boot camp” and prepare to compete on the national stage for their chance to go on and participate in an international pageant. The documentary suggests that the young female contestants who exercise and diet rigorously and endure long hours of training in

ramp-walking and modelling envision themselves as ‘liberated, 21st century women’ who are taking up the opportunities presented by the neoliberal India to gain employment, financial security and fame. One of the more poignant stories is focused on Miss India 2009 Pooja Chopra who attributes her victory to her mother; we learn that her mother raised her alone after refusing to commit female infanticide at Pooja’s birth and walking out on her husband, Pooja’s father (World Before Her, 2014). The narrative posits that resistance and opposition to the ‘traditional’ norm of son-preference and female infanticide which represent the evils of Indian culture (Sen, 1990), seem to be rewarded through Pooja and her mother’s survival and hard work, resulting in Pooja’s eventual victory as the pageant winner with worldwide opportunities now open for her. Ahmed-Ghosh (2003) finds that beauty pageant contestants find empowerment through the competition, as it enables “a sense of individual expression, the potential to enhance their future ambitions, to enable independence in life decisions, and finally 104epresent the nation ‘with pride.’” (p. 220)

In a deleted clip from the documentary which has been made available online, a lower-middle class young woman from a village in northern India articulates how she sees the Miss India pageant and the beauty boot camp as a viable route for exposure, upward mobility and success. She claims to prefer trying her hand at qualifying for the pageant over starting a business, which would require seed capital that she does not have; or gaining education for a professional career, as in the privatization of the higher education sector in India has also led to skyrocketing costs for admission, tuition and obtaining a degree from an accredited college. In her research on the intense body-altering training programme Miss India contestants undertake, Runkle finds that contestants endure the trials and pains of the process for the sake of potential and future prospects of social mobility, arguing that they seek to use the training and the

exposure granted by the pageant “as a means by which to attain their goals, especially in terms of succeeding in media-related professions” (2004, p. 151). The documentary details the procedures of skin-bleaching, dieting, injection of botox, and objectifying photoshoots; only briefly do the women wonder aloud whether these indignities are worth it in the long run.

The second major storyline of *The World Before Her* follows young female instructors at a girls-only ‘Durga Vahini’ camp for the women’s wing of the Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the main right-wing Hindutva ideologue organization in India. It follows young girls taking part in martial arts and weapons training, and being socialized into the major tenets of right-wing Hindutva ideology through speeches and chants – anti-minority (Muslim and Christian) violence, anti-consumerist modernity and anti-Pakistan sentiments, as well as expressing nationalist right over the territory of Kashmir. The women in the camps understand themselves as agentive subjects through training as patriots and good soldiers for the Hindutva ideology, outside of their prescribed roles as good wives, mothers, daughters; they view the beauty contestant pageants as embodiments of western corruption for the emphasis on their bodies’ consumption for public exposure, seemingly at the cost of ‘Indian values’ of domesticity and chastity. However, despite the ‘acceptable’ public activities of women at the Durga Vahini camp, the documentary also details how women in this sphere are not free of patriarchal constraints within their own homes and organizations, from fathers and brothers and male leaders.

Despite the vast differences between these two ‘faces’ posited by the documentary, scholars have argued that the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal modernity and Hindutva are politically allied in the context of India. Gopalakrishnan (2006) for instance, argues that this alliance is built around class interests, in particular around “the need to forcibly depoliticise

society” and build opposition to the rights of communities and political formations (2006, p. 2811). Ahmed-Ghosh explains how the beauty pageant contestant, and winner on a global stage, represents a reconciliation of this agenda of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’:

On the global stage, [Miss India’s] generic Western-like looks, swimsuit, modern dancing, and perfect English diction symbolize India's "modernity" and liberalism. She serves as a covert invitation to international business. On the national stage, she is represented in elaborate, designer "ethnic" outfits, folded hands in greeting, and "traditional Indian" rhetoric. In this context she represents the ultimate modern Indian woman, preserving tradition while heralding modernization. (p. 224).

Even as the ‘new Indian woman’ came to occupy a global stage, her consumerist agency linked to her autonomous sexuality was seen as a threat, and thus had to be disciplined through marriage – demonstrating how this consumption of beauty products was never positioned *outside* the heteronormative goal of marriage, as was evident in the ads for ‘Fair and Lovely’. Sreya Mitra (2019) in her study of the ‘star text’ of Aishwarya Rai Bachchan demonstrates her journey from Miss World to the ideal wife and mother, and dutiful daughter-in-law to one of the premier celebrity families in the Bollywood film industry, thus establishing her respectability and authenticity as the ‘perfect’ actress who can juggle the roles of actress, star, mother and wife. This harks back to what Oza argues about the new Indian woman’s modernity being tethered to tradition, most often idealized Hindu womanhood. As Nandita Dhawan argues in her study of married Indian women of the ‘new middle class’:

The ‘newness’ of the ‘new woman’ could not come at the cost of family and marriage. She had to be modern and independent, yet able to negotiate home and children with ease. Thus, there was apparent opposition between the discourse on liberalising sexuality and that on liberalising the economy, with the institution of marriage playing an important role. (2010, p. 47)

‘Grooming’ to be the Ideal Bride

Personality development and grooming classes are not restricted to beauty pageant contestants, and there has been a considerable rise in the number of private and public instructors offering such classes to young men and women in urban India, looking to develop their self-confidence, English speaking skills and mental outlook so that they can enter into the global market, whether it is as workers or as marital partners. The grooming classes targeted towards women display this modern and western-influenced orientation in tracing their roots back to the European ‘finishing schools’ and are evident in offering their training for young women to marry for social mobility.

In this section, I delve into a popular representation of the role of personality development and grooming schools in enabling marriage migration for an Indian woman, through the analysis of an episode from a made-for-web TV series titled ‘Made in Heaven’, and my interviews with personality development and grooming teachers.

Made in Heaven

The Amazon Prime Original TV series *Made in Heaven* (2019, dir. Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti) depicts the personal and professional travails of two friends, Tara and Karan, who co-own and operate a wedding planning business in New Delhi.²⁷ In episode 5, titled ‘A Marriage of Convenience’, they take up a contract to plan a wedding in Ludhiana, Punjab as the business faces a financial crunch. The episode opens with a beauty pageant with 4-5 contestants, revealed to be competing for the title of ‘Mrs. Jeet Gill’. We come to understand that Jeet Gill

²⁷ The first season of the show was released on Amazon Prime in 2019 and comprised of 9 episodes.

and his parents, a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) family from the USA, are in Punjab to find a bride for him, and have decided to hold a 'bridal competition' to judge the prospects and select his future wife. The episode offers the justification that when NRI men come to Punjab to look for brides, they do not have sufficient time to meet and get to know a variety of candidates. So as a solution and a quick distillation of the qualities required of a migrant bride, the bridal competition consists of two rounds of displaying looks – 'Indian' and 'Western' – and with questions for the contestants such as "What does beauty mean?" and "How will you be a good wife in America?".

The young Punjabi contestants are portrayed as nervous, and speaking hesitant English with a Punjabi accent, placing them in contrast to Jeet and his parents who speak English with American accents. Sukhmani, the eventual winner, is the only one who is able to hold the microphone and speak English with some amount of ease and fluency, smiling as she gives perfect pageant-contestant answers that please the judges – her potential future husband and in-laws. Speaking of the professional training in diction that contestants in the Miss India pageant receive, Runkle comments that an accent "that is the amalgamation of British inflections and American usage that is generally marked as elite in urban India. As it is elsewhere, accent is a major indicator of class in India, and the development of a certain accent as a class marker is discursively constructed as essential for success" (Runkle, 2004, p. 151).

Later in the episode, Sukhmani sprawls comfortably in her room and smokes an illicit cigarette, telling the videographer Kabir that she has honed her confidence at a grooming school and that she is now practiced at these bridal competitions, having participated in a few of them. She remarks that she knows how to "please these NRIs" by giving answers that hinge on "Indian values", as that is what the NRI judges want to hear. The key to success, which she claims she

has learned from her grooming teacher, is to “look them in the eyes and smile”.

This advice, of course, is a far cry from stereotypical ‘Indian values’ – young women, especially new brides, are routinely expected to keep a demure countenance and their eyes lowered when interacting with strangers or elders. Lukose (2009) and Gilbertson (2014), in their ethnographies of young women in urban public spaces in India, suggest that women are expected to portray a ‘respectability’ through their demure comportment and closed body language to guard against threats to their and their families’ honour. In the context where her marriageability is being measured or performed, such as the typical scenario of the initial meeting between prospective brides and grooms and their families, the dominant image or stereotype is a shy, quiet woman who does not raise her gaze to her elders, never poses a question of her own, and only speaks when asked to answer.²⁸ However, in Sukhmani’s narration, we are given to understand that ‘eye contact’ and a smile, though it is something novel that she has learned, is not in opposition to this demureness. It is not a brash, confrontational gaze; rather it conveys a comportment that melds Indian values with a display of confidence, equal footing; an outward orientation, an adaptability to the supposed non-Indian, ‘American’ values – values that were on display at the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant.

Discussing the content of personality development classes in Delhi, Meredith McGuire (2011) mentions the cultural meanings of eye-contact, especially between sexes, as a part of the training that students receive in developing a ‘global’ outlook:

[I]n a discussion of the American paradigm of professionalism, the (ostensibly objectionable) intimacy connoted by lengthy intersex eye contact in India is contrasted

²⁸ “Eyes down. Don't smile. Indian bride never smiles. You'll ruin the bloody video.” This iconic piece of dialogue from the 2002 movie, *Bend it like Beckham* (dir. Gurinder Chadha) demonstrates the gendered performance expected of new Indian brides, in this case, in the UK diaspora. In this scene, Pinky who has gotten married to her longterm boyfriend cannot hold back a smile of joy, or stop preening for the camera – prompting the videographer to caution her to look demure and stop looking happy at her wedding.

with the respect connoted by steady eye contact between the sexes in the United States (p. 221).

Grooming for professional advancement, or matrimonial success, seems to involve similar modalities. Investment in spoken English language classes, or ‘personality development’ and grooming classes, as well as applying to study abroad at a steep financial cost, are emergent methods of navigating this changed milieu of marriage migration combined with economic migration.

Sukhmani’s adoption of this gaze is in stark contrast to a fellow character from Ludhiana, Punjab – Chand, the protagonist of *Heaven on Earth* (2008, dir. Deepa Mehta), is a young woman who travels to Mississauga, Ontario to meet and marry a Punjabi-Canadian man and live with his family, all strangers to her. When she meets her in-laws at the airport, Chand barely speaks a word or lifts her eyes to look at them, especially in a group setting, befitting the bodily comportment expected of a new bride. It is only in the last scene where she puts her passport in her bag and walks out on the marriage, that she makes defiant eye contact with her husband, Rocky. Though Jeet in *Made in Heaven* is in a very different socio-economic situation as compared to Rocky, the episode goes on to demonstrate that despite the class difference, the vulnerabilities of marriage migrants like Sukhmani and Chand are similar, despite Sukhmani’s pre-departure preparation and grooming.

Sukhmani's stated goal is to migrate to America (Umrika, as she pronounces it). While she is happy and flattered to be chosen to be Jeet's wife, and texts him messages of endearment, she is clear-eyed about the fact that marriage to him is the easiest way out of ‘this shithole’ as Jeet calls her hometown in Punjab. The episode then goes on to reveal that Jeet is impotent; to cover this up on their wedding night, Jeet insults Sukhmani and drives her to tears. Facing the

prospect of a loveless and emotionally abusive marriage, Sukhmani nevertheless rejects the idea of annulment based on his impotence. She reasons that in her society an annulment would be seen as no different from a divorce and being publicly perceived as a divorcee would render her un-marriageable, and close off her prospects of migrating abroad. She reminds herself of her original impetus to go through grooming schools, participate in bridal competitions, win Jeet's and his parents' favour — and decides to stay with him so that she is able to go abroad and leave Punjab behind. Sukhmani's illusions of a better life in Umrika, bound up in the promise of happy conjugality with Jeet, are shattered as she understands how her sexuality will be denied and gaslighted and divorce or separation will be a source of stigma whether in India or Canada.

In my research, I could not find any English-language media sources or other data to suggest the existence of such specific or local beauty competitions, so perhaps the device of the pageant itself is a creative liberty taken by the writers of the show. Available sources suggest that rather than such competitions, it is community and kin networks (as seen in the documentary *Meet the Patels*, discussed in the introduction), friends, neighbours or religious institutions that are the major sources of NRI matrimonial searches and selection, along with NRI marriage bureaus and brokers, websites, newspaper advertisements (Abraham, 2005; Anitha et al., 2018; Charsley, 2007). However, grooming schools and personality development classes are 'mushrooming' across Punjab and growing in other parts of the country as well. These are bolstered by government accreditation through bodies like the All India Council for Technical Education²⁹. While there is some burgeoning literature on the role of personality development

²⁹ The council defines 'finishing schools' as "a private school for students that emphasizes training an all-round personality development, cultural and social activities. Specific skill sets may be imparted as value addition. The name reflects that it follows a school or college education and is intended to complete the educational experience. It may consist of an intensive course, or a one-year program". These courses or programs are seen as a step towards creating graduates who are 'industry-ready' or enhancing employability (AICTE, 2017).

and grooming schools for professionals in the global economy (McGuire, 2011)³⁰ and for workers in the retail service economy (Chattopadhyay, 2022), the link with finishing schools/bridal grooming classes has only received media attention thus far, which I explore in the next section.

Teaching ‘self-fashioning’ and grooming

“Grooming and personality development is not needed for people like you or my daughters,” Kaveri, a teacher at a long-running ‘finishing school’ in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, said near the end of our conversation. “It’s for girls who don’t speak English very well, they come from small towns, but their parents are very wealthy. They come for grooming classes because their ideas for the future are different, they want something different from what their families have given them. They have a dreamy picture of going abroad. And sometimes, parents also have that and push their daughter to go for that.”³¹

After enquiring about my PhD topic and my experiences studying abroad, and sharing that her children were also pursuing graduate education, we had circled back to my initial question about how she would characterise her students who registered for the bridal grooming courses. Our ostensibly shared class location must have led to her candour, for her initial assertion had been that people who seek grooming classes are looking for a confidence booster

³⁰ There is some congruency in Canadian labour markets here for immigrant men and women as employers look for “soft skills” in the workplace, the lack of which often devalues South Asians and other racialized workers. Scholars like Srabani Maitra (2015) and Lalaie Ameeriar (2017) criticize these soft-skills curriculum for its assimilationist moves.

³¹ This distinction between big cities vs small towns (smaller urban centres) is key within the discourses of personality development and grooming. According to one such consultant quoted in a newspaper article: “Women, especially from smaller towns, for upward mobility want to learn etiquette at a cost-effective manner. These schools offer a good platform for such women to interact with their counterparts of a higher social status” (Saraswathy, 2014). The same consultant claimed that grooming courses in 2014 cost between Rs 40,000 and Rs 8 lakh (between CAD 650 to 13500 approximately).

and simply want to ‘self-improve’. Not all her students were brides-to-be or women looking to get married; Kaveri shared that husbands in Hyderabad also brought their wives to the finishing school to “shape up a little”, which she explained meant slimming down, updating their wardrobes and beauty routines. This was just to improve their confidence in social situations, she explained, especially with the corporate and multinational workplaces in Hyderabad requiring a particular kind of socializing. But the overwhelming number of young, unmarried women who came to the school came from smaller towns that neighboured Hyderabad – they wanted to improve their prospects on the matrimonial market and be prepared to lead lives abroad with NRI husbands.



Figure 4: Poster advertising 'Dulhan Course' (Bridal course). Source: Twitter image (Amena, 2019).

In the course of my research in this area, I discovered that different terms are in vogue and are used interchangeably. While there are ‘finishing schools’ and ‘charm schools’ that evoke a legacy of training aimed at women and their matrimonial ambitions, these same schools offer ‘grooming’ and ‘personality development’ which are more gender-inclusive, being offered to both men and women, as essential skills for contemporary society and the workplace. ‘Dulhan course’ or bridal courses – as

seen in the pamphlet to the left – were not quite as prominent within this income or class bracket of women accessing finishing schools.³²

³² This particular pamphlet for a bridal course in Hyderabad, targeted towards Muslim women and families as

Hardeep, a finishing school owner and teacher in Chandigarh, Punjab echoed Kaveri in emphasising the aspirational nature of her students. She shared the beginning of her journey with her first student:

[The girl] belonged to a simple family. Financially they were well off, but you know, they have a very casual lifestyle. But the boy in fact was working in a very good company and she wanted to be at par with him. She didn't want to feel small, so I said I can help her. I knew this syllabus because I studied in a boarding school where this was normal...

So I put up small advertisement in my nearest parlour. And the next day I get a call from this lady. She was visiting India from Canada, and her niece had got engaged to a boy in Canada and she said, "please teach my niece. She has to get married and go and she has no clue about how to go about things over there." I designed the syllabus accordingly and I gave her classes for 10 days. (Hardeep, Chandigarh, English, January 2020).

Hardeep began by talking about how all young people, not just women, need guidance and help through the transitional phase of marriage, and migration as well. Whereas Kaveri said that the demand for grooming schools for NRI brides had considerably increased since 2015 or so in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and surrounding areas, Hardeep's location in Punjab contributed to her understanding of the longer trends of marriage migration from this area.

When I started out (2001), that time the migration was very different... and there was no WhatsApp, and this digital media was not active at all. YouTube, Facebook, nothing. Facebook had just started, but yes, it was very basic. Yeah, so that time the only source which these women had was probably from the aunts or cousins, through

evidenced by the use of Urdu language in the ad, evoked a lively debate and outrage on social media, sparked off by a post from user @Fashionopolis: "No, really, what the actual fuck is this? Hyderabad, you are far more fucked up than I thought! Are they any classes for men or the entire onus of making a marriage work is on the woman alone? When is our society going to change & stop putting the entire burden on the woman!" (Amena, 2019). Contrary to most finishing schools, the 'Dulha Dulhan' course was conceptualized and offered by a man, Ilyas Shamsi, based on his experience as a social worker instead of as a model or a professional counsellor (Awasthi, 2020).

magazines, or probably if somebody they knew who was abroad. So that's all the knowledge they would get...

But now migration to Canada, it's become larger in scope. The medium is not only marriage, also this education as early as soon after class 12... now you have all these consultancies sprouting help you get admission... they study there for a few years and then they get the PR and then settle down. And then along with studies they get acclimatized or they adjust to the lifestyle over there. So the younger they go it's easier for them to transition. (Hardeep)

Kaveri had a similar notion when it came to the gap between rural and urban areas when it came to being 'in tune' with the norms expected of a marriage migrant woman living abroad with her husband. Since rural women in her estimation did not speak English or embody globally accepted norms the way urban Indian women could, it was these women who needed personality development and grooming classes more:

Actually now things are little relaxed in the elite circle as they are in tune with the norms. The problem arises if a girl is going from a smaller town to bigger one or then straightaway abroad, they are sent to us to get aligned with the status. Sometimes even basic language is a challenge because that is the foremost aspect or communication followed by grooming and Etiquette. (Kaveri, Hyderabad, December 2019, English)

In her interviews with students and teachers at a grooming school, Huma Ahmed-Ghosh finds that amongst the students, there is a diversity in motivations and expectations from such development courses:

The older women thought this course would make them more attractive and help in finding marital partners. The younger women felt that attending the course would make them "smarter." Four of them wanted to have successful careers and marriages, and two of them were whiling away time until their parents found them husbands (2003, p. 221).

Evidently, even within this range of motivations for women, marriage and marital partners were foremost in their mind while pursuing ‘self-improvement’ and eventual success.

Transnational Notions of Grooming

According to both Kaveri and Hardeep, they had begun their courses on grooming with a very European-influenced idea of a Swiss-style ‘finishing school’ that focused on aspects such as posture, walking, vocabulary, dinner table etiquette, throwing a party and others. Indeed, many of these teachers’ offices and websites boasted their certifications from etiquette schools and business or management schools located in Europe or North America, and displayed books and materials such as collections of writings by American etiquette writer Emily Post, whom Hardeep cited as an inspiration. Teachers and founders of these schools were often models, performers or former beauty pageant winners themselves, their pedigree thus confirmed by the intense personality development, confidence and grooming they would have received in their turn. Throughout my research, the caste-background of these teachers was not evident nor was it a part of their self-presentation; however, the access to ‘forms of distinction’ as Still (2014) argues, does have a caste-exclusionary dimension.

On the website of a finishing school in Bengaluru, which offers a ‘Charm School for Brides’, the section about the founder and teacher reads as follows:³³

Saloni attended and received certification from **the famous Modern Day Charm and Finishing School, U.S.A. with Ms. Gloria Starr**. She has thus brought to her school the current American flavour to blend in to the international syllabus. She has further been individually tutored and certified by **Ms. Zablith, the Managing Director**

³³ I did not interview this particular teacher. This text is taken from the website of Florina Finishing School - <http://florinafinishingschool.com/profile.html>

of Minding Manners Finishing School in U.K.

Saloni has also attended the **Diversity and Cross Cultural Skills Certification Program with HumaNext LLC, New York, U.S.A.** She is now an affiliate with the American company, and utilizes the training material of the company in providing state-of-art Cross Culture and Diversity training to companies and individuals facing the challenge of working in a multicultural, global environment.

Today, Florina has achieved the perfect combination of European and American education offered in the Indian context. (Bold emphasis in original; underline emphasis mine)

This declaration of training abroad in international standards of etiquette and grooming served to boost their legitimacy as teachers. However, as this teacher's bio demonstrates, these qualifications are buttressed by management and other 'social skills' certification, that go beyond inter-personal interactions to offer the promise of locating their students in a 'multicultural, global environment'. As a newspaper article quotes the same teacher saying:

Saloni's ultimate dream however, is to see "every Indian being raised to be refined, projecting his self-esteem and the country's on a global level. We have so much to offer, if we hone our social skills well, there are so many ways we can expand out horizons," she muses. (M. Prabhakaran, 2013)

In my interviews with them, Hardeep and Kaveri both suggested that the pedagogies of 'bridal grooming' were very similar to the modules they offered for corporate training and workplace grooming for women. They emphasized that their female students were not just prospective young brides or housewives, but they were also high-level executives or academic researchers, who benefited from personality development classes as they felt more comfortable at business dinners or socializing at conferences. This similarity between the grooming required to be a marriage migrant woman and a corporate or professional woman speaks further to the

subjectivity of the ‘new Indian woman’ who is required to perform consumption-based modernity in public and private spheres of the home and the workplace with neoliberal efficiency and responsibility.

From bodily training to inner confidence

A typical curriculum of grooming or personality development for women, especially women who are looking to get married and migrate after marriage, consists of courses with titles like ‘Cosmopolitan Diva’, ‘The Confident Lady’, ‘Exquisite Bride’. These courses then include different combinations of modules that focus on developing one’s wardrobe and make-up skills to enhance attributes, developing appropriate table manners and learning to eat with a fork and knife and with chopsticks. An essential component of these courses seems to be ‘confidence’ – whether it is confidence in walking in heels, or in language skills. Along with English conversational training, there is a focus on polite conversation, body language and ‘small talk’ so that women can comfortably navigate social situations, from parties to business dinners. There is thus a lot of overlap between courses that are geared towards women preparing for marriage or women grooming themselves to advance in their corporate workplaces, as it seems similar skills are required for flourishing in both in a neoliberal context.

EXQUISITE BRIDE I

If you are looking for one stop guidance and the necessary training to help you shine in most vital life transition situation, i.e. marriage, then our BRIDE 1 course is the exact thing you need to be a true timeless magnificent bride. We take utmost care that all your specific needs are addressed personally with top priority by highly professionalized experts.

Module	Description	Subject
Beautiful U	Discover the secret of that special joie de vivre that will make your eyes sparkle & your entire body radiate gorgeousness. Considering you have 80,000 to 120,000 hairs on your head it's little wonder you sometimes experience discipline problems. Here's how to stay confident.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Make up I • Basic Make up II • Basic Skin care • Basic Hair Care & Styles
Wonderful U	Be a social savvy. It means you should be able to achieve favorable or desired outcome in your interaction with others. It means your poise, presence & impeccable manners should dazzle everybody around.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Skills • Art of conversation • Art of giving • Art of walking with heels • Art of greeting • Body language • Improving posture & gestures
Smarter U	Many social & business interactions center around dining or entertaining. You can impress people with your charm & sophistication at the table. Style your food & present your crockery well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dining etiquette • Restaurant etiquette • Table setting • Introduction to crockery & cutlery
Elegant U	You know first impression is very powerful & 93% of the first impression is non verbal. So never go wrong on clothing. Key of looking fabulous is identifying what kind of style you have & discover style with us. Keeping you fit to protect yourself is important. Get that training here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art of dressing • Saree tying • Develop a style • Fitness and nutrition • Self defense

- Cosmo I
- Cosmo II
- Bride I**
- Bride II
- Stylish Diva
- Image Enhancement
- Business Etiquette
- International Savoir Vivre

Figure 5: from the webpage of a school of etiquette with branches in Ludhiana and Gurgaon. On the right side of the image, we see the titles of the courses targeted specifically at women

While these were the skills listed on the curricula, both teachers laid strong emphasis on the connection between ‘outer image’ to ‘inner image’ – and claimed that the main demand most students had was to develop ‘confidence’. Hardeep defined this confidence as a ‘comfort in your own skin’ which came from being proud of one’s ethnicity, culture and language skills; and at the same time, meant that one’s confidence did not involve ‘putting others down’

The biggest drawback which these students have is they feel that they are lacking

in confidence regarding language that is English speaking. They feel that until unless they master the English language, they will not be at par with the others... I say please it doesn't matter. At the end you have to be proud of your mother tongue. See the French. See the Chinese, Japanese? Do they ever feel small about the language? In fact, not at all. (Hardeep)

Thus, for Hardeep, the grooming and modern self-presentation of an Indian woman would only feel authentic and comfortable if it involved an acceptance and pride in their own languages and cultural heritages. This pride would then lead to a blending of western values and homegrown practices in the ideal modern Indian woman who stood out for this precise blend, much like how Hardeep perceived the successful French, Chinese and Japanese modern citizens.

Both Kaveri and Hardeep had, over time, realised that the role of emotional intelligence and sensitivity to mental health had overtaken bodily training in these grooming classes. As Kaveri said:

Now the focus is on mental health, emotional intelligence, something is troubling or bothering the participants that grooming alone cannot fix, each person's depressions and frustrations come out during grooming classes (Kaveri)

These days, the girls pick up everything from YouTube videos or elsewhere on the internet. They know how to do make-up, how to have a beauty routine, how to pose for pictures. So our role has shifted to more of counselling and conflict management... if you aren't happy inside, how long can makeup and learning to eat with a fork and knife keep you happy? (Hardeep)

		etiquette & grooming
Nouvelles – Vous	Would you like to be able to relax and keep your edge? Would you like to feel in control of your life? Then learn optimism and take the pressure off and feel good. How to handle relationship with your man and in-laws. Be a social success by revealing your advance dining skills at the table.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism & positive attitude • Advance dining etiquettes • Session on personal counseling • Man management • Relationship handling
Formidables - Vous	You probably already have a list of favorite dishes you like to prepare for your guests & undoubtedly have a selection of plates you regularly use for their presentation. If you are ever tempted to try something different, here are a few of our international favorites that might inspire you to dazzle your guests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cal soups • Low cal salads • Verrines • Hors d'oeuvres
Magnifiques – Vous	Stylish ways of correspondence & techno etiquettes will be taught. Travelling to far away places & knowing the cultural differences is very important. Learn that tips here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you note • Invitation card • Use of chopsticks • Napkin folding



Figure 6: Screenshot from the webpage of an etiquette and grooming school with branches in Ludhiana and Gurgaon. This image shows details of modules offered for the course titled 'Bride II'.

Hardeep shared that over the years she had offered various courses to women that differed from the typical grooming school idea. She laughed as she told me that one of her courses for bridal grooming was titled 'in-law management' – where she focused on conflict resolution through empathy while maintaining firm

boundaries. This course required a lot of one-on-one interaction with her students as Hardeep sought to understand her students' personality and that of their in-laws as well, to devise fitting methods of 'management'. More recently, she and a friend of hers who was an accountant, had teamed up to teach a course on basic financial literacy and skills to women. According to Hardeep, this was an essential lesson that every woman in 'this day and age' needed to be armed with, but that she felt there was a lack in imparting this knowledge to women, whether through their schools or colleges, or within their families.

Though not explicitly advertised as such, each teacher's work seemed to now be geared towards helping their students cope with changed societal expectations and their problems in

adapting to this groomed ideal. In a similar vein, a grooming school teacher and counsellor in Delhi told me that conflict management was a central component of their ‘pre-bridal package’, stating that: “we as women are not taught how to manage conflict at home, in school or anywhere else”. She further explained that the norm of unquestioning obedience was difficult to follow for young brides these days as they managed careers, social lives, a conjugal relationship with their husband and meet the expectations of the daughter-in-law. This represented a shift from the notions of ‘adjustment’ that were endemic to the role of women as wives and daughters-in-law: owing the virilocal notions of marriage where women moved to husbands’ or their in-laws’ homes, women were expected to adjust themselves to the rhythms and practices of their marital homes. I discuss the caste-based aspects of this further in chapter 4.

This emphasis on conflict resolution, counselling and support for mental health hints at the ways in which women’s own aspirations and desires exceeded the boundaries imposed on them as ‘new Indian women’. The positioning of grooming school and personality development courses as the places to learn coping skills for these conflicts, represents a move beyond the norm of ‘adjustment’ imposed on young women and young brides. However, in keeping with neoliberal subjecthood, the requirement of learning conflict-resolution skills as part of bridal grooming/grooming for migration once again responsabilizes women to find individual solutions to the inevitable acculturative shocks of marriage and/or migration.

While talking about their work, both teachers also displayed an interesting tension with changing gender norms and the concept of ‘feminism’ in the context of marriage and conjugal relationships. Hardeep commented that her personality development classes were for women and men, and that it was “boys these days” who needed classes on basic hygiene and table manners. As part of her discussion on the ideal NRI bride, she said:

Well its also now that boys can't expect their wives to do everything that their mothers did for their fathers. How can they? Their wives will go out to work and then come home and take care of the kids, they can't be picking up dirty towels and socks. [A fellow teacher at the school] tells this to her son all the time... she has started to train up her son from now itself. We keep talking about having these courses for boys. (Hardeep)

At the same time, an important part of their grooming syllabus was also for women to modulate their self-presentation. For Hardeep, this meant the 'classic and classy' quality of speaking in pleasing tones in a way that drew people in, being courteous and aware and making people comfortable, an illustration of the roles women are expected to play as 'social lubricant'. In the context of marriage migrants or NRI brides, Kaveri considered that it was more important than ever that women "understand" the pressures that their husbands face: "earning for the family, for the kid, parents, and staying abroad away from his comfort zone takes a big toll too". Kaveri said her concerns emanated from years of interactions and teaching, learning that women could be just as "cantankerous and cruel as men"; but that it was easier to label men as 'abusive' and that they did not report domestic violence because of their masculinity and *izzat* (honour). In fact, as she told me this, Kaveri admonished me to not do "too feminist a job" in this dissertation.³⁴

Kaveri's words were a marked difference from the response Ahmed-Ghosh (2003) received from a grooming school teacher during their interview: "Looking one's best and being confident is what all individuals want," said one of the directors, "hence there is nothing anti-feminist in what we are doing. *If feminism is about giving young girls options in life, then we are feminists*" (p. 221, emphasis mine). While Hardeep's understanding of feminism extended to critiquing masculine norms and 'training' up men to share domestic responsibilities with their

³⁴ This may have been precipitated by my sharing with Kaveri that my PhD program was titled 'Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies'.

wives, this was grounded in a temporal sense of ‘changing with the times’; there was no similar critique accorded to the gendered expectations for their wives. These gendered norms were also located in a particular class-based and cosmopolitan context – Hardeep’s ideas were very much in line with the liberal societies’ ideas about gender equality within the domestic sphere. Kaveri, on the other hand, perceived feminism as having emboldened women to make demands of their husbands and in-laws, and provided them with a vocabulary to name their treatment as ‘abuse’. For Kaveri, the problem was that women were apt to misuse this vocabulary and ignore the men’s own professional pressures and familial responsibilities. The picture painted by these two teachers presented a microcosm of the myriad, at times contradictory, demands placed on the ‘new Indian woman’ who was headed to be a marriage migrant as well – she was expected to be groomed, classy, gentle and at ease with her skills and identity in any social surrounding; however, as a feminist she should also have her own professional ambitions and not have to handle all the domestic responsibilities on her own. At the same time, she needed to be understanding of the pressures her husband faced as a migrant which may drive him to ignore or mistreat her occasionally; she could not misuse the feminist vocabulary afforded to her and refuse to ‘adjust’ or compromise with her husband. The new Indian marriage migrant woman could have it all, if only she was ‘not too feminist’ in questioning gender roles or backing down on her commitment to her husband and their family.

The idea of ‘grooming’ for beauty as well as a performance of gendered norms of the ‘new Indian woman’ carries over across transnational gender presentations in the Indian diaspora. The next part of this chapter explores diasporic beauty pageants, as sites of articulation of the Indian marriage migrant woman as an emblem of her diasporic community, and the place of this woman in Canadian multicultural milieus.

Diasporic Beauty Pageants

In a YouTube video titled ‘Journey to Mrs. International: Mrs. Canada International 2018’,³⁵ the contestant Parita Vadodariya wears a gown and her crown, while her sash proclaiming her to be ‘Mrs. Canada International’ is draped in the background. She speaks directly to the camera and starts her story from her origins in a small town in Gujarat, India. She met and fell in love with her now husband while in college, but they had a rocky road to their marriage as they belonged to different castes. Because of this relationship, she was “abandoned, abused and socially isolated for two long years” – presumably by her family and her community. She and her husband then decided to marry and migrate to Canada together for a fresh start. Eventually, she says, her family reconciled with them, even coming to visit the couple in their home in Alberta.³⁶

Vadodariya then goes on to talk about the period of struggle she and her husband faced as new immigrants worked ‘survival jobs’ at Walmart’s and Tim Horton’s, studied hard to gain skills and employment in the Canadian workplace. Finally, the video takes us through a photo montage of their successes. They have bought a house, “and now we are proud Canadian citizens,” she says; and goes on to frame her professional work as a physical therapist as ‘service’ to her new home and society.

It is a polished, barebones narration of three and a half minutes accompanied by family photographs and stock images, functioning as a video package played to introduce contestants at

³⁵ “Journey to Mrs. International: Mrs. Canada International 2018” This video can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LqgNEylU1w>

³⁶ Vadodariya’s story echoes the central conflict in the popular Bollywood film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001, dir. Karan Johar). *K3G*, as it is widely known and remembered, bears the distinction of being an NRI-themed film – that is, focusing on and marketed to members of the Indian diaspora, and enjoyed widespread success (Punathambekar, 2005).

an event like the Miss International 2018 pageant. Vadodariya sketches out the story of a modern Indian woman, now a Canadian citizen, who stands firm with her choice of husband against the strictures of tradition and family in India. She then finds a new beginning, freedom, and eventual success as an immigrant in Canada. She speaks English fluidly in an accent somewhere between an Indian and a Canadian accent. While she represents Canada in an international beauty pageant, there is no evident tension between her Indian and Canadian identities; her liberal Canadian values are displayed in her dedication to an ‘active and healthy lifestyle’ as a Canadian attribute (Alexander, 2017) and her commitment to her education, her profession, and her extensive charity and volunteer work in keeping with the Canadian liberal script of a good immigrant (Farrales, 2019, p. 47).

Within the trope of a beauty queen who is an ideal representation of womanly virtue of a community or the nation, in this case, is studied the trope of grateful racialized model migrant who gives back to her community and new home. I would argue that this is Canadian multiculturalism ‘embodied’ in the video and in Vadodariya’s self-presentation as Mrs. Canada-International, representing Canada on an international stage. As Fortier argues in the case of British multiculturalism:

The embodied multicultural subject achieves unmarked status through the injunction to speak his and her allegiance and pride in the nation/al. One must be seen and heard to declare her pride in Britishness in order to achieve un-marked status - an achievement that is endlessly deferred as the non-white skin is never fully peeled off in a continuous process of de/re-racialization (Fortier, 2008).

We can see this in Vadodariya’s video where she showcases her immigration story within the broad parameters of leaving behind a traditional and oppressive milieu, in India, to migrate to Canada, ‘the nation of immigrants’ where she found a better life. Diasporic beauty pageants have

been understood as sites where nationalism takes centre stage in a different way as it is “reinvigorated, reimagined, and redeployed” in a different geographical setting (Farrales, 2019). Vadodariya’s gratitude to Canada is then on display in the story of her life here, and in her representation of Canada on a global stage. Though she does not seek to be de-racialized, she places herself at par within the ‘mosaic’ of Canadian multicultural society.

In competitions at various local, regional, national and international levels, beauty pageants are sites where meanings and identities of community and nation, virtue and womanhood are enacted on and through female bodies. In the diaspora, particularly in the context of the Indian diaspora, they acquire a different valency in the different regional configuration or identity that is part of the title – Miss or Mrs. ‘South Asia’ would have a not only have a distinct pool of contestants, but also a different regional specificity as compared to Miss and Mrs. Canada-Punjaban, or Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada, or to Mrs. Canada-International (which is not South Asia specific at all). In the case of the Miss World-Punjaban, a global beauty pageant held in Punjab, India with sub-contests in Canada, Italy and the UK, the explicit purpose is the upholding and continuation of Punjabi ‘roots’ among diasporic youth. The mission statement of the Miss World-Punjaban contest is to move away from ‘skimpy clothing’ towards a more ‘respectful’ display of the qualities of a Punjabi woman. While pageants for married women are common in India, they do not have the same prominence accorded to them, as with Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada where single and married women compete on the same stage.³⁷ Though the stated intent seems to be deemphasizing the focus on the woman’s body, the effect is to equate woman’s body with the upholding of this culture.

³⁷ In the context of grassroots migrant women’s organizing in Canada, Tungohan (2017) suggests that diasporic beauty pageants organized by Filipina migrant workers’ organizations such as Migrant Mother of the Year and Miss Caregiver function as ‘political theatre’ that allow women who work as caretakers to showcase themselves as having interests, talents and lives “outside nannying” (p. 487-8).

In some cases, we see training or ‘boot camps’ for diasporic beauty pageant contestants, in order to cultivate and enhance their performance of their connection to the ‘roots’ of their culture. Farrales, writing about Filipinx diasporic beauty pageants, finds that “most people involved in hosting and organizing community pageants agree that a proper pageant participant must be trained. The successful ones, the ones who stand out to the judges and audience, possess seemingly innate qualities that must be harnessed” (2019, p. 52). In this case, the organizers mention that the contestants connected with elders or grandparents in their community to learn nuances of speaking respectfully to elders in their languages. A similar trend is seen in the training undergone by contestants of the Miss Canada-Punjab and Miss World-Punjab beauty pageants.

In the words of the winner of the 2015 Miss World Punjab title: “It was a cutthroat contest where we had to prove our talent and knowledge about Punjab and its culture through various rounds. I wish to inspire people to love their culture like people in most European countries do” (Correspondent, 2015). Miss Canada-Punjab 2010 Arshdeep Kaur Gosal, ‘trained’ to compete in the final competition of Miss World-Punjab by spending time in Punjab, in her mother’s village and learning specific household chores such as “wield[ing] that spinach knife and to learn the difference between methi and sarson leaves used for cooking” (Frayer, 2010). The ultimate goal of learning to do these chores and embody Punjabi womanhood is clear as one of the rounds of the competition is a ‘bridal round’ – contestants are expected to dress and play the part of a typical, blushing Punjabi bride. As Kajri Jain argues in the context of India, “‘Miss World Punjab’, ‘Miss Karva Chauth’ or ‘Mrs. Ludhiana’ events have melded the interests of the cosmetics and fashion industries with conservative formulations of Punjabi or Hindu womanhood” (Jain, 2010, p. 48). Within the diaspora, this formulation of

Punjabi-Hindu womanhood is mobilized towards disciplining Punjabi-Canadian women into acquiring and displaying these normative and gendered cultural traits in service of displaying their authenticity – which then becomes considered as a matter of pride for the Punjabi diaspora.

Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019

In her exploration of the economics and politics of the long-running Miss India USA beauty pageant, Bakirathi Mani describes a group of contestants and audience with disparate regional and linguistic identities, nevertheless united under a ‘gendered idiom of Indian popular culture’. However, Mani argues, the point of this pageant was not to exalt the winners but rather to reaffirm a “collective investment in producing community, one that sustained an upwardly mobile narrative of South Asians in the United States” (Mani, 2012, p. 3). Though the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada pageant differed significantly from the pageant Mani focuses on – in terms of scale, history and the regional and religious diversity of identities of the contestant present – the aspect of displaying the Telugu diasporic community to its best advantage was very much evident.

Applications for the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant were heavily advertised on the Telugu diasporic Facebook groups that I had joined for the purposes of this research. Organized by an ‘ethnic’ language radio program and supported by longstanding Telugu cultural associations and sponsored by local South Asian businesses, there were several announcements through the event about how this was the ‘first time’ that the Telugu community from across Canada was gathering at this scale. Once the contestants had been selected, their glamour shots and brief intros were also heavily promoted on social media. The pageant itself was also promoted as an event beyond the contest itself, by showcasing performances by a local Indian

dance troupe and a non-Indian singer-rapper; stalls and exhibitions by local boutiques and small businesses owned by South Asians, mostly Telugu entrepreneurs. The event also featured a fashion show by a South Asian designer art studio, and one of the judges of the contest was a popular yesteryear Telugu film actress. Notably, this was a private event that required attendees to buy tickets. It was not a public event where Telugu and Indian culture was on display for consumption by the rest of Canadian society. Yet, the workings of Canadian multiculturalism were discernible not only through the overt displays of Canadian patriotism as discussed in the beginning of the chapter; but also, in the way the event sought to present a homogenized view of the Telugu community and its successes in Canadian life.

The class character of the pageant was evident as it required a CAD \$100 application fee if the applicant was selected. The other criteria for potential applicants seemed less restrictive – contestants were required to be over 5 feet tall, in ‘reasonably good health’ and be of ‘good moral character’.³⁸ There were separate age criteria for the two categories – Mrs. Telugu contestants had to be under 45, and Miss Telugu hopefuls between 17-29 years old.³⁹ The pageant was explicitly restricted to ‘females of Telugu origin’ in Canada, however there was no requirement listed that the contestant needed to speak the language; Telugu origin was defined as “at the very least one of the parent should be of Telugu origin” (2019). The competition was open to Canadian citizens, permanent residency holders, work permit holders and students.

Prior to the pageant competition, the contestants had a two-day mandatory grooming workshop, facilitated by two ‘grooming consultants’, who were themselves former beauty queens and models. I learned from a participant that they practiced walking in heels and posing

³⁸ “Contestant must be of good moral character, have no explicit photos of any kind in any medium nor a criminal record.” – FAQ page

³⁹ This unfortunately took me out of the eligibility pool.

confidently on the runway for the camera. Despite there being no physical criteria for application apart from height, during this workshop, the contestants had sessions with a nutritionist, where they received personalized advice regarding their diets and physiques, suggesting that they were being advised towards achieving an idealized body and figure. Contestants also wrote and rehearsed their Telugu introductions in this workshop – from what I understood, contestants who were not fluent in Telugu received some help from the pageant host (a Telugu radio host) in composing and delivering their introductions in Telugu on stage.

The competition rounds consisted of the contestants displaying looks in different rounds as well as a talent round and question and answers. In the vein of beauty pageants held in India, the rounds were divided along the lines of 'traditional' and 'western' attire – requiring the ideal beauty pageant winner to display her versatility and comfort in both modalities of presentation. Importantly, it was in this round with their traditional attire and their introductions in Telugu, contestants also introduced themselves in English, with an emphasis on their educational qualifications, their professional achievements, and personal interests. With participants who were national-level sportspeople, qualified doctors and researchers, engineers, homemakers, entrepreneurs and students, the ostensible professional success of Telugu women across the country established a certain respectability to the event, as did the moralising discourse included in the application criteria.

The talent round included only those participants who were pre-selected. While there was a range of talents on display, a majority of the participants chose to exhibit dance performances. The married Mrs. Telugu contestants either performed 'classical' dances – largely Bharatanatyam or Kuchipudi – or danced to popular film songs. In the case of one very memorable performance, a Mrs. Telugu Canada contestant brought out an Indian flag on to the

stage and waved it wildly as part of her dance performance set to a patriotic Hindi Bollywood song. The audience received this energetic display warmly, though some eyes seem drawn to the flag more than the performer – for instance, my tablemates watched avidly to make sure that the flag did not touch or drape on the ‘ground’ of the stage, which would have been a sign of disrespect. The performance, so at odds with the otherwise contained movements of the women on stage, suggested to me an example of ‘the erotics of nationalism’ where women are allowed to display desire and abandon for the nation, in a manner that would otherwise exceed bounds of respectability (Natarajan, 1999).

In the ‘western’ outfit round, contestants wore evening gowns and ball gowns, and here some contestants spoke openly about ‘their fantasies coming true’ as they got to wear the princess-like gowns, dresses and heeled shoes of their ‘dreams’. These responses spoke to the power of imaginaries created by ‘western’ media like Disney movies, not only prevalent in Canada but India as well. The glamorous enjoyment that the contestants seemed to exhibit in this round brought to mind the ‘new Indian woman’ once more, one who is able to easily navigate performing her ‘traditional’ cultural identity as well as a ‘western’ sensibility. I would note that none of the outfits could be described as risqué or revealing, especially those worn by the Mrs. Telugu-Canada contestants, in keeping with the moral and respectability discourse that characterised this event.

The pageant thus suggested a seamless exhibition of diasporic and multicultural identity situated on women's bodies, divided by nothing more than their marital status. There was an easy elision of identities as ‘Indian’ and ‘Telugu’ in a community event like this, without other regional identities to introduce heterogeneity of linguistic identities within India. The burden of displaying ‘respectable’ culture seemed to weigh heavier on the married women. Their facility

with cultural markers and gendered ‘traditional’ presentation went hand in hand with the invocation of ‘public sphere’, and the integration into Canadian society established through their professional qualifications and success and English language speaking. Notably, all the contestants were Hindu, easily displayed and spoke with Hindu religious markers and symbols in their presentations and performances; there was indeed a complete overlap of Telugu language with Hindu-ness. Further, caste was not overtly present in this blend of the modern and traditional, and yet, there was no question about the Hindu and upper-caste nature of this event. In the context of the Indian diaspora in the US, Thenmozhi Soundararajan calls out these multicultural displays of ‘Indianness’:

Punjabi rappers throw down lyrics about being proud Jats. Tam- Brahms show off their sacred thread, recreate Thiruvayur in Cleveland, and learn Bharatanatyam while using their powerful networks to connect and succeed in the diaspora. Ultimately, we trade and calcify what is seen as proper Indian culture. But hidden within that idea of ‘proper’ lies the code for what is aspirational and ultimately upper caste... For while caste is everywhere in the diaspora, there is a damning silence about naming caste (2012).

Alongside this understanding of the pageant space as a site of performing the ‘modern’ Hindu caste Indian diasporic woman, I keep in mind that this particular iteration takes place in Canada. Diasporic gratitude and belonging within Canadian multiculturalism was on display at the pageant as women outlined their personal and professional achievements, or shared their stories of migration and lives in Canada. Bannerji, in her scathing criticism of the way multicultural policies have forced homogenization upon racialized and immigrant communities in Canada and elevated conservative and male leaders to represent the community’s voice, argues that this collusion of state and patriarchal power forces women to be the bearers of cultural and religious norms to proclaim the community’s ‘authentic’ status (Bannerji, 2020, p.

410). Ameeriar (2017) outlines how ‘lived multiculturalism’ makes demands on the bodies of racialized women to become legible to the Canadian nation, through the performances of their authentic ‘culture’. That this demand is disproportionately made of women, speaks to the gendered nature of multiculturalism’s violences.

In the context of Filipinx diasporic beauty pageants, Farrales argues that “ pageants in Canada can... be read as sites of power and contestation, wherein the gendered, racialized, and sexual subjectivities of Filipinas materialize in relation to colonial notions of a nation” (2019, p. 51). Farrales further reminds us that constructing respectable racialized sexualities in Canada as a part of the project of multiculturalism is not divorced from the settler-colonialist agenda that dehumanizes and dispossesses Indigenous peoples from their land. Along similar lines, Upadhyay’s work on ‘Indians on Indian Land’ is instructive in locating migrants from India to Canada within shared colonial histories of British imperialism, but also points out that Indian diasporas’ construction as ‘model minorities’ in Canada renders the communities complicit in the colonization and extractive capitalism and benefitting from Canadian multiculturalism (Upadhyay, 2019), which is the context in which these beauty pageants are located.

The Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant was thus a site to observe the ways in which the ‘new Indian woman’ easily morphs into the multicultural migrant racialized woman in the Indian diaspora, under the aegis of the Canadian multicultural settler nation project, and observe the working of multiculturalism within a diasporic community event. Upper-caste Hindu Telugu ‘new Indian women’ were presented on stage as the perfect, authentic representations of the model multicultural successful Indian diaspora that faced minimal friction in becoming Canadian citizens. The coming together of the Indian and Canadian flags and national anthems at the event were reflected in the normative cultural forms of the classical Indian or patriotic dances

and the quintessential ‘Telugu’ beauty of sarees and long hair being juxtaposed with the contestants’ professional success in the Canadian economy, their embodiment of Canadian-ness through their sporting achievements and emphasis on physical, outdoor exercises, as well as their ‘fantasies’ of wearing ballgowns on a stage for the ‘western outfits’ round. Combine these with Mrs. Canada International Parita Vadodariya’s story of escaping traditional casteist structures and the ostracism of her family in India, and landing in Canadian benevolence that nurtured her love story and her professional ambitions; as well as Miss Canada-Punjaban Arshdeep Kaur Gosal’s acquisition of traditional cooking knife-wielding skills in Punjab despite her upbringing in Canada: what we get is a construction of the new Indian woman within Canadian multicultural colonial nationalism. Not only is there a construction of the woman herself, but there is also a narrative of her *success* in skilfully navigating and combining her Indian and Canadian identities, which then reflects on Indian diasporic communities’ successful integration into Canadian society.

Conclusion

This chapter has traversed a wide territory from the economic reforms in 1990s India to diasporic beauty pageants. I have traced the construction of the ‘new Indian woman’ concomitant with the rise of the ‘new middle class’ of neoliberal India, in the interest of sketching out the context within which most of my marriage migrant respondents would have grown up. I then trace the role of national and international beauty pageants in setting up the ‘ideal’ of this new Indian woman in terms of appearance and beauty, which translated into grooming and personality development classes for women. Through my interviews with grooming school teachers, and examining the discourses and curriculum material available on grooming and personality development courses for young women, I unpack the connections between

marriageability and prospects for migration for young women. Finally, I discussed the role of diasporic beauty pageants, specifically in Canada, in construction of the ideal diasporic ‘Indian’ woman who exhibits a seamless Indian and Canadian identity.

With this chapter I have attempted to sketch out the transnational terrain of gendered norms which most of my respondents would have contended with in the neoliberal economy of India and encountered upon migration to Canada. This helps me place the ‘new Indian woman’ in the context of caste in the Canadian multicultural diaspora. By unpacking the ‘new Indian woman’ I have attempted to portray the larger forces of class, religion and caste that shape the capacity and potential for upward mobility in the neoliberal economy for women, whether it is through grooming for beauty pageants and corporate careers or grooming for marriage and marriage migration. Grooming school teachers in India provide us with a glimpse into how these discourses of confidence, femininity and a cosmopolitan outlook, including speaking English with fluency and being versed in corporate western behaviours, dovetail in the case of marriage and familial relations as well as professional settings. As they point out, one of their biggest concerns is to provide women with counselling and conflict resolution tools, pointing to the frictions that arise when discourses of the ‘new Indian woman’ come into contact with other institutions and demands on women’s lives. At the same time, women are expected to embody confidence and pride in their Indian identity, whether it is in speaking their own languages or wearing Indian clothes that make them comfortable. This provides us with a glimpse into how the uncomplaining model minority identity starts to be seeded and shaped even while in India.

Connecting beauty pageants and grooming across India and Canada gives us an opportunity to understand how the subjectivity of the ‘new Indian woman’ fits into the requirements and the milieu of Canadian multiculturalism. Within both these discourses, we see

that complexities of religion, caste and class are smoothed out; and the dominant-caste, middle-class Hindu woman emerges as the stand-in not only for the ‘new Indian woman’, but also the model multicultural migrant woman in a diasporic Indian setting, who is cast as the representative of the upwardly mobile South Asian community in Canada. In the following chapters, I delve deeper into my respondents’ narratives and see how their stories resonate with, or push back against, these discourses of the model multicultural marriage migrant woman.

Chapter 4 - “Adjustment”, Class, Caste and Gendered Agency in Marriage Decisions

Introduction

Back in the olden days, arranged marriages meant that you trusted the parents to choose well and in turn they would take care of all the problems. The parents used to enquire after the match’s family, learn about the family history going back to seven generations. Nowadays, no one has the time to do that, and the neighbours don’t care to know about each other... so they can’t be trusted to make the enquiries. Plus, people are migrating so much that neighbours can’t tell so much about the past or the history of the family (Lalita, Hyderabad, December 2019, Telugu).

I received this response from Lalita when I asked about whether her marriage to her husband was arranged by her parents; and what prompted her to choose an arranged marriage. Lalita laughed at the implication that she had a ‘choice’ in the matter of an arranged marriage; but explained that she understood how things had changed when it came to my generation, and how I might conceive of such a question to ask. Having migrated to Germany and then to Canada after her marriage and raised two children who were now adults, she had given some thought to the matter. While she had been able to place her complete trust in her parents and wider kin network to choose the right partner for her, she did not think she could make that same choice for her children – not that her children wanted her to, she said, with a twinkle in her eye.

Lalita draws a connection between migration – not only transnational, but also intranational from rural to urban settings – and arranged marriage decisions in terms of the breakdown of relationships of trust and longstanding familiarity. Speaking as she did in the context of arranged marriages, it is likely that she was referring to the breakdown of joint-family

household arrangements as well as caste-based community networks.⁴⁰ However, this change has not been a linear or a universal process. Studies show that a majority of marriages in India are still endogamous, and families rather than individuals are central to the marriage decision-making process (K. Gandhi et al., 2016; Goli et al., 2013; Ray et al., 2020). Further, in the absence of longstanding social and community ties to make ‘enquiries’ after potential matches, a greater role is assumed by matrimonial advertisements in newspapers and matrimonial websites that lay out the regional, class and caste-based preferences of marriage hopefuls, both within India and the diaspora. In this chapter, I explore my respondents’ decisions to enter into arranged marriages or marriages where they chose their own partner. Through the concept of ‘adjustment’, I discuss in depth the considerations of women’s agency, as well as the role of caste and class, in both kinds of marriage decisions. My respondents’ narratives reveal the role and utility of the ‘caste as culture’ in marriage decisions, and outline their engagement with the discourses of the ‘new Indian woman’ in terms of their rational choices for security and self-interest.

Technologies of Marriage and Adjustment

The practice of arranged marriage can be understood as compulsory heterosexual marriages between a man and woman, sought within acceptable parameters of class, caste, religion, region, race and language; and decided upon primarily by their respective families (or with the families’ involvement and approval) (Tamalapakula, 2019). Ambedkar describes arranged marriages as entrenched practices of caste-endogamy, arguing that the prohibitions on intermarriage are the main pillar that uphold caste structures (Rege, 2018). Thus, we see that the

⁴⁰ Intranational migration for work, for instance, may result in breakdown of caste-based practices of residential segregation and socialization in urban settings; however, this does not negatively affect caste-endogamous marriage-seeking (Saroja, 1999).

inverse of arranged marriages -- ‘love’ marriages or marriages of choice that transgress these bounds, particularly of caste, religion or sexuality, or take place *without* parental and community approval – are considered less than respectable, inferior and a threat to social organization (Allendorf, 2013; Mody, 2008; Uberoi, 1998). At times love marriages are punished with violence against the woman, the man or both – even to the point of murder, euphemistically termed ‘honour killings’, sanctioned by families and caste associations (A. Yadav, 2014).⁴¹ The Hindu right-wing in India has also invented the bogeyman of ‘Love Jihad’ to perpetuate Islamophobic and gendered violence against Hindu women and their Muslim male partners, even codifying these in laws in parts of India in 2020 (Apoorvanand, 2021).

The longstanding presence of matrimonial advertisements has been noted in newspapers, magazines and periodicals across India and in publications catering to the Indian diaspora (Ghasarian, 1994; Ramakrishnan, 2012; Saroja, 1999; Uberoi, 2006). Shefali Chandra observes that matrimonial advertisements, a regular feature of Indian newspapers, are “megaphones that amplify a massive consent over the permissible parameters of caste, race and gender” (Humanities, Center for the, 2015). Matrimonial websites, a more recent invention, are nonetheless geared towards community-specific matches and constitute a huge market for individuals and families seeking marital partners in India and the diaspora (Agrawal, 2015; Aguiar, 2018; Netting, 2006, 2010; Rajadesingan et al., 2019). In her study of the “shaadi.com” website’s diasporic service, Archana Sharma (2008) finds that under the parameters of ‘caste’ Shaadi.com presents an array of subcategories or jatis under ‘Brahmin’, but not so for other backward castes, and ‘Dalit’ is not mentioned at all. Noting this “presence of high castes and absence of low castes” (p. 142), Sharma argues that these prolific diasporic matchmaking

⁴¹ “Honour killings” are reported not only within India, but transnationally organized by members of the Indian diaspora to take place in India and the diaspora as well (Aujla & Gill, 2014).

websites present a challenge to the notion of the diasporic Hindu in the West as a “modern” or “casteless” subject (p. 148). A further development is the use of Whatsapp groups and other messaging forums to circulate the details of prospective marriage partners within caste-specific groups, as we see in the documentary *Meet the Patels*, for instance.

Along with the individual’s preferences, the parameters stated in newspaper advertisements or filters applied on matrimonial profiles on these websites ensure that there is compatibility when it comes to educational qualifications, employment or employability, and class-based practices. Premarital romantic love in an idealized Indian family – both Hindu and Muslim – is considered detrimental or even dangerous to the success of a marriage (Mody, 2002) with one notable exception. A new form of marriage noted by scholars is the “arranged-love” marriage, or companionate marriage, wherein individuals seek out partners who are acceptable to their families and represent the perfect ‘blend’ of tradition and modernity (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; J. Kapur, 2009) – I explore this further in the chapter.

Outlining the dialogic construction of the Hindu patrilineal joint family ethic, Patricia Uberoi writes that “Marriage should ... be a union of status equals within an endogamous community (the ‘caste’) whose existence and reproduction are dependent on the observance of this principle. But this ideal is in turn contradicted by the hierarchical superiority accorded wife-takers over wife-givers” (Uberoi, 2006, p. 31). This hierarchical superiority is manifested in practices such as dowry, as well as the relatively powerless position that women occupy within their marital households as young brides. Being groomed from childhood as *‘paraya dhan’* (another’s wealth) means that women are outwardly bound from their natal homes, and are expected to shape their lives according to their ‘real’ home – the marital household, whether that is with their husbands alone, or with their in-laws as well.

In such a context, the theme of ‘adjustment’ was prevalent across my respondents’ narratives, where adjustment was defined as changing one’s practices, outlook and reaching a ‘compromise’ that allowed them to settle into their new roles as wives and daughters-in-law, regardless of what their residential arrangement was after the marriage. Analysing fictional stories about marital strife that appeared in the Indian magazine *Women’s Era* in the 1990s as ‘ideological products’, Uberoi finds that within these discourses, “compromise, or adjustment ... is the key to marital happiness. Typically, though not invariably, it is the wife who is advised to ‘adjust’, so that compromise is for the most part asymmetrical, an affirmation of male dominance in the family, as in society at large.” (p. 239). Uberoi cites sociologist Prabhu who attributes these gendered imbalanced expectations of adjustment to “patri(viri)local residence (where the wife moves after marriage to live with their husband’s family) and the requirement of the adjustability on the part of the wife” (p. 239). Despite large scale societal changes that have taken place since the time-period Uberoi talks about, we find that ‘adjustment and compromise’ endure as a lens through which to understand happiness and satisfaction within marriage – for instance, the climactic episode of the popular Netflix TV show ‘Indian Matchmaking’ (2020) was titled ‘Adjustment and Compromise’,⁴² and throughout the series, the burden to change or lower one’s expectations for a prospective partner fell disproportionately on women.

None of my respondents – even those who had arranged marriages and were consulted on their preferences of prospective husbands’ careers – expressed that they had a preference to migrate, or indeed that they had looked actively for a marriage to a Non-resident Indian (NRI)

⁴²‘Adjustment and Compromise’ is the final episode of the series and wraps up the continuing story arcs of each participant in finding their match. Sima Taparia, the matchmaker at the centre of the series, is able to broker a successful engagement for one among the three male participants; the 4 other female participants are ‘unsuccessful’ in finding a match through Taparia’s methods. Though the show presents a few of the female participants as making empowered choices in focusing on other, non-romantic and non-marital aspects of their lives to find fulfilment, Taparia’s attitude towards them appears to be condescending as they are not willing to ‘adjust or compromise’ themselves to fit into the parameters required by prospective male suitors.

man. Women had either been married off to NRI men as arranged marriages, where it had been the parents who had convinced them that this was a good boy from a good family and therefore a good match, or they had decided to go abroad with their husbands after the marriage. In a few cases, women would find out in their initial conversations that their husbands had ambitions to migrate after the marriage and eagerly joined in the efforts to do so once they were married. In only a couple of cases was the woman's education geared towards migration even before marriage was on the horizon.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present my respondents' narratives around their marriage decisions, and analyse the workings of gender, caste, class and agency within them.

Arranged marriage

Among my respondents, 16 out of 24 had arranged marriages, largely contracted through introductions made by relatives and family friends, though some used matrimonial websites and community-based marriage brokers or matchmakers. In each of these cases, respondents' parents were involved at every stage of the process.

As part of my interview, I would inquire after my respondents' religious and caste backgrounds and ask when and how the decision to marry came about. Though I meant it as prompt to place marriage as a chronological event in their lives, most respondents interpreted this question as my asking whether they had an arranged or love marriage. I would usually then ask why they had chosen an arranged marriage. Most respondents found this question strange; some took it as a sign of my naivete and offered arguments in favour of arranged marriage's superiority over love marriages. However, respondents also offered their rationales for *choosing* an arranged marriage, whether it was via matrimonial websites, brokers, or through their familial

relations. Two big themes that emerged here were firstly, women's trust in their parents' ability to choose the right marital partner, or that parental involvement in the process of choosing a partner and their approval would ensure a happy and long marriage. Secondly, respondents opined that an arranged marriage would mean that their adjustment into married life would be seamless and present no challenges, as it would mean less adjustment across caste and linguistic boundaries, not to mention class and religion.

“Parents know best”: Choosing arranged marriages

A Hindu Brahmin Telugu woman in her early 40s, Samira had invited me over to her house multiple times and even introduced me to some of her friends as potential interviewees. Perceiving me as a young, unmarried student, she took on the role of an older advisor, expressing interest in my choices and ambitions (for more, see chapter 2). At the beginning of our interview, as soon as we reached the question on marriage decisions, Samira shared that she had had an arranged marriage, and when I asked why, she said:

I don't believe in love marriages – I think parents know what is best for us, right from the beginning... Parents will always select based on the right family. Parents try to do their best for their children. We believe that there is like-mindedness within the same [caste] community and there won't be “cultural differences.” It's like when you consider income group, right? That's also something parents look for – they want to ensure their daughter gets a similar lifestyle to what she grew up with. So its like that with arranged marriage. It's easier.

In a love marriage, I would have to convince everybody in my family to agree. Then I would have to convince everybody in my husband's family to like me and accept me as part of their family. In my case, I met so many of the family members in the initial pelli chupulu [formal meeting between members of matchmaking families]. They all liked me, so I had a smoother transition into their house. (Samira, Aldershot, August

2019, Telugu).

This argument in favour of arranged marriage draws an analogy between class, or “income group” as Samira termed it, to the cultural familiarity within caste communities. Most respondents who had arranged marriages considered it the duty of parents to select the ‘right family’ for their daughters – undergirded by the understanding that marriage represented a break in women’s identities – to ensure a ‘similar lifestyle’ for them post marriage; in turn they claimed to place absolute faith in their parents to select the right person for them. This interplay between class and caste considerations was a common thread through all the marriage decision-making processes that respondents shared, as well as the trust in their parents to discern the correct levels of these considerations to guarantee an easy transition for women into their married life.

A self-professed “studious type”, Samira had qualified to work in a support capacity for a branch of the Indian armed forces. As an undergraduate, she and her friends had applied together; only a few of them had cleared the written exam and were invited for a physical test. Samira shared with some pride that she scored very well on the national level and was offered a job. However, the job contracts contained a clause stipulating that selected candidates would not get married till they were 28 years of age. This clause was unacceptable to Samira’s parents, so she ended up declining the position even as she had worked hard for it. “In a way they were right too, marriage should not get so late,” Samira said, before conceding that if the decision had been in her hands, she would have signed that contract and stayed unmarried. Like Samira, a few of my respondents expressed that if they had a choice, they would not have married as early in their lives as they did, as they felt that marriage prevented them from pursuing further studies, employment opportunities or other interests.

I thought during your bachelors [education] you should be focused on studies and not think too much about love... but I got married during my bachelors, so I never even had the chance! (Anupriya, Scarborough, February 2019, English and Telugu)

In Anupriya's case, when her parents received a suitable matrimonial proposal for her, they exerted tremendous pressure on her to agree to the marriage as it was a match from a "very good family". A Telugu Vysya woman in her 20s, she had intended to study further and did not want to marry without having finished her undergraduate degree, and thought her early 20s was too soon for her to marry. However, an elder cousin sister who was in her 30s and was still unmarried represented a fate her parents desperately wanted to avoid for Anupriya. Besides, as Anupriya's mother explained to her, if she got married at a younger age, it would be easier for her to 'adjust'.

Adjustment and Risk-Mitigation

My mother didn't even teach me how to cook before my marriage. Yes! You think its unbelievable! So that when I get married, I would learn from my mother-in-law to cook according to that house's tastes... you know, how some houses use more oil, more salt, things like that. I learnt cooking according to their family's tastes from my mother-in-law just by watching. (Samira)

Sharangpani (2010) discerns a form of agency in young women's choice of arranged marriages in crafting their futures, reconciling personal individual choice and traditional, family requirements. Where women see arranged marriages in consumerist terms of constructing the perfect husband, or see marriage as a strategy of migration, Sharangpani understands younger women's approach to arranged marriage as an emancipatory strategy to achieve their

professional goals and personal happiness. Parminder Bhachu (1985) finds that in the case of East African Sikh diasporic communities, caste-endogamous marriages within the Ramgarhiya Sikh community formed a marker of the community identity. Women utilized their own earnings and savings to provide themselves with a dowry, or pay for wedding costs, as a way to demonstrate their social and economic standing and exercise their agency within the milieu of endogamous marriages.

Considering this understanding, I would argue that for those of my respondents who laid out their rationale for opting for an arranged marriage, there was also an element of risk-mitigation for the inevitable post-marital adjustment. The *choice* to have an arranged marriage came to represent a strategy of empowerment. Even though it was what their parents had wanted or asked for, when I framed my question as ‘when did *you* decide’, the answers I received emphasized the women’s own intention to opt for an arranged marriage. In her research with young Indian adults and their decisions to enter arranged marriages, Sharangpani found that:

People believed that same-caste alliances would ensure similarities of lifestyle and value systems—their outlook on education, women working outside the home, cultural development (such as an interest in the fine arts, music, literature and so on), their treatment of women and the elders, dowry giving and receiving practices and so on. (Sharangpani, 2010, p. 274)

This similarity of culture and lifestyle with a caste endogamous arranged marriage was a common theme amongst those of my respondents who had arranged marriages. With a few respondents who were open to talking in more depth about what adjustment meant, the responses centred on food and religious practices. The theme of risk mitigation came to light especially when women who had had arranged marriages spoke about their experiences post-marriage.

For Gargi, a Hindu Tamil Brahmin woman in her 30s, an arranged marriage was a

'rational' choice for her own best interests. An ambitious and studious person who was very close to her parents, she shared that she approached her career and personal trajectory, including her marriage decision-making, in an organized way.

Gargi: I didn't want to get married out of my caste because I thought I would have adjustment issues so I never even had a thought of getting into a relationship, or you know, like trying out dating. I was very clear if I want to get married then I'll do it this way.

Harshita: Just to clarify a bit more. What do adjustment issues mean for you?

G: You know how we internalize that you're not going to be living with your family once you get married. I had no set ideas for my husband, but as a woman I felt it is always better if I'm going into the same family that are same cultural values like mine. Nothing to do with moral values, but cultural values like you know, we celebrate the same festivals. We eat the same food.

H: That's where like the big draw for you for arranged marriage within the caste would have been a smooth transition. But at least in your case, that wasn't the case.

G: It's not like I didn't not want to marry, you know. I wanted to marry in a way that... I just wanted it to last basically. This is one way that it would last. But you're always in for surprises... And one more thing that I was very clear was I wanted to get into a family which had a daughter in it right? So that you know they would empathize a little bit more with me. (Gargi, Toronto, July 2019, Hindi and English).

With her keen understanding of the patrilocal norms and the power dynamic of the marital household, where daughters-in-law are often in the most powerless position (Gangoli & Rew, 2011), Gargi had reasoned that an arranged marriage to a man from the same caste community, who also had a sister, would ensure her a safe and sympathetic marital household that would support her ambitions to advance in her profession after her marriage, and raise her children in a feminist atmosphere.

Gargi and her husband Murali were put in touch with each other as members of the same caste community. They spoke to each other for a week, and when they met in person, they decided on the same day to be with each other. An IT professional, Murali had worked in the US but had come back to India for a spell. This met with Gargi's requirement that her future husband not work and live in the US, as she knew the spousal visa there would not allow her to work. Further, Murali had a sister who worked in the same field as her, which she found reassuring in terms of finding familial support for her own professional advancement. When Gargi's father found that their astrological charts were compatible, all her criteria were fulfilled, and she decided to go ahead with the marriage. However, she found that the reality of living with her in-laws was an unpleasant surprise.

You know we have the same culture, same everything, but it was very shocking because it was very different. [Despite being the same] everything same, you know after so much of planning, yeah, you know I ended up with a family which was way different than what I thought. You have a daughter too, how can you treat me so shoddily? (Gargi)

Though she shared a good rapport with Murali who supported her research studies, Gargi found that her in-laws not only did not support her, but actively pitted her against their daughter's (Gargi's sister-in-law) professional achievements. As Gargi came up short in their estimation in comparison, her in-laws periodically asked her to consider giving up her career so she could focus on their home life. She found no support from her sister-in-law in this regard. When Gargi and her husband moved to a different area of the city they lived in so as to reduce their commute times, her in-laws found it a reason to badmouth her and blame her for disrupting their family home. A few years later, when she suffered a personal health crisis, she found that her in-laws to lack understanding and empathy for her trauma, disregarding her need for recovery time.

Knowing that Murali was dissatisfied with the work culture within his company in India but unwilling to go to the US, Gargi and Murali then applied to migrate to Canada so that they could have a new start.

It was so funny, you know. We were from the same caste, same area, same language, same kind of family and everything... but our families and food habits turned out to be so completely different! You can't ensure everything will be the same after marriage. (Anupriya)

Much like Gargi, Anupriya had hoped that marrying into a family where her husband had a sister would ensure a certain amount of empathy and consideration for a new daughter-in-law. Both respondents understood the presence of a daughter in their affinal families as a potential mitigator of the risk they faced as new daughters-in-law. However, Anupriya found that adjustment to her marital household was not as easy as she had hoped – cooking for her in-laws was completely different from what she had learnt in her house growing up; her in-laws wanted her to give up her career and her co-sister had no interest in having a relationship with her. Anupriya found that having a daughter of her own did not prevent her mother-in-law from mistreating her.

I'm telling you Harshita... Don't marry an Indian guy who wants you to babysit him or is looking for a replacement for his mother. Don't get into a marriage where you have sisters-in-law. It's just a headache. (Anupriya, phone conversation, April 2020, Telugu)⁴³

In one of our catch-up conversations after our interview sessions, Anupriya remarked that I should just choose my own husband. When I replied lightheartedly that I had no patience or skill

⁴³ I include this quote here with Anupriya's consent.

in that area, she observed that if I wanted to enter into an arranged marriage, I should *not* look for a family that had a daughter. I asked her what had prompted this observation.

You would think that having a daughter would make them treat you better. Like they would behave to me like how they would want their daughter to be treated in her in-laws' home, you know? But that's not been my experience. At all! Now I find its just better to not have co-sisters at all. (Anupriya, phone conversation, April 2020)

In January 2020, months after I had met her, Anupriya's mother-in-law came to stay with her and her husband in their new home in Montreal. Her stay became indefinitely extended when the pandemic was declared, and all international travel ceased. For Anupriya, the lockdown and stay-at-home orders worsened a difficult situation.

Her mother-in-law had video phone conversations with her daughter (Anupriya's sister-in-law) who lived in India, every morning, and Anupriya was never welcome to join in and participate in these conversations. Anupriya was not bothered by this; rather what irked her was that she could hear their conversations revolving around what Anupriya was doing – for instance, her mother-in-law would report on what she was wearing, especially if it was dresses or skirts; her sister-in-law would ask after Anupriya's personal grooming routines and her mother-in-law would share everything in great detail. Anupriya was dismayed and felt humiliated at what she understood as this surveillance of her personal presentation and habits, as well as the circuitous way her co-sister sought to get this information instead of speaking to her directly and building a relationship with her. These conversations also led to her co-sister asking for gifts and favours from her brother, which Anupriya perceived as outlandish and confusing. “Why it is that despite an arranged marriage which takes place with the families' consent, mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law still try to push the couple apart?” she asked, in the midst of our conversation, before

advising me yet again to just choose a husband for myself, for at least he would be “on my side”.

What I surmise is that these respondents, being aware of their position of relative powerlessness as wives and daughters-in-law, regarded caste-endogamous arranged marriages as a way of mitigating this risk by banking on a seamless transition into married life and a lack of ‘adjustment’ in terms of caste, class and religious practices. In Gargi’s words, this was a question of matching “cultural values” and not a moral judgement on other castes. This understanding seems to rest on the idea of the ‘culturalization of caste’ as evinced by Balmurli Natrajan (2011), wherein castes are understood as discrete, horizontal ‘cultural’ entities. Natrajan argues for viewing the phenomenon of caste as-culture as a “strategic ideological adaptation of caste rather than a benign, defanged twenty first-century avatar of caste that is seemingly about difference and not inequality or hierarchy” (2011, p. [189](#)). This is a particularly important concept when thinking about caste-endogamy as an insurance against the problems of ‘adjustment’ to a different set of customs and practices as represented by a different caste. When my respondents presented their arguments in support of arranged marriages, with an understanding that they would be marrying into similar cultures and similar communities, they demonstrated an understanding of ‘caste-as-culture’; however there was also an aspect of maintaining their caste-based advantages and privileges that may be lost with the conflicts and potential downward mobility associated with inter-caste marriages.

However, the same women went on to explain how these expectations were dashed because they found conflict within the marital family structures either with their partners or with their other in-laws, emanating from their position as the daughter-in-law in the house. Deniz Kandiyoti’s concept of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ is useful here (1988, 1998), by which Kandiyoti understands women’s conforming to the ‘rules of the game’ within social, particularly kinship

structures – in this case, caste-endogamy and social mobility through marriage – as a way to secure their future security, power and privilege. ‘Bargaining’ is a way to explain women’s actions within a patriarchal system; particularly why women may make choices that appear to go against their self-interest and why the ways to oppose patriarchy are constrained by the system itself. However, as Kandiyoti outlines in her reworking of her initial formulation (1998), this concept can be over-determining; patriarchal bargains need to be understood as ‘inflected by local hierarchies of entitlement’. Further, it is necessary to add that not all women are able to make patriarchal bargains with the same capacity – for example, the costs for queer and/or disabled women are higher in entering or eschewing a heteronormative arranged marriage; and while bargaining with the system may provide *some* security for women, it does not *guarantee* them favourable outcomes.

In the case of my respondents, the choice to enter into an arranged marriage was framed by women as ‘a rational decision’, acting in the framework of a neoliberal subject who acts in self-interest in considering all the options available within the free market, and bases the individual expression of their identity through choices made in the market (Kapur, 2009, p. 227). However, even though women sought to mitigate the risks of marrying a man with whom they had very little prior acquaintance, by relying on their parents’ judgements and the requirements of an arranged marriage that looked for suitable matches in caste, religion, class etc., -- the “adjustment” they sought to minimize was still required as a function of their lower place as a daughter-in-law or a wife in the familial hierarchy. This contradiction between the rational self-interested choice of the individual and the gendered and caste consequences of marriage as a bride constituted a ‘shock’ to women – in other words, women seemed shocked by the fact that their choice to enter into an arranged caste-endogamous marriage did not protect them from the

effects of caste-patriarchy.

Arranged-love marriages

Only one of my respondents, Surabhi, had a marriage that I would describe as an arranged-love union, and this is because of Surabhi's reluctance to name it as a marriage where she chose her partner, or a 'love marriage'. Her husband Anand and she had gone to school together, where he was three years ahead of her. Years later, they reconnected at a school reunion and kept in touch over social media while he studied abroad, and he expressed his interest in deepening their relationship. Though Surabhi kept in touch with him, she was not thinking of anything more.

I was clear, I didn't want to get too attached, I kept busy with college and dance and music classes. I am an only child and didn't want to disappoint my parents. Even though they are really liberal and allowed me to do what I wanted to do, I didn't want to do anything to go against them... Like they never dictated what kind of clothes I should wear, but I just felt that I should not wear things that they wouldn't approve of, you know? All these girls at my school were getting their hair cut short and my mother asked me if I wanted to cut my hair too, but I was the one who said no... my reasoning was that I wanted my hair long for dance performances anyway. There was never pressure from my parents to be traditional or anything like that, it was just how my personality was. (Surabhi, Brampton, August 2019).

Surabhi's narrative demonstrated the disavowal of choice and agency in the marriage decision-making process, as she claimed to be someone who did not "go against" her parents even though she claimed they were liberal and allowed her to make her own choices.

When Anand came to India for a visit, he brought his parents along to one of Surabhi's public dance performances, after which he introduced her to his parents, and his parents to her

family. Surabhi said she left the decision to her parents, who were suitably impressed with Anand and his career prospects. The only objection to their marriage came from Anand's family – though both their families were Telugu Brahmin, they belonged to different subcastes. While Surabhi's family were Niyogi Brahmin, Anand's were Vaidiku Brahmins, and this difference was salient enough that her mother-in-law was not pleased with Anand's choice. However, as Anand was adamant that he would not marry anyone else, they were engaged soon after and when Anand secured a job in Malaysia, they married and left to establish their life overseas.

I asked Surabhi why the sub-caste difference was so contentious; and her answer represented the only point where a respondent openly referenced the hierarchies operating within caste systems and communities. Surabhi explained that "Vaidiku Brahmins consider themselves more superior because they used to be pandits (priests) and work in the temples, while Niyogis used to be administrators in the village – it was all back in the day." In her opinion, it was all a fuss over nothing, because as an urbanised woman she didn't see the relevance of these historical differences; rather she understood that the sub-caste hierarchy was being used as a way to denigrate Surabhi and put her in her place in her marital family. However, she declined to share more about this aspect, as she never did live with her in-laws for an extended period of time, following her husband to various overseas locations for his career.

We see a different aspect of disavowal of choice here – a different aspect of risk mitigation here and minimizing conflict. Patricia Uberoi has termed this the "arranged-love marriage" as seen in Hindi Bollywood movies. Parental consent is an important piece of the new marriage ideals. The moral conflict between romantic desire and social expectations is appealingly resolved in these movies by "arranged-love marriage," in which romantic entanglements are eventually endorsed by parents or, alternatively, a couple falls in love after

being matched by parents (Uberoi 1998, 306).

Love marriage

Out of 24 respondents, 8 had marriages where they selected their own partners, marriages that were not caste-endogamous and had aspects of a pre-marital romantic relationships. Among them, seven had met their husbands during their time at school or in college; one had met her husband at their workplace. In each case, they had maintained ‘friendships’⁴⁴ or been in romantic relationship with their husbands for a minimum of 2-3 years, before getting married. In two cases (Niharika and Meena) the main axis of ‘difference’ in the marriage was defined as region, and in six cases, the difference was that of caste identity and status. Across their narratives of love marriage, women made sure to emphasize the longstanding nature of their friendship or familiarity with their husbands as well as the parity in class status, as it was this consistency and longevity as a friend or boyfriend and the perceived ability of the men to provide comparative lifestyles for the women after the marriage, that convinced their families to agree to the match.

In her study of love marriages in Delhi, Perveen Mody (2002) points out that love marriages disrupt the kin-system and community formation on the basis of caste – which we saw in the story of Mrs. Canada International 2018 Parita Vadodariya, discussed in chapter 3. This is one explanation for why it was important for my respondents to attempt to secure parental consent for their marriage, with the help of sympathetic relatives and friends, no matter how long it took. The absence of the social safety net and community support provided by the family and wider community in the case of ‘elopement’ where the couple is forced to cut ties with their families, not to mention the threat of violence against inter-caste or inter-religious marriages in

⁴⁴ An allusion to a romantic relationship, or a relationship between members of the opposite sex.

particular, provides special impetus to the process of securing familial consent.

Inter-Caste marriages

My respondents who faced opposition to their chosen partners from their parents or their extended families did so on the grounds of caste. In a majority of these cases, the women belonged to 'higher' castes than their husbands; however, on the women's part there was a reticence around admitting a hierarchical difference between each other. Rather, my respondents framed the caste-based objections from their parents or communities as a question of unfamiliarity and horizontal difference, as well as the worries around women's 'adjustment' to the husbands' familial expectations and practices.

Manya, a Hindu Brahmin woman in her 30s had met her husband Suraj, a Hindu Jat, during their undergraduate education. By the end of their first year of college, they were good friends and part of the same group. After finishing their degrees, they both landed an internship at the same workplace and supported each other in a new environment. They even entered the same programme for their master's degree, and their prior familiarity with each other prompted their classmates to "spread rumours and gossip" about their relationship, though Manya insisted that they were simply friends, nothing more. In her words, romance was not on her mind at all.

I had very 'upright' notions - that I would only get married according to my parents' wishes, I am academic and focused on my work and don't have time for this stuff. I won't be going against them. I also knew that we were very different in terms of caste so I knew nothing would happen, didn't even think along these lines. (Manya, Mississauga, April 2019, Hindi and English)

She explained the differences between her and Suraj's families as follows: while she came from an urbanized family full of scientists and engineers, Suraj came from a rural community still

engaged in farming and other agrarian activities. These descriptions line up neatly with their traditional Brahmin and Jat occupations; however, for Manya these were the ‘cultural’ differences between their families and what their families valued. Though she did not name the caste hierarchy explicitly as a problem for her, she implied that the fact that as a Brahmin she belonged to a ‘higher’ and more progressive, urbanized caste was a reason why her parents did not think she would fit in with Suraj’s family.

When she finished her Masters’ degree, Manya’s parents created a matrimonial profile on a website for her and she began to receive suitable matrimonial offers. This was when she finally realised her romantic feelings for Suraj. When she learned that Suraj reciprocated her feelings, they reached an “understanding” between each other to convince Manya’s family to agree to their marriage.

My father is conservative but he’s a perfectionist, he always said, “whichever house my daughter goes to must be proper, the boy should be qualified and have a job.” I was getting matrimonial offers from scientist in UK etc., from really good families... In front of these offers, we knew Suraj would not be as impressive, so he really worked hard to get a good job. On my side I slowly started telling my father about him, it was difficult in the beginning, and it took a while. It was a big shock to my family that I was saying this... I was the first love marriage in our family. (Manya)

Manya’s words around “really good families” implied that these were families from a similar Brahmin caste background who were well-placed in their class position and in western countries that were acceptable to her father as a marital prospect. In order to prove himself worthy and equally desirable as these “good” prospects, Suraj worked hard to improve his spoken English and obtained a job at an impressive sports academy. Manya described this period as a struggle for him, as he worked hard to support his parents and build up his savings. When he had

achieved a promotion and a higher salary, he and his family came to visit Manya's family as a way to establish a relationship and intentions to marry. Suraj charmed them all with "his character and personality". Eventually, after over a year of cajoling and convincing her parents, with her sister's support, Manya and Suraj were able to get married. When I asked Manya what her experience had been with her in-laws, she declined to go into further detail about her struggles in that area, implying that with their migration to Canada some of her familial "issues" had been resolved.

Frida, a Hindu upper-caste Nair Malayali woman shared that she had not been aware of any caste discriminatory practices amongst her family members, until she introduced them to her now-husband, then-boyfriend Venu, who belongs to the subordinate-caste Ashari community. Frida had met Venu when they were in college in a different city from their hometown. When they started dating she kept the relationship a secret from her family. However, during their vacations, their late-night phone conversations were overheard by her father who confronted her. Despite some tensions at home over her relationship, Frida "smoothed over the situation" with the help of her older cousin, and quietly continued her relationship. Once they had graduated and found jobs in the same city, her father pushed her to consider marriage as he "didn't want to leave us two alone if we were interested in each other. He said, let's just get you married."

So up until the wedding talks, I thought my parents were pretty liberal, and everything was equal in the house. We called our domestic servants 'aunty' and ate with them, there was no issue with that, it was normal. But when it came to marriage, suddenly there was this 'caste' problem!

... It was interesting because my mom is from a very traditional household and she had all these dreams about me and my sister, and she was hoping to enjoy the process of 'looking for a boy for my daughter' and yeah, I sort of stole that away from her. I guess she felt bad about it yeah, so all of this came up. You know how it is with a

different caste. So for her when her daughter is getting married to somebody in the society who is not an equal, it was more of a status symbol sort of thing. (Frida, Toronto, June 2019, English).

It was her mother and her uncles who opposed the marriage because of the caste differences between the two of them. Frida very clearly understood that their opposition was not only due to caste, but also rooted in her act of choosing a partner for herself, instead of leaving the choice up to the elders in the household.

It took awhile for me to convince them. I did my part, I asked the logical questions, I said - you bring me a person and then what if I don't gel with him?... My dad even admitted that he couldn't guarantee he could find me someone who could take care of me like I wanted it. But my mother was still saying no. She was always concerned about the society because she's very prominent, everyone in our small town knows who we are.

Surprisingly, my grandma was the one who intervened, and she was on my side! But you know what she said? "So what if they're from a different caste, they are both well settled, the boy has a job. He is well settled. Why don't we just go ahead? It's not like she's running away with an auto driver or a bus driver." Like, wow thank you, grandma! What low expectations for a future partner for me! I just said thank you and let that convince them. (Frida).

Though grateful for her grandmother's support and role in easing the way for her marriage, Frida was aware that it was a double-edged sword. Instead of protesting against the 'low expectations' revealed by casting Venu against the seemingly worst-case scenario of an anonymous lower-class man, Frida decided to let this dialogue proceed so that her grandmother's arguments and authority could convince Frida's mother and uncles to agree to her marriage. On Venu's end, though his family expressed concerns that he was getting married at the relatively young age of

24, they had been aware of his long-standing relationship with Frida and posed no objections. Frida found this a cause of much indignation, and characterised his family's relaxed attitude and acceptance of Venu's relationship to her as the relative independence allowed to "boys" in their pursuit of romance and choice of wife.

As with Manya's case, we see class considerations supersede the caste disparity between the couple. Frida's grandmother's support for her choice of partner was predicated on the fact that Venu was similarly educationally qualified as Frida and 'well settled' with a job in the same city as her. The strawman figure of the 'auto driver or a bus driver' – signifying unskilled, low-paid occupations taken up by lower-class men – served as a counterpoint to Frida's choice.⁴⁵ Caste figures into this comparison in evident ways: though Venu was from a lower-caste, he was not lower-class. In Manya's case, we see that her husband overcame the ostensible objections against him belonging to a different caste through engaging in class-based practices of improving his English and obtaining a salaried position. Manya and Suraj had similar educational qualifications and professional experience, however he had to struggle to make himself 'worthy' of her perfectionist father's expectations that he be able to support Manya. In both these cases, it was the boyfriends' status and their class position that deemed them ultimately acceptable to the respondents' families.

Sirisha, a Hindu Telugu Brahmin woman in her early 30s told me that she had been friends with her husband Shekhar, a non-Brahmin Raju⁴⁶ man since they had both been in school in a large city in Andhra Pradesh; they were known to each others' families as well. When she

⁴⁵ In 2000, Punjabi Canadian woman Jassi Sidhu, who belonged to a 'powerful' Jat Sikh family living in BC, was murdered in India on the order of her family. The killing was motivated by the fact that she fell in love with and married a poor autorickshaw driver on her visit to India. See more: [Aujla & Gill, \(2014\)](#); [Brown & Lakshmi, \(2003\)](#)

⁴⁶ In the Telugu caste hierarchy, Rajus are dominant caste landowners who belong to the 'Kshatriya' varna, while Brahmins are at the top of the varna hierarchy.

finished her studies and began working, they decided to get married to each other. Their families were not surprised by this, though Sirisha did face some resistance to her decision within hers. Though the regional power dynamics of dominance vary, there was a disparity in their class and caste positions in society, and Sirisha's family considered members of the Raju caste as "a little bit tough, they speak very rudely" whereas Sirisha described the characterization of her Brahmin family as "polite and soft spoken". Sirisha described her mother as an Orthodox Brahmin who was "disturbed" at this thought of an inter-caste marriage, and others in the family tried to convince Sirisha "how much it would be better if she married a fellow Brahmin man". However, they soon came around to the prospect of her marrying Shekhar.

When I asked what had brought about this acceptance, Sirisha shared what had happened with an older cousin sister in her family. Many years ago, her cousin had fallen in love with a non-Brahmin man as well. When the family opposed her choice, she eloped with her husband and had cut off all contact with them. This cousin was now happily settled within her marriage with kids, and Sirisha said members of her family still missed her and regretted losing out on the chance to celebrate her wedding and being a part of her life. Sirisha suspected that this incident was prominent in her mother's mind while she mulled over marrying Sirisha to a non-Brahmin man, and that she was keen to avoid such a situation where she lost contact with Sirisha and any potential grandchildren.

For her part, Sirisha promised her parents that no matter what they said or decided, she would not elope⁴⁷ with Shekhar. Instead, she told me with a conspiratorial look, she said she would simply not marry anyone else and sit at home – an effective threat in bargaining with the patriarchy.⁴⁸ As a last-ditch attempt, her parents said that they would only agree to the marriage

⁴⁷ I discuss the social harm connotations of eloping in more detail in chapter 6

⁴⁸ The dishonor of an unmarried daughter

if their *jaatakam* (astrological charts) were compatible – which, thankfully, they were. Upon meeting Shekhar’s parents and his family, they were happy and impressed to see that they lived in a joint family arrangement and the families’ longstanding familiarity with each other led to a relationship of trust, and eventual acquiescence to Sirisha and Shekhar’s marriage.

It was her in-laws, more specifically Shekhar’s mother, who worried about Sirisha’s adjustment into their household, especially when it came to food practices. Being raised Brahmin and vegetarian, Sirisha was at odds with Shekhar’s family who ate meat and seafood, and even owned freshwater tanks in the countryside where they farmed shrimp and prawns.

My mother-in-law worried that I would be uncomfortable in the kitchen because they cooked non-vegetarian food and I wouldn’t adjust to that. I think she thought I would seek to change their habits! It was small things like that... when we lived in a [different city], they thought if any relatives visited us, I would not receive them properly and might not cook the right food for them. She was thinking I would be like an inflexible daughter-in-law... basically, Shekhar had to convince them that I would be fine. (Sirisha, Etobicoke, May 2019).

Sirisha described these concerns as her mother-in-law’s *worries*, which she worked hard to allay. For instance, she learnt to cook the meat and seafood staples of Shekhar’s family meals, but she refrained from eating them – this was the case in Canada as well. By doing so, she demonstrated that she could adjust to his family, but at the same time uphold her own preferences and caste practices.

As a new daughter-in-law, her position in Shekhar’s family would have been one of relative powerlessness; however, it seemed to me that her higher caste position as a Brahmin woman led to her in-laws *worrying* about her adjustment instead of taking her compliance for granted, or imposing their practices on her as a condition of the marriage – a rare reprieve for a

daughter-in-law.

Seeking approval from ‘enlightened’ parents

In cases where women had not faced any objections to their marriages to a partner of their choice, there was a common theme that this was because their parents’ central concern was the happiness of their children – similar to the understanding of parents by women who chose arranged marriages. However, with women who had had love marriages, parents were also portrayed as “enlightened”, meaning that they were modern and progressive by “moving with the times” and respecting their choices and putting aside considerations of caste and region in their approval of daughters’ marital partners. Though respondents’ stories demonstrated that this process was not always smooth, the approval of the respondents’ parents and parents-in-law were very much a part of the success of the marriage.

Madhuja, a Hindu Bengali woman in her 30s, met her husband in Kolkata at a coaching centre for a prestigious institution of higher education. He was two years ahead of her in the programme and they soon became good friends. They dated for two years and when they both got jobs after their education, they decided to get married. Madhuja shared that both sets of parents had been completely happy with the match and readily gave their consent and support. When I asked after their caste backgrounds, she specified that her husband was a Bengali Brahmin and that her family was Baidya, all members of the Bengali ‘bhadralok’ (literally translated to ‘respectable folk’). But this had not been a bone of contention in the minds of their families, in contrast to Surabhi’s case – or as Madhuja put it, “That is not usually an issue for us.”

Madhuja and her family are not unique in this respect, for as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay points out, for many Bengalis “this absence of casteism is a feature of their Bengaliness – their

point of distinction from the rest of India” (2014, p. 32), a result of various pre-colonial and colonial historical processes. In his article titled “Does Caste Matter in Bengal? Examining the Myth of Bengali Exceptionalism”, Bandyopadhyay discusses the predominance of the ‘bhadralok’ within Bengali society, who belonged overwhelmingly to the three upper castes of Brahman, Kayastha and Baidya (but not limited to these castes), who claimed their social superiority not on the basis of caste, but rather due to their culture and education (2014, p. 44). Bandyopadhyay goes on to demonstrate and argue that despite the definition of ‘bhadralok’ being delinked from caste, the supposed superiority of this category is nonetheless constructed against the ‘Other’ of peasant castes, Muslims, Dalits and tribals in West Bengal. Political leadership, and meritorious institutions of education and employment continue to be dominated by people from the ‘bhadralok’ castes, and despite the predominance of Leftist and class-based party politics in the state, caste discrimination continues to be widespread in Bengali society.

Madhuja’s story, in this social context, represents the opposite side of the spectrum from Surabhi’s story when it comes to caste differences between the couple, and provides a brief example of the heterogeneity of caste practices across the country. In a heterogenous sample such as the one for this study, I have attempted to convey and capture the specific local context of regional diversity of caste amongst the respondents.

Niharika, a Hindu woman from Haryana (North India) in her 30s, was introduced to me by her husband Karthik, a Telugu man, who had received my call for participants from a Telugu community member. When I asked Niharika the standard biographical questions at the start of the interview, including about her religious and caste communities, she emphatically denied any caste identity, saying that she “hadn’t grown up with any discussion of caste in my family, it’s

never been an issue for us.”⁴⁹ This prefaced our discussion about her choosing her own partner from South India:

The basics that my family look for is an education rather than caste or something. As long as that criteria is satisfied, I think that’s all I required to have them on board. (Niharika, Toronto, August 2019, English).

Niharika and Karthik had met as colleagues at their multinational corporate workplace in New Delhi. They dated for three years before deciding to get married. When she told her parents she wanted to marry a South Indian Telugu man, after their initial “lightning reaction” of shock, their only uncertainty was over her adjustment to the different values of a South Indian family.

The moment there are two cultures, it’s very different for our parents. Sometimes it becomes a little tricky because North and South cultures are extremely different. Yeah, the way we see basics of life, be it you know, be it your initial mannerisms, in the way you look at money, or the way you look at your own traditions ... So I think initially they were really uncertain whether how I will be able to adjust. You know, you know we have different ecosystems... I think that was also bringing some sort of resistance, if at all there was a resistance. But I believe again, for any parent, nothing matters but the happiness of their own kids. (Niharika)

Niharika characterized the ‘cultures’ of North and South India as ‘different ecosystems’ which she explained as the initial practices of hospitality, attitudes towards money and such.⁵⁰ She

⁴⁹ Writing about the silence around caste in biographies of upper-caste men, MSS Pandian finds that, “Caste always belongs to someone else; it is somewhere else; it is of another time.” (2002, p. 1735). The practice of claiming to not know one’s caste or disavow having a caste identity, as well as desisting from talking about one’s caste is a peculiarly upper-caste practice that demonstrates their caste privilege. This practice of claiming privilege by disavowing the source of it can be comparable to the phenomenon of white people who claim not to “see race” (for more, see: Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Razack, 1998; Scott, 2018). On the other end of the spectrum, however, the Equality Labs’ survey on caste in the United States found that one in two Dalits lived in fear of being “outed” as Dalit and being marginalized for their caste identities (Zwick-Maitreyi et al., 2018).

⁵⁰ Various scholars, from sociologists to economists, agree that a qualitative difference between social relations exist between the southern states of India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana) and the

laughed and agreed when I suggested that her and Karthik's journey was similar to the 2014 Bollywood movie "2 States"⁵¹ which portrayed the story of a Tamil Brahmin (South Indian) woman and Punjabi (North Indian) man who meet and fall in love while classmates at the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM). They then struggle to convince their parents to bless their union, by showing that their cultural differences are not insurmountable. Niharika related with the movie particularly because both she and Karthik were highly educated individuals who met in a diverse, professional environment of the workplace. For her, questions of caste and region were secondary to their bond of love and the similarity of class position, moral values and professional orientation with her partner, as the protagonists of '2 States' argue.

Ajantha Subramanian's work, *The Caste of Merit* (2019), previously discussed in the introduction, lays bare the upper caste basis of 'merit' in India, through her study of upper-caste predominance in students and faculty at prestigious institutes of engineering education the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and the role of IIT alumni in shaping the image of Indian engineers as 'model minorities' in the US. Chinmay Tumble (2020) demonstrates the next step in this link by discussing the close imbrication of the IIT-IIM network in creating India's 'managerial elite'. The uniquely elite status of the alumni of the IIT-IIM network, both within India and in the diaspora, has even led to a matrimonial website service dedicated solely to presenting partners from within this alumni body, called 'IITIIMshaadi.com' (IIT-IIT marriage) for people seeking upward class mobility through marriage (Pasricha, 2014). This gives us an indication of how

northern and central states of India (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand). Explanations usually involve the differing kinship systems found in different regions (Uberoi, 2017) to the differing levels of education of women and overall socio-economic development (Goli et al., 2013)

⁵¹ Directed by Abhishek Varman, the Bollywood movie is based on a semi-autobiographical novel by popular author Chetan Bhagat, titled '2 States: The Story of My Marriage' (2009). Such stories of inter-regional romances are uncommon but not new – the Hindi language movie 'Ek Dooje Ke Liye' (For Each other) (1981, dir. K. Balachander) depicted a romance between a North Indian woman and South Indian man, despite struggling to communicate with each other.

technologies of arranged marriages may move past the language of caste, *jati* and regional/linguistic community in foregrounding class position, education and profession as factors in matchmaking; however, reading this in the context of Subramanian and Tumbe's work reminds us that class, education and profession are themselves caste-d in their discourses of merit, mobility and similarity of experience and orientation.

Unlike the inflexible parents of the protagonists in "2 States", Niharika elaborated on how both sets of parents in her case were "sensitive enough to the surroundings and how the world is changing. That way for them, caste or any of these things do not matter." She explicitly delinked this "wisdom" as she termed it, from educational degrees. First, she lauded her mother-in-law for being a progressive and warm woman, despite not knowing if she had finished her high school degree or not; Niharika said her own mother had not "collected college degrees like us" but was a well-read and well-informed person, nonetheless. Her father-in-law she described as "leagues apart" as a human being, and her father, though a conservative person, had shaped his perspectives according to the experiences he'd had, and instilled in Niharika the confidence to make decisions for herself. It was thanks to this broad-minded maturity on part of their parents that Niharika felt she and Karthik had faced such a smooth journey to their marriage.

It takes time for both of the parties to understand each other, but I believe ultimately, what convinces them in their heart is that their kids are happy and then they give up and they go ahead. (Niharika, phone interview, August 2019)

As for her own navigation of the challenges of a cross-cultural marriage, Niharika said she took the cue from her own parents' maturity to establish a relationship of mutual compromise and give-and-take with her husband, while clearly defining some things that were not negotiable. Having dealt with this kind of diversity in her personal life in India, she said that adjusting to

Canada post-migration did not present a very new kind of challenge to her.

A respondent who grew up in Mumbai, Falak, a Hindu Punjabi Khatri woman in her 30s told me she had met her husband Rahul as a teenager, as he lived in the same locality as her. They started dating while they were still in high school. She had briefly told her mother that she was dating him, which she described as a ‘mistake’:

I got a tight slap, and she said, “you have to really swear on me that you're not going to meet him again.” Well, that wasn’t happening! It was my fault that I told her so soon. Because my dad was very strict, especially during my school time. I was not allowed to be out of home after 8 o'clock. I was not allowed to wear western dresses. Yeah, I was not allowed to go and meet guys even if they are my friends.

So I was really scared, completely sure that they're not going to agree to anything. But later when I hinted to my parents that I had someone in mind... she knew it was coming. I mean, I'm sure she also thought, OK, he's been around for four years and I'm still with the same person. So there's something there. (Falak, Mississauga, June 2019).

Falak and Rahul had dated for four years in secret. Rahul had been adopted into a Hindu Punjabi family as a baby and brought up as such; but he had lost both his parents when he was quite young. When they both finished their undergraduate degrees and obtained jobs, they decided to get engaged but not married right away.

F: He had no family, so when he came to talk to my dad he came all alone. I was sure that it was going to come to nothing, and maybe he would get a beating! But then my dad was pretty decent enough to him.

H: It's nice when you realize that your parents are exceeding expectations.

F: Yes! And it was a shocker because I was thinking in my mind – I was making a list, so if I have to elope, what all do I have to take with me? How much money have I got? And my parents know I'm a disappointment in that aspect, I would absolutely do it [elopement]! That's why I'm sure they knew that saying no was not the right thing to do. They realised that I have decided things. Yeah, at this point it's just better to say yes! So

things turned out pretty smoothly. (Falak).

There were no glaring cultural differences between them, and Falak described how Rahul had taken to her family like they were his own. She surmised that this affection stemmed from the fact that he had been deprived of a family life growing up without parents. He came to care for her parents deeply and considered himself their son. When her brother migrated to the US, Rahul promised to take care of his family (Falak and parents) in his stead. His actions and commitment endeared them to Falak's family, and they threw the two of them a lavish wedding. Falak found this vindicating as her family had finally trusted in her judgement, especially after the strictures they had placed on her as she was growing up, and it alleviated her guilt for lying to them about the length of her relationship with Rahul.

I met Meena, a Hindu Tamil Brahmin woman in her 30s, at her bright and comfortable condo apartment in downtown Toronto. She and her husband Shubho had migrated to Canada in 2018, and within a year they had settled into the life of a young, urban double-income couple with no kids. Upon learning about my research topic, and even when we were settling down to talk with cups of tea, Meena repeated that her marriage or migration story was not one of struggle or hardships, that she might be an outlier in that things had been very smooth for her. I assured her that I was interested in her experience and was not looking only for narratives of struggle for my research.

Meena met her now husband Shubho in Mumbai, a city they both called home, when they were both in their early 20s. Shubho was a Bengali speaker who lived with his mother and grandmother. Within a month of dating, Shubho introduced Meena to his mother. Meena said they both felt like they had found the person with whom they wanted to spend the rest of their lives; but before she said yes to his marriage proposal, she wanted him to meet her parents too.

She was insistent that all the parties – her parents, Shubho, Shubho’s mother – be familiar with each other and have open channels of communications so that there was “no drama down the line.”

When I introduced him to my family, there was absolutely no drama, and what was actually surprising was when my mom said, “please get married soon before you screw this up.” Because she just found Shubho so adorable! We got engaged after two years of being together and married a year later... I wanted to wait till I was at least 30 but my mom had this nagging feeling, “You will mess this up. Don't let this boy go!” ... Oh it's true though, I would have [messed it up]! So she was right! (Meena, Toronto, July 2019)

Having been brought up in an urban milieu with fairly liberal parents who had not pressured her to consider an arranged marriage, Meena knew there would not be any strong objections to her choosing her own partner. She felt comfortable enough to introduce Shubho as her boyfriend, but she said she could not have anticipated such a reaction from her mother. She told me happily that their mothers got along very well, and their families met up for dinner even without the two of them there.

When it came to their cultural and caste backgrounds, Meena shared that as they were both raised in Bombay, there was a baseline of shared understanding between them, even though there were differences since “he’s from Bengal, the east of India and I’m from the south”. What Meena found surprising was that she had no problem in adapting to his family. This was thanks to her mother-in-law who, despite being a devout Hindu, respected Meena’s agnosticism and never asked her to pray, go to temples, or follow her on any of her own religious rituals. With no pressure to change her beliefs or practices, Meena said that adjusting into Shubho’s family was “very easy and lovely”. She added that her own proactive approach in setting up communication

channels and boundaries came in very handy after she moved in with Shubho's family, with whom she was not a stranger.

I just went in with a very open mindset. [After the wedding] the same week after all the relatives had gone, I sat down with my mother-in-law and I told her, "I know I'm a very different person. I can be difficult at times, and we've known each other already so for three or four years at this point. I'm very opinionated. There are certain things I like and I'm sure you have your own things because this is your house, so let's fix boundaries so that we don't get into each other's way. I want you to know that I love you irrespective, like you're not my mother-in-law but my mom."

So that kind of helped us in getting settled in. And I really upheld that. I told her, "You can shout at me if I do something wrong that you don't like. You scold your son, don't you? You're my mother, not my mother-in-law." So we have that open communication between us, and it's really comfortable and nice. We even get together and bitch about my husband, sometimes! (Meena, Toronto)

No doubt the parents were a big part of the acceptance and success of their unions, however, the role of the mother-in-law was also a significant aspect in women's 'adjustment and compromise' within their marriages. Respondents spoke extensively about the role of their mothers-in-law in their marriage decisions and post-marriage experiences, pointing to the importance of the mother-in-law relationship in establishing their place in the marital family and household. The relationship of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law has received particular attention within kinship literature, in relation to the patriarchal structure of the joint family and violence faced by daughters-in-law from senior women in the family (Allendorf, 2006; Gangoli & Rew, 2011; Rew et al., 2013). Kandiyoti, for instance, describes how the young bride enters her marital home as a 'dispossessed individual' (1988, p. 279), particularly in a patri-virilocal society such as India where women are customarily expected to live with their husbands and their families, as well as

bring some amount of dowry. However, within this patriarchal bargain, women are promised power and respectability over other women (such as daughters-in-law) when they have borne sons, have grown older and can marry their sons off. Within such a structure, the mother-in-law is characterized as having a vested interest in wielding her power over the daughter-in-law, whether it is in imposing expectations of domestic labour, making dowry demands and threatening to send the daughter-in-law back to her parents in disgrace, or interfering in the conjugal bond of the daughter-in-law and her son. Accordingly, Rew et al. (2013) argue that domestic violence laws in India need to incorporate a nuanced understanding of everyday practices of violence and abuse to address the nature of intra-women violence against daughters-in-law. Allendorf (2006) on the other hand, seeks to uncover the role of love and friendship between mothers- and daughters-in-law in her research in an Indian village. About half of her respondents reported a supportive and loving relationship as daughters or mothers-in-law; Allendorf argues that for them, the difficult task of building a loving bond between a mother- and daughter-in-law was desirable, as a way to keep the family intact (2006, p. 14).

Among my respondents' narratives shared above, Meena's efforts with her mother-in-law throw a sharp light on to the figure of the mother-in-law in the stories of 'choosing' arranged or love marriages. Within love marriages, or marriages of choice, women seemed to be conscious that they needed to cultivate a good relationship with their mothers-in-law to ensure marital harmony. As with Niharika and Meena, when there was respect and communication possible in these relationships, my respondents praised their mothers-in-law for their wisdom and openness. In Sirisha's case, we see that the caste disparity between Sirisha and Shekhar's family even prompted her mother-in-law to be apprehensive about asking Sirisha to 'adjust' to their caste practices – adding an important complication to the patriarchal equation between daughters and

mothers-in-law as seen above. Within arranged marriages, respondents had trusted in the wisdom of their parents to choose the right partner from the right kind of family for them, or they had opted for arranged marriages that would at the very least promise a smooth adjustment into marital life in terms of caste and class practices within the same religious and linguistic communities, and a security within the patriarchal bargain of heteronormative caste endogamous marriage. For respondents like Gargi and Anupriya, the presence of daughters in their in-laws' family had represented the potential of loving relationships with their mothers-in-law as they envisioned stepping into the daughters' places in the family. However, with the unsupportive and contentious relationships that they faced with their mothers-in-law, the ostensible advantages of an arranged marriage and a harmonious adjustment to marital life fell away.

Caste and Class

In each of the inter-caste and inter-regional marriages outlined above, we see how considerations of class and socio-economic parity are crucial in overcoming parental objections to women's choice of marital partner from a different region or a lower caste. This might lead to the supposition that caste – understood here as *jati* – can no longer be considered central to marriages in India (and the Indian diaspora), as class can supersede the objections to inter-caste unions. While my sample is by no means representative of broad social trends, it is necessary to contextualise these findings within larger shifts around caste and class in Indian society.

When people make class judgments, they identify differences in clothing, food, hygiene, manners, sophistication, education, intelligence, language, mutual support systems, and attitudes toward money and consumption (Dickey, 2000, p. 467).

In her study of shifting class boundaries in urban India, Sara Dickey points out that class has

become an important marker of identity, power and hierarchy in urban India. Though by no means has the caste hierarchy faded from structuring identities and interactions, Dickey contends that class, as understood through the judgements cited above, constitutes “an additional and largely distinct hierarchy and source of identity” (Dickey, 2000, p. 465). In a similar vein, Divya Vaid (2014) demonstrates the flexibility and persistence of the caste system; particularly visible in the mechanisms of matrimonial websites that display caste preferences on profiles, discussed above. She argues for an understanding of caste as a “logic of status fluidity” – caste may have moved away from its ritualistic and occupation bases, but its significance persists in a transforming socio-economic milieu. Keeping the fluidity of these societal processes in mind with an intersectional lens is necessary, not only for Indian society but for the diaspora as well.

Drawing on data from nationwide surveys from 1981 to 2005, Goli et al. (2013) find that, marriage practices in India are still by and large endogamous, and there remains a low incidence of inter-caste marriages and marriages outside the same economic status group. Most of these marriages are found in urban settings and are more likely in cases where women and men were choosing their own marital partner. Using similar nationwide data, Ray et al. (2020) determined that the rate of inter-caste marriages is still lower than 10% in India in 2011. Ahuja and Ostermann (2016) studied interest and openness to inter-caste marriage expressed through favourable responses to matrimonial profiles of potential partners from similar castes as well as lower castes. Though they conclude that there has been a shift towards favourable attitudes towards inter-caste marriages, their survey found that inter-caste marriage is preferred by people for whom upward socio-economic mobility would be made possible by such an alliance. While lower-caste respondents in their study had positive responses to profiles of upper-caste people, the same was not true in the inverse. Other studies like Ray et al. (2020), studying the

relationship of education levels to inter-caste marriages, have found that an individual's level of education could not be a reliable predictor of the likelihood of an inter-caste marriage. With this discussion, my aim is to establish that the role of caste and class do not cancel each other out, but rather in terms of socio-economic status and mobility, caste may be superseded by class in some instances of love-marriage.

Marital issues

About a year after our initial conversation, Anupriya reached out to me and cautiously asked if I had ever found counselling helpful, and hypothetically considered a separation from her husband. She had been married for a few years and the pressure to have children was mounting, especially while her mother-in-law resided with her. Her husband's reliance on the women in the family to perform all the domestic chores, among other things, was beginning to irk her. She said she had been gradually trying to "train" her husband to take on some of the domestic labour around the house; but having his mother around to pick up after him and take over any chores she saw him doing had broken those habits completely.

I remember my father doing so much around the house to help my mother – that's the only way she could have a job outside the house. I learned so much from him growing up. I want a father like that for my kids. But I'm not sure I can count on my husband for that... the only thing he can cook is instant ramen noodles. What if I leave for my job and that's all he can feed the kids? That's not acceptable. (Anupriya, phone conversation, May 2020, Telugu and English).

Unable to make any major decisions while away from her family, Anupriya went to India during the pandemic as her parents had fallen ill and she wanted to take care of them. She planned for a long stay in India with her parents as a way to give herself "a break" from her husband and her mother-in-law. She hoped to use the time to gauge her own feelings and seek guidance from her

family members regarding her future, especially since she had obtained Permanent Residency by this time and therefore had the option to return to Canada untethered to her marriage.

For at least one of my respondents, migration was a strategy to exit her love marriage with minimal adverse consequences for herself and her family in India. Vibha, a Hindu upper caste woman from Gujarat in her 40s, fell in love with her friend from a lower-caste community and married him despite her family's misgivings. Soon after, she came to realise that on her husband's part, he had married her in order to take advantage of her family's reputation in their community in launching his own business ventures. He also turned violent and abusive against her in private. As their marriage was falling apart, Vibha was painfully conscious that to serve her husband with a divorce would lead to stigma and shame for her family within her community in Gujarat, and potentially jeopardise their good reputation. When I asked why she chose to migrate with her husband instead of migrating alone, she replied that migrating as a couple offered a cover story for the separation. Once they arrived in Canada, she was able to divorce him, and found her family in Gujarat supportive of her decisions regardless.

In Falak and Rahul's case, once they arrived in Canada, they both went through a period of culture shock and depression. Falak worked hard to find a fulfilling job in her field within a month, but Rahul did not seem to try; he instead started driving for a cab service. He blamed Falak for their isolation and his failures. This was another huge shock for Falak, as she had known Rahul for more than half her life at this point and had married him after years of being in a romantic relationship. Their marriage had flourished in India but in Canada, soon their marriage was strained:

I realised he's an MCP [male chauvinist pig] after coming here. How can you be so unhappy if I am doing so well? Yes, I got a job, but to sustain that job... that's not luck, it's my hard work! After coming to Canada, you realise, you don't want to be with a

person who's not happy for you. (Falak, Mississauga, August 2019, English).

At the time of our interview, Falak and Rahul were separated and living apart; he was training to get a truckers' licence. Falak was hopeful that if he stuck to this course of action he would get a job and be able to "pull himself out of the depression" that had resulted from their migration to Canada. One point of comfort for her was that her family in India had been nothing but supportive of her decision to separate from her husband and were not pressuring her to reconcile with Rahul.

I asked both Vibha and Falak about their future plans as potentially single women in Canada, and whether they would look to build romantic relationships and/or get married again. Both women said that they were open to it, but would only want to date men from India, even if they were not from their own regions.

I think for me it is about cultural values, like being family-oriented and food and things like that. I want to be able to share things about our background and our culture with my partner. I don't think I can find that with someone who is non-Indian. (Falak).

The question of 'cultural values' here meant that for Falak and Vibha, a partner who was Indian would be the best match, anticipating that similarities of values and background would mean greater compatibility. Despite her own divorce, Vibha even claimed that she observed Indian men being more 'serious' about their relationships while other non-Indian men took a more casual approach to dating that she disliked. The resemblance – albeit a surface-level one – to the question of 'adjusting' within a caste-endogamous marriage being easier because of the similarity of cultures, was striking. Vibha and Falak had both had love marriages, and Vibha had even married a man from a caste lower than hers despite her family's objections. Yet when it

came to dating in Canada's multiracial societies, they resorted to the language used by respondents who opted for arranged marriages – arguing that the similarity of values, experiences and food preferences with Indian men was what they wanted in a partner.

Along these lines, when I asked my respondents what they wanted for their children in terms of their marital partners in terms of their choice of partners, most women said they would prefer that their children “brought home Indians”. Nevertheless, they were aware that raising their children in a multiracial and multicultural Canadian setting meant that their plans for the children's future had to be open to revision. Most women said they would not want to pressurize their children to get married in the way that they had; but they also argued that marriage was a natural and desirable goal for their lives. Some women said they would look for arranged matches for their children only if they asked for parental involvement, much like Lalita and joked that their children were free to find their own partners to spare them “the work” of seeking and vetting suitable matches. I explore this further in chapter 6.

Conclusion

My respondents' narratives around their marriage decision-making processes, whether arranged or love marriage, revealed the key role of parental approval and/or support in their marriages taking place. Further, in exploring the narratives of arranged and love marriages, the role of class and caste in marriage decisions cannot be overstated. In the case of inter-caste love marriages, we see that considerations of class-parity overcame the caste-based objections from the women's family; however, there were other factors in play such as an aversion to elopement or the fear of an unmarried daughter, or a daughter no longer in contact. While caste continues to be foremost in arranged marriages, it does not automatically disappear in inter-caste love

marriages.

The discourses of agency and choice running through these narratives push against, as well as incorporate aspects of the construction of the ‘new Indian woman’ (discussed in the previous chapter) in contradictory ways. With arranged marriages, my respondents either disavowed their investment or participation by proclaiming their enduring faith in their parents’ selection of the ideal husband. Others provided their pragmatic rationales for opting for an arranged caste-endogamous marriages, outlining a process of reasoned calculation that would result in a secure and long-lasting marriage, and protect them from any undue burdens of ‘adjusting’ to a household with different caste-based practices than the ones they knew. Respondents who had arranged marriages, or who faced no objections to their love marriages presented understandings of ‘caste-as-culture’: wherein caste-based communities were defined by their cultural practices and traditions; instead of being defined against higher or lower castes in the hierarchical system. This allowed them to present their choice as a part of rational self-interest.

By understanding these as ‘patriarchal bargains’, I argued that these women either displaced responsibility onto their parents or opted for endogamous marriages in order to ensure a harmonious marital life in their new families and minimize any risk to their person and/or professional ambitions they faced as new brides and daughters-in-law. However, some of these respondents found that despite their parents’ selection or despite their advance planning, they were still subject to the censure of their mothers-in-law within the gendered hierarchy of the family that placed daughters-in-law at the lowest rung. Further, they found that a caste-endogamous marriage did not guarantee a smooth transition or adjustment into married life; neither did it ensure a similarity of values or even food-based practices. Despite making choices

in their self-interest, whether by trusting in their parents or opting for an arranged marriage, my respondents were still caught in the dilemma of the ‘new Indian woman’ who felt they had the freedom and wisdom to *choose* but at the same time could not escape the problems and perils of ‘adjustment’.

Respondents who had entered into love marriages faced differing levels of hesitancy and opposition from their families, closely tied with the difference between caste status of their intended husbands. One of the main obstacles some respondents had to overcome was the fact that they had *chosen* a partner for themselves, instead of allowing the family to take part in the selection of a husband. For my respondents who had higher caste-status than their husbands, the men had to demonstrate their suitability through class-based practices such as educational and professional equality with the women, a high income and speaking English. For other women whose caste status was close to, or equal to their husbands, the familial objections were not so intense. In cases where women had receptive families and faced no objections to their choice, they attributed this ease to the education levels or wisdom of their parents and parents-in-law, who were ‘enlightened’ enough to let their children make their own decisions.

This chapter has demonstrated the complex interplay of caste, class and gender in structuring the agency of my respondents in making their decisions around marriage. While for some, the prospect of migration was woven into their marital decisions; others made the decision to migrate a few years after their marriage, in concert with their husbands. The next chapter explores the class and gendered-based aspects of women’s decision-making around migration to Canada.

Chapter 5 - Choosing Canada: Migration Strategies and Class aspirations

Introduction

At the New Delhi offices of a Canadian government-funded pre-departure immigration programme, I spoke with Vandana⁵² about her experiences working with people in India who have been approved as permanent residents to Canada, as well as two of the facilitators of the pre-departure information session. As she put it, the mission statement for her office's programming was "preparing people for the new norms in Canada and new ways of thinking and the new skills they need for this society." When I asked her about what some of the common preconceived notions brought by prospective migrants to the immigration information sessions were, she said:

I think the biggest misconceptions are this huge over-optimism and like a little bit non-reality. So we do a lot of reality-checking in the programme. You know, while still being positive but just challenging people to manage their expectations and be aware... we do a lot of enforcing about what they need to do, how to have realistic expectations, right? And that it's not this 'dream'. I mean, [Canada] is a wonderful country. but like people come with a very rosy, the streets are lined with gold kind of idea. And they're not, they're really not. (Vandana, New Delhi, December 2019, English).

One of the questions I would ask my respondents was what they knew about Canada before coming here, or even what they imagined Canada to be like when they knew they would be migrating. My objective had been to gain a notion of the imagination of their new homes in my respondents' minds, in an attempt to bring the cognitive processes of 'imagination work' operating within transnational decision-making into discussion (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). At

⁵² All respondent names are pseudonymized.

times, these questions were accompanied by prompts about what they knew of Canada from relatives or friends, or even movies (whether English, Hindi, Telugu, or other languages), television shows or other media.

To my surprise, most respondents insisted that they had zero or very little knowledge about Canada when they were in India, despite later detailing their online research, conversations with immigration consultants and agents, or the advice they received from friends or family who lived in Canada. Most would admit that they knew Canada was a ‘cold country’ that experienced many months of snowfall – which, being a huge change from the climate in India, was a source of some trepidation. This denial of a mental image of Canada and life here puzzled me, until my respondent Frida explained it in our interview:

Yes, I watched ‘How I met your mother’ and TV shows like that which have jokes about Canada and all, but none of that was of any use... I had very little information that made any difference to what life here is actually like. So it’s like, yeah, I don’t think I knew much before coming here (Frida, Toronto, April 2019, English).

It was only through this notion of a ‘reality check’ that occurred after migration that I could understand Frida’s disavowal of an imaginary, even a superficial one constructed by popular culture. In my interviews with marriage migrant women who were already living in Toronto and surrounding cities, the ‘rosy idea’ about migration to Canada was notably absent – rather the decision to come to Canada was a complex interplay between parental expectations and the ambitions of their husbands, the presence of other family members, friends or acquaintances in Canada, their own professional aspirations as well as hopes for a better future for their children. Respondents’ choices also included weighing the opportunities offered by Canada as opposed to other countries such as the US, Australia and countries in the Gulf.

In this chapter, I explore my respondents' decision-making processes to migrate, including their choice of Canada over other countries and their efforts to prepare and gain information before they migrated. I also explore the narratives of my respondents who were twice-migrants, who had lived in other countries before coming to Canada. Through these, I seek to understand the imaginaries of Canada within my respondents' minds, and how these survive and transform in the encounter with the nation upon migration.

Pathways to Migration

Among my sample of 24 respondents, there were three main routes and strategies that to arrive in Canada:

1. 37% of the women among my interviewees were the *primary applicant* for permanent residency.
2. 27% arrived as *international students* and brought along their husbands with the open work permit available to spouses.
3. The remaining 46% arrived as *spouses* to permanent resident husbands who were already living in Canada, or were the dependents for the permanent residency application led by their husbands.

As is evident, a majority of the women I interviewed led the migration process, whether as permanent residents or students. This was not always because of the woman's higher qualification as compared to her husband, as seen in Crystal's case – rather, it was a strategic negotiation to maximise chances to migrate. This strategization was based around the points-based criteria for permanent residency applications.

In 1967 – a few years prior to the introduction of the Canadian Multiculturalism policy in

1971 – the Canadian state established a new standard of evaluating potential immigrants to the country. Replacing the previously followed ‘national preference’ policy which favoured immigrants from white-dominated European countries, the points system was introduced which focused on ‘human capital’ – namely, educational qualifications, language proficiency, and professional experience. This allowed for a wider recruitment of economic immigration, and allowed for a wave of significant migration from India and South Asia. Immigrants could also become landed immigrants, later renamed as permanent residents – who could then apply to become Canadian citizens.

The points system has endured, albeit with shifts over the years with points being increased for applicants who belonged to ‘preferred occupations’, decided on the basis of labour shortages in the Canadian market. The introduction of the ‘Express Entry’ program in 2015 centralized the management of all applications for economic immigration for permanent residency. It is important to note here that the above discussion has focused on ‘skilled’ workers – economic immigration to Canada has also proceeded along a parallel line of Temporary Foreign Worker Programs that have brought in seasonal and ‘unskilled’ workers into the country with no guarantees of permanence or stability, locking them into what Walia terms as ‘transient servitude’ (Walia, 2010)⁵³.

On the CIC website, the information for qualifying for permanent residency through the Federal Skilled Worker Program (one of the streams under Express Entry) – which was accessed by most of my respondents – lays out the criteria as follows:

- *Language skills points* – these points are adjudicated on the basis of standardized

⁵³ See more: (Choudry & Smith, 2016; Faraday, 2012). Much of the activism around migrant workers’ rights during the COVID-19 pandemic has demanded permanent status for temporary workers, as well as the right to unionize and claim benefits (Faraday, 2021).

English and French language tests. Most of my respondents took the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) exam which measures English language proficiency under writing, speaking, reading and listening.

- *Education points* – these points are awarded on the basis of highest educational qualification, with extra points for degrees earned in Canada.
- *Work experience points* – work experience is measured in full-time paid work, and needs to conform to particular skill types in the National Occupation Classification. It is through this mechanism that particular occupations can be given higher preference at different points in time, on the basis of labour market shortages.
- *Age points* – the maximum number of points are awarded to applicants from ages 18-35, decreasing one point per year for every year after.
- *Arranged employment in Canada points* – holding a job offer of at least 1 year from a Canadian employer significantly increases an applicant's points, as it demonstrates a need for the applicant's skills in the economy.
- *Adaptability points* – these points are described on the CIC page as awarded to the applicant and the applicant's spouse. This means that an applicant gains points for their spouse's language skills, educational levels, and if the applicant or their spouse have relatives in Canada who may help them 'adapt' to the country.

As Robertson and Runganaikloo argue, the points system is a biopolitical project: "The points system facilitates this 'optimization' through the construction of 'desirable' migrant characteristics including skills and qualifications, but also language ability, cultural adaptability

and biological factors such as age and health” (2004, p. 209). Similarly, in the context of Canada, Simmons (2010) argues that the points system, with its orientation towards highly educated and highly skilled workers produces a demand for ‘designer migrants’ who meet the specificities of a “neo-liberal nation intent on productivity, cost recovery, and immigrant self-settlement” (Simmons, 2010, p. 85). This is evident in the ‘adaptability’ criteria, wherein the role of spouses in increasing the applicant’s points total is prominent – the spouse’s language ability, work experience and potential relatives in Canada are all taken as factors that increase an applicant’s adaptability to Canada. In the case of my respondents, this was the criteria within which they found the means to strategize and maximise their chances to qualify for permanent residency. For instance, in the calculation of points, multiple respondents shared that they were the primary applicant primarily because they had more extensive or applicable work experience that garnered higher points in the national occupational classification; or, even more commonly, because they had a higher score on the IELTS exam than their husbands.

Once applicants clear the points threshold and are invited to apply for permanent residency, they need to fulfil certain requirements like health checks and background security certifications. When their application is approved and they arrive in Canada, they are expected to present ‘proof of funds’ that are sufficient for the applicant and their family to settle in Canada. The CIC website provides a calculation of funds required for number of family members. As of July 2021, a two-member family is expected to demonstrate CAD \$16,449 (roughly equivalent to INR 970,000). The proof of funds threshold increases by around CAD 3,500 per additional family member (Immigration, 2007).

These requirements of Canadian permanent residency present an immediate classed barrier for hopeful applicants from India. The per capita income in India is estimated to be INR

44,901 (CAD 761)⁵⁴ (A. Jha, 2021), and the various economic estimates put the number of Indians in the middle class – defined as a per capita annual income between INR 200,000 – 500,000 (CAD 3391 – 8478) – between 5 to 20% of the total population of India (Inani, 2021). Among my sample, respondents reported drawing on their savings, selling their jewellery, houses or other assets, and borrowing money from family members or other familiar sources to fund their journeys (Zachariah & Rajan, 2010). They could not borrow from banks as that would disqualify them from PR. Others chose to apply as students instead where the proof of funds is lower, and loans for education easily available.

Application for a study permit presents different and fewer challenges. The number of international students in Canada has been on the rise, and the increase in international students from India has been astronomical. The pathways for international students are supported by infrastructure in India, wherein Canadian colleges regularly hold education and recruitment fairs, publish advertisements in local newspapers and tie up with immigration consultants to channel students seeking admission to 1-2 year degree or diploma programmes (Bascaramurty & Rana, 2021; Trilokekar & Masri, 2019). An application for a study permit involved applying for admission into a Canadian college or university, which also required a language test. However, the threshold for proof of funds is much lower for students as they are assumed to be temporary, and thus the overall cost of application is lower too. Further, students are able to take out loans not only to fund their educations, but to support their migration and living costs as well – something that permanent residents are unable to do.

Among my respondents, the main attraction for a study permit was not only that it allowed women to pursue their ambitions of higher education, but that a study permit in Canada

⁵⁴ This number comes with multiple caveats, including the fact that India does not publish income statistics (Jha, 2021).

came with a work permit for themselves and an open-work permit for their spouses valid for the same duration. Thus, respondents with a study permit were able to work to support themselves, at times in their chosen industry, as they worked towards gaining Canadian educational credentials and work experience. These would then be invaluable resources that increased their points total for the application for permanent residency. The open-work permit for their spouses allowed for study permits to be an attractive avenue for marriage migration.

For women who came as secondary applicants on the permanent residency application, they reported not feeling any qualitative difference between the opportunities available to the primary applicants, their husbands. Despite the anti-“marriage fraud” campaigns, none of my respondents spoke to any difficulties they faced from immigration officers in evaluating their application, except one who was asked to provide additional documentation and proof of conjugality in the form of text messages and call logs between herself and her husband (Gaucher, 2014). In 2012, the Canadian government had introduced the conditional permanent residency requirement for spouses of economic migrants and spouses who migrated through family-reunification policies. It required spouses to remain wed to their sponsors for 2 years to be able to become full permanent residents – a move that was introduced as a response to the fears of “marriage fraud” (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Bhuyan & Ramsundarsingh, 2017). As a majority of spouses were women, community activists, refugee and immigrant advocates and women’s groups argued that this requirement heightened the vulnerabilities women faced, in terms of being unable to leave their sponsors if they faced abuse or violence, for fear of losing status and being deported (OCASI, 2011). As a result of this advocacy, the conditional permanent residence was abolished in 2017. Among my sample of 24, 9 respondents entered Canada between 2012-2017 (inclusive), and out of these nine, only 3 entered as spouses of permanent residents. None

of them shared any impacts from the conditional permanent residency requirement. Overall, considering the resources my respondents were able to mobilize, they can be said to represent the middle to upper classes in India.

It is necessary to note here that people from India also apply for asylum to Canada, and India is among the top 25 countries of citizenship from which asylum claims are made.⁵⁵ Recently, there have been reports of fraudulent schemes in India involving refugee applications for Punjabi farmers in exchange for large sums of money (Stevenson, 2021). However, a glance at the Immigrant and Refugee Board's Responses to Information Requests for refugee claims, shows that refugee claims from India are made on various bases, including: gendered violence against women, the treatment of sexual minorities, as well as the treatment of political activists and religious minorities such as Muslims and Sikhs. The caste system also figures regularly in these claims, whether in the form of treatment of lower-caste communities, or the dangers faced by inter-caste and inter-religious couples.⁵⁶ I was not able to include any respondents who had come as refugees to Canada in my sample.

Caste-ing the points system?

The class and gender implications of the Canadian points system have been extensively analysed and understood, as outlined above. My research project necessitates the question – is it possible to have a caste-analysis of the points system? It is a difficult undertaking without the

⁵⁵ According to the CIC, India is among the top 25 Countries of Citizenship for Asylum claimants, and the number of asylum claimants has steadily increased from 2015 to 2020, taking a sharp dip in 2021. (Secretariat & Secretariat, n.d.)

⁵⁶ IND106276.E India: Situation of inter-religious and inter-caste couples, including treatment by society and authorities; situation of children from such marriages (2017-May 2019) Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa. **IND200260.E** India: Application of the caste system outside of Hinduism; treatment of lower castes by society and the authorities; availability of state protection for lower castes; ability of lower castes to relocate and access housing, employment, education and healthcare in Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore (2015-June 2020)

data – Canada does not record caste affiliations of migrant hopefuls or permanent residents of South Asian origin. The government of India, for its part, does not keep centralized or organized records of outmigrants, and neither does it conduct a caste census beyond the Constitution-given categories of SC (Scheduled Castes) and ST (Scheduled Tribes), despite a growing demand for the enumeration of OBC (Other Backward Classes) in the national census (Omvedt, 2010; Shantha, 2020). The caste identities of migrants in the ‘new’ diaspora stream – that is, migration from post-colonial India starting in the 1950s – can be discerned from the caste-based associations and organizations formed by diasporic Indians in their countries of residence. I discuss these further in chapter 6. The US-based anti-caste organization Equality Labs conducted a caste-survey that relied on self-reported data, and uncovered narratives of caste discrimination among diasporic South Asians (Zwick-Maitreyi et al., 2018). Further evidence of the presence of caste in the diaspora can be traced through the mobilisation against caste-based discrimination in the UK, the US (Mosse, 2020; P. (Jay) Smith, 2008; Waughray, 2018) as well as Canada (V. Kumar, 2009). One of the best documented is the Ravidassia movement of subordinate-caste Sikhs in Europe (Lum, 2010; Varghese & Rajan, 2015).

A broad brushstroke caste-based analysis of the points system, using the imbrication of caste and class among Indians, can be built up through studies that focus on the success of particular dominant caste communities in building upwardly mobile diasporic communities through a mix of different strategies, including kinship and family reunification policies, as well as pursuing high-skilled occupations that are in demand in western economies.⁵⁷ Chakravorty et al (2017), for instance, argue that the relative economic prosperity of Indians in the US is not due to any particular exceptionalism or personal characteristic, but rather a combination of selection criteria.

⁵⁷ See for instance Tamil Brahmins in the US (Manohar, 2019), Jat Sikhs from Punjab in Canada (Mooney, 2011), and Kamma community from Andhra Pradesh in the US (Roohi, 2019).

They make this argument in combination with Devesh Kapur's findings through database searches and caste-name coding that upper-castes dominate the Asian Indian American population (D. Kapur, 2010, pp. 78–81).

The first two selections took place in India, where the social system created a small pool of persons to receive higher education, who were urban, educated, and from high/dominant castes; and also where there was an examination system that selected individuals from this socially selected pool to receive higher education in technical fields. This doubly selected pool of individuals then became eligible for selection by an U.S. immigration system that favored individuals with specific skills, especially, in recent years, in information technology as that industry zoomed to prominence. It is this combination of selections—a triple selection—that has rapidly created this unique population. In essence, Indian Americans have been selected to be outliers—they have been selected for success (Chakravorty et al., 2017, p. 28).

Conducting a close examination the transnational circuits of the dominant-caste agrarian land-holding Kamma community in Andhra Pradesh, Sanam Roohi employs the concept of 'caste capital' to analyse these circuits. According to her, members of the Kamma community first migrated to the US as engineers or scientists in the 1960s and built networks of information within the community to enable others to migrate by helping with paperwork and identifying vacancies etc (2017, p. 2762). At the same time as these first-wave migrants who were mostly men, they married women from within the caste community as a means of maintaining their status in the community, and further facilitated the migration of their kin (2017, p. 2759). These established networks were pivotal to creating a desirable image of migration to the US within Kamma (and other) communities within Andhra Pradesh, in particular through the philanthropic efforts they undertook within their villages and towns in India, raising their caste's social profile and ensuring that these educational and healthcare institutions benefited members of their caste

community (Roohi, 2019). Thus, the creation of social and knowledge capital by the diasporic Kamma community networks further helped to usher in the second wave of software engineers and third wave of graduate students from the same community:

Such networks become the basis of 'caste capital', which works in ways that predisposes some groups over others to achieve spatial and social mobility, thereby reproducing caste privileges on a transnational scale (Roohi, 2017, p. 2758).

So, then the question arises whether migration at this scale is only available to dominant-caste communities. Does the imbrication of caste and class in India mean that migration to countries in North America is not available to subordinated caste communities? This easy equation needs to be complicated with the aforementioned presence of Dalit diasporic communities.

According to Kumar (2009) and Smith (2008), Dalit engineers, scientists and lecturers also emigrated to the UK, the US, Canada, and a number of other countries starting in the 1950s-60s. Kumar estimates that they were fewer in number, and represented the “first generation of literates and professionals” who had benefited from the Constitutionally-guaranteed reservations in public educational institutions and attained the skills and qualifications (2009, p. 114).⁵⁸

Various accounts of this wave of Dalit diasporic communities outline how they kept in touch ‘underground’ where they could, while concealing their caste identities from fellow Indians (Adur & Narayan, 2017), for fear of being ‘rejected from South Asian religious and cultural life’ (Zwick-Maitreyi et al., 2018, p. 18). At the same time, Dalit communities further assisted each

⁵⁸ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Dalit political leader and thinker, also served as the Chairman for the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India, responsible for drafting independent India’s Constitution. He advocated for and included in the Constitution an extensive guarantee of social and civil liberties, as well as a system of reservations (or affirmative action) in public education and employment for members of marginalized Dalit and Adivasi groups, referred to as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) following colonial nomenclature. Today, multiple Dalit writers attribute Dalit groups’ upward social mobility to the opportunities made possible by reservations, and the extension of reservations to subordinate-caste groups like Other Backward Classes (OBCs) remain a flashpoint of conflict in contemporary Indian politics.

other with migration applications and with settling into immigrant life (not unlike the Kamma community networks outlined above), while also organizing against caste-based discrimination faced by their communities in India (Hardtmann, 2009). One such example is Purvi Mehta's research (2021) on the activism and advocacy work of US-based Dalit activist Laxmi Berwa in the 1980s-1990s, which reveals the role of diasporic Dalit activists in creating transnational alliances and advocacy networks in the US while also "countering state neglect with diasporic care and vigilance" by organizing demonstrations against the violence faced by Dalits in India.

Dalit diasporic networks became more extensive and diffuse starting in the 1990s, thanks to communication made possible by the Internet (Hardtmann, 2003, p. 150). Dalit diasporic groups also organized extensively to mobilise against caste-based discrimination, evident during the 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism where groups sought to bring caste under the rubric of race-based discrimination. Associations such as the Dr Ambedkar International Mission in Canada and the US, the South Asian Dalit and Adivasi Network (SADAN) in Canada, and Equality Labs in the US also organize community events such as Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations and lobby against caste-based discrimination in the diaspora. Simultaneously, digital networks of Dalits have contributed to further creating transnational dialogues between Dalit youth and activists and contributed to consciousness raising and advocacy against caste discrimination (Nayar, 2014; Sam, 2017). Rajan et al (2017) however, caution against overestimating the effects of Dalit migrants' activism or even their remittances to communities within Punjab and Kerala – in the case of Kerala, they even argue that reservations for marginalized communities may constitute a deterrent to migration.

Before concluding this section, I must bring attention to recent developments that may affect the further formation of Dalit diasporas. Along with the accounts of the history of Dalit

diasporic network, the caste survey conducted by Equality Labs (2018) brought further attention to the role of reservations and affirmative action in enabling subordinate-caste communities such as Dalits and Adivasis in achieving upward social mobility and migration. However, the system of reservations in public education in India has been under attack in multiple ways – first, through the large-scale privatization of higher secondary education in India, making it increasingly inaccessible to marginalized communities; secondly, through legislative and judicial threats to the system of reservations themselves and thirdly, through the atmosphere of extreme communal and casteist discrimination in educational spaces.⁵⁹ As of this writing, the National Overseas Scholarship Scheme (NOS), instituted by the Indian government to aid students from SC/ST communities in pursuing postgraduate abroad, have been restricted for students seeking to study “[t]opics/courses concerning Indian [c]ulture/heritage/[h]istory/[s]ocial studies on India” in universities abroad – constituting a suppression of future critical social science scholarship and possible dissent by these students (Joshi & Malghan, 2022). Taken together, these developments represent a shrinking of avenues for students from subordinate-caste communities to pursue international education, a growing pathway to education; or to achieve the educational and employment qualifications within India that would enable them to pursue migration streams. The points system, as it stands now and contributes to the multicultural milieu of Canadian society through its construction and selection of ‘designer-migrants’, privileges upper- and dominant-

⁵⁹ Some of the starkest evidence of this discrimination are the ‘institutional murders’ of Dalit PhD student Rohith Vemula, who died by suicide in 2016 after facing consistent casteist discrimination and financial deprivation at the University of Hyderabad (KV, 2016), and Adivasi doctor Payal Tadvī who died by suicide after facing casteist abuse from her colleagues. The murder and rape of Delta Meghwal in 2016 reveals how sexualized violence is employed against Dalit students, particularly women, to humiliate and block their access to educational institutions (P. Patil, 2016). As of writing this, right-wing Hindutva groups were preventing Muslim female students in Karnataka from wearing the hijab in colleges, further creating an atmosphere of tension, oppression and exclusion of Muslim students within educational institutions. The targeting of the hijab in an educational institution is a familiar story within the larger milieu of Islamophobia in Canada – in 2021 a teacher was removed from her classroom in a town in Quebec, for wearing her hijab.

caste Indians who are more likely to be highly educated and professionally skilled. This caste-based analysis of the implications of the points system indicates to us the homogenizations of ethnic or national populations within the rubric of ‘diversity’ in Canada.

For the remainder of this chapter, I discuss my respondents’ motivations and impetuses to migrate to Canada, as well as their planning and strategizing around their application to migrate to Canada over other destinations.

Impetuses

Natal Family

In most of my respondents’ narratives, the role of the natal family in migration decisions lessened considerably after their marriage, in keeping with the notion that the natal families relinquish their primacy or authority in their daughter’s lives once she is married. Only two of respondents shared that their families expected and actively encouraged them to migrate abroad independent of marriage; in both cases, this encouragement came from the fathers and was connected to the respondents pursuing higher education. One of my respondents had studied for a graduate degree in the UK while experiencing the pressure to marry – her family had arranged for her to ‘meet’ suitable men through their community networks while she was there, with the hope that she may marry and settle down in the UK. This investment in daughters’ higher education as a mode of mobility and potentially chain migration through marriage has been observed across the country, especially as it represents a sea change from earlier trends of investing in sons’ education rather than daughters’ (*Routledge Handbook of Indian Transnationalism*, 2019; Sondhi, 2015; Walton-Roberts, 2015), echoing Upadhyaya’s (2016) respondent who claims that “girls are more responsible, they want to help their families” (p. 251).

In the case of Jasmine, a dominant-caste Sikh⁶⁰ woman from Punjab in her late 20s, it was her father's dream that she – his only child – migrate to Canada. In her hometown, she had lived and grown up in a large joint family and most of her cousins had migrated to Australia, Canada and the US and were settled there. Her father had been keen on Jasmine's migration; according to her, he wanted to be able to claim that "his daughter was no less because she made it to Canada". He supported Jasmine's desire to study further since she was a "studious type who did well at school" as she completed her bachelor's degree in pharmacy and prepared for and wrote her IELTS exam. Her father encouraged her to go to an education consultancy which advertises Canadian colleges, and through them, she was accepted to a graduate diploma course in healthcare management in a college based in North Bay, Ontario.

I really wanted to fulfil his dream, and just come to Canada to see what it was like... he spent so much on my education even though others dissuaded him, so I really wanted to do it for him. (Jasmine, Scarborough, March 2019).

Though her marriage had been arranged by her family by then, she filed her application for a study permit before the wedding. She could not add her husband's name to her application for the study permit as he was not yet 21 years old, the legal age of marriage for males in India. They married before she left for Canada in 2018; her family visited her in North Bay even before her husband was able to join her six months after she arrived.

Crystal, a middle-class Telugu-speaking Christian woman in her late 30s, migrated to Toronto as a high-skilled worker. She told me that her father, who had experienced economic stressors throughout their lives, asked her for a reason why he should pay for her to pursue

⁶⁰ As discussed in the introduction, despite the anti-caste egalitarian scriptural basis of Sikhism, in practice there exist caste distinctions, hierarchies and marginalization among Sikhs in India and in the diaspora. See Gorringer et al. (2017); Jodhka, (2004)

higher studies in behavioural psychology and special education in India. She convinced him by describing how her chosen field presented high-paying job opportunities and the opportunity to migrate to the US, where there was a high demand for professionals. Her father agreed to let Crystal complete her degrees and take up a job in a city away from their village.

Everyone from my batch migrated within one-two years of graduation, I'm telling you, every single person! I was the only one left. I just didn't want to go alone, you know? I wanted to get married and then go to the US. Daddy kept asking me when I would apply for US and he didn't understand why I was waiting... (Crystal, Toronto, April 2019).

Her father's insistence on Crystal's migration almost as though "a return in his investment" in her education rankled her, especially as he did not seem to respect her professional commitment to her job at a reputed medical institute in Hyderabad. He ramped up his efforts to find a matrimonial alliance for Crystal, calling her back to their home village, a 3-hour journey away, for *PELLI CHUPULU* (initial meeting) indiscriminately without consulting her availability.

The economic recession in 2008-09 ended Crystal's ambition to migrate on a work permit to the US. The reputed government-approved immigration agency through which her batchmates had migrated to the US and found jobs had shut down; there were no jobs in her field anymore, and her application for a work permit to the US was rejected. I asked if the recession impacted any of her batchmates in the US, but she said that it seemed to her most of them had "established themselves" by then, which she explained as having bought houses and cars. "If only I had just gone when they did, I would have been set up too," Crystal rued, more than once, as she told me this story. At the same time, she was heartsick that she and her father were unable to find a suitable match; Crystal earnestly wanted to get married and the delay was affecting her self-esteem.

She eventually decided to stop waiting for marriage, and turned towards Canada which had added 'special education' to the list of preferred occupations. She began her application in 2012, and told me that she met her now husband on the same day as when the Invitation to Apply (ITA) for express entry arrived. She was more educated and professionally qualified as compared to her husband, who only held a bachelors' degree and worked in the police services; he was open to her migration plans as he had never had that chance. To Crystal, this appeared as a 'divine sign' that her initial resolve to migrate as a married woman was correct – and that her husband was 'her lucky charm'.

Husbands and in-laws

As described above, the majority of women in my sample led the migration process, whether as permanent residents or students. While the couples seemed to have taken this in stride, in that this was a strategy to help the couple achieve the larger goal of migration; the decision or the perception of the woman actively leading or participating in the drive to migrate caused conflicts with their marital families, or sometimes with their husbands. I discuss the shifting nature of these negotiations in this section.

My oldest respondent, Lalita, was an upper-caste Telugu-speaker in her 50s and had recently moved back to India with her husband. She had sought out the interview with me and seemed to enjoy it as a time to reminisce about her migration journey that began in 1981 in Calgary. A lot of my interview questions and prompts were amusing to her, like my enquiry about whether she had *wanted* to migrate after marriage, and whether she was part of the decision to migrate to Canada:

It's not like it is for you young ones these days! Back then you just listened to what was told to you by your parents. They said this is a good match, we'll fix it for you, so you just say okay. If your husband said he was going [abroad], you just went along.

No one asked me for my opinion! (Lalita, Hyderabad, December 2019, Telugu).

Lalita opined that ‘young ones these days’ had more of a say in whether they wanted to migrate or not after marriage. The number of avenues and opportunities, globalization, gendered expectations around migration have certainly shifted with the increasing emphasis on skilled migration, which allows women – who have had greater access to education and employment - with specific skills or occupational niches to access migration streams as solo or lead applicants (Raghuram, 2004). However, as Walton-Roberts (2015) observes, Indian women’s occupational and educational mobility is decided upon by, and is framed in the interests of, their family – natal or in-laws – to counteract their fear about the effects of this mobility on young women’s sense of independence and sexuality.

However, a surprising observation from my interviews was that my respondents never claimed an explicit ambition to ‘marry abroad’ – that is, to marry an NRI man and establish a conjugal life together outside of India. Various scholars have observed that the demand for NRI grooms and marriages is high as it represents upward status and class mobility to live abroad, for women and their families (Ali, 2007; J. Kapur, 2009; Uberoi, 1998). Perhaps my respondents’ reticence to claim this desire for NRI marriages was in response to the characterization of young women as ‘crazy to go abroad’ and pressuring their parents to shell out a large amount of dowry and incur considerable expenses in finding an ‘NRI groom’ for them. In cases where my respondents had arranged marriages to men who were already living abroad, they insisted that their NRI status had not played a role in the selection process. Rather, their parents considered them to be the ‘best match’ in terms of family values and lifestyles and sought their daughters’ consent on those grounds.

In cases of arranged or love marriages where their husbands aspired to migrate, women

were not opposed to this plan; rather they agreed to find the best way to migrate as a couple, fulfilling their personal ambitions to study further and travel along the way. Largely, marital families seemed supportive; in a few cases, even assuring the couple that if they were unable to establish themselves, there would be a ‘safety net’ for them back home in the form of their houses and support. In only Crystal’s case was her husband the one who had to overcome opposition from his family and relatives, as he was giving up a steady government job to follow his wife halfway across the world. I elaborate on her story later in this chapter. In most cases where there was opposition from in-laws, it was women who took the brunt of it.

Anupriya, an upper-caste, middle-class Hindu woman in her early 20s, told me that because her husband, Varun held a well-paying job in India, his family were not happy with the decision to migrate. They were ‘well-settled’ as Varun had bought a house and vehicle and was advancing in his workplace. However, it was Varun’s dream to migrate to North America by whatever means possible, and Anupriya wanted to support him and be with him. She did not want to be left behind living with her in-laws in accordance with the virilocal norm, as hers was an arranged marriage and her in-laws were virtual strangers to her.

As Anupriya and her husband did not clear the threshold for permanent residency under express entry to Canada, they decided to apply for a study visa for her. This was ideal as it fell in line with her personal ambition to study further as a physiotherapist. The study permit would also make Varun eligible for an open work permit which he would use to find jobs in his sector and gain Canadian employment experience – this would ultimately be an asset for their PR application, along with Anupriya’s Canadian education. However, when she found no programs directly relevant to her field, Anupriya applied to a diploma program tangentially connected to physiotherapy at a college, to be able to apply for the study permit visa. As part of this process,

she studied for the IELTS exam while also working full-time at a clinic in Hyderabad. Her in-laws regularly pestered her to quit her job, and ‘behave like a newlywed wife’.

You know how you are expected to do all the housework and build family ties after marriage but I couldn’t manage all that with my job too... My in-laws knew about their son’s dream to migrate. So they let me do less chores so that I got time for my research and study for the exam, but that was only because it was what their son wanted. They knew that if I didn’t get a good score, he would not be able to migrate. (Anupriya, Scarborough, February 2019, Telugu and English)

At the time of our initial interviews, Anupriya was an international student at a college in Scarborough. She was a trained and qualified physiotherapist in India and was preparing for the Canadian licensing exams. She had migrated alone as an international student, and Varun joined her a few months later. “They only tolerated this because Varun convinced them,” she told me. “If it was what I had wanted, no way. Even knowing it was his dream, they really put me through some emotional harassment when I was alone here.”

I met Ila, a middle-class, subordinate-caste Hindu woman in her 30s at her house, and her husband Chiru joined us for the interview, adding dates and details to Ila’s narration and picking up the thread when she excused herself to prepare dinner. They had an arranged marriage through a community-based marriage broker and had decided to migrate together even before the wedding took place; as Chiru had loved his time studying in the UK and did not like the work culture in India. However, they too did not have a combined total of points that would qualify them for express entry, and once again in line with Ila’s ambition to keep studying, they decided to take the international student route. Chiru said he was “done studying”; Ila joked that Chiru had had his chance to be a student abroad, and she wanted hers too.

After their marriage, he researched graduate programs for Ila, and applied on her behalf.

To ensure that she received funding and a prestigious degree, he made sure to apply to universities, rather than colleges, as he knew there was a hierarchy within institutions in Canada. Chiru's parents, however, were completely opposed to their migration and blamed Ila for 'taking their son away' from them. The issue here was that Chiru was their oldest son and he had already lived away from them, and their younger children were also living abroad. His parents had been counting on Chiru and his wife to provide care and support for them in their old age.

Despite knowing "deep down" that Chiru also wanted to migrate, his parents still blamed Ila for his decision. They went to great lengths to prevent the couple's access to Ila's dowry – which she characterised as her right – to be able to fund their application:

I had brought dowry in the form of jewellery and [my mother-in-law] just hid it away... they used to be downright abusive when I came home from the IELTS tuition study sessions. They badmouthed me to everyone, but we were determined... we applied for the study permit in secret and when we got it, we booked the tickets in secret too. But we needed more funds. So during a festival, when everyone was occupied, we took the jewellery out of the cupboard without telling anyone. We sold it to finance our journey.
(Ila, Pickering, June 2019, Telugu)

Ila tried for years to resume contact with her in-laws, even when Chiru advised her to give it up and wait. The ice only melted when their child was born, and Ila and Chiru sponsored visas for his parents and financed their visit. Ila felt vindicated because both she and Chiru had well-established careers, had fast-tracked their citizenship process and had recently bought a house, all markers of a successful immigrant life. Though she was still unhappy with her in-laws, she said it was her duty as a wife to maintain family cohesion and encourage her child's contact with her grandparents, and through them, their Indian heritage and culture.

Having worked as an immigration consultant in India, Pravalika – a middle-class,

dominant-caste Hindu Telugu woman in her 30s – said she felt a certain amount of social expectation to migrate. As she had helped multiple friends and acquaintances, as well as members of her own family, migrate to various countries including Canada, the delay in her own application and migration seemed to be a cause of curiosity among her social circles. She explained this as the general social tendency towards gossip and speculation prevalent in ‘our’ society:

No one really said anything to us but I know there was talk about why we were not going... After a while I think people started assuming that there was something wrong with us, or that we did not qualify or something like that. It was very frustrating, but that’s how it is. Everyone has a curiosity about everyone else’s business... Like if you stay unmarried for too long, people start wondering what is wrong with you that your parents are unable to marry you off. (Pravallika, Scarborough, July 2019, Telugu and English).

She and her husband Ravi had an arranged marriage. Ravi worked in the software field but his specialization was not one that lent itself to high migration prospects; after a few years in India, they decided it was time to migrate. Pravallika was the primary applicant on the PR application owing to her professional qualifications and experience. As part of the preparation to migrate, Pravallika said she was “proactive” with their families in speaking about their plans, saying, “when their children want to take such a big step, naturally parents will be worried.” She assuaged her in-laws’ worries by assuring them that once she and Ravi settled in, they would sponsor his parents’ visas and be united in Canada.

We told our families that we would try to make it here for a few years, and if it didn’t work out here, we would come back to them; that’s how we consoled them... We keep thinking about it even now, we have not been able to bring them [in-laws] here (Pravallika, Scarborough, July 2019, Telugu).

Women commonly sponsored their parents to travel to Canada when they gave birth to provide pre- and post-natal support and care. Sponsoring their in-laws seemed to be more of a collective decision between the couple and the in-laws, and parent/s stayed for months at a time whenever they arrived. This ‘proactive’ approach of consoling parents, promising to sponsor their visits and stays in Canada as a sop for their decision to migrate seem to fall to the women; as well as the actual work of filling out application forms, seeking out agents or consultants and gathering the documents necessary for sponsoring one’s parents and in-laws.

The Role of Intermediaries

A significant number of my respondents had utilized the services of an immigration consultant or agency to explore migration to various countries, and to prepare their applications to Canada. In most cases, they spent a substantial amount, and still did not have a smooth journey. One of the facilitators at the pre-departure information session shared with me that she had worked as an immigration consultant as well, quitting when she realised that the consultancies ‘took advantage’ of gullible, hopeful people.

At the consultancy, I was taking care of all the documentation and getting my sales pitch for everyone to immigrate or not. So I do know how clueless these people can be. How actually how consultants confuse them, they don’t give them full information because they have their own agencies over there [in Canada], so they give half information so that clients have to go to the agencies in Canada for post-settlement services (Lilly, New Delhi, 2019, English).

The facilitators also shared that information about the free pre-departure information sessions, one-on-one planning sessions and mentoring services was given out in the letters approving the

permanent residency. However, only 10% of all persons approved for permanent residency overall actually accessed these services while in India. At the same time, the Canadian consular services were also making efforts to combat private and unauthorized agencies that offered ‘half information’ and charged exorbitant amounts for information and planning services.

In Chandigarh, the VFS [Visa Facilitation Services, a third-party company to which Canada outsources visa application handling service] is on the floor below the consulate. Just outside the VFS people were being duped. Right there and they have no control. On the same floor across consulate, there’s this person who’s sitting and they [the Canadian consulate] know the person is not right, but they can’t do anything about it. (Jinny, New Delhi, December 2019)

Jinny, who had worked at the Chandigarh consulate prior to becoming a facilitator of the pre-departure information sessions in New Delhi, told me that her idea of putting up information boards warning people away from unscrupulous immigration agents outside the VFS office had been taken up, but she was unsure of how effective those would be.

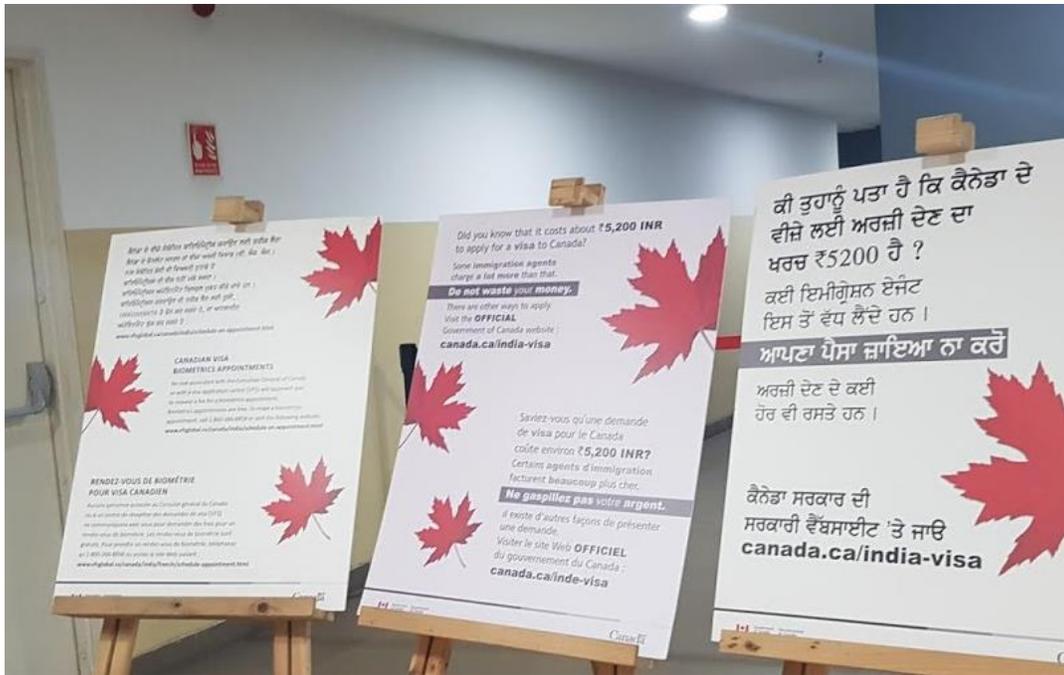


Figure 7: Outside Canadian Consulate, Chandigarh. Caption on the middle easel reads “Did you know that it costs about Rs. 5200 INR to apply for a visa to Canada? Some immigration agents charge a lot more than that. Do not waste your money. There are other ways to apply. Visit the official Government of Canada website: 207unjab.ca/india-visa. Same information is provided in Punjabi on the easel on the right. Photograph H. Yalamarty

Most of my respondents had utilized the services of an immigration consultancy or agency in their applications, especially when it came to ensuring that their documentation was complete and cross-checked. Respondents claimed that they paid substantial amounts of money for their services in preparing and filing the application – one respondent claimed that the total expense for them over two rounds of application was around INR 500,000 (around CAD 8500). This cost, along with the cost of the tuition classes to prepare for the IELTS exam, as well as the cost of the exam itself, and the cost of airplane tickets added up to a substantial amount spent to prepare to migrate. My respondents shared that this initial sunk cost made it hard to consider returning to India in the first few months of struggle in Canada. In a few cases, immigration agents were actually responsible for delays or losses.

Manya, a middle-class, dominant-caste Hindi speaking woman in her 20s had applied as the principal applicant in a PR application for herself and her husband, both working as sports

physiotherapists in India. After receiving the initial invitation to apply (ITA) for express entry, the immigration agent did not submit the correct documents, and Manya and her husband were rejected. As they later discovered, their marriage certificate had not been submitted. Manya attributed this to the carelessness of the agent. They later reapplied on their own, and it took them three months to apply with the requisite paperwork, including police verification. They received PR soon after; however, because of the failed first attempt, the application process which they began in January 2015 only concluded three years later when they arrived in Canada in January 2018.

Crystal recounted a similar story of errors and mistakes on the part of the immigration agents. She received her PR approval on the day her marriage was arranged, and Crystal decided to postpone her landing in Canada to after their wedding, so that she could migrate with her husband as she had always wanted. The change in her marital status was not updated by the immigration agents who were handling her case. Instead, the agent suggested that Crystal go alone and land in Canada in order to obtain PR before the approval expired. However, at the Toronto airport when she disclosed her status as married, it was found to be inconsistent with her application documents and Crystal was denied PR.

My mistake was that I just followed what the agent said, and didn't read the files closely enough – it said, if there was any kind of change in your status, inform us and wait. I realised later that it clearly said that on the file. I wasn't financially sound, by then I had invested so much money to come here – upon arrival you have to show 10000 dollars in the bank... I had to take out a loan to rebook my ticket to go back. And when I returned we dumped that agent, and had to start all over again.

It took the second application process two years to come through and Crystal, her husband and her son were able to migrate together in 2015. Despite this eventual success in migration, she

was still angry at the negligence of the immigration agent, and even gave me the name of the consultancy as one to avoid.

In a similar vein, Pravallika, had worked as an immigrant consultant while in India, albeit an ‘honest’ one who did not sugar-coat the visa application process for her clients. She told me that immigration consultants overstated prospective applicants’ chances and made them pay exorbitant fees to prepare their applications; or advised them to bend the truth of their career specialties – based on the preferred occupations list for express entry – to increase their points score for the permanent residency application. This was something that two of my respondents, Falak and Sirisha, spoke openly about. They had both turned down this idea to falsify their resumes, and Falak had even gone to a different agency after this experience. Both Sirisha and Falak were sure that there were others who had taken up this offer and subsequently suffered in the job market in Canada.

Pravallika claimed to be more straightforward with her clients and enjoy more honest relationships with them. When she quit the immigration agency she worked at because of her opposition to these practices and the ‘extortion’ of hopeful applicants, her clients came with her and even brought her referrals as she continued preparing migration applications. Some of her friends in Toronto had been her clients; and they had even been the ones to help Pravallika and her husband when they first arrived.

Offering an interesting counterpoint, my respondent Samira had worked as an office support worker for a South Asian immigration lawyer in Canada, who handled applications from people who were in Canada on open work permits or study permits but wished to apply for permanent residency. Samira reported a similar kind of unethical behaviour on the lawyer’s part, where office workers such as herself were encouraged to not share information with clients who

called for updates on their application process, keep billing their clients for court dates. Being active within the Telugu community, she now advised people seeking to update their residency status in Canada to conduct their research and file their application by themselves and helped out when she could.

Planning for Canada

Among my respondents, only Meena shared that she had attended pre-departure information sessions offered by the Canadian Immigrant and Integration Program (CIIP) (now known as Planning for Canada). Funded by the Canadian federal government, these sessions are offered in person in major Indian cities, as well as in the Philippines, to people who had acquired Permanent Residency, whether as economic or family-class migrants. Though there are other information sessions available as well, they charge admission fees while CIIP sessions are free. Meena had gained a lot of useful information from these sessions; she had especially benefited from one-on-one sessions to plan her next professional steps once she arrived in Toronto and being put in touch with a career-specific Canadian mentor. As part of her “advice” for other newcomers, Meena strongly advised seeking out such resources before departure.

In December 2019, I attended one such day-long pre-departure session for future permanent residents of Canada in New Delhi, India. The session offered a general overview of the geography, demography and history of Canada, career prospects and interpersonal workplace skills that would be essential in Canada, as well as arts-based activities and open questions-and-answer rounds on the topic of ‘life in Canada’, including culture shock, depression etc. The initial presentation featured multiple images of prominent Indo-Canadians such as then Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan, as well as the Chairman of Fairfax Holdings and Indo-Canadian

billionaire Prem Watsa, with quotes proclaiming that “Canada is a country of immigrants. There are no limits to your achievements.”⁶¹

This was a very different visual sight from what I had experienced in another context. In February 2017, I was in the VFS (Visa Facilitation Services)⁶² Global centre in New Delhi to reapply for my entry visa to Canada. Multiple countries that had outsourced their visa application handling processes to VFS Global, had their counters in the same room. During the wait, I noticed that the backdrop of the Canadian counter featured large colour prints of scenes from Canada – including skiing, hockey, snow, maple leaves, mountains, forests, skyscrapers – a snapshot of the landscape of Canada. What I noticed simultaneously was that all the people featured on this were white, nuclear families in puffy jackets and hats, smiling wide into the bright sun against a snowy background. This depiction presented to visa applicants looking to visit, work or study in Canada was at odds with the multiculturalist image – rather, it utilised visual stereotypes of ‘foreign lands’ to present travel or stay in Canada as different and aspirational, as personified in the whiteness of the snow and the people depicted.

In my conversation with Vandana*, she mentioned that with visa and other application processes being outsourced to third-party service providers such as the VFS due to their high volume, most applicants for PR did not even have an interview with the Canadian embassy. For a lot of prospective immigrants, the pre-departure information session was their first interaction

⁶¹ When I asked Vandana whether these presentations and facilitator scripts were uniform across locations in Philippines and online presentations in countries such as Nigeria etc., she shared that though the content was the same, some of the slides were edited to include more images of immigrant achievers specific to their countries of origin. The facilitator scripts were also tweaked to include information that was frequently asked for by the audience. Vandana also told me that these sessions were going to undergo a transformation starting in April 2020, moving away from a didactic manner of conveying factual information, towards more of a responsive and analytical model that would focus more on issues of gender and race, and adjusting to the ‘new values and new skills’ needed in Canadian society. These changes were being brought about as a result of the Liberal government’s change in direction. As I was back in Canada by April 2020, I was unable to attend the revised information session.

⁶² VFS is a private company to which countries like Canada have outsourced visa application processes, as opposed to handling them through embassies. www.vfsglobal.com

with a Canadian institution, and so the CIIP sought to convey a high-level overview of information about Canada. Even so, Vandana estimated that roughly 10% of total immigrants in India contacted pre-arrival services, while those that accessed post-settlement services in Canada was around 40%.

In a pleasant surprise, the morning presentation on historical and cultural facts about Canada included some basic facts about Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of Canada with images including Haida totem poles— a fact that was presented in no tension with the narrative of Canada as a country of immigrants. Facilitators spoke about Canada’s “Indian” peoples being referred to as “Aboriginal” or “Native” instead. A slide about the British and French colonial histories of Canada tied in with the forced relocations inflicted on Indigenous peoples, as well as discrimination and forced assimilation, which led to their exclusion from mainstream Canadian society. The facilitator also commented that the awareness about Indigenous issues is on the rise in contemporary society, as well as governmental efforts to rebuild relationships with Indigenous communities. The audience seemed to receive this information with the appropriate gravity. As I learned over the course of the day, the audience had a high level of awareness of general knowledge and facts about Canada, including provinces, their capital cities as well as each province’s leading employment sectors and housing prices.

Subsequent slides talked about equality as a key Canadian value, embodied in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the national policy of multiculturalism as well as an image of the ‘rainbow flag’ – a melded image of the Canadian national flag and the rainbow LGBTQ+ pride flag, a common sight during Pride Parades in cities and towns. While the Charter had its analogue in the Indian Constitution, I found the last image notable. In September 2018, after a protracted legal campaign, the highest judicial body of India, the Supreme Court had read

down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalized homosexuality – a move that was as welcome as it was hard-fought for by the gay-rights movement in India.

Aware that this judicial decision did not mean that homophobia had disappeared overnight in middle-class Indian society, I asked Vandana about attendees' reactions to the rainbow flag and that same-sex marriage was legal in Canada.

V: A few people have had those reactions. One person told me, "We're ready to go to Canada, but we don't want to go anywhere, where there's any gay people."

laughter Well, unfortunately, they're all around us!

H: In India, too!

V: And in India too, right, exactly! And so then we had to tell that person like you need to reflect on this because like you can't behave like this - you might not fit in. Yeah, of course everybody has their opinions but generally this society is moving in this direction. If it's not the right direction for you, like you need to think about it, yeah. We really want people to come understanding those bigger pictures. (Vandana, New Delhi, December 2019).

In the next section, I explore the narratives of twice-migrants who chose to come to Canada, and how they understood these 'bigger pictures' in terms of preferring Canada to other destinations, on the basis of not only their personal ambitions, qualifications and preferences but also the comparison of political climates and societal trends in Canada as opposed to other major migration-attracting countries.

Choosing Canada

US

Amongst my 24 interviewees, a significant number were twice or multiply migrant, meaning that they had migrated to a different country prior to arriving in Canada (Das Gupta, 2015). Further, out of the 8 respondents who had migrated multiple times, 6 had been in the US

and had either moved to Canada straightaway, or moved back to India before migrating to Canada. This group demonstrated some unique commonalities:

1. they were largely wives of high-skilled IT workers,
2. they had arrived in Canada on spousal visas or as dependents on the permanent residency application,
3. They had changed their professional trajectories multiple times across their migrations, including spells when they had to step out of the workplace for various reasons, including childcare, lack of daycare facilities or visa restrictions.

These observations resonate with Amrita Hari's (2013) findings among skilled tech workers Indian marriage migrants to Canada, where it is largely the women who sacrifice their careers and professional ambitions to take care of children or shift their occupations to voluntary or part-time work.

For each of these respondents, it was their landing in the US that represented a transformation in their lives, and the transition to life in Canada was relatively easy compared to others who arrived from India. In these cases, I enquired after the reasons they left the US and chose to come to Canada, and what differences they perceived in each place.

For my respondents who were Telugu, this was a particularly loaded comparison. Whereas in a state like Punjab, there exists a culture of migration within which Canada looms large, the US occupies a similar place in the imaginary in Andhra Pradesh, especially among certain dominant-caste communities such as the Kammas. As Roohi quotes one of her interlocutors: “‘America and Canada are not the same, we (referring to Canadian Telugus) are looked down upon by the Americans, no matter how much money we have’. ‘America’ thus has a valourised image in the Telugu imagination” (Roohi, 2017, p. 2762). The trope of the ‘America

Abbayi, Andhra Ammayi' (American boy, Andhra girl) has pervaded Telugu romance and family drama movies going back to the 1990s, firmly establishing the aspirational quality of a American-based husband for Telugu women in the popular imagination (J. Reddy, 2020).

This comparison, and hierarchy between migratory destinations, was borne out especially in the stories of multiple respondents for whom Canada was a second choice once they realised that they would not qualify for visas to the US for various reasons (Anupriya, Surabhi, Ramani), or in Crystal's case, due to the 2008 economic recession which caused there to be a lack of job opportunities in her professional field. Her regret seemed to be amplified by her current reality in Canada, where she had not found suitable jobs in her field. She and her husband were both underemployed and did not have anywhere close to the level of prosperity in Canada that she claimed her cohort in the US had achieved.

Ramani, a middle-class dominant-caste Hindu Telugu speaking woman in her 40s, had been impacted by the norm of migration to North America among the Kamma community, and was bitter about how it had driven their migratory journey:

I didn't even want to come here... I would have been fine staying in India. We had both the kids by then, [my daughter] was 11 already. But [my husband] was just so set on coming here. All his friends had migrated to the US, no one was in Canada back then. But we didn't qualify for the US and since my husband was in the healthcare field someone told him Canada was good for that too. (Ramani, Scarborough, February 2019, Telugu-English).

Ramani and her family arrived in Canada a few days before the events of September 11, 2001, and felt the effects reverberate across the border as essential services for newcomers were shut down in Toronto due to the high security alert. It took Ramani and her husband more than a month to obtain their Social Insurance Number and had to seek out work that paid despite the

lack of a SIN. The memory of the struggle in those initial days in Toronto seemed to be a source of frustration for Ramani still, especially as her husband had not found professional success the way his friends or relatives had in the US.

However, amongst the more recently twice-migrated respondents, there was a clear sense of how the shine had worn off the US for migration, and Canada was becoming a more desirable destination. Back in Delhi, Vandana contextualised this in terms of the public political image of Canada, which appeared as a “beacon of light” as opposed to the US:

Yeah, I would say there is very rosy glasses on right now, and that's also because of Canada's political image externally in the last four years. Well, also the liberal government is like a media darling, so to speak, right? People here probably read non-Canadian media, looking at the BBC, American news and stuff.... people see Canada as this wonderful this beacon of light, you know compared to like what's happening in the US, so the clients have definitely been eating that up. (Vandana, New Delhi, December 2019).

The then US President Trump figured in the narratives and reasons for why respondents and their husbands chose to move out of the US. During his campaign, Trump had promised reforms to the H1-B visa program, which is accessed by high-skilled professional workers especially in the information technology (IT) and software industry. Indians, especially software engineers, are a majority of the applicants (Pierce & Gelatt, 2018). However, the reforms actually took a restrictive approach, as applications for H1-B visas began receiving increased scrutiny and the denial rate doubled between 2016 and 2019 (Pierce, 2020).

Further, reports of hate crimes against Indian engineers, especially Telugu men, sent shockwaves through the community, and reverberated in my respondents' reasoning around avoiding migration to the US:

We couldn't even try for the US [because of lack of qualification], then we thought its for the better... we have all seen what Trump thatha [old man] has done! (Surabhi, Brampton, August 2019, Telugu).

US was better back then and felt warm and welcoming, not like now. But we didn't like it. We had the opportunity to do the H1 - green card [conversion], his company offered us the opportunity multiple times. But we were never sure we wanted to settle there. People talk very roughly there... Crime rate has gone up. When Trump came in the situation went from bad to worse - people were openly abusing others on the street". (Roja, Markham, 2019, Telugu).

When I asked for more details about these changes post-Trump, Roja was not able to give me examples of what she referred to as 'open abusing on the street'. However, she went on to claim that girls and their parents back in Andhra had broken their engagements and called off weddings to NRI men from the US. Reportage around this time did claim that demand for NRI marriage with men from the US went down during Trump's rule, attributing this to the rise of hate crimes against Indian engineers, specifically Telugu engineers. This was coupled with restrictions on spousal visas for the H1-B tech visas, as well as the freeze on H1-B visas that came later, taking the shine off of American-residing software engineers as potential marriage partners (Chennapragada, 2017; ET Now, 2018) ⁶³.

Echoing Vandana's analysis of the 2015 Liberal Government in Canada, Gargi – a middle-class dominant upper-caste Hindu Tamil woman in her 30s – confessed that she was happy to have chosen to migrate Canada "because here's a Prime Minister Trudeau who is

⁶³ The ET now article outlines the shift in marriage trends with this example: "Last year in July, an ET report showed how the crisis in Indian IT industry was impacting marriage prospects of techies. Matrimonial advertisements reflected this change in preference. An ad placed by the parents of a prospective Tamil bride in a matrimonial column ended thus: '(Seeks) IAS/IPS, doctor, businessman. Software engineers kindly do not call.'" (2018).

openly saying he is a feminist!”⁶⁴ Her point of comparison to Trudeau, however, was not just the US President Trump but also the 2014 BJP right-wing Indian government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As a feminist activist and scholar, it was important to her to be able to live and raise her child in a political environment that did not penalize her for her convictions, and in fact encouraged feminism and women’s rights. She later shared how visa considerations for wives had played a big part in her marriage and migration decisions, as she was aware of the rules that restricted or prevented H4 holders (spouses of H1-B visa holders) from seeking employment.

I’d been very clear initially that I was not looking at guys settled in US because I don’t know if I would get a job there... I wanted to be with someone where I would get a job, like I don’t want to give up my job, that was a no-no. It’s a message that you internalize, right? Even in India, you must have seen many women working there now because you can’t have a single family income anymore (Gargi, Toronto, July 2019, English-Hindi).

The turning point for nearly all the US-based respondents was either visas not being renewed or their husbands’ work contracts coming to an end. As their chances of achieving longer term stability and further employment opportunities declined with the increasing restrictions on the H1-B program (Sahay, 2019), respondents and their husbands found Canada to be a better option to continue living in North America.

My husband’s H1-B visa ran out after 6 years, and we didn’t get accepted for a green card... then my husband didn’t want to settle in the US anyway. Some friends of his advised us to apply to Canada for PR instead. (Mythili, Brampton, September 2019)

I just never felt connected to the US, even though I had found some wonderful friends, that feeling was just never there... I’ll tell you why I never felt settled. It was

⁶⁴ When he was instated as the Prime Minister of Canada in 2015, Justin Trudeau presented an ethnically and gender-equal cabinet; upon being asked why a gender-equal cabinet was a priority to him in a press conference, he responded by saying “Because it is 2015” (Murphy, 2015). At the time, this response went viral on social media, as it was no doubt intended to; and was received very warmly on Indian social media in particular.

because my husband's job was so project-based and we moved so many times – San Jose, Boise, Minneapolis... whenever the project finished, even if it was in the middle of the school term, we just had to pack up and move. As my son got older I just didn't like it. It never felt stable... when we got PR for Canada, it was such a relief. (Samira, Aldershot, September 2019, Telugu).

So many people I knew in the US couldn't stay on, they had to go back home because their H1-B did not get renewed... In fact my husband and I helped one couple do their migration application to Canada! Even in my neighbourhood right now, I know there are multiple Telugu and non-Telugu families who moved to Canada because of the lack of H1-B. (Roja, Markham, July 2019, Telugu)

Mythili and Samira, among others, claimed that the Telugu community in the last few years had grown exponentially, attributing this growth to the increasing restrictions on IT workers in the US and the simultaneous high demand for IT workers in Canada. This trend is being recognized with some alarm in the US (PTI, 2021). Madhujā claimed the same about the expansion of the Bengali community in Toronto and Waterloo, where high-tech professionals are concentrated.

While some, like Prabha applied for Canadian permanent residency while still in the US as a 'security' measure, others went back to India and were only able to come to Canada after a year or more. Like a few other of the twice-migrants, Mythili admitted that this was not what she would have chosen.

At that time I really wondered why we had to leave again. It was so nice to be close to family again, and to have the kids play with their cousins. Yes, they faced some problems when they started school in India but they adjusted very quickly. I didn't want to have to uproot them all over again. I asked my husband over and over, "is it really necessary to go back?" But he just didn't see himself working in India and convinced me to give Canada a go. When we got the PR, I thought okay at least we can settle there for a few years and then see. (Mythili)

The Canadian permanent residency afforded a measure of stability and security that the H1-B visas, with their time-limit and no guarantee of renewal, could not provide. Mythili gave me an example of couples who work in the US and are primarily based there, but have a Canadian PR as well. The family, including children, migrate back and forth and spend months at a time in Canada in order to meet the minimum residence criteria to maintain PR⁶⁵; when they leave for the US they rent out their Canadian apartments on limited leases. I was not able to interview any respondents who had such a transnational family arrangement. However, what Mythili described seemed to resonate with the concept of ‘flexible citizenship’ as described by Aihwa Ong (1999), wherein transnational global elites maintain citizenship and passports in different countries which facilitates their mobility and provides security in the face of political and economic instability.

The social welfare nets available in Canada, particularly when it came to health care and public education, also played a role in my respondents’ preference for migration to Canada over the US, especially as they all had children. Upon returning to India, Roja had supported her mother-in-law through a lengthy hospital stay. The medical expenses had weighed on her mind, and she found that the healthcare system in Canada provided her a measure of peace and weighted her decision towards Canada. Samira and Mythili said their husbands conducted similar calculations, especially with their growing families, to opt for life in Canada over elsewhere.

When it came to the public school system in Canada, as compared to the US, Roja, Mythili and Prabha found the schools to be of a good standard and appreciated that it was free,

⁶⁵ According to the Canadian immigration website: “To keep your permanent resident status, you must have been in Canada for at least **730 days** during the last five years. These 730 days don’t need to be continuous. Some of your time abroad may count towards the 730 days.” (Immigration, 2019)

allowing them to spend more on private language and religion classes for their children. Samira and Mythili also claimed that the Ontario curriculum on sex education was a good move, as it enabled them to have to open and honest discussions with their children around puberty, menstruation and sex, that they had lacked in their own upbringing. Among the twice-migrant respondents, only Aishwarya disagreed, saying that she found public schooling curriculum not rigorous enough as it “let kids off too easily” as compared to the schooling systems in the US or in India. She was also dismissive of the sex education curriculum as it included LGBTQ+ issues, and found that in comparison to the US, Canada “had more opportunities for kids to get spoiled” because marijuana consumption and same-sex marriage were legal across the country.

Australia and the Middle East

Manya and her husband had considered migrating to Dubai as they knew that the licensing exam for physiotherapists was easier compared to other countries. The other destination was Australia, where she had a cousin who also worked as a physiotherapist, but Manya said her cousin had faced a very tough time in the job market which dissuaded her. In contrast, they had classmates and seniors in Canada who were giving them clear information and job prospects looked better. Some aspects about Canadian migration were better in comparison with Australia – the process to go from being PR to obtaining citizenship seemed easier and more transparent, and less time consuming. They figured that if it was too tough to pass the exams in Canada they would migrate to Dubai instead, despite lack of permanence through citizenship; Manya reasoned this would be acceptable as “at least we would be closer to home”.

For Surabhi, who had followed her husband to Malaysia, then to Qatar and Abu Dhabi, migration to Canada had been through a process of elimination. Surabhi had found work in a

security consultancy while in Malaysia despite not knowing Malay. Their daughter was born during their stay in Doha, and as Surabhi “did not believe in babysitting,” she chose to stay home with her newborn instead of seeking work. She was unsure of whether she even qualified to work in Qatar. Soon after they moved to Abu Dhabi, where Surabhi’s husband, an instrumental engineer, had a job on site at a factory outside the city. This meant that he lived close to the factory, and he only came home on the weekends. Surabhi and her child were alone in their home through the week, and she worried that her husband had lost the chance to bond with their child. During this time, she offered dance lessons in Kuchipudi from home to children in the Indian community over there.

Though the job in Abu Dhabi paid extremely well, Surabhi’s husband decided to leave because of the discrimination he faced based on the employees’ passports. A new colleague who was of Gujarati-origin but held British citizenship received a higher starting salary, despite their relative lack of experience; and this experience embittered him to the work culture there. This “hierarchical matrix of rights and privileges” was also noted by ‘twice migrants’, studied by Das Gupta, who left the Gulf to settle in Canada (2021, p. 91).

Surabhi said her husband and she were very clear that they did not want to stay in India, as they felt it was a place with “no scope for growth, no transparency even within our family... too much dirty politics, too much talks behind our back.” Her husband was resolved to go to a country which would offer them some stability, a place to settle down, where they “could acquire citizenship... get that country’s passport.” Weighing their options between Australia and Canada once again, they decided on Canada.

For Vibha, a middle-class dominant-caste Hindu Punjabi woman in her late 30s, the initial goal had been to migrate to the US as a graduate student, to pursue a Masters and PhD

degree, with the goal of settling down there.

So I was actually going to apply for my Masters with PhD program in US, in early childhood education. I was researching my bit over there, where I could go on a PhD program and study and live with my daughter because I was facing a lot of domestic violence and that was the reason for breaking up my marriage... I was just looking for an escape. (Vibha, Toronto, August 2019, English and Hindi).

Vibha's desire to migrate was borne out of a strategic decision to leave her abusive and violent marriage in a way that reduced the social stigma and censure she and her family in Gujarat would face. She reasoned that as long as she and her family could claim that Vibha and her husband had migrated to the US, any transnational family arrangements which separated the two spouses could be explained away. She could thus separate from her husband and spare her family the embarrassment of a divorce in the family. Despite her well-paying job, the prospect of a graduate education in the US was still beyond her economic means. In this scenario, the express entry program to Canada came as a panacea.

In 2014, I came to know both Canada and early childhood category opening up for the first time. I could get settled and find a job also. So I tried my luck over there because my experience and qualifications and all was quite relevant, yeah, and within 3 months I got PR. (Vibha)

At this time, the plan had been for Vibha to migrate with her husband and her daughter to Canada; once she found a job, she planned to divorce her husband and expected that he would return to India. However, around the same time as the PR, she received an excellent job offer from a UAE-based school that offered an excellent salary. She strategized around acquiring the Canadian PR and then moving to Dubai with her daughter to work and rebuild her savings:

The moment I was going to leave India, I had a job offer from Dubai. So the

dynamics changed for me, it was like go get the PR, when the process is done, leave him there and move to Dubai for my work. And live in Dubai for maybe 2 years, keep coming and going [to Canada] so that PR stayed active, and then settle back here. My daughter would have been with me and he [her husband] could do whatever he liked as long as he stayed away from us.

But when I came to Canada, the company that was doing all the process for a work permit to Dubai told me it was not possible because it was just for me and my daughter... the school's headquarters were in Abu Dhabi, that is the country's rule. They don't give work permit visas for 2 females... So if I had a son or any male member in any relationship, my visa would have gone through. But I didn't. I had to let that job go and stay in Canada. (Vibha).

Vibha hoped for a transnational family arrangement that would keep her away from her husband, but was unable to achieve it due to gendered visa restrictions. As a result, she had to spend a few months in Canada with her husband, where she continued to face domestic violence. She told me that it was through a neighbour's intervention that she registered a case against her husband in the police, but that life turned into "circus with police and lawyer and social worker visits". Vibha sent her daughter away to live with her aunt in the US so she could handle the situation by herself, and only brought her back when her husband was finally deported to India and she filed for divorce. She told me that her family knows the situation and support her fully. In fact, Vibha said that she no longer cared whether people in their hometown knew about her divorce, as she and her daughter had found a better life in Canada.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my respondents' migration decisions and negotiations, including their decision to choose migrating to Canada over other countries. From the context of the immigration system in Canada and its restrictive economic requirements, we see that it is

highly-educated, skilled and upper to middle-class people from India who have the ability to migrate. With a brief analysis of the points system for migration in relation with caste structures in India, I argue that in the case of economic immigrants from India, the points system privileges upper-caste communities in India that are more easily able to access the educational and professional qualifications required by Canada. The growing threats to reservation policies for marginalized caste communities in India, combined with the privatization of education, also present a scenario where future migrants to Canada may be drawn largely from privilege upper-caste communities. Further, migrating with spouses is made easier under the Express Entry points system, pointing to the construction of ‘designer migrants’ as a conjugal unit who are motivated to adapt to Canadian society. I then discussed my respondents’ motivations to migrate as economic immigrants, whether as students, lead applicants on permanent residency or as spouses of permanent residents.

Women migrated not only in response to familial, more specifically their husbands’ desires, but at times in spite of their opposition as well. These negotiations were more acute in cases where women were, or were perceived to be, the leaders of the application to migrate. I attribute this increased burden on women to the virilocal practices discussed in earlier chapters, where women are customarily expected to join their husbands or their in-laws’ households, instead of being the drivers of migration themselves. I also discussed the role of professional and personal ambitions of women choosing to migrate, as well as the role of intermediaries and support agencies. Finally, I discerned the various political, bureaucratic and pragmatic reasons why my respondents and their husbands chose to migrate to Canada, as opposed to other countries like Australia, US and countries in the Gulf – these consisted of a combination of job market potential, social welfare provisions, a perception of Canada as a liberal and less racist

society, as well as the fears of economic insecurity and racism in the US.

These narratives reveal a nuanced and complex engagement with the process of strategizing and decision-making around overseas migration on the part of my respondents. Some made the decision to migrate to Canada specifically to further develop in their chosen careers, or because they perceived that there were opportunities in Canadian economy for their professions, based on ‘preferred occupation’ criteria for PR applications or through other sources of information. Respondents even shared that they strategically shifted their career trajectories in order to maximise their chances of migration to Canada. Respondents whose husbands had opted for Canada after stints abroad in other countries, or after their work-visas in the US had expired, similarly shared conflicted narratives around moving to Canada, or preferring Canada above the US or vice versa. In these ways, my respondents pushed back against the notion of migrating to Canada with nothing more than a ‘rosy picture’, and revealed the depths of their engagement with the process of migration, especially in the cases where they had led the migration application. The next chapter will delve deeper into my respondents’ lives and engagement with social and economic structures in Canada, moving into their perceptions of immigrant success and ‘model minorities’.

Chapter 6 - Gender, Labour and Class/Caste Mobility: Model minority and migrant success in Canada

Introduction

At the pre-departure information session in New Delhi, December 2019, the last portion of the day was a session on ‘Life in Canada’ and included an arts-based activity for the participants based on the question ‘What does success in Canada look like?’ Participants were given a sheet of paper and markers and had to graphically depict a representation of what their ideal lives in Canada would look like, the only caveat being that they could not use words on the sheet. At the end of the activity, participants had to display and describe their artwork to the rest of the group and spark off discussions on how to ‘reach for success in Canada’.

Most responses to this activity consisted of symbols scattered across the page – a smiley face to show happiness, a stereotypical house with a sloping roof to depict home ownership, and dollar symbols indicating high earning. The most striking illustration, which the larger group enjoyed and approved of, consisted of a linear graph with the horizontal axis standing for the progression of time and the vertical axis depicting levels of success in Canada.

The diagonal line began at the bottom, with a sad face, representing the beginning of an immigrant’s journey. The participant, Anuj,⁶⁶ explained to the session that this meant that the first few years would undoubtedly be a struggle against isolation, depression, and to establish oneself. For Anuj, this time of struggle was something newcomer immigrants should accept, and that anticipating the challenges in advance was a way to be prepared to overcome them.

As it sloped upwards, the diagonal line was not straight but showed some waves. Anuj

⁶⁶ All names have been anonymized

explained that this represented the inevitable “ups and downs” in getting established in one’s career and in “settling down”. This portion of the graph showed a dollar symbol, which stood for finding a job and a steady income in one’s preferred field. Next came a car, and a house, depicting ownership of the two – as Anuj said, home ownership without car ownership would be very hard as one would need to travel to one’s workplace. Finally at the apex of the diagonal line, at the peak of happiness and the furthest amount of time, stood a group of happy people in front of a house; for Anuj this represented the ideal of a successful life in Canada – a happy family established in one’s own home. Though Anuj himself was heading to Canada unmarried and alone, he said he intended to sponsor members of his family to join him. He also anticipated marrying a girl from India and setting up their marital home in Canada. The diagonal line then became a dotted line sloping upwards outside the bounds of the axes, as a way to show life after this ideal as only growing happier still.

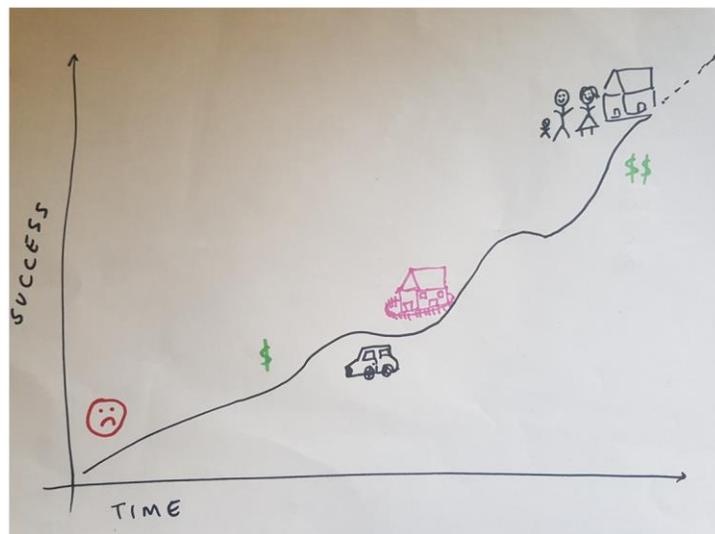


Figure 8: Recreation of Anuj’s drawing. Photograph: H. Yalamarty

In my conversation with the facilitators of the information session at the end of the day, they were appreciative of the artwork and its explanation. Vandana claimed that Anuj’s depiction was the message they wanted future immigrants to receive – that life in Canada as a new

immigrant would not be “all rosy” but be marked with some challenges and a few ups and downs; nevertheless, there was the possibility of success down the line. If future immigrants were prepared for the ‘struggle’, this meant that they were less likely to be shocked by the changed conditions they encountered in Canada, and could set themselves up for ‘success’ as denoted by better employment outcomes, homeownership and integration in to the wider society.

In the previous chapter, I explored Indian marriage migrant women’s motivations to migrate to Canada and negotiate the process of migration decision-making with their husbands and their families, guided by a vision of a successful, better life in Canada. In this chapter, I explore the narratives of immigrant life in Canada put forth by my respondents, including their experiences in the Canadian job market and educational institutions. Further, I seek to understand how transnational changes to arrangements of domestic work, including childcare, as well as the ideas of Indian ‘culture’ and cultural labour in keeping their children connected to Indian culture play on the minds of my respondents and influence their lives in Canada. Finally, I end with my respondents’ advice to hypothetical future immigrants, and analyse how this advice, accompanied by the stories of ‘failed’ migrants who returned to India, served to shape their subjectivity as ‘successful’ immigrants.

Starting life in Canada

For multiple respondents, life in Canada revolved around the themes of independence/isolation and dependence/community. Starting over in a new city, in new surroundings without the familiarity of their kin and friends, in new types of workplaces without any prior networks, and without the everyday community of support from neighbours, friends and family members and paid domestic labour workers meant isolation, as well as independence after a fashion; but at the same time the lack of these supports meant that my respondents

depended heavily on their partners or the community networks that they were able to access.

Sutama Ghosh (2020) explores the complicated and differential notions of freedom in the lives and imaginations of Indian migrant women navigating Toronto. These notions came up in my interviews particularly when I asked my respondents if they were nervous about their move to Canada. For a few respondents, who had had the experience of living on their own in India, usually in students' or working-women's hostels, the apprehension was less compared to if they had only ever lived with their parents and their husbands.

I wasn't bothered about going abroad, and I wasn't nervous when it came to leaving India and going to the US because I had been independently living in a working women's hostel in Hyderabad for 3 years at that point before getting married... it was really important in teaching me to be self-sufficient and independent before migrating. Those lessons really helped me when I came to the US. (Prabha, July 2019, Milton, Telugu and English)

Prabha went on to describe how she was able to put her skills at navigating a new environment to use when she moved, especially when it came to exploring her new neighbourhoods, accessing community centres and making connections with neighbours. At the same time, coming to the US on a spousal visa⁶⁷ meant that she was more isolated and dependent on a single person – her husband – than ever before. Other women who had lived alone in hostels as students and/or professionals, often moving from their family homes to a new urban centre, claimed that those experiences had prepared them for dealing with the challenges of migration; however, they missed the easy camaraderie and closeness of roommates, fellow students or workers in their lives in Canada.

⁶⁷ For spouses of workers who migrate on an H1 visa, like Prabha, a spousal visa is an H4 visa that does not allow them to seek waged work (A. Bhatt, 2018a).

Among couples who were moving together to Canada, women's apprehension was tempered by the excitement of moving to a new place with their partners and independently setting up their conjugal home. In a few cases, where respondents arrived earlier as students and lived alone for a few months before their husbands joined them, they reported a mixed experience. Their initial struggle to overcome culture shock and navigate a changed context was acute, and these respondents also faced a high degree of surveillance through the "transnational panopticon" (Walton-Roberts, 2015) of their family members, in-laws in particular. Respondents like Anupriya and Sirisha reported that during their time alone in residential dormitories or student housing in Canada, their parents and their in-laws called multiple times a day (owing to the ease of internet calling) and demanded to know their daily activities, even contacting their roommates on occasion to "check up" after them. These calls, combined with their desire to maintain their communication with their husbands and keep in touch with friends from India, took up a significant amount of their time and mental energy. Anupriya in particular reported that living alone despite being married led her in-laws to make "sleazy accusations" towards her, despite the fact that their separation was not by her choice, but an institutional happenstance - her husband was simply waiting for the approval of his spousal visa. Jasmine similarly shared that while she was alone in her dorm, her cousin brother visited regularly, and even kept in touch with her roommates in order to have an alternate way to contact her. Jasmine enjoyed this time with her brother as he had left for Canada while she was still young, and she missed him as his visits dropped off once she was married and her husband had joined her, and her brother did not feel the need to visit and support her. However, even as they negotiated these familial demands and depended on the kindness and support of fellow students, family connections and strangers at institutions, these women also enjoyed the taste of temporary independence, exploring a new

city or town on their own, or with their fellow new immigrant students.

Among all my respondents, women largely reported feeling safe and independent in their daily routines, including driving and navigating the city through public transportation, alone at night. This was an important component of their feeling of ‘freedom’ in Canada (Ghosh, 2020). This experience was significantly different from their routines in India which included avoiding solo travel, especially at night, as much as possible for women who worked; and avoiding it altogether for women who did not. While some respondents bemoaned the *necessity* of driving in the suburbs of the GTA, in the same breath they noted that learning to drive gave them self-confidence and a sense of independence. Respondents who had not yet learnt to drive noted that the public transit system, particularly in Toronto, was much more efficient and regular than the systems in their hometowns, even though some ‘missed’ the Delhi metro system and Mumbai train service. However, from these respondents, the overwhelming sense was that travelling alone – whether driving, taking public transit or walking – was free of a sense of bodily danger and harm in Canada as compared to their hometowns, which they valued. Women with children valued the same sense of safety they had for their children as well, especially when it came to pickups and drop-offs from school being closely monitored, as well as having safe places for their children to play in the streets or neighbourhood parks; and overall reported that life in Canada had brought about a certain kind of ‘peace of mind’ for themselves and their families, especially as it related to their physical wellbeing.

Initial Days

All of my respondents who arrived directly from India had a family member, friend or an acquaintance to receive them at their airport. In most of these cases, these known persons

brought the newly arrived immigrant/s to their homes and provided an Indian home-cooked meal. A majority of my respondents spent their first one to three months staying with these family members or friends in their apartments, commonly basement apartments. In only a few cases did respondents have an apartment or room rented in advance of their arrival, either through online services like AirBnB or through their husbands' companies. In some cases, it was 'distant family' or friends of friends who came to receive the new immigrants at the airport. Frida for instance reported that she had a picture on her phone of the uncle who was supposed to pick them up, for she had not met him since her childhood and did not know him well enough to recognise him. Despite claims that they had not known much or researched Canada sufficiently in advance of their arrival – as noted in the previous chapter – clearly most respondents had familial or other networks that they could activate while in India to draw upon for support and to ease their entry into a new society.⁶⁸

The time spent at the others' houses appeared to be a necessary buffer for my respondents to become familiar and comfortable in their new contexts. Friends and family members made sure to take my respondents along to grocery stores and departmental stores, pointing out places to buy specifically Indian groceries and get better deals and discounts on their shopping.

Respondents used these initial days to gather their bearings, become familiarized with the public

⁶⁸ While none of my respondents spoke of contacting a community group or association in Canada while still in India, journalistic reporting on caste organizations in Canada has noted that caste associations have played a role in facilitating newcomer immigrants' entry into life in Canada. In 2010, an article titled 'Caste Associations go Global' in *Mint*, an Indian publication, shared the story of Tejas Dave's first days in Canada:

"His caste relatives, members of the Srignaud Brahmin Group of Toronto (a community of brahmins hailing from the Godhra district of Gujarat) picked him up at the airport, took him home and gave him a place to live, served warm, home-cooked Gujarati meals that he was used to, showed him the sights and helped him learn the ropes—how to drive, how to get a driver's licence, how to get health insurance, how to get a green card, where to shop, and, of course, how to get a job and a house.

"I lived in their home for about four months. By then, I had got a job as a warehouse manager in Toronto. But I had not saved enough for rent and everything, so when my wife and son came over, we lived with another Srignaud Brahmin family for two months. They helped us for the first five months after our immigration here in a way that only a family can. They were there for us, every step of the way and it became so easy to adjust to life here," says Dave." (Narain, 2010).

transport system, begin applying for jobs or begin their studies. Respondents lived with these known persons for an average of 2-6 months in total before moving out to set up their own homes.

Ethnic Enclaves and Caste in Housing

Renting their first apartment appeared to be a problem for most of my respondents. Without a Canadian credit report or reference letters from previous landlords, respondents often relied on their contacts or known persons to be guarantors for rental applications. In a few cases, respondents were only able to obtain rentals in the same building where they had initially landed, by maintaining a connection with the building superintendent, or through recommendation letters provided their contacts. Basement apartments in free-standing houses, especially houses owned by fellow members of the Indian community, were a common feature of these stories. In Facebook groups or WhatsApp groups for diasporic communities, messages and posts offering rentals or seeking rooms were common. These groups were organized along various lines; while some were Canadian place-specific, such as “Indians in Toronto”, others were based on regional or linguistic identities such as the “Canada Telugu Network”, and in some cases caste-based, whether an ‘umbrella group’ as “Brahmins in Canada” which encompassed Brahmins from all regions or more specific networks such as “Nair Social Society of Canada” or “Rajput Association Canada”.

In one case, after I introduced myself as a graduate student and researcher on a WhatsApp group for a caste-based Telugu community, I received multiple messages advertising rooms for single students, sometimes single female students, in people’s houses in various parts of the GTA. When I replied that I was not looking for living arrangements, people often asked

me to pass on the rental-information to my friends and fellow students. Multiple respondents shared that they had relied on information and leads from such groups to find their first rental housing. As I found through my interviews, a few of my respondents who owned their houses or condo apartments rented out rooms or basements as a way to pay off their mortgages. Often these rentals were offered to new immigrants with whom they connected through such Facebook or WhatsApp groups.

Wang and Zhong (2013) have pointed out that many immigrants in recent decades have settled directly in suburbs upon landing in North American cities, rather than passing through ghettos or enclaves within the city itself. Another notable aspect with newer immigrants is that these decisions are mostly voluntary; there is minimal pressure in forming ethnic concentrations. Mohammad Qadeer (2005) traces the development of ‘ethnic enclaves’ in cities like Toronto, as areas that may have had an initial settlement from a few members of a particular ethnic group, but soon grow to have a concentration of residents from the same group. This in turn leads to the development of religious, cultural, and community institutions and then the growth of commercial activities associated with the members of that ethnic group (Qadeer, 2005, p. 57). For Qadeer, this does not necessarily carry negative connotations of segregation; rather, it can be understood as one manifestation of multicultural practices in an urban space. Similarly, Murdie and Ghosh (2010) also find that the concentration of ethnic immigration in particular spaces does not necessarily mean that they are not integrated within wider society.

Respondents’ feelings about living near or surrounded by members of the Indian, South Asian or their linguistic community ranged from comfort and belonging, to discomfort. For Jasmine, living in Brampton, near a gurudwara (Sikh religious centre) and close to other Punjabi immigrants and Indian grocery stores, was a big relief as it helped her feel at home in Canada.

Similarly, Shailaja spoke wistfully about the time she lived in an apartment building in the east-end of Toronto that consisted of multiple young Telugu couples, as she had found an active social circle of support among them and enjoyed the closeness and interaction with fellow Telugu speakers. Manya mentioned that when she arrived and stayed with her college friends for her initial months in Canada, it was the easy access to an Indian food restaurant and grocery store nearby that helped settle her fears around everyday life in the city.

A few respondents had made sure to buy houses within a few years, which was only possible in new developments in the suburbs of GTA, close to people known to them from South Asian networks; at times based on their recommendations and connections. As Qadeer (2005) puts it: “Immigrant professionals and business entrepreneurs often buy homes in areas where co-ethnics have settled, thereby creating ‘ethnoburbs’” (p. 55). Respondents like Roja, Aishwarya and Mythili all mentioned that they had specifically bought houses in ethnic enclaves so that they could feel a sense of comfort and familiarity by having other Telugu families in the area and in their children’s schools. For Roja, the concentration of Telugu families in Markham had led to the setting up of Telugu language classes in her area, which was a huge draw in terms of ensuring her children could learn and speak Telugu and that she could connect with other Telugu parents. Mythili even shared that her first acquaintance in her Brampton neighbourhood was a Tamil woman who just greeted her on the street out of the blue, assuming that Mythili spoke Tamil and was a distant friend. This act of ‘misrecognition’ nevertheless led to Mythili feeling seen and welcomed in the neighbourhood, even as she outlined the linguistic differences between herself and her new acquaintance.

In his book ‘Multicultural Cities’, Qadeer (2016) similarly argues that in the case of Toronto, racialized segregation patterns in settlement and ethnic enclaves are *not* due to

systematic discrimination but are generally the result of voluntary choices and market transactions. Residential clusters well established in Toronto can also thus be known to immigrants through their networks – for example, I heard common references to Brampton as “Little Punjab” or the “Punjab of Canada”⁶⁹ – and influence immigrants’ decisions to settle. While ethnic enclaves may lead to an atmosphere of mutual support and strong identity associations, there are still class-based distinctions that may render residence in the ethnic enclaves difficult for lower-income families (Qadeer, 2016). In the case of newer immigrants who became concentrated in inner-suburban enclaves, integration could be a worry (Murdie & Ghosh, 2010). This was borne out in the divisions within my sample between people who had been able to buy houses in ethnic enclaves (largely respondents who had arrived as spouses) and those who were still renting, both in the city and in ethnic enclaves (respondents who had arrived as students or had led the migration process within the last 5 years). Multiple respondents had in fact been ‘priced out’ of ethnic enclaves, resorting to buying houses in towns outside of the GTA – such as Pickering, Aurora and Milton. Further, living in ethnic enclaves also posed gendered and caste-based challenges to some of my respondents.

As new immigrants to Scarborough, Anupriya and her husband Varun had reached out through caste-specific WhatsApp groups to find a basement apartment. The owners and landlords, an older married Telugu couple, lived upstairs and had agreed to rent to them as they were of the same caste and linguistic group. However, Anupriya found that when Varun was away on work trips and she had friends come over in the evening, her landlords were monitoring her activities via the security camera installed at the entrance to their house. In one instance, they

⁶⁹ Also sometimes referred to as ‘Brown Town’, taken as a derogatory term. In September 2021, when Brampton mayor Patrick Brown appeared to refer to Brampton as ‘brown town’ in his address, Black community leaders demanded an apology (Gamrot, 2021)

had even emailed a log of Anupriya's movements to her husband, including all her guests.

Anupriya was incensed and thankfully Varun was on her side, letting the landlords know that this information was neither necessary nor welcome.

Soon Anupriya realised that her home and her conduct was being surveilled not only on gendered lines, but on caste-based food practices as well. On multiple instances, Anupriya's landlords had entered their unit and checked her fridge to make sure there were no meat products stored in there – as they all belonged to a caste that did not consume meat. Anupriya suspected that they had entered the unit even when she and her husband were out of the house. One day, while cooking a special meal for her husband, she received a phone call from her landlord demanding to know what the smell was, as it was unfamiliar. She demanded to come down to check that Anupriya was not cooking meat. After this event, Anupriya was rightly enraged and wanted to report her landlords; but her husband convinced her against this course of action, saying that as recent immigrants, they should not antagonise members of their community and jeopardise their relationships and future networks. However, he agreed that they needed to move out. This experience had soured Anupriya's view of a mutually helpful community of Telugu immigrants that she could rely on for support; she had not expected to feel such an intrusion of her privacy and a suspicion of her caste-based practices in a foreign country. As she said, "you cannot imagine that people will bring these practices with them when they leave India also!"⁷⁰

A minority among my respondents was not inclined towards living in an ethnic enclave. Crystal, who lived in the Parkdale neighbourhood in the south-west part of Toronto, found it a

⁷⁰ Thenmozhi Soundararajan writes: "So what is caste like in the US? Quite like in India, it is the smooth subtext beneath questions between uncles, like, "Oh! Where is your family from?" It is part of the cliques and divisions within those cultural associations where Indians self-segregate into linguistic and caste associations. It continues when aunties begin to discuss marriage prospects. They cluck their tongues softly, remark about your complexion, and pray for a good match from "our community"" (2012).

vibrant neighbourhood where she had multiple friends from different regions in South Asia, and appreciated the racial diversity in the neighbourhood, amongst her children's friends and schoolteachers. She compared living in Parkdale favourably to her sister-in-law's house in an ethnic enclave suburb, even as her dreams for the future included buying a house. Meena also said that she could not imagine living anywhere except downtown Toronto as she and her husband were keen on enjoying the diversity of experiences and cuisines that were on offer. Surabhi mentioned that she sought to live in a 'mixed community' as she had grown up with that kind of diversity in her city in India, and looked forward to moving out of Brampton to their own house in a new development when it was built, hoping that a different township would provide a more diverse community.

Along similar lines, Prabha said that during her time in Toronto she had not enjoyed living in a suburb where the residents were largely Indian, as she perceived that it was "like eyes are on us all the time" – that is, the "same old" networks of gossip and surveillance pervaded the neighbourhood, where she felt that her and her families' activities were monitored and commented upon by her neighbours. Falak reported a kind of surveillance as well, centered on her presentation as a young Indian woman in public spaces, but situated it in the particular context of the ethnic enclave where she perceived a heightened scrutiny of her activities from fellow South Asians:

Sometimes it's like I never left. You see how all these men – and women too, the aunties are no less! – turn around and stare at me. It's like they've never seen a woman smoke before? But you know what the problem is. They act like they've never seen an Indian woman smoke before. It's not a problem anywhere else in the city. Its like Mississauga is mini-Delhi or something.

H: What do you do when they stare at you?

I just ignore them; you can't let people stop you from doing what you want.

Sometimes I just stare back. Like, what are you going to do to me? We're in Canada now! (Falak, Mississauga, June 2019, Hindi-English).

In these ways, housing experiences and decisions to live within ethnic enclaves were complicated in multiple ways for my respondents. Even as the presence of members of their linguistic communities and other institutions was a source of comfort and familiarity in setting up their lives in Canada, some respondents consciously sought out a more diverse, or a differently diverse milieu in Toronto. For some respondents, there were particular gendered and caste experiences of prejudice or discrimination that soured them on the experience of relying on community support or living in ethnic enclaves where gendered and caste norms that marginalized women were still enforced in public and private realms.

Waged work

Ensuring high employment outcomes for immigrants, especially immigrant women, has been important for the Canadian government – as borne out by the Canadian Immigration Integration Program's efforts in the pre-departure migration information seminars. As outlined in the previous chapter, the programme consisted of one day of general information seminars, but then offered one-on-one counselling sessions, and even connected immigrants with mentors in their specific professional fields. Despite such efforts and other programming and supports post-arrival, a majority of women among my sample, even those who had obtained PR under preferred occupations, reported experiences of under/unemployment in the Canadian job market (Premji & Shakya, 2020). Further, over the last two decades, “among new immigrant women, their relative position in the employment rate improved slightly, but their relative earnings position fell further behind that of Canadian-born women with similar sociodemographic

characteristics” (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Among my respondents, 9 out of 24 were the primary applicants for a Permanent Residency under the economic class, 4 were international students and the remaining 11 had come as dependents (spouses) of Permanent Residents or under family reunification policies. All women held at least one university degree, and more than half had experience of working while in India. With a few key exceptions, most women appeared to be disappointed in their employment outcomes in Canada for various reasons.

Women who arrived in Canada as dependents were largely twice-migrants – they were ‘trailing’ migrants who had followed their husbands’ internationally mobile careers, at times at the cost of their own professional trajectories (Cangià, 2018; Venugopal & Huq, 2021). As described in the previous chapter, many of them were wives of IT professionals based in the US who worked in each location for the duration of project-based contracts, leading to frequent and abrupt moves across the country and led to women cycling in and out of the job market. In Canada, this group of women among my sample had largely opted out of the workforce in order to focus on childcare and described themselves as ‘homemakers’, especially as their husbands’ high-skilled careers allowed for a one-income household. According to my respondent Crystal:

It's hard to get a job here. You have to be educated here, create a network – to do that you need a supporting system... and that's hard when you have kids. You can't go anywhere when you have them, especially if they're not school-going kids. That was my assumption that was mistaken. (Crystal, Toronto, May 2019, Telugu-English)

Among the remainder of women, employment outcomes ranged from a few women who said they were gainfully employed in the field of their choice, to a majority who had faced deskilling and under/unemployment. The deskilling was exacerbated by a number of factors,

including the lack of Canadian experience, lack of available childcare and difficult licensure requirements. Multiple respondents found it necessary to pursue re-education and obtain graduate degrees, diplomas and certificates in Canadian secondary institutions in order “to get a foot in the door”, develop professional and social networks to rebuild their careers. This was not an easy process either for it required an investment of time, an increase in their workload as they could not find relief when it came to domestic work as well as accessing other supports such as day-cares etc.

Deskilling and Lack of Canadian Job Experience

Women who had led the PR process, especially on the strength of their educational and professional qualifications, were largely disappointed in the job market they found in Canada. Very few women managed to land jobs in their preferred fields soon after arrival. This was largely thanks to their previous careers in high skilled occupations at corporations in India, as well as preparations and arrangements before arriving in Canada. For instance, having worked at a large consultancy multinational corporation in India, Niharika found it easy to leverage her connections and experience into a job at a similar consultancy in Toronto and adapt to the work culture right away. Meena was also able to obtain a job commensurate to the position she held at her multinational corporation in India, and work remotely while travelling periodically. Similarly, Falak had anticipated the job market requirements in Canada and shifted her career trajectory into healthcare software, and as soon as they landed she began networking and setting up meetings with prospective employers.

Women who were not able to navigate the job market, or unable to obtain jobs in the fields where they were qualified, experienced significant deskilling. They attributed this to a lack of information or proper guidance, or a mismatch between preferred occupations as listed under

the PR and the actual job opportunities available. For instance, Vibha had qualified for PR as a skilled worker under the category of Early Childhood Education. She had had a high-profile career while in India, but was compelled to migrate for personal reasons (explored in the previous chapter). While she knew that she may not be able to begin her career at the same level in Canada, she found that there was a dearth of jobs available. Further, when she did apply for these jobs, she found herself navigating onerous paperwork:

Here I'm starting from zero. Nothing has carried forward from my time in India. For the last 3 years I am struggling with basic documents or updating documents with Ontario Teachers College to verify teachers' credentials... They get into such idiotic nitty gritty things that are not required at all.

When you [Canadian government] are calling people to your country, giving them access, all the benefits because of that [skilled worker early childhood education] category why are you not letting me start with that? That license process is so tedious and so frustrating. I mean, come on! The government, the ministry has all my educational qualification documents to give me a PR, why can't you give me a teacher's license? (Vibha, August 2019, Toronto, English and Hind)

On the other hand, Manya and Anupriya who were trained and licensed as physiotherapists in India had migrated to Canada knowing that they would be required to give licensure exams in Canada to qualify to practice here. Both had been aware that these exams in Canada were difficult and time-consuming; however, both were still frustrated that their training and work experience in India was considered valid when it came to migration, but was not within the job market. Anupriya, who had come as an international student to study for a healthcare management diploma, was studying for the licensure exams alongside her college courses. As she sought to gain work experience and networks, she was working as a volunteer physical assistant as well, supported by her husband's job in the software sector.

Manya shared that her husband, Suraj, also a qualified physiotherapist in India, decided to seek work in Canada as soon as they arrived to gain a foothold in the industry, and sustain them with his income so that she could focus on studying and preparing for the licensure exams. He was able to get a minimum wage job at a care facility, but they were happy as it was in the field and offered good benefits. This was an arrangement unlike the more common one reported by Hari (2018) and Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi (2015), where immigrant women delay their own accreditation processes to prioritise their husbands' professional certification by providing care and emotional support.

Suraj wanted to learn the ways of the healthcare industry here in a hands-on manner, and he didn't want to study anymore, so we decided I would focus and give it my all. I gave my first exam in July 2018 but failed, you know why? ... The passing mark for the licensure exams is not an objective mark, but rather decided based on the average Canadian student's score and so it keeps on fluctuating. It just keeps getting hard. (Manya, English-Hindi)

The fact that she could not anticipate the threshold for passing the exam was a big source of stress for Manya. The patient-centred medical ethics system of Canada was also new to her, as she explained to me, and she had to study hard for that portion of the exam. Eventually she was able to pass the first of multiple exams. As it was getting hard to manage their household on a single income, Manya had taken up a similar job at the same facility where Suraj worked, but she quit when she found out she was pregnant and was devoting herself full time to prepare for the remaining exams, counting on the possibility of passing her exams and getting to work whenever she could.

The lack of Canadian experience was a particular roadblock for multiple respondents, which they tried to make up for by accruing work experience in different ways, as volunteers or

part-time jobs, or picking up jobs in their field that were far less skilled than their qualifications. Despite being an experienced educator, Vibha was only able to find work as an administrator in private schools in Toronto city. This was a source of frustration and pain to her, as she perceived herself unable to fulfil her professional ambitions in Canada.

When I'm going for interviews, I know have all the skills. I have all the knowledge, I have all the experience. But I don't have it in the Canadian context. It's difficult in my sector, within early childhood and schooling. I'm now drifting to college sector because I have no other choice. I have to move in that direction. As it is I'm too much into management and administrative side of things and my curriculum skills are going for a toss, and it's very painful, because my passion lies there. (Vibha)

Pravallika echoed this experience of being back at 'zero' after arriving in 2016 and beginning her job hunt in Canada. She had worked as an immigration consultant in India but was also trained and had experience in the software sector. On the advice of a friend, soon after migrating she attended a newcomers services program offered by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). At the TDSB job fair, she learned that she could overcome the disadvantages of lacking Canadian experience by volunteering at companies, which she would be able to list on her resume. For 5 months, she volunteered at various companies, including an electrical manufacturing plant. As the volunteering positions were not paid, she also worked as a part-time cashier at Walmart to be able to sustain herself and her husband.

Anupriya, mentioned above, also worked as a volunteer to be able to gain experience of working in Canadian clinics. Other respondents, such as Crystal and Roja, also volunteered at their children's schools or for after-school activities, sometimes on the recommendations of their children's teachers. Pravallika argued that volunteering improved her prospects in the job market, enabled her to get a lay of the land and adapt to the social atmosphere of a Canadian

workplace, but she nevertheless understood that volunteering as benefiting the companies she worked for, more than it did for her confidence or her resume (Guo, 2014).

‘Canadian Experience’ has been understood and explained as a paradox for new immigrants, whereby their prior experiences and qualifications that enabled immigration to Canada are then disregarded in the Canadian labour market. Ku et al. (2019) argue that this constitutes “a form of exclusion in the context of “post-racial” politics where Canada’s performance of humanitarian, benevolent and multicultural global citizenry expressly rearticulates colonial race discourse” by displacing the explicit effects of racism onto the more benign-seeming ‘Canadian Experience’ (p. 293). This then has the effect of responsabilizing the new immigrants into volunteering or being under-employed as a way to gain Canadian experience, in keeping with a neo-liberal immigration system geared towards flexible, economic migrants.

As Wilson-Forsberg & Sethi (2015) argue, volunteering can be an important way for new immigrants to integrate into their new communities, but the privileging of Canadian work experience over foreign experience combined with the *promotion* of volunteer work whether it be through programming such as the TDSB or community members such as teachers, serves to marginalize skilled migrants. Thus, they argue that “Canadian experience is a marker of difference that contributes to the marginalization of skilled immigrants” (p. 105) while maintaining an egalitarian and multicultural façade.

Spoken English

Shailaja had worked as a GIS engineer while in India. When her marriage to her husband, Arun was arranged, he was already living in Canada and working as a software engineer. Arun’s family had selected Shailaja as she was a qualified professional already working in Hyderabad.

Before their marriage, Arun had assured Shailaja would be able to get a job in this field, and that he would support her too. She had trusted in his word as he had been working in Canada as an IT professional for a few years already.

My family really wanted me to get married to him, but I didn't want to go so far away, I had a job and everything... but this way I knew I could keep working after marriage. He said it was important for both of us to work in Canada and he said there was a lot of jobs here. But he didn't really know about my field and I found it so hard here. (Shailaja, phone interview, July 2019, Telugu).

Shailaja was unable to find work in her field in Canada. Despite a growing demand for GIS expertise, Shailaja could not access opportunities because she, in her opinion, “didn't receive proper guidance” in navigating the job market. Her lack of Canadian experience and her limited fluency in English made it hard for her even to get an interview callback. In her first two years in Canada, Shailaja was only able to get work as a cashier in Indian restaurants. When she became pregnant, she found the long commutes hard to bear and subsequently quit the job. Soon after, Arun's work took them to Calgary and she went to India to be close to her parents after the delivery. At the time of our conversation, Shailaja was still in India with her baby, and seemed very uncertain about continuing her professional career whenever she returned to Canada.

Most respondents had given the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam for English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening – a requirement for the Permanent Residency application as well as the study permit. Despite their IELTS grades being judged sufficient to qualify them for migration, some respondents found that their lack of fluency, speed or Canadian accent in conversational English was a barrier in interviews. For Vibha, who sought work in the educational sector, documentation of her own education in English was required:

They wanted to know whether I studied in an English medium school. I gave my IELTS, I've got such a good score, but you see that even that is not enough! Because I come from a country which is not English speaking and so I have to give evidence at each stage that I studied in English, which is not even required. They want to contact my primary school, my college and all to certify that my education was English-medium. And you know what it's like with institutions in India! Good luck communicating with them over email!... This is why I think a lot of people who come here, they face this challenge and then they're like it may be easier to just get a Canadian degree. (Vibha)

Other respondents like Ramani and Prabha – both arrived as dependent spouses – also shared that their limited spoken English language skills had proven to be barriers in obtaining full-time employment in their chosen fields. Ramani, especially, had not expected to work in Canada; but her husband's inability to find a job as a pharmaceutical engineer in a challenging economic situation necessitated that she seek employment to sustain their family.

Just a week or so after we arrived, I hit the pavement, first job I worked at was a McDonalds in a subway station... that's where I learnt to speak 'Canadian' style English!
(Ramani, Scarborough, May 2019, Telugu)

Respondents who undertook such 'survival jobs' – jobs that were nonetheless far below their skill and educational level – often credited them for their first exposures to the Canadian society and economy, and to their 'learning' English to communicate in the new society. The challenging nature of these jobs formed a part of the narrative of the new immigrants' initial struggle to establish themselves. As I explore near the end of the chapter, respondents characterised these jobs as "dignified – and should not be looked down upon like we do in India." Nevertheless, my respondents made every effort possible to leave these survival jobs behind and gain experience and skills to find full-time work.

Re-entry into education

As Vibha pointed out, one of the ways my respondents tried to gain entry into the Canadian job market was through obtaining a degree or a professional diploma from a college. Having Canadian educational qualifications would enable an immigrant to bypass the requirement to demonstrate/submit educational equivalencies when it came to job requirements. My respondents were thus drawn to programmes offered by Ontario colleges which promised resources, access to industry contacts and assistance with job hunts after completion.

Roja, who had studied as a physiotherapist and did her mandatory internship in India, had previously worked as an office administrator while in the US with her husband. During their year in India, before coming to Canada, she worked as a school administrator as the work hours were convenient with her childcare responsibilities. She had wanted to study in Canada but did not get a chance to do so until September 2018, when she obtained a diploma in office administration from an Ontario college.

It's not like they had anything really new to teach for me, except a few software things I guess. The real thing is that I got to submit CV at job fairs and got part-time contracts in a few big companies. (Roja, Markham, August 2019, Telugu).

Similar to Vibha, Crystal had migrated to Canada as a skilled worker but was unable to find jobs in her sector with her Indian educational qualifications. She and I had become friends after I assisted her in applying for a graduate program in early childhood education at a college in Toronto. Balancing her coursework, which included group work, with her domestic and childcare work was a big struggle for her, especially as her husband worked night shifts at his job. Crystal attributed her completion of the degree to three of her classmates with whom she formed a good personal rapport and worked in a group with – they were all South Asian

immigrant women and mothers themselves, who understood and empathised with each other's time commitments and were accordingly flexible with meeting times and work schedules.

Though Crystal was able to get a paid internship right after she completed her degree, she still struggled to find a full-time job as she felt passed over for being "too old and too overqualified."

In a few cases, women took the opportunity to study further in line with their personal desires. Vibha, for instance, had for many years wanted to pursue a doctoral degree in education, and Anupriya wanted to study for her masters and further graduate studies in physiotherapy once she had her licence and had a few years of work experience under her belt.

Similarly, before leaving India, Gargi had held an admission for graduate studies at a prestigious institution but was unable to pursue her studies and research work as her family migrated. She held a research degree and had years of qualitative research experience in India but was unable to find work in her field when she arrived in Toronto. She managed to find a job as a recruiter, and eager to return to a university context, she worked as an international student academic admissions advisor. A few years later, once her husband was well-established with a full-time job in his field and after her maternity leave, she was able to get admission to a graduate program at a university. This for her represented a culmination of her dreams, which she implied would not have been possible in India.

Like Gargi, some respondents had success finding jobs with agencies that were designed to help other immigrants settle and find jobs, as recruiters or working with lawyers. For instance, despite Samira's lack of legal or paralegal training, her one job experience in Canada was a part-time office position with an immigration lawyer who worked with new and potential migrants and handled citizenship applications. Samira quit within a few months after realising the exploitative nature of the lawyer's practices of delaying her clients' petitions and applications,

misinforming the clients and demanding more money from them. This experience, Samira said, strengthened her resolve to serve “her community in Canada” through other ways.

When Prabha initially migrated to the US with her husband, she was unable to seek employment as a condition of her spousal visa. Having lived independently and worked in India prior to marriage, Prabha had struggled with “uncomfortable feelings, like I’m a dependent now”, common to women who were wives of IT workers and were restricted from paid work by their visa conditions (Bhatt, 2018). Prabha and her family migrated to Canada in the early 2000s, after their visa in the US expired. As she had children by then, she opted out of the job market to care for them. Prabha then spent a few years cycling in and out of the job market. Eventually, she started her own firm that offers job recruitment services, aimed at new and recent migrants. With the growing number of migrants to Canada, her firm had maintained a steady growth. However, as she worked from home, she viewed her income as ‘additional income’; she considered her husband as the main earner of the house. In these ways, women mobilized various resources to navigate the workplace and sustain their households in Canada after migration (Das Gupta et al., 2014).

Canadian workplaces in comparison to India and the US

Multiple respondents, especially those who were in IT, software or engineering fields, reported that there were significant differences in the Canadian and American job markets, which disadvantaged Indians. The American job market prioritised technical skills and experience, whereas Canadian employers looked for high communication and language skills, and behavioural fit with the existing team.

Respondents had mixed experiences on whether commensurate work experience in the

US was taken into consideration in Canada. Relentless networking and persistence in pursuing the job one wanted were necessary to “cracking” the Canadian workplace. According to Falak, with such strategy, one could “start at zero” but progress exponentially through the workplace hierarchy proportional to one’s prior work experience. Similarly, Prabha who worked as a recruiter and had mainly high-skilled immigrants as clients, claimed that once employed for good communication and fit, Canadian employers would even invest in training and further upgrading their workers’ skills.

For some respondents, Canadian workplaces also presented a stark contrast to their Indian counterparts. Women whose husbands worked in the IT and software sector shared that they had been unable to adapt to the “culture of ‘bossism’ in India” after experiencing the relatively egalitarian work cultures in North America. A few respondents also felt that working in Canada allowed them to have better work-life balance, which they could not manage in India with hierarchical workplaces where employees were expected to work long hours, including overtime hours, on top of long commutes. One respondent, Madhuja, opted out of the workforce entirely and instead pursued her ambitions as an artist, including teaching painting classes to children out of her home and exhibiting her work. She felt this to be far more fulfilling than her life as an office worker in India, and as her husband held a well-paying job at a consulting firm, she was under no pressure to find work that would contribute to the household income.

At the same time, these supposedly egalitarian Canadian workplaces free of ‘bossism’ presented some novel challenges for my respondents, as well as their husbands, especially those that did not have experience working in multinational corporations while in India. A minor example was the expectation that employees would pick up after themselves, for example, wash their own coffee mugs at work – something that is routinely handled by janitorial staff in Indian

workplaces. For some this was a benign aspect of being independent and responsible for themselves, while others perceived it as an inconvenience and a somewhat humiliating adjustment compared to their previous experiences in India. I unpack this further in the section below, exploring the implications of caste in workplaces in Canada.

The major change for most was the racially diverse workplace, whether it was a factory floor or a medical software office. Most respondents noted that workers tended to gravitate towards socialising with other workers of their own race or ethnicity, including their own tendency to do so; they observed cliquish behaviour at their workplaces. A few of my respondents shared examples and instances of racism or microaggressions that they faced in workplaces. Pravallika, among others, shared that despite her co-workers' comments on her "unprofessional" attire at her workplace, she continued to wear her long kurta tops with pants as she felt comfortable in them. "I wear cotton clothes, they are washed and pressed, nothing flashy and showing skin. What's their problem with that? It's not like I have a client-facing position... I should be able to wear what I think is smart and comfortable," she explained.

While working in administrative positions, Gargi had observed that white and/or male colleagues who were equally or less qualified and experienced were routinely promoted to higher positions and salaries. Some respondents attributed this to white and male colleagues being able to socialise with their colleagues and bosses outside the workplace, and bonding over shared Canadian experiences. When it came to their own connections at the workplace, they perceived that their foreign education and experience, as well as their domestic and childcare responsibilities, made them less able to connect with bosses, in particular if they were white Canadians. Falak, for instance, said that she felt safer and better about working at a majority-Indian staffed company, where she felt her contributions would not be overlooked and her

leadership potential was encouraged, as opposed to the experiences of some of her friends.

Model Minority Workers

Kamala Visweswaran argues that the positioning of Indian diasporic communities in the west, relative to other Asian American and racialized communities, needs to be understood in the context of British colonial rule in India, what she terms as “[t]he crucial role of empire in establishing the Indian diaspora as "middleman minorities" in some parts of the world, and labor diasporas in others” (1997, p.13). With her use of ‘middleman’ in the case of Indians, she refers to the role of English-language education in the creation of a ‘colonial middle class’ where Indians were incorporated into colonial British bureaucracy in a position of subordination. This, Visweswaran argues, accustomed upper-caste and middle-class Indian men to a role of mediation between white dominated power structures and marginalized groups – and enables high-skilled Indian workers’ incorporation into the American racial system as ‘model minorities’ (1997, p 17).

The position of ‘model minority’ occupied by Indian workers featured in a few respondents’ accounts, especially in cases where they had supportive colleagues or supervisors who were white. This was prominent in the stories of the two men, Chiru and Navjit, who had accompanied their partners while I interviewed them, and chimed in with their stories of their lives in Canada. Both men, while outlining their qualifications and preparation for life in Canada and attributing their professional stability to their own hard work, also claimed that white colleagues were easier to work with as they recognized ‘merit’ and the ethic of hard work in Indians. The attribution of race-blindness within meritocracy to white colleagues was remarkable; as Jodhka and Newman (2007) argue, meritocracy for private-sector corporate employers in India implied that merit was based on ‘family background’ and a ‘casteless’

identity that was nevertheless undergirded by class-based practices of education and professionalization. Both Chiru and Navjit had, in their narration, shared stories of their own experiences working with multinational corporations in India and in Chiru's case, studying abroad in Australia. What underlay their notions of meritocracy was their own class and caste-based privilege; not to mention the privilege of being cis-heterosexual men who had female partners to share if not carry out domestic responsibilities.

One of my respondents, Sirisha, also shared that her experience as a research assistant working for a white academic had been very beneficial as she found it to be a close, mentoring relationship.

She [her boss] has been really helpful to me. What I like is that she doesn't hold back praise, she tells me when I have done good work. That's not like what we see back home, right? She even acknowledges that people coming from India are always good and qualified! Sometimes when I have taken some food or sweets from home to her, she knows the names and all... she always tells me that she has had good experiences with Indians. She is really supportive, and keeps assuring me that my contract will get extended, and she'll take care of me. (Sirisha, Etobicoke, Telugu).

In a similar vein, other respondents like Meena and Frida also talked about good relationships with white co-workers and supervisors at their workplace, whom they considered friendly and easy to relate to, as they had a level of 'exposure' to Indian culture, borne of the multicultural nature of life in Toronto. Having come from urban backgrounds in India and being fluent in English, with access to English-language media, also helped respondents like Meena and Frida socialize with their co-workers. Roja, who did not have this ease of communication, shared that she strived to have a cordial equation with everyone at her workplace; but by being 'extra nice' to her white co-workers, she hoped her temporary administrative work contract at a multinational

corporation might become a regularized job. Prabha, whose recruitment work mainly focused on IT and other engineers, confirmed this preferred status for Indian technical workers, pointing out that Indians were being admitted as high-skilled migrants in record numbers. However, she mentioned that though Indian technical workers had an ‘edge’ over other migrant workers due to their relatively better communication skills, and Canadian workplaces’ familiarity with Indian culture, Indian workers had low retention rates as they tended to falsify their resumes.

Commenting on her experience with white bosses, Ramani shared an anecdote from one of her jobs where she managed a food-processing operation largely staffed by workers from Jamaica. She perceived a closeness between the workers on the basis of their shared identity, and that this contributed to a measure of disregard for her managerial efforts and authority.

I was feeling frustrated, and thinking that maybe if they had a Jamaican manager they would actually listen. So then I asked my manager – he was a white guy – why I got hired for this group. He started praising Indians saying we are smart and we work hard, we don’t slack off, we show up for work. So I thought, does he mean I will work hard even when the others are not doing they jobs? That’s what was happening anyway. I was staying back after my shift to complete the work! So after that I just quit. (Ramani, Scarborough, February 2019, Telugu-English).

Ramani’s actions demonstrated her understanding of her ‘model worker’ status to be a double-edged sword. When I asked further if she had experienced any other stereotypes at the workplace, or if she knew of stereotypes that were imposed on other groups, Ramani instead went on to outline a ranking of the ‘desirability’ of racialized groups of workers: from “lazy” to “hardworking”, from “dominating” to “cooperative”. Within this schema, Ramani did not further disaggregate South Asians on the basis of nationality or religion. Though she did not have a good personal opinion of white workers or managers, she was partial to them as she said, “at least they

recognize Indians are good workers.”

I tried asking Ramani if this hierarchy was what she heard about from managers, and she responded it was a mixture of observation and her own “learnings on the job”. At the hint that I was challenging or trying to analyse her ranking of ethnic workers in the context of larger social racial dynamics, Ramani responded sharply to me, “*in the real world, those things don’t matter*” – implying that as a student or an academic, my understanding of race and racism was necessarily limited as compared to her analysis based on her experiences in the Canadian workplace, which were lived and pragmatic, and therefore superior.

In making the following argument about model minoritization, I want to keep in mind an individual’s diligence and work ethic, as well as an individual boss or manager’s mentorship of their employees. However, as Rita Dhamoon argues, “the model minority is one who can most closely replicate the ideal white male worker” (2010, p. 136). Within a multicultural society and its institutions, dominated by white groups and structured by white supremacy, the ascendancy to ‘model minority’ available to Indians/brown people is through emulating whiteness. Tania Das Gupta, for instance, argues that aspiring to the ‘white space’ of Canada, associated with the promise of a more ‘civilized’ and meritocratic society, is one of the major reasons why Indians choose to migrate to Canada (2021, p. 27).

Nishant Upadhyay argues that especially for South Asian model minority communities, “[t]he racialized self is constructed not just in relation to the white superior Other but also in relation to the “unmodel” Native and Black Others” (Upadhyay, 2019, p. 158). This “unmodel” is expressed in terms of productivity and moral values of dependability, diligence, and the ability to emulate whiteness. In their research with Hindu Indian software engineers in Canada’s tar sands, Upadhyay finds that the discursive construct of the good, productive South Asian worker

is built around anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism and exclusion:

Many of my interviewees reproduced such narratives by highlighting the growing presence of South Asians in workplaces. They proudly claimed that management perceived Indians as more hardworking and responsible employees than others. One respondent argued, '[We] have good work ethics. If racism exists, then it is benefiting us.' (Upadhyay, 2019, p. 160)

Ramani's adoption of a similar hierarchical ranking of the productivity of workers based on their ethnicity needs to thus be located within the model minoritization strategy of managing difference within multicultural societies, which deems certain kinds of difference as acceptable or unacceptable, and establishes this hierarchy of difference through pitting racialized groups against each other (Park, 2011; Snelgrove et al., 2014). Though my respondents did not speak to having colleagues or coworkers who were Indigenous, Ramani's insights directly (and others' indirectly) echoed what Upadhyay terms 'colonial logic of labour' in evincing a racial hierarchy that positioned South Asians/Indians as superior to other racial groups at the workplace. As Visha Gandhi argues, "Class-climbing aspirations often tinge anti-Black racism in South Asian communities, along with a desire to align oneself with whiteness. South Asians can imagine themselves as equals to whites by taking on the racisms and stereotypical thinking of the white majority" (2014, p. 8)

At the same time, this uncritical adoption of 'model minority' status and the replication of its logic of managing difference, is inflected also by my respondents' experiences and knowledge shaped by a striated society and economy such as India's, where caste, class and regional identities structures labour markets and labour value. Not only does there continue to be a high degree of discrimination in the urban public and private sector against lower caste workers (Madheswaran & Singhari, 2016), as well as persistent workplace bullying of Dalit workers

(Noronha, 2021); but the very *choice* of occupations are at times structured around traditional caste occupations or associations. As Banerjee and Knight (1985) have argued, manual labour markets in India are marked by job discrimination against lower castes: “It is in the allocation of workers to jobs that discrimination is most likely to be practised. An employer would have no aversion to employing an untouchable provided that he worked in an *untouchable’s job*” (p. 301, emphasis mine), which resulted in lower-caste workers being disproportionately channeled into unskilled jobs. They further argue that as the recruitment process for jobs takes place through contacts and established caste networks, past discrimination was likely to carry over into the present as well (Banerjee & Knight, 1985).

This analysis is evident as despite longstanding public sector affirmative actions such as reservations for lower-castes and scheduled tribes,⁷¹ members of the upper castes dominate influential and well-paid professions such as engineering, accountancy, law and education (Aggarwal, Drèze, & Gupta, 2015). Reports and surveys also routinely find that quotas of positions reserved for candidates from marginalized groups are left under- or unfilled, belying the promise of the reservations policy to bring about parity of opportunities (Basant & Sen, 2020; Santhosh & Abraham, 2010). Research has also found that board members of Indian corporate house are dominated by two particular caste clusters: the Brahmins and the Vaishyas (Ajit et al., 2012). On the other hand, members of the Dalit caste are disproportionately represented in stigmatized occupations of sanitation, like sweepers, manual scavengers and sanitary workers in state institutions in India, in an instance of the modern Indian state perpetuating caste-based occupations and hierarchies through recruiting through caste-based networks (Harriss-White & Basile, 2014; Harriss-White & Prakash, 2010). Further, the historical system of reservations in

⁷¹ Constitution of India.

place by the Constitution of India has been under attack by the 2019 Indian government and the Supreme Court (Jeenger, 2021)– threatening one of the main avenues of upward social mobility for marginalized communities within India.

In her book *The Caste of Merit* (2019), Ajantha Subramanian looks at the aggregation of upper-caste students, teachers and networks in prestigious institutions of engineering in India, such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), and the connections between IIT alumni who fulfilled the rising demand for tech workers in the Silicon Valley, United States of America. She argues that the construction of South Asians as highly valued and skilled tech workers, especially those drawn from institutions like the IITs, has played an active role in creating the myth of the Indian immigrant as the high skilled, high achieving ‘model minority’ in the US. Through this examination, Subramanian unpacks how this particular figure of the model minority effaces its basis as upper caste. Similarly, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, among others, has argued that homogenous constructs of South Asian-ness in North America are built around dominant caste-Hindu practices (2012); as mentioned earlier, the caste survey conducted by Equality Labs in 2018 found that one in two Dalit respondents and one in four Shudra respondents lived in fear of being ‘outed’ as lower-caste (Zwick-Maitreyi et al, 2019).

Keeping in mind the arguments outlined above, I argue that not only is it caste that is structuring Indians’ presence and orientation towards the labour market, even in the diaspora, but that having and replicating caste privilege is also central to upper-caste Indian immigrants’ drive to perform model minoritization and reap its benefits. Upadhyay’s work (2019) is instructive here in unpacking how highly skilled Indian workers’ sense of model minoritization is thus also constructed in relation to the ‘Dalit-Bahujan’ Other. The Dalit-Bahujan Other is inextricably linked with the Black-Indigenous Other when it comes to the self-construction of the dominant-

caste Hindu Indian as a model minority worker in Canada, and the two aspects cannot be separated from each other.

As noted in their report on caste-based discrimination and harassment in the UK, Metcalf and Rolfe (2010) found that there were instances of upper-caste employees refusing to clean spillages on the shop floor, considering it to be a task to be performed by their Dalit coworkers (p. 34). In a landmark for the recognition of caste discrimination in the US, an unnamed Dalit engineer filed a case against two upper-caste managers of Indian origin at a tech firm in California, Cisco, alleging that they ‘outed’ his lower-caste identity and as a result, he faced caste-based harassment and discrimination at the workplace, including bullying and name-calling; Cisco’s internal investigation had found no evidence of violation of company policy. Subsequently, the state of California has filed a lawsuit against Cisco for caste-based discrimination, opening up the possibility for caste to be recognized as a category of discrimination in the US; this possibility has been met with ferocious opposition from Hindu organizations in the US, like the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) that seek to deny the existence of caste as a hierarchy and its presence in the diaspora (Chakravartty and Subramanian, 2021).

In Canada, there has been some reportage highlighting the treatment of Dalits in the diasporic community, though I could not find evidence of similar workplace discrimination being documented. A National Post article quotes Dr Varinder Dabri, a veterinarian in BC who belongs to a lower-caste community: ““When you are working with mainstream society, no one asks you your caste. But when you are working with people from India, the first thing they want to know is the caste.”

This is necessary contextualisation for the attitudes around frustrations with the

‘egalitarian workplace’ I mention above. When working with those of different races and ethnicities, collegiality and employment structures may be shaped by whiteness. However, when Indians or even South Asians share a workplace, questions of caste inevitably arise in interpersonal interactions and influence working relationships, as mentioned by Dr Dabri. Even in reactions where respondents or their husbands found the expectation of picking up after themselves at the workplace to be a striking or degrading change from their contexts in India, we understand how caste structures Indians’ presence in workplaces in the diaspora, and shapes their interactions with each other.

Husbands’ contexts of work and education

Over half of my respondents led the migration either as primary applicants on the permanent residency, or as international students who brought along their husbands on open-work permits. Even though in most cases this was a strategic decision in order to maximise their chances to migrate, women still felt responsible for their success as immigrants. This was especially evident when women talked about their husbands’ deskilling or inability to find jobs that were not survival or shift-based work and expressed their guilt or worry that their husbands had been unable to succeed in their new environment.

For Ila and Chiru, migrating with Ila as an international student was a doubly beneficial decision as it allowed them to migrate and allowed Ila to pursue her dream of further education as an engineer. While in India, Chiru had taken the lead on researching graduate programmes and preparing her application; he was prepared to arrive in Canada on a work permit and seek work in his field as Ila studied. However, when they came to Calgary, he initially found the job search a struggle and had to pick up a job as a shop clerk at a dollar store. Ila recounted feeling horrified and sad that Chiru had taken such a “step down” just to ensure that they had an income;

when Chiru was able to find an office job a few months later it came as a big relief to her.

Other respondents similarly reported feeling simultaneously worried and grateful to their husbands for what they perceived as a sacrifice of their place in the social order, to ‘follow’ their wives to Canada and take up underemployment to sustain their families.

You know, he had a great government job in the police department in India, life was happy and peaceful. He left it all behind because I got the opportunity to migrate... who does that, tell me? Who leaves it all like that? His friends, his relatives dissuaded him, but still he agreed. I am so grateful to him, every day. (Crystal, Toronto, November 2019, Telugu)

When I pointed out that women are routinely expected to uproot their lives and move to wherever their husbands and in-laws live, Crystal scoffed and said, “that’s what we are supposed to do, you know... it’s not so easy for men”. Her words demonstrate what Chopra (2009) notes in the case of male migration as spouses: “while a girl is literally primed from her childhood to leave her natal family and home at marriage, a man is unprepared to face the consequences of such a move” (102). Crystal went on:

It’s a different struggle here... I miss my family and friends, but I adapted. Gopal really struggles without a single friend... he has a problem with communication. Here all the men are in the IT field, and that's all they talk about, he feels left out. He works a minimum wage job in shifts, and we barely see him during the day, and he is losing all his confidence. (Crystal)

Crystal minimised these challenges, and the burdens of housework and care of two children, saying that she was finding solutions; her big worry was her husband’s changed demeanour and inability to adapt to life in Canada. She worried that she had failed her husband as a wife, as the one who induced him to migrate.

Niharika was one of the key exceptions among my respondents, who had been able to secure a job in Canada at a comparable level to the one she held in India, owing to her experience working with a multinational corporation. Her husband had chosen to go back to university for a graduate degree, with her full support. However, his education was in a town that was over 6 hours away by bus. This meant that she had gone back to a ‘long-distance relationship’. Unable to cope with the single-parent household while working a full-time job, Niharika’s months-old baby was with her parents in India as a temporary measure while her husband finished up his degree. Niharika confessed that “life seems empty and pointless right now”:

I just keep thinking, this is not what I signed up for... I’m just waiting for the day he graduates and can come back here. Then we can go and bring our baby home too and finally be a family again. (Niharika, Toronto, August 2019, English)

Pravallika had been the primary applicant on the PR application owing to her professional qualifications and experience. She had even shifted her career trajectory while in India to ensure a smoother transition to the job market in Canada. With all her efforts to access a job, volunteering at various companies and holding part-time shift work, Pravallika was only able to obtain full-time work a year after being on the job market. Her husband, on the other hand, had taken up a part-time position with the TTC initially while he looked for jobs in his preferred field. However, he had not been able to break into the market in the same way and had continued with the TTC. This was a source of guilt for Pravallika, as she had led the migration process and felt herself to be responsible for her husband’s professional challenges. At the time of our interview, she held a full-time job and was a homeowner; however, she shared that she was worried about not achieving her life goals:

Because [my husband] has still not settled into a career, he works long shifts, and I barely ever see him... it just hasn't worked out for him so far. We had wanted to try for a baby, but I can't do everything on my own; I need him to be present. We told our families that we would try to make it here for a few years, and if it didn't work out here, we would come back to them; that's how we consoled them... We keep thinking about it even now, we haven't been able to bring them [in-laws] here (Pravallika, Scarborough, July 2019).

From these cases, it is evident that to reach the ideal of immigrant success, it was important for my respondents that their husbands also succeed in their professional domain by moving past survival jobs and under/unemployment. Even if women themselves were able to attain their professional goals and support their families on their income, this was still insufficient if their husbands had not achieved a similar level of stability.

Domestic work

Despite positive changes over the past few decades, the gendered division of domestic and care work within households continues to be unequally distributed (Guppy et al., 2019). For recent migrants to Canada from India, this represents a stark change, as domestic workers are easily available for most middle-class households and represent a symbol of class status. Research has shown that in the post-migration context, immigrant families from India experience an intensification of the gendered imbalance in domestic work connect (Hari, 2018). As Bhatt points out in her study of transnational housewives in the US, "women's reproductive labour... masks the true cost of waged labour in an economic system predicated on freely exchanged work for market-determined wages and becomes naturalized through the conditions of transmigration" (p. 79). A few of my respondents also revealed class- and caste-based frustrations with the

amount of domestic work they had to perform in their homes in Canada, particularly in the context of lacking paid domestic workers, revealing the presence of the ‘Dalit-Bahujan’ Other in intimate practices of their households.

In my interviews, discussions about domestic work usually fell under two broad comparisons – the amount of housework in India as opposed to Canada, and the gendered division of housework between my respondent and her husband. I use a transnational analytic to understand the comparative meanings women attach to their domestic and care work arrangements, which ranged from becoming ‘independent’ in Canada, to bemoaning the loss of ‘comforts’ as the lack of paid domestic workers was seen as downward class mobility. I also explore the gendered division of care- and housework in women’s households in Canada. I argue that immigrant women’s meanings of domestic work, gender and class must be understood within the larger context of their pre-migratory status, negotiating migration with their husbands and their families, as well as their labour market expectations and outcomes in Canada.

Paid Domestic Workers and Class in India

While asking respondents to compare their lives in India and Canada, the question of domestic workers inevitably came up, especially considering the middle-class status of my sample. In an earlier chapter, I have discussed the ‘new middle class’ in India, designated so according to its hegemonic politics and reproduction through everyday practices. Fernandes (2006) writing about the employment of middle-class women in India, points out that women’s entry into waged work is reliant on the labour of primarily female domestic workers, and so “the gendered boundaries of middle-class women’s patterns of work and family life are thus produced through a politics of class inequality structured through this relationship with working class

women” (p. 250).

In agreement with this point, Ray and Qayum’s (2016) work on domestic servant and employer relations changing over time in Kolkata, argues that even as upper and middle-class housewives were freed from the burden of housework, they acquired a new chore in the form of the responsibility of managing the household domestic servants. Sara Dickey (2000) argues that, in urban India, “the ability to hire servants is a sign of having achieved middle or upper-class status.” (p. 466), however this is not free from attendant fears of servant crime, and vulnerabilities of class-mixing. Nandita Dhawan’s(2010) work with corporate employed married ‘new Indian women’ finds that employed middle-class women are dependent upon the domestic worker in order to live out their professional lives and ambitions, but simultaneously construct their respectability by Othering the practices of the domestic worker.

Attitudes towards domestic work in Canada, amongst my respondents, were often filtered through the lens of lacking domestic workers who would “do everything” in their households in India. Only one of my respondents, Meena, claimed that she was “uncomfortable” with the idea of domestic work while in India, and that she and her husband preferred to take care of all her household chores in Toronto as they did ‘back home’ in India. Among the rest, attitudes were divided between a frustration at the quantum of housework that they were expected to handle, including childcare where they had children; but on the other hand, in a new country without domestic workers, there was an expression of the control and freedom they found in being responsible for their domestic chores themselves, instead of hiring and being dependent on workers.

In a few cases, women pointed out that managing domestic workers was also a “headache” as it constituted a chore in itself, which they did not miss. Aishwarya, for instance,

claimed that though it was hard to keep up with chores at her home in Brampton, “the trouble with servants in India is no less”. She clarified that the ‘troubles’ referred to finding reliable and safe servants, coordinating with servants “who all have mobile phones these days”, which enabled them to take days off with a bare minimum of notice, as well as negotiating high salaries etc. My respondents presented this as a problem of being at the mercy of the whims of domestic servants, implying that it was “these days” that domestic workers were unreliable and flighty. Mythili mentioned this too, whenever she visited relatives in India, she saw how completely reliant the households were on their domestic workers. “Everything seems to just fall apart when the maid doesn’t show up sometimes,” Mythili said, “the entire household would be in a tizzy. I would just think, what’s the big deal, it’s just washing dishes. I just prefer the way we have things here [Canada].”

As mentioned above, the management of household workers in India is a gendered chore, often falling within the domain of housewives. Respondents like Aishwarya perceived this chore becoming more difficult as domestic workers with access to mobile phones had more avenues to negotiate their agency and working hours (Malhotra & Ling, 2020). To me, Aishwarya’s complaint seemed to be inflected by the 5+ years she had spent in the US and Canada; during which time the expansion of mobile networks and cheaply available phones in India have led to a ubiquity of mobile phones across classes and regions. However, her censure of domestic workers using their mobile phones to negotiate their workdays and salary echoes what Fernandes (2006, p. 75, p. 167) observes in terms of middle-class women perceiving working-class women’s pursuit of middle-class lifestyle practices like going to the beauty salon – in this case, using their mobile phones – as a threat of leveling class/caste distinctions.

In response to Mythili, I asked if she thought life here was easier because of the many

gadgets that did the work a domestic worker was hired to do in India. Mythili agreed that life was easier – especially since, according to her, machines were more reliable than workers. Nevertheless, she reminded me that gadgets like washing machines were staples in urban centres in India, but at the same time had a complaint about gadgets in Canada being not up to the task of coping with “Indian lifestyles”:

The dishwasher can't handle our stainless steel utensils, I think! We have our greasy food and our dishes for talimpu (tempering spices in hot oil), our idli plates and pressure cookers, and that poor machine just can't handle any of it! So I end up doing everything by hand anyway... its just double work (Mythili, Brampton, September 2019, Telugu)

Other women echoed Mythili's comments about various household appliances. Ramani even shared that a recent acquisition – the Roomba, an automated vacuum cleaner – required a lot of supervision; she felt like she had to follow the Roomba around “like its my child” to ensure that the house was properly cleaned. Thus, the lack of domestic workers in Canadian households lead to complex transformations of caste and class practices within the erstwhile middle-class Indian households, while placing an increased burden on women to manage domestic chores on their own.

Gendered Division of Domestic work in the Canadian household

Echoing Amrita Hari's (2018) observations around the gendered categorisation of household tasks as cooking, cleaning, outdoor work – a majority of my respondents reported the same general divisions of labour between themselves and their husbands. Women were largely in charge of cooking, cleaning and childcare, while outdoor work of lawn mowing, washing the car etc. were handled by the husband. This was especially true for respondents who lived in

standalone houses in the suburbs, or respondents who were not working outside the house while their husbands did.

For recent immigrants like Jasmine, who lived in a basement apartment shared with another young married couple, this division was not always relevant. Her husband had grown up as the youngest son in his family in Punjab, and was not at all in the habit of carrying out domestic chores. Jasmine struggled to keep up commuting to her college, her shifts as a grocery store checkout clerk, and cooking and cleaning up after her husband while he did not even pick up his own laundry.

You know just today morning he packed my lunch for me while I was getting ready for college... he had no idea of the correct quantities, he's given me a portion fit for 3 people! My friends here have all enjoyed my cooking today! But still, I think it is a big step for him... When his mother calls up, she tells him to help me out because I'm out of the house so much. Last night she was telling him to cut onions and vegetables and keep it ready for me, so that when I get home it will take less time to cook! So nice, I didn't expect a mother-in-law would be like that... But my husband still grumbles about it. He says things like, did I get married only to do all these chores? And I say, well you're not in India anymore. (Jasmine, Scarborough)

In order to ensure that she did not fall behind on any of her chores, Jasmine had reached an arrangement with the wife in the other married couple who shared the apartment with them. Jasmine and her housemate cooked in bulk and took care of the laundry together on weekends. When one was away from the house, the other made sure to serve lunch or dinner to both the men. In this way, both women in the shared household negotiated a sharing of domestic responsibilities between themselves, rather than altering the gendered equation of handling domestic work altogether.

In cases where women were homemakers, they took on the bulk of the household chores

and childcare, with only a few outdoor tasks and other chores reserved for men. They viewed this division as an organic arrangement as their husbands stepped out of the house to work, while they stayed home. Especially during or right after periods of husbands' struggle with employment, women 'felt bad' that the husbands worked so hard to support them, and willingly took on the bulk of household chores out of a sense of duty and to "lighten their husbands' burden". In some cases, women described themselves as 'staying home with the kids' and the primary household chore doers because it made sense to understand the home as "their domain" (Manohar, 2019).

A majority of my respondents shared that their husbands contributed to the domestic work and the upkeep of the household, even if there was the gendered division of tasks as outlined above. These respondents expressed praise and gratitude for their husbands, especially in comparison to the work they did in their households in India. Crystal, Meena and Frida in particular shared that they found their husbands to be equal partners within the household. Their gratitude was particularly centered around their husbands taking on chores that the women themselves did not like performing. Strikingly, each of these respondents were not very inclined towards cooking and each lauded their husbands as interested and involved in planning and preparing meals for the household, which they found as a huge relief. I suspect that this abundance of praise was because cooking and meal-planning are chores uniquely assigned to women, and so for their husbands to take on this work was a distinct aspect of the gendered division of housework that women perceived as balanced in their favour. In contrast, in her study of Indian female nurses leading migration to the United States, Sheba George (2005) found that even where migrant couples reported an equitable division of domestic work and childcare in order to support women who were primary breadwinners, cooking still remained a woman's task

in most households.

In a few cases, women were candid enough to say that they found no help from husbands. They said they were training their kids to help out around the home as much as possible. Ramani found it very frustrating that her husband not only did not contribute to household chores, but that he devoted his free time to helping other members of the religious community he had founded. Surabhi, similarly, joked that she did not expect or want any help from her husband; all she wanted was for him to turn off the TV now and then so that their child could focus on finishing up her homework.

When I first interviewed Anupriya, she was juggling her studies, her part-time job at a physiotherapy clinic which required a long commute, studying for her licensure exams and a majority of the housework. Right before the COVID-19 pandemic, her mother-in-law had come for a visit, and after lockdown in March 2020, her stay with Anupriya and her husband, Varun, was indefinitely extended as international travel ground to a halt. By this time, they had obtained permanent residency and transitioned out of being dependent on Anupriya's study permit, and as Varun sought to advance his career, she had trailed behind him to Halifax and then to Montreal, where she had trouble finding jobs in her field. Anupriya hoped that her mother-in-law's presence would mean that she would have some support with housework, and that she could dedicate herself to her licensure exams.

However, the lockdown presented a challenging situation – she, her husband and her mother-in-law, with whom Anupriya did not have a close relationship, were all cooped up in a basement apartment in a new and unfamiliar city. Among other things, Varun's reliance on the women in the family to perform all the domestic chores, was beginning to irk her. She said she had been gradually trying to “train” her husband to take on some of the domestic labour around

the house; he had been lax with essential documentation like ensuring they had provincial health insurance coverage whenever they moved, which had become a problem for her. However, having his mother around to pick up after him made Varun revert to his previous complacent self. Worse, every time he did start cleaning or working around the house, his mother would immediately intervene and take over any chores she saw him doing. Anupriya was very frustrated by this situation, as she felt that instead of encouraging Varun to help with housework, her mother-in-law was encouraging his laziness and judging Anupriya lacking as a wife.

I remember my father doing so much around the house to help my mother – that’s the only way she could have a job outside the house. I learned so much from him growing up. I want a father like that for my kids. But I’m not sure I can count on my husband for that... the only thing he can cook is instant ramen noodles. What if I leave for my job in the future, and that’s all he can feed the kids? That’s not acceptable. (Anupriya, phone conversation, May 2020).

In our first conversations, Gargi had said that even though she took on a bulk of cooking and childcare responsibilities, she felt content in the task-based equivalence in the gendered division of housework with her husband, Shiva. With the advent of the COVID-19 lockdown, she shared a further analysis of the arrangements in her household with me. Gargi’s parents-in-law had joined the household in 2019 on a grandparent super visa (allowing them to stay in Canada for up to 2 years at a time). With the advent of the pandemic and lockdown in March 2020, she found their support and help invaluable in managing her studies, employment and domestic responsibilities. However, she faced a similar situation as Anupriya – where earlier Shiva was proactive in chores like housekeeping and grocery shopping, his parents (Gargi’s in-laws) were stepping in to do his portion of the chores for him. Gargi had no particular objections to this as Shiva dealt with some health issues and needed the support. But Gargi now had a new

perspective on housework as either ‘essential work’ or what she termed as ‘volunteer’ work:

Essential work is the work you have to do, it means making lunch or dinner for the family everyday, as well as 24/7 childcare, cooking food for [her baby], cleaning up after her, bathing her, diaper changes, breastfeeding, in addition to ‘volunteer’ work. (Gargi, text-based correspondence, July 2020).

Gargi went on to outline ‘volunteer work’ as activities such as “playing with the baby, dancing with her, childminding for some time, *sometimes* diaper change /feeding/ bathing” – activities that can be perceived as more fun, less time-consuming, and more transferable. She now asserted that she took on the ‘essential work’ of the household much more in addition to her own work; while Shiva contributed to the ‘volunteer work’ side of things along with working from home, with his parents picking up the burden of his housework. Increasingly, Gargi found this imbalanced state of affairs unequal and frustrating, especially as her parents-in-law were not supportive of her need for time alone to complete her professional work from home, as mandated by lockdowns. Only when her parents-in-law departed, and after her own parents arrived to stay with her family in Canada, did Gargi find some measure of relief and support to balance her work and activist commitments with housework and childcare responsibilities.

In a few instances, the lack of support from their husbands and the unavailability of domestic workers as in India came together in my respondents’ frustrations. As Anupriya bitterly exclaimed at one point in our later conversations, “My parents did not get me married off and send me here to scrub endless dishes!”

This sentiment was located in the context of Anupriya’s exasperation at the lack of support from her husband and mother-in-law, both when it came to her professional efforts and with domestic work. Her frustration was heightened by the marriage decision that Anupriya had

trusted her parents with, as well as the downward class mobility of migration, where she was now responsible for ‘washing endless dishes’ without domestic workers to do that job ‘here’ in Canada. This dissatisfaction was compounded by not being able to work (during the lockdown especially), echoing the highly skilled professional women workers in Ghosh’s study (2020) who had migrated to Canada describing herself as an “over-educated maid”.

Caste and Domestic Work

Near the end of our interview in 2019, Jasmine expressed a very ambivalent attitude towards her time and future in Canada. The months of struggle were wearing away at her mentally and emotionally and she did not see the situation getting much better even with her recently arrived husband there, especially as he was severely homesick and kept arguing that they should return to Punjab. Jasmine vacillated between wanting to return home where “things were so good, there wasn’t a single moment of loneliness in my joint family, it was a relaxed life” on the one hand, and on the other, honour her father’s ambitions for her and his economic investments in her migration journey and education, and stay in Canada.

As she spoke about her frustrations, particularly around domestic work, and her desire to return home, Jasmine said, in Hindi “*Bhangiyan jaisa kaam karne thode hi aaye hain!*” (“I haven’t come here to work like a *Bhangi* (a Dalit caste)”). The word ‘Bhangi’ here indicates members of the Valmiki caste, a Dalit group who were previously classified as ‘untouchable’ for their association with cleaning household and human refuse, also referred to as ‘jamadars’ (S. Sharma, 2016). Sharma outlines how caste hierarchies amongst domestic workers translated to non-Dalit or OBC domestic workers refusing to clean bathrooms in their employers’ homes; as well as the breakdown of caste hierarchies where Bhangi workers were allowed into hitherto ritually ‘pure’ spaces of the house such as kitchens and bathrooms, at times by deceiving their

employers about their caste identities (Sharma, 2016, p. 56).

Jasmine's usage of this word signifies her unthinking association of Dalits with household chores she considered menial, dirty or degrading. This association is the result of generations of association of caste-based occupations, particularly that of sanitation work with Dalit groups, as outlined in the section above on model minority workers. That Jasmine chose to articulate her frustration with the perceived humiliations of doing 'dirty work' in casted terms is not an anomaly; as Chinnaiah Jangam states, caste structures the worth of human beings not just in terms of material wealth but also in terms of respectability and dignity (2017).

The surprise and enduring antipathy with being in Canada and having to 'clean my own bathroom' and 'clean my own dishes, especially at the workplace' has been a recurring theme in many interactions with diasporic members, when asked to reflect on their initial days in Canada. The trajectory then usually follows an 'adjustment' to life here where one has 'no other option' but to perform these tasks on their own; this adjustment is taken as evidence of the flexibility and "open-mindedness" required of migrants – as I will discuss below in the 'advice to new migrant's section.

Here we find yet another instance how structures and practices of caste do not automatically disappear upon migration, for caste associations with work and dignity of labour are closely associated with the tasks of purity/pollution binary. Further, bringing domestic work into our understanding of work reveals that it is not free of the construction of the 'Dalit-Bahujan' Other, and that the drawbacks of life in the diaspora are associated with the perception of having to denigrate oneself by performing tasks associated with lower castes. Underneath the claims to egalitarian meritocracy and the 'desire for whiteness' that drives migration from India to North America (Das Gupta, 2021), lie these caste-based frustrations that rupture the image of

upward social mobility.

Cultural and Religious identity

As most of my respondents had arrived in the last 10 years and maintained active links to their families, friends and communities in India, they largely felt secure in their identities as “Indian”, though these were further disaggregated into linguistic, regional, religious and caste groups. A majority of my respondents had exclusively Indian friends and family in Canada, even if they had friendly or cordial relationships with non-Indian colleagues, neighbors or fellow parents at their children’s school. With Anupriya I was able to discuss caste more specifically, and she shared her encounters with caste identities within her college space. Anupriya had continued to dress in Indian clothes occasionally and wore a bindi and shared that “Reddy boys” who were her friends in her Scarborough college – young men belonging to the Reddy caste, separate from her own Vysya caste – would cajole her to “fit in with Canadian norms” more closely by not wearing bindis. Anupriya seemed to largely be amused by them but was rankled by the implication that because Reddy women did not wear the bindi, they were somehow ‘more modern’ – and that her friends did not just want her to be more Canadian, but more “like them”.

For many respondents, getting involved in associations as a way to meet and socialize with other members of their community was important. Further, associations offered resources but also opportunities to help other immigrants coming in because “it is very important to give back to community”, according to Samira who worked and volunteered with Telugu cultural associations, and organized community picnics and temple poojas. Samira believed that it was worth taking the time and effort to connect with new immigrants and help them out; an activity enabled by her not needing to seek waged employment outside the home thanks to her husband’s IT job. Saira’s husband was also involved with his regional association in Toronto, which she

shared as a matter of pride – through his work supporting new immigrants, Saira’s husband had a vast network of friends in Toronto who made her feel welcome as soon as she arrived. Similarly, Ramani’s husband had been part of establishing a temple space in Scarborough which also served as a community gathering place for regular celebrations and occasions; between Ramani’s multiple part-time jobs, regular activities and poojas at the temple were often Ramani’s primary avenue of socializing.

Further, multiple respondents maintained social relations through the practice of communal religious rituals. As Sailaja Krishnamurti writes, “For many women in diaspora, religious community is an important space for affirming traditional identity, maintaining transnational family ties, and fostering cultural connections” (2021, p. 19). I was invited to Hindu poojas conducted in respondents’ homes for the ‘navratris’ or the nine days of goddess worship, where married women invited each other to their houses for chanting and to share food with each other and their children. These gatherings involved elaborate altars and decorations of their goddess idols, as well as a sumptuous banquet of food designated as “celebration food” prepared in traditional ways. Women also dressed in their best finery and sarees to celebrate these occasions.

After one such pooja, and once lunch was concluded, the group’s discussion turned to the topic of how women “in the olden days” used these days of worship as excuses or reasons to gather and socialise with each other, finding these gatherings a respite from their daily routines of work and care for their families. On further prompts from me, women also shared that keeping up rituals, especially these religious-inflected gatherings, was an important practice of maintaining their identity as Indian in the white-majority Canadian society, as well as a way to build connections and community with “like-minded people” – ostensibly, people who were

Hindu, shared caste-positionality enough to have similar practices of worship, and were class-privileged enough to travel to each others' houses, sometimes driving for nearly an hour, for get-togethers that could last over half the day. Women with children also made sure to bring them along to these religious gatherings, dressed in "Indian" clothes that the children did not have a chance to wear in their daily lives. For the women who were at this particular pooja, bringing their children was also important to give them 'exposure' to religious rituals and the cultural aspects of such gatherings. As one attendee shared with me:

Well it's nice for the children to meet each other and they can play in the background, that's fine. But its also important that they see what our poojas look like, how to sit for some time while the prayers are taking place, and how to do the small things – putting flowers on the altar, how to perform the aarathi,⁷² what bhajans⁷³ to sing, sitting on the floor to eat food, things like that. In India these things are normal, everyone does it so it's not so new for the kids. But here we really have to make an effort to show them, otherwise how will they learn?

Every Hindu household to which I was invited had at least a small altar, usually placed in the kitchen or the living room, if not a dedicated space for a pooja room. Religious symbols, particularly Hindu religious symbols, were ever present in various ways, even in Indian diasporic spaces that were not marked by religion as such for instance, during the prize-winning Bharatnatyam performance by a contestant at the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant, she and her team brought a large statue of a Hindu god onto the stage for her performance, serving to make the religious orientation of her 'classical' Indian dance as well as the parameters of the pageant explicitly Hindu in nature.

⁷² Ritual at the end of a worship

⁷³ Devotional songs

Children – second generation identity

For respondents with children, it was important to give children moral and cultural values at home because “outside, our values are not the dominant ones”. In Surabhi’s opinion, it was inevitable that “children growing up here are susceptible to outside influences”. Her response to this was to try and infuse the atmosphere at home with the values she wanted her child to inculcate.

I try to get [her child] to sit with me during pooja days, teach her all the holidays and the stories behind them. In fact, recently, I got her to sing the [Indian] national anthem in front of the altar on the Indian Independence day... well, let’s see how long it lasts. I don’t know for how long I can ‘fool’ my kid into being close with her roots. (Surabhi, Brampton, August 2019).

In these ways, Surabhi attempted to meld Hindu religiosity with Indian patriotic fervour – two values that she could convey within her home that her child would not receive in her public educational institution, or within Canadian society at large. When I probed her as to the significance of “fooling” her kid, Surabhi laughed and said she was aware that “all these traditions and mother-given values are not what [my child] will find ‘cool’ as she grows up.”

As long as she still stays by my side, I will try my best. The thing is, I don’t want there to be misunderstandings between us when she is older. I want to be clear what the values are, what is acceptable and what is not. She should know what I think is right and what is wrong. For example, nowadays you hear all this about young people eloping with their lovers and all. I don’t want any of that from [her child]. But the responsibility for that is with the parents. When parents instill the correct values in their children while growing up, then they don’t do disgraceful things like eloping later in life. (Surabhi).

This importance of ‘values’ inculcated by parents being oriented towards future marital choices

was striking. Ramani, who had a daughter in her 20s, shared that she was looking for a suitable match for her daughter through community networks, and that her search was extending across national borders to the US. According to Ramani, her daughter had been brought up with the “right values” as she had partly grown up in India, and so she was acquiescent to her parents’ search for a suitable boy from the same caste community, linguistic background despite coming of age in Canada.

When I asked Surabhi whom she would want her child to marry, Surabhi said she had “no expectations of having a say in arranging her child’s marriage” as a nod towards her upbringing in Canada – all she hoped for was that her child chose “an Indian”, and if possible, “from our community”, even if the partner had grown up in Canada. Other respondents who had much younger children found these topics largely hypothetical; but most answers included this concession to their children’s choice of partner as opposed to the parents arranging their children’s marriage. However, nearly all of these respondents said they wished for their children to *choose* Indians and “from our culture” – this was so there would be no difficulty in the family communicating with each other. Respondents understood cultural and familial compatibility as the foundation of marriages that “lasted”. These ideas also included anxieties that “the next generation should not succumb to western/Canadian practices of divorce” – notwithstanding the rising rates of divorce in India as well.

In the quote above, Surabhi’s refers repeatedly to young people ‘these days’ eloping⁷⁴ as the ultimate undesirable outcome that she hoped to avoid. Here she used ‘elopement’ to mean young people’s choice to enter into a marriage with someone they had a prior romantic

⁷⁴ Surabhi here used the Telugu word ‘lechipovadam’ which means elopement, or chaos. Almost always carries a negative connotation in mainstream media, associated with marriage patterns among tribal groups. According to Bandyopadhyay (2011, p. 3) elopement is “the voluntary flight of heterosexual lovers away from their respective homes for the purposes of marriage or cohabitation”.

attachment, but more importantly, she meant their choice to do so *against* their parents' and their wider community's wishes; and at times fearing violent reprisal from their families. Perveen Mody (2008) in her examination of love marriages and the law in Delhi, finds that elopement is closely linked with anxieties around young people, especially young women's sexualities and agency, leading to families, communities and media to portray elopements as abductions or other criminal activities. Mody argues that "an elopement... upsets the social order with its implicit declaration that 'love' couldn't wait for an arrangement... this damning condemnation is not merely limited to the couple but has the effect of weakening the family's honour and reputation too... for parents, the only option is to disown or disinherit the child" (2008, p. 158). The representation of love marriages as elopement understood as kidnapping or abduction that Mody describes in the 1990s is echoed by Bandyopadhyay's findings (2011) in colonial Bengal of narratives of love-marriages or other relationships outside acceptable boundaries being portrayed as the same. In her book *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples*, Prem Chowdhry (2009) outlines how young people entering into inter-caste marriages in north India have been subject to increasing violence from families and caste-governing bodies. Though these violent acts are often described as "honour killing", Chowdhry argues that caste endogamy is enforced and upheld in the context of colonial ordering of caste identities, as well as shifting economic and political dominance between caste communities (2009). A similar assault against young people, especially Dalits, who marry partners of different castes has been noted in southern Indian states like Tamil Nadu (Hebbar N., 2018) and Andhra Pradesh, in rural and urban centres (Ram, 2018).

Anxieties around love marriage and elopement have been amplified in the last two decades, especially by right-wing Hindu allegations of 'love-Jihad', alleging that Muslim men target Hindu women to convert them. These allegations are of a piece with larger Hindu

majoritarian politics around stoking anxiety of demographic panic, as well as a preoccupation with young women's sexual agency. In 2016, one such case gained national attention; the parents of a 26-year-old woman, Hadiya, alleged she had been abducted by a Muslim man and forced to convert to Islam by her now-husband. Combined with the heightened atmosphere of Islamophobia, stoked in part by mainstream news outlets (Drabu, 2018), this case recalled and added fuel to the ever-present anxieties over the body of the Hindu woman standing in as a representation of the purity of the nation, threatened by the Muslim aggressor (Mody, 2018, p. 28-30). What was striking here was that soon after the media furore began, Hadiya testified that she had in fact married her so-called 'abductor' and converted of her own free will. Despite mounting public pressure and threats to her safety, she maintained that she was acting of her own free will and appealed to the judicial system to protect her rights. This is a very different characterization of their agency in marriage decisions by women against parental claims of being tricked or coerced, than what I observed among my respondents as discussed in chapter 4. Charu Gupta suggests that "women, who were often perceived as victims by the Hindu communalists, may actually be actors and subjects in their own right by choosing elopements and conversions" (2000, p. 15), while pointing to the recurrence of these narratives of abductions as means to heighten communal polarization and justify violence against Muslim communities.

One of my respondents, Roja, laughed when I asked about her children's future partners, and in a moment of candour, said to me that "as long as they don't bring any Blacks or Muslims home, I'm fine with it!" Even over the phone, my stunned reaction must have been obvious to Roja, for she clarified:

Well the fact is that there are such huge cultural differences between us and them, it would be just so hard to imagine a family like that. And some of the things I see with their communities here, I really don't agree with, how they treat their daughters... so I

wouldn't want those values to take hold in our family. It would be really hard to adjust, don't you think? (Roja).

Roja's words here echoed what my respondents shared in terms of their support for caste-endogamous arranged marriages, whether in their own calculations or according to their parents: the idea that it would be easier to 'adjust' with someone of the same cultural background. As I discussed in chapter 4, these ideas and fears around 'adjustment', in part, stem from women's awareness of their lower position in the marital family's hierarchy as brides and daughters-in-law and cultural practices that expect women to conform completely to the customs, tastes and preferences of their husbands and in-laws. There is certainly a case to be made to understand Roja's concerns in the context of different racial and religious backgrounds as incommensurate to her ideas of her child's wellbeing and marital partnership.

However, as discussed in chapter 4, the concept of 'adjustment' itself is weighted with meanings of caste-based hierarchies as they are borne out in ritual practices, practices around food and other gendered expectations. Further, as Roja preceded her comment with specifically naming 'Blacks or Muslims' as partners she would object to for her child, it becomes necessary to locate her comments within not only the milieu of Islamophobic campaigns of 'love Jihad' in India, but also the anti-Black racist and Islamophobic rhetoric regularly directed towards Black and Muslim communities within Canada.

Sensing my reluctance to agree with her, Roja changed topics and the conversation ended soon after. These anti-Black racist and Islamophobic sentiments are not uncommon among diasporic Indians, if discussions and comments on popular forums are anything to go by. In the documentary film 'Meet the Patels' (2015), discussed in the introduction, one of the talking heads from a second-generation Indian-American reveals that these notions of avoiding Black

and/or Muslim people as potential partners was something that was drilled into them as children by their parents. Speaking about the challenges faced by Black-South Asian couples, Nitasha Sharma told an article “For many Indian parents who immigrate to the United States, a Black boyfriend is a “worst-nightmare” scenario... Unaccustomed to the American racism they experience ... Indian immigrants may try to distinguish themselves from Black Americans as a way to re-create privilege they had back home”(Kitchener, 2021).⁷⁵ Visweswaran (1997) also lays out the history of South Asian immigrants to the US in the 1920-1940s arguing that they were of Aryan descent, and thus qualified as ‘white’; and points out that Punjabi male immigrants in California could not marry white women due to miscegenation laws, but were also advised against marrying Black women “as that would align them with a group hated by whites” (p. 19), and ended up marrying Mexican or Mexican-American women.

In her work on the notions of ‘izzat’ as community and family honour among Sikh communities in Canada, Mandeep Kaur Mucina (2015) focuses on how women’s bodies become the sites upon which violations of this honour and its consequences are visited. A second-generation Punjabi Sikh woman herself, Mucina details how her own marriage to a Black African man led to her family’s proclaiming that she had violated their ‘izzat’, that is, their community honour and reputation; and consequently, faced a traumatic social rejection from her family and community for her choice. She contextualizes this act with the racism that she and her family were subjected to in Canada, as well as the colonial histories of migration within which they are enmeshed.⁷⁶

As Visha Gandhi observes when it comes to anti-Black racist tendencies among South

⁷⁵ My interviews were conducted before the election of Kamala Harris, notably a person of Indian and Black descent, to the Vice President of the United States.

⁷⁶ Though Mucina mentions caste in her analysis of honour-based crimes against women, she does not engage with caste-endogamy in her story.

Asian communities when it comes to matters of dating, love, marriage or reproduction, “Chromatism⁷⁷ often colours this anti-Black racism, or a fear that future generations will end up even darker skinned through inter-racial dating and marriage, as many South Asians desire a Fanonian “lactification,” or a desire to lighten the lines of future generations (Fanon 47)” (V. Gandhi, 2014, p. 8). The desire for light-skin, and its racial-casteist connotations as well as a feature of modernity and upward social mobility, has been discussed in Chapter 3.

Other respondents, such as Meena, Saira and Niharika who were more urbane and did not feel an attachment to upholding their Indian identity, nevertheless asserted that it was important to impart these values to their children. So even though they themselves did not go to the temple as a matter of course, or celebrate any religious occasions at home, they shared that they would be taking children to temples for celebrations and enrolling them in religious education and moral value classes⁷⁸ on the weekends to ensure they would be ‘in touch with their roots’.

Prabha took a hopeful view of parents bringing up their children in Canada and imparting values to their children in a changed context:

The good thing about coming all this way and setting up life here is that you can create your own version of ‘Indian’ culture. Keep what is good and meaningful, and get rid of what we don’t agree with. We don’t have to blindly follow everything the way it was back home, we have to change here according to the norms here, but at the same we can retain what makes us unique. (Prabha, Malton, Telugu-English).

Prabha thus advocated for a reflexive and flexible approach by taking advantage of their new location and surroundings to build an “Indian” culture for family and children in a diasporic

⁷⁷ What I have earlier referred to as ‘shadeism’ or the preference for lighter skin.

⁷⁸The Vishnu Mandir in Richmond Hill, for example, offers a ‘Bal-Vihaar’ program for children and adolescents, that consist of Hindu-religion and moral value classes every Sunday. There are other similar programs offered by other religious institutions. My respondents also reported enrolling their children in after-school language education programs which also included an element of religious-based story telling as part of language curricula.

community.

Advice to new migrants

Near the end of my interviews, I would ask my respondents what advice they would give newcomers or people who intended to immigrate to Canada. Though none of them were at a loss when it came to giving out advice, I sometimes qualified this question by asking what they wish they had known when they first came to Canada. The responses to this question fell along two lines – first, adopting a subjectivity of ‘flexibility’ to succeed as an immigrant; and second, to consider the relative privilege of one’s life in India before deciding to migrate.

A majority of my respondents said that, with respect to finding waged work and domestic labour, new migrants needed to be flexible and open-minded in their approach to various avenues available. Many of them said taking up survival jobs like working at fast-food outlets or on factory floors, was a part of the journey towards establishing themselves, and that new immigrants should not consider them deskilling or demeaning as they might be perceived in India (Dean & Wilson, 2009).

It’s not a bad thing to work behind a shop checkout counter. I’ve done it now and I can say that! Of course it would be very strange if I took up that kind of job in India, with my educational qualifications and all... but here it’s not like that. There is equality and dignity in labour, you know. That’s a big thing you have to accept in Canada. You’re not seen as lesser for doing these jobs. (Ila and Chiru, Pickering, June 2019, Telugu and English)

This was one way that respondents acknowledged the initial downgrade in class status as new immigrants: the ‘starting from zero’ stage upon arrival from India, which nevertheless was accorded ‘dignity’ in Canada. Within the frame of this advice, however, the expectation was that taking up jobs incommensurate to one’s educational qualifications or work experience, that

would only be performed by people from lower classes or castes in India, was only a temporary measure. Eventually, when one had worked hard to network and find a suitable job, this period of struggling with deskilling work would pass and the promise of upward social mobility and model immigrant success would begin to come true. This hope also belied the understanding of Canada as a meritorious society (Das Gupta, 2021) where favoured economic immigrants and ideal multicultural minorities such as Indians would receive their due. Those who were not sufficiently ‘flexible and adaptable’ and failed to push past their discomfort or humiliation of being under-employed, became the stories of failure – individual cases of acquaintances, friends of friends or colleagues who were unable to ‘stick it out’ in Canada and returned home, treating migration as a failed experiment.

My respondents also pointed out these were qualities important within their marriage to weather the challenges of immigration – the need to have open discussions with their husbands, be flexible in sharing in domestic chores and doing whatever necessary to survive the change. Falak even recommended accessing mental health services:

You should blindly not trust in your partner. You never know how people change in a new place... Counselling can help people adjust. But both partners have to be willing. I feel the government should provide it along with all the newcomer career services! (Falak)

By suggesting that it should be the Canadian governments’ job to provide these services, Falak demonstrates how women struggle to reconcile their roles as good wives and good (future) citizen – and seek to bring the state into the responsibility of ensuring that new immigrants, as individuals and as a couple, were able to sustain their marriage. In this way, women exhibited the qualities of the self-sufficient and competitive migrant-worker-citizen that Canada seeks;

however, these qualities did not seem to guarantee a family life that met their expectations. In return, respondents like Falak wanted to hold the government responsible not only for employment and settlement⁷⁹, but also to maintain their families and marriages.

A few respondents said bluntly that they would advise people not to migrate as the struggle was not 'worth it'. This advice was commonly given by women who had left behind relatively comfortable and privileged lives in India, and had then struggled to find jobs in Canada. They felt that they were denied the promise of upward social mobility as they faced a life of isolation without community networks of support. In comparison to their lives in Canada, life in India seemed to offer them more avenues of advancement, and a happier social and cultural life. Newer immigrants who were still coping with changed circumstances, like Jasmine, were also prone to expressing feelings of disappointment and the longing to return to India.

Where women led the migration process, they faced resistance from their families, or had to present their decision to migrate as serving their families' interest (Manohar, 2019). Once they migrated, any failure to achieve personal goals or their husbands' failure to adapt to a place where the women had led them weighed heavily on their minds.

While most of my respondents presented self-narratives of overall contentment, excitement and preparedness for the struggles of life in Canada, each one shared stories of friends, classmates, neighbours or colleagues who were depressed at the social isolation, unable to cope with the downward class mobility, experienced acute acculturative stress (Samuel, 2009) and eventually 'gave up' and returned to India. These stories seemed to serve as cautionary tales, not only for the challenges of immigration, but also the price women seemed destined to pay for

⁷⁹ Other respondents even blamed the Canadian government for its support of refugees, viewing this to be at the cost of 'regular' immigrants such as themselves who qualified for the Permanent Residency through an arduous and costly application process, replicating standard anti-refugee rhetoric.

desiring to move away from their families, advance their careers, and set the terms for the mobility of their marriages, instead of leaving it in their husbands' hands.

Migrant Gratitude

The other major component of my respondents' advice to hypothetical new migrants comprised of constructions of migrant gratitude, operationalized to explain the 'strangeness' of being in the new context of Canada, and to advocate tolerance and an uncomplaining attitude. As Himani Bannerji argues, "No third-world immigrant is left in doubt that he/she is in Canada on public and official sufferance and is to be grateful for being allowed into the country" (2000, p. 46). In the case of my respondents, this understanding was offered as advice to smooth the path of newer immigrants towards markers of migrant success.

We are new to this country so obviously we don't know everything... that's important to remember. When we see something that is strange, or not something I would do, I just remember that this is not my society, these are not my rules. Here you have to obey their rules because it is their country. (Frida)

When asked about how they overcame the challenges of a new society and new workplaces, multiple respondents used metaphors casting themselves as 'guests' who did not have the 'right to complain', positioning themselves as eternally grateful to the white hosts, and unwilling to challenge any mistreatment or discrimination faced in the host society. This attitude echoed across migrants who had been in Canada for various lengths of time and displayed a conception of Canada as a 'white country'. Writing about the construction of 'ideal' Filipina female workers as grateful and uncomplaining not only by state and government agencies, but by transnational migrant communities as well, Ethel Tungohan (2021) argues that Filipino communities display

an internalized “gendered colonial mindset” by requiring that female migrant workers adhere to norms of a docile and compliant woman; and reacting with sexist vitriol against “ungrateful Filipinas” where female migrant workers have “shamed” the Filipino migrant community by publicly criticizing the Canadian government.

A similar attitude was evident in some of my respondents’ advice as well, particularly in response to the notion that immigrants from India might complain of receiving racist treatment.

I don’t see the point of saying racism or anything. In our country, don’t we give preference to our people? Canada is the white people’s country, so obviously they will give preference to each other and not to immigrants... we just have to work harder.

That’s how it is. As soon as new immigrants accept that, life will be easier. (Pravallika)

In the quote above, Pravallika justified an uncomplaining attitude on the part of Indian immigrants by comparing the dominance of white people in Canadian society and economy to the dominance of what she terms “our people” in India. Her use of “our people” here is illuminating – speaking in Telugu to me, it was idiomatically clear that she did not mean *all* Indians, but rather members of particular groups that she or I belonged to – our linguistic community (Telugu), our religion (Hindu) or caste (she belonged to the dominant Kamma caste in Andhra Pradesh). Her reference to ‘preference for our people’ in this case gestures to the prevalence of kinship- and caste-based networks of social and cultural capital that allow dominant caste and religious groups to maintain their hold on positions of power, whether it is in politics or in the economy, and exclude members of caste and religious marginalized groups. Pravallika seemed to take it as given that a similar network of dominance amongst white groups operated in Canadian politics and economy; and that new immigrants outside of these networks could only expect to do extra and harder work to attain positions of security or power. At no

point did these notions stray towards an allegation of injustice or exclusionary practices on part of Canada or white groups; rather the self-positioning as ‘guests’ in a white host country only engendered the expectation that Indian immigrants would need to work harder to achieve the coveted model minority status. It is not a stretch to imagine that hypothetical new Indian immigrants would in turn be able to access resources and established networks among the diasporic community in Canada; and as with Tungohan’s analysis mentioned above, be expected to conform to similar values of gratitude and compliance.

There are no ideal situations in life. Always there are advantages and disadvantages. We have come to this country for good opportunities and a better life for the kids, that’s what any parent wants, and by god’s grace we have settled down... so any new immigrants should just accept the problems and try to overcome them, not waste their time in complaining too much. (Ila)

Ensuring their children’s future in the supposedly civilized and meritocratic society of Canada was thus also a reason for migrants to maintain a grateful and uncomplaining attitude; rather than considering the idea that their children would also be subject to a divided and discriminatory society. As Das Gupta argues, while such ideas showcase an internalization of the superiority of a white dominant society, it is also “a pragmatic acknowledgment of a Western (white) supremacist world with which they have to conform in order to succeed” (2021, p. 161). Each of these pragmatic statements by my respondents nevertheless demonstrate the confluence of migrant gratitude with a buy-in to the process of model minoritization that hinged upon emulating ideals represented by whiteness, as a way to ensure ‘immigrant success’ as outlined in the beginning of the chapter. To refer back to the pictorial depiction of success by Anuj, reaching the pinnacle of the success-line required this negotiation with white Canadian structures, and in most cases, this included falling in line with exclusionary ideas embedded within it as well.

Though this dissertation has been unable to engage with questions of the Indian diaspora's position as settlers of colour in Canada, my respondents' self-positioning as 'guests' in Canadian society prompts me to quote here from Haudenosaunee scholar Ruth Koleszar-Green's (2018) incisive distinction between 'settlers' and 'guests', which she derives from discussions and conversations with Indigenous elders and thinkers. 'Settlers' for her are individuals who may be aware of residing on stolen land in Canada, but do not unsettle their privilege or even question their complicity in the settler-colonial and exclusionary practices that enable their residence and prosperity in Canada. I end this chapter with one of Koleszar-Green's working definitions of 'Guest', as a reminder to myself of the limitations of my present work, and a commitment to future work:

A Guest... understands through a reflexive process that as a Guest they have responsibilities to learn about rematriation of the land (including for example, stewardship and possession are foundational to environmental revitalization). The Guest learns the history and current story of the land that they are Guests on! They politicize that understanding. Finally, they listen to and learn protocols which do not appropriate but unsettle the privilege of ignorance. The Guest is an active and respectful individual who recognizes their privilege and uses that privilege in a way that does not centre themselves but centres the community (Koleszar-Green, 2018, p. 174).

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to bring together multiple threads around gender, race, class and caste to paint an intersectional and transnational picture of my respondents' experiences in Canada, especially with respect to work and cultural identity. The chapter demonstrates the specificity of experiences of my respondents that belong to the Hindu Indian diaspora in Canada and argues that their perception of 'migrant success' and participation in multicultural

frameworks needs to be studied at the intersections of gender, class, caste and religion.

My respondents shared the myriad challenges they faced as new immigrants to Canada; they stressed how these challenges emanated not only from strangers or new institutions, but also from community members when it came to housing or socializing. Respondents were clear in articulating the racist treatment they faced in the workplace, however only a few were able to express or contextualise their interactions with workers from other races. Analysing one of my respondent's understanding of raced 'hierarchy' among workers on the basis of diligence and productivity, I draw a parallel between 'model minority' constructs that place various racial labourers in a hierarchy within a capitalist and settler-colonial structure, to the basis of 'meritocracy' in upper-caste privileges and structures in India and the diaspora.

I argue for the importance of incorporating caste analysis into the study of everyday experiences of diasporic Hindu Indian women in Canada, from interactions in the housing market, to the workplace, as well as within notions of domestic work. The prevalence of the 'model minority' stereotype, which was taken up by most respondents as a point of pride, was accompanied by a stereotyped and hierarchical understanding of various other racialized labouring communities as less diligent and therefore less deserving. The similarity of views towards members of subordinate-castes and their labour, as well as this racialized understanding of labour and diligence considered acceptable within white multicultural logics, lends further credence to the idea that the model minority status of Indian diasporic communities in Canada is constructed against an 'unmodel' Black-Indigenous Other *and* a Dalit-Bahujan Other simultaneously (Upadhyay, 2019). This is further borne out by my respondents' views on their children's future marital prospects, within which some expressed anti-Black and Islamophobic views while evincing a 'caste-as-culture' understanding where they wanted their children to

marry partners from their 'own community'. This was an important goal for some respondents in ensuring that their children stayed in touch with 'their roots', which my respondents encouraged through enrolling children in religious classes or Indian-language education.

Finally, by casting themselves as 'guests' in Canadian society who were not entitled to complain, my respondents demonstrated their understanding of their own subordination within the racial and class structures in Canadian society through notions of 'migrant gratitude'. Respondents presented this as a pragmatic, matter-of-fact strategy towards achieving their markers of immigrant success. Through this nuanced exploration of life in Canada, I place Indian marriage migrant women's aspirations towards migrant success and become designer-migrants and model multicultural subjects in context with the challenges presented by the Canadian immigration system, at the intersection of gender, class, caste and race structures.

Conclusion

In May 2021, the ‘Ask Ellie’ advice column in the Toronto Star newspaper ran a reader letter from an international student in Canada:

Q: In 2013, my girlfriend and I met as international students from the same country. We fell for each other and started living together in 2014.

Three years later, she introduced me to her father who inquired about where I come from, which caste, etc. It didn’t go well, as I wasn’t aware of any such beliefs from my family.

Several years later, her mom’s health deteriorated due to genetic heart issues and she passed away. My girlfriend’s father and brother blamed her for her mom’s demise due to her relationship with me (*apparently as a low-caste human*), which impacted my girlfriend severely.

Previously, she’d been firm about our relationship since I first met her father.

We’ve since been living together peacefully and have a beautiful home, supporting each other through all phases of career, immigration and life.

But her father’s started forcing her to marry someone of his choice, or else cut all ties with him... (“My girlfriend’s caste-obsessed family is pushing for an arranged marriage. What can I do? Ask Ellie”, Teshler, 2021b, emphasis mine)

The country of the students’ origin is unnamed and so is their religion; however, given the question of caste I surmise that they must belong to a country in South Asia.⁸⁰ Ellie Teshler, the advice giver, began her response by citing Isabel Wilkerson’s book “Caste: The Origins of our Discontent” – the book had enjoyed widespread popularity since its release in August 2020, following the summer of Black Lives Matter protests across North America.⁸¹ The book received

⁸⁰ This is statistically likely; and as outlined by the astronomical growth of Indian international students in the introduction it may be particularly likely that the student and his girlfriend are Indian.

⁸¹ In summer 2020, George Floyd, a Black man was murdered by white police officer, Derek Chauvin, in Minnesota. ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests, which had begun in 2014 following police violence against Black bodies, reignited in 2020 across the US despite the lockdowns of the coronavirus pandemic, and soon found support across the world,

particular attention for its comparison of the Indian caste system to the racial hierarchy in the US; Wilkerson compared the marginalization faced by Dalit groups in India to Black Americans, terming them “American Untouchables”. While most reviews agreed that Wilkerson’s book was a well-argued indictment of race in America, in particular the treatment of Black Americans, some reviewers more familiar with Indian social structures pointed out that the book did not contain space for the issues faced by contemporary Dalits in India, or indeed in the USA (Dutt, 2020; Ramesh, 2021) In her response to the letter-writer in the Toronto Star, Teshher’s response equated white supremacy with upper-caste/Brahminical supremacy:

With reference to your personal dilemma, I’ve learned that issues of caste in India, which the author compares closely to anti-Black racism in America (and elsewhere), exists so deeply in the minds of those considered by themselves and others to be higher caste, that *not even advanced education and successful careers can diminish their prejudices and discrimination* (“Readers respond to ‘low-caste’ boyfriend’s arranged-marriage fight, Ask Ellie”, Teshher, 2021a, emphasis mine).

In her column as per her usual practice, Teshher also invited other readers to share their stories to provide guidance for the letter-writer. Ten days later, the column ran four reader letters that shared experiences of dealing with parental threats to romantic relationships, overcoming “race incompatibility” and stories of successful inter-religious marriages that resulted in happy adults and well-behaved children. Three out of these four letters urged the international student to persist with his relationship and inspire his partner to defy her father and brother’s threats. At the

including on Indian social media. One of the responses to the undeniable history and presence of racism in the American society was growing attention towards books on anti-racism, including ‘So You Want To Talk about Race’ (2018) by Ijeoma Oluo, ‘How to Be an Antiracist’ (2019) by Ibram X. Kendi, ‘White Fragility’ (2018) by Robin diAngelo; and the release of ‘Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent’ in August 2020 was buoyed by this wave. Media mogul Oprah Winfrey selected Wilkerson’s book for her book club, calling it the ‘most important book club selection’ and reportedly sent copies to over a 100 top CEOs in the US, because she believed that “it is necessary for people who are leaders in our country to understand the origins of our discontents and what ‘caste’ really means.” (Herzog, 2020)

end of the June 2021 column, Teshher's "tip of the day" was: "Adult children *living in countries that celebrate diversity* won't long accept bullying by parents disposed to caste inequities, racism, and religious intolerance." (Teshher, 2021a, emphasis mine).

Once again, as with the story of Mrs. Canada International 2018 Parita Vadodariya, the multicultural society of Canada was being positioned as a panacea to challenges to young peoples' agency from social ills like the caste system. Even though the reader responses did not claim to be about migrant experiences, Teshher's phrasing in her "tip of the day" positions Canada and other countries that 'celebrate diversity' as places where adult children can resist bullying by parents, who may be located in the same countries that celebrate diversity, or their countries of origin that do not. Such a characterization proceeds with blithe indifference to the social striations and segregations within Canadian society, the transnational scope of the lives and experiences of migrants like international students within Canada; as well as an ignorance of the many inter-caste and inter-religious marriages that do take place in defiance of social norms in the South Asian country from which the international students came to Canada. The response is also symptomatic of the idea that caste structures and its attendant oppressions are somehow separate from Canadian society; it does not consider that caste is already *here*, with the burgeoning communities of workers, students and their family members from South Asia encouraged to migrate and settle in Canada. More importantly, caste is featuring in the personal decisions of young people and their transnational negotiations of marriage decisions with their families as well.

This dissertation has attempted to weave together an intersectional and transnational understanding of Indian marriage migrants in Canada by centering women's voices. I have strived to represent women as agents navigating the various structures and pressures acting upon

their selves as gendered, classed, casted and racialized identities. I placed marriage migrant women as the ‘model multicultural subjects’ desired by Canadian immigration policies, where they are understood as part of the self-sufficient conjugal unit of ‘designer migrants’. These designer migrants are seen as highly educated, highly skilled, highly adaptable and able to navigate the Canadian labour market with ease, fitting into the mantle of Canadian ‘model minorities’. By incorporating an analysis of caste in understanding diasporic communities from the point of view of marriage migrant women, I sought to unpack the dominant caste and religious hegemonic basis of identities of such designer-migrants-model-minorities within the Indian diaspora. Through the analysis of my respondents’ narratives around marriage and migration decision making, I bring attention to how caste-based privilege travels, and how hierarchical and exclusionary practices are fostered within the multicultural societies. The contribution of this work is two-fold: firstly, I am providing nuance to our understanding of Indian marriage migrant women as agentive decision-makers in processes of marriage and migration, and secondly, I am adding to the growing analysis of caste in the Indian diaspora, not only through marriage decisions but also through an analysis of the ‘model minority’ construct, and the caste-based relationalities within the Indian diasporic community.

Chapter 1 laid out the conceptual keys to this work – namely, gender, caste, class, race, multiculturalism, and diaspora – and set out the context of Indians’ migration to Canada. Chapter 2 elaborated on the intersectional and transnational theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my research, and presented a few reflections on the research process. In particular, I explored how I was being understood as the researcher by my respondents, when it came to gender and caste. My status and presentation as a young unmarried Indian woman and an international student, a Telugu and Hindi speaker as well as my caste identity of Arya Vysya-Komati caste

community affected and shaped my interactions with my respondents and other members of the Indian diasporic community. In conversations about food preferences, about my marital status and plans for the future, as well as my appearance and familial networks, there was a clear desire on the part of my respondents to pin down my caste identity, my conformity to gender norms as well as my ‘authenticity’ as an Indian/ Telugu woman.

In chapter 3, I attempted to map out the transnational continuities in the construction of the ‘new Indian woman’ and a model multicultural migrant Indian woman in Canada through the site of diasporic beauty pageants, in particular the Miss and Mrs. Telugu Canada 2019 pageant. To provide a background to my respondents’ narratives, I explored the ‘pre-departure subjectivity’ of women who aspired to be upwardly and outwardly mobile, through grooming schools and personality development classes that formed a part of women’s preparation to migrate after marriage in cities like Hyderabad, Chandigarh etc. With a close examination of beauty pageants as sites of establishing group identity and belonging through women’s bodies and presentation, I analysed the multiple facets of a successful multicultural migrant identity for Indian women in Canada. The performance of this identity on a stage in front of fellow South Asian community members required a seamless blending of a hegemonic upper-caste Hindu Indian cultural tradition upholder and a liberal, active Canadian citizen, thus constructing a model minority subject.

In the next three chapters I analyzed my respondents’ interviews and narratives within the context and theory laid out in the preceding chapters. In Chapter 4 I looked at questions of women’s agency in marriage decision making processes within their families. Here I explored the centrality of caste and class in both arranged marriages and marriages of choice and developed the conceptualisation of caste-as-culture in the lives of my respondents. I understood

women's agency in decision-making around marriage through the lens of the 'patriarchal bargain', through which they sought to minimize risks relating to 'adjustment and compromise' in their marital lives.

Chapter 5 delved deeper into my respondents' migration decisions and strategies, especially as it pertained to accommodating their husbands' desires, navigating support and opposition from their in-laws, and their own personal and professional ambition. I examined their understanding of Canada as a desirable destination as opposed to countries like Australia, the USA and the Gulf, in terms of broader political and economic contexts. I also explored the specificities of twice-migrant women – from India to the USA and then to Canada. My research found that women face differing levels of pressure and responsibility to earn incomes, depending on their migration strategy as well as husbands' incomes. Further, women who led the migration process as lead applicants of permanent residency or as international students felt an increased sense of responsibility for the 'success' of their lives in Canada.

Finally, Chapter 6 mapped out the experiences of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada in terms of housing, finding employment and waged work. Here, I explored my respondents' experiences with multi-racial workplaces, both in terms of facing racist discrimination for being Indian women, as well as adopting a racial and hierarchical understanding of labourers, which I argue is central to the 'model minority' myth. I also explored women's changed experiences of domestic labour and childcare between their households in India and Canada. I brought in a dimension of caste analysis to unpack women's narratives domestic work. Finally, by analyzing my respondents' hopes for their own children growing up in Canada, as well as their advice to other newcomers, I developed an understanding of 'migrant gratitude' practiced by my respondents.

To summarise, through centring the narratives of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada, this dissertation provides exploratory insights into the ‘model minority’ segments of Indian diasporic communities in Canada – highly educated, skilled, middle-class and largely belonging to Hindu and dominant-caste communities. I analyse women’s agency in marriage and migration decision-making processes and their upwardly mobile class aspirations towards becoming ‘new Indian women’ and ‘model multicultural minority women’ in Canada. I read these alongside the pressures women face in navigating life and labour in Canada, to sustain their marital relationships and engage with familial and community gendered norms, while also working towards their personal and professional ambitions and achieve markers of migrant success. These pressures sometimes contribute to not only a downward class mobility as women face deskilling and discrimination, but also puncture women’s sense of themselves as upper-caste subjects. At the same time, my work women’s notions of migrant ‘gratitude’ glossed the fact that to achieve markers of ‘migrant success’, respondents needed to negotiate with their subordination within white Canadian structures, and fall in line with exclusionary ideas embedded within it. By reading the culturalization of racism within the Canadian society and economy in conjunction with the role of caste networks in my respondents’ migration trajectories, my dissertation makes a case for centring caste as a category of analysis in studying the Indian diaspora.

The COVID-19 pandemic set in as I wound down my fieldwork in 2020, and the lockdowns and travel restrictions resulted in extreme changes in circumstances for my respondents. I kept in regular touch over text with some of my respondents and had sporadic contact over social media with others; I also had periodic phone calls with two of them. Multiple

respondents had to step out of the workforce as they struggled with childcare and home-schooling. Some respondents had to delay moving into houses they had already bought, which caused them financial and emotional distress. Some were separated from their husbands for periods of time due to travel uncertainties; others were able to bring over their parents and/or parents-in-law to Canada, and a few rushed to India to take care of sick family members. For respondents who stayed in Canada, isolation and loneliness without the prospect of travel to India to see their family, or without the option to bring over their parents to help with childcare were serious issues. I was unable to continue formal interviews with my respondents during the pandemic for various reasons, including personal and institutional ones, but also because I did not wish to make more demands on my respondents' time during a period of great uncertainty and stress.

This brings me to one of the biggest limitations of this study – its lack of attention to the impact and influence of time since immigration on gender roles, cultural identities, experiences with waged and domestic labour, and attitudes towards race, caste, religion etc. among my respondents, what Robertson (2015) terms as “time tracks and timescales” (p. 4, see also (Nourpanah, 2021). While my respondents do range over more than 10 years since migration to Canada, my interview questionnaire and data analysis did not pay sufficient attention to the critical aspect of time since immigration, enough to compare across different respondents' narratives. This is not to suggest that there are linear or consistent changes in familial arrangements or gender roles within migrant communities over time; but rather that a temporal dimension may have brought additional texture to not only intimate and community narratives but also a wider political context to lives in India and Canada. A prospective future project could be one that analyses shifts in attitudes towards interracial, interreligious, inter-caste or in other

ways inter-cultural marriages among different waves of Indian migrants.

The heterogeneity of linguistic and caste identities, as well as migration strategies, among my sample illustrates the variation of experiences among Indian marriage migrant women in Canada and contributes to debunking stereotypes about Indian marriage migrant women. At the same time, I am limited by the necessity of keeping each of these variations in mind while analysing the interconnections of class, caste, race, gender in migration decisions and labour-market experiences among my respondents. Focusing on one linguistic group of migrant women (Telugu), a single occupation, a single neighbourhood in Toronto, or even a single kind of migration strategy could have resulted in a deeper exploration of the role of that particular factor in women's lives in Canada. Further, even as my respondent sample comprised of a majority of Hindu women, I have not sufficiently analysed the role of religion in their lives, nor the diversity of religious practices among them (Krishnamurti, 2021). However, the broad and heterogenous nature of this work does give rise to multiple directions of research which I hope will be pursued in the future.

One could potentially focus on Indian women as international students in Canada, especially in colleges, and the role of marriage in their views and practices. Taking a transnational perspective that includes different institutions and non-migrant actors into account, research could focus on students' preparatory practices in India – for example, attending recruitment fairs, preparing for IELTS exams; their experiences as students in Canada, including around housing, and working in service or retail jobs. This project could also incorporate an analysis of Canadian immigration policy, especially the use of the spousal open-work permit among international students, and gendered trends of married international students from India. The transnational aspect of this research could be an analysis of the impact of this policy on

standards of marriageability, as seen in the requirements of IELTS scores in matrimonial advertisements. What effect would that have on women's bargaining power within marriage decisions, for instance, through practices of dowry? What would it mean for caste-endogamous marriages?

Along the lines of caste in the diaspora, this dissertation opens up spaces for further enquiry into how institutions like caste-based diasporic associations and groups are involved in transforming and/or perpetuating caste practices in Canada. This could be done in two ways: firstly, through a deeper exploration of Telugu communities in Canada, caste-based and cultural organizations, language schools; and secondly, through a survey or detailed ethnography of caste-based diasporic organizations in Canada, including their histories, their roles in community-building, supporting or excluding newcomers, facilitating community gatherings and matrimonial alliances and perpetuating caste-based practices. Investigating these associations and their understanding of caste hierarchies, and the role of caste-as-culture in the diaspora, would be a rich project that opens up further avenues of analysing caste alongside race, and incorporating caste into an analysis of immigrants' implications within settler-colonial practices as well. In seeking to understand transnational dimensions of intersectional power hierarchies within migrant communities in countries 'that celebrate diversity', like Canada, this work has led to as many questions as answers. I pose one such question here towards Canadian multiculturalism – in enabling the 'flattening' of ethnic/racial identities, does it also provide a ground upon which discourses of caste-as-culture can flourish, and perpetuate caste discrimination in the diaspora?

Ultimately, this dissertation has attempted to center the narratives of Indian marriage migrant women in relation to the 'new Indian woman' and the 'model multicultural migrant', by

understanding their struggles around establishing a marital life that satisfies them, their professional and educational ambitions, and their navigation of the challenges of immigration. As a parallel, I have also shown how caste-based hierarchies in India inform my respondents' lived experiences, and how caste then becomes operationalized within their interactions with other diasporic Indians, within their understandings of race and labour, and their own imaginations of 'migrant success'. I find that Indian marriage migrant women are active agents in decision-making processes and draw upon various resources to strategize responses to the problems they face as immigrants. Even as they critique or feel marginalized by norms around gender, race, caste or class, they play an active role in upholding, altering or perpetuating certain facets of these norms as well. The experiences of Indian marriage migrant women in Canada present a rich and embodied way to understand the complexities inherent in the creation of diasporic Indian spaces and the upward social mobility of Indian communities in Canada. To understand Indian diasporas as 'model minorities', it is imperative to account for how structures of caste travel, shift and transform in migration, and become enmeshed within multicultural societies.

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Appendix A Information Sheet and List of Helplines

Study name: **Saat Samundar Paar: Marriage, migration and mobility in the Indian Diaspora**

Researcher: Harshita Yalamarty

Doctoral Candidate

Graduate Program in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies

York University, Toronto, Canada

harshita@yorku.ca

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to understand the migration journeys and examine the everyday practices of marriage migrant women from India to Canada. It aims to learn the impacts of these migration journeys on the lives of women and their families, and based on interviews and analysis, understand how Canadian state policies affect the lives of marriage migrant women and shape the Indian community in Canada. The research is undertaken as part of a doctoral dissertation at York University, Toronto, Canada and may be presented to academic conferences, community organizations and other stakeholders to expand current analysis of gender and marriage migration.

What you will be asked to do in the research: As part of the study, you will be asked a series of questions based on your migration experiences, before and after coming to Canada; your everyday life in Canada and the challenges you have faced and overcome since your migration here. This study will interview migrants and organizations in Toronto, Ontario. Interviews will be an average of 1-2 hours in length.

Risks and discomforts: The research is considered low risk as the questions are designed to understand your experiences and engagements with migration. The interview is structured to enable you to reflect on your migration journey from India to Canada, and offer perspectives on and propose changes to existing policies, practices, services, and norms. Some questions may pose a degree of discomfort to some of you. Please find attached a list of community service providers and resources, should you wish to seek support after the interview.

Benefits of the research and benefits to you: The information that you provide as part of this study will enable me to understand the multiple ways that Indian women experience migration to Canada after marriage, their journeys before they migrated to Canada and the challenges they face in Canada, and opportunities to improve current policies and services. This work will be of interest to scholars, community organizers, NGOs, state/national policy makers and service-providers and expand on the current limited knowledge and situated research on migrant communities in India and Canada. Also, I hope that sharing your story with me can help you reflect on your journey and gain self-knowledge and self-esteem. I also hope to use this knowledge to put together resources to help other newly arrived marriage migrant women to Canada.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. The decision to not continue volunteering will not influence your relationship or the nature of your relationship with the researchers or with staff of York University either now or in the future.

Withdrawal from the study: You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other

group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: The documentation/recording of the interviews and field notes will be securely stored on a password-protected external hard drive with access only to the researcher.

Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process in order to ensure privacy and anonymity. The data will be deleted and destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions about the research?

Should you have any questions, please contact the researcher Harshita Yalamarty in the Department of Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies at York University, Toronto at harshita@yorku.ca, and/or supervisor Shobna Nijhawan shobna@yorku.ca. You may also contact the Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies Department at (416) 650-8143 and gpagfws@yorku.ca.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca

Additional Resources - NGOs, Helplines, and Migrant Service Providers

South Asian Women's Centre (SAWC)

800 Lansdowne Avenue, Unit 1
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4K3
Tel: (416) 537-2276
Fax (416) 537-9472
Email: info@sawc.org

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

110 Eglinton Avenue West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON M4R 1A3
Telephone: 416-322-4950
Fax: 416-322-8084
Email: generalmail@ocasi.org

South Asian Legal Council of Ontario (SALCO)

45 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 106A
Toronto, ON M2N 5W9
Tel: 416-487-6371

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

5200 Finch Ave E Unit #301A,
Scarborough, ON M4S 1Z7
Tel: [\(416\) 932-1359](tel:(416)932-1359)

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic (legal representation, multilingual interpretation, counselling)

489 College Street, Suite 503

Tel: 416-323-9149

Email: info@schliferclinic.com

Crisis lines:

Central Toronto — Gerstein Centre: 416-929-5200

Scarborough: 416-289-2434

Etobicoke, North York and East York: 416-498-0043

Peel Region: 905-278-9036

York Region: 310-COPE (2673) from 905 area only

Woodgreen Walk-in Counselling

Tuesdays & Wednesdays 4:30pm-8:30pm (Registration opens at 4:15pm and closes at 6:45pm*)

Location: 815 Danforth Avenue, Suite: 100

Tel: 416-572-3575

Yonge Street Mission Walk-in Counselling

Thursdays 4:30pm- 8:30pm (Registration opens at 4:15pm and closes at 6:45pm*)

Location: 270 Gerrard Street East

Contact: Elaine Paz, 416-929-9614 Ext. 3235

Appendix B Interview Guide for Respondents

Background/Biographic information:

- How old are you? What was your age at the time you first migrated?
- What is your highest level of education?
- How many children do you have? What are their ages?
- How many people are in your household?
- Where are you from? (village/city/town/state)
- What religion/community do you belong to?
- What is your employment status?
- What is your family income?

Pre-Migration:

- When did you get married? How did the decision to get married happen?
- What was your family's involvement in the marriage decision and wedding?
- When did you migrate? What was the process of getting a visa like? Who helped you?
- Did you have a job in India? What work did you do/want to do? What was it like to be employed? What did you want to do in Canada?
- What did you know about Canada before migrating? Did you know anyone here before you came here? Whom did you ask for information? What did they tell you?
- What did you imagine Canada to be like? What were you excited about? What were you nervous about?

Post-migration:

- What do you remember about your first day in Canada? What were your first impressions of the city?
- What was the first meal you ate? What was the first meal you cooked? Where did you go shopping for the ingredients?
- What was your process of settling down in this house? Who all live in your household?
- What has been the biggest difference in living here from living in India?
- What have you been surprised by? What are you nervous about?
- Are you looking for a job? What kind of job, how is it related to your educational qualifications?
- Are you currently working? Are you facing any challenges or barriers to finding employment suited to your qualifications? How many hours are you employed each day?
- What is your daily routine like? Where do you go shopping? Where do you like to go to relax, have fun? What's your favourite place to eat?
- What do you like about living in Toronto? What do you dislike?
- How do you and your partner contribute to the household? Who does the bulk of the child-rearing, cooking, cleaning, scheduling in your household? How many hours do you spend on

average on housework and children? How many hours does he spend on it? Do you have any other help around the house, e.g. older children, in-laws, sibling?

- What is your community network like? Do you have relatives/friends living close by? How often do you see them?
- Have you reached out/connected with/found people who are of the same community as you/from the same region as you? Speak the same language as you? How easy was it to find them?
- Do you attend community events, like religious celebrations, cultural events, or other occasions? How is it important/not important to you?
- What was the process of making friends like? Your neighbours, your coworkers, fellow parents at the school?
- What is some advice you would give to other women who are coming to Canada from India?
- How often do you go back to India? What do you do when you are there?
- Are you a permanent resident? What was the process of acquiring PR like?
- Do you have Canadian citizenship? What was the process? / Do you want to acquire Canadian citizenship? What does that mean for you?
- What changes in policies would you recommend? What things would have eased your integration in Canada as a sponsored migrant?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C Simple Interview Guide for Grooming school teachers

- How long has the bridal groom course been offered for? How long have you been teaching it? How did you come to teach this course?
- How would you describe your students? – age, background, class etc
- What would you say is their motivation in taking up the bridal grooming course? How did you develop the curriculum for bridal grooming? Did you rely on earlier courses or respond to the needs of women as they came up?
- What would you say are the major topics covered in the curriculum?
- What, in your opinion, is the requirement to be a groomed Indian bride ready to go abroad?
- What are some of the major challenges in teaching this curriculum? What are some of the questions or doubts your students bring?