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Negotiating Im(mobility): Left-Behind Migrant Wives

Introduction

Previous work on the non-migrant and left behind wives of migrants has attempted to understand women's experiences through the metrics of empowerment and autonomy (for example see Akram & Karim, 2004; Desai & Bannerji, 2008; Datta & Mishra, 2011; Gulati, 1993; Maharjan, Bauer, Knerr, 2012). Specifically, these studies look at the impact of men's migration on women's workload, responsibility, economic security and social status among others. How women fare on these indicators is used to ascertain their level of autonomy and/or empowerment. The present paper is located in the lives and experiences of young married women that belong to upwardly mobile Ad-dharmi or Chamar¹ families in the village of Chaheru. Chaheru is a predominantly Ad-dharmi village, which is located at a distance of 5km from Phagwara city in the Doaba region of Punjab. This paper attempts to interrogate the experience of middle-class migrant wives by drawing on a processual view of agency, which engages with women's everyday navigations with mobility. A focus on everyday forms of agency reveals the ways in which migrant wives reproduce the mobility imaginaries in the village through their public behaviour while negotiating private forms of autonomy in the household. Thus, contrary to the mobility imaginaries which purport that women's marriage to migrants will lead to their own mobility, the experiences of left behind wives demonstrates the immobilities and negotiations that characterize their everyday lives.

The village's location in the Doaba² region of Punjab³ and in close proximity to the city implies that ideas of urbanity and especially, migration circulate and acquire prominence in the village space. The village's culture of migration dates back to the 1970s, when the first labour migrants left for Gulf countries. The previous generation of migrants that left the village in the 1970s, spent 20-25 years of their life in the Middle East to ensure the economic security of their families. Villagers see the advent of migration to the Gulf and western countries as having brought *sudhar* or development to the village. Community members often use the discourse of migration to highlight the ways in which they have charted autonomous paths of mobility that were not reliant on government support⁴. The villagers' discourse about autonomous forms of community development has to be prefaced with regard to the economic, social and political mobility of the Ad-dharm community in Punjab.

¹ In this study the Chamars in Chaheru are referred to as Ad-dharmis and Dalits because Chamar is seen as a derogatory term and respondents self-identified as Ad-dharmi. Chamar translates to someone who works with *chamri* or animal hide. The hereditary occupation of Chamars consists of the snaring of skins and hides, tanning and leatherwork

² The Doaba region of Punjab, where Chaheru is located has the highest proportion of Dalit population within Punjab and also more pronounced Dalit mobility

³ A celebratory narrative of migration is pervasive in Punjabi popular culture, state discourse and everyday parlance in Punjabi villages and towns. A stroll on the street of Jalandhar or Phagwara reveals a proliferation of visa agencies and institutes that advertise *IELTS* classes. This strong culture of migration dates back to Punjab's economic decline, which began in the 1980s as agricultural productivity and incomes began dwindling, agrarian protest coincided with the political unrest and persecution that followed Operation Bluestar. This coincidence of economic and political turmoil conspired to create social uncertainty and lead to the exodus of young men from Punjab (Chopra, 2011; Gill, 2005; Gill, 2009; Singh, Singh & Ghuman, 2007). Doaba is the region of Punjab with the highest number of outmigrants.

⁴ Kumar (2004) has pointed out that in Dalit communities migration is even more valued because it is seen to be crucial in allowing lower castes to attain economic mobility and override caste stigma (Kumar, 2004).

At the economic level, Dalits in Punjab have undergone an occupational shift towards non-agricultural work. This shift can be linked to the advent of Green Revolution in the 1970s, which coincided with transition to mechanized agriculture, availability of cheaper migrant labour and withdrawal of Dalits from agricultural labour. Dalits sought to consolidate their economic position through non-farm work and emigration abroad (Jodhka, 2002; Judge & Bal, 2009; Ram, 2009; Singh et al., 2012). The economic mobility of Punjabi Ad-dharmis is complimented by religious and social assertions of the Chamar identity. Specifically, a religious and political movement that is associated with the emerging narrative of Chamar pride is the Ravidassia movement. This movement has its antecedents in the Ad-Dharm movement⁵ of the 1920s. It emphasizes an exclusive Ad-dharmi religious identity, separate spaces of worship and more recently, a distinctive religious text. Contemporarily, the Ravidassia movement is perceived as a tool for confronting the social and political dominance of Jats (Behl, 2010; Judge & Bal, 2009; Ram, 2009; Sharma, 2012). The sense of Ad-dharmi mobility also reverberates in aspects of popular culture like songs and slogans that celebrate the Chamar identity (Gill, 2016).

In the contemporary context of Chaheru, migration is not guided by economic need but rather by aspirations around consumption and status. Young women from most middle-class families seek migration, as it allows them to forge access not only to wealth but also urban and western lifestyles, mannerisms and cultures. These discourses about migration are informed by the ways in which return migrants carried themselves, young womens' interaction with migrant relatives and Punjab's movie and music industry. In imagining and planning for migration, young women are attempting to navigate their mobility or the physical and cultural movement away from the village space, as they seek to access urban and western cultures outside the confines of the village. The mobility imaginary around migration purports that movement to the West is associated with westernized fashion, greater female mobility, consumerism and independence

Despite the persistence of the migration as mobility imaginary, young women, especially from educated and/or more secure middle-class families also seek opportunities for employment⁶ and further education. But given the strong migration culture in Chaheru, migration emerges as the main paradigm for imagining movement away from the village. In comparison to employment and further education, it also signals a more permanent movement away from the village. The migration of women was premised on their marriage to well-settled migrants from Europe, UK or North America. This paper attempts to examine the mobility imaginary around migration in Chaheru with regard to the experience of left behind wives. It argues that the personal narratives of left behind wives reveals a more complex picture of marriage-based mobility than supposed by mobility imaginaries. Moreover, the

⁵ The Ad-Dharm movement dates back to the early 20th century when various communal forces like the Arya Samaj, Christian church and Ahmaddiya movement were actively wooing the scheduled caste population so as to be able to establish a larger base. At this time, Mangoo Ram, a Chamar Punjabi who upon his return from America became troubled with the continuity in caste discrimination, founded the Ad-Dharm movement. He decided to create a distinct Dalit identity to render it unsusceptible to poaching. At its onset the Ad-Dharm movement faced physical opposition from both Hindus and Sikhs and was only welcomed by the British. Despite the hardships, the Ad-dharmis were able to register "Ad-Dharm" as a separate religion in the 1931 Census. This move was later reversed in 1932, when with the signing of the Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi, Ad- Dharmis given their SC status were classified as Hindus. This categorization was conceded to, so as not to lose the benefits of reservation (Ram, 2004).

⁶After completing their education, young women aimed to secure "respectable" jobs that were not too far from their home, did not involve long working hours and were preferably government jobs. In fact, most women ended up running tuitions or doing stitching work from home as this was seen as more respectable than doing lowly paid private work, as they waited to migrate through marriage or secure respectable government jobs. Among government jobs, teaching jobs were preferable because they were seen as conducive to fulfilling domestic duties.

“balancing” that left behind wives perform between their public and private discourses also reveals their negotiations with patriarchal oppression.

Young Women and Marriage in Chaheru

In Chaheru, young women between the ages of 18 and 35 from upwardly mobile families had a well-developed discourse around their future plans and aspirations. Their orientation towards education and government employment, sets them apart from the young men in the community, who were more invested in accumulation of wealth and status through labour migration. These women were also the first generation to attain undergraduate and graduate degrees, as their parents were generally illiterate or had very low levels of education. The highest level of education of parents was grade 10.

The young women that I interacted extensively with for the purpose of the research have the following educational qualifications:

Name	Qualification and Institute
Kavita	MA at Ramgharia College
Malika	MA at Ramgharia College
Somika	MA at Kamla Nehru College
Gunita	Completing BCom at Ramgharia College
Nina	MBA from Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar
Rajini	MA at Lyallpur Khalsa College
Reshma	BA at Ramgharia College
Sunita	Completing BCom at Ramgharia College
Sonia	MA from Ramgharia College

Table 1.0: Educational qualifications of young women that participated in the study

After completing their undergraduate and postgraduate education, these young women aimed to migrate through marriage⁷ or attain “respectable” jobs that were not too far from their home, did not involve long working hours and were preferably government jobs. But given the high level of competition, such jobs were difficult to secure. When women sought jobs, teaching jobs were preferred because they were seen as conducive to fulfilling domestic duties (Chanana, 1993; Osella&Osella, 2000). In the absence of respectable employment opportunities, most women ended up running tuitions or doing stitching work from home. As this was seen as more respectable than doing lowly paid private work.

⁷ The most commonly accepted method for women to migrate was through marriage. This was seen as the most respectable way for women to migrate. In some cases, if you women had close extended family abroad, they also tried to migrate through work visas i.e. caregiver visa. There was only one family where young women had migrated for work to a country where they did not have relatives. In the same family, the younger sister of this girl was planning to migrate through fraudulent marriage or independently for study. This family did not enjoy a good reputation and were looked down upon for being desperate to migrate at any cost.

In contrast to young women's discourse on their future plans, which largely featured education, migration and employment, in practice young women's ability to move away from the village and attain mobility was largely possible through marriage. Despite the inevitability of marriage, it did not feature as prominently in young women's narratives. The lack of discourse on marriage can be better understood with regard to young women's particular construction of their present selves and future plans. In narrating their plans young women often overlooked or avoided discussing those aspects of their plan that they could not control. However, higher levels of education made young women more suitable candidates for marriage to a well-settled migrant from UK, Europe or North America. It was common to find young women with MA degrees married to well settled migrants who had only passed grade 10. The discourses on marriage were mostly initiated by parents, who were interested in finding migrant grooms for their educated daughters.

Especially, among less educated middle-class families, mothers expressed that they wanted to get their daughters married to a well-settled migrant boy. This desire was especially directed towards their well-educated daughters, who had completed or were pursuing a BA or MA degree. Less educated daughters generally completed their education till grade 12 and were married to locally employed men or those that migrated to the Gulf. Marriage related mobility was more accessible to educated women who could marry migrants from the West, as their marriage had the potential to facilitate not only their own but also the family's mobility.

In discussing their daughters' marriage parents expressed that they wanted to find a *pakka* boy or someone who has permanent status in the country abroad. They did not want "*kacha*"⁸ or temporary marriages for their daughters, as marriage was a "serious business". The term *kacha* referenced marriages that were brokered for the purposes of migration or fraudulent marriages, in which the bride was deserted by the groom. The risks of marriage to a migrant was also highlighted by young women themselves. Within the community, if a migrant wife did not migrate within a year of the marriage, rumours about the marriage being fraudulent and the husband having a second wife abroad began.

The Doaba region of Punjab is infamous for its high number of fraudulent marriages. In such marriages, migrant men come and get married to local women but never take them abroad. This phenomenon has often been called holiday brides or honeymoon brides. Between 2016 and 2018 there were 4307 complaints of Indian women being deserted by their NRI husbands in Punjab, Gujarat and Kerala according to the Ministry of External Affairs^{9,10}. Other estimates peg the number of abandoned brides much higher at 15,000 within the Doaba region of Punjab itself^{11,12}. Despite the real risks of marriage migration, it continued to be the most popular and reliable way to move away from the village. In Chaheru, mothers of educated young women discussed the possibility of finding migrant grooms for their

⁸ It was known that lower class women in the village migrate through marriages of convenience, where the marriage is arranged for the purposes of migration and dissolved soon after. But middle-class families did not perceive this as a respectable thing to do and looked down upon it as a sign of desperation.

⁹ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/punjab-govt-cracks-down-on-nri-grooms-who-abandon-brides-103900-2012-05-30>

¹⁰ <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/spurt-in-cases-of-marriage-fraud-behind-govt-s-push-for-nri-bill-1554835184671.html>

¹¹ The Punjab state government has been confiscating the passports of men whose wives have filed their complaints. Women are required to substantiate their complaints with a copy of the FIR against the husband, proof of marriage and an affidavit that the complaint was not frivolous. Following the preliminary scrutiny, the office issues a show-cause notice to the respective grooms.

¹² <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/the-big-story/story/20190121-sham-marriages-revenge-of-the-brides-1427714-2019-01-15>

daughters but were often silent on the negative implications. Young women were more aware and concerned about such implications and often said that in order to prevent the case of honeymoon brides they made sure to do a background check through other migrant relatives and kin abroad.

In examining the experiences of migrant wives, we find that in some ways they embody the mobility ideal, as they have been able to marry well-settled migrant men and attained the consequent class mobility. But marriage to a migrant has not provided them with the promised physical mobility or movement away from the village. Their personal narratives reveal the gap between the mobility imaginaries and actual navigations around mobility.

Left Behind Wives

In examining the experiences of left behind migrant wives it is important to attend to the everyday negotiations around forms of autonomy and mobility. Rashid(2013) argues that examining women's experiences through the narrow lens of autonomy and empowerment echoes development discourse and reduces women to passive actors in need of intervention. Rashid (2013) purports the importance of engaging with the concepts of self, agency and power that emerge from women's own negotiations and narratives. She draws on the work of Mahmood(2006), who proposes that agency must be understood based on the conditions of its emergence. Mahmood (2006) says, "...viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (p.42). Rashid(2103) uses Mahmood (2006)'s framework to look at the experiences of left behind wives in different conditions: in a nuclear household with their children in the husband's village, with the in laws in a joint family set up in the village, in her natal home with her children and as a working woman. In engaging with women's own narratives, Rashid is able to show the varied experiences of migrant wives and the multiple constructs of agency that emerge. Rashid(2013) shows that often as agentive beings Bangladeshi women are attempting to inhabit dominant gender norms by fulfilling the conditions of a good wife, daughter in law and mother. She makes a strong case for expanding our definition of agency to include those acts that may serve to perpetuate patriarchal oppression.

In using Rashid (2013)'s framework as a point of departure, the present work attempts to situate agency in women's everyday discourses and navigations. The wives of well settled migrant men were seen to be occupying a distinctive position in the community, as they embodied the mobility ideal of the community. They were educated young women who had managed to marry well placed migrant men, which would eventually lead to their own migration and positioning as migrants. As per the community perception they had attained class mobility even if they physically remained in the village. Consequently, wives of migrant men conducted themselves in public spaces to live up to the mobility ideal of marriage migration. Despite the public display of wealth and consumption, privately, migrant wives continued to struggle with immobility and the rupture in their personal imaginaries of mobility. The private narratives of left behind wives revealed that their negotiations were directed around charting their independent mobility or movement away from the village through migration. The agency of left behind migrant wives emerges in their balancing of

their public and private lives. This can be further explored with regard to the experiences of Sonia and Reema.

Sonia¹³ has been married for the last three years and also has a one-year-old daughter. She has completed her MA from Ramgharia College and was teaching at LPU for some time before marriage. Sonia's husband works and lives in Italy. Right after marriage she stayed with her husband for a month and half and thereafter, he kept coming every few months. But he has not come for the last two years. He is waiting to finalize the papers for his wife and daughter's migration before he comes to India. He has never met his daughter. Often owing to problems with her mother in law Sonia lives in Chaheru at her father's house. While there she is mostly on the phone talking to her husband. In fact, it becomes very difficult to talk to her in her house. On one occasion when she has to go outside the village to get sanitary pads, I accompany her and get to talk to her alone. Sonia confides that while she wanted to go "bahar"¹⁴, or outside, she did not want to marry a man so much older than her. Sonia's husband is eight years older than her. She is also concerned that her husband has not even seen his daughter and has not yet facilitated her migration. When I ask her if everything is fine, she reiterates that it is just taking time for the paperwork to come through. She also adds that she has gotten a relative to check and confirmed he is not up to something else there (implying a second marriage).

In contrast to Sonia's private admission of her qualms about marrying an older man and her anxieties about her own migration, in talking to other community members she is careful to uphold the image of a happily married woman. People in the community often gossip about how she has been married to someone so much older than her. When people ask how come her husband has not seen his daughter, Sonia calmly explains that her husband is in the process of arranging the visa. She presents herself as well settled in her marital household. In fact, other people in the community do not seem to know how often she is at her parent's house because she does not step out of the house much. When Sonia does step out, she is careful to wear well-stitched and fashionable clothes and ensures her daughter is also dressed and groomed appropriately. This variation in narratives for public and private consumption also comes forth in case of another migrant wife, Reema.

Reema is in her mid-thirties and has been married for the last ten years to a migrant that lives and works in Italy. Reema wears fashionable and expensive suits, spends on her personal grooming and her kitchen is well stocked with fruits and vegetables. Her children are well dressed, articulate and are often seen playing with different toys. In fact, they resemble city children. Even the general impression in the community is that Reema has a lot of money and is spendthrift. In fact, Kavita, who is her neighbour comments that she married her husband, despite knowing that he has a wife and family in Italy due to money¹⁵. Kavita relays that she gets INR 35,000 a month from her husband that is why she is sticking around.

¹³Sonia's father owns one of the most popular grocery stores in the village and runs the store along with his wife and older son. Sonia has three brothers. The eldest brother is handicapped and is often at home and the youngest brother is pursuing his BA at Ramgharia college. The middle brother, who also helps out at the grocery store harbours a strong ambition to migrate and has been trying for the last 3-4 years.

¹⁴Bahar translates to outside. This term was often used to refer to western countries and spaces abroad that people aspired to move to.

¹⁵Based on Kavita's telling, Reema's husband got married to an Italian girl to get PR and he did not leave the other wife after he got PR. Kavita tells me that is why he does not take Reema there. Also, Reema's mother in law claims she knew about this prior to her marriage.

Kavita¹⁶ often complains that although Reema has done both beautician and stitching courses, she gets Kavita to do her waxing and stitching and then does not even pay her the commensurate amount. Kavita paints Reema as a scheming and aggressive woman who cheats people off their money, oppresses her in laws¹⁷ and is only interested in her husband's money. Moreover, it interprets Reema through the lens of the mobility imaginary, according to which people's actions are explained by their desire to move up and ahead. Reema's negotiations, struggles and immobilities as a migrant wife are overlooked. Thus, the construct of mobility is maintained by both migrant wives who are careful to create an image of wealth and status as well as, community members who only view migrant families through the mobility imaginary.

In contrast to this manicured public image, in her private conversations with me Reema defines the struggles and constrains in her everyday life. It is likely that my status as an outsider to the community enables Reema to express her problems more freely. Reema is upset and frustrated that her husband is neither facilitating her migration nor allowing her to work within the village. She says,

Your bhaiya is not clear what he wants to do. He doesn't take a decision. He doesn't take us there... there are so many girls that were married at that time whose husbands were abroad and now they are all there with their children...and he also doesn't say that you have to stay here. In the last 3 years he hasn't been sending enough money home and when we ask him, he says he hasn't been paid. But if he hasn't been paid how is he managing there

Reema's frustration emerge as stemming from her "left behind" status and insecure claim to remittances. While other young women have surpassed her and have been able to move away, she is still "stuck" where she started. Reema is a well-educated woman (has completed her MA) whose liaison with her husband (has only completed grade 10) was likely premised upon migration as an opportunity opening up for her. However, Reema's husband has failed to facilitate her mobility and is even infringing on her autonomy within the village space by restricting her movement and economic resources. Reema recounts that while she was offered the job of an Asha worker by the sarpanch she could not take it up because her husband does not allow her to work. Even her trips to other people's houses are monitored by her mother in law and then relayed back to her husband¹⁸.

Similarly, Sonia also mentions restrictions around employment¹⁹ and clothing. In describing her husband's control over her clothing, she says, "...he has this in his head that my wife should wear jeans and look good...he would like me to wear short and tight dresses as well." While Sonia's husband's insistence that she wear western clothes appears out of place in a

¹⁶Kavita is a young girl of 23 who belongs to a migrant family. Her father was a bank clerk and passed away six years ago. Interestingly, in her family the migrant members are not male but her older sisters and maternal grandmother. Like many other girls in the village, Kavita has obtained various educational qualifications with the objective of migration. Kavita tells me she has done beautician and caregiver courses with the hope that these courses and skills will enable her to land a job in Canada. She has also completed her MA in History from Ramgharia College and wants to do her B.Ed. degree in Canada. Kavita's also has three married sisters. The oldest sister is in the UK and the one younger to her moved to Italy to join her husband towards the end of my fieldwork. Kavita's youngest oldest sister, Meeta lives in Chandigarh with her husband who works as a driver. Kavita's oldest brother works in Bangalore and the younger brother is receiving training in cooking to be able to go to Canada and assist with his uncle's restaurant.

¹⁷ Kavita and her mother claim that Reema beats her mother in law.

¹⁸ In fact, Kanta and Kavita tell me later that Reema's husband was on the phone listening in to my interaction with his family, the first couple of times I spoke with them.

¹⁹ Her husband is of the view that she can work post migration, once she is abroad.

rural cultural context, it appears oriented to showcasing one's status as a migrant wife. In fact, even migrant men who visit from Europe and North America dawn attire like shorts, T-shirts, sunglasses and expensive watches, which is out of place in a village but positions them as high-status migrants. Moreover, contrary to the assumption that Sonia would enjoy parading her position as a migrant wife in western attire she expresses discomfort. She laments that now she always has to be stuck in jeans and cannot wear suits. When I ask her how her husband will even know what she is wearing, she says that he will ask her. In fact, the phone becomes an explicit instrument of intervention for the husband. Even Reema's husband listens in to my early conversations with Reema and her family. I only find out about this later when Kavita tells me. The phone also sometimes allows for a positive intervention from the husband. In the case of a Gulf migrant and his newly wedded wife, there was a misunderstanding between the wife and mother in law. The mother in law thought the wife was talking to another man when actually she claimed she was listening to religious hymns. The husband intervened via a phone call and told his mother to not bother his wife. Thus, much like Rashid (2013)'s findings, despite their physical absence migrant men continued to be involved in household dynamics.

Intrahousehold dynamics and ensuing negotiations with the mother in law also occupy an important role in young women's narratives. Sonia explains how her migration is being obstructed due to intrahousehold dynamics. She mentions that her mother in law doesn't want her to go because she fears her son will stop sending as much money home. The mother in law also does not let her go for IELTS classes or work because she fears she will surpass her son and leave him. Even in the case of Reema, she claims that her mother in law reports on her behaviour and controls the money that her husband sends back home.

In addition to coping with being left behind by their "mobile" husbands, migrant wives have to work around the restrictions imposed upon them by their husbands and mother in laws. The gendered restrictions, which involves young women's withdrawal from devalued forms of work and management of young women's engagement with the public sphere is reminiscent of processes of class mobility among lower caste communities. Kapadia (1995) and Still (2017) insist that the transition to class mobility among lower caste communities entails the selective emulation of upper-caste behaviours. This often entails adopting more conservative norms around women's behaviour, which uphold the value of female seclusion (Kapadia, 1995; Srinivas, 1956; Still, 2017). Still (2017) terms this process of appropriating and adapting upper caste patriarchy as the "Dalitisation of patriarchy" (p. 190). This process of selective adaptation involves rejecting most aspects of upper caste lifestyles, customs and religion and only adopting the upper caste focus on female respectability. It spurs a shift in Dalit women's identity within the household, from being economically productive members to the producers of status and respectability (Heyer, 2014; Still, 2017). This modification in women's household role also coincides with their withdrawal from lowly valued agricultural and manual work.

In response to these conditions of Dalit patriarchy, both Sonia and Reema align with gendered expectations and in publicly playing out their roles as "good" migrant wives, much like the women discussed by Rashid (2013) can be seen to be reproducing the conditions of their oppression. However, in performing their role as migrant wives, Sonia and Reema are able to accrue status and class mobility. Moreover, their personal narratives suggest that young women are also questioning and resisting these gendered expectations. Migrant wives are also "making plans" and attempting to negotiate greater access to economic resources and

autonomy around clothing, employment and physical movement. In fact, in discussing her future plans Reema mentions that once the children are grown up, she will leave them with their maternal grandmother and go abroad. Similarly, Sonia also talks about starting beautician work from home. Thus, despite constraints young married and unmarried women alike, at the level of plans and discourse express a commitment towards independent claims of mobility. It is not enough for young women to accrue status through marriage to a migrant. They envision mobility as reflective of individual mobility and their own movement away from the village.

Conclusion

The experiences of migrant wives that have been left behind in the village reveal a more complex connection between marriage and mobility than that implied by mobility imaginaries. While mobility imaginaries draw a simple link between marriage migration and mobility, many young women despite marrying well settled migrants remain in the village. In probing the experience of left behind wives, this chapter draws on Mahmood (2006)'s construct of agency and locates young women's agency in the "balancing act" that they perform between their private and public selves. Left behind wives put up the veneer of class mobility for public consumption. This public display of class mobility involves migrant wives partaking in the conditions of their oppression while simultaneously reinforcing their status. Within the household, they have to negotiate restrictions around physical mobility, employment, clothing and ensure access to remittances. Their personal narratives reveal the discrepancy between mobility imaginaries of migration and the experience of marriage migration. Additionally, these narratives also point to young women's resistance to gendered expectations and their personal immobility. Taken together, marriage continues to be an important conduit to migration-based mobility. But it is also a site of patriarchal oppression and immobility that young women have to actively negotiate.

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