

Dreams of Flight: Educational Mobility among Young Dalit Women in Punjab

In much of the work on social mobility among lower caste communities, mobility is conceptualised as the attainment of tangible outcomes. In contrast, this paper, situated in a predominantly Dalit village with a strong culture of migration in Punjab, attempts to move beyond objective measures of mobility and explores the operation of mobility as an ideal and aspiration for modern spaces outside the village. In this village, Chaheru despite the prevalence of strong mobility imaginaries linked with migration to Europe and North America as well as, movement to urban spaces, young women's chances of moving away from the village through migration or employment are severely limited. This paper finds that in the absence of "real" mobility young women create mobile and respectable identities while remaining in the village by drawing on their access to higher education. In their everyday negotiations with education, young women draw on ideas of Dalitness, female autonomy and urban modernity. While normative ideas of caste and gender continue to be reproduced through marriage practices, young women's construction of "educated identities" relies on reconfiguring and channelling ideas of caste and gender mobility.