



At the “Love Commandos”: Narratives of Mobility Among Intercaste Couples in a Delhi Safe House

RASHMI SADANA

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology MSN 3G5
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 22030*

SUMMARY *Meeting runaway intercaste couples hiding in a safe house in Delhi led me to reflect on the kinds of mobility at work in their lives and in the city today. By highlighting the social and physical parameters of their mobility in a single ethnographic context, I argue that it is the quest for mobility rather than an expression of individual choice that is most significant about their flouting of social norms. [caste and class, India, marriage and family, mobility, urbanism]*

In 2010 a Delhi-based organization named “Love Commandos,” with the tag “No More Honour Killings,” created a new political platform and course of action for addressing an old “problem”: Indians attempting to cross lines of caste or community to marry someone of their choosing.¹ Part vigilante group, part nongovernmental organization, the group has garnered significant attention in both Indian and foreign media.² The Love Commandos’ method—as epitomized by the image on their website of five burly men with arms folded across their chests—is to extract and provide a safe haven for couples who are in imminent danger. They both work with police and subvert them when they deem necessary. However, their larger goal is to highlight the social attitudes and circumstances that lead to conflict within families and communities. They in fact do not see the 1,000-plus murders (a United Nations estimate considered to be on the low side) within families each year as being about honor but rather about issues of prestige, money, and familial power plays that are often sanctioned by the police and community leaders. The appearance of the Love Commandos on the Indian social and political scene dovetails with a larger Dalit rights movement and a rising incidence of so-called “love marriages” in Indian society. The Love Commandos brandish the concept of love as a way toward a more equal and just society while also subversively questioning the love that families actually have for their children. Meanwhile, intercaste couples that I interviewed at the safe house at times inhabit the larger political cause of the Love Commandos—taking on the language and attitudes of the organization and their secular view of love—but more often their narratives reveal a more complicated relationship to the politics of love. Couples are not so much acting on the new-found freedoms of a more globalized consumer and urban oriented culture in India’s era of economic liberalization, but rather they are uncovering for themselves the ways in which the ruse over caste identities is a foil for issues of social status and economic mobility.³

In talking to couples over days and weeks, I found their stories of love and crossing caste boundaries to be tales of economic insecurity, notions of status, and power relations within the family, often leading to coercion and fear of violence. These narratives—of individuals within family and community contexts, living between notions of urban and peri-urban lifestyles and amid shifting ideas of class, caste, and status—were about their ideas of mobility as much as about love, marriage, or family. Despite being holed up in a safe house, the “answer” for couples was not to disengage with family but rather to reform their families so they fit with their own expectations of their futures. I came to see the safe house not as an end point for lovers, but rather as part of an affective urban landscape that mediated their understanding of love, aspiration, and caste. The safe house symbolized a dramatic shift in their own temporal and spatial coordinates, one where they were cordoned off, in a space of waiting, yet also one where they were part of something larger themselves—a new node in the urban social network.

Methods and Context

When I was living in India from 2007–2012, the incidence of couples in Crisis as reported in the news was sometimes presented as a social epidemic. These often, sensational accounts were partly due to instances of extreme violence, referred to in the mainstream press as “honor killings,” but they also had to do with the sheer numbers of couples on the run, so many that the Delhi government created its own hotline to help couples. Marriage and love relationships are continually evolving but perhaps never more so than in a digitally enabled, economically liberalized society, whereby young people from all social strata have more access to information and to each other. At the time, I was researching the social impact of Delhi’s new Metro rail system, and in the course of that research I came to know about the Love Commandos, whose office was near a Metro station I frequented. I saw the Metro and the Love Commandos as two different kinds of urban institutions and platforms for mobility, both operating in conjunction with one another at specific moments. The narratives I present and analyze here—in the form of two extended case studies extracted from a range of in-depth interviews with couples in a Love Commandos’ safe house as well as interviews with the co-founder of the organization—primarily concern the relationships of two intercaste couples and how they fortify their own love arrangements, even if, as we will see, their futures are uncertain.

Francesca Orsini has written about the need to recognize love’s pluralities in the South Asian context and to “document the discursive and social spaces available for lovers” (Orsini 2006:1–2). Central to my analysis is an understanding of “love” as being culturally and historically determined but also as being a social complex (Trawick 1990; Ahearn 2001; Parry 2001; Mody 2008; Grover 2011; Osella 2012; Verma 2016; Reddy 2006; Basu and Ramberg 2015). It is both ideology and institution, emotion and practice. In the ethnographic case I explore here, love is a vehicle toward marriage,

family, and social acceptance. Most significantly, love is part and parcel of young people's making their way in the world and defining their aspirations.

"Aspirational" has become a catch-all term in India (and many other places) to describe a cross-class striving, usually toward a globally recognized middle-class status, but in fact, as the recent anthropological literature shows, it takes quite different forms and meanings (Schielke 2009; Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012; Chua 2014). Jocelyn Chua writes of "intemperate aspiration" (wanting too much, especially consumer goods and the new lifestyles they make possible) in relation to how people in Kerala view the increasing incidence of suicide among young people (2014:40). There is a similar moral quality put onto young couples seeking a love marriage—not that they want too much materially but rather that they want too much *for themselves*, a marriage partner that suits their needs rather than their family's. By seeking escape—not in the form of suicide but in the form of running away from their families, at least temporarily—intercaste couples that go to Love Commandos' safe houses are able to recast their love in terms of broader societal aspirations.

Unlike other couples in the National Capital Region (the term for Delhi and its environs, extending to neighboring cities in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana) who flee (see Mody 2008, especially), the couples at a safe house are not alone. They instead find themselves in an instant, if ephemeral, community, one defined by a political objective—the upholding of India's secular marriage laws.⁴ Being at a Love Commandos' safe house helps couples take control of the moral narrative of their stories and thereby encourages the social transformations that are at the heart of their stories. At the same time, it is important to understand the nature of each couple's "escape," because while they have come to the safe house and are at an impasse with their families, they desire to re-integrate with their families as long as their partners are accepted by them. Their aspirations are meant to lead to a kind of moral and practical reform within the family, and their own reintegration is imagined as part of that reform and, indeed, part of their social mobility. This understanding—their understanding—reveals the precise limits and possibilities of the couples' own aspirations. In this respect, my ethnography shows how relationships forged outside the norms of caste create new forms of subjectivity, which for the couples means new ways of being in the world and seeing themselves (Das 2010:376). By casting the couples' stories as narratives of mobility, I mean to highlight the issues of status, economic insecurity, and familial power relationships that underlie the prevalent and often deterministic discourses on caste violence, love versus arranged marriage, and urban/rural divides.

The personal conversations I had with the couples (which were all in Hindi and are represented here by my translations) about self, family, and caste, and inevitably about politics and society, created camaraderie and a level of trust between us. My time with them was intense, mostly because the couples' circumstances and their unknowable futures always hung in the air. Our conversations, not surprisingly, focused mostly on their relationships, families, jobs/prospects, and stories of how they ended up at the

safe house. They were often linear narratives, and I have presented the two case studies here in that manner. Their narratives of love and aspiration—interlaced with a see-saw of class and caste expectations their families had of them—were also undeniably part of a larger financial calculus of marriage, kin making, and social mobility. Their physical and social mobilities—mostly accessed through jobs, education, transport—were continually balanced by what they saw as the immobilities of social and familial obligation.

Love as a Social Cause

Once in the safe house, at an undisclosed location not far from Connaught Place in central Delhi, I am taken to meet Sanjoy Sachdev, a former Hindi journalist who is one of the founders of Love Commandos.⁵ We are in a cramped room, and I sit on the edge of a bed on a mottled purple comforter. Sanjoy, in a simple white kurta pajama and with a mess of white hair, sits at a narrow desk piled high with papers and a desktop computer. A portrait of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar hangs above us. Ambedkar (2014) is the most ubiquitous symbol of the contemporary Dalit movement for social justice in India today. He argued that it was only through intercaste marriage that the scourge of the Hindu caste system could be brought down. For the “Love Commandos” to ally themselves with an Ambedkarite message—as evidenced by their rhetoric in published interviews, on their website, and on the popular Indian television program “Satyamev Jayante” (Khan 2012)—makes their organization not merely known for “saving” couples but also for promoting a very specific kind of social change.

Intercaste relationships challenge and disturb affective ties that are the very ways in which feelings and sentiments within and across families and communities circulate (see Stewart 2007). These relationships are also part of a newer, more trenchant critique of caste society, amid dramatic changes in urban lifestyles and attitudes, and within the slow but steady empowerment of Dalit voices. This empowerment, however, creates new sites of struggle and forms of violence (Rao 2009). Intercaste relationships concern the “ordinary” matters of love and family, as well as emergent forms of political recognition. They have the power to incite, even if the “content” of what an intercaste relationship is varies to the extent it is about issues of actual caste background or other forms of social and economic mobility. In my ethnography, the critique of cast comes through the couples themselves. This is because they are more aware, through digital media technologies and access to education, of how their stories fit into the larger social scene. In this regard, the Love Commandos organization is emblematic of a larger trend whereby individual stories of couples get channeled into a broader social cause. At the same time, the couples’ narratives of mobility give meaning and nuance to the mission of the Love Commandos.

Sanjoy turns his chair halfway around and speaks in a raspy smoker’s voice. His own political activity had started in the early 2000s with protests against the Hindu right’s cultural policing of Valentine’s Day. Couples were harassed and businesses seen to provide public expressions of “V-Day” celebrations were vandalized. I had been living in the Delhi University campus

area during that time. I remembered the images well, of Hindutva goons turning over tables in coffee shops or trashing novelty stores that sell Valentine's Day cards. Most of all, these were public places in the city that were recognized for offering a secular and commercial outlet for the expression of love and romance, especially by what were considered impressionable youngsters. It was also ten years into India's economic liberalization, and these kinds of western-originating, "global" practices had seeped into the consciousness of many urban and not so urban young people. Shops and cafes, with their glass window fronts in central markets across town, gave a new kind of visibility to these expressions.

Sanjoy is particularly supportive of Valentine's Day because he sees it as a secular holiday. This is precisely why the Hindu right disdains it. They see it as a foreign affront to India's religious traditions, especially their own. But the "love" aspect is the key element in the holiday, because for Sanjoy it is a "universal" emotion that may be applied to on-the-ground social and political realities, including Indians' constitutional right to marry whom they choose. For Sanjoy, love is both a "natural emotion" and part of "Indian tradition," something that should be honored, not ridiculed. He rattles off the love marriages between epic gods and goddesses—Ram and Sita, Krishna and Radha, Shiva and Parvati—and political figures such as Indira and Feroze Gandhi. His moment of levity is matched by a dark societal critique of arranged marriage, with its "money-making parties, promotions, banquet halls, sweets, meals, clothes, flowers, car dealers, tent houses, and all that jewelry, but above all, dowry." Arranged marriage itself should be made illegal, he declares. "Arranged marriage" may encompass an array of activities and courtship rituals, ranging from newspaper ads and Internet match-ups to conspiring aunts, but the distinction I found in his rhetoric had to do with the notion of choice. In this respect, his use of the term "love" was a way to talk about "choice," "secularism," and "rights."

Sanjoy reaches for a law manual from one of the three overflowing bookshelves in the room, all the while lambasting the recently elected Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who ran on an anticorruption platform meant to benefit the "*aam aadmi*" (common man). Kejriwal has made concessionary statements to the unelected to the unelected *khap panchayats* (village councils), affirming their place and worth to society. This recognition of *khap panchayats* is abhorrent to Sanjoy because they are often the bodies that sanction so-called "honor killings" (murdering your own kin to save face socially, which in the Western context is usually called "domestic violence"). He seems to take personal offense at Kejriwal's comments. It is pandering of the worst kind because Sanjoy locates much of the country's retrograde social mores in those male-dominated *panchayats*, where "the mindset is all for men." Even when positions for women are "reserved" on the *panchayats*, powerful local men send their wives in their places. He calls up an article on his computer that documents Kejriwal's offending statements; for Sanjoy they quash any other more progressive idea the man may have had.⁶

Then he flips through one of the legal volumes he's taken down and points to the Indian civil code on marriage. Sanjoy has the audacity, I

realize, to want to square the law with social practice and to do it on a mass scale, one couple at a time.

We come out of the room to an adjacent sitting room and find the commandos lounging in front of a television set. I find them to be a reassuring mix of friendly and burly, and I get a sense they could spring into action at any moment. Dishes clatter in the kitchen next to us, where couples are tasked with cooking (the girls) and cleaning (the boys), in order for them to understand, Sanjoy tells me, what married life will be like once they leave the shelter. The dingy flat has two small bedrooms, a sitting area, where the actual "commandos" hang out, napping, chatting, or watching television, and a tiny kitchen at the front end. There are two wall air-conditioning units in the flat. The organization is in a constant funding campaign, but Sanjoy says that the place should not feel like a prison, hence the cool air.

I go into a larger bedroom off the other side of the sitting room, and meet three couples chatting softly as they sit or recline on thin mattresses lined up on the floor.⁷ At first the couples keep talking over each other. Their stories get intertwined, when in real life they were not, at least not until they reached the safe house. The young women sit braiding each other's hair, while the young men massage each other's heads. It is very typical of the kind of homosociality of everyday life, that counters the Westernized image of the heterosexual couple in love, impervious to the world around them (Osella 2012). This talking and interacting between the couples and between the young men and young women is a kind of communion of its own, even if in a rather unstable "community" per se. Whereas the Love Commandos organization frames love as an ideology, a stand-in for secularism, human rights, and choice, for the couples at their shelters love understandably has more fine-grained meanings. These meanings involve intimate feelings, but they also have to do with the precise contexts within which their relationships arose. In their descriptions of their lives and families, the couples' ideas of "love," "caste," and "marriage" get broken down into hopes and fears about status (a mix of class and caste expectations), money, and acceptance. The moral hierarchy between class and caste flips back and forth in the course of the narratives, as the couples assert in different moments that it is caste, not class, or class, not caste that is the root of the problem.⁸

Love as Conversion

Ajay is a compact and energetic 25-year old, clean-shaven and earnest. Gita, who is 21-years-old, seems shy at first with a slight, sweet voice, but this comportment changes once she, too, begins animatedly to describe their predicament.

Theirs was a "caste problem," Ajay explains. They come from the same district in Haryana, but he is from a lower caste, she from a higher one. The way he describes it, his voice low and intent, Gita is a Jat (a dominant caste in the Punjabi subcaste schema), while he comes from a lower caste that works with wood, *lakri ka kam*. Gita chimes in using the English word, "carpenter." These words and designations are meant to create a distance

between them, but they seem to have the opposite effect. They seem to be part of their intimacy, of their acceptance of each other.

They met at a government polytechnic college in Haryana. They were classmates, "sitting on the same bench," studying for a diploma in electronics and communications. They were friends (*dosthi thi*), and then their friendship became love (*pyar hua*). Ajay says, "I don't know exactly when our friendship got converted to love (*convert hui*) and went to a higher level. There was no scope for any physical relationship. It was a matter of the heart. *Gharwalon* (the people at home) do not understand that love is something that happens in the heart, they think it is only physical love." Gita jumps ahead, "First we tried so hard to get our families to accept us. 'Just accept us, accept us,' we said, 'Let us get married in a good way (*achchha tarike se*).'"

Later, at home several metro stops away, I listen to their digital recording. I go back and forth over their descriptions, each time catching more repeated phrases and mutterings. Ajay uses the English word "convert" to talk about the moment or process by which his and Gita's friendship becomes love. I am struck by it because it is one of the few English words he employs. He does not know when the "conversion" happened, or at what rate, and this seems to trouble him. Perhaps it makes him culpable in some way. I cannot help thinking of love as conversion, as in religious conversion. I am pretty sure Ajay does not mean to use the word in this way, but it seems to capture the nature of his experience of love. There is some culpability in it. One moves in a certain direction, follows certain clues or feelings, acts on things. But then the moment of conversion is surprising and maybe unexpected. Once you have converted perhaps there is no turning back. To do so might reveal a superficiality in the relationship or in you. When Ajay says "*convert hui*," I sense that he is trying to reckon with that moment and his inability to account for it.

"*Pyar hua*" (love happened) is the more common phrase, and Ajay uses that too. It is passive, or at least more passive than "*convert hui*." The latter gives a sense of action, though it is still unclear who or what force is the causal agent. Love is at a "higher level" than friendship, even though it gets negated or reduced by both of their families (*gharwalon*). A changeable quality and emotional state, "love" gets contrasted with the seeming fixity of Ajay's low caste background. Whatever social mobility he has achieved or thought that he was on the path to has now been stalled. Talk of love quickly becomes an explanation of caste.

Ajay is resigned but not indignant. The "caste problem" is based on irrefutable facts, but it does not mean it is insurmountable. On the one hand, he and Gita "sit on the same bench" at the polytechnic, which equalizes them socially (or at least makes caste incidental) and creates the ground on which their friendship can be converted to love. On the other hand, Gita's family sees Ajay as unemployed and as someone who does not have land or adequate family resources. Unfortunately for them, Gita's family boils these factors down to his caste.

Ajay's plan had been to wait two years before getting married to Gita, so he could secure a good job. "But her people," Ajay explains, "once they

came to know about us, they had another idea." This other idea was to get her married to another boy. He continues: "They wanted to push her out of the house. They found someone else for her in a matter of ten days—not even. In that many days they found a boy whose background they did not even know, and whether he is good or bad, they were ready to send her away with him." Ajay emphasizes the "ten days" (*das din*), again and again. Now he is indignant. Love gets computed whereby time equals familiarity: this other boy equals ten days, while Ajay and Gita equals four years.

"He was someone my father met, but I did not meet him," explains Gita about the boy her family wants her to marry. "You see, he had a government job and some land." I ask if this other boy was also a Jat, like Gita. Ajay interjects, "Yes, same caste, meaning a mentality that he has land, money, that he's rich, even if he has committed four murders or some other crimes. That's the mentality." Where caste was a problem in relation to Ajay marrying Gita, it was now a "mentality" that enabled Gita's parents to foist this other boy on their daughter. What is essentially a financial deficit in Ajay's profile gets computed as a "caste mentality." Gita: "My parents did my engagement with this other boy and printed marriage cards, without asking me, for the same day as my older sister was to get married. They trashed the old cards and just printed both our names together on new cards.

There are two logics of marriage at work here. Ajay emphasizes emotional intimacy as proof of love and its long lastingness into marriage. Gita's parents, meanwhile, may precisely fear this emotional closeness of the couple, because that closeness could, after marriage, privilege the couple's relationship over their family. This privileging is the real fear that many families have regarding love relationships—that they will lead to companionate marriage ties and essentially change the emotional dynamics of joint family life (Osella and Osella 2000; Mody 2008). "Love" may be a universal feeling and fine for gods, politicians, and film stars, but for ordinary families, it is most often seen as a threat to the social order. It is precisely the role of individuality in companionate marriage (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006:4–5) that is seen as tipping the balance of family life.

From Family to City

Now it is Gita's turn to be indignant. Her future seems to hinge on the phrasing of a wedding card, and it is the manner in which her parents quite literally wrest control over her life's narrative. It is at this point that Ajay obtains information on the Internet ("*net pe*") about the Love Commandos. He gets in touch with them and describes his and Gita's predicament of: being locked up by their families, having their cell phones taken away, and being threatened physically. Days before the wedding, Gita goes with her mother to get fitted for her wedding clothes at a market in Bahadurgarh where they are supposed to meet her *bhua* (father's sister). "Once there," she explains, "I took my mother's phone and pretended to call my *bhua*." She then gets out of her mother's sight on the pretense of looking for her aunt.

Following Ajay's instructions, she makes her way to the Mundka Metro station. This station is the last one on the Green Line, which heads due west out of Delhi. An array of jeeps, vans, and buses wait outside the station, ferrying passengers to and from the Haryana border. Gita meets Ajay at Mundka as planned, and they buy tokens and get on the train. Ajay is familiar with the Metro, but it is Gita's first time, though she is too worried about being followed to notice it much. She speaks to her father on the mobile, saying she cannot find her mother and so she is coming home, when she is actually on the Metro with Ajay, going away and not coming home.

When Gita leaves her mother in the clothes market in Haryana to go to the Mundka Metro station, she is in one sense leaving one network—her family network in Haryana—for another, the Delhi Metro network where she will meet her lover and get absorbed by the capital city and its institutions (e.g., the Love Commandos). That distance, between the Mundka Metro station and Bahadurgarh, which is just across the Haryana border, represents a rupture, yet it is also an evolving space. The stanchions of the Metro are currently being constructed beyond the Mundka station, and within the next two years, the Metro will travel as far as Bahadurgarh. This visual and experiential understanding of place and how people are connected impinge on how people negotiate the city but also how they perceive their own identities. Identity is often expressed as "belonging" to a place, for example, "She belongs to Bihar, I belong to Haryana." This belonging relates to a past that people may claim but also a place that may have a claim on them. While not eschewing their past and origins, I found that the couples often wanted to lessen the claim that "place" had on them and that it was a requirement for their social mobility.

"We first go to Inderlok," Ajay explains, "and then change lines and go to Rajiv Chowk." He pauses for a bit, and then admits, "It didn't leave us with a good feeling to have left our families in this way. But their mentality is a little different. Here we have made a new family, found new brothers and sisters.

It is at this point that the couple moves into a liminal state, or what Perveez Mody describes in her ethnography of love marriages as "not-community," which is "defined by the criteria of choice in love-marriages" (Mody 2008:3). It is a state of self-assertion and familial alienation. How long it lasts depends on the circumstances of each couple, but "for the majority of couples," Mody explains, "the state of 'undoing' (not-ness) is but a brief interlude before they manage to be re-socialised into their communities and families" (2008:3–4).

I wonder what this "undone-ness" will mean for Ajay and Gita. At the safe house they are not alone, they have support and even camaraderie, but it is a temporary situation. Without jobs and money, they cannot forge a future. The Love Commandos can only help them so much, though Sanjoy had told me that for couples that do not get re-integrated with their families, the organization does help to settle them and arrange for "furniture and pots and pans." Unlike the cases that Mody documents, the couples I met at the safe house seemed to have a semblance of community to fall

back on if their families did not relent. In fact, now that the Love Commandos have been helping couples settle on their own for several years, many of those settled couples are in turn helping current couples in the safe houses, some of whom, like them, will not be able to return to their families and will need to establish their own households. In this regard, the safe houses of the Love Commandos, as well as their website and hotline, have created a platform for rethinking and actualizing new forms of community.

When I ask Ajay and Gita about the future, Ajay tells me that he has to get back on his feet. This means getting a job. He had received a diploma in junior engineering from the polytechnic. He also wants to try again to convince the families to relent, even though Gita's family has in the meantime filed a kidnapping case against him. On a more somber note, he adds, "If they don't accept us, we will start our life separate from them."

Love's (Im)Mobilities

Shiv is a little older than Ajay, and a bit more measured. He is also more confident, from the tone of his voice to the way he sits up straight. He has precise theories on why he and Renu are in their current predicament. They have recently gotten married but under duress. Renu is a few years younger than Shiv, who excitedly describes how she decided she was in love with Shiv and took the bold moves to first broach the topic with him. As with Ajay, Shiv is resentful of the larger social strictures that have come to impact his own life. "I am from the lower schedule caste, *chamar*," he says carefully, "Here in Rajasthan, actually, the whole country has a problem with my caste." Caste once again becomes visible, especially in relation to those belonging to scheduled, or Dalit, castes.⁹

There is a problem with Renu's profile too. She is a higher caste than Shiv, but is originally from Bihar, which as Shiv remarks is seen as "a poor and backward state." He tries to make up for this geographic discrepancy:

The way she talks and her dialect, you do not feel she is from Bihar. I am from Haryana. We heard relatives asking things behind our backs. Where is the girl from? What does her father do? They asked and I told them she is from Bihar. They said, 'Our son won't marry someone from there, we have a problem with that.' My problem is that I am going to marry someone who I want to live with.

Shiv tries to disavow Renu's Bihari-ness by saying she does not speak or act like someone from there. This is how Bihar enters the lovescape of Haryana. There are regional mobilities that complicate the caste complex. At the same time, Shiv announces that for him the fact that Renu is the person he wants to marry trumps the regional difference. He points to a "dual standard" where families in Haryana will "import girls" from elsewhere, particularly Bihar, but also Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, and Uttaranchal, to marry their boys, especially if the boy is older or physically or mentally challenged. He chalks it up to the imbalanced sex ratio in the state—the worst in India.¹⁰

"The families just buy girls," Shiv continues, "they don't look at the *jat* or caste or that the girl is from another state. They don't have a problem with it. Both family and society accept the girl in these cases, the marriage happens, and they put her to work." He is unnerved by this hypocrisy that has landed him and Renu in a safe house rather than at home being feted by their families. There is mobility, in a physical and geographic sense, which enabled their relationship across and in the city—and immobility—in the social sense of the enduring familial restrictions on that relationship and in the physical sense that they are stuck at a safe house. The safe house could be seen as a fulfillment of Shiv and Renu's mobility in the city, which the Love Commandos enable, and yet its very temporariness calls into question the stability of their relationship. Theirs was a relationship that began at home, Renu explains to me. Her family had rented a room out to him at their place in Gurgaon.¹¹ Shiv used to come over and talk, mostly to Renu's mother. Her mother liked him, his good manners, and the fact that he was educated (*pudha-likha*). Renu had noticed him too and insists to me that it was his personality. She had not been looking for a boyfriend but became familiar with him during his visits to talk to her mother. Shiv legitimately enters Renu's world, with her mother as gatekeeper no less, and he then becomes a way for her to connect to worlds beyond her own.

Shiv tells me he believes his parents should be the ones to select a girl for him, that it is their right because they have "taken care of us all our lives." Though, in the course of our conversation, he ends up questioning this very "right" through his disillusionment with the business of marriage. Moreover, once Renu makes her feelings known to him, he quickly falls for her. "After her proposal, I told her I would never leave her. I can certify on stamp paper to prove it." As he continues, I notice that he gave his commitment to Renu before actually falling in love. The commitment seems to be more for her person and for having gone out on a limb for him. He seems to recognize the risk she has taken and wants in a sense to honor it. Perhaps he knows that love will come after, or perhaps love is secondary to what she has already done for him. Unlike Ajay's moment of conversion (convert *hui*), Shiv uses a bureaucratic metaphor (certification on stamp paper) to show the immutability of his commitment.

Anonymity and (In)Visibility on the Delhi Metro

Shiv explains: "We began to talk and meet often. We went all over Delhi by Metro—Old Fort, Red Fort, movies, and lots of times at New Delhi Railway Station." It is during this period, where "friendship *ho gai*" (the friendship happened). Then, Shiv says, "I slowly realized she is the perfect girl to get married to." Because Shiv and Renu have nowhere else to be alone, the Metro and the places they visit become important to their relationship. On the one hand, they visit some of the most iconic places in the city and make themselves visible there. On the other hand, they are part of the anonymous crowd and Metro public. Renu got to know Shiv in the familiar space of her own home, over time, but it is in the anonymity of Metro stations where their relationship perhaps has the space to go to the next level. There is an

ease to their invisibility, which is socially freeing, as they become more visible and perhaps socially accountable to each other.

This visibility is a little different from the kind of visibility and recognition in daily life that Sara Dickey (2013) writes about in relation to socioeconomic class in Madurai, and yet there are some important points of correspondence. In Dickey's study, visibility relates to someone being seen in clean, new clothes, with oiled hair, and carrying a cell phone. This mundane, everyday, visual apprehension of class, she argues, conveys dignity, which she identifies as "the operation of vision" itself in "determining respect" (Dickey 2013:225). In the case of couples on the Delhi Metro, clothes and cell phones matter, but riding the Metro itself, being visible there, is also part of the dignity that gets conveyed in the visual message. It is a visual message that people are themselves recording, by taking photographs and making videos with their cell phones. The Metro is a globally recognized symbol of modernity and a local form of transport, and it is this combination that allows the Metro to at once be a site of individual anonymity and social recognition. What is unique about this sort of "apprehension"—to use Dickey's term—is that the esteem or dignity comes from within. The Metro is an anonymous space (covering 200 kilometers in a city of sixteen million), so the question of visibility is complex here. It is not so much who sees you (which is significant in the cross-caste regarding that Dickey describes) but how you see yourself. Yet, how you see yourself is influenced by how you think you are being perceived by others. It is in this way that an urban infrastructure such as a Metro can frame one's activities anew. It is not a specific mode of apprehension that occurs, as in Dickey's case, but something at once more diffuse and recurrent. It is also an instance where physical and social mobility coalesce.

For Shiv and Renu, the fact that part of their courtship plays out on the Metro as they traverse Delhi's iconic locales is significant in that their relationship is built on a third space, on locales neither of them are specifically from. This space becomes the ground on which they create a sense of familiarity with each other, even as it is a space of anonymity more generally. Through the Metro, the city becomes an amalgamated site of pleasure for them. Like the image of Gita making her way to Mundka Metro station where she meets Ajay, there is something cinematic about Shiv and Renu taking the Metro around the city. It is another instance where the urban network replaces and then reframes the familial one.

Shiv's narrative sequences the events and his feelings in a slightly different manner as compared to Renu's. It is almost as if, by Renu telling Shiv she loved him, that their relationship gets self-arranged to the extent that there is a solid commitment (certified on imaginary stamp paper). But only after their explorations of the city does the friendship, for Shiv at least, turn to love and the idea of marriage. While it seemed from their two narratives that Renu had already made up her mind about Shiv, Shiv felt compelled to commit to her but did not actually fall in love until they had started seeing each on both of their terms rather than only hers.

Shiv did not believe in hiding the relationship from his family. Maybe this was naïve of him, but he thought it would be disrespectful not to tell them.

The problem with telling the family was that the question of marriage was immediately put on the table. Shiv was not ready to get married. Like Ajay, he is still studying and does not have a job. He not only cannot support Renu, but he is being supported by his family and is living with his *bhua*.

The families, for their part, see their children in more and more contexts where making choices and being independent become important—in college, in the workplace, and even navigating the city. These are all spaces where people from lower middle class and lower caste backgrounds in particular have the possibility of blending in to some extent, places where their own aspirations can be lived and experienced. In this case, greater freedom and mobility actually means assimilating ("sitting on the same bench," whether it be in a college or on the Metro), at least up to a point. Families know that giving their children certain freedoms might lead to others, which has generally been the excuse for monitoring the behavior and whereabouts of young women in particular.

The breach in trust with the couple and their families occurs at this juncture: the families are hurt and upset by the not knowing, and everyone has a hard time getting over this fact. It is not that they do not try, they do, and like Renu, Shiv does not give up on trying to convince his parents. "My father was so mad" Shiv tells me, "He wanted to hear the news from me directly, not through my *bhuas*. He came to see me and beat me up. He stopped giving me money and told me to move back home."

It should be noted that the majority of young people seek out their parents' approval in their marriages and often expect them to help them find a suitable match. Young people can be as concerned about social status, wealth, and occupation as are their parents. Marriages arranged by parents are regarded as being more morally correct on several counts. Allowing your parents to arrange your marriage, or at the very least, have a say in it, shows that you have respect for them and the larger kin network. This respect, in practical terms, means that you are not thinking solely of your desires and personal preferences but rather are concerned with how your spouse will fit into your immediate family (including your parents), as well as your larger kin network. The individual choice that is assumed to be at the heart of love marriages, then, is seen as selfish. This dynamic, depending on the degrees of arrangedness in a marriage, can play out in numerous ways, from outright violence to quiet acceptance whereby norms are reconfigured. Nevertheless, Shiv's critique is one you hear more and more, one that questions the moral superiority of arranged marriages.

The Confines of Family, the Reach of Kin

Parents, the couples tell me, are actually ready to support their children. It is the relatives that pose the problem and the societal pressure that is so intense that parents become willing to lock up their kids or disown them, or even threaten violence to relieve this pressure. "Our own planning failed," says Shiv, "I had to go home, stop my studies, and work in a call center to support myself while we kept trying to convince both sides." This retreat into the family becomes the first step towards their social disconnection.

Both Shiv and Renu tell their parents that they cannot marry anyone else. After a lot of convincing, Renu's family agrees to meet with Shiv. Of course they already know him and have met him many times before, but this is the first time since the revelation of his relationship with their daughter. Shiv admits he was afraid at the prospect of meeting with them. "Parents can kill children over this in Haryana," he tells me. Renu interjects, "My papa is good; they only talked." Shiv continues, "I told them, 'I'm from a lower caste, and that can't be changed. But please tell me what I can do? Do I need to earn Rs. 15,000 or 50,000 or 70,000? Do I need to get a government job to come take your daughter's hand?' But all he said was that I should have taken his permission before starting to go out."

Renu's mother softens and admits that Shiv is a sincere and "good boy" from a "good family." But she still does not agree to them marrying due to caste and the pressures from family and society. For Shiv, her attitude is the ultimate hypocrisy, though he sees it as a generalizable problem:

My mother suggested to my father to let me marry Renu, then my *chachha* (father's younger brother) came and said that the family will disown us if they let me marry her. Growing up we always heard about our family, that elders know better, that they will match you to the right family, a good home with good values, and that relatives will be the backbone of your life, that they will secure your future, like social security. If you marry by choice, we were told, you will be all alone. I said to my parents, 'O.K., I will not marry Renu if you can give me on stamp paper that the girl I marry will make us all happy.'

Shiv invokes stamp paper again, this time to bring a rational authority to the most nebulous aspect of marriage: happiness. He also sees his future bride as not only bringing happiness to himself but to his entire family. Marriage may be a form of social security, but it also brings risks if everyone is unhappy. Shiv asserts happiness as a value that may ultimately impinge on everyone's social security. His parents tell him that they cannot certify his future marriage in this way, because they just do not know. Shiv counters with his own evidence, telling them that Renu will "massage your feet every night." He recalls the classic trope of the good daughter-in-law who will massage her in-laws' feet, and, it is assumed, care for them in old age. She could in effect be *their* social security.

Shiv's father eventually tells the couple to do what they want, but it is clear that his words act as more of a dismissal than a show of support. The couple is back to square one, and each is becoming more isolated. Shiv struggles with his call center job because he has to walk four miles to get there each day. Renu's parents threaten her, make her stop working, and take away her phone, restricting her physical and social mobility at once. Shiv now feels compelled to have an exit strategy. He is afraid that Renu's parents could send her to Bihar, where she would be out of his reach. He is also resigned to society's "false standards" where, he tells me, "respect is given only to anyone who is financially well off." By this time he has also been reading posts on the Love Commandos website and chats with one of their volunteers online. Moving forward means getting married. The Love Commandos recommend an Arya Samaj wedding. Couples who want some

kind of religious ceremony but who are from different caste or religious communities will sometimes opt for the Arya Samaj, which began as a nineteenth-century religious reform movement, an off-shoot of Hinduism that shuns rituals and customs, in an attempt to get back to the unadorned essentials of Vedic-era Hinduism. A lawyer friend of Shiv's advises him *not* to go in for a court marriage because in Haryana, word can get around that "people talk and relatives have resources." These "resources," several in the room pipe up to explain, are nothing less than "*goondas*" (thugs) dispatched by the family. The specter of violence is never far from their minds.

When some more of his relatives show up at the house to pressure his parents, Shiv abandons his plan to wait for his next paycheck from the call center and leaves the house. He travels ticketless on a train the 90 kilometers to Gurgaon. He then contacts one of Renu's girlfriends to relay a message to Renu, and the girlfriend arranges for the two to meet. "I left the house with no phone, no money, and no idea that by 5 p.m. that day I would be married," says Renu, still incredulous.

Shiv and Renu had been at the Love Commandos safe house for just a week when I first met them. They told me they are grateful to the organization for doing everything to protect them, even if the question of the future looms. "We don't have our school certificates or documents," says Shiv, "since they are with our parents at home. We want to study, to go back to work, to eventually live with my parents." They want to be re-absorbed by the family, but on their own terms.

Love, Marriage, and Family

The safe house of the Love Commandos offers an escape and yet the couples that end up there experience a new form of physical confinement and immobility. Put another way, their current "invisibility" to their families is informed by the visibilities of caste and class at the heart of their stories. As the anthropological literature shows, these visibilities and invisibilities are central to urbanism as they propel, restrict, and enable people to re-interpret their lives (Frøystad 2006; Dickey 2013). There is also a strong temporal quality at play, as in June Hee Kwon's (2015) ethnography of Korean Chinese migrants who get stuck waiting for each other and for remittances in transnational marriages. Such marriages enable social mobility, but they are premised on a kind of immobility of the relationships themselves and of the individuals involved on each side of the border. This waiting is different from the experience of "timepass" (boredom and disengagement associated with masculine forms of idleness) recounted by Craig Jeffrey (2010) in his ethnography of unemployed young men in Meerut. The anticipatory aspect of waiting is distinguishable from the resignation inherent in timepass, even if timepass also becomes a site of meaning and identity formation.

As with the couples I met in the safe house, the process of waiting in the safe house comes to bear on the meaning and experience of love and the caste politics that undergird the situation in each case. What is different is

that the waiting does not produce wealth (unlike the remittances moving across borders in Kwon's ethnographic case) but rather seeks to reform families based on the couples' absence. They wait for legal redress, which makes their long days at the shelter inherently meaningful, but they also wait, in a sense, for social change. Each person I talked to at the shelter cared deeply for their families and lamented the turn of events that had led them to the safe house. At the same time, the details of the stories of each couple illustrate their own critiques of society and of how their own families are enmeshed in what the couples see as hypocritical and outmoded views. Their disappointment was also palpable. In the ethnographic case I have explored, the temporal and anticipatory nature of the couples' confinement colors their entire narratives because their aim is not individual liberation—their escape not an end point—but rather it is to affectively and socially align familial interests and networks with urban ones. This alignment is in fact essential to their mobility in a neoliberal economy and globalized cultural realm.

Conclusion

By tying together social and physical mobility I have wanted to show the ways in which they overlap and connect to each other, an experience of urban life made concrete in the narratives of the two couples. I have also wanted to concretize how mobility functions in the lives of the couples as a way to think through the "mobility paradigm" as well as how mobility and immobility play out in a discrete ethnographic context (Urry and Sheller 2006; Salazar and Smart 2011; Cresswell 2010). The couples' social mobility fueled by aspirations for education, living with the person of their choice, and moving around the city in a way that enables caste invisibility and social confidence, the mobility of the two couples has altered their senses of belonging to places where they are from, whether Haryana or Rajasthan or Bihar.

"Mobility," then, is not merely being on the move, nor is it only about what impedes or enables movement. "Rather," it is a complex of institutions that bear on the social and affective relations between individuals and notions of self, family, and caste. Loving someone across a caste boundary, while questioning and re-interpreting the meaning of that boundary and the mobilities it impedes and enables, as Ajay, Gita, Shiv, and Renu do, is in fact the work of social change.

As a result, the couples must forge new senses of belonging by bridging urban and familial networks and attitudes. Their experiences of escape and confinement, physical release and constriction, are not isolated acts but rather attempts to dislodge the social order and challenge their own social designations. The safe house and the Delhi Metro are transitional spaces that contribute to this dislodging, as marriage and love relationships in these narratives have been lifted from the realm of the family and been taken into unfamiliar and unknown spaces. At stake are certainly the lives of the couples but also the social and political meanings of love and caste.

Notes

1. See Inderpal Grewal's (2013) analysis of how the idea of "honour killing," which hinges on racial and religious difference and "the crime of culture," gets produced in Euro-American contexts and projected back onto Eastern contexts as a kind of "outsourced patriarchy." I see the Love Commandos' own use of the term as evidence of that transnational feedback loop, as "honour killing" has become a catch-all term even for Indians.

2. See, for instance, Gethin Chamberlain, "Honour Killings: How the Love Commandos Rescue India's Young Lovers," *The Observer*, October 11, 2010: 36; Pallavi Pundir, "Romeo and Juliet in Delhi," *Indian Express*, November 7, 2012; Ben Doherty, "Rescued by the Love Commandos," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 5, 2013: 9; Martin Gilmour, "Rescued by the Love Commandos," *The Examiner*, January 13, 2013: p. 30; Jane Mulkerrins, "A Matter of Love or Death," *Irish Daily Mail*, February 9, 2013: 37–41; "The World's Only Army for Love," *Pretoria News*, February 28, 2013: 37; Tanul Thakur, "In the Name of Honour," *Man's World India*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.mansworldindia.com/people/in-the-name-of-honour/>

3. An intercaste relationship or marriage is one between individuals from two different subcastes or (*jatis*) that are the interstitial caste groupings, of which there are hundreds, that vary by region. Over 90% of Indians marry within their subcaste, although intercaste marriages are becoming more common. Intercaste marriage in most communities carries the taint of having had a marriage by choice (or "love marriage") rather than formal or informal arrangement by one's parents. See Donner (2002) for an ethnographic example of how choosing one's own marriage partner within one's subcaste is becoming more acceptable. The cases I explore here are of couples who not only choose their own marriage partner but also cross caste lines while doing so; both issues are central to their stories.

4. I have in mind the Special Marriages Act of 1954, which allows a civil contract between a man of at least 21 years of age and a woman of at least 18 years of age. The Act enables couples to be married without religious rites or any other ceremonial requirements.

5. I met Sanjoy on several occasions but recount our first meeting here.

6. "Arvind Kejriwal says ban on khap panchayats not needed," January 30, 2014 Reuters article posted on the NDTV website, retrieved on April 7, 2015: <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/arvind-kejriwal-says-ban-on-khap-panchayats-not-needed-549299>

7. My interviews with the couples at the safe house of the Love Commandos took place in March–May 2015 and July 2016. I chose the couples to write about in this article based on my analysis of how typical their narratives were. I have disguised the names of the young people I interviewed, as well as some of their identifying details, in order to protect their privacy and whereabouts.

8. Mark Liechty describes this dynamic well in relation to youth and consumerism in Kathmandu, where the social imperative of money and the market economy make the moral logic of caste subordinate to the economic logic of class (2003:8).

9. "Scheduled" castes refer to the more than 1,000 historically disadvantaged caste groups listed in the Indian Constitution, most of whose members were considered untouchables (the British colonial term) or *harijans* (Mohandas K. Gandhi's term, meaning "children of god"), or today, "*Dalits*" (their own term, meaning "downtrodden and oppressed").

10. Haryana has the lowest ratio of women to men, according to the 2011 Census of India. There are 877 female to every 1000 male residents in the state, whereas the all-India rate is 940 female to 1000 male residents. See the Government of India 2011 census website: <http://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>. Delhi sociologist Ravinder Kaur has analyzed the relationship between North India's skewed sex ratio and the "importing" of girls across state borders within India to make up for the gap in the number of marriageable girls. She shows that these cross-border alliances not only cross regional and linguistic barriers but also those of religion and even caste

(Kaur 2004). For a historical and anthropological perspective on cross-region marriages in North India, also see Chowdhry (2007).

11. Gurgaon is a city in the neighboring state of Haryana, at the southern edge of the National Capital Region, now connected to central Delhi by the Metro.

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