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## Gated Communities in Gurgaon: Caste and Class on the Urban Frontier

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Gated Communities in Gurgaon: Caste and Class on the Urban Frontier

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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## Acknowledgements

**My Parents, My Friends, My Advisor, Radha.**

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# Introduction

## Arriving

I have been travelling to Gurgaon since I was 10 years old. First for school, till 2010, and then for friends. The journey, much like Delhi, has transformed substantially. When I was young there was little public transport between Delhi and Gurgaon, the school bus was one of the only ways to get from one to another. Now, with the metro, my journey to Laburnum, a gated community in Gurgaon and the site of fieldwork is straightforward.

Walking down my street in search of an auto<sup>1</sup> is treacherous business, or at least it feels treacherous every time I return from Bard, cars, 3 or 4 to every home, have occupied the sidewalk. Pedestrians have to walk in the unmarked space between parked car and oncoming traffic, avoiding the new hulking Delhi Transport Corporation buses and the explosion of SUV's; dodging cyclists who flirt between the unmarked space and the road proper; steering clear of stray dogs and leashed dogs; being wary of cars backing into the road from their sidewalk occupation. Space is at a premium. Describing this delicate dance perhaps makes my fear understandable, but within a few days it dissipates and the cultural logics that underpin all the movement kick in and walking down the road, is simply walking down the road.

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<sup>1</sup> Auto Rickshaws, auto for short, are 3 Wheeled Motorized Vehicle. Popularly known as a Tuk-Tuk in other parts of the world

Securing an auto has a cultural logic, that regardless of how long I've been away returns, ask for the meter, he'll<sup>2</sup> quote a price, decide whether price is right, counter if price is too high with meter plus ten rupees, add slur about meter, smile throughout, use formal address if he is older.

Negotiating with autowallahs<sup>3</sup> and autowallahs themselves are reviled by the state and their main customers; the upper middle class. Usually dismissed as cheats because they don't go by the meter, or rude because they don't by the meter, or inconsiderate because they don't take you where you want to go<sup>4</sup>. There is, of course, a political economy behind this refusal.

In the past 15 years, autos have slowly been phased out of Delhi's roads, with a cap put on the total number in a 1997 Supreme Court judgment, part of the process of making it a 'World Class City'. The cap on autos automatically made their price rise dramatically; new autos required a far larger amount of money to push through the bureaucracy. Soon most auto drivers weren't owners but renters, the going price for a 12 hour rent ranged from 350-500 rupees, plus the price of the gas; Liquefied Petroleum Gas in this case, which has risen 150 percent in the past 4 years. Rentiers had to make up the price of renting the auto and paying for gas before making any money. The government mandated and regulated meter has not kept pace with these changes.

This political economy is exacerbated by an endless demand from a labour pool that migrates to Delhi from all over India, but especially poorer state like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The ever increasing demand by migrants allows auto owners to increase the price of renting, squeezing the amount you can make as a driver smaller and smaller. Almost all autowallahs are willing to give you this information; all you need to do is ask.

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<sup>2</sup> It is invariably a man

<sup>3</sup> Autowallah is the name of the profession. Auto, the name given to the vehicle. Wallah means 'Person of'.

<sup>4</sup> "Auto-rickshaws are not a good option — they are uncomfortable and pollute environment. Also, auto-rickshaw drivers are unruly and harass passengers," said Sheila Dikshit, former Chief Minister of Delhi ( Express 2010)

The auto, which normally costs me Rs. 50, drops me off at the Hauz Khas metro station. After descending underground into the station, there is a line, over a couple of hundred people long at rush hour, only a few deep on the weekends, that leads to security. Drop bag off on scanner, walk through a beepy box, a quick up and down with a handheld metal detector and then through the metal gates. The Delhi metro, wherever you get on, has this elaborate ritual of security along with at least one sad soldier behind a ring of sandbags, automatic rifle in hand looking terrifically bored.

The journey from Delhi to Gurgaon is dominated by young professionals working for the rapidly expanding business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, all the companies that work in the sector are in Gurgaon. However the metro is one of the few places that class partially dissolves; there are students, courier boys, young professionals, veteran bureaucrats, villagers from Delhi's periphery. The right to sit is determined by age, and anonymity reigns with regard to caste.

The journey from Hauz Khas to Iffco Chowk (See Figure 1), the closest station to Laburnum, begins underground, the first two stations; Malviya Nagar and Saket, are traversed in darkness. With Qutub Minar comes light as well as the last posh residential colonies of Delhi. The metro from Qutub Minar to the border Delhi border; Chattarpur, Ghitorni, Arjangarh, is built on large mushroom pillars that occupy the dividers on the Mehrauli- Gurgaon ( MG) Road, one of the two major roads from Delhi to Gurgaon. Although the space surrounding MG Road is all zoned as agricultural, it is home to a range of furniture dealers, bathroom outfitters, car dealerships, and other services that cater to its new residents, extremely wealthy Delhi residents who have bought 'farmhouses', which are low on farming and high on house. There have been a few attempts at reigning in construction on farmland, such as the 2006 Supreme Court order that demolished two



of the poshest malls on MG road, or rather half demolished them, they lie broken, their insides exposed and corrugated, but both commercial space and residents have largely been left alone in the illegality.



Figure 1. Delhi National Capital Region Metro Map

The last stretch before Gurgaon proper looks out on the Delhi ridge, a rocky and forested continuation of the Aravali mountain ridge, whose geographic makeup of granite, sandstone and mica has been instrumental to the huge construction booms which haven't left Delhi since the influx of partition refugees in 1947. The Ridge, which continues on into Gurgaon, is now part public park, part nature reserve.

There are three stations in Gurgaon before Iffco Chowk; Guru Dronacharya, Sikanderpur and MG Road. Guru Dronacharya is flanked by a corporate park and an “English Wine and Liquor Store”. Sikanderpur connects to the Gurgaon rapid metro; a privately owned line that connects different parts of Gurgaon. The line is partly funded by Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), the biggest real estate developer in Gurgaon, and travels through many of its properties. MG Road has two malls, the first two malls in Gurgaon, on either side of it are Gurgaon’s first gated communities; Beverly Park, Essel Towers and Heritage City.

Iffco Chowk metro station will soon to be connected to the airport via an express line and Laburnum is a short rickshaw ride away. Although the ride is short, it doesn’t make it less terrifying. It involves going the wrong way on a one way street, while oncoming traffic whizzes by your human powered piece of metal. You could walk from the metro station to Laburnum, but the non-existent sidewalk, mixed with Gurgaon’s ever present dust, both from construction and from its arid ground, make it painful. The cultural logics that buoy me in Delhi tend to fall apart here.

At Laburnum’s gate another ritual of security plays out. The guards ask me for a name and an address, they call the house I name and I’m approved for entry. My clothes and language betray my class and there’s never any trouble getting in. The south gate, which is closest to the metro station, opens up onto three apartment tower blocks; these are the three south towers. There are three north towers up ahead and the whole perimeter of Laburnum has ‘villas’ or independent houses surrounding it. In addition to housing there is a coffee shop, a gym, an organic grocer, a restaurant, a hairdresser, tennis and squash courts and a soccer field.

## **Gurgaon**

Gurgaon, also known as the Millennium City, is at the beating heart of India's (most visible) policies of liberalization, it is home to the booming business process outsourcing industry, where global firms export work like telemarketing and accountancy to countries with lower wages, it is home to the New Middle Class (NMC) who work and increasingly live in its gated residential enclaves and it is a city that claims to be a model for India's future. Its creation has been narrativized into a swansong for private industry. For example, a recent New York Times article entitled 'In India, Dynamism wrestles with Dysfunction', paints the simplistic narrative that private industry is fuelling India's growth while the Government does little or nothing.

In Gurgaon and elsewhere in India, the answer is that growth usually occurs despite the government rather than because of it. India and China are often considered to be the world's rising economic powers, yet if China's growth has been led by the state, India's growth is often impeded by the state. China's authoritarian leaders have built world-class infrastructure; India's infrastructure and bureaucracy are both considered woefully outdated. (Yardley 2011)

Narratives of Gurgaon's transformation, like the above New York Times article, tell a compelling but completely misguided tale of Gurgaon's growth from unwieldy and unattractive appendage of Delhi to muscular but vulnerable 'Millennium City' of India. The narrative is wonderfully simplistic; Government bad, private good. Government, here, is seen as holding back private enterprise, mired in its old, clunky socialist ways, while individuals and their aspirations finally manage to overcome their inept and ancient administrators.

This neoliberal narrative, of energies unleashed by the power of the market and the will of individual, has no space for caste or the relationship between Gurgaon's developers and the state and central government. This narrative, which has powerful sway over the English language

media, both in India and around the world is propagated by the class that has most benefited from the economic liberalization of the early 90's, in Fernandes and Heller's (2011) terms, the 'New Middle Class' (NMC) of India.

## **Liberalization, the New Middle Class and the Importance of Caste**

As a 'child of liberalization', born in the same year (1992) that the supposed landmark reforms were passed, the economic changes in India have cast a long shadow over my life. The changes variously termed 'liberalization', 'deregulation', 'death of the license raj', opened up certain sectors of the Indian economy up to private and foreign capital, started deregulating industries and began to break government monopolies.

The dramatic political-economic changes of liberalization have been characterized by Corbridge and Harriss, in their pioneering work *Reinventing India*, as an 'elite revolt'. (Corbridge and Harriss 2000:119) They argue that this elite revolt needs to be understood as a way by which elites, both class and caste based, have restructured the economy to benefit themselves against the democratic upsurge of lower and middle castes and consequently lower classes, whose zenith is reached in the Mandal Commission reservations.

The year 1990, two years before my birth, was the year in which the Mandal Commission's<sup>5</sup> recommendations were partially instituted creating 29 % reservation in all government jobs for communities recognized as Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Mandal Commission, in proper bureaucratic form, had come up with a list of indicators on which different groups were judged; social backwardness, economic backwardness and educational

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<sup>5</sup>The Mandal Commission, which was constituted in 1980, had to identify 'backward communities' in India and give recommendations to improve their status.

backwardness. Many extremely powerful peasant castes, such as the Jats who were the original inhabitants of Gurgaon, scored very highly on the social backwardness scale which consisted of “performing manual labour, do women of other castes work outside the home and if the average age of marriage is below 17.” (Gupta 2005: 424)

The inner workings of the changes that started in 1992 and continue on to this day, is a life's work, however Corbridge and Harriss' idea of liberalization as an 'elite revolt' is worth investigating. The idea of an elite revolt revolves around a shared set of interests by 'social groups', as Corbridge and Harriss put it, and not only of a class interest. They pair this elite revolt with the rise of the right wing nationalist Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), whose main support base, at least in the early 90's, was upper caste. Their pairing of these two revolts and their apprehension to do a classical class analysis suggests that the simplicity of class interest isn't applicable to India, and the relationship between caste and class is changing.

Reviewing their work, and a whole host of others, Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller argue that the New Middle Class (NMC), which has benefitted greatly from liberalization, is constructed in opposition to the rising lower castes. This democratic upsurge is no longer limited to short lived political coalitions and the Mandal Commission; but rather strong independent caste based parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) whose primary makeup is Dalit or lower castes, and the rise of outfits like the Samajwadi Party (SP) whose primary makeup is middle caste, or rich peasant castes. This dual challenge faces upper castes as well as urban elites, as state power shifts towards the middle and lower castes, and therefore 'liberalization' and the rise of the BJP is paired for Corbridge and Harriss as well as Fernandes and Heller.

Fernandes and Heller fully embrace a class analysis and attempt to integrate it with caste based privilege. In Fernandes and Heller's model liberalization has brought about the stratification of the middle classes into three factions, the dominant faction (New Middle Class) which has "advanced professional credentials or accumulated cultural capital who occupy positions of recognized authority" (Fernandes and Heller 2011:500), who are the subject of this study, and two minor factions, the petty bourgeoisie and the subordinate middle class fraction which have "have some educational capital, but do not occupy positions of significant authority over other workers." (Fernandes and Heller: 500) This diversification, they argue, is fuelled by a "political context marked by organized political challenges from below, that is, the increased political assertiveness of other backward castes" (Fernandes and Heller 497)

The dominant fraction, what they call the New Middle Class (NMC), the subject of this study, is an important one because they occupy a potentially hegemonic position, they "coordinate the interests of the dominant classes and try to forge internal unity upon the middle class" (Fernandes and Heller:496). It is this class that give title to Fernandes and Heller's title '*Hegemonic Aspirations*'. This new middle class, for Fernandes and Heller, hold the key to a hegemonic position because they both hold out the possibility of inclusion to the subordinate section of the middle classes. This makes the study of the NMC all the more important, but how are we to understand class, if not as a relation to capital?

Fernandes and Heller's definition of class is not simply numerical or descriptive but rather class "as a class-in-practice, that is, as a class defined by its politics and the everyday practices through which it reproduces its privileged position". (Fernandes and Heller 511) Their understanding of class draws on Bourdieu's notion of habitus as "the intimate social context in

which individuals acquire certain skills, demeanors, cultural competencies, and dispositions” (Fernandes and Heller 512). Habitus is the most important structural link between caste and class in Fernandes and Heller’s argument that “When understood as an expression of habitus, caste is no longer a pre modern identity- an ascribed subjectivity destined to be swept away by modernity- but rather a mechanism through which the continuous struggle between classes to reproduce their respective bundles of capital is organized.” (Fernandes and Heller 512)

Fernandes and Heller’s adoption of Bourdieu helps us locate class in everyday practices; this focus on how class is constantly reproduced is an important part of my understanding of class. It shifts the emphasis to class discourses, such as those that surround caste, rather than on a purely economic position. Moreover it demonstrates how inter class dynamics can also have the logic of inter caste dynamics. Although their article is concerned with the broader dynamics and relationships between classes and their struggles for hegemony, this thesis is primarily concerned with how class is formed, especially in opposition to lower castes and classes. This interest is fuelled by both Fernandes and Heller’s and Corbridge and Harriss work, which presents classes defining themselves against rising lower castes.

Caste here is unmoored from its traditional source of power, religious hierarchy, and transferred into the domain of class. Locating class creation in the everyday, rather than a static economic category, helps us see how caste and class logics can be intertwined. For example caste domination in the language of ‘hygiene’ is brought to bear on interclass interactions. Shifting the domain of caste to class, from religious hierarchy to the messy plane of class dynamics, has been taking place in Indian Anthropology for some time now. This shift shows the affinity of Indian anthropology to political economy. (Appadurai 1986) As Dipankar Gupta, in

his recent Annual Review article on caste, demonstratively entitled '*Caste and Politics: Identity over System*' says "pure ritual hierarchy operates only when backed by wealth and power."

(Gupta 2005:422)

This view of caste, as deeply influenced by political economy, is in stark opposition to an influential idea of a pure hierarchy espoused by Dumont, and backed by the famous village studies of India in the 50's and 60's. Although Dumont along with a whole generation of Anthropologists made it impossible to talk about South Asia without caste, there has been a rich vein of critique since his theories inception (Cohen 1987, Dirks 2001). However the turn to highlighting class as the main form of division and domination has overcorrected. A recent anthropological study in South Asia by Mark Liechty, '*Suitably Modern: The Making of a Modern Middle Class in Nepal*', demonstrates this.

Liechty's description of class mirrors Fernandes and Heller's ideas, class as "constantly renegotiated cultural space—a space of ideas, values, goods, practices, and embodied behaviors—in which the terms of inclusion and exclusion are endlessly tested, negotiated, and affirmed. From this point of view, it is the process, not the product that constitutes class."

(Liechty 2003:8). I will draw on this conception of class because it will help me demonstrate how class interests are made. While class as practice helps us highlight everyday forms of domination, class as process helps us understand the mechanisms and institutions, such as the Resident Welfare Associations, where class is processed.

However Liechty wants to distance himself from the idea of caste as being key to middle class identity, instead, for him, the market takes centre stage as the node from which the middle



class makes itself modern, through discourses of fairness, achievement and hard work. Here Liechty is falling into the trap of middle class discourses, caste cannot be talked about amongst the middle classes. The legal elimination of caste based discrimination has been one of the successes of the post-colonial state but it is has made it impossible for the middle classes to acknowledge their caste privilege. There are still a few legitimate avenues for caste within the middle classes such as caste endogamy, but space can only exist and be talked about *within* their class.

Although Liechty suggests that the middle class of Nepal are constructing themselves in opposition to caste by aligning themselves with the market, he doesn't discuss how the idea of caste shapes how they think about lower classes or how caste prejudices and fears still inflicts their discourse. The opposition to caste, in Liechtys telling, is central to a construction of a middle class identity, but caste-based or caste-infused discourse still haunt the middle class. It is not the opposition to caste, but the *suppression* of caste based discourse, its constant elision, that is central to middle class identity formation.

## **Chapter Outlines**

The first chapter will demonstrate the importance of caste to Gurgaon both in the past and the present and is divided into two sections. The first sections demonstrates the elisions of institutions which led to Gurgaon's existence, namely; caste, kinship and patronage. By looking at the autobiography of KP Singh, head of the biggest real estate developer in Gurgaon, Delhi Land and Finance ( DLF), I explore how his caste identity, that of a Jat, was key to acquiring the land he later developed. The second part of the chapter analyzes how caste is characterized as an identity that exists outside the walls of the gated community and how it is deployed to dismiss

rising lower castes (Jats). This process is set against the backdrop of a crumbling caste hierarchy driven by the political-economic changes discussed above.

The second chapter deals with how Gurgaon is imagined from the vantage point of the residents of Laburnum, a gated community in Gurgaon, and the real estate developers that make such gated communities. It argues that Gurgaon needs to be seen as an extension of a Delhi, a city that is increasingly integrated into global circuits of capital. The rapid influx of capital into Delhi turns Gurgaon into a real estate frontier, devoid of history, and subject to increasing speculation. This idea of a frontier at the edge of a Global City highlights how the demand for land by the pressures of capital leads to the creation of unstable environments. This instability is then answered by processes of fortification, as a response to rapid economic changes and inequality. The association between gated communities and the promotion of private capital or during a process of democratization and often both is a hallmark of the literature on gated communities in the global south which include Brazil (Caldeira 2000), China (Pow 2009), Turkey (Bayacan 2012) and South Africa (Lemanski 2006). In all these cases there is a heightening of preexisting structures of domination, race in the case of Brazil and South Africa, rural migrants in the case of China and Turkey. These two characteristics are equally found in India, and inside Laburnum; where class and caste based domination is accentuated by the form of the gated community. The frontier is a way to conceptualize how these processes of domination are justified, understood and made possible by the colonizers of Gurgaon.

The third chapter focuses on the relationship between Laburnums residents and the domestic workers they employ. This relationship is mediated by the Resident Welfare Association (RWA), a group that handles the maintenance and administration of Laburnum. There is a widespread consensus that RWA's are becoming increasingly powerful arbiters of

space in Indian urban centres. (Srivastava 2014, Chatterjee 2003, Zerah 2007, Lama-Rewal 2007) Sanjaya Srivastava in his work on Gated Communities, follows Caldeira, and suggests that the current form of gated communities have “extended rather than invented the logic of separation” (Srivastava 2014:114). Srivastava traces the evolution of gating back to powerful Resident Welfare Associations gating off colonies, and consequently, public thoroughfares in Delhi, citing security reasons. His argument does not take into consideration the specificities of control that gated communities exercise over space as opposed to gating colonies. Gated communities control who enters and exits their space, people can be banned from the community and employers can regulate how their public space is used. Both these new forms of power make gated communities, especially for the domestic workers in them, a radically different space from earlier colonies.

Srivastava's interest lies in how RWA's are becoming sites for the creation class interests and this is another theme I will explore in this chapter. I will focus on how Laburnums RWA is a key site of class interest articulation, or how these organizations take the often contradictory views found within a class and turn them into a unified interest. The examples discussed in chapter 3 look at how public discussions through the RWA give us insight into the different discourses of this new middle class identity; civility, markets and security. The process of negotiation and articulation highlight how different discourses are deployed and how they help form a class identity.

These discussions, resolutions and articulations lend credence to Pow's argument; Gated communities should be seen as “*key sites of and for middle-class spatial formation*, where class cultural practices and place-making strategies are enacted and where nascent class identities are being cultivated, staged and contested.” (Pow 2009:8) Viewing gated communities as a space

where class is cultivated, the RWA's than run them as a place where it is processed, or a concentrated area of 'class in practice', animates this project.

## *Chapter 1*

# **Caste Aside**

In Gurgaon, we see complicated processes of caste articulation and interaction - the first section of this chapter focuses on the process of articulation, and the second on inter-caste, inter-class interactions.

KP Singh and DLF are the centerpieces of the neoliberal narratives I outlined in the Introduction. DLF is the largest real estate developer in Gurgaon and considered one of the most important post-liberalizations firms in India. KP Singh, normally the protagonist in these stories, is portrayed as having a sage-like ability to predict the future of India, acquiring land when Gurgaon was a rural backwater, ignored by the government of Haryana; building a vision of the future even when India's economy was embroiled in the sludge of state socialism and planned economies. The last paragraph of the New York Times article quoted earlier neatly sums up Mr. Singh's hubris, "if Gurgaon had not happened, the rest of India's development would not have happened, either," contended Mr. Singh, the chairman of DLF. "Gurgaon became a pacesetter" (Yardley 2011).

What better place to turn then but K.P Singh's autobiography. Singh, of the Jat caste, married into the family that owned DLF in the early 50's. Chaudhery Ravendra Singh, whose daughter KP married, had set up DLF in 1946, a year before partition. The company had grown exponentially in the years following partition by building a number of neighborhoods or 'colonies' for refugees who came from the newly created state of Pakistan. Many of the residents of these colonies would become part of the first wave of migration to the newly created settlement of Gurgaon.

After being pushed out of Delhi by the nationalization of real estate development in the capital in the early 1960's, DLF, with Singh at its head, turned to a town southeast of Delhi, Faridabad. Located next to the Yamuna on a fertile stretch of land, Faridabad was seen as one of a number of peripheral cities laid out in the 1962 Delhi master plan that could be connected to the Capital, supplying Delhi with industrial goods and labour and easing the immense pressure on Delhi's space.

Singh was unsuccessful in Faridabad and turned his attention to the neighboring city of Gurgaon. Gurgaon, which also lay southeast of the capital, wasn't slated for development in the 1962 master plan since it was cut off from the Yamuna and didn't have a perennial source of water. It consisted of largely medium and small Jat farmers who grew subsistence crops. It was here that Singh had luck acquiring land, and as Delhi continued to grow exponentially the demand for new space continued.

Singh's acquisition of land followed a dual strategy: it involved influencing and convincing locals to sell as well as manipulating the state government to change laws and zoning requirements. All these developments happened through the late 1970's and 80's. There has been little work done on how Singh managed to convince farmers to sell, except for a few newspaper articles and magazine pieces. Shubhra Gurunani, is one of the few, if not the only, academic to have studied this process as part of her work on urban planning, she writes of land acquisitions that "[e]ven though such mediations and negotiations are invisible and it is hard to track their working, they are not ad hoc. They are embedded and systematized through cultural logic and sedimented practices of power that exceed normative ideas of planning" (Gurunani 2011:16). Two questions arise from her comment: are these negotiations, even if they happened in the past, invisible? And what are the 'cultural logics and sedimented practices of power' in play?

KP Singh, in his autobiography, ‘Whatever the Odds’, traces his story, in true American Dream style, from the son of a middle class peasant farmer to one of the richest people in the world.<sup>6</sup> I will investigate three different examples that he gives and demonstrate how the logic of caste and the dynamics caught up in it, especially relations of patronage and kinship, were integral to his success. Moreover these examples will demonstrate how Singh while using the logic of kinship, patronage and caste to acquire land was systematically undermining legal systems of collective ownership. The first example comes at the beginning of the chapter, ‘Acquiring Land’ as Singh is doing research into land acquisition.

I discovered almost two dozen such laws in Haryana when I started to acquire land to build in Gurgaon. Of them, the most bizarre was the Punjab Pre-emption Act of 1913. It essentially gave the right to any family member to lay claim on property that was duly sold by the person who legally owned the property. So, if anyone bought a piece of land from a farmer who legally owned the land, any distant relative of the seller could surface years later to challenge it. I was taken aback by the irrationality of this provision- how on earth would I ever be able to acquire thousands of acres from hundreds of farmers with such a law hovering like a threat over my whole project.

I met bureaucrats and politicians to explain the logic of why Haryana could not afford to continue to have this law on its statute books. Even though everyone I spoke to accepted my contention in principle, they were hesitant to do anything about changing the law because no one wanted to be seen doing anything that would help private developers in politically sensitive Haryana. But I kept on trying to convince them that such a law would seriously retard the development of the state. It took time but after scores of meetings, things finally started moving and in due course the Punjab Pre-emption Act of 1913 was repealed ( Singh 2011:98).

The Punjab Pre-emption Act was an uneasy compromise in how to deal with collectively owned land. Land was often claimed by a large extended network of family members; this was not ownership in the formal legal sense, but rather a stake in the land. Brothers-in-law may till the land when there was trouble in their home province, uncles may lay claim to a percentage of the produce and so on. By investing legal power in one owner while acknowledging the stakes of

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<sup>6</sup> At his height KP Singh was the one of the world’s richest men with a net worth of 35 billion USD.

others through the ability to challenge sale, the government was trying to reconcile the capitalist demand for clear property rights with the social system of kinship that reigned supreme. The movement towards creating and regularizing a formal system of property deeds and creating a land market had already been in progress for about 100 years in India. The British, and the various provinces indirectly administered by colonial rule, had varying success in setting up these legal institutions. Such attempts often faced peasant revolts, tax strikes and direct attacks on government notary offices. This system of 'legibility', as James C Scott in his work *Seeing Like a State* puts it, is the process of "arranging the population in ways that simplified the classic state function of taxation, conscription and prevention of rebellion" ( Scott 1998:2). One of Scott's examples is creating clear ownership patterns so that taxes could be collected, which is precisely what the British were doing. This process of legibility has inspired a huge body of literature (Stokes 1980, Dirks 2006, Guha 1999, Bose 1993) and is a thread that will run through this chapter.

KP Singh's insistence that the act was completely irrational is not borne out by an argument, simply the necessity that this system of land ownership made large land acquisition projects extremely complicated. (how on earth would I ever be able to acquire thousands of acres from hundreds of farmers with such a law hovering like a threat over my whole project.'). This logic is carried over into how he decides to influence the government. His argument is that the act 'would seriously retard the development of the state'. He never argues that this system of ownership doesn't represent a lived reality. This inability to attack the logic of kinship is important because it is precisely the logic of kinship and patronage that KP Singh used to gain trust while acquiring land. Two examples can help us understand this dynamic. The first comes



from his description of how he dealt with a Jat villager who was unwilling to sell his land, the second about how he dealt with the money that villagers gave him.

Before visiting him [a Jat villager averse to selling], I had identified one of his main concerns- he had a problem getting one of his children into school. I chose to focus on that rather than talk about the land. I assured him that it would be done and made sure it happened. It is only after helping him out that I talked to him about selling his land. He agreed. In retrospect, I can see that the genuine friendships we cultivated went a long way in helping us assemble the land we wanted in Gurgaon. Getting his child admission to a good school was not a big thing for me, but for the father, it was akin to securing the future of his child. (Singh 98)

They [Jat villagers who had sold their land to DLF] often needed money for marriages and other sundry needs. We allowed them to withdraw it in such emergencies and this helped DLF build tremendous credibility and acquire more land. When you make an effort to hold hands with your partners, they always back you. Mohar Singh, for instance, had around ten acres of barren land in Gurgaon. He was happy to get RS 5 million for it. All his life, he had not even seen RS 10,000 in cash. I told him that he would gain if he deposited the entire amount back with DLF to make it grow. He readily agreed. Touched by his trusting attitude, I asked him if we could help in some way. Mohar Singh said he would be glad if DLF employed his son as a watchman. Here was the ultimate irony: someone who had five million rupees was asking me to get his son a menial job. I desperately wanted that money to develop land and all it required was one small favour from me. I got his son employed by DLF. A job, however ordinary, made them feel useful and secure. We were dealing with villagers with such modest dreams (Singh 92).

This kind of transaction is different from the impersonal transactions often described at the heart of capitalism. These are not two rational actors that are looking to maximize their benefits. They suggest a reading that is closer to systems of patronage and kinship.

Jan Breman who works on changing agrarian relations in Gujarat describes patronage as a “stratified relations between persons or groups that expect mutual assistance from each other. Patrons provide material or political resources while clients provide labour power and loyalty. The bonds are personal and indeterminate with respect to extension and duration” (Breman 1993:18). The form of patronage that Breman describes has to do with agricultural labourers

securing their futures by tying themselves to their master. Breman's work focuses on the transformation from relations of patronage to monetized transactions and how this transformation has made life for agricultural labourers much harder as they now have to compete for work in a supply saturated labour market. We see in the above examples how Singh is guaranteeing the future stability of these farmers, by securing an education for one's son and providing a job in his company for the other's son. The system is modified since instead of labour, Jat clients are providing land, but still guaranteeing loyalty.

The type of patronage described by Jan Breman is inter- caste, the form of patronage at work in Gurgaon is intra-caste and a characteristic of the Jat caste, to which both Singh and the farmers belong. Although Jats don't fall easily into the rubric of caste (something which will be discussed in detail later) they have always relied on systems of patronage (Datta 1999:13). Jats use the *bhaichara* system which involved dividing land according to lineages, with each family owning a portion of the cultivable land. This system was radically different from other systems in India, where land ownership was normally concentrated in a large landholder, and farmers were tenants. Although there wasn't a massive concentration of land in one person's hands, such as in the cases described by Breman, there was a hierarchy of holdings, and smaller landowners often worked for larger landowners (Pradhan 1966:34). Their labour was rewarded with political power in the khap councils<sup>7</sup> of the village.

Although in Gurgaon there is a transaction between a landowner and capitalist, rather than between small and large landholders, the dynamics of power are similar. Singh offers a new place in a rapidly changing rural order to Jat families by helping them gain access to social capital in the form of schools and what are considered non-menial jobs. KP Singh offers Jat

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<sup>7</sup> These are councils that decide disputes, arbitrate etc

peasants “political resources” of the kind described by Breman; Singh helps his “client” Jats in establishing a space for themselves in a rapidly changing social order.

The scale of DLF’s project needed large amounts of capital that were unavailable to private enterprises at the time. Leveraging kinship to acquire capital was an ingenious method by which DLF managed to acquire land. It protected them from farmers who changed their minds about land acquisition. The ‘credibility’ that DLF acquires in this example is through allowing villagers to withdraw their money for important ritual events like marriages. This resembles structures of patronage throughout India. Jan Breman in his discussion of earlier modes of patronage stresses that patrons were traditionally required to look after ritual expenses like marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies and giving gifts at births (Breman 1974). Although Singh isn’t extending his benevolence, as in traditional modes of patronage, he is offering himself as an alternative to banks and banking services. He presents himself as someone who understands the ‘sundry’ activities for which families need access to large sums of money. He is also allowing Jat villagers to tie themselves to him, through a bond of capital, which he will manage, mirroring how clients found safety and surety in a powerful patron.

The tactic of reinvesting the farmer’s money into DLF gives Singh their loyalty. This was key because it meant that those farmers loyal to Singh could be used to pressure their fellow farmers into selling. Singh required large swaths of continuous land, and the holding patterns in Gurgaon were relatively small.<sup>8</sup> This expression of patronage politics, which is made possible by caste solidarity, gives us an insight into how older forms of loyalty were changing. If Breman was charting the change from agrarian patronage relations to capitalist relations, we see here that the relationships are rather more complicated. The power structures of patronage are kept in

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<sup>8</sup> The land he buys in the above two examples are 1 and 4 acres respectively.

place, however the ‘political resources’ are no longer sway in khap councils but a foothold in an expanding urban environments,

The kinship corporation coupled with repealing the Punjab Pre Emption act shows us how structures of power within caste and kinship are changing. KP Singh can call on caste solidarity and establish modes of patronage politics to acquire land and raise capital while also demolishing the legal basis for a form of collective ownership. This reorganization of corporation through caste lines is especially interesting because it shows us how caste and kinship solidarities and modes of patronage were the basis for the ‘Millennium City’.

## Caste in Contemporary Gurgaon

Although the development of Gurgaon was based on caste solidarity and modes of caste patronage, in present day Gurgaon, especially for those in its numerous Gated Communities, ideas of caste play a radically different role in quotidian life. The Jats, who are middle caste and previously dominated Gurgaon, are seen in a very different light. Now that there are upper caste communities in Gurgaon, Jats are routinely demonized. The word “Jat”, in everyday usage in Gurgaon and especially in Laburnum, has become a slur. For example, a resident recalled a rainy day on which his car, going through a pothole had sprayed another car with dirty water. The other car then followed him, got him to stop and its passengers threatened to beat him if he didn’t apologize for what he had done. This resident called the men who threatened him ‘Jat types’. This kind of story was common in Laburnum. As Srivastava highlights, the “default caste identity in (gated) complexes... (is) vehemently upper caste” (Srivastava 2014:187). One of the

upper caste Laburnum residents I spoke to, Radhika, her last name betraying a caste that occupies the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, had this to say.

Gurgaon, it's very unsafe, very unsafe with this particular clan of Haryana, which is not a very safe clan, and their whole thinking is very different, women think *very* different, and that's very scary, the youth is not what youth should be, I don't know what's happening to their children. I've had these experiences myself, at Arjun Marg, 8 o'clock, which is quite fine, it's a good hour, at the [traffic] signal, and there was a group of youngsters, 18-20 [years old] max, all drunk. [They] started banging on my window and I was trembling in my car. No one did anything, and I'm at a signal at 8 o'clock, they're drunk, they're screaming, and I went cold and no one stood up to do anything. I took the U-turn and I went straight into Hamilton [another gated community], and I called my husband and told him to come to Hamilton...

(Later in our conversation while talking about her children, she reflected on her previous actions and interactions with Jats)

You can't argue with this lot, I used to be very angry driving and I used to retaliate, and then I said "what am I doing? These guys, they roam around in cars carrying knives and guns, they'll just hurt you and won't care." You learn to control your temper.

Later in this conversation Radhika clarifies that the 'clan' she is talking about are the Jats.

This is an interesting suggestion, because in other conversations Jats were referred to as a caste, while according to the Government of India they fall into the category of 'Other Backward Classes'. This confusion of terms - clan, caste, class- and the lineage of 'backwardness' or in Radhika's terms, '[Jat] women [who] think *very* differently', are all interrelated and born out of a history that demonstrates the complexity of relationships between politics, sociality and community identity in Gurgaon and in India.

Although the Jats, as a classificatory group, have existed in the historical record since the 6<sup>th</sup> century, for our part it is worth picking up their story in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as they had settled as cultivators across the north Indian states of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. By this time the word 'Jat' referred to peasants and small landholders in the area

and included a number of religions; Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. (Mayaram 2004:32) In the words of Noncia Datta, who has written about identity formation amongst the Jats, they were “a socially inclusive group with a remarkable capacity to incorporate pioneer peasant castes, miscellaneous military adventurers and groups living on the fringe of settled agriculture” (Datta 1999:11). However all those included were shared in the system of *bhaichara*, outlined earlier, in which each family was given its own piece of land depending on how it was integrated into the lineage. This meant that Jats were not tenant cultivators or sharecroppers; they were landowners.

The areas south of Delhi, in what is Gurgaon and Faridabad, were inhabited by Hindu Jats who were, “men characterized by early eighteenth century Mughal records as plunderers and bandits preying on the imperial lines of communications, [who] had by the end of the century spawned a range of petty states linked by marriage alliance and religious practice” (Bayly 1998:22). The term ‘Jat’ was used to describe the people of these states, stressing their practices of marrying within their community and shared religious symbols. However the Jats were not easily classified and integrated into the caste system.<sup>9</sup> Because the Mughals were so afraid of the Jats threatening trade routes south of Delhi they gradually gained legitimacy and the right to collect taxation in exchange for supplying the Mughals with soldiers.

This relationship with the Mughal power is what saved Jats from making it into the British rule books as a ‘criminal tribe’. However, because of their frequent revolts and raiding practices, the logic of criminal tribes, which were codified through law, was often extended to Jats. A discussion of the criminal tribes system in India is a thesis unto itself but for our discussion it is worth noting a few points. According to British Law there were certain social

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<sup>9</sup> “Marathas, Sikhs, Jats, and even Rajput’s represented social groups with old names but new cohesion and status. These were not age-old Indian ‘castes’.” ( Metcalf 2006:24)

groups in India, often nomads, or moving peoples, who were considered criminal by nature. Criminality, in this line of thought, was biologically determined; it was also often explained by social conditions and organization; such as vagrancy. This label was used politically; applied to those peoples who were thought of as a threat to the British, such as the Meo, who lacked any of these characteristics (Mayaram 2004) Codifying them into law and justifying that through biological determinism gave birth to the idea that certain groups were criminal by nature. These groups often didn't have an umbrella classification either. Put differently, they didn't identify themselves as 'Meo's' or 'Thugees' but soon the identity started to solidify as they were persecuted into being. This system of classification was another one of legibility, whereby the state, in trying to vilify peoples that were a danger to it, grouped them together and labelled them a threat. Together, these three ideas become criminality ascribed to a group through law leads to group formation.

This connection between criminality and entire social groups is echoed in Radhika's description that 'you can't argue with this lot', one cannot reason with them, their criminality is unchangeable. The way she describes them, 'I don't know what happening to these children' and 'the women think very differently,' suggests that Jats are socialized into this way of thought. The description is also radically different from circulating narratives of crime, normally focused around specific incidents: it attributes problems to whole social groups. Although this pattern of thought has its lineage in the British classification of criminality, the political- economic background of present day India can serve as a way to understand why Jats have this label of criminality attached to them. As I discussed in the introduction, the rise of lower castes is the

larger backdrop to liberalization and middle class formation. In this case it is important to outline the increasing political economic significance of the Jats and the peasant proprietor class.

Charan Singh, a Jat, who was Prime Minister for just over a year between 1979-1980, is perhaps an exemplar of the political power of Jat's in the past 40 years. Charan Singh organized under the rubric of AJGAR<sup>10</sup>, a coalition of landowning peasant castes, whose identity was oppositional to urban politicians. He is one of the first to articulate the rural-urban, or India-Bharat divide, "the social philosophy of a member of the non-agricultural, urban classes is entirely different from that of a person belonging to the agricultural rural classes" (quoted in Jafferlot 2001: 280). Jat's along with Ahirs have come to dominate the political structures of Rajasthan, Haryana and parts of Punjab. There are many competing theories to explain how these peasant classes have grown so politically powerful but the most compelling, and in the case of Gurgaon, the most pertinent are the size of land holdings in post-independence India and the politics of 'reservation (Gupta 2005, Jaffrelot 2003 Corbridge and Harriss 2010)'. Reservations are similar to affirmative action, wherein a percentage of jobs in government institutions and admissions in institutes of higher education are reserved for member of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) reservations were provisioned by the Constitution of India to rectify historical wrongs committed against 'traditionally' marginalized groups. SC's, placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchies, were consistently discriminated against while also being denied a whole host of opportunities. ST's, who were often integrated into the lowest rungs of the caste order, were seen as lagging far behind the rest of country because of their 'lifestyle', which included slash and burn agriculture, moving villages and animism. In 1990 the government took the advice of the Mandal Commission and instituted

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<sup>10</sup> AJGAR stands for Ahir, Jats and Gujjars



another category of reservation for 29% of all government jobs and educational institutions: other Backward Classes (OBC), which included Jats.

This legal system of classification has caused a significant breakdown in caste hierarchies and changed how castes view themselves. A recent demonstration in Gurgaon illustrates how this system of entitlements is radically changing the way castes understand themselves in relation to the traditional hierarchy. In 2007, Gujjars, another caste based group, held a series of protests around Delhi and Gurgaon, shutting down parts of both cities, demanding that they be given SC status instead of OBC status. SC's are those castes traditionally at the bottom of the caste hierarchy while the OBC's are higher in this hierarchy, with low social, economic and educational indicators. The Gujjar's wanted this because the OBC reservations in the surrounding region had been dominated by Jats. In this way, the Gujjars wanted to move down the legal-bureaucratic hierarchy to move up in the world.

Demanding downward mobility so as to launch upon a path of upward mobility one, as Sanjay Srivastava puts it (Srivastava 2014), illustrates a powerful change in how the caste system should be understood within India. The colonial census<sup>11</sup> in India, as many scholars have argued, solidified how castes were ranked and how they viewed themselves (Cohen 1998, Dirks 2011). During that time there was a great uproar about castes being ranked lower than their perceived status (Cohen 1998). The census unleashed a whole system of jockeying, the quoting of obscure scripture, attempts to bribe officials etc. to make sure a caste was ensured its rightful place, usually higher than it was actually ranked. Whether because of the census or the system of reservations, it is clear that the rigidly hierarchical caste system is hardly an indigenous category that is being modified by the state programs. The system of reservations, the census and previous

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<sup>11</sup> The Census was commissioned in order to collect the right amount of taxes, another tool of legibility.

classifications like criminal tribes all help maintain the cohesion of caste as an important identity.

Caste and its rigidity as the defining quality of 'traditional' India is perhaps one of the most powerful contributions of anthropology (Dumont 1980, Srinivas 1962). Consequently modernity is defined as not drawing on these antiquated identities. This idea of modernity makes it impossible for proper middle class citizens to call on them. Middle class nationalists have since colonial time, criticized caste as an identity, describing caste as a category in the census as designed "to keep alive, if not to exacerbate, the numerous divisions already present in Indian society" (Srinivas 1962:104) With the consequent outlawing of caste based discrimination in the Indian constitution, the idea of caste as a dividing force in Indian society could not be spoken by the middle class.

### Criminality or Reassembling the Social Order

The political and economic ascendancy of peasant-based caste groups is extremely threatening to previous structures of classification. Radhika's fear of Jats needs to be seen as a response to larger structural changes taking place in arenas of power. Criminality, through this lens, is a political response to a rapidly changing order. Caldeira in her ethnography of fortification in Brazil highlights how attributing criminality to outsiders and the lower classes needs to be understood within the tensions of political democratization as well as economic liberalization. (Caldeira 2000: 105-207) Hence she spends almost half her book demonstrating how the threat of a rising lower class politically and a huge influx of migrants to towns from a failing agricultural economy sets the stage for elite fortification. In this instance, the breakdown

of the structural and symbolic order of political and economic power leads to fear. Order and consequently safety is found through ascribing criminality.

Radhika's personal description of crime is hardly criminal. Having drunk youth bang on her car is obviously deeply unsettling but the impact of that incident is only realized when we think of how she sees Jats: armed, and beyond reason. Radhika's description of Jats as a 'clan' is instructive. She does not use the word "caste", yet feels the need to group them in a way that suggests familial relations and shared social upbringing. The symbolic order that came with caste is broken, and replaced with clans, yet, throughout our conversation, she never used 'clan' to describe the people within a gated community or of a similar class. Clan then is another symbolic way to order the rapidly changing world around one. As Caldeira points out "[b]eyond maintaining a system of distinctions, narratives of crime create stereotypes and prejudices, and they separate and reinforce inequalities" (Caldeira 2000: 39). Over here we see how a system of distinction, the use of the word clan, is part of a narrative to create a stereotype and reassert a threatened hierarchy. I am not suggesting that Radhika is trying to remold the Jats in the shadow of caste, attributing them incommensurable substances that cannot be mixed with others. Instead I suggest that in Radhika's words we see that the political prominence of Jats that threatens upper castes needs to be articulated in the idiom of 'clan' since caste is off limits to modern middle class citizens.

Moreover, as I have demonstrated, caste itself is a constructed identity that is deeply influenced by the state, whether colonial in the form of the census, or post-colonial in the form of reservations; it is not an inherent timeless identity. By situating caste in this light, I want to point to how seeing 'clans' and attributing certain traits to them is precisely how groups get formed.

Radhika does not have the power of the state apparatus to reinforce these caste identities but her classification and distinction of them shows us how the middle class distance from an identity system, caste, paradoxically strengthens it.

We can see that Radhika understands gated communities as spaces that don't have clans. In her narration, they are a safe place where she finds refuge from the 'clans' outside. This attribution of safety and distinction to the space of the gated community and a construction of the space outside as belonging to the past is a key component of how Gurgaon is imagined by the residents of Laburnum. The world outside of the gated community is seen as dangerous and foreign, and this theme is picked up by the next chapter where the notion of Gurgaon as frontier is explored.

## **Conclusion**

Caste and patronage were integral to the creation of Gurgaon; KP Singh's success drew on established Jat traditions of patronage and kinship to establish himself, while modifying them to the new dictates of urbanization. However the Jats, who were once dominant in Gurgaon, have been increasingly vilified as New Middle Class residents enter into unstable geographies. Casting them as criminals is one of the reactions that Gurgaon's new settlers have had to its original inhabitants. This reaction is well established, with the colonial state attributing criminality to undesirable populations who threatened the 'social order'. However as the idiom of caste cannot be used, euphemisms are made, and the caste based Jat identity, as happened in colonial times, is rearticulated.

## Chapter 2

# The Frontier

“The frontier is not a natural or indigenous category. It is travelling theory a foreign form requiring translation” (Tsing 2005:31).

In this chapter, I explore the way Gurgaon is imagined as a frontier by its new inhabitants, particularly real estate developers. As a frontier, Gurgaon differs from the classic resource frontier because its resource is not timber, birds' nests or precious metals (Tsing 2005). Instead, its resource is land. Frontiers of the past were extractive; Latin America and the Caribbean being the prime example where the voracious desire for goods and capital itself, in the form of gold and silver, fuelled the rapid exploitation of the continent's people and environments. Frontiers of the future exist at the edge of rapidly expanding urban spaces. Delhi's brisk integration into circuits of global capital and the shifts in the economy, as I outlined in the introduction, have led to a predatory sprawl which has in turned transformed Gurgaon into a frontier of the Indian capital city.

All resource frontiers have been fuelled by capitalist expansion, but equally so by the erasure of the past. The speculators who are destroying Tsing's frontier of Kalimantan, and ravaged the new world, had no interest in their indigenous population (Tsing 2005).<sup>12</sup> Their exploitation depends on demonizing local populations, or erasing them from accounts. Colonists of the new world used both these strategies. The Frontier is, equally, the space of imagination, where a new society can be envisioned. New World colonizers, for all their destructive capabilities, often saw great hope in the frontiers they exploited. This is one of the contradictions

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, the power of capital is so strong, that many among the indigenous population are now looking to fell trees and cash in on the boom.

I will explore in this chapter and in my conclusion - how destruction and possibility are intertwined. In the previous chapter I suggested that the Jats, many of whom were the original inhabitants of Gurgaon, are often demonized and dismissed by Gurgaon's new inhabitants. In this chapter I argue that Gurgaon's new residents, most of who are from the New Middle Class, oppress its original inhabitants, either through erasure or dismissal. This process further facilitates a rapidly expanding real estate market, created by a collusion of state and private interests, dispossessing Gurgaon's original inhabitants. In Gurgaon's case, land is the resource of the frontier, its new settlers the colonizers and capital its fuel.

### Silencing Surroundings

“By frontier I don't mean a place, or even a process, but an imaginative project capable of molding both places and processes” (Tsing 2005: 32)

There is no better illustration of the way Gurgaon is imagined as a frontier than K.P. Singh's autobiography. Singh, whose discussion of buying land I examined in Chapter 1, has been the biggest real estate developer in Gurgaon; in fact Gurgaon was known as DLF, the name of his companies, in its early years. He opens his chapter 'Acquiring Land' with a vivid description of the vast and 'austerely beautiful landscape' that he imagined as an empty horizon that he could 'fill in' with traffic, people, parks, and houses.

Somehow, I could just could not stop myself from driving down to the outskirts of Delhi and staring for long hours at the wide open spaces all around with nothing but miles and miles of rocky but austerely beautiful landscape. In my mind's eye, I could see modern, tall buildings made of glass and steel. I could visualize wide, tree-lined avenues with smooth-moving traffic and people walking on them and children playing in lush green parks (Singh 2011: 95).

KP Singh's bizarre opening shouldn't be dismissed as the madness of a megalomaniacal businessman who had Shakira perform on his 80th Birthday. Singh follows this fantastical description of "wide open space" and "rocky but austere beautiful landscape", with a detailed description of how he bought farmland. Singh is clearly aware that the land is populated and irrigated; it has already been domesticated. The erasure of Gurgaon's previous inhabitants and their work is part of the substantial imaginative labor that legitimates the city of Gurgaon. Frontiers are imaginative processes; they require the constant distortion of fact, of observed reality, to the possibility of a future. Singh's narrative requires constant recourse to the realm of the imagination. In his book Gurgaon is brought into being through the singular force of his will. Although he acknowledges the work of his colleagues, Singh's story of Gurgaon relies on his own vision. When reflecting on the practical difficulties of convincing bureaucrats to change laws he returns to his dream, writing

When I recall those days today, I myself wonder what gave me the strength to persevere. Perhaps it was the power of my own vision and faith in the possibility that sometimes, fairy tales do come true. As it turned out, this actually happened in the rise of a gigantic dream city. (Singh 2011: 96)

Singh's descriptions are meant to mask the problems of Gurgaon's present as well it's past. The transformations of the city are seen as mythic, 'fairy tales do come true', and even the language of the present is saturated with the unreal, 'dream city'. His stories mythic aspects are necessary to make his narrative of his personal dream fulfilled. This is how he ends the chapter on acquiring land:

Undoubtedly, it took many long years of hard work, many moral-sapping disappointments and traumatic setbacks and great deal of faith and self-belief before the fantasy could become a reality (Singh 2011: 105).

Singh's fantasy is just that, a fantasy. But this kind of fantasy is integral to erasing the violence of the frontier, to mask its workings. Seeing the inhabitants of Gurgaon, or rather, taking them into account destabilizes the fiction of Gurgaon's timelessness. Put differently, recognizing previous inhabitants forces Gurgaon's new residents to acknowledge the history of their city. Acknowledging this history is impossible, for to do so would be to acknowledge the widespread dispossession of its original inhabitants.

### **The Frontier from Inside the Walls**

Maintaining the fiction of emptiness is easier to do in books than in everyday life. Residents of Laburnum, the gated community which lies in the center of Gurgaon, have to encounter the frontier in which their homes are located. Often when talking to residents of Laburnum about the history of Gurgaon I came upon seemingly contradictory responses. For example, Gautam, who has lived in Gurgaon for 14 years, described the view his father had from one of the very first gated communities in Gurgaon, Garden Estate.

Gurgaon was always a quieter place, no "hecticness". Two malls. It was just barren land. There was a point where he (his father) could look out of his house and see Saket, through the barren land. There was so much greenery, basically Gurgaon was a forest. If you go back, it was land which has a lot of trees on it.

What is particularly interesting about Gautam's description is that his father could see Saket from his house in Garden Estate (one of the first gated communities in Gurgaon). Saket lies at the tip of south Delhi roughly 13.5 kilometers from Garden Estate, across a huge tract of uneven land and parts of the Delhi ridge. It is physically impossible for Gautam's father to have seen Saket. The space between Garden Estate and Saket is populated by a vast variety of people, commercial activity and vegetation, yet the adjective Gautam uses is "barren". However, Saket is



the last recognized, fancy residential colony on the way from Gurgaon to Delhi. In picking Saket, Gautam's father was drawing a direct symbolic link between two recognizable and familiar spaces: two "civilized" spaces.

Gautam's insistence on Gurgaon being a forest is similarly hard to imagine. Vast stretches of Gurgaon are and have been agricultural, which is the exact opposite of a forest; the land is tamed by human labor, not wild. The spaces that aren't cultivated are not green; Gurgaon's lack of water is one of the prime reasons it hadn't been developed till the 1980s. Farmers have to rely on bore wells instead of surface water, which makes vegetation scarce. There is also the interesting contradiction in his description that Gurgaon is both barren and forest; spaces that yearns for both cultivation and taming.<sup>13</sup>

Gautam's symbolic connection between two legible spaces, Saket and Garden Estate, in Delhi and Gurgaon respectively, demonstrates the importance of the connection between the two cities. This connection between Delhi and Gurgaon, although used symbolically here, is deeply material. In fact the processes of Delhi developing into a 'Global City' are integral to understanding its frontier, Gurgaon.

Delhi's rapid expansion is fuelled by massive demands on space from global circuits of capital that see India as a place of cheap, English speaking labor. Imagining Gurgaon as a frontier allows for the expansion of capital smoothly, where barren land can be converted into spaces of capital production. As Anna Tsing writes, frontiers are "built from historical models of European conquest, frontiers create wildness so that some- and not others - may reap its rewards" (Tsing 2005:32). These demands of space look to carve up the urban periphery and turn it into

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<sup>13</sup> There is some irony that Gautam's father was living in 'Garden Estate' at the time, the garden being the prototypical taming of the natural.

‘civilized’ space. This process of legibility, as I have discussed in the first chapter, was an integral part of colonial rule. Land tenure was formalized, public lands were abolished and the rapid turnover of land was facilitated (Guha 1999; Scott 1998). All other forms of ownership were seen as irrational and ancient, not in keeping with the strictures of modernity.

Delhi’s expansion into Gurgaon rests on similar processes, in which the city’s orientation turns from a resolutely nationalist imaginary towards an internationalist one; from capital city to ‘Global City’. Agriculturalists on its periphery are seen as remnants of India’s archaic past<sup>14</sup>, part of a frontier where the ‘World Class City’ can be built.

### The Global City, the Globalizing City: Centre to Periphery

The 2021 Master Plan for Delhi titled “Vision-2021” is unequivocal about its goal to “make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city” (DDA, 2007: Introduction). Sheila Dikshit, former chief minister of Delhi between 1988 and 2013, used the idea of a ‘World Class City’ as a recurring slogan throughout her election campaigns and in the build up to the Commonwealth Games in 2010. The Times of India, India’s largest English language newspaper, carried a campaign whose motto was “From Walled City to World City”, a reference to the old capital, Shahjahanabad, whose perimeter was once walled. The idea of making Delhi a world-class city has huge sway over its bureaucrats (which are numerous), its elected officials and large sections of its elites.

Delhi’s vision to make itself a ‘World Class City’ is part of a much larger trend that is occurring throughout the globe. Theorized by Saskia Sassen (2001) as the “Global City”, whose main orientation is towards circulating networks of capital rather than the nation-state and its

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<sup>14</sup> Much like Gurgaon’s inhabitants are attributed the ‘archaic’ caste as I have demonstrated in Chapter One.

citizens, Sassen situates the 'Global City' as a product of the rearrangement of international economies from manufacturing-based to high-end service based. This movement allows for a degree of de-territorialization. Firms are no longer bound to an industrial plant, and they can stretch out their operations across a number of cities. There is a hierarchy of these 'global cities' where command centers, or cities that house head offices, are located on top, while others range below depending on the importance of their relationship to the center.

There have been wide ranging critiques of the 'Global City' model, with scholars (Cohen 1996; Shaktin 1998) arguing the global city is a model for the global north, promoting a teleological model of city growth. These critiques are partially misguided, according to Sassen and other global city theorists, they offer descriptive models rather than prescriptive models. But they do point to an important difference between 'Global Cities' of the North and the 'Globalizing cities' of the South. The cities of the global south have only partially been integrated into circuits of global capital, and their growth and transformation is guided by a number of extremely powerful local factors. Globalization is an important context from which to analyze them, but hardly the only or most important one.

The orientation of Delhi's elite, in this context, is important because it has situated itself as wanting to be 'world class', and we see this desire manifest in the development of Gurgaon. This desire, promoted by the government and fueled by global capital along with global events, like the commonwealth games has led to the spatial purification of the city through the destruction of slums (Baviskar 2006), the construction of mega transport projects like the metro (Siemiatycki 2006), the rapid rise in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) (Dupont 2011) and other large spatial transformations. Importantly, Sassen and other Global City theorists have pointed

out that cities are now in competition to attract the financial resources of companies, making cheap land, SEZ's and rapid transport systems integral to attracting capital, which in turn is integral to the cities survival.

Although a number of these rapid transformations have happened within highly urbanized areas, such as slum demolitions, they have come up against entrenched interests, characteristic of old modes of government. Political society, as Partha Chatterjee describes it, is the terrain on which populations and government agencies negotiate the transfer of welfare schemes in exchange for votes and a degree of social calm. Political society is in opposition to civil society, where the state interacts with citizens "through the mutual recognition of legally enforceable rights" (Chatterjee 2013:13). The key to political society is the organization of interests. For instance, if slum dwellers are organized and can present their case as a unified whole<sup>15</sup>, they will get concessions, even though they maybe squatting in illegal spaces. This political society is precisely what makes projects of spatial purification and transformation difficult, in contrast to civil society, whose presence rests on laws, enables purification and transformation.

The periphery of Delhi, especially neighboring towns and villages, have become desirable sites for urban transformations as their residents have fewer structural ties to power and are less well organized. This is especially the case in Gurgaon, which did not have municipal elections or a mayor till 2008, over 20 years after its colonization had begun. Although Jats represent an extremely important power base in Haryana's electoral politics and are very well organized, this is changing in Gurgaon as civil society, mostly made up of middle class

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<sup>15</sup> "To play the game of strategic political negotiations with the authorities, population groups too must organize themselves. Governmental policy will always seek to deal with them as discrete elements of the heterogeneous social. It is the task of political organization to mould the empirical discreteness of a population group into the moral solidarity of a community" (Chatterjee 2003: 179).

organizations like RWA's, has begun to assert itself.<sup>16</sup> This volatile combination of shifting powers enables the frontier to expand. As Debroah Thomas writes, "frontiers do not "open" and "close" but, instead, acts like tides, waxing and waning according to the pull of complex negotiations among governments, capital and populations" (Thomas 2011:43).

## The Frontier and Laburnum

Laburnum, as a gated community, is shielded from the frontier. However, Laburnum residents' narratives of arrival are deeply mixed up with the circulation of capital and real estate speculation. Here is Ravi's description, one among many, of how he was able to afford a house in Laburnum.

We bought a small apartment in DLF Gurgaon (in 1995), when DLF phase 1 was being floated, and these 2 bedroom duplexes were being floated, Purnima's (Ravi's wife) company was doing the advertising. An employee of mine said to me, (He then recounts the conversation)

Employee: Why don't you invest in one of these houses?

Ravi: Are you kidding, me it's 7 Lakhs (Rs. 7,00,000). What are you talking about! I won't be able to pay even the first installment.

Employee: Take an HDFC (Housing Development Finance Corporation) loan for 6 Lakh and then you can pay the down payment and get another loan for the last lakh.

Ravi: Where will I get that money?(and remember I'm the Chief Financial Officer of a company)

Employee: Boss, you have that much money in your PF (Provident Fund)

Ravi: Really?

I went and checked and he (the accountant) said, "Yeah, you can borrow." So I actually signed up for a 7 lakh apartment which I could pay over the next 3 - 4 years. I borrowed from my PF and that I could do such a thing did not occur to me as the CFO of the business because my mentality was shaped by 'these things are done later in life', when you have a greater need and can afford a little more, you can think about it later. Just a few years I was buying something that was 10 times [the price] (Ravi is referring to his Laburnum apartment) without even thinking about it.

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<sup>16</sup> The Aravali Biodiversity Park (discussed in the conclusion) is a prime example of civil society flexing its muscles.

In the early and mid 90's DLF started selling plots of land and built houses in three 'phases' in Gurgaon. These phases were large loosely planned territories with the vast majority of plots remaining undeveloped. They were however, sizeable and comparable in scale to the plots found in the posh colonies of South Delhi, at a fraction of the price. Phase 1,2 and 3, as they were called and are still called, were the first inroads into Gurgaon, and in the late 90's Gurgaon, which is now called the Millennium City, was simply called DLF.

As I mentioned earlier the majority of residents that came from Delhi to Gurgaon moved from resettlement colonies in Delhi. Those who had small plots, which were the staple of many resettlement colonies, had an opportunity a much greater swath of space in Gurgaon. The globalization of Delhi, which was driving up real estate prices in the city, made it possible for Ravi and Purnima to enter into the real estate market and eventually cash in to buy something worth '10 times' their earlier purchase without even thinking about it.

The Provident Fund, which Ravi used as collateral for his loan, is a government program wherein employees are forced to pay a percentage of their salary towards their pension. The scheme, instituted in 1952, is part of Nehruvian model of growth that encouraged high savings rates. Since the Provident Fund and auxiliary forced savings schemes were managed by the government they were often leveraged to create capital, capital which was then invested in large capital intensive primary and secondary industries.<sup>17</sup> Ravi, when leveraging his Provident fund, was following in the well-established footsteps of the India's previously socialist state, even if the idea came as a shock to him. In this way, Nehruvian 'middle path' growth served as a basis by which the financialization, so often considered the exclusive purview of neoliberalism, became possible. The distinction between the two worlds is important, here capital was in private

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<sup>17</sup> Nehru famously pronounced Dams and Power Plants as the new temples of India.

hands while the older paradigm of growth kept it squarely in public hands. However thinking about high savings rate that were maintained in the 1980's, as an important prerequisite for the liberalization complicates the narrative I have discussed earlier.

Ravi, who first worked for an Indian state run firm, made the switch to American Express, with its Gurgaon offices, in the early 2000's. The process of liberalization has focused on expanding the tertiary sector. The growth of the service sector was fuelled by foreign firms who took to outsourcing a number of their business practices from telemarketing and accountancy, to consulting and human resources; India's cheap wages and English proficiency made it a prime location for these business.

The influx of these foreign firms brought with them a range of foreign business and brands. The residents of these early 'phases' soon found their jobs were moving en masse to Gurgaon; where cheap land, tax subsidies and proximity to Delhi made it an extremely attractive location. As Delhi and consequently Gurgaon were integrated into the circuits of the global economy, they manifested one of Sassen's statements about global cities true, that "high-profit specialized service firms have the effect of raising the degree of spatial and socio-economic inequality evident in these cities" (Sassen 2000: 21).

Citizens turning into real estate speculators are a real problem for those inside the gated community as well: out of the 250 houses available in Laburnum, roughly 40 lie empty. They have been bought and are kept as investments, steadily accruing value even though they aren't lived in<sup>18</sup>. The frontier, to echo Deborah Thomas, waxes and wanes, and makes its presence known in a seemingly securitized and sanitized space. Although the frontier threatens the gated community by seeping through its wall and running the risk of turning it into a holding ground

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<sup>18</sup> "There were at least 68 vacant flats, which were bought purely as investments" ( Donthi, 2001)

for capital, rapid transformations are taking place beyond the walls of Laburnum. The collusion of state and capital create spaces of speculation and capitalist proliferation “particularly at capitalist frontiers where accumulation is not so much primitive, that is archaic, as savage” (Tsing 2009:32)

## **Expanding the Periphery**

The Haryana state government, which administers Gurgaon, was one of the first governments to embrace private industry and to promote privately funded growth.

The structure of governance in Gurgaon was radically different to other towns on Delhi’s periphery. Faridabad, another city south west of Delhi, was planned and developed by a local municipal corporation. Gurgaon’s development, by contrast, was handled by the Chief Minister. This meant that every land grant went through his office, rather than a whole web of bureaucrats. The directness of governance and the desire of the Haryana state government to promote privately funded growth are essential to understanding the speed of urbanization in Gurgaon and the development of gated communities like Laburnum.

Shubhra Gurunani, in her article 'Flexible Planning', details how specific acts<sup>19</sup> and policies were implemented to rezone agricultural land so that it could be residentially developed. Gurunani’s argument centres around rethinking planning, not as a rationalizing, modernist enterprise but rather to view it as a tool “which responds to political pressure, shifting alliances, insurgent interventions, and material and ecological restrictions... in the context of liberalization, it has presented a strategy of accumulation of capital through which cities can become financially competitive” (Gurunani 2011) Planning, in her description, becomes a space of collusion

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<sup>19</sup> Such as the Punjab Scheduled Road and Controlled Areas Act,



between private interests, politicians and planners to change the landscape. Even when bureaucrats are involved they are subsumed into the process of politics and capital.

In Chapter One, I outlined how systems of patronage and caste allowed for the primary acquisition of land in Gurgaon in the 80's and early 90's. Gurgaon's continual and rapid growth in the 90s and 2000s has opened up a vast field of land acquisition and speculation. This process of acquisition and speculation rests on two main systems; firstly getting access to privileged information, such as zoning patterns, new infrastructure projects and new legislation; secondly, on cultivating a steady stream of demand. Both these systems work together, getting access to information allows for developers to buy land cheaply, and a steady stream of buyers allows them to sell for a high price. Buyers purchase apartments and houses before they are constructed, and developers use the money to create new developments.

The first system, of privileged information, is best described by Praveen Donthi in an investigative report about Gurgaon's real estate market:

On a typical day, a steady stream of brokers and friends from the nearby village of Rampura, where Yadav lives, passes through the Dev Property office, sharing the shade and a hookah. The farmers living here once grew wheat and millet or herded cattle, but began selling whatever plots they held in 2004, when a rumour spread that the Haryana government might acquire their land at cheap prices in order to build an airport. (None of them knew from where the rumour originated, and nothing came of it.) (Donthi 2011).

If developers know that a piece of land is going to be rezoned from agricultural to residential or commercial, they immediately try to acquire it. The land, before it has been rezoned, is worth far less, for example in the story mentioned above, Donthi says that farmers sold their land for a few lakh rupees an acre. The apartments that were built on their land started to be sold at 18lakh per apartment and are now circulating on the real estate market for upwards of 65lakhs, or 4 times their original price. This informal system of rumors is supplemented by a

formal system of rezoning where agricultural land is routinely declared *banjar*, or unproductive, which allows it to be opened up for commercial and residential development. (Gurunani 2013: 15) Michael Goldman describing another World City expanding, says “As real estate brokers have explained to me, for each and every new regulatory land law passed over the past few years in order to free up ‘dead capital’ buried within unproductive public and poor-people’s landscapes, a flurry of money-making opportunities have been created for government actors.” (Goldman 2011:571) This transformation from spaces of ‘dead capital’ to places that are alive is a process of legibility where the state is intertwined with the market; a marker of neoliberalism. Deborah Thomas, in her book *Exceptional Violence* documents the attraction between neoliberalism and frontiers, “Neoliberalism *creates* the new frontier space through a remapping of administrative purview of the state, particular populations fall through the cracks” (Thomas 2011:44). Thomas highlights how the state’s repositioning allows for frontier space, in the case of Gurgaon it is the collusion between private and state interests that allows agriculturists not to ‘fall through the cracks’, but to be purposefully excluded from the model of development.

The rapid increase in price of land is part of what sustains Gurgaon’s growth and it is a legion of small brokers who sell flats to prospective residents. These brokers, in addition to directly selling houses, buy and sell in an unregulated market, to push up the prices of their products. As Donthi says, in his article *The Road to Gurgaon*:

As Gurgaon expands outwards, aided by a government that’s been more than willing to help builders acquire land, it needs a steady infusion of new blood—prospective buyers—to fuel construction. Yadav’s [A real estate broker] job is to find them. “It’s a *nashaa* [high],” he said. “Once you get into this, it’s tough to get out. (Donthi 2011)

The real estate brokers’ description of ‘*nashaa*’ is in sync with the addiction to profit that frontiers engineer, an addiction that leads to spiraling prices of real estate. Real estate in Gurgaon

, like all over India, is growing at an unprecedented rate, with estimates of growth at over 30% per year since the mid-2000s and is estimated to grow by three and a half times by 2010 (from US \$12 billion in 2005 to US \$60 billion in 2010) (Shrivastava 2008). As Anna Tsing says of frontiers, “Their emptiness is expansive, spreading across the land, they draw the quick, erratic temporality of rumor, speculation, and cycles of boom and bust.” (Tsing 2005:32) Gurgaon’s real estate market is rife with rumor, speculation and no doubt, soon -to-be many busts. Its erratic temporality is built out of the massive demands of capital, and the unequal relationships between builders, brokers and agriculturalists.

We can see here that although fuelled by global capital, the growth of a city is heavily determined by several local factors, including the structure of governance, the ability of a company to play off caste relations, and the melding of private and state interests. All these three movements suggest that as powerful as forces of global capital are, they are shaped by the particularities of history (caste affiliations), and accidents (the structure of governance in Gurgaon), and local systems of expansion (Brokers).

## **Conclusion**

Gurgaon is imagined as a frontier by settlers who fuel real estate speculation. But it is a frontier that’s created by the collusion between state and capital on the edge of a globalizing city. The frontier depends on the erasure of Gurgaon’s original inhabitants and the constant stream of new demand that foreign capital and the new middle class create. It is not a stable entity; it opens and closes, and will keep expanding outward as the demands of capital increase.

Although the frontier is fuelled by the Gated community and the erasure of its original inhabitants, the lifestyle of those within Laburnum is dependent on the people beyond the walls, or at least, the classes normally kept at bay by the walls. In the next chapter, I will examine how

middle classness is formed through interactions with lower classes, how class interest is formed and how the taboo flavors of caste still exist within the walls of the gated community

### *Chapter 3*

## **Domestic Servitude, Class Interest and Caste**

Going from house to house in the gated community of Laburnum I realized the range of different relationships residents had with the people who worked in their homes. Ravi, Purnima's husband, affectionately called Josephine<sup>20</sup>, who has worked for them for 15 years, his 'real mother' as she served us biscuits; Josephine made sure Ravi kept his sugar and caffeine levels low. This call was met with a wide smile and swift disappearance on Josephine's part. Mr and Mrs Boothalingam, who were both of Tamil origin, only had part time help who cleaned the house and didn't serve food. Uma, who lives with her extended family, had uncountable domestic workers: a sweeper, a cook, a nanny, a clothes washer, and their names were often and easily confused by her.

The examples above suggest that Laburnum, as a gated community, encompasses a wide variety of domestic servitude relationships; servant-master, domestic helper-employer, employee-employer. The realm of domestic servitude is the most intimate connection between classes. There is no other field in which the middle classes have such extended, often intimate, relations with members of different classes.

This multitude of relations is further complicated with the work and space of domestic servitude. As Raka Ray and Seemyin Qayum in the work '*Cultures of Servitude*' (2009) observe, domestic workers "confuse and complicate the conceptual divide between family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the home and the world precisely because the hierarchical arrangements and emotional registers of home and family must coexist with those of the workplace and contract in a capitalist mode" (Ray & Qayum 2009: 3).

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<sup>20</sup> Although I am using pseudonyms, I purposely use the name Josephine, since Josephine is Christian.

## Sketching Relations of Domestic Servitude

Relationships between domestic workers and their employers vary across a spectrum of employer- employee on the one side, and patron-client on the other; understanding this continuum elucidates the power dynamics we see at work in Laburnum. Patron-client relationships can be understood as “stratified relations between persons or groups that expect mutual assistance from each other. Patrons provide material or political resources while clients provide labour power and loyalty. The bonds are personal and indeterminate with respect to extension and duration” (Breman 1993:18). In the case of domestic servitude, this means the exchange of housing, food, taking care of ritual expense, health care expenses and often money in exchange for labour and loyalty.

The feudal estate or the bungalow was prototypical space of this kind of relation. Feudal houses employed retainers of servants, being closer to the head of the household, or even simply closer to the house carried power. Older retainers had the ear of the master, or members of the household that made decisions, they were also in charge of the other servants, being held responsible for mishaps and rewarded for success. Ray and Qayum call this type of relation that of the essential servant (2009). Their power was primarily based on keeping good relations with the employer, and was often translated into the material benefit, such as better housing, better food and access to privileged parts of house. This type of relationship however kept clients tied to their household, since their benefits came without the liquidity and storability of money and savings.

Employee-Employer relations are normally defined by a degree of equality, the exchange of cash for labor and stricter relations governing what kind of benefits are extended to employees.

In the realm of domestic servitude this kind of relation is often found in middle class families as opposed to extremely wealthy feudal landlords. Families who have apartments often have less space and less money so the reciprocity of housing, food, healthcare etc. for loyalty is harder to establish. Moreover the space of a flat, if it has live-in domestic workers, is far more fraught with the partitioning of space made much harder.

These two types of relations are, of course, caricatures of reality. Hybrids are more often found than one or the other, especially within households. As Froystad points out, feudal landlords who have increasingly moved to the cities have smaller plots of land<sup>21</sup>, families often employ one or two full time workers who they engage in patron-client relations with and a whole host of part-time workers, who they engage in employee-employer relations with. This neat division is also often complicated by the fact that part-time employees can often have certain benefits extended to them such as payment for ritual services, marriages, healthcare etc. while some full-time employees may not get housing. These confusions are best resolved with through long periods of participant-observation, interviews and thick description. I did not have enough time in my fieldwork to closely observe these relationships longitudinally, having weeks instead of months and years. Instead of focusing on the deep histories and complexities of individual relationships, I will focus on how the new space of gated communities cause the tensions in the domestic servitude relationship to bubble to the surface. This new space, the space within the walls of the gated community, is a space that does not clearly fit into earlier divisions. It is not wholly public, walls and guards still delimit who can get in, and not wholly private, it is not the space of the home.

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<sup>21</sup> This shift from feudal landlord to city dwellings can be seen as a larger systematic move of upper caste households losing power in rural areas and trying to regain it in urban areas. ( See Chapter 1)

The Resident Welfare Association (RWA) manages this space, inside the walls and outside the houses. But it is also built to manage who is allowed to enter and exit the community.

Discussions of new RWA policy, and proposals for new policy, are a fertile site in which to investigate New Middle Class (NMC) spatial politics, NMC discourse and how middle class organizations, such as Resident Welfare Associations, lead to the articulation of class interests.

## The Architecture of Laburnum and the Meanings of Space

The architecture of a gated community, with its regulated public space, complicates divisions between inside and outside. *Andaar* (inside) and *Bahar* (outside), as many scholars<sup>22</sup> have argued, has been a central organizing principle of the home throughout North and some parts of South India. This division comes in part from the caste-based division of pollution and purity, but in equal measure from classed notions of privacy.<sup>23</sup> The division is not a dichotomy but shifts continually depending on the observer. *Andaar* and *Bahar* do not map easily onto the public-private divide that is often discussed and theorized in Western contexts. Hancock (1998) and Dickey (2000), for example, argue that homes should be perceived through concentric circles of interiority and exteriority. Homes in Laburnum, for example, are designed so that as soon you enter you find the guest room on the right, the kitchen on the left; if you walk a few steps further you find a dining room, normally attached to a living room and then bedrooms at the end of a hallway. The domestic worker housing is through the kitchen, across a short balcony and on the right, furthest away from any part of the house. Almost all the apartments I visited in

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<sup>22</sup> (Waldorp 2000, Dickey 2000, Hancock 1999)

<sup>23</sup> “Another principle simultaneously in operation in contemporary larger homes is the placement of the family's most private areas, especially bedrooms, at the furthest reaches of the house. (Note that both of these principles require that access be increasingly restricted to people most immediately connected with the family.) The most elaborately constructed households today are built on the often overlapping continua of purity and privacy” (Dickey 2000:).



Laburnum had the bedroom as soon as you entered as a guest room. We can clearly see how the kitchen and guest bedroom, dining and living room, and bedrooms of the family map an increasing move towards personal space. Inside space is regulated and controlled; as you move outside that power is slowly diminished.

This view of inside and outside space often extends to space outside the physical home. But the Hancock and Dickey version of the concentric circles of interiority and exteriority break down. Here *Andaar* and *Bahar* became relational categories, they are context-specific. In the case of gated communities in Delhi, Waldorp argues, that the 'public' space, outside the homes, inside the gates, is also considered inside. Here, as she shows in her ethnographic examples, people of lower classes can still be called on to do work, even if they are not your employees, or clients as understood in the patron-client relationship. However, as Waldorp demonstrates, there is no guarantee that the lower classes will listen when approached with these demands (Waldorp 2000:102). Control, or at least subservience of lower classes, even outside your employment, is assumed even if they do not respond favorably. The back alleys in these colonies are not considered inside space, they are given over to the lower classes, often used as a place to dump garbage. However the gardens inside these colonies are definitely inside space, demarcated by regular usage, through activities like morning walks and performances for NMC.

This space differs from the ungated colonies in Delhi which, although they have a similar class profile, do not have the control over public spaces like parks. The parks of residential neighborhoods, Greater Kailash Part 2, the colony I live in, are filled with domestic workers, especially during siesta hours in the afternoon, often napping, chatting or smoking beedis. Although by the evening these parks are overrun by the middle class ritual of evening walks, children playing and the gossiping and discussions of retirees, they return to the domestic

workers at night. Here it becomes clear that inside space is relational, it waxes and wanes, but becomes increasingly more demarcated as securitization, such as the installation of gates, takes place. The ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ of space should be understood through the lens of a power relation in which the expansion of inside space is the expansion of controlled space. If within the home, inside and outside space was about pollution and privacy, outside the home it is about pollution and control.

In my time at Laburnum the most prominent workers in this space were guards who seemed to be on endless patrol. The only domestic workers that were out and about were nannies who were accompanying children. Gated colonies in Delhi have a multitude of workers in the streets and resting in shaded spot, and ungated colonies often have domestic workers in public space. After posing this as a lighthearted question to one of the residents, I was pointed to a discussion over the Laburnum listserv. The listserv is a group email in which the RWA announces its policy; it is a mechanism through which residents can raise issues, discuss policy and express grievances.

## Purified Space and the Meaning of Elite

The following interaction took place between Anand and Megha over the listserv in early 2011.

Dear Laburnumites,

It is agonizing to see a beautiful place like Laburnum withering away its charm and elite class status by the decay seeping in our social interaction. One can easily fathom the rottenness in our sensitivity levels when we encounter sadistic recurrence of throwing sanitary napkins over the co-resident's door steps! Another common scenario that one cannot appreciate is the ever increasing crowd of our maids enjoying their evenings occupying the green patches by perching & relaxing on the benches meant for our residents.

We alone are responsible for letting it happen. Security staff, RWA or the management entrusted with a plethora of responsibilities be spared for other necessary issues and tasks. We need to educate the "offenders" by our own wise ways. This alone can transform and alter our falling standards! After all we are the one who have to tame our wild & uncivilized servants and housekeepers.

Please don't allow the rottenness to flourish in our dear LABURNUM .

Anand

To this Megha responded,

I take huge offence at being clubbed in an "elite class status" where "wild and uncivilized servants" need to be "tamed".

All the helpers are here because we residents have brought them in.

Which century are we living in, again?

All education, spiritualism and prosperity are supposed to take us on a higher plane of thinking and action, and these privileges make us "elite".

Disgusted by this mail.

Megha

Anand's language follows tropes that I have discussed earlier, for example, he refers to the domestic workers as 'offenders', in the language of security and law. Yet at that time, and to this day, there is no law or RWA directive that prohibits domestic workers from using Laburnum's public space. His fear is explicit: he doesn't wish for the 'charm' and 'elite class' of Laburnum to be degraded through 'the decay of social interaction.' It is evident that Anand has a clear vision of what he sees as proper social interactions: ones in which there is an unambiguous spatial division between domestic workers and employers. In Anand's email, workers relaxing in public areas are viewed as a breakdown of a social order as well as, and more importantly, the loss of 'elite class status'. Laburnum's eliteness, for Anand, depends on maintaining a singular class status across its 'public' space. For him the spaces of Laburnum are considered to have 'insiderness', where the actions of workers can be controlled.

This desire is different from viewing lower classes or castes as a physical threat, endangering the residents' safety, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Anand makes explicit the connection between purified space and a class status. Workers can only exist in the community if they are tied to their work, the domestic workers can be in employers' bedrooms and living rooms in the context of work, whether serving or cleaning. Similarly within the context of the public space of the gated community, domestic workers are tolerated as long as they are working. However if they are 'perching and relaxing on benches' they are suddenly considered matter out of place.

Spatial purification is an important part of new middle class practice. For example, Leela Fernandes in her work on public spaces and street vendors in Bombay talks of the 'politics of forgetting' which she describes as "a political-discursive process in which specific marginalized social groups are rendered invisible and forgotten within the dominant national culture" (Fernandes 2004: 2415). This process is part of a politics of "spatial purification which centres on middle class claims over public space" (Fernandes 2004: 2416). Fernandes' work is founded on claims to 'public space', which is different from the internal space of the gated community, but demonstrates how widespread the power of spatial purification is. The process in Laburnum requires a similar cleansing: here working class establishments are not removed as in Fernandes' example, but rather domestic workers cannot claim this public space because it is considered an extension of inside space. Inside space is gradually considered normative space. Marginalized social groups, in this instance, are rendered invisible by being tied to their work. This is not a middle class claim to cleansing 'public space' but rather to asserting strict control

over a new kind of semi-public space. This demonstrates eliteness because lower classes only exist to serve their employers, and their access to these spaces is governed by their relationship to the employer.

Anand's language of taming the 'wild and uncivilized servant' is the most explicit reference to the discourses of colonialism I encountered when talking to and trying to understand domestic servitude within Laburnum. Anand is putting himself in the colonizer's role here ("we have to tame them!"), and this doesn't go unnoticed. Megha's response that 'education, spiritualism and prosperity' takes you to a 'higher plane of thinking and action' takes aim at the colonial subtext of Anand's language ("which century are we living in again?"). Elitism, for her, is a move away from the language of colonialism. She is renegotiating what 'elitism' means, rather than challenging the specifics of workers relaxing in space. Megha's view of domestic workers is clearly radically different for Anand's; she uses the word 'helpers', not 'servants', which is the most widely used term, suggesting that she doesn't view the relationship as master and servant or patron and client, but closer to employer and employee. This interaction is another example of the widely divergent views held in Laburnum about domestic workers.

There was no resolution to this argument. The RWA never passed an order banning domestic workers from sitting on benches. Nonetheless in the weeks I was in Laburnum I never saw a domestic worker relaxing in the public space of the gated community. Norms, especially when they come from of an employer class, do not always have to be formalized in the way of a rule, or order, they are equally effective through small confrontations and invisible lines. In this way institutions such as RWA's do not always have to play a formal role in the articulation of a

class interest and identity. Informal mechanisms, especially when they play out within relations of domination, create norms that become the basis for identities.

However RWA's often resolve issues, especially when they involve termination of employment. One of the recent conversations surrounded the fear of workers acquiring duplicate ID cards. All residents need to obtain ID cards for all domestic workers they employ, both full time and part time, and the cards are used to gain entry into Laburnum. Part time workers, although they work for multiple households, have only one ID card. The following conversation takes place over email, between Mala, who is calling attention to the danger of acquiring more than one ID card, the RWA, the residence welfare corporation that handles the internal policy of Laburnum, and Megha who intervenes to argue for domestic workers.

### Part time workers and Class

Mala writes,

A duplicate ID card was issued to a part-time domestic cleaning staff, without establishing the facts on the ID application form as to exactly who the person was working for. Thereafter, I have requested that RWA office should go through their own records to verify that more such duplicate IDs have not been issued by mistake. This is a serious security issue, besides being ethically incorrect, as the Office/ Guards need to be aware at all times of the whereabouts of the part-time staff that enters the complex.

In response to Mala's email, the RWA wrote,

Practice so far has been for insisting that full time/live-in help (including Drivers) to obtain an ID card based on Application submitted by a resident. For part time help the same principle has been employed although ARWA is aware such part timers often work at more than one home. To date there has not been a problem but, based on changed security perceptions, ARWA will undertake to do the following:

- 1) Commencing 19th November Security staff at both North & South Gates will ascertain from every part time help entering the premises where all they work and timings. We expect over a period of 7 days to have a complete list which will be logged on to the list maintained by ARWA office.
- 2) List will be updated every 6 months in the same way but also circulated to all residents to update/confirm.
- 3) A General Circular will be sent out shortly reminding all residents that it is their responsibility to take back and deposit with ARWA Office any ID Cards obtained for staff (full or part time) whose services have been terminated.

Mala objected to the proposal of the RWA, writing that,

The procedure detailed by RWA in their mail does not address a serious dichotomy concerning domestic help which needs to be resolved. We have very appropriate stringent rules of behavior for full time domestic help. For the same misdemeanors the services of full time/live-in help can be terminated for these reasons and the employer can bar the entry of the employee so that this rude and cheating behavior is not inflicted on others. This rule has been in force for several years and this practice is highly recommended.

However with regard to part-time help no such rule applies. If a part-time employee is employed in several residences his or her entry into Laburnum cannot be barred if their services are terminated by one of the employers. As of today I have been informed that no action can be taken against part-time domestic staff for rudeness, insolence and cheating. Unless an FIR has been lodged or that all the part timer's employers agree to the dismissal, the staff cannot be barred from entering Laburnum.

This implies that an aggrieved employer has to grin and bear the fact that an ex-employee whose services were terminated is with impunity entering Laburnum and in all likelihood taking on other jobs without any reference to earlier dismissals. RWA should understand that having two different set of rules for domestic staff makes no sense

A proposal for consideration:

All part-time staff to have one ID card regardless of the number of places where they work. This should be strictly adhered to by the RWA office staff. If any employer chooses to dismiss the employee, all employment should be terminated and the person barred from entry. Such a rule will discipline the staff who will know that offending one employer means total termination of employment at Laburnum. This will also prevent incidents such as the recent one where an employee obtained a second ID card by what the Estate Manager herself termed as "fraud and cheating" and even when discovered, continues to be employed at Laburnum.

Megha in turn took issue with this conversation, responding,

Sorry to play the devil's advocate here but this does not seem very logical...one person should not have to grin and bear it but multiple others being inconvenienced is okay...?

I am in no way saying let us condone bad behaviour by staff but it is a fact that people have different levels of tolerance, paying capacity and expectation from the help. If a part-timer has committed a serious offence and is a threat to the employer/others, the employer/rwa can inform others who will, no doubt, not want to endanger their safety and well-being and agree readily to terminate.

While on the subject, I am also of the (perhaps extreme) opinion that though we cannot allow random moves by staff within the complex, any working person, irrespective of their socio-economic status, moves for a more lucrative offer, better employers (as perceived by them) etc. It's called 'moving up' in life. It is not an insult to us. Let us put our egos aside and not hinder the progress of those less fortunate.

This exchange is slippery it moves from a fear of duplicate ID's to how the community should respond if a domestic worker is fired by an employer. Mala writes that a part-time domestic worker managed to get an ID without ascertaining who they worked for. This needs to be addressed primarily for security reasons because the guards must know "the whereabouts of part-time staff that enter the complex." The office replies that in light of 'changed security perceptions' they will audit ID cards in addition to reminding residents that it is their responsibility to confiscate ID cards in case they fire a domestic worker. Till here the discussion has been straightforward, but now it takes an interesting turn, a turn that suggests what Mala would actually like, or what she is truly angry about. Mala argues that part time workers, just like full time workers, should be barred from entering Laburnum if they are dismissed for 'rudeness, insolence and cheating'. Mala is taking the example of procuring a duplicate ID card as indicative of a type of behavior, and then arguing that anything subsumed under that type of behavior should be grounds for being barred from Laburnum in its entirety. Megha takes issue with this sentiment, arguing that inconveniencing one member of the community does not provide sufficient grounds for being barred from Laburnum, nor moving from one place of employment to another. This



conversation led to a new policy in Laburnum, wherein domestic workers had to obtain a no-objection certificate for the employer if they wished to move to another job within the colony.

The articulation of Mala and Megha's different positions on the subject indicate two radically different views of the world of domestic servitude. Their interaction and language can help us understand how competing views are expressed, what underlies them, and how their resolution is an articulation of class interest. Mala's first complaint is in the language of security ("serious security issues", "need to be aware of the whereabouts of part time staff") and her second moves to the language of respect and civility ("rudeness", "insolence", "cheating", "impunity"). In contrast, Megha justifies domestic workers shifting jobs in the terms of employer-employee relations and the aspirational, market-driven language of "moving up" in the world through "lucrative offers".

To understand the threat domestic workers pose first we need to understand the work they do. The majority of domestic workers in Laburnum, and throughout India if not the world, engage in housework which includes cleaning the house, raising children and cooking. This is boundary-making activity, between dirty and clean, between order and disorder. These activities help make "making meaningful patterns of activities, people and materials" (Davidoff 1995:75). The ability to distance one from these boundary-making activities is a sign of privilege (Ray 2009:18). In the Indian case this is another form of middle class status privilege: being removed from what are and were considered low caste jobs, such as sweeping and cleaning toilets.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Froystad, in his article, *Master-Servant Relations and the Domestic Reproduction of caste in Northern India*, gives a number of ethnographic examples that demonstrate the middle class distaste for these boundary making activities.

Second, the maintenance of an orderly and clean home is an imperative part of class status. The home in India is a symbolically charged space. Chatterjee in his work on Indian nationalism outlines how the space of the home as “represent[ing] one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity ... and woman is its representation” (Chatterjee 1993:121). Here the ideas of *Aandar* and *Bahar* are instructive: inside space is ordered and pure, while outside space can be disorderly and polluted. The classed notion of this inside space is also apparent in Dickey’s argument that “hygiene and orderliness are generally more elaborated concerns among higher classes. Concerns with purity are also greater among higher castes, which have a proportionately higher representation among the middle and upper classes” (Dickey 2000: 480). In these two ways, one by distance from boundary-making work, and the other by maintaining an aesthetic of cleanliness and order, middle class families are completely dependent on domestic workers to maintain their class status.

However in the Indian context as Dickey (2000), Froystad (2003) and Ray (2009) all argue domestic workers symbolically represent disorder and dirt. This disorder stems partially from the act of allowing low class and low caste workers into one’s intimate space, and partially from the dangers they represent, such as the possibility of illicit sexual relations between workers and employers. The tensions are accentuated by tropes: the looseness of lower class women and the illicit nature of inter-caste sex. This tension helps us better understand the drastic steps Mala is suggesting. Domestic workers occupy a fraught space, integral to maintaining class status, while at the same time constantly threatening it.

The fear of losing a worker is not only about the possible loss of status through a disorderly home and perhaps doing housework one otherwise wouldn’t engage in. Domestic workers, because they work in small and intimate space, can spread information about the people who fired them. Civility is another integral part of class status. Civility, in a very different context, according to

Norbert Elias (1982), was a mode of distinguishing oneself through habits and customs to maintain a form of political power. Elias' work documents how European nobles created long and elaborate rituals surrounding sociality from the 16th century onwards. These rituals were used as a way to distinguish themselves from the rapidly rising bourgeoisie. However, many of these slowly filtered down to the bourgeoisie, who in turn used and them as a mark of distinction from the lower classes. Civility, embodied in everyday practices, was a form of class power, a process of distinction through which classes could assert their moral superiority; hence the designation of the 'vulgar' lower classes. Therefore, the leaking of one's intimate information can potentially be a threat to an individual's class status. Being a bad employer, family secrets, the way one treats ones children and parents can all threaten the way a person is viewed by the community. The loss of a worker is not only the inability to control a subservient class; it is also about maintaining one's *izzat* or respect.

Megha's view of domestic servitude is mediated by the lens of an employer-employee relationship. This rests on a different kind of effacement of the worker. She justifies her position that domestic workers should be able to move freely between households in Laburnum by calling on the language of paid work; conditions and expectations of the worker and the temperament of the employer ("tolerance, paying capacity and expectation from the help"). This language is bolstered by a capitalist version of 'moving up' in the world through higher wages. Here we see an opposition to the model of 'moving up' in the world through gaining full- time employment or integrating oneself into the family, moving up the hierarchy of domestic workers and having a closer patron-client relationship with your employer. However, Megha's view of the domestic worker moving to the top through the sale of her labour comes with a caveat: she is not endorsing

“random moves by staff within the complex,” she is only endorsing those done because of higher wages.

Although in Megha’s and Mala’s emails we find two different views of how the domestic worker relationship is imagined, both nonetheless are articulated in the languages of security, civility and the market. These three fields of discourse are the pillars on which the middle class identity is formed. The market, as Liechty (2003), Fernandes and Heller (2006) have argued, is where the power of the middle class resides; they distinguish themselves through purchases but equally important is their rhetoric of fairness, achievement and hard work.

Security becomes a pillar of middle class identity, not because of its economic position, but rather because of the specific context of Gurgaon as a frontier and the democratic upsurge (discussed in the introduction) that threatens the NMC. Civility in the context of the evolving power dynamics of Gurgaon becomes another form of distinction which, if we understand class as in-practice as opposed to statically descriptive, needs to be constantly performed. It is the everyday marker of class.

The resolution of the email discussion between Mala, Megha and the ARWA, that workers must obtain no objection certificates from employers if they want to move to another job in the community, is an articulation of a class interest. It protects against the loss of class status through leakage of status-threatening information and reasserts the class dominance of this spatial area. In Mala’s language it “disciplines them (domestic workers)” by an action of class power. This idea should be seen as a way to supplement the idea of class in practice. Although the notion of class in practice is powerful in highlighting the everyday nature of class politics and domination, it misses

how class interest is created. Seeing the RWA as an organization where differences of opinion within a class are resolved, and a class interest is created, helps us see how classes can affect larger structures beyond the everyday.

## Caste and Domestic Workers

Megha was one of the few residents who talked openly and at length about the relationships between domestic workers and employers. She gave me access to the listserv and emails, in some of which she is referred to as head of the ‘maids’ union’. While talking about how she is viewed and the different relations of domestic servitude that exist in Laburnum, she narrated two different stories that reveal, even among the well-intentioned, that some ideas, like caste, are out of bounds.

Maids are wearing jeans, what next; they’ll be in out pool. We actually have a couple who have a kid here, we got them married and all, and she’s a friend of mine. And [the Laburnum residents who employ this couple of domestic workers, friends of Megha’s] are raising this kid as their own, so he gets the best of education that we can support, one life changed beautifully. He’s going to DPS (a private school), he’s the cook and maid’s son, and now they are live-in (domestic help). And [my friend] said [to me], “Megha only you can do this -he wants to play tennis [in the Laburnum tennis courts].” I said, “You put him in tennis, let me see who objects, I’ll handle it.” And she told me that it had worked. But you know why? - and I felt like weeping - because he’s a very fair kid (referring to his complexion); he’s white, he doesn’t *look* like a class 4 employees kid, he looks like any other kid, he doesn’t look like he’s from a lower socio-economic background. And then she said, “[what about] swimming [classes for the boy]?” I said, “You get him into the pool.” But I can understand this becomes a problem: do you open up a community swimming pool to help now? You can’t, I understand that, let’s look at it through resources, the resources are limited. But let’s look at it on principle, let’s just look. If he’s living with her, he’s her adopted son now, he’s started questioning me now, it’s not a utopian world, he’s going to feel these differences and how are we going to deal with it? And Racy (Megha’s husband) said “Don’t make this kid your experimental model, because he might suffer the consequences of it.”

We have to prepare him, fully. We want the kid to feel like it’s an equal world and [they’re] bringing him up equally, [they’ve] given him everything that [they’ve] given your biological born kids. They’re giving him the best education, the car drops him to school, it’s the same thing, but somewhere Mom isn’t the same, mom doesn’t speak English, mom doesn’t look like everybody’s mom, mom doesn’t dress like everybody else’s mom, and

now he wants to go swimming, so now next summer. If you say you're his legal guardian you can [have the boy use the pool], because [the] next battle [will be] "you'll have servant kids in the pool."

...the so called 'hygiene issue' we've been through it in school, with these reservations (referring to policies that require 25 percent of students to be from the socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds of SCs and STs ) and all, the play school Pallavan was giving an afternoon slot to a NGO to run their school. It was their way of giving back, you can use the classrooms, and the facilities, and the easels and stuff. I used to volunteer, teach there. All parents through a big fit, saying, "How can you do this? Our children will get lice, they're using the same loo, and these are kids from slums." So we had a meeting and I said, "I agree that your kids can get lice, but lice is not a life threatening disease [especially in the face of] a generation helping a generation." I don't know why these communities feel threatened. Your threats are coming from very unreal things, your threat should be coming from [the fact that] someday someone is going to say, "You've got too much from this area and we've got too little."

Caste is, as I have discussed earlier, something that is 'out there', beyond the walls of the gated community. However, these stories make clear that domestic servitude is not limited to the home but "bridges the domestic-public divide, bringing social relations of power (class, caste, race/ethnicity, gender) into the household, and [domestic servitude involves] mirroring and reproducing these relations within the domestic unit" (Ray 2009: 17). Megha's discomfort and complete inability to even mention the word "caste" is indicative of how taboo a subject it is; her reference to reservations is the only concrete allusion to caste. But, despite the absence of "caste" from her words, these two stories and Megha's narration of them shows us that caste inflects many of the relations between domestic workers and employers. Caste, here, works in the idiom of 'hygiene', a common euphemism. As Froystad points out, "urban upper and middle class people who discuss inequality today, often prefer to do so in terms of class, literacy or hygiene- even when reluctantly acknowledging that caste may come into play as well" (Froystad:2003 76). The language and logic of caste draws on pollution and purity; hygiene is the modern equivalent of this

strain of thinking.<sup>25</sup> As Megha's story suggests, there is one boundary that cannot be crossed: the boundary of the swimming pool. The swimming pool is not like a tennis class, because in the swimming pool all substances can mix. The fear of the backlash that would come when putting the child in the swimming pool is the clearest indicator that the logic of caste still has powerful sway.

In the first story we see how caste and class are also increasingly intertwined with race. Megha's friend's perception of why she was successful of enrolling her adopted son in tennis has to do with how fair the boy was, how his outward appearance masked his background. This insight is the underside of what many call the 'cosmopolitanism' of gated communities and the newly liberalized India (Brosius 2013). Whiteness, especially in North India, is a sign of wealth and prosperity. There are a number of reasons for this: some say that fairness is a sign that you don't have to labor in the sun, some attribute it to a colonial hangover that's refused to go away, but a recent, increasingly powerful explanation, is that fairness represents the West, and more importantly, the power of the West.

A number of authors have written about the nuances by which Indian modernity has adopted and inculcated aspects of the West (Mazzarela 2003, Mankekar 1999). Yet cosmopolitanism is an insufficient idiom to articulate the power differentials in this form of globalization. The relationship between whiteness and class, and consequently, whiteness and upper-casteness is an indigenization that isn't cosmopolitan. It reproduces the racial hierarchies that colonialism created and maps them onto caste. Whiteness as prosperity, and prosperity as being incompatible with low caste, demonstrates how caste and class are still intertwined.

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<sup>25</sup> However it is interesting to note that since Laburnum doesn't provide cooking facilities in their domestic worker housing, workers and employers almost always end up eating the same food. Although this is not always true, barriers can still be setup through segregated cooking space, or requiring workers to find food outside Laburnum, this provision makes food separation, one of the pillars of casteism, harder.

## Conclusion

If in Chapter 1 caste was a category that existed beyond the walls of the gated community, this chapter has demonstrated how caste logics still run through relationships between domestic workers and employers, whether in employers' refusal to do low caste boundary-making work, or in viewing lower classes as 'unhygienic'. Understanding class as class in practice highlights these connections and demonstrates how class formation is bound up in the everyday logics of caste.

However, class in practice alone is an insufficient medium through which to understand the power dynamics of class. Organizations like RWA's are key sites where different views within classes are resolved and where the everyday practices of class are solidified and a class interest is formed. This suggests that class is formed not only through everyday practices but also through key sites of articulation. RWA's do the powerful work of presenting diverse social opinions and presenting them as a unified class interest. Their rising prominence in urban worlds, as documented by scholars like Sanjay Srivastava (2014), should be studied not only as an expression of middle class interests but rather as a space where middle class interest are formulated, often by the suppression of voices like Megha's. The formation of class interest and class in practice is reconciled by class as process, or examining how institutions like RWA's contribute to processes of class formation.



## **Conclusion: Redefining Public**

As you cross the Delhi-Haryana border into Gurgaon on the metro, on your left are hundreds of marble and stone traders, surrounded by large slabs of pre-cut rock in an open air market. They cater to the never ending need for construction materials in a city that is forever covered in a layer of dust<sup>26</sup>. The market has always been there, at least since there has been mining on the Delhi ridge. In a city where land prices are constantly rising, and access to Delhi is paramount, I've always wondered why the market hasn't been bought out by one of Gurgaon's hungry developers.

Across the road from the marble traders is the Aravali Biodiversity Park, an outdoor park, carved out of the Delhi ridge. The ridge runs from the north east of Old Delhi southward where it branches out in south Delhi, one half runs South West, while the other continues south stretching a few kilometers beyond the Delhi-Haryana border into Gurgaon. The ridge, for most of modern Delhi's existence, has existed as a periphery. A place that provides for the centre, usually through raw materials and living space for labour. As Delhi rapidly developed through the 60's and 70's and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) built hundreds of new residential colonies, the southern edge of the ridge, rich in granite, sandstone, red and mica, started to be mined. The mining was neither systematic nor large scale unlike the massive and well planned industrialization of India that was taking place at the same time. The ridge, large parts of which were officially gram Sabha<sup>27</sup> lands, was slowly excavated by a small scale mining industries,

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<sup>26</sup> "The entire city of Gurgaon is materially and symbolically under construction" (Gurunani 2013:1)

<sup>27</sup> Belonging to Villages Councils

staffed by rural migrants and controlled by upper caste village leaders<sup>28</sup>. The mining was a precursor to the resource frontier described in chapter 1, with a rapacious demand, in this case by a government agency, fuelling the pillaging of a landscape.<sup>29</sup>

By the early 70's the industry had grown huge and unwieldy the Government was forced to take notice of its semi-regulated nature after a series of high profile mishaps<sup>30</sup>. It decided to nationalize the mines in the late 70's, which did little. There was no influx of capital or oversight, the only change was in official ownership.

In the early 90's the government formally banned mining on the ridge citing environmental concerns. Large parts of the ridge were consequently converted into Wildlife sanctuaries. However a small coalition of groups called 'I am Gurgaon', which consist of "residents, the administration, corporate organizations, schools, RWAs, NGOs and developers" whose mission is "to effect change and make a true 'Millennium City'", came together to turn part of it into a large outdoor park the Aravali Biodiversity Park. (IAmGurgaon)

The list of organizations that make up 'I Am Gurgaon' is middle and upper class, there are, for example, a conspicuous lack of a workers organizations. The main players in the coalition: corporates, RWA's, developers and the 'administration', a euphemism for government, are the most prominent arbiters' urban space in Gurgaon. I am Gurgaon and the Biodiversity

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<sup>28</sup> "In village after village the panchayats began to throw open the hilly parts of gram sabha lands, till then a mixture of forest and pasture, for quarrying operations. Mining Permits were issued to private parties by the Delhi Administration through the office of the collector of the Mines, while ownership rights over the respective mineral-yielding areas rested with the village panchayats, elected from landowning castes. This allowed the panchayat members and their kinsmen to act as middlemen, procuring truckloads of minerals from quarrying sites and supplying them to city buyers." (Soni 2000:84)

<sup>29</sup> Frontiers are caused by a massive increase in demand which can be affected by both governments as much as it can be by private interests.

<sup>30</sup> See Bhatti Mines Deaths

Park is then a good entryway to understand how public space is negotiated and constructed in Gurgaon. In their website they describe the. I Am Gurgaon describe the park:

Aravali Biodiversity Park, as its name suggests, is an endeavor to create a forest garden that celebrates forest flora native to the Aravali range. We have lost a large part of Aravali range, its flora and fauna to rampant development and urbanization. The Aravali Biodiversity Park was once a mining site. The land still has fresh scars of the mining era. 'I Am Gurgaon' intends to restore this scarred land into a biodiversity reserve and celebrate the rich flora of the Aravali Range. (I Am Gurgaon)

The language of 'I am Gurgaon's' vision is a window into understanding how the most powerful organizations in Gurgaon imagine space. The oxymoron of 'forest garden' neatly sums up the contradictions inherent in the project, forests and gardens have two traditionally opposing meanings, a forest is wild and untamed, while a garden is civilized and controlled. The 'forest garden' could be a metonym for the whole process of bourgeois environmentalism; the wish for freedom, the need for order.

Mining 'scars' the landscape even though it was fuelled by the very actors who want to heal it. The coalition of groups that makeup I am Gurgaon are the agents and executors of real estate speculation; the prime agents of 'rampant development and urbanization'. Now they stand as Gurgaon's protectors endeavoring to turn into a 'true Millennium City'.

I Am Gurgaon's conversion of the Delhi ridge into a biodiversity park included a performance venue. The venue, carved out of the mining site, is a large imposing amphitheater. It has become a space for large performances and events, one of the first public spaces in Gurgaon to have them. These events, organized by the members of Gurgaon's class, are often funded or subsidized by the state government, which like I Am Gurgaon, seem to be for all of Gurgaon's residents.

## Gurgaon Utsav

I founded a company called Arts [Art and Literature Foundation], we have achieved a lot in the past few years and we do a festival for the Haryana government every year, Gurgaon Utsav [In the Biodiversity Park] that's been my contribution to Gurgaon. The way they [Gurgaon residents] welcomed that space, shows how anxious people are for that kind of work. It's like Nehru Park, it's free and we try and get the best we can, last year we got Piya Behrupiya, Dastangoi, Qawalis of Hyderabad, and Laal Uma, a resident of Laburnum.

Gurgaon Utsav is sponsored by the Haryana Government, and organized by Uma's organization 'Art and Literature Foundation'. Utsav, which literally translates as festival, is 'branded', much like 'I Am Gurgaon' for all the people of Gurgaon. The use of the word 'Utsav', and its connection to religious and folk festivals, suggests they want to draw people from both Hindi speaking and English speaking backgrounds.

There are a number of ways of exploring how Gurgaon Utsav became a classed space but what is equally interesting is that Uma, along with other residents I spoke to, kept referring to Gurgaon Utsav as one of the few public places that wasn't classed like shopping malls, cinemas and other upmarket public spaces. For example Uma insisted Gurgaon Utsav was free and open to the public, as did Purnima and Megha. However I later found out that you needed passes to get in. Nayantara, another resident of Laburnum, who had provided me with this information, insisted that having passes didn't restrict who came to the event; this is what she had to say:

Nayantara: The locations for the passes were told, in fact I have a photographs, I don't know where those kids were from, There were obviously some labourers kids, they all sat around, and last time there was Lal band from Pakistan, it was music, they weren't interested in the Dastangoi, no action happening. You have to see the shot, I have it they weren't sitting in the amphitheater, they were on the edges but all the kids, they were obviously some labourers from somewhere, about 50 came and sat in front, and I said

you'll never see the leopard printed aunty and the labourers together anywhere else. It was beautiful, it wasn't as if it was an exclusive closed off event, not at all, it is a public thing, they kept passes. I mean you have security issues, you have to do something. Now obviously Dastangoi and Lal band, which is a commie band from Pakistan, is speaking to an educated audience and it is open to others but not many people are interested though..... it was not as if it was closed, as if entry was not permitted, but you have some sense of numbers, I agree with keeping a pass, how do you know whether ten people or 200 are coming? I don't think it was to keep it exclusive.

The people who came, came for the organizers they knew, they invited the municipal guys and police guys and said call your friends but the largest number of people who came are the ones who got to the bookshop and see that little poster. It will always be the people who seek out these things, word of mouth spreads things

Nayantara's description of the 'beautiful' moment when the labourers kids and 'leopard printed' aunties were together enjoying a performance is betrayed by her earlier comment that the labourers kids weren't interested in Dastangoi but were interested in Lal. Dastangoi, a revived form of oral Urdu storytelling that died out in the early 20th century, works on a system of punning, rhymes and meters that is found in other parts of the high period in Urdu literature. It requires a vocabulary, conceptually and literally, to understand it, as Bourdieu, in his pioneering work on 'taste' in Modern France says:

"In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception"(Bourdieu 1984:3).

Dastangoi requires a large system of previous knowledge, such as the role of punning, how it demonstrates the closeness of two alien things, to appreciate it. I am not arguing that all the leopard printed aunties in Gurgaon have a deep and intimate knowledge of a recently revived art form, but that they can read the text because of their exposure to similar textual systems. Bourdieu, in his work on taste as a mechanism of social power, demonstrates how social origin and schooling are the biggest determinants of one's taste. Bourdieu's argument is that the ability

to read texts (in this case performance) is not always conscious, as he says, in his famously convoluted sentences

The conscious or unconscious implementation of explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation which constitutes pictorial or musical culture is the hidden condition for recognizing the styles characteristic of a period, a school or an author, and, more generally, for the familiarity with the internal logic of works that aesthetic enjoyment presupposes (Bourdieu 1984:5).

Simply, that leopard print aunties have the ability, the tools, to read the text of Dastangoi even if they don't fully comprehend it. Nayantara suggestion that the labourers children could enjoy Lal, 'a commie band from Pakistan', because of the 'action' is one that follows a clear pattern of attributing simple tastes to lower classes. Again, Bourdieu is instructive in this regard, when describing how art is viewed:

Not having learnt to adopt the adequate disposition, he stops short at what Erwin Panofsky calls the 'sensible properties', perceiving a skin as downy or lace-work as delicate, or at the emotional resonances aroused by these properties, referring to 'austere' colours or a 'joyful' melody. He cannot move from the 'primary stratum of the meaning we can grasp on the basis of our ordinary experience' to the 'stratum of secondary meanings', i.e., the 'level of the meaning of what is signified', unless he possesses the concepts which go beyond the sensible properties and which identify the specifically stylistic properties of the work" (Bourdieu 1984:6).

Bourdieu critique of this vein of thought is that the codes which allow us to move to the specific stylistic property of work are programmed by one's social history, 'the eye is a product of history reproduced by education' (Bourdieu 7). Taste is a product of socialization rather than a form of personal distinction. Nayantara knows this, therefore she says 'it is speaking to an educated audience' and that eventually the people who come to this event are inevitably, those who 'seek it out in the corner of some bookstore.'

A system of passes, only available at upmarket bookstores, shopping outlets and through organizers, is enough to severely curtail the heterogeneity of the audience but, more importantly, it is the kind of events, the kind of 'culture' that determines who can attend. Bourdieu's

argument, that taste is a system of social power that excludes the lower classes from moving up, relies on the ‘habitus’ gained in childhood and through education. This is the ‘habitus’ of class, and as I have demonstrated throughout my thesis, this is also the ‘habitus’ of caste. The reason I highlight this event is because it takes a part of elite culture and elevates it to a position of representing ‘the people’. The event took place as an ostensibly public park with sponsorship by the government and a name that suggests it was for the people of Gurgaon, yet its content and entry were severely classed.

### **Summation and Directions**

Gurgaon’s frontier is beginning to dissolve, as the real estate race moves further and further away from Gurgaon proper to what is now called ‘New Gurgaon’. As the frontier falls apart, the state government is slowly starting to take control, 2008 were the first municipal elections, and even though it is still heavily controlled by the chief minister<sup>31</sup>, the shift to form a stable form of government. Gurgaon now faces the problem of trying to create a city out of a highly fragmented and divided population, although this is a familiar story, the division, through processes like fortification, is much harder to reconcile. Events like Gurgaon Utsav and spaces like the Biodiversity Park suggest that even when places aren’t explicitly gated, they are built around elite cultures and perhaps more importantly that these elite cultures see themselves as representatives of Gurgaon. Leela Fernandes discusses a similar process in Bombay as the “the politics of forgetting”, a “a political-discursive process in which specific marginalized social groups are rendered invisible and forgotten within the dominant national culture” (Fernandes 2415)

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<sup>31</sup> It earns too much revenue for the state government not to be controlled by the Chief Minister.

This movement also raises the specter of Partha Chatterjee's infamous article '*Are Indian Cities become Bourgeois at last?*' Chatterjee suggests a number of interlinked ideas that are leading to the transformation of Indian cities, the subtext of which is the slow erasure of marginalized social groups. All three of Chatterjee's main claims can be linked to Gurgaon's growth and present state.

First, it is evident that there has been in the last decade or so a concerted attempt to clean up the Indian cities, to rid streets and public lands of squatters and encroachers and to reclaim public spaces for the use of proper citizens. This movement has been propelled by citizens' groups and staunchly supported by an activist judiciary claiming to defend the rights of citizens to a healthy environment in which everyone abides by the law. Second, while there continues in every Indian metropolis a process of the suburbanization of the middle class, there has been at the same time a growing concern, expressed in the form of organized movements and legal regulations, for the preservation of the architectural and cultural heritage of the historic city, whether pre-colonial or colonial. Third, even as public spaces are reclaimed for the general use of proper citizens, there is a proliferation of segregated and protected spaces for elite consumption, elite lifestyles and elite culture. (Chatterjee 2003:172)

The ridge was cleared of its workers by middle class citizens who 'reclaimed' public space and then transformed it to an elite space. Although it is not segregated and protected as Chatterjee's third hypothesis suggests, its form of exclusion is much more insidious. Although there hasn't been a corresponding move to preserve architecture and cultural heritage, the recovery of the ridge suggest that bourgeois environmentalism is an equally powerful force. The convergences and divergences from Chatterjee's statements demonstrate the changes I have documented are part of much larger processes.

The massive transformation in urban space has been fuelled by the NMC (New Middle Class) and it is they who have been the focus of this project. I have demonstrated how groups like RWA's build class interests out of a mishmash of different ideas. How the growth of



Gurgaon has been fuelled by speculative abilities of this class and in this chapter how this class looks to shape public space.

I have also attempted to disentangle the myths this class tells about itself. The most powerful being that caste is a thing of the past. In my first chapter I demonstrated how Gurgaon wouldn't have existed if it hadn't been for the caste and patronage politics of KP Singh with his fellow Jats. I also explored how caste is cast outside the walls of colony while it still structures relationships between domestic workers and residents in Gurgaon.

Caste, to my mind, wasn't going to be a central part of my project. In fact a quick keyword search of my midway material demonstrates that I had bought the middle class narrative that caste was a thing of the past. Wading through my interviews, notes and KP Singh's wonderful book I came to see how caste logics were pervasive in how lower classes were viewed and this led me back to the work of Corbridge and Harriss (2000) and introduced me Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller (2006).

The project, in part, has been about the journey between two different fields; political economy and anthropology. Or rather how the political economy can supplement anthropology, say by giving context to caste relations, and how anthropology can investigate the development of important structural changes, like that of the New Middle Class. My understanding of class, as class-in-practice and class as process has been the largest structural between these two fields.

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