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We are Good:
Political Life in a North Indian Community

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by

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The dissertation of Whitney Russell is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

To Match and her chaperone.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Ashrey is a village in North India that is made up of one tribal community that was once nomadic, racialized, and criminalized under British rule, but has been reclassified as a Scheduled Caste (also sometimes known as “untouchable”) and permanently settled in this village since the

1970s. Ashrey has since become what some scholars term a “prostitution village,” a place where the majority of families derive most of their income from sex work. Commercial sexual labor is highly contested in Ashrey, and has been officially banned by the community's extra-judicial council. Despite their directive, sex work continues as an open secret. While it might seem like politics in Ashrey could align with several salient political frameworks in North India, including development and indigenous rights, I did not find that politics took these forms in this community. Instead, political life in Ashrey is a question of who and what is “good.”

This dissertation looks at the good first in its historical context as the community came to be categorized by various governance regimes. I then detail the ways in which sex work is contested and debated as a potential site of the good, followed by how an NGO intervention has disrupted its use in the community. I end with two cases in the local village council, where goodness is evaluated through the public performance of dispute resolution. Ashrey, I argue, is a community perpetually enmeshed in hyper-moralized discourses of not only sex work, but race, gender, tribe, caste, class. As a result, politics have become an ethical enterprise motivated by a collective investment in the good. This finding is significant because it implies that what some anthropologists call “the good" can be a site not just of morality or ethics, but also of political power.

Chapter One: Introduction

On the subcontinent described by geologists as the Indian Plate, the Yamuna river flows south from the Himalayan mountains towards the sea. The Thar desert lies to the west. From the south, the land is sliced at a diagonal by the Aravelli mountain range, relatively small at its height of 5,000 feet in comparison to the Yamuna's origin at 30,000. The Aravelli mountains point towards the Yamuna and in between them, lies one of the most populated cities in the world. The vast metropolitan area of Delhi is home to over 30 million people, its roads and sidewalks packed as people teem with what is sometimes called "organized chaos." A shiny metro system shuttles millions of people around a city that has been populated since the 6th Century BCE. In May and June, daily temperatures soar to over a hundred degrees and, in August, streets flood in the monsoon. People seek solace from noise, heat, and air pollution in the leafy boulevards around the Parliament building, in air conditioned shopping malls, or on the cool marble floors of temples, mosques, and gurdwaras.

In this density of noisy human activity, it is easy to forget the existence of villages, farmland, and open rural areas in the region known as "outer Delhi." The village of Ashrey (a pseudonym) is located here. While Delhi seems to be ever expanding, it has not reached all of its rural lands, especially not those bordering on the hot and dry state of Haryana. Despite its arid climate, Haryana was one of the states in India at the center of the Green Revolution of the 1960s that converted agricultural societies into vast spaces of industrial farming. Haryana, now, is a sea of agriculture intermittently marked by rapidly growing industrial cities. Ashrey lies along a straight and narrow road running away from Delhi and into Haryana. The village's

land is bordered by farm fields and protected forest, and only a few moments drive will take one to the banks of what was once a rushing Yamuna tributary. From a rooftop in Ashrey, the view over sweeping swaths of trees and agricultural fields is clear after a rainstorm, and limited in the winter when atmospheric inversion traps pollution, industrial farming, and car emissions from millions of people in a thick haze close to the ground.

"Ashrey" is a place made up of one denotified tribal community that was once nomadic and criminalized under British rule (Bhukya 2010; Radhakrishna 2001; Bhattacharya 2019). Today, denotified means that the tribe appeared on this colonial list of inherent and biological criminals, but was cleared of this designation after independence. Like many other denotified tribes, Ashrey's has been settled in their current location ever since elders purchased land from a wealthy farming community in the 1970s. Unlike some other denotified tribes who have settled (Pandian 2009), Ashrey's land is not sufficient to take up agriculture. In the last few decades, the community has instead become what some scholars term a "prostitution village" (Agrawal 2008), a place where at least one family member in most households provides the majority of the income through sex work. Though there is variation in what makes for a "prostitution village," those of the North Indian plains region usually share a common history as a denotified tribe, and settlement on small spaces of land they do not share with other caste or tribal communities. While criminal tribes were formally cleared of their criminal status at independence, a few saw their default "denotified" status replaced with the designation of Tribal or, in the case of Ashrey, a Scheduled Caste, which makes them eligible for positive discrimination in universities and government employment. While this history is more extensively detailed in chapter two, the context of criminality, nomadism, sex work, and

caste status are important to understanding how the ethical and the political are intertwined in this community.

I first visited Ashrey in 2008 when I was a research intern with a well-known (but here unnamed) women's rights NGO located in India and headquartered in Delhi. My primary responsibility, aside from managing foreign guests, was to write and edit sections of a report contracted by the National Commission for Women. Ashrey was one of the communities being analyzed in the report, and I was introduced to most of my key informants here through working on this report in 2008-2009. As an intern at that time, I had what I now recognize as common unsettling experiences regarding the operations of NGOs in the postcolonial world. For instance, donors seemed to have much more control over programming than the people being served. Funding seemed to flow mostly to the donor instead of to communities because, I was told, merely giving people money would be interpreted as an insulting form of charity. Yet, even then, I did not attribute any of these practices directly to the founder or individual NGO employees. I disagreed with many things the organization did, but also understood that there was a bigger picture or larger issue surrounding what the NGO was willing or able to do, and what it was not.

What stuck with me the longest was how often Ashrey was presented to me as a place requiring an external input to become politically active. It became a familiar refrain that women in this community were, allegedly, uninterested in organizing themselves to take major steps towards improving their community. I heard they could not organize for their own empowerment without intervention and that, whenever things looked like they might take off, progress suddenly stalled because they women were not ready for it. I heard this narrative in

various forms from the founder, from consultants, staff, funders and foreign visitors, and saw it repeated in the grey literature that moved through our office as I both read it, and produced it.

The reason why the presentation (and representation) of the community stood out to me would be made clear many years later when, as mentioned in the last chapter of this dissertation, a young woman in Ashrey succinctly exclaims how disconnected from reality it is to understand her community as lacking in politics. “We are so crazy!” she says. Her assessment comes in light of just how many cases are arbitrated by the local extra-judicial village council and, at a rate of several a week, her understanding that other villages simply do not have as many conflicts to resolve. In the year of ethnographic research I did in 2018, I saw when she means; disagreements between families and clans can easily erupt into cases requiring public mediation, and the rate of their eruptions visibly weighed on my host family who sat on the council and often hosted these meetings in their own home. The idea that people in this community are not political actors engaged in political activities does not reflect peoples’ experiences of everyday life.

While my initial questions as an intern were about development, empowerment, and women’s rights as human rights, my observations of tensions and misunderstandings among and between various stakeholders led me to wonder how power was distributed such that NGO interventions were never going to have the outcomes promised to donors. Most of these mismatches seemed adequately explained by thinking with critical development studies and post-development theory to see development as a discourse (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995); the very problems that the NGO sought to solve were tied up in discursive formations that had little to do with what people in the community actually wanted for themselves. While the

fourth chapter details some of these misunderstandings, and contextualizes them within the legacy of India's Criminal Tribes Act, there seemed to be yet another layer around these issues that required a broader analysis beyond development. Specifically, I kept returning to how Ashrey was repeatedly rendered as all but politically inert. It was almost as if the community was a blank slate or empty space that needed a spark or input to become political in some, unspecified, adjectival sense. All the while, council members were almost exhausting themselves with demands for mediation that erupted so frequently that a frustrated resident identified her village as "so crazy."

This dissertation responds to a disconnect between what development agencies and actors tend to see as political activity, and everyday life in a small North Indian community teeming with politics that are not seen as such. By reconsidering the category of politics itself, I hope to push slightly past the well-established idea that development acts as an anti-politics (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995), and instead suggest that flourishing political activity can sometimes be misread as something else entirely, thus giving the impression of its absence. In other words, if development is an anti-politics (Ferguson 1994), it may only act against a certain kind of politics that are already understood as such. I found that politics in Ashrey have gone on undisturbed, almost as if the community has never been the target of various state and NGO-based development and/or improvement plans. I suggest that this happens because the politics in play are not obviously "politics," and they are not so because they are usually deployed in the realms of what might be seen as moral or ethical activity. The community in Ashrey does ethics at the site of politics and that, by working through moral and ethical questions in political spaces, they are often excluded from being read as political actors.

Politics in political anthropology

Social science has had a long-running interest in how to define politics as a distinct dimension of human life. In her history of how this category was formulated by colonial thinkers, Prathama Banerjee reminds us that the social was considered a sign of advancement; only after having reached a certain advanced level of social organization, were societies considered even capable of formulating a political (2020). The "political," as distinct from a broader "social," has been theorized in many forms. For Aristotle, politics were the actions of citizens operating in the public sphere. Carl Schmitt saw politics in the sovereign power to distinguish between friends and enemies (1996). The key early contribution from anthropologists, however, was to think about politics at a local level rather than through the state. For example, Meyer Fortes and EE Evans Pritchard located politics in efforts to sustain order, while Edmund Leach focused on how politics changed societies over time. In thinking about the Ashrey community as political actors, but in a way other than what they are to the Indian state, I am drawing from these early political ethnographies that aimed to understand non-state politics as practiced at a local level.

As some anthropologists followed Laura Nader's call to move away from the village, and "up" to broader systems of power, political anthropologists began looking at specific aspects of the state to understand how power, in various forms, shaped people's lives. The context and nature of power shifted as the hegemonic rise of neoliberal ideals brought about new forms of the political, often through what some scholars term "new social

movements" (Tarrow 1998; Touraine 1985) which tend to be based on identity, rights, and recognition (Honneth 1996). In South Asia, "neoliberalism" indicates a shift away from the state and towards the market as the vehicle of growth and development (Gupta 1998), which pushed theorists to reconsider the role of the state in how politics are understood. Jacques Rancière, for example, would say that none of these "new social movements" for recognition are politics, as politics are rare occurrences in which people disagree with the order of society and reorganize it entirely (see Genel and Deranty 2016). Rancière's view of politics is one in which myths of equality, inclusivity, and fairness are rejected as a "miscount," and everything else, even if it appears to be politics, is really a way to "police" the existing social order.

Others saw a space to reinterpret how a Marxist understanding of class politics might be further developed by what is now often called "identity politics." One impetus can be seen in what Dagnino calls a "perverse confluence" (2003), which is that new forms of citizenship and democracy produce "new social movements" for rights and recognition, while also pulling the rug out from these demands by revealing a state too reduced and diminished to administer a meaningful response (Brown 2015; Mouffe 2005). This confluence leaves almost all social problems to be solved, or not, by neoliberal rationality, and Wendy Brown sees this relegation as a threat to democracy itself (2015). The solution is to radicalize democracy, and turn the anti-democratic effects of neoliberalism into radical democratic pluralism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2000; Keane 1988).

To some extent, radical democratic pluralism was helpful in my effort to identify and describe politics as practiced in Ashrey. These scholars are interested in the interface between ethics and politics, particularly the ways in which an ethical claim, such as equality, can create

new politics when people consider extending it to all a new area of social life. In Ashrey, however, political questions were less about how a moral or ethical idea might be applied to people in new ways. These questions did surface sometimes in my fieldwork; they are best seen in chapter three where people are shown to have conflicting feelings about how sex work might fuel or stall movements towards modernity as imagined. Yet the alleged absence of politics was, in my view, less about people's unwillingness (or perhaps even inability) to apply egalitarian principles to their lives, and more about a supposed disinterest in doing politics of any kind. To account for that, I had to think about where people located the sources of power that could make political claims possible.

The definition of politics that aligns most closely with what I saw in Ashrey is a broad and flexible understanding articulated by Postero and Elinoff (2019). For them, politics are "practices of world-making that proceed through the formulation of constellations of critique, disagreement, difference, and conflict" (2019). I see politics as a site. It is a space in which "constellations" are formed through various strategies and arrangements that include "critique, disagreement, difference, and conflict" as people act to produce the new worlds that they envision and desire. It was the practices that could not be perceived, and they were not read as politics because they were understood as something else, as diversions, distractions, gossip, or family matters that had nothing to do with world-making and the power needed to enact it. What these distractions from progress and politics were and are, however, are ethical endeavors that move through difference and conflict to accumulate power.

By power, I am thinking of how it has been described and developed in feminist theory. While politics in feminist political theory are often famously equated with "power

relations" (Watson 2013), there are variations. Liberal feminists think about power in terms of how women are excluded from opportunities, mostly professional and political, that are available to men. Socialist feminists use reproductive labor to show how class relations are not the sole source of hierarchy and inequality, and that gender is a strong factor shaping capitalist relations. Radical feminists focus on patriarchy (Ortner 2014), which is explored in detail in chapter three. In thinking about power and its relationship to politics in Ashrey, I draw from a feminist psychologist, Jean Miller, who saw politics not just as power relations, but as a question of obtaining and wielding a power to "effect change" (Miller 1992). She was thinking about what power meant to people in a therapeutic setting, and why it would be worth pursuing. However, I find her focus on the ability to *do* something especially useful in thinking about politics in a community that was perceived to be doing nothing political at all. Power may be a relation in the vein of Foucault, but power matters to people in Ashrey because power grants the possibility of change. The critiques, disagreements, differences, and conflicts of "politics" are oriented towards securing enough power to convert "practices of world-making" into habitable worlds. In other words, the actions of people at the site of politics are about producing enough power to make the worlds they can imagine, into worlds they can inhabit.

The source of the power to make worlds

Laura sat at the edge of the platform bed in my room across the courtyard of my host family's grounds. The end of my time conducting a year of formal ethnographic research with the community was in sight, though there were still several weeks remaining.

“What will you write about us, when you go back to your place?” she asked. The hot sun of what should have been the monsoon season sunk through the slats in the window, and we could smell the plastic cloud of someone burning garbage in the distance. A goat outside the window bleated, and Laura’s grandmother yelled after it, comparing its apparently lazy nature to that of her husband.

“I do not know,” I said with honesty. “I will have to think.” As I had gotten to know her, Laura had turned out to be direct, curious, and open about the details of her life. I first met her in 2008. She had been too little to speak with me, but joined a group of eager children who liked to push their way forward into pictures. Ten years later, when she was about eighteen, we laughed at how endearing she looked in an old picture, her baby teeth missing as she stood smiling next to her cousin. In 2018, it was Laura who insisted I conduct a formal life history interview with her, as she had been thinking about what things she wanted to say. I knew her wedding was imminent; that she would join her older sister in a village where the fields were wide and the animals many. Her cousin would eventually join her but, at the moment, they were not speaking on account of mutually accusing the other’s intended husband of being ugly.

“What do you want me to write?” I asked. Laura answered quickly. Based on how she had conducted her life history interview, it struck me as a question she had thought about before. She already knew the answer.

“I want you to write that we are good.”

In Ashrey, the good is the source of political power. It is both site and aspiration, a destination of striving and a place that fuels the journey. Its elusiveness frames the historical and repeated precarity inflicted on the tribe who lives there, and their ability to be perceived as

political actors. Goodness is cultivated in the individual as life decisions are weighed and made. The good is tried and tested in interactions with the state as they are mediated by NGOs, and the good is an explicit source of sovereign power within the communal adjudicating body. The good described in this dissertation is a political power without which none of the "constellations of critique, disagreement, difference, and conflict" (Postero and Elinoff 2019) could be converted into inhabitable worlds.

The good, and the ways in which it is pursued by being good, is a way to think about how rights and recognition might be contingent on a certain level of positive regard and unblemished reputation. By blending mortality with power relations, goodness becomes fundamental and prerequisite to rights and recognition. This is not the same as respectability politics, though some of the terminology might be similar. Being respectable in an effort to appear deserving of rights is not the same as a politics that grants rights, in earnest, to those who are good enough to possess them. For example, Ranciere's "miscount" could not be claimed in Ashrey if the claimants were not good people but, unlike respectability politics, it is possible to be good enough to make such a claim. No politics, in the Ranciere sense, are possible without some assurance of the power of adequately claimed good. Those who are good, in this community, escape enough of the disciplining authority and control of other people such that their constellations have a chance of becoming material, and they do.

Laura was the last of many people in her village to tell me to write about the goodness of her community. "Say that we are good" was delivered to me in a refrain almost as common as the one I had heard in my earlier life as an NGO worker, which was that this community was not politically active. Say that we are good, tell them we are good people, these were the

wishes people had for the information they shared with me. What I suggest in this dissertation is that "I want you to write that we are good" is a political statement. All the talk about goodness, all the times I listened to people sort one another into different categories of goodness, the frustrations expressed at panchayat meetings, the time Ishani hesitated and asked me "do you think I am a good person?" before sharing a secret, in all these moments between when I first met this community in 2008, to when my formal fieldwork ended in 2018, people were doing politics, it was just that they were doing them in the language of ethics.

Politics in Ethical Anthropology

The anthropology of ethics and morality is often framed as originating in Talal Asad's observation that morality is not merely a question of religion (1993). From here, a line of inquiry emerged regarding the difference between what is moral or ethical, versus what is political (Faubion 2001). Since then, the fields of ethical anthropology, anthropology of ethics, and moral anthropology have grown substantially. Some researchers use this terminology - ethics and morality - interchangeably (Mattingly and Throop 2018) but, for those who do distinguish, morals tend to be about social rules and constraints (Shweder and Menon 2014), while ethics is about how people reflect, enact, live, and negotiate within those social system (Fassin 2015). By using "ethics," I am not necessarily drawing a distinction from morals, but I am thinking along the lines of more recent work on ethics that draws from Aristotle and Foucault, rather than Durkheim (Mattingly 2012), and tends to focus on processes of ethical self-formation (Mahmood 2005; Laidlaw 2014). I am thinking about ethics as a relatively

undisciplined space in which there might be an "otherwise" to imagine (Povinelli 2011), but not as one that is separate from politics. The site of politics is entered into through ethical work in Ashrey and not the reverse, which would be engaging ethics as a way to exit the comparatively disciplined space of politics.

India has been a key ethnographic site for arguments over where the ethical is located, and has been particularly fruitful for debates over whether ethics is located in everyday life or at moments of moral breakdown (Das 2006; Laidlaw 2014). My intent was not to locate the ethical in Ashrey, but I did find that both sides of this debate seemed relevant and important to people at different moments; everyday activities were not less significant than the public arbitration that followed moral breakdowns. However, more than what ethics looks like in Ashrey, my research was aimed at trying to figure out the connection between the ethical and the political, and the ways in which they are interrelated.

Recent scholarship has asked similar questions about politics and ethics are intertwined. Saba Mahmood, for example, rethinks the notion of agency by showing how submitting to the morals of a community - in this case, veiling - can open up new possibilities for women's freedom and agency (2005). Others, such as Miriam Ticktin and Didier Fassin, look at the relationships between ethics and politics through the wide lens of humanitarianism and demonstrate that, far from being politically neutral, humanitarianism is a moral framework through which political claims are limited and made (Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2011). Scholars have also found humanitarianism useful in making claims about the connections between ethics and politics within forms of humanitarianism that are specific to South Asia (Bornstein 2012; Craig et al 2019). Many more work to reintroduce politics into a study of ethics, by

showing how the two are mutually limiting, mutually constitutive, or one at the limits of another (Das 2007; Garcia 2010; Dave 2012; Mattingly 2014).

Ethics and politics, however, have always been closely related in South Asia. For instance, in Anand Pandian's work with the Kallars of Tamil Nadu (also a denotified tribe, like the community of Ashrey), he finds that cultivation of land and cultivation of the self are related processes wherein moral tradition and modern state making are connected in an attempt to develop people into ethical subjects (2009). As Aradhana Sharma points out in her analysis of empowerment-based development interventions, these kinds of self-cultivation projects have always been a part of how the modern Indian state is imagined because of the interminable influence of Mohandas Gandhi (2008). For Gandhi, the intentional cultivation of an ethical self was prerequisite to political participation in part because a properly cultivated subject can understand the necessity of a nonviolent movement, and also because it prepared people to face the inevitable violence inflicted on nonviolent protesters (Sharma 2014; Godrej 2006; Chimni 2012). In this context, ethical self formation has been a part of South Asian politics for a long time. As people in Ashrey go about their lives considering whether they, their family, and their community are good, we can see that the answers have long-reaching political implications. It determines the likelihood of lives imagined, opens possibilities for families to thrive, factors into the formal system of grievance redressal within the community, and greatly influences the tenor of interactions with outsiders and the state.

The good

There is a growing anthropology of the good that speaks to what people are doing in Ashrey as political actors. I did not set out to intervene in this literature; I was aiming for an ethnography of political life, and only in gathering data did it become clear that politics and goodness cannot be separated in Ashrey. Given that this is what I found, it is worth briefly overviewing what has already been said about the category of the good. The good has had a long life in European philosophy; it is frequently described in terms of a positive emotion such as happiness, pleasure, or joy (Kant, Locke, and Spinoza, respectively). For Plato, in his *Republic,* the good is an imperceptible "form" responsible for all that is worthwhile in human life, and which must be sought and cultivated in order for one to become a "philosopher-king."

In anthropology, the good is currently and primarily focused on questions of what the discipline is and/or what it ought to be doing, and the debates have been brought about, in part, by Joel Robbins' 2013 essay, *Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good*. Sherry Ortner describes this debate as a tension between "dark anthropology" and "anthropologies of the good" (2016). Robbins' argument is that the decline of culture as an analytical subject gave rise to an anthropological focus on suffering. The result is scholarship that is stuck in describing the violence of neoliberalism, without the ability to offer alternatives. The "savage slot" (Trouillot 2003), he suggests, has been replaced with a suffering slot. Robbins sees the good as a way of understanding how people pursue and live good lives despite such suffering (2013). Ortner is sympathetic to some criticisms of "dark anthropology," but cautions against reducing it and its proposed opposite - anthropologies of the good - to a binary with no overlap. She proposes studies of resistance and activism as ways to look at the good within larger contexts of power and inequality (2016).

There is some debate as to whether anthropologies of the good are interested in, or have any commitments to, a sustained study of power and inequality. For instance, James Laidlaw defends anthropologies of the good as avoiding suffering, power, and inequality only as a matter of method; the end goal is still to understand suffering and goodness together within broader social experience (2016). Laidlaw, therefore, might say that suggestions underscoring the importance of studying both darkness and the good (Knauft 2018) are worthwhile suggestions for the discipline, but do not have to be taken by each individual anthropologist. Other criticisms, such as Hayder al-Mohmmad's suggestion that the good cannot escape being the same as the normative, or Veena Das' related concern that the good might revive colonial tropes of good and bad life (Venkatesan 2015) are a bit more difficult to answer. Robbins responds by separating the good from the right (the latter of which would be a normative claim), emphasizing that the good should be one area of study that deepens ethnography rather than limiting it, and that people's actions in pursuit of the good are sometimes normative, but that the normative is not the only good (Venkatesan 2015).

If my ethnographic material is convincing, then political life in Ashrey will show that some of the debates about how politics in the field of suffering, versus wellbeing in the field of good, might be an artificial separation. This division may only be brought about by disciplinary differences that render it difficult to perceive politics as such if they come in the form of the good. Politics, in Ashrey, are about building worlds through disagreements and difference, but it's not only about the process of making those realities. Rather politics are about who is a bystander and who has enough power to bring something into being. Power comes from being good, which could be a way to bridge the binary Ortner (2016) sees

emerging between anthropology of the good and dark anthropology. Many people in Ashrey are suffering; the next chapter shows a historical pattern of being relegated to marginalized categories, and the last shows how the state may wield these categories to inflict more suffering in the near future. Everyday life, however, is full of humor, care, and camaraderie as people go about the work of creating and maintaining goodness for themselves and their families such that they are able to build the worlds they wish to inhabit, potentially up to and including the world that will be necessary to counter the plans of the coming state. The political life of the good in Ashrey is thus both a study of "dark anthropology," and a story of the good.

Research Site: Ashrey

Ashrey is a "prostitution village" where sex work is a point of contention and thus a space where ethical considerations about the best way to make a living as a family are also political questions about the future of the community. Unlike prostitution villages described in other research, many people are adamant that sex work is something that happened to the community, and not at all a traditional practice. In Agrawal's ethnography with a Bedia prostitution village in Uttar Pradesh, for example, the residents of which share Ashrey's designation as a Scheduled Caste, she found a "tradition" wherein a daughter-in-law will remain unmarried and responsible for the family's income (2008). My own preliminary research done in 2008 on behalf of an NGO found a similar arrangement in a community in Rajasthan. In Ashrey, however, this is not the pattern or practice. Instead, a woman will marry

and have children, after which she will undergo tubal ligation (which is not unusual, as studies find ligation to be the most common form of birth control in India), and begin sex work by her mid to late twenties. She will hope to work until her son can bring a wife into the family to replace her labor or, perhaps less hopefully and certainly less commonly, her husband takes another wife who can take over the labor of sex work.

The contentious issues over sex work in Ashrey have to do with how the land was settled, when, and by whom. Families like Laura's were part of the original land purchase and settlement and her grandfather, noted above as a source of irritation in the daily life of Laura's grandmother, holds papers showing the purchase from the wealthy and upper caste Jat community living on the visible horizon. As the first of this tribe to formally settle anywhere, he and his many relatives carry power and prestige across the entire tribal community, no matter where its people are living. He and other original settlers blame a second wave of settlers for bringing a "bad mindset" into the village that supports, condones, and spreads prostitution. Laura and her cousin Naina are being married into another village where the tribe has land and, as their grandmother bluntly put it to outrageous laughter one afternoon, "they have land, so there is no sex work." From their perspective, sex work is an out-of-control problem threatening the reputation of the village, and one for which there does not appear to be a solution.

Apart from intensive internal tensions over commercial sexual labor, Ashrey, as a field site, defies expectation in other ways that render them difficult to locate in scholarly literature on politics in South Asia. The next chapter traces a chronology of how and why they are missing from agrarian studies, indigenous studies, and Dalit literature. For example, while the

rural and the agrarian are often assumed to be the same in India (Bhattacharya 2019), Ashrey is not a village built around cultivating land; should they wish to farm, there would be no place to do so because state-installed signage (perhaps in anticipation of this issue) clearly indicates that the vacant spaces around them are not for their use. At the time of writing and just outside the village, farmers are gathering in what some are calling the largest protest in human history. Ashrey's residents, however, have not been moved to participate. They do not seek power from inclusion in agrarian struggles, do not align with the farmers as a labor movement, and do they make demands of the state on that basis.

Secondly, the community is a tribe that has been officially reconfigured as a caste, but caste is not an identity internal to the community. Both these literatures, on tribe and caste, do not necessarily apply. Delhi, Haryana, and Panajab are the three states in India which do not officially recognize any tribes. Should anyone in Ashrey wish to organize around tribal status, it would currently be impossible to do so because there are, ostensibly, no tribes in the region. Caste is differently unavailable, as community members do not identify with a low-caste status and instead have their own, internal, caste-like system of hierarchy based on clan. While some communities in India do find tribe and caste useful in making claims to rights and recognition, neither are invoked in Ashrey.

The third chapter details why I could also not use the feminist and decolonial literature on sex work to explain politics in Ashrey. There is no organized sex work collective in the village. There is no service center or health intervention, and women invest significant effort into cultivating a level of deniability around their participation in commercial sexual labor. The secretiveness of sex work, owing mostly to a ban put in place by tribal elders, means women

do not agitate for rights or recognition on the basis of sex work, and I found no evidence of any future plans to do so.

Finally, Ashrey has no NGOs. In a country with millions of registered NGOs, this is unusual. Small villages in remote areas of India may have no NGOs in operation, but Ashrey is within driving distance of India's capital. Delhi's metro rail system now brings travelers less than an hour from the village, and imminent expansion of the system will make the village even more accessible. Sex work, one might imagine, should be of interest to at least one of the many Delhi-based organizations focused on the ever-prominent framework of women's empowerment (Sharma 2008). In chapter four I show that the community was the subject of an intervention along these lines. However, it has been many years since any NGO operated in the village. There is no development intervention, nor are there interventions through other frameworks like human rights or humanitarianism. There are also no direct, government directed programs such as the Delhi Commission for Women's mahila panchayat initiatives (Lemons 2016). While, as mentioned earlier, some of the critical and post-development literature was helpful in understanding some aspects of politics in Ashrey, I found there was still more to explain.

Ashrey was described to me (and, at the direction of my supervisors, *by* me as well) as void of political activity despite evidence to the contrary. Yet, in looking for the right literature with which to think through what was happening in the community, I found myself better understanding how such an evaluation could be made. Where farmers are protesting, Ashrey residents are not. Where people are agitating for rights and recognition as a caste or tribe, Ashrey's residents are not. While India is looked to as a key example of successful sex worker

organizing, there is no such organizing in Ashrey. Development interventions are also not present and, if they were, would perhaps be ignored or entirely rejected (for reasons explored in chapter three). And yet, politics are unfolding all the time.

Methodology

Drawing from earlier ethnographies of non-state politics, my approach to political ethnography in Ashrey had much in common with the "village study." Such studies in South Asia were often commissioned by the colonial administration because they were integral to colonial governance and control. In independent India, village studies were still commissioned, but they began to disappear in the 1980s (Srinivas 1997). Today, the village study is sometimes seen as reductive or limiting, overly romanticized, or too prescriptive in how the village is imagined to be a microcosm of larger national issues, but some scholars are reinvigorating debates over the role and value of village studies in contemporary scholarship on South Asia (Mines and Yazgi 2010; Shneiderman 2015).

I approached Ashrey as a relatively fixed and bounded village because it made sense in context. The signage mentioned earlier is very clear about the boundaries of the land. Men in Ashrey do not migrate to urban areas for labor, nor did I encounter anyone who has availed themselves of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which guarantees 100 days of work per year to people living in rural villages. Women go out for work at night but, if they are not in sex work, it is common for young women like Laura and Naina to stay home for weeks, sometimes even months. When James (introduced in the next chapter) went to

university, he stayed in the village and not in university housing. In other words, much of the mobility and permeability of villages that underscores the salient criticism of the village study does not apply in Ashrey. This is not to say that I imagine the village as a fixed place from which no one over moves and all social issues can be perceived in a laboratory-like setting, but it does mean the community can be studied as a village.

I first visited Ashrey in 2008 and, after my position with an NGO ended in the fall of 2009, I returned to visit James and his family in 2010 and 2011. James is Laura's uncle, a key informant, main character, and community leader without whom research would not have been possible. After those visits, I was not able to return to Ashrey again until, as a PhD student at UCSD, I received funding to conduct a summer of exploratory research in 2013, and a full year of ethnographic research in 2018. I stayed in a room on James' family compound, conducted interviews, visited families, tutored a few children in English, and spent many hours outside chatting with people, especially grandmothers. I attended weddings, went to markets, visited temples, accompanied a family to court, watched movies, listened to stories, avoided ghosts, observed the proceedings of the local extrajudicial village council, and took two hundred pages of field notes. This bound document of notes marks a formal period of ethnographic research, but I consider my engagement with the community to be much longer. Though most of my time as a research intern in 2008-2009 was spent at a desk in the NGO's main office, those experiences were instrumental in developing my interest in Ashrey's communal life, and especially in framing my research questions around politics. I would not say that I have been conducting research for twelve years, but I would say that the ethnography presented here is informed by information gathered on and off, and at various thresholds of engagement, over

the course of that time period.

My status as a person in possession of a variety of personal and institutional privileges affects my perspective, and I did my best to be aware of these things and their impact on my relationships with community members. Sometimes I was successful, such as when I asked a group of women to teach me the local form of dance, and our lessons became a daily and embodied practice in inverting whose knowledge counted as expertise. Sometimes I was unsuccessful, such as when I tried to offer material resources, and learned that the only correct way to do so is to say "please take this and give it to someone poor." The position that most affected my ethnographic research, however, was my dual status as married and without children. Marriage, and having my husband with me, drastically changed who could be around me and where I could go. Even James, who I had known the longest but didn't always feel completely comfortable around, quickly became a friend as soon as he was introduced to my husband. Rather than an ambiguous friendship with a single foreign white woman, my husband and I came as a unit, and therefore we had more space to get to know people as a family, instead of as unaffiliated individuals.

The second piece, that I do not have children, also changed who I talked to because it confused who my peer group was. Being in my thirties did not automatically affiliate me with women my age because, without children of my own, we were not in the same stage in life. This is how I ended up gathering much of my information from young people who were either about to get married, or had very recently been married, which usually meant men and women between the ages of eighteen and approximately twenty three. This demographic was not my sole source of information, as I also spent time with young people's older relatives, with James

and his extended family, and a significant number of the aforementioned grandmothers. Yet this perspective, as a young person looking towards what their life is or is about to become, informed much of how I came to interpret my wider set of ethnographic data.

My friendship with James paired with the existence of my husband meant I could go anywhere and speak to almost anyone. This also simultaneously limited my ethnography. James represents perhaps the most powerful and privileged family in the community. He sits on the council, and as the only English speaker with a university degree on his "side" (more details in the next chapter) of the village. His word often carries more weight than even older council members. Were he to deny a researcher access to the village, research could not be done. There is another man who could probably act as an equivalent permission-granter, but proceeding without the awareness and approval of one of these two men would mean that research could not occur.

Being affiliated with James' family was requisite, but also meant that some people in less powerful positions were hesitant to share family secrets. I did not get the impression that they viewed me as a spy who would report their behavior to village leadership. Perhaps some people felt this way, but hesitancy more often seemed to be about worrying I would accidentally communicate something I did not realize was a secret. I thought this was a reasonable concern and, while I think a lot of good ethnography comes from being a little bit pushy and insistent, I did not do anything like that in Ashrey. Annie's (a young woman to be introduced shortly) father, for example, went out of his way to carefully avoid letting me into situations where I might have spoken to his wife alone. He never explicitly forbade me, but it was obvious from the kinds of invitations I was extended, and the things that were "cancelled"

once Annie invited me to attend. I was not in a position to challenge such limitations, but I did my best to work around them by spending time with other women, their mothers, and cousins. Pushing past clear limits while also remaining welcome in the community would have been impossible. Given the choice between the two, I chose to preserve the potential for a long working relationship over an immediate ethnography that hustled past what people were reluctant to tell me.

Chapters and organization

This dissertation looks at politics through four themes. The next chapter follows the convention of many dissertations in that it attempts to explain who this community is by outlining their history. The challenge was to talk about violence and oppression without first, repeatedly falling back on stereotypes of the developing world and, second, reinforcing identities and categories that residents of Ashrey do not use. I attempt to avoid both of these issues by looking at the history of this community through the lens of what I call "intersecting events." I use notions of affect and trauma to show how a series of related and violent events create the circumstances in which goodness becomes the source of political power.

Chapter three explores sex work as a contested practice and, of the chapters, this was the most challenging in terms of gathering ethnographic data. Svati Shah carefully shows that direct interviews with sex workers in India who discuss the subject of sex work are compromised by the unspeakability of a taboo practice (2014). I did find this to be the case and, as mentioned above, was unwilling to push women in sex work to talk about sex work

involuntarily. This does not mean, however, that sex work is never discussed. It is, in fact, widely criticized and frequently spoken of often among prominent families frustrated by its persistence. Unmarried women could talk about the possibilities of sex work in the abstract, and their families could talk about plans for their daughters and daughters-in-law. The most informative interview was conducted in a far away village in Haryana with the help of a research assistant from Jawaharlal Nehru University who correctly anticipated that even she, as a native speaker, might struggle to understand the interlocutor's dialect. We also suspected that, because this person lives outside the bounds of the community and its taboos, she would be in a position to speak more directly about her experiences. Her story, of entering sex work, feeling abandoned by her husband, and subsequently leaving Ashrey forever was instrumental in shaping my analysis.

Chapter four is most directly influenced by my earlier engagements with an NGO many years ago. I consider the NGO's absence, and the prolonged absence of any replacement, as unusual, and suggest that the intervention inadvertently and unwittingly acted (because of its location in networks of power) to reinforce a narrative of criminality.

Finally, in chapter five, I use the tradition of "dispute gazing" in legal anthropology to unpack the workings of the local extrajudicial council. In the field, I came to understand that the very existence of this council was one of the "secrets" people were not sure if they should tell. The council is an extrajudicial body. It is related to the similar (but not identical) and much maligned khap panchayat found in the nearby Jat communities, and not necessarily something people would want to disclose. While I assumed a council existed, I did not observe its workings until Naina invited me in one day. I only mention this timeline because I did not

begin by observing the proceedings of the council, and my developing understanding of politics was not lifted out of these meetings and applied to other areas of life. Rather, it was reinforced by watching proceedings that Webb Keane might call "ethical affordances" (2016) as various claims were evaluated and affirmed by the council, in a public setting, and in ways that showed ethics at the site of politics.

A note on names

James and Laura are what people in Ashrey call "English" names. As is common in ethnographic research, I asked people to choose their own pseudonyms. However, I believe it is less common for this opportunity to turn into an enjoyable pastime of learning English names, their meanings, and trying out their sounds. Groups of people, especially young people, had extensive conversations about English names and how to choose them. Some had pre-existing favorite English names that they were excited to have me use. Others wanted me to tell them the names of my friends and family members, or the names of Hollywood movie stars. This process, of picking an English name for an English-speaking audience, was fun for so many of my interlocutors, and also taken quite seriously. After all, as one young woman put it, "when you speak about us you will speak in English, so we should have English names."

The problem is that names have implications. While I read this interest in English names as an interest in wanting to be more understandable to an unknown English-speaking audience, it also tasks me with erasing Indian names and replacing them with English ones that are almost never given in India. I did not expect an offer to choose one's own pseudonym to go

this way, and I could see reasons to both keep the English names people chose, and reasons to replace them. My solution is that I have honored the "English" names of those most enthusiastic to have them. (James, for example, chose his name because he is greatly amused by the idea that readers might think of James Bond, and I could not bring myself to deny him this possibility). Others, however, I have changed. Wherever I got the impression that the person would not be upset or disappointed to learn I had given them a more locally-generic name over an English one, I have used a name of my choosing.

What if politics are good?

Laura's statement of "write that we are good" is a challenge to how we think about the political dimension of life in South Asia. Analyzing her statement brings together political anthropology with ethical anthropology, and contributes to an understanding of a "good" that is fully political in its own right, rather than an overlap, intersection, or shared space between the political and the ethical. By looking at the tribe's historical encounters with external conceptions of goodness and moral worth, the decisions women make around sex work, their experiences with development interventions, and the practices of the local tribal council, we can see a multi-scaled pursuit of goodness as a political project, and a political project of goodness.

Through four scales - historical, familial, communal, and judicial - I show that power is contingent on how much good one is able to accumulate through a diverse set of practices. The most good is not synonymous with the most normative, nor is this a community and context in

which the ethical and the political intersect, align, or overlap. Instead, the particular circumstances of communal life lived in Ashrey introduce us to another conceptualization of the political entirely.

Chapter Two: "What is Perna?"

- A Precarious History of intersecting affective events -

Once you have fallen off the edge like all of us have … you will never stop falling. And as you fall you will hold on to other falling people… This place where we live where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. - Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy

This chapter deals with the conceptual problem of how to describe a community of people who do not relate to the identities others use to describe them. Early in my research, I learned that the community's context and location in time and space were both often confusing without a lengthy explanation. From an IRB who said I was not working with a vulnerable group, to a peer reviewer who suggested the community should just switch to indigenous politics if they wanted human rights, I found I was always under-explaining who this community was and what their relations were to other groups of people. During an afternoon in the National Archives in Delhi, I decided this was not just a matter of personal writing style or a lack of elaboration. Rather, a whole chapter dedicated to historical context would be necessary to explain how and why so many of the usual suspects of political subjectivities (gender, caste, class, tribe, etc) were not the basis of political activity in Ashrey. The conundrum is that the explanatory power these categories carry in terms of making a community comprehensible to a reader, is overwhelming compared to how little they matter to people living in this place. This chapter attempts to move out of this dilemma by introducing the community through a series of events, rather than categorical identifications.

First, while the community living in Ashrey is called "Perna," and Perna is a Scheduled Caste, these are not the words people use to describe themselves. They are discussed as something that happened, not identities the community claimed or advocated for on their own. Indigenous anthropologists have dealt with similar problems of whether and how to use markers that may be helpful in describing a community to leaders, but comes at the cost of invoking identities that were imposed through colonization and other outside forces (Simpson 2014; TallBear 2014). To put the problem another way, how can the politics, agency, and resistance in a community be understood without an understanding of broader structures when those broader structures produce a vocabulary that, itself, is a source of marginalization?

In order to explain who this community is in historical context, I use the concepts of affect, trauma, and precarity to construct a history of what I call "intersecting affective events." I use this construction to reconcile competing pressures to use the terms community members use to describe themselves and those they do not use, but which are helpful in recognizing an ongoing history of structural violence. By focusing on events, I take the focus away from identity which, as I will show throughout this dissertation, is not the main animator of politics in Ashrey. The intersecting affective events I outline are drawn from a variety of sources. Some are key ideas that were sometimes missing from my own descriptions of my research site. Others are important events I was familiar with, but needed to confirm and learn more about in the National Archive. Some are events that surfaced in my ethnography. The demolition attempt, for example, briefly made the local news years ago, but came up repeatedly in several of my life history interviews with residents of Ashrey. In other

words, not every event has a clear ethnographic source. Some were picked and chosen by me to give necessary context to the research site. In approaching a history chapter through intersecting affective events, my intent is to lend context, detail, and explanation that draws from archival material and journalistic sources as well as ethnographic interviews, together giving a sense of who this community is without have to describe them in terms of categories they do not use.

Intersecting Events

Most people in Ashrey view the official terminology used to classify them as an external imposition. Rather than caste, for instance, people tend to describe themselves in terms of their family and, secondarily, their *gotra* (clan). The problem for an analysis of politics is that, while family and clan may be most meaningful to an individual, these two markers do not evoke anything about the repeated, and ongoing, structural violence this community has faced. Contextualizing the ways in which politics has come to be practiced requires a sense of the larger scale, and that larger scale is best evoked through terms that the community usually does not use.

In this section, I begin to address this problem by thinking about what I call "intersecting affective events." The definition (and organizing potential) of identity has its own literature (see Hill-Collins 2019; Carastathis 2013; Crenshaw 2017) but, here, I think of identities as categories and demographic markers used, usually in an official sense, to describe communal affiliations and groupings. Identities are always intersectional. As the

originator of the term "intersectionality," Kimberle Crenshaw argued that black women experience an intersection of two identities that exclude them from both the categories of "women," who are assumed to be white, and "black" which is assumed to be male ([1989] 2017). The concept of intersectionality has since expanded to include identities beyond gender and race to various effects. Some feminist theorists, for instance, grapple with whether and to what extent intersectionality is useful outside the United States (see: Fernandes 2015), with some suggesting intersectionality was a response to a specific kind of discrimination perpetrated by white American men and women (Kumar 1993). I am using intersecting events, rather than intersectionality, to solve a conceptual problem specific to the Ashrey community. While interested in what this might contribute to scholarship on intersectionality, my framework does not advance any particular position on whether or not intersectionality should, or should not, apply in India.

I use the term "intersecting" to talk about related events accumulating over a period of time. People in Ashrey have been, and continue to be, marginalized because of intersecting identities but, by focusing on intersecting events instead, it is possible to discuss that marginalization without focusing on identity as the cause. An "intersection" is something that happens among and between experiences. When identities intersect, they make certain kinds of human experiences more likely. Over time, those experiences intersect within people and communities to form an overall experience of marginalization. Identity produces the possibility of certain kinds of events, on multiple scales, as more likely than others, but it is the experience arising from identity, rather than identity itself, that produces that marginalization. A woman, for instance, does not experience discrimination and/or a lower

social position relative to men *because* she is a woman. Rather it is the accumulated series of events she experiences ranging from micro-aggressions to major events that, over time, subjugate her through a compromised ability to thrive. She shares this compromised position with other women to the extent that "woman" opens the potential for similar kinds of events, and she does not share her position with other women to the extent that other identities intersecting with "woman" would open other sets of accumulating events on the basis of race, ability, sexuality, and others. Identity, as a marker of inequality, vulnerability, precarity, marginality, oppression, and discrimination, only indicates these things because of the accumulated events made more possible by that identity, not because of the identity itself.

Thinking about intersectionality in terms of intersecting events touches on a large literature theorizing the "event." For Alain Badiou, for example, the "event" is only an event when it marks a full rupture with history. Badiou's event is globally significant, leaving new subjects and terminologies in its wake. Veena Das' work on the event in South Asia engages Badiou, but her "events" are in relationship to the "opposite movements" of ascent and descent, both of which are possibilities in everyday life (see: Das 2006; 2018). A third approach to the "event" comes from queer theory, which looks at how seemingly less remarkable events coalesce to pull people into marginalized positions. Elizabeth Povinelli, for instance, considers "quasi-events," or unacknowledged small obstacles that accumulate to make life more challenging (2011), while Lauren Berlant creates a category of "temporal genres" including the episode, eruption, situation, and aside (2011). The identity-adjacent events I describe in Ashrey cross these approaches because they come from different sources. Decolonization and partition, for example, are both ruptures in the Badiou sense, but most of

the events listed are more akin to quasi-events or temporal genres. The events described are events that are notable enough to notice, but do not irreparably interrupt the person or community experiencing them. They, cumulatively, lead to precarious life as people struggle to make flourishing lives out of compounding structural violence.

Shelters from Precarious Life

The baby goat was barely balancing on the ledge of a balcony two floors up. Her ears flopped against her head as she bleated for attention and stepped carefully along the ledge. Laura charged into the courtyard with two small glasses of Pepsi.

"Did you hear?" Laura asked, stepping around a small river of mud that had formed in front of her house. "Last night, in that big storm, Neighbor's roof blew completely off!" Laura's house, like most in Ashrey, was once made of mud walls and layered grass roofing. Over time, the house has been expanded and fortified into a series of rooms made of metal and thick cement. Most houses now look like hers, and a select few rise like palaces with large, reflective windows and beautiful, ornate gates. It would take incredible force to remove those roofs.

"The entire roof came off?" I asked. "How?"

"Yes. His home is not a permanent structure (pacca). In the wind and rain it came off completely."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"No no. No one was hurt," she said, refilling our glasses. "Just the house!"

There was a time when everyone in the family would likely have been hurt by such a storm. Insulation from that kind of danger is not necessarily available to the precarious and vulnerable, and the labor and effort that goes into building roofs and shelters, both literally and metaphorically, should not be underestimated. In social and political theory, there have been a number of frameworks to describe oppression, marginality, and other forms of exclusion. I find that precarity is an imperfect but best-fit for the way the Perna community is situated within India and larger, global, patterns of inequality; precarity points to the potential to fall. It indicates a struggle to balance upright against a range of pushing and pulling forces. It means one has not fallen yet, and may never fall, but is still in a position of struggle against a downward dive into some kind of unknown, one that everyone hopes to avoid. It is no coincidence that women in sex work are often described in English as "fallen" women. No longer precarious, they are imagined as lost to something they cannot escape.

"Falling" is also how Arundhati Roy chose to describe one of the communities explored in her book, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. In the quote that opened this chapter, a main character explains in a reluctant tone that "this place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of the falling people." Roy invokes a sense of the precarious in her vision of a falling community. People are in the process of falling, and grasping at others in the same predicament. "This place where we live" is one in which precarious circumstances have won out and a fall is in progress, but has not yet fixed these lives into a permanent "fallen" state.

Precarity, as Roy suggests, is about an ongoing state of challenging circumstances

rather than, say, a vulnerability *to* challenging circumstances. Some scholars use the two terms almost interchangeably (see Butler 2016), but the circumstances the two terms seek to describe are quite different. Vulnerability comes from a history of regulating medical research on "vulnerable" populations, which the US began to regulate more formally in the 1970s. The medical language of "vulnerability" then slipped easily into the emerging field of human rights (see Moyn 2012). However, when a group is described as "vulnerable," it is sometimes unclear what, exactly, they are vulnerable to and why. Vulnerability sometimes seems to appear almost spontaneously or at random, without a sense of who, or what, is responsible for making a group vulnerable. Precarity, rather than vulnerability, offers a comparatively more flexible frame in which to name specific events and perpetrators. It suggests "precarity," in and of itself, is an event of harm, rather than the potential for harm indicated by the term "vulnerability." Precarity helps underscore that living under precarious conditions is violence in the present tense.

I think of precarity, especially in Ashrey, as the weather conditions against which one can and does build shelter. The conditions ought to be recognized as specific, and unequal, patterns of inclement weather. Laura's neighbor with the missing roof does not have a simply constructed house by chance, nor is inclement weather spontaneously intensifying. His roof is constructed as it is because that is the roofing he can afford, and the severity of the storm that blew the roof away cannot be separated from intensifying climate change. Yet he is able to shelter himself and his family from most, though not all, weather. In the especially acute storm that blew his roof away, the family escaped unharmed. Metaphorically speaking, precarity is about being disproportionately at risk to many things, including to the kind of

home destruction that could cause serious harm.

While many scholars focus on the ways people experience precarity in wage labor (Jeffrey 2010; Allison 2013; Millar 2014; Han 2012), precarity is not limited to the economic. It can also be thought of as an experience that is inflicted on, and experienced by, a wide range of people. The "precariat," as it arises in Ashrey, is not a universal force poised to pull the lynchpin of global capitalism (Standing 2011). Rather precarity is a useful way of thinking about inequality and its perpetrators in the context of global inequality. Though uncertainty could be thought of as a shared human experience, the violence of "precarity" is not evenly distributed; it relegates some people to a pronounced experience of its effects and, in doing so, shores up the stable lives of others. It is thus a framework that alludes to a shared experience while also rendering it impossible. For instance, Judith Butler's definition of precarity, found in *Frames of War* (2009), captures the potential for equal experiences of precarity, along with its concurrent political impossibility.

> The body is exposed to socially and politically articulated forces, as well as to claims of sociality…that make possible the body's persistent flourishing. The more or less existential conception of 'precariousness' is thus linked with a more specifically political notion of 'precarity.' And it is the differential allocation of precarity that, in my view, forms the point of departure for both a rethinking of bodily ontology and for progressive or left policies (3).

In this definition, precarity is located in bodies; it is an individual state in which the person may or may not flourish, and it is unequally distributed across social systems. I read this as similar to what Lovell describes as "double precarity - the fragility of lives and the societal fragility shaped by our political economy and governments" (2013, 576). I see that "fragility" as similar to Roy's sense of falling. The possibility is brought about by a series of intersecting

events, and these events are "shaped by our political economy and governments." Precarity, for Perna families in Ashrey, is itself an event, one in which events related to, but not determined by, their status as Perna. In other words, precarity is precarious because it carries with it a persistent threat of a fall.

If one is a "fallen woman," what has she "fallen" into? If weather conditions throw one from their home, what are they thrown into? When a community is made up of "falling people," what is their destination as they fall? In asking these questions, I am looking to explain how a group unjustly faces a challenging set of life circumstances. I see the infliction of these circumstances as violence, but am trying to underscore the stakes and potential consequences of living with this violence. In other words, is it possible to talk about the events of precarity, while also thinking about a larger, unrealized "event" that would exceed the agency and creative resilience of long-term precarious life? I find it helpful to think of affect as one set of events, and trauma as another category that would exceed the limits of affective experience. I suggest, broadly, that precarity is violence because the entwined experiences making life precarious are also conditions that make it more likely for one, and/or an entire community, to fall into trauma.

What it means to fall: Affect and trauma in a precarious place

Trauma is a term evoking long debates (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). At its center, trauma is a medical term used for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD has been a feature of the Diagnostic Services Manual (DSM) for decades, with a purposefully flexible

definition allowing for a wider range of treatment plans and billing options. Medical anthropologists debate whether and to what extent "trauma," even with such a flexible definition, is a useful concept across cultural differences (Good et al, 2015; Summerfield 2001), but there does seem to be something like trauma, or trauma-like, that appears across difference. Good et al (2015) suggest "trauma" differentiates itself from other kinds of human experience by placing the past in the present, and that this struggle with time is a shared human experience. The temporal rupture, in which the past event is present, makes the event unique. Even if trauma is not the best terminology, they find people struggling to place a past experience in the past (Good et al 2015). Trauma (as a placeholder term) keeps a person in that experience, unable to move themselves into the present and, subsequently, the future. Trauma is different from other kinds of human experiences because it disrupts time; there is a temporal break, or rupture, such that an event remains in the present, appearing in everyday life when it should remain in the past. The felt omnipresence of this experience can disrupt who a person is and who they understand themselves to be, making it difficult to move into the future as one's self.

Affective events have the potential for trauma. Affect is not trauma only because it affects who the person is, but does not make it impossible to go as themselves. Enough affective events that are intersecting and accumulating over time can result in a rupture that is traumatic. Extrapolated to the communal level, I am trying to think about how a community can be impacted (affect) without being destroyed (trauma). Affect theory comes from a long line of humanistic inquiry into feelings and emotions. Taking inspiration from Deleuze by way of Spinoza, research on affect theorizes experiences before and behind discursive forces

(Masummi 2015; Stewart 2007; Mazzarella 2003; Povinelli 2011; Berlant 2011), and as something that carries “a sense of intensity that exists prior to its capture by language” (Mankekar 2015, 13). Berlant (2007) thinks of these instances as “transactions” that are about an ongoing commitment to normalcy; it is about returning to, being, and creating, “normal.” This normalcy has temporal dimensions in that it is related to ideas about where the person belongs in the present and future. There is a self concept, understood as normal, that exists in the present and, unless disrupted, is promised to perpetuate.

Berlant writes that this sense of the normal "can be entered into in a number of ways” (2007, 278) I understand this collection of “ways” as a type of folding - as conscious and emotive manipulation, as an origami of experience, and a smoothing of self. “Folding” is the process by which events become a part of a person’s being. Disaster may strike but it can also be smoothed into a story of the self. It can be manipulated, repurposed, reformed, in a way that lets the person move forward. Affect is all things with an impact on the self that can be absorbed into the story of who we are. When it cannot be folded into life experience, it is trauma.

Affect involves a break with normativity that is just significant enough so as to require attention and effort to incorporate it into a sense of the future. The inability to do so is trauma. I am thinking of trauma as an *unfolded* moment that can hold the person in the present, making it impossible to imagine a normal future. In contrast, affective transactions are the work of avoiding trauma, wrapping an experience into a recognizable story of the self and allowing the person to move forward, even if they are still vulnerable to alternative stories that would unravel the carefully folded work of survival. Extrapolating to the communal

level, affect is a challenge to communal belonging. It may move the community, categorize it, or recategorize it, but the Ashrey Perna community is still recognizable to itself as a community. Trauma, at the communal level, would be complete demolition, dispersal, or perhaps outlawing communal affiliation. This kind of cultural genocide makes it impossible to see one's self, in the present, as a living community, and makes it impossible to move into the future as such. Which is, by my understanding of the term, trauma.

In this next section, I am looking at events that the Perna of Ashrey have managed, through remarkable, creative, and resilient affective folding, to turn into affect, rather than trauma. Ethnic and tribal communities across the world have faced long-term, and compounded, precarity under threats of elimination through various forms of colonialism, neocolonialism, cultural genocide, and state power. I suggest that these kinds of elimination events are the end of precarity, and the beginning of trauma. Precarity is a problem not just because it is unevenly inflicted across communities, but it is a problem because there is only so much affective folding a community can be expected to manage before falling into trauma; precarity is violence because of the increased possibility for an event that exceeds the affective. As more and more events must be folded into a coherent narrative, the more difficult it can become to sustain a temporal trajectory of past, present, and future. In Ashrey, there have been a number of moments that seemed poised to exceed affect and approach trauma. Yet the community survives these events, precariously, but as itself.

Precarious and Perna: Fifteen events

In this section I lay out a series of fifteen events to help explain who the Perna of Ashrey are and what kind of precarity they face. Not every event listed here is especially salient to every individual in Ashrey, or at least not salient in exactly the same way. Generational differences matter, as do clan, family, and income. I have also gathered these events not just from ethnographic material, but also from journalistic sources and what has been documented in the National Archive. In other words, I am not saying that each event had to be "folded" in the Berlant sense by each person in the community. Rather, I am looking at the major ruptures and the well-known events, alongside those that people spoke about as if they had happened that morning. Together, these events outline Ashrey's historical context in such a way that the particularities of Ashrey's political life can be understood in relationship to a longer, communal, story. It is a signposting of major events that have affected the Perna community in Ashrey but, to date, have not caused them to "fall."

I begin these fifteen events with the Perna's appearance in the British colonial records as a nomadic criminal tribe, and follow that designation into their 1936 miscategorization as a Scheduled Caste, decolonization, and partition. I look briefly at how the relevant reserved categories were conceptualized in newly-independent India, the Habitual Offenders Act of 1952, and some of the ways communities continue to contest their official classifications. I show the circumstances under which the nomadic Perna established a permanent settlement in Ashrey, the doubling in size they went through in the 1980s, and the development of sex work as the primary source of income. I look at the demolition attempt in 2000, which occurred shortly before the sudden spike and rapid departure of NGOs. I end by referencing pending events which are poised to intensify the community's precarious position, and possibly push

them into “trauma.”

First Event: British colonization and the criminal tribe

In May of 1857, the Sepoy Rebellion against British rule began in Meerut and ended with the arrest of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar at Humayan’s tomb, only 20 miles from where Ashrey now stands. This rebellion, officially known in India as the “First War of Independence" claimed thousands of lives as Indian soldiers and civilians revolted against the British East Indian company. Following the war, the East India Company was disbanded and official power over India transferred to the British Crown. While many historians view this transfer of power as largely symbolic, the transfer deepened the legislative power of British colonizers, allowing a new series of coercive laws to be placed on the Indian subcontinent.

As Britain assumed direct rule in India, government officials (including anthropologists) set out to categorize the various communities living within their domain. Ethnographic data emerged describing caste, the jati system, religion, and other aspects of South Asian life. At the same time, in Britain, the government had become preoccupied with disciplining mobile and nomadic populations, whom they viewed as requiring special surveillance (Radhakrishna 2001; Rana 2016). Given the information ethnographers were producing about caste and the traditional nature of some occupations, administrators concluded that some tribes are hereditarily predisposed to earn their livelihoods from crime and crime alone. Thus, ideas about caste and occupation, combined with generalized fear about mobile communities, coalesced in the idea of a “criminal tribe” - a community that, by

biology, will only, ever, and always commit crimes.

The goal of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was to suppress “hereditary criminals" (Radhakrishna 2001) and, under this law, some tribes were forced to settle and report themselves to local police. With the guidance of Britain’s Salvation Army, many tribes were forced into workhouses where they labored with little or no pay, under the belief that work might reform them into productive (meaning “non-criminal”) citizens. While not all communities were forced into settlements and workhouses, the Act swept up people whose traditional occupations were fading away and would therefore, it was assumed, turn to crime. This included hijras, street performers, and anyone who did not conform to the British ideal of modern, settled, agricultural labor (Radhakrishnan 2001). For nomadic communities, their traditional routes suddenly passed over agricultural land, leading them to commit the repeated crime of trespassing (Bhattacharya 2019). The Perna, because they were nomadic goat herders, became a “criminal tribe” under these conditions.

One of the oddest aspects of the CTA is that it managed to simultaneously criminalize and racialize a large category of people who were not a category prior to the Act. Under the CTA, crime was used to create race, rather than racism being used to create the image of the criminal. Put another way, the category of “criminal tribe” did not exist independent of rumors about widespread crime being perpetrated by a particular, as yet unnamed and unrecognizable, community. From the British perspective, it was necessary to distinguish upper-class Indians from Indians who were responsible for crime, and the very existence of crime in British territory, whether real or imagined, helped create a racial category to explain who was committing it.

Second Event: Nomad, criminal, "untouchable"

When the Perna appeared in colonial records as a criminal tribe, they effectively joined thousands of others in a completely new racial category. As the "criminal tribe" expanded to include more communities, the differences between groups became less clear. Some communities, like the Perna, took on additional designations. Hindu criminal tribes, for instance, could also be categorized as scheduled castes. Since Britain's 1931 census, scheduled castes have been those Hindu caste communities who are poor, or, in the British terminology, "depressed," and subject to discrimination on the basis of untouchability. The Perna, already registered as a criminal tribe, were also listed as a scheduled caste community in the first list of scheduled castes published in 1936. Thus, they were both members of a racial group of criminals and viewed as "untouchable."

The Perna community, however, have their own, internal, caste system based on gotra - or clan, which has nothing to do with this designation dating to 1931. The two upper gotras in the Perna community - Nashgavat and Ahlawat - are seen as higher than all others. Lower gotras, for instance, do not sit in chairs at weddings and other special events. Instead they sit on stumps of wood, squat on the ground, or take food to eat at home. A lower gotra person will spend very little time in an upper gotra person's home. If she needs to speak with someone, she will enter, state her matter, and leave. Marriage between any gotra is possible and accepted, but marriage within a gotra is forbidden. Being categorized as a Scheduled Caste, especially for an upper gotra Perna, is a miscategorization of who they are, and it

requires them to accept an "untouchability" they do not carry in their own community.

Third Event: Partition

Decolonization and partition in 1947 were major events, in the Badiou sense, bringing about new political subjectivities. Elders living in Ashrey today say they were mostly on Pakistan's land at the time, and that they had to choose whether to stay or move into India. Their religion is a polytheistic blend of traditions combining Hindu Gods with ancestor worship. It was clear to them that, even if they were not quite Hindu, they certainly were not Muslim. Most of the tribe moved into India, with only a few distant relatives left behind in Pakistan. A few letters are still exchanged between Ashrey and these Pakistani relatives, though people largely do not discuss their living Pakistani relations. Some adults speak in vague terms about long gone relatives and ancestors who had Muslim names. "Like this one here," James said while showing me a family tree he had constructed with the help of this father. "Isn't this a Muslim name?" His father sat quietly across the room and breathed out a slow cloud of smoke from the hookah. He did not speak.

Fourth Event: Habitual Offenders Act

The new Indian state was compelled to decide which British categories, if any, to retain in independent India, and the CTA was repealed and replaced by the controversial Habitual Offenders Act (HOA) in 1952. The HOA does away, officially, with the notion of a

criminal race, but replaces it with the figure of a hardened criminal who may face additional penalties for repeated crimes. The hardened criminal is not connected to any particular tribe or race, but the Act nevertheless helps reproduce a race of people allegedly addicted to crime; the enduring notion of a criminal race is perpetuated by the overrepresentation of Criminal Tribe communities (now called "denotified tribes") in arrests, convictions, and imprisonments.

Following heavy participation from Indian Dalit activists at the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism in South Africa, the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has joined India's National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi- Nomadic Tribes in recommending the repeal of the HOA. Many expect this repeal is imminent, as it tends to hold broad support, but the repeal is, as of writing, still pending.

In Ashrey, most sex work practiced in the community is legal, but women are still arrested for soliciting outside the village. They may also be arrested for robbing buyers, or for rum-running alcohol from cheaper Haryana into the more expensive state of Delhi. The HOA affects Ashrey in that it threatens higher legal penalties for being caught repeatedly engaging in one's livelihood.

Fifth Event: A Scheduled Caste

"*What is your community?"*
"We are called 'Perna.'"
"What is your caste?"
"Nashgavat."
"Is that upper or lower?"
"It is upper."

The independent government also sought to create its own lists of Scheduled Castes and other communities, a grouping that had to grapple with the fact that many communities hold multiple designations. In a memo to the Minorities Committee written in 1947, Member of Parliament HK Khandekar wrote that the CTA must be repealed and that "the members of the criminal tribes who are largely nomadic must be settled and must be classified under Scheduled Castes so that they will get all opportunities for progress as the Scheduled Castes are seeking." In this comment, it is clear that he is not thinking of Scheduled Caste as a particular kind of Hindu category related to untouchability, but rather a label for any group that requires greater "opportunities for progress."

When the Scheduled Castes order of 1950 was released, it drew further questions in Parliament. Pandit Munishwar Datt Upadhyay asked whether it was true that some of these castes don't want to be seen as Scheduled Castes. Rajagopalachari answered saying, "I wish they did so, but I do not know." He went on to add that "untouchability is not one standard form of untouchability." This point, that there is more than one "form of untouchability" is telling in how it relates to Khandekar's earlier comment. In 1950, the government was not necessarily thinking of the "custom of untouchability" as a Hindu practice surrounding a certain caste (or non-caste) in the varna system, as British administrators seemed to do. Instead, they were thinking of untouchability more widely, as a type of discrimination that perhaps encompassed more general practices of social avoidance. I read his "I wish they did so" as a response to the large number of people untouchability, conceptualized this way, would actually capture, and the wish that some would come forward and opt out of the designation.

In the case of the criminal tribes, the "form of untouchability" that makes a tribe "untouchable" is actually their status as criminal. Rather than their position in a Hindu hierarchy, it is the enduring notion of a criminal race that leads to avoidance and, therefore, a "form of untouchability." Offering "opportunities for progress" on the basis of "untouchability" is not necessarily a miscategorization of a community. Rather it could represent recognition of the affective event of being designated a criminal in the first place.

The Perna do not see it this way. As mentioned in Event Two, the Perna have their own caste-like hierarchy based on clan rather than caste. Laura, for example, is an upper gotra Perna woman in her early 20s who will be married to a lower gotra Perna man. She explains:

> Perna is a caste. I don't know why it is a caste. We are called Perna, but I don't think I am Perna. I wasn't even born when this name was given. It shouldn't have been Perna but something else. Many people say this. They say "what is Perna? We shouldn't be named this. We should be something else."

Laura, like everyone in her community, uses the word *jati* for both Perna and her Nashgavat gotra. She sometimes uses her clan to describe herself, but sees "Perna" as a designation coming from outside. It was applied to them before she was born and, in her experience, many people object to this imposition. It is especially incongruous for her because, as a Nashgavat, she enjoys rights and privileges similar to what Brahmins outside her community enjoy in wider society. Even if the government originally intended to reserve rights of positive discrimination for her community, they did so by identifying her with a low-caste position she does not identify with, and would prefer not to use.

Sixth Event: Not a tribe

There was a brief opportunity to "be something else," as Laura suggested, but the chance came and vanished in 1958 when the government released an updated list of Scheduled Tribes. "Tribe" more accurately describes how people in the Perna community think of themselves, and would have been an opportunity to correct their 1931 (British) categorization as a scheduled caste. However, in India, a tribe has a very narrow definition. Panjab University researcher BP Singh writes that "to identify a community as tribal the Government of India has prescribed these five features: indications of primitive traits, distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness" (2010). Less than 10% of Indians meet this criteria, and three states report having no tribes at all. These three states are Punjab, Delhi, and Haryana, exactly where the Perna live or have lived in the recent past. The insistence that no tribes exist in these states hinges on the requirement for "geographical isolation," the idea being that, since these states no longer have any forested areas after what Bhattacharya calls "the great agrarian conquest" (2019), no one can really be seen as living in "geographic isolation." It is impossible for the Perna to be a tribe because tribes, according to the government, live in remote areas and there are none in the region.

Independent India retained Britain's 1931 designation of the Perna as a scheduled caste, and categorization played out differently for other formerly criminalized tribes. Some are categorized as tribes, some are scheduled caste like the Perna, and others are the wider "Other Backwards Classes." Still others received no categorical protection or reservation at all (Ganesh Devy 2000). There are a variety of ways people resist these categories. The All

India Bazigar and Banzara Sabha, for instance, has been petitioning Punjab's state government for tribal status. In Gujarat, the Chhara community produces street plays and other activism as the Budhan Theater. Still, changes to reserved categories are very difficult to make, and the Perna have not sought to change their name or categorization.

Seventh Event: South Delhi Development

In the early years of India's independence, small nomadic groups of Perna people were slowly decreasing their range of nomadic travel to a smaller area consisting mostly of present- day Alwar, Rajasthan and Rewari, Haryana. By the late 1960s, two groups of Perna from the same clan came to be semi-settled in an area of south Delhi. "I always tell my father," James said, "if we had bought land then and there we would be rich. So rich!" He is likely correct, as this land is now the highly developed and expensive South Delhi neighborhoods of Hauz Khas and Greater Kailash. Rapid urbanization made permanent settlement in this area impossible; most of the land the families were using for livestock were being quickly developed by the DLF Limited company. As expensive housing complexes emerged on the landscape, the Perna community found they no longer had enough land for their animals, and began to look elsewhere.

Eight Event: Settlement

In 1973, Perna elders bought land from the leader of a Jat village on the very edge of

the Delhi National Capital Region. The two communities were, and are, separated by large stretches of fields belonging either to the Jat village, the Delhi municipal government, or the national government. The first Perna families of the same clan, nashgavat, were joined on the land they purchased by another, smaller, group of upper-gotra ahlawat families in this new village that became Ashrey. At first, Perna families spent the summer together in Ashrey and continued nomadic winters with the animals in nearby Haryana. In 1975, during the Emergency, the Jat village head offered official paperwork documenting the sale and formalizing Perna ownership. Today, this paperwork accounts for about half of present-day Ashrey.

The Jat village and Ashrey do not interact, and prefer to avoid one another. It's inaccurate, however, to attribute all of this avoidance to racism and discrimination of behalf of the Jats, though that is certainly a factor. People in Ashrey also avoid the community who originally sold them their land because, in Annie's words, "they're crazy over there." She said this because, as will be explained in the conclusion, I saw on the news that someone in the Jat village had found a white snake, and the community was worshipping it as a God. Annie reappears throughout this dissertation as perpetually unimpressed with the upper-caste communities around hers, towards whom she might be expected to show deference. There is now a long, wide, open field between her village and the original Jat village it was purchased from. My impression is that Annie joins most of her community in wishing it was even wider.

Ninth Event: Neoliberalization

Tarun told me his father James always keeps coins in the dashboard of their car for beggars.
"Why does your father do that?"
"I don't know. But my father always gives something."

When Ashrey was settled, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had just violently, and successfully, suppressed the CPI:Marxist-Leninists and disintegrated communist groups across the country. Despite objections from the left, neoliberalism emerged as the primary plan for moving the country forward (Jain 2005; Kumar 1993; Rose 1993). Neoliberalism indicates a shift away from the state and towards the market as the vehicle of development. It includes the reduction of fiscal deficits, lowering tariffs, opening markets to foreign companies, and outsourcing social services to NGOs (Gupta 1998, 13). In the 1980s neoliberal free-market thinking entered the economic mainstream because the World Bank and IMF made such policies a precondition of financial aid.

Ashrey's elders were settling the village right as neoliberalism was becoming hegemonic, and they speak of this period as "a struggle time." People built their homes by hand out of mud and grass. Further away from the city, the market for animal products was harder to reach and money often felt scarce. "We didn't have shoes!" James says about growing up during this time. He, unlike many children, would go to school in a nearby village during the day but, like many children, would spend his afternoons begging on the street.

Today, most children in Ashrey do not beg. Today, James has a car. He keeps coins or small bills in the console, handing them to the hijra and other beggars he sometimes sees on his drive to work. He doesn't talk about begging with his children. "My childhood was a struggle," he says. "But my children's lives are comfortable."

Tenth Event: Conflicts and second settlement

As Ashrey grappled with the poverty of early settlement and the country's larger economic reforms, they were also drastically changed by the emergence of the "Perli Side." Perli means "Other" (both "other" and "Other" to indicate a sense of difference), and refers to the influx of Perna families that came to Ashrey from other areas of Haryana. These new households built their homes just outside the legally recognized boundaries of the village, and were initially welcomed by the originally settled families. However, over time, the leaders of the original settlement have largely come to regret this influx.

In a narrative that seems to go uncontested, the Perli Side is blamed for turning Ashrey into a prostitution village. These new families, the narrative claims, were not interested in the poverty associated with animal husbandry and traditional nomadic practices. Instead, they brought a "bad mindset" in their solution to poverty, which was to send married women into sex work. Homes in Ashrey became redlight areas, and were subject to objections from neighbors who would regularly call the police. As more people came to the Perli Side, however, the practice of prostitution grew and more married women across both sides began working in sex work. Frustrated, the local village council banned sex work entirely, saying they do not accept it and will call the police on anyone engaging in commercial sexual labor.

Eleventh Event: Development through sex work

As income increased through commercial sexual labor, Ashrey's married women brought much of the community out of poverty. The village grew to become the largest Perna village in India. Houses that were once made of mud gave way to permanent, concrete structures, some with multiple floors, and many outside the original, legal, boundaries of the village. Some of these newer households have secured a level of legal claim over the homes they have built. For instance, the village received *lal dora*, an official redrawing of village boundaries to accommodate growth and entitle people to public water and electricity. Another family built their home on what is meant to be a water retention area, but managed to acquire a title.

The expansion of the village, the utilities, expanded houses, and increased incomes are almost entirely due to the rise of sex work. I see this emergence as affective, but quite close to trauma for many who live in Ashrey. Changing from a poor community relying primarily on animal husbandry, to what some call a prostitution village, is a drastic change in how the community sees itself. The struggle to even remain a community, and what that will mean, is ongoing, and takes place on multiple scales from the family to the village council. Thus far, sex work has divided the village, but both sides still recognize one another as belonging to the same community. Part of this willingness to continue recognizing each other has to do with shared history, but also with pending threats and the potential for trauma; the majority of the Perli Side lives on land that belongs to the government. If the government claims that land there will be no way to prevent them from taking it, but that does not mean they will not try.

Twelfth Event: The demolition

It is just the nature of our community to fight. - Vishant's son, age 24

On the Thursday morning of August 31, 2000, Vishant knew they were coming. He'd almost gone to work that day, but instead braced himself as he stood outside the cement house he had built only a few years earlier. He did not have legal claim to the land, but the house was built in such a way that it appeared well-integrated into the village. Nevertheless, the police had gathered a magistrate, private security, and the Delhi Development Authority on the corner of intersecting roads far from the village. They must have looked like a mob, maybe a riot, or a horde, as they advanced on the village, kicking up a flock of dust as they came. They came to destroy houses that were built outside the legal bounds of the village. Vishant stayed calm as he carefully stepped backwards, ready to do everything possible to prevent destruction.

Vishant and his neighbors fought for over an hour. The police attacked anyone who tried to interfere as they felled his house to the ground. He says the police "hit everyone from the youngest children to the oldest women." Many people were injured, including a few police officers. The police arrested Vishant with 17 more people (11 women, 7 men) and kept them in jail for a week. The court case that followed was labelled the "State v. Vishant and Others," burdening him with the only named role for the 13 years it took the case to be decided. At first, the village council helped pay the court fees, but expenses were later turned over to the defendants themselves. In that long 13 years, 7 of the 18 accused died. One man got very drunk one night and was met with an accident. Two women died naturally of old age, and four women died by suicide. The 11 survivors were acquitted of all charges in December,

2013. In his decision, the judge wrote

> There is serious doubt regarding the identification of the accused persons as part of the unlawful assembly, or that they were the ones obstructing the government officials in discharge of their duties, or that they had caused injuries to some of the said government officials present at the spot, or deterred the said officials from discharging their official duties. Consequently, all the 11 accused persons… deserve to be given benefit of doubt. As a result thereof, all the above said 11 accused persons are acquitted for the offenses.

The judge's reasoning includes suspicions that evidence may have been planted or at least tampered with, as well as the fact that none of the police officers called to testify could identify individual accused persons. The judge found insufficient evidence that the police had not simply arrested anyone they could reach rather than, as they claimed, arresting those who had actually caused harm. Most importantly, however, is what the judge did not say. The matter before the court was limited to whether these 11 people had been the 11 unlawfully assembled who had injured police officers. It did not say anything about whether the demolition was legal, or legally carried out. Since the 2000 demolition attempt, the police have opened a new police station much closer to the village. Another demolition, or demolition attempt, is ever possible.

Thirteenth Event: An NGO takes the tutoring center

The last collection of events I wish to outline as affecting precarious life in Ashrey is a confluence of journalists and NGOs who suddenly appeared and left. This series of effete interventions began shortly after James opened his own tutoring center in partnership with AJ,

a man who is, effectively, James' counterpart from the Perli Side; while James' family had been one of the original settlers, AJ's grandfather built his home during the 1980s migration into Ashrey. Both grandfathers were, and remain, leaders of their respective sides of the village. When James took one year away from academic studies, AJ was one year behind him and did not pause. Because of mutual feelings of congenial competition between the two men, James returned to school for his 11th and 12th years. Finishing just ahead of AJ, James became the first member of the Perna community to complete a university degree. AJ became the second, and James' son will likely be the third.

In 2002, AJ and James opened an academic support center for children in Ashrey. They received nominal support from a nearby NGO, and operated in the open courtyard of a family home. At first, very few Perna young people were attending school outside the village, but many were willing to come to the center for tutoring. At its peak, AJ and James had almost 100 children studying with them. By the start of my longest fieldwork in 2018, the second generation of Perna young people were taking their class 12 exams and graduating. After extensive prodding, James admits that this would not, and could not, have happened without the learning center, and the way it supported a communal shift in priorities towards education.

The learning center was thriving in early 2008 when a wealthy South Delhi woman with a growing NGO took a private car the two hours necessary to reach Ashrey from South Delhi. She parked outside the village and approached the learning center with a proposal; given that the center was already working so well, she wanted to take over operations. She promised to expand and diversify the services, as well as offer paid positions to the small

group of literate adults in the village. James accepted the offer, and secured a job for his literate sister-in-law, Poonam, teaching the youngest children.

Fourteenth Event: Journalists

The internationally-known NGO brought with it a flurry of journalists and interns interested in life in a "prostitution village." Yet the collection of articles published by these visitors closely matched the NGO's own narrative of what this life was like; Ashrey, allegedly, was a community of intergenerational Hindu sex workers performing traditional labor as required by their caste. Photographs of young girls growing up in prominent, high gotra, families from the first wave of settlement, were published and described as children destined for early marriage and sex work on account of their caste. In other words, the externally-imposed identities people had long avoided, were formalized and reinscribed through these stories.

Local accounts of this time suggest women were paid to say certain things in interviews, or they were misled into speaking to a journalist who claimed to be a social worker. AJ's niece describes a day that journalists came to her house seeking people to photograph and interview. "We slammed the door and locked it," she says. The children who did open the door, she says, were fitted with hidden cameras and the footage was used on the news. I do not know if the journalists would agree with this interpretation of their methods. I do know that I never heard any contradictory stories from residents, which indicates to me that, whatever they had intended, residents did not appreciate or agree with how they were

documented. By now, this journalistic record has helped produce a narrative of a community that is divorced from history and both unwilling, and unable, to change. For a community organized around a politics of goodness, this narrative is a deeply affective event, requiring significant effort to refold it into a reputation of goodness.

Fifteenth Event: NGOs come and go

There was work for a few years and then one day it was gone. They left no contact. Then I heard about the news and saw it on TV. It was shocking… I will never work with a stranger again. - Poonam

James grew increasingly frustrated with the NGO and its associated journalists, and resigned in 2010. At his wife's urging, he slowly stopped engaging in all "social work" within the community. Instead, he used his university degree to secure a much higher-paying job managing a luxury apartment building in a nearby area of Delhi. Of his time as a social worker, James says the founder of the NGO would call him a few days in advance and ask him to assemble women and girls to meet a celebrity, foreign visitor, and/or potential donor, but these visits never resulted in new resources or programs. Whenever he asked for new services, the founder would say there was no money. "I came to feel that she was blackmailing us," he says. "If you have money, you can do a lot for a community. But I saw that she is not a social mind.

She is a business mind." He resigned from his position and, without him, the NGO decided to abruptly end all operations in Ashrey.

When I first met James and Selene in 2008, people in Ashrey were excited that a major NGO from outside was so interested in their wellbeing. "There was no resistance at all," Selene says. Now, however, "strangers" will find doors slammed and locked, with no indication that they will open again anytime soon.

Conclusion:

Ashrey is prostitution village and its inhabitants are a scheduled caste called Perna. While these markers may be helpful for an outsider to whom "prostitution" "scheduled caste" and "Perna" mean something, none of these markers come from the community itself. The dilemma I have attempted to solve lies between competing commitments to recognize the harm and injustice this community has faced, while also affirming that the words used to indicate some of that harm are not words of the community's own creation. My solution has been to use the concepts of precarity, affect, and trauma to develop a framework of "affective intersectional events" that moves away from emphasizing identity as the major point of politics, and towards how the community actually orients political life.

Separating identity from politics is helpful because of how it makes the community's politics more visible as such. In Ashrey, politics are not identity politics but rather a site on which ethical activity produces power. The community does not mobilize identity as a vehicle for justice or rights. Suggesting, for example, that this community is scheduled caste and

therefore marginalized or oppressed does not leave space for the complex kinds of resistance and negotiation which are done in ethical terms.

Throughout this story, I could not avoid my sense that being classified as a tribe, rather than a caste, was a pivotal moment. I wondered if reclassification could reverse many past mistakes and better position the community to claim goodness as needed. A tribe is, for instance, often outside the caste system entirely. Tribal status carries other kinds of stigma (Shah 2011; Moodie 2015), but not quite the same kind Ashrey's residents are burdened with today. Tribal communities also benefit from an affirmative action system of positive discrimination that lowers entrance exam cutoffs for university below what even a Scheduled Caste is entitled too. While James' son, for example, did quite well on his final exams, it was not enough to secure him a spot in Delhi University. Had he been classified as a member of a tribe, he would have gained admission easily. When I asked James about this, he repeated that the classification of Scheduled Caste came from outside and no one had any idea where it came from. I mentioned the movements in Panjab for some tribes to be reclassified as such and asked whether his community had ever considered pursuing a movement for reclassification. His answer was indicative of a politics that is less about identity, more attuned to the good, and worried about who the community is and will be in the future.

"We are a tribe," James said. "We are definitely a tribe. But that is not our main concern right now. Our main concern is prostitution."

Chapter Three: The Search for Sahi

From where does one derive the power necessary to flourish? In the preceding chapter, I referenced Butler's use of the term "persistent flourishing" to describe what is at stake in, and damaged by, precarity. In her view, it is not just bodies themselves that are hurt by the violence of precarious life, but individual and collective potentials to "flourish" or thrive. When one is subject to precarity, there is a threat to life in a literal sense but also a threat to one's ability to live a life that "flourishes."

In Ashrey, the concept I encountered that best approximates a notion of "flourishing" is *sahi*, contentment. When Isha described the structure of her polygynous family, for instance, she explained that yes, it may seem a little strange but, honestly, "ham sahi hain" - we are content. Sahi, translated as "content," is different from being fine, good, or happy in that it is a little fuller, indicating a level of peace or comfort. It has parallels with what Audre Lorde might call the "erotic" in that it invokes "an internal sense of satisfaction" (1978). It does not necessarily mean that all circumstances are exactly as one would like, but they are sufficient to feel comfortable living as one's self within the world. As such, sahi also has some similarities with what Jarret Zigon, after Heidegger, calls "dwelling" (2014). He writes that "to dwell is to be in the world such that one's being is not reduced to such a degree that being-in-the world becomes something like being-trapped-in-the-world" (2014, 757). In Ashrey, the search for sahi is, indeed, a search for "being" above trapping.

Women in Ashrey face a multitude of potential "traps," including those related to gender, caste, class, and tribe, as well as all the fallout from the historical events of the last chapter. Yet

many do find themselves in sahi, that is (approximately), dwelling without feeling trapped. The ways in which they come to sahi in a prostitution village are best understood by looking at one part of the many structures of power through which they navigate which is, in this case, patriarchal power. In the context of patriarchal power, life in this prostitution village shapes the structures of that power is surprising ways. Because of internal tensions over sex work that have effectively bifurcated the village, there are actually two patriarchies that are kept separate in some ways, mutually reinforced by others, and often engaged in tense competition for hegemonic power over the other. While seeking sahi under patriarchy can be difficult, it is perhaps further complicated by the need to manage and negotiate conflicting messages offered by multiple patriarchies. The ways in which women do this on one side of the village versus the other shows us new ways of thinking about how patriarchal power operates, especially through the family and commercial sexual labor.

Patriarchy, family, and the sex worker

> I would say there are many Indias, and they are doing battle with each other now, just as they always have been. The battle I chose to focus on is the battle between tradition and "modernity," fundamentalism and capitalism, and how this plays out on the bodies of women. - Filmmaker Nisha Pahuja, 2013

In South Asia, thinking about "patriarchies" in the plural arises primarily from feminist debates in the 1990s. More recently, a well-known example of this theoretical framework surfaced in Nisha Pahuja's acclaimed documentary, *The World Before Her.* Pahuja follows two Indian women through two different worlds; Ruhi Singh is an aspiring beauty queen, and Prachi

Trivedi is growing up in a Hindu nationalist household. Viewers see Singh through the pageant process, which a producer calls a search for "the modern Indian woman." Activities include skin whitening, botox, and having contestants walk the catwalk with paper bags over their heads so they can be judged on their legs. Meanwhile, Trivedi learns anti-Muslim slogans, self defense, and weapons training at the Durga Vahini Hindu nationalist camp for young women. Trivedi confesses that she thinks she's called to defend India from Muslims, not to marry and have children. Singh and Trivedi appear to be living in two worlds at odds with one another, each with different expectations of women. As both attempt to thrive within their respective worlds, viewers see two competing forms of patriarchal power; one that stands for "tradition and fundamentalism," the other for "modernity and capitalism," as quoted above.

Pahuja's work shows modernity as the primary force bifurcating two patriarchal systems of power. We see Miss India contestants carefully shaping themselves into women who are at once both Indian and, importantly, "modern." The modern Indian woman stands as a figure at odds with Prachi's family, particularly her father. When the pageant briefly appears on his television, he sees it as an indicator of all that is wrong because Hindu fundamentalist tradition, including its demands of women, are what is best about India. Rather than evolve with what he sees as a Western-influenced modernity, his daughter should learn to fight for the Hindu nation. This too is a kind of "modern" expectation in that it expands Prachi's range of activities and experiences beyond what is perceived to be the realm of traditional Hindu womanhood. Only she builds herself into a present-day fighter, rather than a modern beauty queen. I found Ashrey is also divided between two patriarchies but, while modernity plays a role in their formulation, ideas about sex, work, and sex work are just as productive.

In her critique of a different, earlier, documentary, the Oscar-winning *Born into Brothels* (BIB) by Americans Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman (2004), Svati Shah notices a pattern in how sex work in India is shown to American film audiences. She shows that prostitution is presented as a "timeless other," one whose inhabitants must be rescued into the present day by a comparatively more modern, usually American, outsider (2013). If there could be an opposite to what she describes, it would perhaps be in Ashrey; here, prostitution was consistently described to me as a recent imposition. We were always nomadic goat herders, the narrative would go, and sex work only came after these other people arrived and settled here in the 1980s. They, I was told, are crazy people with a "bad mindset," and it was them who brought prostitution into the community. When asked to elaborate on what drove people to prostitution, surmising seemed to center around uncontrolled wishes for the material comforts of modern settled life. In other words, Ashrey's sex workers are far from "being outside the flow of time-as-progress" that documentaries of sex work in India tend to show (Shah 2013, 562). Instead, sex work is a means by which some people in Ashrey leave traditional nomadic life behind, and lay claim to a more lavish and sedentary modernity.

My data suggests that this division over what it means to be a modern family in Ashrey results in more than intra-communal tension. Rather, it also goes so far as to produce two different forms of patriarchal power. Returning to the two patriarchies presented in *The World Before Her*, Pahuja's presentation can be seen as extending a South Asian feminist theory of patriarchy. South Asian feminists often think about patriarchies in the multiple, meaning more than two, with divisions between them based on the communities each is able to influence. For instance, Brahminical patriarchy, as introduced by Uma Chakravarti in 1993, is a systemic way

of controlling women in order to simultaneously maintain "not only patrilineal succession, but also caste purity" (1993, 579). This patriarchy lies at the intersection of caste and gender, serving to organize both caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy simultaneously. The concept has since been further developed by others including Sharmila Rege and Cynthia Stephen.

Taking off from Chakravarti, Kumkum Sangari writes about "multiple yet overlapping patriarchies'' (1995). At that time, there was public debate over India's practice of breaking personal laws, such as marriage and family, into different categories according to the citizen's religion. In arguing against this practice, Sangari recognizes patriarchies that are not based in Brahman Hinduism. Rather, patriarchies exist in the multiple, and "different patriarchal arrangements distribute protection, entitlements, and oppressions differently in terms of class, caste, region, and religion" (1995, 3382). There is no reason to assume that religion, and religion alone, confines women to one particular patriarchy over another (Sangari 1995), because religion is always practiced in relation to other social realities.

Sangari's notion of multiple patriarchies could be read as another way to think about intersectionality, which isn't to say that intersectionality does, or does not, easily travel to the South Asian context (see Fernandes 2015 for discussion). Rather it is a way of thinking about systems of power in which the system, itself, is what is intersectional. Rather than thinking about how multiple identities intersect within an individual person, it is the *patriarchy* that is intersectional between various social identities over which it may, or may not, have control. Various social structures such as religion, class, caste, geographic location, race, and more overlap to produce particular forms of patriarchal power and therefore different patriarchies. As explained in chapter one, identity is not necessarily the most salient category in Ashrey.

Therefore, rather than thinking through how gender, race, class, and caste intersect in individual women, it is more useful to think about how the forms of power, themselves, are produced by intersections.

This notion of patriarchy does not necessarily map directly onto how it has been conceptualized in anthropology, and South Asian feminist thinkers have commented on these variations (see discussion in Uberoi 1995). While Radcliffe-Brown's definition of patriarchy was formative, the following decades moved away from his focus on patrilineal descent, marriage, and inheritance to think of patriarchy as a complex power structure. Lila Abu-Lughod, for instance, thought of "fields of overlapping and intersecting forms of subjugation," of which patriarchy is only one, that could come into view by paying attention to how people resist (1990, 52). More recently, in a commentary about patriarchy's disappearance from analyses of power, Sherry Ortner modifies this definition to say that

> patriarchy can be seen as having a particular structure, a particular organization of relations of power that involves not only men over women, but also men over other men. Furthermore, while one can think about patriarchy in pure form—and many all-male institutions approximate that form—in general it is always intertwined with other structures of power (2013, 534).

None of these are quite aligned with how I understand Sangari's approach to patriarchy. Families in Ashrey do, indeed, tend to meet the Radcliffe-Brown criteria for a patriarchy, but the arrangement of family units is not as helpful in understanding what Abu-Lughod calls a "field of subjugation" as the ways in which those structures come to shape life trajectories. Without over-privileging the life course (as this is not the only way that power presents itself) I am thinking of patriarchy as something that simultaneously draws on and creates genders as a means of ordering

the reasonableness and likelihood of any particular path to contentment. Patriarchal power is a central (though not exclusive) force shaping women's lives in Ashrey. The likelihood of achieving sahi by foregoing gendered expectations altogether is quite low, though not impossible, as the power structure of patriarchy creates the obstacles and tensions around such transgression. What is substantially different from anthropological understandings of patriarchy, is the sense that it can be concrete enough to be multiple. Abu-Lughod writes about "intersecting and often conflicting structures of power" (1990, 42), and Ortner mentions patriarchy as something "intertwined with other structures of power." Both suggest that these different kinds of entanglements may result in variations in how patriarchal power presents in a particular context, but Sangari, along with other South Asian feminist thinkers mentioned above, suggest it is not just about different contexts. Rather, as power intersects and intertwines, there can be more than one patriarchy involved, and more than one that results.

In this sense, Sangari could be read as harkening back to a sociological notion of gender (and, as Uberoi 1990 points out, divisions between sociology and anthropology in India are often not very important, as scholars from both disciplines draw from one another frequently). Connell's notion of multiple masculinities (2016), in particular, seems especially relevant. Connell uses Gramsci to analyze how multiple masculinities articulate, interacting with and reinforcing one another in different ways as one or another surfaces as hegemonic. Sangari is not talking about masculinities per se. She means multiple, and differently constructed, patriarchies but they do, as Connell suggests of masculinity, interact as one may become more powerful than another. I find that patriarchy is a broader, more encompassing, and comprehensive notion of power, and that masculinity does not bring quite as much into visibility. There are multiple

narratives in Ashrey about what kind of man is the most masculine and how one ought to behave to maintain one's masculinity. However, from the perspective of multiple patriarchies, rather than masculinities, we can see that men too are influenced by conflicting modes of patriarchal power. In other words, it is not just competing notions of gender that render sahi elusive, but also the ways in which those notions play out on others in the form of patriarchal power that limits, shapes, and supports a search undertaken within many structures of power.

The mechanics of marriage and its complications in Ashrey

Become a wanderer's partner.
Become an anklet's bell.
Honor me.
Become my slave.
Maybe you're a king somewhere else…

From "Chole Ke Peeche Kya Hai?" (What's beneath the blouse?) danced by Madhuri Dixit in the 1993 film Khalnayak

I met Annie at her brother's wedding when she pushed through a group of children hovering around my table, grabbed both my hands, and dragged me towards the stage. I was planning to decline dancing because it was obviously terrifying; all the women sat gathered around a stage before a DJ with copious confidence in his strobe lights, and young men lingered as music began. It was impossible, I thought, that a foreign anthropologist could pass what seemed like such a high-stakes test. But I didn't know Annie. I would later learn that Annie does

as Annie pleases, and that she always assumes no one will stop her. I dug my heels in to no avail as she dragged me to the dance floor. “English song?” she asked. I opted for Hindi, on the condition she danced with me. As the song began I closely copied her. We were joined by two other young women who graciously wished to help. (I would later get to know them as Ella and Renu- Ella, one of the fastest learners of English grammar I’ve ever worked with, and Swara, whose brother’s eventual elopement would erupt the Perna community in just a few months).

This kind of dancing is just called by the English word “dance” in Ashrey. It is also sometimes called *nakal* on social media, but I never heard anyone in Ashrey call it by this name.[1] The closest analog to dance, or nakal, is khodia,[2] which is performed throughout rural Haryana. With only one exception, the 1993 song *Choli ke Peeche* quoted above, Ashrey’s dancers tend to choose the most current popular music. Later, I would ask Annie to really teach me how to dance and, eventually, I would learn a passable *Laung Laachi*. I didn’t know this one dance would become requisite at weddings, or that I would be asked to do it so many times. I certainly didn’t know that a man far away in Haryana would call James to say “Sir, I would like to invite you to my son’s wedding. Please bring the foreigner who dances.” (A request I would decline) I didn’t know any of this yet, as I tried my best to adequately dance through two Hindi songs with the help of three young women from the Perli Side. Without their assistance in leaving my hosts on the original side and crossing over to theirs, the plurality of patriarchies in Ashrey would likely have never become visible to me.

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[1] *Nakal is* the name in Punjab.

[2] Traditionally, haryanvi women dance khodia behind closed doors at weddings. Popular dancers, especially Perna favorite Sapna Choudhry mentioned below, have only recently made khodia into a performance style

A woman getting married in Ashrey, on either side of the village, does not dance at her own wedding, and will likely spend most of the night at home with her parents. Since the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006, weddings occur at the legal marrying ages of 18 for women, and 21 for men, if not slightly later. Betrothals can occur much earlier. Families in Ashrey who are hoping to form connections may make these arrangements even before children are born, but agreements remain negotiable, and a family can express ambivalence even after a formal agreement is made. James' youngest son, for instance, is potentially betrothed to a young upper-clan sister-in-law named Meghna, but James is having reservations; Meghna, it seems, is not attending school. Though curious, outgoing, and bright, Meghna says she does not like the early mornings or the headaches that accompany pre-dawn school attendance. She rarely attends, and James does not want his son to marry an uneducated woman.

Regardless of whether a couple is betrothed, most marriages are arranged by parents. Parents choose a partner for their child who is within the Perna community but outside the clan (an arranged endogamous, clan exogamous, betrothal and marriage). Young people, for their part, seem to have no interest in intra-gotra marriage. When I asked Naina and Laura if they would consider marrying a boy from the same clan, they both scrunched up their faces in disgust. "From here? No! Never. They are our brothers. Absolutely not!" That does not mean that there have never been mistakes. Gotra affiliation is not necessarily a topic of everyday conversation, meaning some children may not be certain of their gotra, and are unsure exactly which families in which villages are of the same and different gotras. Thus, some young people have, by accident, fallen in love with someone from within their own clan. In all cases, either one or both of the star-crossed lovers have ended their relationship before it could become public knowledge.

An open and public challenge to the rule is yet to be seen or, if it has been, is no longer in living memory.

A general willingness to follow parental direction in marriage could perhaps be seen as contrary to other trends in surrounding areas. In Haryana, what is known as a "runaway marriage" appears to be on the rise. A runaway marriage is an elopement, one that young people pursue because, for a variety of reasons, at least one family prohibits or rejects the marriage. The couple may be from an upper and lower caste, for example, or from the same clan, both of which are forbidden by local councils. Meena Dhanda describes these elopements as a "silent revolution," because young people are using marriage to revolt against a variety of interrelated traditions (2010). Prem Chowdhry, however, observes a backlash against such couples. She suggests that increasing numbers of young people willing to defy their families and village councils may be leading to a doubling down of these rules, such that the councils are becoming more strict, and the penalties for defying them more dangerous (Chowdhry 2004).

If there is a silent revolution of runaway marriages, it has not come to Ashrey, or at least not yet. My research suggests that no one, to date, has ever attempted to marry outside the Perna community. While some interview participants were willing to speak about intra-clan love stories (none of which have resulted in marriage), no one has ever suggested even a rumor of someone wishing to marry a non-Perna. A few men have spent considerable time outside the village in school or a profession, and have had brief romances outside the community, but none have pursued marriage with an outsider. One possible explanation is, of course, that no one is willing to share this information. However, given the kinds of personal stories that are eventually shared, I doubt such a marriage would be an unspeakable matter. Assuming it is true that no one has ever

seriously considered marrying a non-Perna, there may be many complex explanations, of which two should be highlighted. First, the most encompassing explanation seems to be that a non-Perna person simply cannot meet the definition of "marriage" as it is conceptualized in this community. Affairs, dalliances, romances, a long series of WhatsApp messages depicting the daydreams of young people in love, are not "marriages," nor are they the material upon which a marriage is built. For a relationship to be a marriage, it must be an arranged endogamous, clan exogamous, betrothal and marriage, or at the very least appear to be.

Secondly, as will be detailed in a later chapter, marrying outside the community would effectively disenroll the couple from the formal system of adjudication available to the Perna community. Non-Pernas are not beholden to the power of Perna village councils, and non-Perna families have no substantive reason to comply with council directives. Should discord arise in the marital home, the Perna family would have no council at their disposal to defend themselves and their child against the non-Perna family s/he married into. Even as a small group of young men become the second generation to attend university outside the community, parents do not voice any concerns about them meeting a non-Perna girl and attempting to marry her.

Once an endogamous, clan exogamous, betrothal and marriage are arranged, money and resources are exchanged between the two families to support the couple. A date is set, usually months in advance but within a year. Weddings take place over a few days. In the evening, unmarried female family members of the bride, no matter their age, dress in their best clothing and apply full makeup.[3] The bride's family will hold a feast and invite all families with whom they have no conflict. Late in the night, after everyone has eaten, a DJ will set up a small stage

and play songs on request as women take turns dancing. The festivities end very late at night, when the groom and his wedding procession arrive. They are offered food and everyone sleeps for a few hours. Religious ceremonies begin very early the next morning. A priest conducts a ceremony, and the married couple spend the rest of the day visiting relatives and seeking blessings. In the evening, the bride leaves with the groom to her new home.

After marriage, a woman may change the way she dresses. If she wore jeans or T-shirts as a girl, her married wardrobe will be mostly restricted to traditional *salwar-kameez*. Many married women wear makeup. If she is, or will be, in sex work, she may wear makeup every day, while others will wear makeup for special occasions only. Some women on the Original Side do not wear makeup at all and, of those who do not, most say it was the preference of a father or other in-law. All married women wear symbols of marriage including the red dust of a *kumkum* or *sindoor* in the part of their hair, a *bindi* on the forehead, bangles, and a black and gold necklace.[4]

Married women must have sex with their husbands. If they do not, the marital family can take her natal family to the village council and seek to end the marriage. Married women usually become pregnant right away because, as Annie's cousin Isha put it before descending into a fit of giggles, "no one has any control!" After the birth of a child, a new mother will rest for several weeks, and her mother may come to the house to help care for the baby. She can also expect her younger sisters-in-law or youngest daughter to assist with much of the childcare. While men avoid most aspects of infant and childcare, the oldest man in the family has final say in disputes over things like discipline, often scolding daughters-in-law for being too harsh.

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[4] Despite feeling uncomfortable about possible appropriation and/or feeling like I was wearing a costume, I quickly realized I was expected to wear all these things, and eventually did.

Breastfeeding prevents pregnancy for several months, but a wife will likely become pregnant again quickly. While grandparents in Ashrey come from families with as many as ten or twelve children, the current generation has half that, and many express desires for no more than two children, one girl and one boy. While sons are, sometimes and in some ways, preferred, there is no evidence of a particularly strong preference for sons in Ashrey. For instance, the family may encourage a woman to continue getting pregnant until she has a son but, even if she only has daughters, she is not pressured to continue getting pregnant after more than a few children. At this point, she undergoes tubal ligation,[5] free of charge, at a local state hospital.

Though not practiced by the majority, some families include more than one wife. So long as the second wife has not been married before and has no children, the local village councils do not object. A first wife will go through the formal ceremonies outlined above. Subsequent wives do not. These additional marriages are independently chosen, seen to be unavoidable given the sudden and strong love between the man and his additional wife, and are expected to be permanent. First wives are often hurt by the sudden appearance of a second wife in their homes. "Think," Isha explained one day. "Your husband comes home and says 'this is my new wife.' You can say 'No! I don't want her here' but there is nothing you can do." Depending on her own views on love and marriage, first wives may feel sad, betrayed, or simply disappointed that a lifelong, exclusive, love did not result from marriage (see Wardlow and Hirsch 2006). However, after some time, the family may settle into its new formation. Isha's own family was disrupted at first, but her father has since taken a third wife and kept his household together. "Everything is ok," Isha says. "Ham sahi hain - we are content." Given the presence of so many women and

[5] This is not unusual. Tubal ligation is often cited as the most widely-used form of birth control in India.

girls in a household, whether daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, grandmothers, or even other wives, a wife's share of domestic duties may decline as her children grow older. It is here that life trajectories diverge and multiple patriarchies become visible because, in only some households, sex work becomes a possibility.

How sex works: Commercial sexual labor

Scholars often struggle to conduct research outside three long established and well-entrenched policy positions on sex work. This is primarily because something as simple as acknowledging a sex worker's agency can sometimes, even inadvertently, group one with advocates of legalization or decriminalization (Augustin 2007; Day 2007), while writing about patriarchal power tends to associate someone with the abolitionist or "Nordic" model, which advocates decriminalizing the sex worker but not the buyer (Farley et al 2003; Raphael and Shapiro 2004; Jeffreys 2008). In Ashrey, the village council has adopted none of these feminist positions and have, instead, declared an outright ban. Disputes related to sex work cannot be adjudicated through them, and they threaten to call the police on anyone seen with non-Perna men in their homes at night. Even though a majority of the village's income derives from commercial sexual labor, it is a highly contested and criminalized secret.

Contemporary sex work debates in India came into being as discourses in favor of legalization combined with international efforts to prevent an AIDS crisis in India on one hand, and anti-trafficking concerns in the United States and United Nations were operationalized as foreign policy on the other (Gangoli 2007; Kotiswaran 2014; Agrawal 2018). In the case of the

former, organizations including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Department for International Development, and the Gates Foundation shared a goal of preventing India from becoming what some imagined would be the epicenter of the AIDS crisis (Kotiswaran 2011).

On the other hand, the abolitionist position has been supported in India by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission, and the National Commission for Women, as well as domestic abolitionist NGOs such as Prerena and Sanlaap. The Abolitionist perspective came into debates in India through the United Nations' (2000) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (also known as the Palermo Protocol) which has been interpreted as abolitionist. Concurrently, the United States' Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA), also passed in 2000, has perhaps had an even more direct impact on the global south; under the TVPA, the US Department of State ranks countries according to their efforts to combat human trafficking, and those with a low ranking are threatened with sanctions and loss of aid.

Following independence in 1947, India was party to the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons, and enacted the agreement with the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (SITA) in 1956. SITA was amended with the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) in 1986, and there have been a number of proposals to amend the law further (Sunder Rajan 2003). When India began to fall in the US Department of State trafficking rankings, Parliament responded by introducing abolitionist amendments to the ITPA in 2009, and ratifying the Palermo Protocol in 2011. The ITPA was recently revised to more closely align with the abolitionist model (Misra 2018; Kotiswaran 2018).

In Ashrey, the only direct contact people have had with these transnational debates is through an NGO that advocated the abolitionist model (detailed in next chapter). Engaging the community through a decriminalization or legalization approach would be difficult, if not impossible, due to the ban on sex work. The ban also means there is no sex worker collective or organizing, because doing so would mean open defiance. However, there is no shortage of people willing to surmise what is driving people into prostitution. Unlike the debates outlined above, so much of what people say is focused on the behavior of men, and not the women.

Men, I was repeatedly told, do not have the proper mindset for wage labor and little motivation to try. A few families manage a small business of wedding band rentals. Simran's father owns a pair of white horses which are rented out for weddings. Some families own roadside snack and convenience shops. One man, introduced later, works in a bank. Still, the narrative that men are lazy is taken as such an indisputable fact that, when I asked Laura and Naina what men do after finishing their studies, they laughed and could not stop. Vishant's youngest son, Jack, is a dedicated student with a dream of going to medical school. He too told me matter-of-factly that "the men here are very lazy." I asked what men do all day and, after reminding me that his father actually does have a full-time job selling Times of India subscriptions, he explained that "the men wake up, they eat breakfast, and sleep. They eat lunch, and sleep. They eat dinner, and sleep. Really, you must understand. They are very lazy."

A woman who marries a man without a job can reasonably assume he is expecting her to enter sex work and support him. Avani is an academically talented lower-gotra 18-year-old, who may become the first Perna woman to attend university. When her sister (from a second wife) received an official date for her wedding, I thought Avani would be more excited for her. "He is a

nice person," she said, "but he doesn't have a job. He says he's looking but he still doesn't have any work." Highly disciplined and very polite, Avani couldn't quite mask her annoyance that her sister was marrying someone so unmotivated. In a situation like this, women are usually hoping their husbands will find work eventually but understand that, if they don't, she may be expected to enter sex work.

Women in Ashrey who do sex work have tiring schedules and routines. Still expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities, even if these responsibilities are shared across women, she will likely make at least some of the breakfast for the family after she has worked all night. She'll clean up and maybe do some household tasks before taking a short rest. When children return home from school, she'll cook them an afternoon meal, and settle in for a long nap. In the late afternoons, it is not unusual to find whole sections of the village completely quiet as families catch up on their sleep. Women will then wake and cook dinner, or do more household chores, while children study or go to private tuition. In the evening, women in sex work bathes, change clothes, and put on heavier makeup. Clients may come to the house, where they are fielded by husbands or other male relatives. Other buyers stop on the road, and negotiate an exchange from their vehicle. Some women will go in groups of about a half dozen female relatives to solicit buyers in nearby areas. Some, in families who have accumulated enough wealth to buy cars, will be driven farther out by their husbands to roadside stands along the highway. Women who do sex work usually end their careers when a daughter-in-law gives birth to a male grandchild, is sterilized, and replaces her in sex work and as the primary generator of family income.

Women have a variety of experiences around beginning sex work, and continue to have diverse experiences, both positive and negative, as sex workers. No matter their experience,

however, all Perna women in sex work must negotiate the stigmatized position sex work holds in the Perna community. Despite the village-wide ban, sex work is an open secret. Women will not speak about their labor outside their families, and will often hide their work from their children for as long as possible. Despite the practice being widespread, its ubiquity has not convinced Perna leadership to shift positions. To the contrary, the leadership seems to grow less and less sympathetic as sex work brings families out of poverty. James says he speaks for the general tenor of the council when he says that "maybe in the past they were poor so there was a reason. But now? Now the children can study and people can do something else. There is no excuse for this dirty work."

Dirty work is the central tension; in some families, women are effectively forbidden from doing sex work. In others, they are almost forbidden from refusing. Levels of coercion vary, and I do not mean to imply that women in sex work in Ashrey are systematically forced into prostitution. Instead, my data points more to how patriarchal power produces sex work as either nearly unthinkable or almost inevitable. There is room for resistance, as Renu's story below shows. Yet what I saw happening as I crossed between two sides of the village (escorted by Annie and her cousins), was that the patriarchal expectations making up what it meant to be a good wife, mother, and woman were drastically different depending on the family's attitude towards sex work. The two notions reinforced each other as each looked to the other as not doing enough to honor and support the family.

Searching for sahi between patriarchies: Simran

The thing about the Underworld is it's boring.
Sure there's pain, fear,
stress - knowing the work
back home lies fallow -
but it's dull. I've been here
a year now in this haze…

First half of "Persephone in Grey" by Shweta Narayan

Simran was never in danger of going into sex work. When I first met her in 2008, she was nine years old with two baby brothers. James' tutoring center had just been handed over to the renowned NGO mentioned in the previous chapter (and elaborated in the next), and Simran was a regular participant in the new NGO's activities. On a special day she remembers well, Simran joined Naina, Laura, Monica, and a few other upper-gotra (nashgavat) daughters from originally-settled families, on a field trip to see the sites of Delhi. Everyone dressed in their best. They saw the Red Fort and had ice cream by the pond near India Gate.

Simran and her cousins derive high standing from their prominent families, but also from public condemnation of sex work, and strict adherence to what might be interpreted as conservative family values. When Naina left school, for instance, her world became limited to her own house and the short path to Simran or Laura's homes. At 14, Naina had finished her compulsory education, as defined by the Right to Education Act of 2009, and there was no reason to study farther; her oldest brother was still unmarried, and she was needed at home. Naina helps run the family's small shop, cooks meals, cares for goats, and keeps her home tidy. The shelf requiring the most careful dusting, and the most time, displays her academic achievement awards.

Like Naina, Simran attended school until she was 14. She was quickly betrothed, but did not marry until the legal age of 18. At the time of my field research, Simran had been living with her husband for about a year, and she came to Ashrey for a short visit of a few weeks. Her new home is in Haryana. It is a busy and dusty town with over 100,000 people, and a smattering of beautiful medieval ruins. Before Simran married and left for her marital home, she built up a reputation as one of the best dancers in Ashrey. Quiet, shy, and affectionate in her interactions with others, I never would have guessed Simran was such a vivid performer. "Thank you but no," Laura said when I incorrectly guessed her to be the best. "The best was always Simran."

...shin-deep in chalk dust, I might bring color,
wet taste (I almost remember)
if I cut myself. But with what?
And if I could find the right seeds this time
in the white fruit breaking powdery,
medicinal under my hand, if I could dry-swallow
(anything) enough, I might make it home
for one bright day, and my mother
might know me again.

Second half, Persephone in Grey by Shweta Narayan

Simran's youngest brother, Vikram, loves to learn slowly. Focused and methodical, Vikram would endure teasing from his cousins as he struggled to memorize English words they had already committed to memory. Vikram asked me many questions about the United States, and carefully explained things happening in his own community. One day he made a paper flower with a long, twisted stem. "For teaching," he said.

Simran had been visiting her family in Ashrey for several weeks when Vikram came to my room with his head shaved and an orange *tikka* on his forehead, something that marks participation in a religious ceremony. His shaved head, however, suggested a more serious undertaking beyond a routine visit for prayer. Until then, I'd only ever seen Ashrey's men shave their heads in times of grief.

The Hindu ceremony of Karva Chauth was approaching, in which women fast all day for the wellbeing of their husbands. Wives take their first sip of water when they see the moonlight in a bowl of water, and the ceremony is widely criticized in India for having no equivalent fast for men. Some men, in response, join their wives in the fast, but a child like Vikram would have nothing to do for Karva Chauth.

"You went to the temple?" I asked.

"Yes," he said quietly. He did not elaborate.

"Did Simran go with you?"

"No. My sister has returned to Haryana." Vikram paused, pulling on the edge of a thick red curtain on the room's wide window. A small cloud of dust drifted into the air, backlit by fading light. "She wanted to meet with you before she left."

"Simran wanted to meet with me?"

"Yes. She's gone now. She wanted to speak with you."

"I would have liked to speak with her," I said. "Why didn't she come to see me?"

Vikram then explained, as carefully as always, the last thing he would describe in detail before my fieldwork ended: Simran had been in Ashrey to escape her husband. Though he seemed like an acceptable match at first, her husband had shown himself to be moody,

emotional, and deeply unhappy. Whenever he became angry, whether connected to Simran or not, he would beat her. In a negotiation between the two families, Simran was granted leave from her marital home to spend several weeks with her natal family. The extended time was meant as both a respite from the violence, and a punishment for her husband as he endured living without a wife. Vikram did not believe his brother-in-law would change, and had gone to the temple to pray for his sister. Not only did Vikram pray, but he shaved his head to symbolize the gravity of his prayers, and how much he wished them to be heard.

"Why did she leave today?" I asked.

"For Karva Chauth," he said. "That was the agreement."

Simran, an upper-clan daughter of a prominent family, is married to a man who beats her. Her relatively high standing within the community meant her family could arrange a long respite from her husband, but they could not exempt her from religious obligations. As agreed, Simran returned to something like a "year-long haze" that poet Shweta Narayan describes as she reimagined the Persephone of Greek mythology. Simran looked into a vessel of water and saw the moon, shining like "white fruit breaking powdery" in the ripples of the water. Her husband raised her glass and Simran drank, dutifully praying he would live forever.

A different search: Renu[6]

Renu was born in Haryana in a small settlement of only a few families. Anyone passing by would assume the agricultural lands around them were theirs, and that they live a peaceful,

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[6] Renu is a composite character, deliberately constructed to obscure the multiple sources making up her story. Though composites create problems for scholarly analysis, it is necessary to protect the identities of these women. I am especially grateful to one woman, in particular, who was in a position to share more detail.

simple life. They do not farm that land though, nor is it theirs. Renu's uncle has a roadside stand selling cold sodas and packaged snacks to truckers and others who might pass, but most families rely on sex work. When Renu was twelve she discovered her mother was one of these women. No one had ever discussed it. She didn't tell anyone at school, and stopped attending shortly after.

A few years later, Renu's cousin got married. Renu travelled with her parents and uncle over a long road towards Delhi. They reached Ashrey at midnight and were offered vegetables, chicken, rice, and orange sodas. Renu watched the last of the women dancers on the stage, and politely hid her smiles as two intoxicated uncles playfully joined their wives on the dance floor. Arun saw her. With the surreptitious assistance of Renu's new cousin-in-law, Arun would get Renu's WhatsApp number. He sent her videos and emojis until the cousin-in-law discovered he was serious, and proposed that the two families make formal arrangements.

Renu and Arun married, and she moved into his home in Ashrey. Renu's days were mostly spent with Arun's mother and her sisters-in-law. There was also another woman, Asha, living nearby who was from the same village and clan as Renu. They became friends, and liked to watch youtube videos of Panjabi dance choreography whenever they had time. Arun found work for a little while, but the job did not suit him. He was fired, or quit. He claimed to be looking for other work, but it never materialized. Instead, he helped other male family members smuggle contraband beer and alcohol from Renu's native Haryana to be sold at lower prices than what is available in Delhi. Arun spent most of his time watching movies and going to the gym with his brothers. When their son was born, everyone celebrated.

The next two children were girls. Renu had a tubal ligation, and the conversations began. “Shouldn’t she retire? Don’t your sisters deserve some rest?” Not now, Renu said, but Arun’s new job continued to elude him. In an argument Renu said she wouldn’t have to work if he wasn’t so lazy. Arun turned his hand and slapped her, hard, across the face. Arun had never hit her before, and never did again. Asha said the red mark faded quickly. The next week, Renu became a sex worker.

When men came to the house, Arun or a brother-in-law stopped them at the door and decided on a price for whatever they wanted. One brother-in-law liked to make a game out of it. “Is work available here?” a client asked. “Hm. What kind of work do you mean?” he would say with a smile. “Oh come on! You know what I mean!” Renu’s brother-in-law patted him on the back with a deep laugh and showed him into the house. On other days, he would take her and Asha in his car to nearby truck stops. If anyone caused trouble, Arun and his brothers put their gym attendance to use; they were larger than most buyers, and the threat their bodies implied seemed to prevent trouble. Renu kept her money on her person, and Arun rarely asked her to give it to him. He asked her for money when he needed it.

After almost two years, Arun took another wife. Her name was Juhi and she came from an urban area of Haryana. They met at a wedding. Renu outwardly showed her disapproval of Juhi. Secretly, however, she found she did not mind Juhi’s presence. Eventually, Renu insisted on moving upstairs to a larger bedroom she shared with her children. They had direct access to the roof, where they fed birds and flew kites. They had peace, quiet, and time with each other away from the rest of the family. Her daughters used these assets to study well into the evening. The room seemed to function as a kind of compensation for tolerating the second wife, and the girls

who practiced English with me in its quiet space seemed to improve faster than students who did not have the same.

Renu's daughter turned out to be academically talented. Her grades far surpassed those of her brother, who appeared to prefer cricket to studying (and was quite good at the former). When the family suggested it was time for Renu to pull her oldest daughter out of school because she was almost fourteen, Renu refused. Everyone assumed she would change her mind, but she did not. Instead, she took her first daughter out of public school and enrolled her in a competitive private school for girls. Renu had been paying for private tutors for the children for years, and believed her daughter could manage the challenge. One day her daughter seemed to have trouble focusing on the sentences we were reviewing. "You must study. Do you understand?" Renu said, with a seriousness I had not seen before. Her daughter nodded.

When Renu enrolled her daughter, she chose a Jat last name and wrote that they lived in the next village. Other girls from nearby households later joined the same school, and most of them attended tutoring every day. Renu's son finished public school and passed his exams. When the home required more space in anticipation of his coming marriage, Renu counted her money carefully and handed it over to Arun. The carpenter he contracted to build the additional room told his wife he had a job in Ashrey, and he was willing to talk to me about it. He assured her that, no, it was impossible that this family had women in sex work. All the ladies were modest, calm, and respectful. They obviously make their money some other way.

Searching for sahi across patriarchies

Sahi, as Isha used it, is contentment; a comfortable peace with everyday life. It is the absence of precarity, akin to what Butler terms "persistent flourishing" Zigon's notion of "dwelling." Patriarchal power influences the scope of sahi by determining what kinds of contentment are available to whom, and under what conditions. This kind of pressure is negotiable, contestable, and resistible. It is also multiple. In Ashrey, two major forms of patriarchal power compete with and influence one another such that woman are tasked with navigating a complicated tangle of "traps" (to use Zigon's word) in their search for sahi.

The two stories show two different women engaged in this search under patriarchal pressure, but the pressures are not the same because the patriarchies producing them are also not the same. The first is produced by the upper-clan original settlers. This community holds a range of privileges, one of the most important being the legal documents showing ownership of their land, and a second being the power they hold in the village council. The patriarchy among these families is closely related to their relatively high standing in the community, and it is reinforced by publicly condemning poor behavior. Sex work is criminalized and, by condemning it, they assert a certain form of patriarchal hierarchy that is supported by other ideas such as, for example, the value of formal education. Children are expected to attend school, at least for a while, and help their parents with income generation. Simran's brother Vikram, for example, takes care of their horses. Simran left school when she was told, and married who she was told at the decided time. Simran's family uses their relatively high standing to advocate for her wellbeing, but we also see that this high standing has limited effects once she is inside her marital home. Within her marital family, Simran struggles to defend herself.

The second patriarchy is quite different. These families do not share in the same power as original settlers from those upper clans. As such, patriarchal power among these families is closely related to the lower standing of second-wave settlers, and the fact that high-standing in the community, as a whole, is not meaningfully available. Women influenced by, and subjected to, this patriarchy do not navigate the kind of pressure Simran does as a representative of a prominent family. Instead, women in this second patriarchy are expected to subjugate their own personal reputations for the good of the family, including through the criminalized and secret labor of prostitution.

These two patriarchies mutually reinforce one another. To make this relationship visible, it is helpful to draw from one last concept in the literature on gender in South Asia, which is the feminized relationship between suffering and power (Snell-Rood 2015; Bedi 2012). The figure of the suffering woman, one who is regarded as honorable or respected for enduring her anguish, is a familiar character in this literature. Women are seen as able to suffer and endure or, as Pinto shows, required to do so, sometimes with the assistance of pharmaceuticals (2014). Suffering, however, is only part of the story, because the suffering woman may also derive power from her pain. The power she derives is not a pretense or a facade, but can be a substantive source that gives her power over others in the family who are not seen to be suffering the same way. For instance, in her analysis of women living in a Delhi slum, Snell-Rood argues that experiences of sacrifice and suffering are part of how women develop a sense of spiritual well being that may be highly regarded by others (2015). In Mumbai, Tarini Bedi shows that many women in the Hindu nationalist organization of Shiv Sena have survived significant personal hardship, and their reputations for patient endurance translate into respect and political power (2012).

In Ashrey, the stigma and criminalization of sex work means the women who endure it are often able to derive power in exchange for their suffering. Sex work is a secret, but there is widespread acknowledgement that prostitution entails at least some exposure to harm and suffering. As Poonam wondered one day, "what all must such women endure in their work?" She trailed off, before adding "the buyers must demand everything." Furthermore, this risky work is a secret, and women risk personal respect, honor, and reputation if their work is discovered and publicly acknowledged. Sex work is a sacrifice. A woman's sacrifice, especially one made to benefit the family, can be a powerful source of feminized power in South Asia. In Ashrey, the sacrifice made for the family is sex work, and sometimes this is seen as especially honorable."This work is wrong. Absolutely wrong," Vishant's son once said emphatically. "But they are doing it for their families. How can I say anything when it is for the family?"

Sex work entails becoming a secret whose discovery could do irreparable damage to personal reputation. It is because of this that Renu was hit by her husband once, and only once. Once she sacrificed her own will to avoid sex work, and subsumed it to the needs of the family, her standing within the family improved; it was assumed that Arun would not hit her once she began supplying income, and it was also assumed he would not hit her because she had agreed to work for the family. Though domestic violence can happen in any family in Ashrey, women in sex work find that being beaten by a husband is deeply unacceptable because he has not made a comparable sacrifice, nor does he contribute as much income. Many divorces initiate from these grounds. Arun will not hit Renu because, as Simran's story shows, women can and do seek respite from violence by spending time in their natal homes. In such a case, Arun would be blamed for the loss in income that Renu's absence would produce. He never hit her again. It is

this line of thinking that led Annie to comment on the plight of someone she knew on the other side of the village who, like Simran, was facing domestic violence. “What can she do?” she said. “She does not work.”

When Arun took another wife, Renu made sure that Arun, the family, and all their neighbors knew she felt betrayed, but she did not initiate a separation, nor did she attempt a temporary stay in her natal village. Instead, she sacrificed and endured. Her endurance and willingness to keep the family together yielded her own room, and helped her keep her daughter in private school. Were a similar situation to arise in the families I knew on the side where sex work was less ubiquitous, I could not imagine a husband, father-in-law, uncles and, as the ultimate decision maker, a grandfather all agree to the expense of educating a daughter in private school, but not a son. All of these men yielded to Renu’s decision, and she instructed her daughter not to take it lightly. From demanding not to be hit, to educating her daughter, Renu’s search for sahi relies heavily on the power she derives from making a sacrifice for her family. Perhaps this is why she was so serious and threatening when she told her daughter to study well.

Simran is living a search for sahi that seems even more precarious. She lives under a patriarchy in which sex work is openly condemned. She has a good reputation that has been carefully cultivated, and duly protected with the help of other similarly-situated families. Were Simran to enter sex work, the reputations and power of these prominent families would be affected by the public hypocrisy between criminalizing sex work, and a highly-regarded daughter doing it anyway. Domestic violence, however, does not elicit the same kind of outrage at the initial outset. As I will show in the last chapter,[7] domestic violence is not normalized and is, in

[7] My actions described there were in response to learning that Simran had wanted to ask me for help, and I did not notice.

fact, a frequent topic of adjudication. Yet, in the early stages of a marriage, a man beating his wife tends to be seen as something that can be changed. The first step is to punish the man's family by removing the wife and sending her back to her parents.

Simran supports her household through unpaid reproductive labor. When her family negotiates an unusually long leave from her marital home, her husband's family experiences no financial punishment. There are other reasons to miss her. For instance, acquiring a wife from such a prominent family may be a point of pride, not just for the husband but also for all the family members who maintained communal relations good enough to obtain a wife from a "good" family. Making her unhappy jeopardizes these relations. As Simran searches for sahi, she relies heavily on the good reputation of her family. She helps maintain that reputation through her own sacrifices, including education and, to date, refraining from initiating a divorce.

Concluding: Who is sahi

Patriarchies in Ashrey interact, co-produce one another, and shift in both scale and reach. The notion of sex work as criminal and dirty (which comes from the upper-clan patriarchy) helps Renu keep her daughters in school because she does not want them to have to do dirty work and, because she does, her wishes for their education are honored. She may be, in effect, trying to release them from the demands of her own patriarchy by positioning them to comply with the demands of another. The types of contentment that people want and desire do not always align with the patriarchy that is constraining them, as efforts are made to free future generations from those constraints.

The lines between these patriarchies are not always clearly drawn. As the second-wave settlers grew material wealth from sex work, including cars and expansive additions to their houses, original settlers also began feeling pressured to consider prostitution. According to village leadership, this is how the "bad mindset" spread in Ashrey; the first settlers were, at least at first, poor and even the most prominent families were sending their children to beg on the streets. James says people struggled to provide for them as animal husbandry became an increasingly precarious way to earn a living. Some of these respectable, but poor, families saw in the second wave an opportunity to finally come out of poverty; precarity could be turned into flourishing through the commodification of women. Because so many women in this new wave of settlement to the village were in sex work already, people believed there would be little, if any, stigma for practicing prostitution.

When Perna leadership criminalized sex work, this is the exact shift in thinking they were hoping to prevent; stigma,[8] as it disappeared through ubiquity, had to be artificially created and enforced through bans. It has not worked. Sex work flourishes in Ashrey and, because of it, some families flourish as well. While village leadership sees this as a problem of dirty work, another way to see it is as a problem of a competing patriarchy. Women in sex work are following directions, but not the same directions given to women in better-established families where sex work is not an option. The problem for leadership, then, is that while some women find sahi in never entering sex work, others find it in the power exchange that comes from agreeing to do the "dirty work," and then claiming power from the sacrifice they have made for the family. In other words, the thorn in their side is that, for some women, sex work brings sahi.

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[8] Again invoking the terminology of "stigma" that James uses in English

Simran's search is ongoing and far from over, but I do regret that I did not realize she had wanted to talk to me. A few times, she came to my room when other people were there, but did not ask to speak alone. After learning of her situation from her younger brother, I found that her plight is widely known and frequently discussed. It is not a secret, and a resolution may yet come, but her required participation in karva chauth bothered me, and upset her younger brother. Days before, I had been joking with some women around my host family's house asking "and what do the men do for our long lives?" to great amusement. On the day of the fast, however, my commentary did not ellicit the same reaction in Renu's house. She did not laugh. "It is no problem." She said kindly but seriously. "If husbands wish to fast there is no issue. They can do it." I asked if Arun would fast and was told "He is doing so now." It was true. That karva chauth, the only fasting man I was able to locate in the entire village was her husband.

Arun's fast for his wife's long life alludes to the issues of modernity mentioned earlier. If the modern Indian woman can be found in a beauty pageant, the modern Hindu Indian man may be found fasting in solidarity on Karva Chauth. Social media references abound about how fasting for one another is an egalitarian and modern way to celebrate what would otherwise be a "patriarchal" festival. Arun is not educated. He is an unemployed man living with multiple wives and off the proceeds of sex work. From the other side of the village, he is perceived to be holding everyone back with his "bad mindset" and refusal to pursue education and professional employment. Yet he is also, perhaps even singularly, the only one engaged in the modern practice of fasting for his wives.

Arun's behavior does not mean Renu negotiates a patriarchal power that is less intense than what Simran faces. Namely, can it be said that she was not forced into sex work? The

question presumes a sort of neoliberal and individualized trajectory of decision making that is not necessarily appropriate to the context (see Varma 2016; Pinto 2014). Nevertheless, I would still not feel comfortable saying it was her choice to enter sex work. There were obvious elements of pressure, if not coercion, and the word she and other women in sex work use, *faisala,* does not carry a sense of intrinsic motivation like other phrasing might.[9] I would not go so far as to describe her entrance into sex work as succumbing to pressure, but perhaps accepting the pressure in hopes of exchanging it for something else; a classic type of "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti 1988) that is only available to women in Ashrey who consider sex work and eventually join. Renu did not have misplaced hope in the bargain she made. Her wishes for her daughter are honored, and she has successfully lobbied for a literal "room of one's own" that very few women in the village possess. She has what she wants, and is sahi.

Women in Ashrey negotiate different patriarchies, neither of which can claim to be the modern or progressive patriarchy, and neither of which has asserted itself as the dominant structure that subsumes the other. This is the context into which women's-empowerment focused NGOs began working in Ashrey. These NGO workers brought with them their own experiences of patriarchy, as well as state-sanctioned ideas about whether and how one ought to comply, or not, with its demands. This chapter has shown that sex work is differently contentious in Ashrey due to the presence of competing patriarchies. Women search for sahi for themselves, and power for their families in their decisions to comply with the demands of whichever patriarchy they find themselves subject to, even as they may be curious about the alternative for themselves or their children. In the next chapter, I show how an NGO intervention could not have been

[9] I'm thinking *man*, which is something like an alignment of head and heart that moves an action. Naina says "it was my man" to put on makeup, for example. Man usually moves people to do something for personal enjoyment.

prepared for this complexity. By intervening, they ultimately and inadvertently reinforced criminality and a bad reputation for the village, despite all the efforts made by Ashrey's women to the contrary.

Chapter Four: Development

At first glance, Ashrey is a development success story. What James calls the "struggle time" has given way to material comforts. Pictures of Ashrey from the early 1980s with thatched roof one-room houses bear almost no resemblance to the community as it currently stands. At that time, families had many children, sometimes up to ten, all born at home with the assistance of the local midwife. Children did not attend school. Instead, they would tend the animals or beg on the street to supplement their mother's sex work earnings. No one worked in the formal economy, and incomes, on average, were not enough.

Today, these small houses have mostly changed into permanent structures, some multi-floor and elaborately constructed. Most homes have at least one room with an air conditioner. Some have reverse osmosis water filters and other indicators of improving material circumstances. All the children go to school, at least for a few years. Many even go to private schools as well as private "tuitions" in the afternoons. Young people identify as a caste, not a tribe and, though some feel stigmatized in their schools and other interactions outside the community, many form friendships with classmates from other, upper-caste, communities. Every household has at least one woman who can sew at the level of a professional tailor, and she may have other, seemingly random, skills such as karate or knitting that came through various short-lived NGO programs. Health practices have also changed; a doctor rents a small shop once a week to take consultations. Uma laughed remembering how Tarun was born right in the corner of

her courtyard with the help of her mother, the local midwife. Uma's granddaughter, like all other children, was born in the nearby private hospital.

Though most men do not hold stable jobs in the formal economy, some, including the two with bachelor degrees, work in such positions. One works in a bank, another selling Times of India subscriptions. Another man drives the family car for Ola[10] and another has a small wedding band business. Sex work remains pervasive, but its decline is evidenced in the lives of young women who, unlike their mothers, do not assume they will be asked to do sex work.

In the last several decades, a development success story often showcases changes in people and their way of thinking. Ashrey, it seems, is this kind of story. If development is about creating an ideal neoliberal subject, then present-day Ashrey is full of these citizens. One, however, truly stands out.

Annie, as mentioned previously, does as she pleases. A teenager on the brink of her final school exams, she can often be found independently wandering into the homes of friends and relatives to socialize. She usually embarks on these wanderings after school and following her afternoon nap, but before going through a disciplined cardiovascular and strength training regimen in preparation for the police academy physical entrance exam. In the evenings, Annie studies and works on school projects. She likes school and, in my observation, is well-liked by her peers. Accepting an invitation to her school's Independence Day celebration, I watched in amusement as she chastised younger girls for talking and quietly passed judgement on the delicate, feminine, and modest style of Bollywood dancing that her classmates were performing. Annie is an expert dancer in her community, but this was not her style. When school is not in

[10] Ola is the Indian-owned equivalent to Uber or Lyft, which are also both available. Much like how "Uber" is often used as a catch-all for ride sharing in the US, Ashrey residents use "Ola" to mean all three companies.

session, Annie takes a rickshaw alone into the nearby town for sewing lessons. She used to go to an NGO but "she [the founder] had us sewing only for her.[11] The government program teaches us to sew everything." One day, Annie returned from a day in one of these programs with a question for me. "When you go to the US for your sister's wedding, could you bring something back for me? I want jeans. I'm looking for the tight ones with the long cuts at the top of the thigh." Though some young women in her family wear jeans, this kind of revealing style might be considered too much, especially by her father and older brother. Annie, however, frequently pushes the boundaries of proper dress. On this particular day, for instance, she was wearing track pants, a red tank top, and a matching cropped jacket. I cautiously asked her what her mother, father, and brother might think of such revealing jeans, but Annie waved her hand dismissively. "What will they say? I do and wear anything I want. They cannot say anything."

There are other model "neoliberal citizens" in Ashrey such as Annie's younger cousin Ella, who is an exceptional student with dreams of being a teacher in a big city. There is their neighbor, Sachi, who hated her public high school and successfully convinced her parents to send her to a more prestigious (and expensive) private academy. Not too far away, another family grapples with the fallout of educating a son who attempted to marry a woman of his choice. Are these young citizens the product of successful neoliberalization? Are they "developed?" Have they been "empowered" and, if so, by whom?

I argue that Ashrey has developed, but not because of any effort by development NGOs. NGO intervention - specifically women's empowerment based NGO intervention - has served to

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[11] I know a little bit about this NGO, and am certain they would disagree with Annie's characterization. In the NGO's view, they are teaching girls a marketable skill that will help them avoid sex work. In Annie's, she was hired to produce goods for the founder's use.

recriminalize the community and left them, again, vulnerable to new forms of state violence. Rather, the development that is apparent in the community comes from sex work revenue which, in the eyes of the state, is inadequate or undesirably development.

Furthermore, the state has effectively invoked NGO-lead development as a way to evaluate the community and re-diagnose them as criminals. It does so in the shadow of the British Criminal Tribes Act, which continues to shape and underscore how the community is perceived. The Perna have been "criminals," to various degrees, ever since the CTA came into effect over a century before Ashrey was settled. Taking the language of this Act, which is that those criminalized by it were said to be "addicted to the systemic commission of non-bailable offenses," development, in this community, has served as a means by which the state may determine if they tribe is still unwilling to develop and is, instead, addicted to crime. Though the original crime was nomadism, which is no longer practiced, sex work, and the unwillingness to leave it behind (as confirmed by an NGO) communicates to the state that the Perna are still "addicted to the systemic condition of non-bailable offenses," just as they were under the CTA.

The kind of *empowerment* brought to Ashrey

Empowerment, as used in the development field, has had two main definitions that have been variously framed in the literature. Andrea Cornwall calls them "empowerment" and "empowerment lite" (2018). Sardenberg calls them "liberal vs. liberating empowerment" (2008). One could also think about them as empowerment/Empowerment (Hart 2001). One "empowerment" has been about drastic social and political change, while the other serves to

advance neoliberal ideas of improvement and progress. This latter form of empowerment is also a paradigm. It is a discourse, a framework, toolkit, and blueprint. It is a hegemonic idea about development, its subjects and its purveyors. In India, it is a discursive formation with a long, complicated, history. When James and AJ opened their tutoring center in 2001 (as outlined in chapter 1), empowerment was just beginning its hegemonic rise and, by the time the pair handed operations over to an NGO in 2008, empowerment had become mainstreamed to the point that the NGO was of course, almost as a matter of fact, an empowerment-based development NGO. The type of empowerment they brought with them was a particular kind produced out of ongoing disagreements about what it means to empower women in the global south.

The main gender and development regimes have been Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD), largely named so via the work of the United Nations, and all encompassing variations on what it means to empower. At about the same time that the UN's Commission on the Status of Women was formed, India gained independence and set off what Ludden describes as "the heyday of nationally planned development" (2011, 230). Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru advocated ambitious plans to modernize industry and end deprivations (Gupta 1998, 12).

There was, however, ongoing tension between a Gandhian approach to development, and Nehru's vision of large-scale development at the level of the state. Gandhi and Nehru both hoped to empower, but had very different notions of empowerment. Gandhi's view is central to understanding how Ashrey is perceived today, and is perhaps best captured by his idea of self-rule, *hind swaraj,* through which he outlines how to produce moral, upstanding, individual citizens capable of leading an ethical and independent India (Chaterjee 1986). The path to

independence, according to hind swaraj, lay in cultivating the self to understand one's place, duty, and role in the collective such that participating in non-violent resistance to foreign rule was the only logical path. Aradhana Sharma writes that

> Swaraj, thus, was a self-making project that cultivated a moral person who exercised self-control over his (Gandhi only used male pronouns) mind and body and pursued the path of truth. Because it was a pedagogic process that involved self-transformation, one did not have to rely on others to establish a swaraj society. Indeed, such a just and free society would be realized through each individual governing her or his conduct according to local moral principles (2008, 12).

Empowerment, from a Gandhian perspective, was about pursuing a "free and just society" not just in terms of material resources, but also as good, moral, and ethical subjects; sovereign power, thus, is inseparable from personal development. Though Nehru agreed with many of Gandhi's principles, for him, empowerment was primarily about providing the people with the technology, infrastructure, and skills necessary to participate in a global economy (Ludden 2011; Gupta 1998). The morality and goodness of the empowered citizen remains important, especially so when the people under consideration are living in a prostitution village.

As Nehruvian and Gandhian approaches to development proceeded through various disagreements in postcolonial India, new development paradigms were emerging in the United Nations. Women in Development (WID), noticeably influenced by second wave feminism in the United States and Europe, assumed a shared experience between all women, believing them universally oppressed by the same patriarchy. The alternative to WID, advanced primarily by women from the USSR and recently decolonized countries, was the Women and Development approach (WAD). WAD advocates advanced a "development" that took a more holistic account

of hierarchies including colonialism, classism, casteism, and more.[12] In India, WAD tended to align with a Gandhian notion of empowerment, and also found resonance with communist groups. The CPI:Marxist-Lenninist emerged in this context but, following the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, and under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, the CPI:Marxist-Lenninst was violently, and successfully, oppressed by the state.

Communism, despite reconstituting itself, was again violently repressed under the Indian Emergency called by Indira Gandhi in 1975, and the events that followed paved the way for an empowerment that would eventually be led by NGOs. During the Emergency, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) was passed, allowing the state to scrutinize any funding coming into organizations from foreign sources. The Emergency was formally lifted in 1977 and Indira Gandhi was briefly defeated. When she returned to power, she founded the Kudal Commission to investigate NGOs who may have been involved in her brief loss of power (Kumar 1993). Though many people took the trouble (the autonomous women's movement, for example, arose in this period), registering a social service organization meant proving one was not a shell for treasonous activities. As a result, NGOs have also long been viewed as suspicious at best and anti-national, or treasonous, at worst. While it may be surprising that, within just two decades, NGOs would become the primary messengers of empowerment-based development, it is not surprising that their activities would be scrutinized, examined, and evaluated as they are. In a context where the empowered citizen is a good and moral citizen, the efforts of NGOs to make them so while also turning a profit are subject to frequent critique.

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[12] Reiter's edited *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975) takes this WAD position as she, June Nash, Karen Brodkin, and others argue against the WID position of *Women Culture and Society* (1974).

One way in which otherwise suspect NGOs overcame suspicion to become the primary agents of empowerment, is through the UN Decade for Women. The Decade for Women was launched in Mexico City in 1975, and featured the first NGO Forum - a space for NGOs to meet, network, converse (Jain 2005) and, I might add, strategize about how to open and operate under the eye of the state. Delegates left the first conference disagreeing on how best to empower women, with many from the postcolonial world motivated to collaborate through a new "non-aligned" coalition (Tambe and Trotz 2010). The 1980 Mid-Decade for Women conference in Copenhagen suggested consensus was moving towards a US-centric vision of formal equality (Ghodsee 2010). The shifting ground prompted more women to organize, and NAM to meet again in New Delhi. At the last meeting of the Decade for Women, held in Nairobi in 1985; delegates released and ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which effectively references a NAM-endorsed commitment to "substantive equality" rather than WID's "formal equality." However, a new development paradigm, Gender and Development (GAD), was emerging internationally as the Decade came to a close. GAD is less interested in programs targeting women, and more committed to understanding how the gender category of "women" was preventing freedom and development (Jain 2005 148; Tambe and Trotz 2010). Moving out of the Decade for Women, the main debates would no longer be between WID and WAD, but rather WAD and GAD. All along the way, thousands of NGOs were building professional networks, developing best practices, and professionalizing in ways that would position them to be the obvious and uncontested agents of women's empowerment. They would inevitably be assisted by the inescapable interpolation with neoliberalization that was simultaneously growing into its own socio-economic paradigm.

Neoliberalism, as it is generally used in the development field, indicates a shift away from the state and towards the market as the vehicle of development. It includes the reduction of fiscal deficits, lowering tariffs, opening markets to foreign companies, and outsourcing social services to NGOs and the private sector (Gupta 1998, 13). In the 1980s, neoliberal, free-market thinking entered the economic mainstream because the World Bank and IMF made such policies a precondition of financial aid. India, after the "balance of payments crisis" in 1991, neoliberalized the economy, and this was the beginning of "empowerment lite" (Cornwall 2018). Neoliberal empowerment was about freeing the market to meet the needs of people, rather than looking to the state to provide for those needs, and the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference formalized the UN's commitment to neoliberal economics. The conference continued the NGO Forum introduced in Mexico City and, given the proliferation of NGOs at this time, had the largest turnout to date (Merry 2006). The Beijing Declaration spoke of freeing women from poverty by changing economic structures. NGOs, after years of networking, were ready to operationalize. In India, as elsewhere, there was a period of intensive NGO-ization (Bernal and Grewal 2014). In 1988, for example, there were 12,000 NGOs. Today, there are millions. NGO-delivered empowerment at the level of the individual became the primary paradigm for development, a point which was emphasized when India's government declared 2001 to be "Women's Empowerment Year," right as James and AJ opened their tutoring center.

Ashrey received its first external NGO intervention in 2008, perhaps at or near the peak of empowerment's rise as the dominant development paradigm. In looking back at this intervention almost ten years after it ended, I argue that the NGO also unwittingly participated in state violence by, unbeknownst to them, helping the state use empowerment to determine who

deserves the full range of development benefits. In other words, some aspects of what played out are a familiar story of short-lived interventions with good intentions, but no effect at best, and harmful effects at worst. Yet there is more to this particular intervention. When thinking about empowerment as a specifically neoliberal empowerment, and contextualizing it against the backdrop of a Gandhian empowerment that required people to be be moral and good so as to rule themselves, we can see the Ashrey community caught in a fraught circumstance wherein the NGO seeks to legitimize themselves by creating good citizens out of a prostitution village. The problem is the CTA which, in its enduring influence, serves to make the NGO's failure to empower not just a failure to empower, but also a reassertion of criminality.

The intervention in Ashrey

In 2008 a large women's empowerment based NGO from Delhi came to know that James and his friend AJ had opened a successful tutoring center in Ashrey. As outlined in the introduction, the founder of the NGO arranged to meet with them to discuss a collaboration. This NGO represented a departure from the pair's focus on tutoring and educational support. Specifically, the NGO meant to introduce an "empowerment" that led women out of sex work and into other productive labor. Bringing women out of sex work was not entirely in misalignment with the community. In fact, James was eager to pursue this end. AJ, however, was a bit more hesitant. The way James tells this story now, AJ's reluctance was partially informed by not wanting to build a permanent structure next to James' house, given that children from his "side" of the village would have to cross over if they wanted to continue attending. But James

had the space, the time, and the finances to build a two-room structure. The pair eventually agreed to do so, accepted the NGO's terms, and began going about their new work. James says he never told the founder about the local ban on sex work only because she did not ask. For him, the common goal of ending sex work in the village, combined with the influx of resources promised, was enough to agree to the collaboration.

The NGO began by asking James and AJ to hire local women. Since there were no literate women from AJ's side of the village, or at least not yet, James hired his sister-in-law, Poonam, as a tutor. She had studied through class eight before dropping out of school to marry and have children. "My parents did not pressure me [to drop out]," Poonam says. "They told me it was my choice to study and they wanted me to be happy." Her marriage was known locally as a lucky one, full of love and mutual respect, and she does not regret her decision to leave school for marriage. Still, she used her literacy and other skills to organize her cousins into a women's group at the behest of the NGO. They registered as a formal Self Help Group, but never took out a loan. Looking back, she says "James brought me in because I had studied. He told me they were starting something for girls and I started teaching children. People were happy with it because people were learning things. There was no resistance from anyone."

This is the juncture at which I first met James and Poonam in late 2008. Acting as a research intern for the NGO, I would sometimes visit the community and often spoke with James when he visited the home office in Delhi. When I met him, he was already beginning to feel frustrated by visiting donors, and the fact that it was no longer the tutoring center James and AJ created together. With only a few days, or sometimes even a few hours advance notice, the NGO founder would call him and tell him to assemble groups of women and girls to meet with a

foreign donor. They would sit in one of the rooms, someone would translate, and the children would giggle. Shortly after, the donor would depart, never to be seen again. Speaking in 2018, James says he "came to feel that she was blackmailing us," meaning he had to bring these women together to meet donors lest investment cease entirely. He says that "if you have money, you can do a lot for a community," but an influx of money was not being diverted to materially supporting his village. I was not in a position to intervene in the founder's financial decisions, but did my best to advocate for James and share information with him. When I finished my internship and returned to the US, James was still working for the NGO, but I had the impression that the tension would continue to escalate.

What was happening, in retrospect, was at least partially a mismatch between what James and AJ saw as the path to empowerment, and the NGO's more contemporary, and UN-sanctioned, version. Such misunderstandings are well-documented in India (Romanowicz 2017; Sharma 2008), and some of the specifics here will sound familiar; James believed, and still does, that "education is very necessary." While the NGO may have heard this and concluded they were in agreement, it does not seem so now. James was thinking of education as disruptive; as a first step towards empowerment as a community, not an individual. His own education and success in school (helped along by upper-caste friends from outside the village, and friendly competition with AJ), put him in contact with professors, foreigners, and other college students, and included experiences of feeling like someone who belonged in these settings. This is not to say that he faced no discrimination as a low caste university student, but it is to say that being seen as intelligent, capable and, perhaps above all, good, spurred him to try to help his community into the same experiences. The education center was a way to fill gaps and prepare students to

succeed in nearby schools outside the village. It was empowerment for everyone, not just AJ, James, and their children, but a chance for the whole community to rise in prestige and esteem. In other words, it was a political process that aligned closely with earlier, pre-neoliberal, notions of empowerment that sought to secure powers and freedoms for whole groups of people. If an NGO wished to invest their money in such an endeavor, it would go all the faster.

The NGO, however, was a product of its time. 2001 was Women's Empowerment Year in India. The economy had neoliberalized and NGOs had emerged from the NGO forums of the UN Decade for Women as the responsible agents of women's empowerment in the global south. Indian NGOs were proliferating, and future Prime Minister Narendra Modi had not yet begun scrutinizing their activities for treasonous behavior. The NGO's "empowerment" was a decidedly neoliberal one in which women were encouraged to empower themselves. That encouragement did not come in the form of material support, but rather through things like directing Poonam to register a Self-Help group and take out a loan, or telling James and AJ to build a center with their own money. The visits from foreign donors were also in this vein of encouragement as they were described to me as "exposing" women and girls to outside ways of life. Even my own trips into the village, I would eventually learn, were intended to encourage women into empowerment by seeing how I lived my life as a white American in my 20s. While I find this absurd, it is not necessarily so through a framework of neoliberal empowerment; the money is there to encourage relatively powerless women to somehow empower themselves. It is not there to fund an entire community as it drastically changes its standing and position.

The ultimate tipping point in this collaboration was when James became aware of how his village was being described in the press. An American published a photo essay in partnership

with the NGO. “This area is a slum,” he wrote, “and children are generally born in dysfunctional families.” A young woman (who would actually not get married for another eight years) is described as “being married off soon,” and Poonam’s own daughter sits above a caption reading “From birth, they are socially conditioned to accept prostitution as normal.” James thinks it’s possible the journalists just misunderstood, but that the NGO should have known better. Papers kept in a locked box in his home show that the land is legally owned; it is not a “slum.” Poonam’s family does not see prostitution as normal, and in fact works hard to keep girls in school and away from local people who might normalize prostitution. While engagements may be arranged earlier, the community also complies with the legal marrying age of 18 for women. Should the government attempt to enforce the law against child marriage, a lie like this would put people in the village in danger. More articles began to surface. One day, there was a segment about the village on television. The message was that every woman is a sex worker and, without the NGO, there would be no interest in change. The effort James and AJ had put into improving the community’s standing and reputation was now being threatened by an NGO who needed poverty and prostitution to justify their empowerment program.

James was unsure what to do, and reached out to me in the US to see if I had any connections to other potential funders which, at the height of the US recession, I did not. Speaking retrospectively in 2018, his wife, Uma, tells me she encouraged her husband to leave such “social work” behind. She told him to “think of his own family,” and accept a better-paying job that his education had qualified him for. Eventually, James quit the NGO. He did not realize that, without speaking to Poonam or anyone else in the community, the NGO would close

entirely. He was unsure what to tell Poonam or the larger community, but Poonam came to her own conclusions. She says that

> There was work for about two years and then one day it was gone. [The NGO] left no contact and I never saw them again. If I did, I would ask why they closed. They started everything and it was starting to work. Then, suddenly, it stopped. What went wrong? At first I felt neutral about the closing. If they didn't want to do it, fine. My husband's income was enough. Then I heard about the news and saw it on TV. It was shocking. I wanted to ask about it but they had vanished. If I saw them today, I would ask why they wrote lies. [The founder] must have gotten some benefit from telling lies about us. Luckily, I don't think the community knows about all these lies. They were connected to the NGO through James and me. When they asked why they closed, we told them [the founder] was not right for us, and that she was not healthy for the community.

Following the departure of the NGO, James' family reclaimed the vacant community building as a dwelling for his aging parents. He took a job with an apartment complex outside the village, earning many times more than he earned through the NGO. James and Poonam have moved on, but they still think about what happened. James has mixed feelings about moving away from social work and into a private sector job. He says

> I would think about working with a new NGO, but it would be 50/50. I would never work with a stranger. If it was someone I knew, then maybe. First we have to do education, then vocational training is very necessary, but education first.

Poonam, in comparison to James, is a bit more direct. "If another NGO came? No. I would not work with them. I will never work with a stranger again."

Many NGOs come to communities and work only for a short time. Many interventions have disagreements with employees and expectations that are a mismatch with the communities

they serve. What I interpret this story to offer, however, is a way to think about what work "empowerment" - as a paradigm and framework - might be doing beyond its disappointing effects on particular communities. In this case, when intervening in a tribal community with a history of criminalization and a present practice of sex work, empowerment has not just disappointed, but discursively recriminalized a vulnerable group of people. When looked at in the specific context of a formerly criminalized tribe that has only attempted to be landed and stationary since the late 1970s, it is clear that this empowerment intervention has, unfortunately and unwittingly, participated in an injurious exercise of state power; the NGO effectively re-diagnosed the community as criminal and unwilling to develop, both of which leave them vulnerable to a new cycle of state violence.

The diagnosis: "Addicted to the systemic commission of non-bailable offenses"

In Ashrey, the NGO acted on behalf of the state to run a diagnostic test on a (formerly) criminal tribe to assess their present addiction to crime and eligibility for the full scope of citizenships rights. James and AJ had been involved in a similar endeavor to empower the community through education and eventual change, but their understanding of empowerment was drastically different. Positioned as it was in various networks of power, the NGO was poised to make an assessment as to the progress of that improvement project. Working as they did through a neoliberal empowerment, the community did not live up to a new reputation, and were relegated, once again, to a reputation of criminality. Unpacking this claim requires an

understanding of how development is sometimes used in India, as well as a sense of the will and its relationship to an idea that appeared in the Criminal Tribes Act: addiction.

First, Aradhana Sharma notes that Gandhi's "concepts of self-rule, individual upliftment, bottom-up and decentralized governance, and a locally defined just and moral social order have defined the terrain on which social movements and NGOs in postcolonial India operate" (2008). Hind swaraj, as noted above, hinged on the development of a "moral" self, which was requisite to claiming sovereignty as a nation. Yet frameworks of morality and self-improvement seem to surface with special frequency when talking about development of tribal communities. In his work with Parambai Kallars, for instance, Anand Pandian finds that outsiders evaluate these communities in one of two ways; either they "reformed well," or they "they will never reform" (2009, 5). The Kallars, like the Perna of Ashrey, were criminalized by the Criminal Tribes Act. Pandian makes direct connections between how Kallars were treated by the British as criminal, animal, savage, and childlike, and the ways in which development is expected of them now by the independent Indian state (8). In his analysis of development as an object of desire and imagination, Pandian finds Kallars engaged in a process of "cultivation" of both the land and their personal selves. He shows that "progress," in this area, demands not just material improvements, but also "a radical remaking of character" (3). In Ashrey, an NGO's women's empowerment based development intervention effectively diagnosed the community as those who "will never reform," rather than "reformed well," because there is little room for formally-criminalized tribes to be perceived as anything other than one option or the other.

Sex work in India is primarily governed by the Immoral Trafficking in Persons Act which, despite recent reforms, restricts sex work such that almost everyone is working illegally.[13] The fact that so many people in Ashrey are engaged in criminal activity gives special weight to an NGO's tacit suggestion that they are beyond help; because people in the community are engaged in the criminal activity of sex work, this designation as "will never reform" reiterates their status under the colonial CTA. The specific wording of the CTA was that these communities, Kallar, Perna, Hijra, and others, were "addicted to the systemic commission of non-bailable offenses." If criminals are offered empowerment and do not reform then, in the eyes of the state, they are still "addicted to the systemic commission of non-bailable offenses."

Under the CTA, the issue was not just that these communities committed crime. Rather, as described in Chapter 1, these communities were believed to be "addicted" to it. The "addiction" in the CTA could, perhaps, be glossed over as mere metaphor, except that addiction, more specifically addicts, were one of many moral preoccupations in Victorian England at the time the law was enacted. Legal scholar Mariana Valverde writes that addiction, specifically alcoholism, was particularly puzzling to British Victorian social workers and reformers. They believed alcoholism was not, itself, a disease but rather a problem of the will. Those most susceptible to its grasp were "over-zealous" men, the "weak minded," and women, who were generally of lower moral character (Valverde 1997). The concept of addiction has since been reconfigured many times beyond a problem of the will. However, the legacy of "addiction" as it pertains to the Perna currently living in Ashrey, is a colonial legacy of a weak will.

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[13] The ITPA was recently revised according to the Abolitionist model (Misra 2018; Kotiswaran 2018), such that nearly all purchasing of sex is criminal.

Sara Ahmed has theorized "the will" as inseparable from the willful. She writes that "willfulness is a *diagnosis* of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given" [emphasis added] (2014,1). In Victorian England, the "over-zealous" men, along with the other suspects of alcoholism - women and other weak minded people - (Valverde 1997) were not sick or in need of help. Rather, they were "willful," and hopelessly unable to make proper decisions becoming of a Victorian subject and citizen. Tania Li, in her work on development programs in Indonesia, traces a more specific kind of "will," the "will to improve," which travelled through missionaries, colonial officials, the World Bank, and other donors as thy attempted to guide Indonesians towards desiring particular kinds of "improvement" (Li 2007). While there are similarities, the "will" at stake in Ashrey is less about cultivating a desire for particular kinds of development. Rather, it is more closely aligned with colonialist ideas about addiction as an indicator of the quality of one's person. In the shadow of the CTA, it is not enough for a formerly criminalized tribe to demonstrate a "will to improve." Rather they must prove the possession of the will itself, and dispel any indication of willfulness.

Development, in these formerly criminalized communities, acts as a diagnostic test of whether the community is moral and good, or if they continue to have a disease of the will preventing them from breaking an addiction to a "non-bailable" offense. Rather than offering neoliberal empowerment alone, what the NGO also offers is a chance to establish the community as no longer "addicted." When the NGO cannot empower, it is not attributed to any failing in empowerment as a model of development intervention, but rather considered the obvious outcome of working with a weak-willed criminal community. By intervening in the community, bringing no one out of sex work, and leaving so quickly, the NGO unwittingly acted

to re-diagnose a tribe as (still) criminal. They did so on the basis of confirming a weak will that, over a century later, is still seen to be "addicted to the systemic commission of non-bailable offenses."

Conclusion: Disempowered by Diagnosis

Annie is an expert performer. Apart from her skills as a dancer, she also knows how to speak, act, and present herself in ways that highlight her ambition, progressive views, and modernity. How did Annie come to be? How have she, her sisters, her cousins, and her neighbors come into being as apparently empowered neoliberal subjects if a women's empowerment based NGO intervention criminalized them, rather than empowering them?

Annie is AJ's eldest daughter. She, in the company of her father, would cross to the Perli Side to study with Naina, Laura, Simran, and other girls from the original settlement. Today, Naina and Laura still call her their sister, but they do not meet or speak anymore. AJ left the tutoring center out of distrust of an outsider's NGO who insisted on "empowering" women to leave prostitution. While James was eager to pursue this directive, given its alignment with the goals of village leadership, AJ, as part of the Perli Side, could not. His side of the village is driven by sex work. The houses are big, bright, and airy. Their people own cars and other material comforts. Sex work pays for life. It sends Annie to her extracurriculars. It supports tutoring and private schools. It pays for development.

When the NGO left, its failure was about a community too "willful" (Ahmed 2014) to leave their criminal lives behind and empower themselves into modernity. The sex work labor

that was, in actuality, paying for families to empower their children through education and job training, was not sufficient to be seen as empowered because that power comes from the "systemic commission of non-bailable offenses." The panchayat, in its enduring frustration that sex work continues despite their directives, criminalized sex work shortly after the NGO left. They, like the state, were hoping that families would seize upon an opportunity for empowerment and leave sex work behind as their children pursued education and professional positions. For them, as James explained, "poverty was an ok excuse" for sex work but, now that there is more work available than previous decades, and that an NGO was willing to offer help at least once, there is no justification for continuing to do sex work.

The Independence Day celebration Annie invited me to at her school was one of my favorite invitations. She did not ask anyone if I could come, so I showed up at the gate clad in *khadi* and hoping for the best. Graceful teachers in beautiful saris sat me in a chair and offered chai as I tried not to be a distraction. With the heat index, it was 135 degrees, and I tried to quietly shift my plastic chair back under the shade as the sun moved over the performances. Annie confidently directed younger girls to sit still, be quiet, and stop talking. Eventually, she too was told to stop talking and Annie defiantly clicked her tongue at the teacher who had scolded her. Annie was not going to perform, and had rolled her eyes at my question. This delicate, feminine, and modest style of Bollywood dance, with classical elements of kathak and bharatnatyam, was not "dance," and she would never dance for these Jat girls anyway. That did not surprise me, but the school's patriotism did. I stood for the Indian national anthem more than once, and watched young girls stand at full attention to pledge their loyalty to the nation. When Annie didn't stand quite as straight as the others, I guessed that it must have been because she

was annoyed at being scolded. I wondered, however, about what her life might mean to a postcolonial state who tends to see her as a criminal, or eventual criminal. Historically, colonizers justified their violent presence by claiming the natives were not ready for freedom. They did not deserve sovereignty and citizenship because they were not smart enough, strong enough, modern enough, or some other combination of excuses. For Annie's community, they were not strong-willed enough, given that they could not break their "addiction" to crime. Today, Perna families are, again, supposedly not ready for the development that comes with full citizenship and at the behest of an NGO. They are still not ready, but now the agent of that decision is the same state Annie was required to stand and salute.

Chapter Five: "I Fear No One" and the adjudication of bekar

Naina wasn't willing to tell me what was wrong, but Laura was. I had brought an extra-large bottle of soda from a convenience store outside the village, and was offering it up for what we were calling "Pepsi parties," casual chats in the early evening where we drank sodas and listened to Punjabi music. By now I had, as a guest in many homes, consumed an uncomfortable amount of other people's Pepsi. I was aware that my own cultural views on ownership, sharing, and private property were leading me to feel that I wasn't pulling my weight in these social events. I figured bringing a novelty sized bottle of Pepsi to the party was a reasonable way to reciprocate, but was worried they disagreed.

"What's wrong?" I asked Laura as she patted the liter bottle.

"Nothing is wrong!" Laura interjected. "Let's listen to *Laung Laachi."* But Laura was always a little bit more direct.

"Well," she said. "This Pepsi is *bekar,"* useless. I'll put it in my brother's refrigerator for some time." I laughed, and took out my phone to play Laung Laachi, but something was happening outside. We didn't notice anything unusual about the shouting at first. People often congregated in front of Naina's family shop to talk or watch other people going about their day. We started to notice, however, when the number of voices grew into a crowd. Naina shifted on the edge of her cot, and looked over my shoulder towards the window.

“We should go and see what is happening,” she said, and the three of us headed outside. One of Uma’s sisters was standing in the middle of a small crowd. Older, upper-clan, and great grandmother to several children, she was in a social position to hold the center of attention. If she saw fit, she could verbally berate misbehaving others of lower social status, which was exactly what she was doing. She swung her arm definitively at two young men from a family that lived closer to the main road. Naina quickly jumped into the crowd to affirm and support her aunt’s claim which, to me, remained unclear.

Suddenly, Naina returned to the doorway of her house. “Please give me your phone,” she said. “Quickly. We need to call my father.” I found the phone but didn’t have his number saved. Despite her confident demeanor, Naina’s hands were shaking and it took her two tries to enter her father’s phone number correctly. He didn’t answer, but then we saw James, her paternal uncle, coming home from work in the family car. Leaning slightly out the window, he drove deliberately and carefully towards the crowd as the vehicle forced people to separate. He turned off the engine and opened the door. The crowd immediately set upon him but he waved them off. Tomorrow he said. Yes, yes. Tomorrow. In the morning, I would be invited to observe the first of many cases deliberated by the local council, the panchayat, as they discussed this short uproar, its repercussions, and assigned responsibility. For now, Naina, Laura, and I returned to Laura’s house. The mood was no longer conducive to a party, and it was anyway starting to get late. The liter of Pepsi I had brought was no longer cold by the time I had handed it to Laura. In the short distance it travelled, heat over a hundred degrees had rendered it flat and lukewarm. Laura had called it “bekar,” “useless.” By putting it in a refrigerator, she was hoping to regenerate some of the proper properties of an ice cold soda, yet it wouldn’t be the same. Once bekar, it is bekar.

The notion of bekar, however, goes far beyond material items to a broader way of thinking about how the community is organized, and the role of the local village council in maintaining its structure. Bekar-ness is part of the way the council exercises its power, and is integral to why anyone in the village seeks, accepts, or tolerates, their rule.

The actual word, "bekar," is unremarkable. Introductory Hindi students are likely to encounter it on early vocabulary lists, as I did, with the corresponding translation of "useless." Bekar can be used as an adjective to describe a variety of situations. A worn out piece of clothing will be sent to the garbage once it becomes bekar. Food left out for too long may become stale, but it will also become bekar, and thus no longer edible. *Bekari log* (useless people) is a way to speak dismissively and generally about a group of undesirable Others. What struck me about its use in Ashrey, however, was its frequency. When asked, for example, why women travelled to a further market rather than one closer to their village, the answer was that the people in the latter were "bekar." Drunk men who occasionally wandered in from outside were bekar, as were some people from various, far off, communities. Items, people, and places, were so often bekar that, when Laura expressed disappointment at the bekar Pepsi, we laughed. It had become a joke that I was confused by just how many kinds of things can be bekar. Bekar is not *saitani* or *badtamiz,* meaning it is not mischievous or prone to misbehavior. It is not *pagal,* or crazy. One can call a friend or a sibling pagal and it will mean they are "crazy" or "mad," but the context and relationships matter. Pagal may be affectionate, but it can also be a sharp insult to mark undesirable behavior. Bekar has no friendly possibilities. Once, in discussing the tensions between the two sides of the village, James' eldest son Tarun thought for a moment and then said (in English), "I would not say they are *bekar*, but they fight a lot." Calling half the village bekar

would be a serious claim indeed, especially coming from a presumed future leader like Tarun. One does not use the word thoughtlessly because you cannot. Once a person is bekar, there is no returning.

In this chapter, I show how the local council derives its power from a shared social interest in what is good(*achha)*, and what is bekar. I do not mean this literally. Rather the good and the bekar stand in for complicated and nebulous notions of good people who deserve power and respect, versus those to whom no mind should be paid. The power to identify and sort people between these two categories is wielded by the local (and extra-judicial) village council, the panchayat. Much of their activities and decision making often appear as routine conflict resolution; they are the ultimate arbiter of conflicts between families that have risen to the level of disturbing others in the village. Yet their decisions also have a wider effect. By making a public performance of affirming goodness, the panchayat maintains governing power despite its extrajudicial status, and despite significant state efforts to undermine the power of similar councils in the region.

Dispute resolution in a village council cannot be seen as doing one thing only, and I do not mean to imply that this council acts in a simplified manner with clear-cut goals and solutions. Rather the entirety of the process, including what comes into their jurisdiction, how it is discussed and remembered, and the long-term extended effects of these arbitrations does many things, one of which is displaying the council's ability to affirm and contest claims to goodness. The cases are a way of discussing and deciding the levels of goodness achieved by people, as well as a site where the very power to adjudicate rests heavily in a shared interest in who and what is good, as well as concerns about being and becoming bekar.

This case contributes to conversations in legal and political anthropology about the nature of sovereign power, and also adds to recent conversations in gender studies. The latter because, as my ethnographic research suggests, sovereign power derived from a communal commitment to being seen as good is a type of sovereign power that cannot, and does not, extend to cases of domestic violence. In feminist political theorizing, particularly in the United States, alternative dispute resolution such as restorative, transformative, and community-based justice are often proposed as alternatives to incarceration that may weaken the carceral state and support its abolition. As mentioned in the introduction, I do not make an explicit contribution to these debates. However, the panchayat in Ashrey does show an instance of a particular kind of sovereign power that is based on a collective investment in what is good, and the council's ability to make those determinations in the event of a conflict. While the absence (and general inutility) of the police in this process does have some benefits, the second case explored below shows that some types of conflict, particularly domestic violence, cannot be adequately adjudicated by a dispute resolution process based on the power of goodness.

Legal Pluralism and South Asia

In South Asia, Ashrey's panchayat falls into a complex web of state and non-state legal pluralism. Pereira et al note that, in India, "legal pluralism" most often draws to mind the independent legal systems operated by tribes in the northeastern states, but the term actually has a longer and even more encompassing history rooted in colonial rule (2018). British colonizers were perpetual advocates for the standardization of plural systems into one, singular and

universal criminal code because they believed it would simplify administration. However, especially at the time of independence, many leaders (including Jawaharlal Nehru, but not including BR Ambedkar) were adamant that different sets of laws would protect community and cultural diversity (Rudolph and Rudolph 2000). The result, in independent India, is a legal system wherein "personal" issues such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance are governed by the person's community, meaning religion, and all other matters are subject to universal law. While personal law was initially explained as an effective way to protect cultural autonomy, feminists were quick to argue that this was an oversimplification, and one that romanticized culture at the expense of women's rights (Sangari 1995; Mani 1990; Sharifi 2008). While this issue has never gone away, it is newly relevant in the Hindu right wing effort to do away with personal law entirely, this time under the guise of protecting Muslim women from Muslim men (Agnes 2018).

Separate from the pluralism of personal laws, India can also be seen as legally plural in terms of Panchayat Raj. In Gandhi's vision of *swadeshi* (self-rule), the independent Indian state would be decentralized, with each village operating autonomously. Though this did not come to pass, Gandhi's thoughts on political structure has greatly influenced India's adjudication system. In Panchayat Raj, villages are beholden to a strong central government, but their own panchayats (village councils) are the first and primary units of local administration. The structure came into being through a series of laws, with Delhi's panchayats established by the Delhi Panchayat Raj Act of 1954. The Act states the purpose as "an act to establish and develop local self-government in the rural areas of Delhi state and to make better provision for village administration and development." These councils hold elections and follow procedures for adjudication and administration in keeping with the laws of the larger Indian state. They are therefore not "plural"

in the sense that they follow and enforce laws different from the state; the panchayats of Panchayat Raj are "statutory panchayats" (Chowdhry 2004) operating within the formal structures of the judiciary state.

The second kind of panchayat is an extra-judicial, "traditional" (Chowdhry 2004) or "non-state legal structure" (Santos 2006) that operates outside the explicit directive of the state. Perhaps the most maligned of these in India is the khap panchayat. Khaps have long been prevalent throughout Haryana and other parts of North India, with some estimating their origins to be as distant as the Fourteenth Century (Kumar 2012). The khap panchayat is the traditional system of adjudication for the jat community, and jat villages will typically have both a statutory panchayat and a khap panchayat operating in the same locale (Madsen 1991). Khap panchayats are maligned primarily because of their involvement in opposing marriages between people they see as related and, in the event that the couple marries anyway, for ordering (or at the very least allowing) honor killings (Chowdhry 2010). Recently, the well-known instance of a khap-ordered (or permitted) honor killing was the Manoj-Babli double murder that was carried out in 2007 in Haryana by Babli's relatives. In response to this case and the associated public outcry, the Delhi-based women's NGO Shakti Vahini initiated a Supreme Court case against khaps, which resulted in a 2018 decision by the Supreme Court declaring that khap panchayats have no jurisdiction over marriages, and no right to issue a diktat (order) to kill. For the ruling to be enforceable, Parliament would have to write these guidelines into law, but they are yet to do so.

In the meantime, there have been efforts to curb khaps in other ways. One attempt is the implementation of Mahila (women's) panchayats. Most, but not all, khap panchayats prohibit women from being present for deliberations (including when the case is their own) (Chowdhry

2004), and the Mahila panchayats are meant, in part, to be a counter to the power of these all-male councils (Grover 2018). The Mahila panchayats were formed and operate at the direction of the government as a statutory panchayat. Once the women leading a mahila panchayat are trained, usually by an NGO, they enjoy an independence and autonomy over family matters, particularly in how best to keep a family together (Lemons 2016; Grover 2018), that would otherwise fall to the khap panchayat. By being a statutory panchayat, but managing issues that are typically the realm of an extra-judicial body like a khap panchayat, the mahila panchayats are supposed to pull power away from the supposedly unruly male-led khaps, and reclaim it for women under the watchful eye of the state.

The sovereignty of Khap panchayats, particularly why they endure despite their delegitimized status and reputation for harm, remains a pressing issue. One answer is that they are simply popular, and the most effective means of resolving village-level disagreements. The khap panchayat is accessible, moves quickly, and charges no fee for their services (Sangawan 2008). Another suggestion is that the khap enforces internal notions of *bhaichara* (brotherhood), which grants people social support that the modern Indian state has not delivered (Kumar 2012). Going further, Chowdhry suggests that their "dictatorial power" (3) arises from their notions of "honor, and what the public holds as honorable and esteemed" (2004, 24).

In this chapter, I propose another potential explanation, which is based on a shared, public and political, investment in goodness. This is not to say that honor does not matter, nor that "brotherhood" is not an apt descriptor for some of the principles governing these cases. Rather, it is to say that honor and brotherhood in this community seem to be subsets of larger concerns around being, pursuing, and appearing to be good in the public eye. I see goodness, in

this sense, as a broader catch-all that can manifest in various forms, including in wanting to be honorable and in the desire to be a good brother and community member. The larger investment, however, is in being able to claim that one is good.

Some of the questions over how and why khap panchayats continue to be so powerful are closely aligned with what Kēhaulani Kauanui calls the "sovereignty turn" (2017) in anthropology. Rather than thinking of sovereignty purely in terms of Westphalian sovereign power, the sovereignty turn provincializes sovereignty as something rooted in European theoretical frameworks (Bonilla 2017) and seeks, instead, to understand how communities think about sovereign power on their own terms (Kauanui 2008; Simpson 2014; Bonilla 2015). Rather than a particular power located in law (Schmitt 1996) or the ability to relegate citizens to bare life (Agamben 2005), these scholars see sovereignty as a perpetual project; one that requires, for example, ongoing performances of state power (Hanson and Stepputat 2009; Sundar 2014; Postero 2017) and responses to challenges from its margins (Das and Poole 2004). I add to this literature by thinking about how the extra-judicial panchayat in Ashrey claims and reasserts its sovereignty through the public performances of adjudication. The nomadic origins of the community means that their judicial structure does not depend on formal territorial borders. Rather, it is about communal affiliation and a type of power akin to what Singh calls "power over life," brought about by "varying relations of force and contract" (2012, 386) that are performed publicly, asserted, and reasserted over time and through the public display of the panchayat case.

Ashrey's panchayat is difficult to classify; it is not a Mahila panchayat, nor is it part of Panchayat Raj. It is similar to a khap panchayat in that they are responsible for inter-family disputes within the same caste community, and they operate extra-judiciously. However, it would

be a mistake to completely equate Ashrey's panchayat with a khap panchayat. As mentioned previously, the tribe making up Ashrey was nomadic until the 1970s. They were criminalized by the British, and only later reclassified as scheduled caste. Their legal system is not the same as the powerful, land-owning, and wealthy Jat communities that presently surround them. As described earlier, the absence of formally recognized tribes means that diversity between and among Jat and tribal communities in this region is often blurred by the assumption that there are no tribes at all. While it is reasonable to assume that there has been blending and overlap between local legal systems in this area, the village council in Ashrey should not be seen as a khap panchayat simply because it bears similarities. Here, I simply call it by the name people use locally: panchayat.

The day after Naina, Laura, and I happened upon a major conflict, I was invited to observe the panchayat. Laura wasn't sure if I could, but she confirmed with the panchayat leaders that I was, indeed, allowed to listen before she invited me onto a cot in the doorway behind her family shop. I could not hear everything clearly; the oldest panchayat member spoke so softly I could hardly hear him at all, and his use of local dialect often left me confused. My observations, therefore, were accompanied by many questions, confirmation, and discussion before and after, all of which came to form the bulk of my notes on the panchayat. Because James sits on the council and his eldest son, Tarun, will eventually take his place, they were positioned to grant me access to any case I wanted to observe. I still tried to think about considerations beyond mere permission. These cases were crowded, with dozens of observers of different ages and genders from all over the village. It was not difficult to avoid drawing attention to myself if I sat at an audible distance from the panchayat members, covered my head

with my *chunni* (long scarf), and for example, sat next to a pillar or on the other side of a window. My intention was not to hide, but rather to avoid causing a distraction. It is worth noting that no one, including me, was ever allowed in the pre-hearing meetings among panchayat members, which are mentioned below. On occasion, these meetings were more akin to casual evening chats around a shared hookah. When those conversations were held in my host family's home, I was present for some of the discussion. Formal meetings before a case however, such as those held behind a locked door on the temple grounds, were not available to me or any community member who did not sit on the panchayat.

I listened in on many cases, and chose the two recounted here for two reasons. First, I chose a relatively mundane issue that helps train the focus onto the ways in which the panchayat works, rather than the particulars of the conflict. I was present for parts of larger cases with higher stakes and more upsetting consequences, but found that revealing those details does not advance the argument more clearly than this simpler case. The second case I present is higher stakes, but is also the one in which, at Poonam's request, I became most directly involved. While the first case establishes how sovereign power is derived from the ability to confirm and deny claims to being good and being bekar, the second underlines this claim by explaining how the panchayat has almost no power over anyone who has become "bekar" in the eyes of the community.

Niru throws a shoe

The commotion outside Naina's house died down after James parked his car in the middle of the crowd. He walked home where Uma had *roti-sabzi* waiting. They ate together with Tarun, and talked about his upcoming exams. Later, the panchayat gathered around the hookah in James' courtyard. Made up of the male heads of five different clan groups, the men are called to respond to what James calls "our internal matters" at least once a week and typically much more. James learned how the panchayat works from his father who says it came from his father, then his father, then his, and so on. As James' father aged, he phased himself out of representing the clan and James assumed his role. Eventually, Tarun is expected to do the same.

The men met in the courtyard and discussed the day's matter over drinks and around the hookah. They decided the case could be heard in the morning, and chose Naina's father's house as the proper location. It was proper because they had not met in his home in some time, they did not expect a large crowd, and his family was not one of the two involved. Those families were discussed at length as well, as each man shared background information that could become relevant the next day. "Relevant" information includes recent things the families had or had not done, as well as knowledge of their financial circumstances. After some time, the men said good night and went home to sleep.

The panchayat meeting began early the next morning, and Naina had been up for even longer preparing her home for their arrival. As the meeting went on, she would throw up her hands and say "They give me such a headache. Since dawn they have been talking and talking. It is such a headache." Their deliberations really did take all day. The meeting was open to everyone, men and women, adults and children. Anyone in the village, or even smaller Perna villages far away, can come to these meetings. Each party can directly invite as many people as

they like, and those with whom neither party has good relations typically self-select not to attend. Anyone present can speak. In explaining the process, James made a point to say that women are allowed to both attend and speak, and that they always do both. He wished to emphasize this point because he knows the khap panchayats around them do not allow either. Young people are also allowed to contribute but typically do not. When asked, most have Laura's response, which is that she simply had nothing to say.

This case was smaller than usual, but still brought out about fifty people for the full proceedings, and about twenty more stopped in and out periodically as discussions unfolded. Naina's mother passed around a cold bottle of Mountain Dew, and people poured one another's drinks into small plastic cups. The whirring fan gave a little relief as the temperature climbed into the hundreds, but the electricity cut off for a while and another, colder, bottle of orange soda made its rounds. The matter up for debate could not be rushed, and everyone needed a chance to speak.

What had happened yesterday was the inevitable result of a skirmish two days prior. On that evening, Laura's older brother Yash had been drinking and ran out of beer. He knew that a family up the path and closer to the main road was selling, as many households do, and that they had some alcohol available. He left his courtyard and wandered out into the dark and towards their house. Upon arrival, the eldest daughter-in-law, Meera, was put off by his drunken behavior. She snapped at him and, when he did not retreat, she took off her sandal and slapped him with it. Embarrassed, drunk, and angry, Yash went home.

This incident alone had not sparked a panchayat meeting. Chiding men for wandering drunk outside their homes is not unusual. Both men and women will scold them loudly, so long

as they are not younger than the drunk individual. A woman hitting a man with a shoe, however, is quite aggressive. The shoe is dirty in a literal sense, soaking the wearer's sweat on one side and guarding against dirt, garbage, and dung on the other. Shoes and feet in North India, as well as much of Asia and large parts of the world, carry a ritual impurity as well. Shoes do not, for example, come into temples or other sacred spaces. They are removed in homes according to caste and other considerations. When Meera took off her shoe and hit Yash with it, she did so deliberately and with all this context in tow, making it a serious offense indeed.

Which is why Niru, Yash's wife, could not stand for it. As Yash stumbled back into their courtyard, she was sitting on a cot and combing the tangles out of their daughter's hair. She stopped to find out why her husband was so upset. As his embarrassment passed, he became more angry. He was humiliated and Niru, on his behalf, was angry too. She stayed up late discussing the matter with the rest of the family. In the morning, as rumors of the incident spread, it became more and more difficult for Niru to keep things to herself. The next day, she took the most logical step. Shortly before sunset, she marched out of her house and up to Meera's place. She called for Meera's husband, Lohit. He came out to speak with her, and Niru promptly began beating him with her shoe. When I asked Laura to clarify this series of events, she explained things simply. "That is what happens in our community," she said. "If a woman hits a man with her shoe, then his wife will come and hit that woman's husband with her shoe."

The aftermath of Niru's revenge was what Naina, Laura, and I heard outside, and it was the matter before the panchayat today. The matter was in the panchayat's purview because two separate households were involved and, second, because Niru had acted in public. Mediation was necessary to keep the neighborhood peace, and the panchayat would strive to come to a decision

that, in James' words, "would make the most people happy." Comments people made to the panchayat were both directly related to the incident and, in my understanding and from my position, not related at all. Questions were raised about Yash's drinking in particular, but also drinking in general. The personalities of those involved were discussed, as well as interactions people had had with members of the households. Positive and supportive things were also said, attesting to the good natures of those involved, particularly Yash, and appealing to the good will of the panchayat. Eventually, it was decided that Lohit's family was in the wrong and responsible for Meera's behavior, and they would have to make things right.

At this point, Lohit, Yash, Meera, and Niru all left to attend to other matters at home, though Yash would return to hear more discussion. That panchayat members, themselves, continued discussing and socializing as they circled around setting an appropriate consequence for Lohit's family. Eventually, they came to a fine of 2,000 rupees (about 25 US dollars). The amount considered both the severity of the original transgression, which was considered high, the context and reasoning for it, which seemed to be nothing, and the family's ability to pay, which was limited. Lohit's father paid the full fine directly to the panchayat members, who used it to buy food and drink for themselves.[14] This is a typical use of fines; no matter what happens in the village, the panchayat works to maintain amicable relations between themselves by eating, drinking, and smoking hookah together after the conclusion of a hearing. Naina, of course, saw it differently as her "headache" was destined to continue through the prolonged occupation of her house. By evening, the men finally left. From start to finish, they had sat for almost nine hours.

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[14] There was no money leftover this time, but large portions of more significant fines are typically distributed to two additional places. First, panchayat members collect a portion of the fines as compensation for their time. The percent varies. The second percentage goes to support the maintenance of the local temple. It sits at the front of the village, and was created by James and the other panchayat members about ten years prior.

When I asked Laura how she felt about the case, she said she saw both sides. Her brother, in her view, should not have gone out drunk. Laura had been away from the village that night, spending the night with her sister at her sister's marital home in a nearby village. Laura, as a young woman who would be married soon, would not have ventured out to buy beer for her brother, but a pair of younger boys could have easily done so. In her view, that's what should have happened. She was sure her brother, being drunk, must have said something inappropriate or at least annoying to Meera, causing her to lash out and hit him with her shoe. Meera refused to give context to her action, and her family maintained that they didn't know why she had hit Yash. Nevertheless, Laura said she also understood why her sister-in-law had retaliated. After all, "in our community, if a woman hits a man with her shoe, then his wife will come and hit that woman's husband with her shoe." In her mind, they shared equal responsibility.

Why did Yash win?

This particular panchayat case is simple enough to highlight the basic structures of how the process works; an issue arises between families and erupts in a public place outside the home, the panchayat prepares for a public hearing, the matter is discussed in front of many people, a decision reached, fine paid, and intra-panchayat tensions smoothed over by a period of socializing. However, in gathering information about the panchayat and the cases it heard, I spent many conversations on this incident because I was confused by its outcome. My confusion was first because I thought I had misheard, but then because I thought I had misunderstood; wouldn't Yash have to pay the fine? My assumption was that he would be held responsible for addressing

an unrelated and married woman while drunk after dark. Indeed, Laura was willing to say that her older brother had not acted correctly at that moment. Though Laura is, by nature, more open and inclined to speak her mind than some of her siblings and cousins, voicing a critique of an older brother to an unrelated outsider, me, is usually frowned upon. Laura's comment that her brother was initially in the wrong ought to be understood in this context; he was wrong, perhaps even fully. So why wasn't he fined?

The answer has to do with what the panchayat is actually deciding. Ultimately, the panchayat considers the goodness of each party and their family as part of their deliberations, and the ruling has the effect of either affirming or undermining good reputations. While the matter at hand is the matter at hand, what might be considered the relevant facts of the matter are wide and reaching sets of information. On the surface, Niru merely hit a man with her shoe; the incident was over as quickly as it began, but the matter was not resolved until almost twenty four hours later. In Yash's case, his drinking is not necessarily a problem worth deliberating. Both men and women drink in Ashrey, though the rules and expectations vary a bit by gender. Women, for example, usually won't drink if the husband or father-in-law does not, or will only drink if one or the other grants permission. Public drunkenness at the occasional special event, like a wedding, is acceptable for married men and women, but young and unmarried people are expected to maintain at least the appearance of sobriety. Outside of special events, one can drink amongst relatives in the privacy of a home, but should not show any signs of being addicted. In proving to be clear of addiction, men may give up drinking entirely for a period of weeks or months before rejoining adult family in beer and whisky. Yash, as a married man, has few

restrictions on drinking. However, it is unbecoming to venture out of the home or the home of a close family member while intoxicated. As Laura said, he should have sent a boy.

Selling alcohol, however, holds more ambiguity than merely consuming. Alcohol is closely regulated in India, as well as more heavily taxed in some states over others. Alcohol in Delhi, for example, is much more expensive than the neighboring Haryana. It is therefore no surprise that networks of illegal alcohol import and sale exist along the borders of the two states. The police, for the most part, ignore these activities, as well as benefit from them as customers. The police will occasionally conduct raids, use knowledge of alcohol sales as leverage for something else, or threaten to report people unless they pay the "fine" (bribe). Ashrey, like many other communities, has families who buy alcohol while in Haryana, and keep it at home for local, lower-cost sale within the community and among its visitors.[15] Families who do this, for the most part, have women in sex work who can sell alcohol to their clients, or they are a family without women in sex work who have fallen on difficult economic times. Publicly, Meera's family is the latter, though it goes unsaid and unconfirmed that they are also the former.

It may seem that the "brotherhood" the panchayat is enforcing is primarily about norms and peacekeeping. It could appear that, in the manner of Meyer Fortes and EE Evans Pritchard, the politics of the panchayat are mainly about maintaining norms and order. Indeed, James' comment about wanting to do what "would make the most people happy" is an explicitly utilitarian claim that actively seeks to avoid disrupting hierarchy and power relations as they are. In my observation, peacekeeping is a major part of what motivates the decisions of the panchayat, but it is not the only consideration. Any decision they make has detractors, and

[15] If people are involved in higher-risk activities like selling to Delhi's government-owned liquor shops, I never learned of it.

simply deciding along the lines of which outcome will keep detractors in the minority is not enough to keep the peace, nor is it enough to maintain the panchayat's power over public disputes. They also must consider the extended implications of their rulings, not just the number of dissatisfied parties.

I do not know, for sure, whether Meera or anyone in her household is in sex work. I do know that their economic situation is considered precarious, and that families in Ashrey who face financial problems rarely have no women in prostitution, or at least not for long. I do know that her family is affected by this undetermined cloud of ethical ambiguity brought about by their income from illegally selling alcohol, as well as being economically precarious enough to raise suspicion as to the income generating activities of the women. They also, I learned, have a history of neutral to poor relations with James' extended family. Things rarely escalate, but sometimes I would hear yelling outside while sitting in Naina's house.

"What is that?" I'd ask. "I can't understand what she's saying."

Naina would say something like, "It's the people over there."

"What are they yelling about?"

She'd shrug. "They are like this."

While a seemingly neutral comment, it illustrates that one can be "like this" in a larger way; a sense that they are always causing trouble, being loud, or generally causing a ruckus, none of which is of any particular importance. When it comes to the panchayat, this disinterested orientation towards whatever problems the family might have, is an integral part of the case. The belief that "they are like this" factored (heavily, it seems) into the case.

It also mattered that Yash is James' nephew. By "mattered," I don't quite mean nepotism, but rather his standing within one of the most respected families among the original settlers. The panchayat has members from each of the major clans, so merely being related will not be enough to bolster the case of any one petitioner. However, the larger reputation of one's clan and family does become a factor in how cases are decided. Yash's grandfather was one of the individuals who negotiated the purchase of the land on which the village sits. This mattered in two ways. One, it played into his credibility as someone who must have been raised well, given how much deference is given to his grandfather. Second, and quite importantly, it affiliates him with an upper-clan. Both Yash and Lohit, though not closely related, are members of the same clan. Because marriages are always across clans, neither of their wives are from this same upper gotra. Niru's clan is considered lower than Yash and Lohit's, but climbing through various friendships. connections, and investments in the education of its young people. Meera's clan, in contrast, is both lower than Yash and Lohit's, and also not seen to be making any public efforts to elevate their own status.

There was never any doubt that Yash was originally in the wrong to go out drunk, but that was not quite the full question up for discussion. Rather, it was also a public evaluation of the various levels of goodness achieved by the families and clans. Niru, as a good wife, could not be expected to accept such disrespect towards her husband. She also benefited from her clan's rising status and her marriage to James' nephew. She is not in sex work, and not affiliated with any family that sells alcohol. Meera, on the other hand, is known to be "like that" and suspected of worse. Ultimately, among the parties, it was Meera's marital family that needed to be held publicly responsible for her unreasonable behavior towards Yash. It was not that the shoe did not

matter; the exact details of who was hit with the shoe, when, and why were absolutely relevant, but they were only part of the story. The punishment was a performance affirming the various levels of goodness involved. The panchayat did not want the issue to linger; Meera's family was held publicly responsible for being "like this," it was made known in a public forum, and the matter was closed.

Performing sovereign power

The sovereign power of Ashrey's panchayat comes from a shared interest in the status of goodness, and the panchayat's ability to confirm or deny these claims in the public forum of the panchayat case as they go about the routine activities of mediating conflict and keeping the peace. The effect of this goodness can be cumulative, as repeatedly having cases resolved in your favor is one of many ways a reputation for goodness can be shored up and produced over time. Yash, for example, benefits from the good reputations of his family members which are affirmed, though not exclusively, by their own successful panchayat cases in the past (both recent and distant). Participation in these cases, therefore, is not only an accessible way to resolve conflicts quickly (Sangawan 2008), but also a higher-stakes risk with potentially great reward as one's side is declared, in front of all assembled, to be the just and right position. In the process of obtaining the facts of the case, discussing the context, hearing from all parties and anyone else assembled, goodness is being presented, discussed, manipulated, and moulded through the conclusion of the case and its absorption into narratives of various families and their reputations. One of the functions of the case is conflict management for people living in close quarters, but

the benefits, and the motivation to participate and accept the panchayat's rulings, go beyond the conflict itself. What the victorious party gets from the case is a defense of their good reputation. The unsuccessful party is not necessarily maligned or insulted, but sometimes even a case that seems fifty-fifty (a generous estimate of who Laura thought was to blame, for example) leaves an impression that a questionable family is perhaps not so good.

Returning to debates over "the good" discussed in the introduction, I did find that the panchayat was the grounds on which the good came closest to being the same as "the norm" (Venkatesan 2015). Part of the panchayat's role is to maintain the everyday nature of things as they are. It is not their role, for instance, to arbitrate collective claims to social justice, or hear serious challenges to tradition. However, this kind of rigidity, or adherence to norms above all else, did not come across in the cases I observed. For one, as was made most clear in the chapter on commercial sexual labor, the norm is highly contested and disputed, particularly across generational divides. If the panchayat is seen as overly traditional or too stuck in the past, they may not be able to claim authority over a changing community. This is why, I suspect, some of their decisions can be so surprising, especially when it comes to inappropriate marriages. An elopement, for instance, could have dire consequences for couples in this region (Chowdhry 2010), but Ashrey's panchayat is willing to consider supporting these couples under certain circumstances. If both are consenting adults from different clans and without prior marriages, the panchayat has, in the past, affirmed these marriages against the wishes of parents. In contrast, a khap panchayat (see above) would not be expected to do the same. Admittedly, some of these decisions seem rooted in James' influence. Though he is the youngest member of the panchayat, he is also the most educated and the most experienced in working with different people

(including foreigners) outside the community. His experience with outside communities, professional work, and comfort in English has lent him a bit more flexibility in terms of what he finds acceptable. If it did not, and the panchayat was only invested in protecting traditional norms, they may not be able to claim as much power as they do.

There are limits to this power. Since the panchayat's sovereignty is rooted in an investment into goodness, what I saw is that it effectively only has power over people who seek to be good. Those who are no longer good, or no longer interested in being seen as such, tend to fall outside of the panchayat's jurisdiction and thus, are not subjects of its sovereignty. "Good" people in Ashrey come from good families like Yash's. The men of their families are locally powerful and may come from an upper-clan. A woman who makes sacrifices for her family (see chapter two) is a good woman. Someone who remains calm under stress and does not cause trouble for others is a good person. Young people who listen to their elders are good. Good people are sincere, good natured, and content. They look after their families, and do not abandon their wives or children. Someone like Tarun (as well as Yash) benefits from the cumulative goodness of their powerful families. When I told Tarun a group of people had described him as "very good," he said "Yes. They say this because my father is so famous in the village. They will say that I am good, that I listen to my elders, things like this." Talking about people as good is a common topic of everyday conversation, as reputations are built and maintained through these kinds of statements that Tarun describes, and affirmed or challenged in the public space of panchayat deliberations.

The reputation that people are seeking to avoid in this project of goodness, is best approximated by the notion of "bekar." As described in the introduction, accusations of bekar-

ness are not spoken lightly. Other critical terms such as badly behaved, mischievous, or crazy are more flexible and can be used in jest in the right context. Bekar, however, is a more permanent declaration. It is a generalization that someone is "useless" along the lines of being "hopeless"or beyond improvement. Bekar people are addicted to alcohol. They are too direct with women or too pushy in demanding selfies. They have sex before marriage. Someone who is bekar may be irritable, raise their voice, or shout at people. Bekar children throw stones and refuse to listen to adults. They may be low gotra (but not always) and surviving only on the proceeds of crime. Finally, as I elaborate below, bekar men are men who beat their wives.

Domestic violence and the laws

Asha suddenly sat down next to Poonam, the gash under her eye larger than the one by her chin. Everyone had heard about the incident, but I hadn't seen the cut yet. I knew they'd gone to the doctor, and I could see that the doctor had filled the spot with antibiotic cream. I tried not to stare at the white wound, about the size of a table tennis ball, but I mentioned it to Uma as we walked back to her house.

"He drinks a lot and he hits her," she said. "We call him The Mosquito because that's what he is like."

"What can she do?" I asked.

"What can she do?" She repeated the question, but it was rhetorical. "They call the police. The police take money and nothing happens. The panchayat tried to do something but

what can they do? It is a matter for the police." I paused, trying to read her thoughts on the matter.

"I know this [domestic violence] happens sometimes," I said. "But I have never seen it like that."

"Yes," she said, looking at me seriously. "It is very bad, isn't it?"

In chapter two, I detailed some of the ways in which sex work becomes a viable mitigation strategy that may protect some women from violence in their families. Asha married into a family that expected her to do sex work, but she either did not comply, or complied only briefly.[16] In that earlier chapter, I tried not to make a direct connection between refusing to do sex work and experiencing domestic violence. Asha's situation, however, is still in the context of the pressure to work, and the connections between that and the risk of violence. Among those women who do experience domestic violence in Ashrey, their mitigation strategies are echoed in some of the scholarships on domestic violence in South Asia. For example, women often rely on kin for assistance, and are reluctant to reach out to unrelated neighbors (Snell-Rood 2015). Women may use care of the perpetrator as a way to demand nonviolent treatment (Snell-Rood 2015b; Banerjee 2019), as well as other strategies like organizing a meeting of the families, retreating to the natal home, and seeking comfort in religion (Bhandari 2019). They also make use of various legal structures, both formal and informal, including those created from the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005. Though the Act has been criticized for, among other things, reinforcing existing inequalities (Kowalski 2018), and not being

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[16] This is an example of information I did not press people on. Svati Shah (2014) might suggest this kind of direct and accurate information about sex work would not have been available to a researcher like me, and I do not want to imply otherwise. If Asha ever did sex work, I was not given reason to believe she was engaged in it at this time.

inclusive of a range of personal and family experiences (Datta 2010), it is a civil law focused on protection, with a broad definition of violence, and an allocation of resources to combat it. The PWDVA allows courts to grant compensation, prevent women from being thrown out of their marital homes, and make decisions on custody of children.

As mentioned earlier, the ways in which the sovereignty of Ashrey's panchayat may or may not extend to domestic violence is also relevant to current threads in gender studies, particularly abolitionist feminism. Coming off of the sudden growth of alternative dispute resolution programs (Santos 2002), abolitionist feminist scholars criticize the carceral state as a solution to crime, and call for an end to prisons and policing. They advocate replacing them with restorative or transformative justice programs, including in cases of gender based violence (INCITE 2016!; Richie 2000). One way of envisioning these alternative systems has been to look at how gender based violence is treated in tribal and indigenous courts (Speed 2013; Coker 2006), but fewer connections have been drawn between this literature and extrajudicial systems outside the territory of the United States. I do not present Ashrey's panchayat as exemplary or without flaw. Instead, I hope that it can offer a way of thinking about the source of an extrajudicial council's power over gender based violence, with the understanding that some kind of decision-making and enforcement power would be necessary to any future alternatives to the American carceral state.

In Ashrey, domestic violence is considered a conflict between two families, but there is a certain level of ambiguity around whether the conflict is private, where the panchayat does not get involved, or public, in which it can. This does not mean that the actual, in the moment, instances of violence are seen as private matters, into which non-kin (both panchayat and not) do

not intervene, but the larger issue of a pattern of violent treatment is viewed as a conflict between the victim's kin and that of her marital home. Domestic violence becomes a public issue under the purview of the panchayat only when the victim's family makes the issue public. For example, the victim's extended family may assemble outside her marital home to shame the perpetrator, and these shaming events are typically followed by a hearing in the panchayat. By being outside and causing a public disturbance, like what I witnessed outside Naina's house, the victim's relatives bring a private matter into public view and into the jurisdiction of the panchayat.

When the panchayat hears domestic violence cases, a popular solution is to order the family of the offending man to shoulder the expense of sending him to an alcohol rehabilitation center, usually at a cost of between 5,000 and 10,000 rps (65 to 130 $USD). Poonam explained that no one expects a visit to these centers to cure the man completely, but that they are most effective when the perpetrator is threatened with an indefinite stay. He may return with a reduced pattern of alcohol consumption, which she says means there are more opportunities to reason with him. Even perpetrators who do not drink heavily often return on better behavior. The threat of being ostracized and left alone is, in some cases, the more effective deterrent than anything else the center may do to combat drinking. Rehabilitation, one of these men told me, is a terrible place.

If the violence begins again, women will often seek respite in their natal homes. This was, for example, the purpose of Simran's visit in chapter two. Women can usually stay with their natal families for short periods of time as they wish, but frequent stays of long duration often signal marital trouble, including violence. Parents (on both sides) will begin encouraging the woman to return after about one month, saying that the man has probably learned his lesson

and improved. By then the woman will miss her children if she has left them behind, and men will miss the reproductive labor his wife performs for his comfort and benefit. This cycle of visits and respite may continue several times, and the panchayat may intervene more than once. Escalating the issue further, however, will require the police.

Asha had gone to the panchayat before. For a time, her husband Mosquito was compliant, but everything changed when Asha's older brother (Poonam's husband) suddenly died of a heart attack. Asha's father had died many years prior and, with her brother gone, and no powerful older male relatives left to advocate for her, Asha was vulnerable. By gathering extended family who were willing to cause a scene outside her house, Asha again brought her case to the panchayat, who ruled against Mosquito and his family. This, however, only increased the violence she faced. Mosquito began drinking more heavily. His mother locked Asha out of the house and forbade her children from speaking with her. Asha began sleeping on the floor at Poonam's house, but she wanted to return home, and Poonam struggled to support her. When Asha's oldest son, a soft-spoken boy in his early teens, defied his father and went to see his mother, Mosquito punished him with a beating.

Increasingly desperate to see her children, Asha returned one evening. Mosquito was drunk, and his violence reached a pinnacle; he grabbed a knife, held her face, and made a gash on her cheek under her eye. "What will you do?" he screamed. A neighbor called the police, who came and separated people, talking to those involved one by one. Ultimately, the official report said they had responded to a call for a local disturbance, but no crime was found to have been committed. I wasn't there that night, but Asha's mother had a copy of the report, which she showed me. She explained that everyone knew what had happened; Mosquito's family paid the

police not to register a case. Even when they went back to the police station in person to demand an explanation, the police declined to acknowledge a crime.

"Don't they have women there?" I asked, thinking of the many female police officers I had seen standing around outside the station and the possibility (though often unfounded) that this could make a difference.

"Yes but they don't think about it like this," Poonam said. "They do not think 'you are a woman, I am a woman, so we are the same.' They see us as different.'"

"Do they think about community (caste)?"

"Yes. They think of community. They think 'yes, you are a woman but you are not my community. You are different.'"

I became involved at this point at Poonam's request but, as I expected, my involvement was of little apparent benefit. I first pulled a list of NGOs from the local Violence Against Women cell's (VAWC) website, which are special units within police departments dedicated to gender-based crimes. I emailed everyone in the list saying there was an emergency case in a village, and I needed help understanding what we could do. Only two responded, and only one ever spoke to me on the phone. Padmini Kumar at the Joint Women's Programme helped me understand the various legal options. Separate from this list, I also went into central Delhi to meet a representative of the Delhi Commission for Women, under the direction of Swati Mailwal, and learned that they also mediated family conflict, both in their own offices and through mahila panchayats. The mahila panchayat that was meant to include Ashrey, I was told, was located in a Jat village, but women from Ashrey avoid that village even for shopping and

routine needs. I knew before I asked that Asha would not approach Jat women to mediate domestic violence.

A few days later Asha, her mother, two male cousins, Poonam, and I followed Padmini Kumar's suggestion and went to the closest VAWC to speak with the constable in charge. Speaking primarily in English and almost entirely to me, the officer reiterated that her hands were tied and there was nothing she could do; the report said that no crime was committed. At that moment, I accidentally blurted out something along the lines of "Are you saying it is legal to gash your wife's face with a knife?" She stared at me, and repeated that there was nothing she would do.

Then we went to the court. We were ushered into a comfortable office where the senior lawyer agreed that a crime had obviously been committed, and said they could order the police to register it as such. This appeared to be the moment in which everyone assembled understood why Poonam had invited me. I had strode in at the front of the group, and we had been immediately attended to by groups of lawyers escorting us into an air conditioned office and offering refreshment. As explored in an earlier chapter, Poonam had worked with NGOs and had, I think, expected this treatment from bringing me along. I had not realized this was not clear to the group until Asha's cousin said "you came in and immediately made friends!" and Poonam gave me a knowing smile. I do not know how they would have been treated without me, but Poonam's reaction made me think I had, in fact, done as she had hoped.

The lawyer who took us in said he would use the PWDVA to find a solution. He claimed Asha could expect to quickly get an order granting her a right to stay in her home, but other provisions would take time. The lawyer asked what her husband does for income and nervous

glances were exchanged before Asha said “he has a shop.” He said that he and the other lawyers may not be able to get her very much money, but Asha would get access to her children, as well as some kind of financial compensation for what she had endured. The whole process, they admitted, could take up to two years. I wondered what financial relief Asha could receive, as the Act seemed predicated on the assumption that men earn and women do not, but I left feeling hopeful that the lawyers might be able to do something of use.

Shortly after this meeting with the lawyers, my research visa ended and I returned to the US. Had I not been scheduled to leave soon, I may have had to respond to Poonam’s request to get involved differently and with more caution. Mosquito was clearly dangerous, and I was glad to avoid him, but I did not think I was taking any particular risk in assisting as I did. Even merely having conversations with Asha could have, for all I knew, set off Mosquito, so declining to get involved may not have protected me. I was also, admittedly, influenced by my regret at not having helped Simran. As I explained in chapter two, she had been trying to talk to me about the domestic violence she faces, but hadn’t quite been able to say so. I didn’t pick up on her distress, nor the fact that she wanted to disclose it to me, until she left the village and her younger brother told me. In a fate shared by many domestic violence survivors across the world, there is no way to contact Simran. She has no cell phone, and no way to speak on someone else’s phone without being monitored. I wanted to help Poonam and Asha because I thought that successes in this case might, by extension, be helpful to Simran someday as well.

I don’t know if anything I did was actually helpful. At the time of writing, I do not know where Asha is in the legal process, but Poonam sent me a video on WhatsApp that suggested Asha’s situation may have changed. In the clip, Asha sits crouched on the ground surrounded by

family. With a dramatic flourish, Asha's veil is pulled from her head and she stands up, smiling. In Haryana, de-veiling ceremonies like these are common ways to mark a divorce (Chowdhry 2004). I hope she is safer and happier now.

Bekar at the limits of sovereignty

The central point that I want to emphasize in the above story is about how and why Asha's case even had to move away from the panchayat and into the jurisdiction of the police and courts. In this community, the police are not the default way of dealing with disturbances or what James calls "our internal matters." While the police are not feared in the same ways some of the American abolitionist feminists mentioned above might describe, the police are still dangerous. The danger they pose is less to do with a legitimate fear of physical violence or bodily harm (though the police can, do, and have physically harmed residents). Rather, reluctance to engage the police is primarily about their institutional power to affirm, or not, the facts of an incident. Though the police can be violent, they are more often seen as hapless, bumbling, and sometimes useless (bekar) agents of the state. They need to be bargained with, cajoled, and coaxed into doing their job, especially since, from the perspective of Ashrey residents, they police seem to see the caste community as a "different" community, and one they are not always obligated to assist.

Among young people, attitudes towards the police seem more varied than their elders. Tarun, for example, was delighted to be introduced to famous American hip hop group N.W.A. On at least one occasion, he blasted their most famous song from his father's motorbike while

speeding through a police checkpoint.[17] Others are perhaps more optimistic, and hope to harness the power of policing for the benefit of their families. Jack and Maria's eldest brother, for example, saw his father beaten and arrested by the police during the demolition attempt described in chapter one. He, like Annie, is preparing for the police entrance exam. He says,

> My life's biggest dream is to be a police officer. People fight in this village. If I am in the Delhi Police, it will be helpful. But I can only help once or twice. They keep fighting about very little things! If there would be a problem in my family, I could help. I'll try to protect. I'll try my best to save them.

As young people in Ashrey attempt to become police officers themselves, attitudes towards the police and what they are able to accomplish may shift. (Poonam, for example, believes this is a good thing for young people to aspire to.) For now, however, the police are called as a last resort and, in Asha's case, that moment of last resort was the second Mosquito cut her face.

I am afraid of Mosquito. Asha and her natal kin are, to various degrees, afraid of him too. He, however, claims to fear no one. After Mosquito cut Asha's face and screamed "what will you do," the police came, were paid, and left, but he had more to say. According to Asha and Poonam, he said "No one can touch me. Not you, not the panchayat, not the police. Who is the panchayat? They are nothing. I fear no one." I assume this is a paraphrase of his statements, but the underlying sentiment is important. Mosquito feels he can do whatever he wants, including terrorize his wife, because no branch of accountability or enforcement has been able to meaningfully affect his actions. He is correct, but the key point is that he is only correct because

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[17] The process for obtaining a license can be long and expensive, so many people who plan to ride bikes forego the process altogether. Police frequently put up barriers specifically to stop people on motorbikes and ask to see their license and registration papers. Since many do not have them, they pay the fine (which, I'm told, is sometimes legitimate and other times a bribe) and continue on their way.

he is bekar. Mosquito is perceived to be useless and beyond improvement, and carries many of the bekar qualities mentioned above. He is, for example, addicted to alcohol. He is irritable and screams at people. He beats his wife and children. His routine violence is something the panchayat can rule on, and they are usually able to make rulings and enforce their will, but only on those who are invested in the sovereignty that the panchayat holds.

Bekar men do not fear the panchayat because bekar men are not good people. They have, in a sense, given up and on their social standing and begun to publicly flaunt the rules as they please. If their behavior comes to represent their family, the entire group may be forced to think twice about availing the panchayat for conflict resolution; if they are bekar, they are unlikely to be successful. As Yash's case showed, communal standing is integral to the process and all kinds of behavior is relevant to the outcome. As bekar-ness accumulates among a family, they may find themselves cast out of the shared investment in a project of goodness, and wondering whether there is anything to gain by restricting themselves to communal norms around good and proper comportment. In other words, by being bekar, they become ineligible for the benefits derived from being a good person, or a good family.

Bekar men are not political subjects of the panchayat because they have no investment in the source of the council's sovereign power. When the panchayat lost its power over Mosquito, it became what Uma called "a matter for the police." From the perspective of the police, taking a bribe from Mosquito's family and denying a crime occurred may have been a routine evening for them; not all police officers ignore domestic violence, and not all take bribes, but these officers, apparently, did both. Though the matter may have been routine for them, it was devastating for Asha. The panchayat had no control over her bekar husband, but she had still held out hope that

he might fear the police. After they left, bribe in hand, he told her "I fear no one." In context, this was a triumphant threat to remind her she had nothing left.

Conclusion

The panchayat is central to life in Ashrey, in part because of the frequency of cases it comes to adjudicate. In Naina's words, "Our village is so crazy! In other villages, maybe they have a few panchayat cases, but here there are always cases." The everyday nature of panchayat cases speaks to the shared investment in what they do, and the shared investment people have in participating in, and witnessing, the panchayat's performance of power. Granted, like other studies of similar councils, people will explain their participation by saying it's an efficient way to keep the peace, and a means of facilitating living together in limited space (Sangawan 2008). However, as I have argued above, the panchayat does more than keep the peace. Through the extended, frequent, and public performance of the panchayat case, their decisions also have the effect of contributing to who and what is seen as good, as well as who and what is approaching the bekar.

As the last chapter in an overarching argument, the panchayat shows most clearly that ethics are the primary political activity in Ashrey, and that the ethical and political cannot always be pulled apart into distinct categories in this community. By any definition of politics, a local council in charge of all disputes between families would be seen as a political entity and the most convincing reason, to me, is that they exert governing authority. What makes the panchayat unusual, however, is that their power does not come from some of the more expected sources,

which could include elections, land and territory, or a mandate from the state. Instead, their power is connected to a need to have a final say on which family is right, and this rightness is not just a question of facts, but goodness. Cultivating a public reputation for goodness is worth it for families because it means more political power via the decisions of the panchayat. The panchayat rules on the matters in a public way that becomes part of a family's narrative and, just in the volume of cases Naina describes, it is clear that families are eager to participate. The only way out is to be bekar. As Mosquito shows, a bekar man has nothing to fear.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The good we are

Everyone was talking about the snake in the brush. This snake, I quickly learned, was different from the one that appeared several months ago, across the way in the Jat village where Perna no longer go. That snake, with glowing albino white skin, had made regional news as a miracle. People were worshipping it as a god, and credentialed conservation scientists were going on television to gently urge them not to do so, only because it might endanger the young snake. People still came from miles around, and the traffic they caused was just visible over the hazy horizon. “Oof,” Annie said when I asked her if she could see them. “They are so crazy over there.”

Today, her cousin told me about the big black snake, and how frightened everyone had been. Coming from the other side of the village, I was told that I had just missed it. I do not know anything about various species of South Asian snakes, and the groups I spent most of my time with did not know either. The older men, however, were saying it was a dangerous one and I assumed that, after centuries of roaming with herds of goats, they knew what they were talking about. They said the snake had been big, fat, shiny, and fast. People had run away as it swished through the dust and, thankfully, out into the forest. I asked if anyone got a photo or video, only out of curiosity to know what kind of snake it had been. No one had, because it was just too quick.

A few weeks later, my fieldwork ended and I flew back to Detroit. I spent most of the flight looking out the window and wondering if other anthropologists also felt that their field work ended suddenly; I had been prepared to leave, and people knew when it was almost time for me to go, but the ending nevertheless felt sudden. Maybe to ease the transition, I began thinking backwards through major memories, points, and events, and arrived at the snake. Ella had been so excited to tell me about it, and offered the greatest detail of its appearance and movement. I started thinking about the snake, and the brush it had moved through, in terms of a familiar and cliche metaphor; it had been, just as Ella said, a snake in the grass.

The English idiom, "snake in the grass," denotes a friend who is not. It means a treacherous person, someone who seems loyal and helpful but is really working against one's interests and wellbeing. A snake in the grass is a disruption, a break from expectation, and a betrayal. This literal snake had appeared in Ashrey on government land. The empty field adjacent to the Perli Side is used for enjoyable things like cricket and weddings, but that land does not belong to anyone in Ashrey. The snake darted across this space and scattered people back into their homes. It had come straight through the field and right up to their ominously demarcated borders, before disappearing back into minding its own business. It was almost like it came, not as a god like another snake had to the Jat village, but as a message. That everything is going well for now; peaceful lives may be lived and sports games can happen here from time to time, but this land is not for you.

What politics now?

At the time of writing, Delhi and the surrounding rural areas are international news for two reasons. First, farmers are staging the "biggest social movement in a generation" (Vanaik 2021), or perhaps "the largest strike wave in world history" (Dubal and Gill 2020). For months, farmers in Haryana and nearby areas have been leading a protest against a series of farm bills that privatize agriculture under the guise of reform. The protest, marked by coalitions between students, unions, and other groups, has expanded to encompass a wider critique of Narendra Modi's right wing and Hindu nationalist politics (Sagar 2021; Pandey 2021).

If anything can halt the protests, it is the surge of covid cases in India in general, and Delhi in particular. The first death of a protestor was marked today, and it is unclear how the pandemic will shift the movement. 3,500 people died in India today, adding to a total death-count of over 200,000. The peak is not anticipated until at least a week from now. Concurrently, the death count in the US has passed 500,000, but the two places are not the same. For instance, in the last year, I can recall only one image of deaths or body bags in the US that ever showed on the news. I am finding the situation in Delhi difficult to follow because people in the global south are not afforded the same; fields of mass cremations in India are shown on Fox and CNN. A news alert shows me an article that documents, in a series of photos, the death of a father of five in Delhi, not too far from Ashrey. It makes me think of how people in Ashrey talk about journalists; about how they slam doors and lock them, screaming that they will not talk. I believe them, and the alerts remind me they are justified.

The people I am in touch with over WhatsApp are alive and safe for now. The village is buffered on all sides and could, hypothetically, greatly limit the chances of corona entering its grounds. People are staying home to the extent possible but, even before then, they were not

going out to join what might be the biggest protest in human history. No one, from the messages I have exchanged, has been moved to join. This does not mean I have information that speaks to every person in the village, but it does suggest the absence of coordinated participation. This cannot be explained simply be recognizing that the people of Ashrey are not farmers; the farmer protests have expanded well beyond farmers alone. Even some Dalit agricultural laborers have, as a result of careful relationship building over time, joined the Jat farmers in the protests in a fragile alliance (Sinha 2020). It would not be unreasonable for people in Ashrey to protest on wider, anti-Modi, grounds that the movement offers. Yet this is not happening, which returns to my original research question about what politics are in this community.

Ethics are politics in Ashrey, and the farmer protests may indicate that such a formulation is not limited to the bounds of this village. As Pandian suggests, farmers, farming, and cultivation are tied up in discourses of what makes for a good and ethical subject in India (2009). This almost romantic notion of farming may sound similar to other kinds of agrarian and yeoman myths found in other contexts, including the US, but the particular framing in India is also about the farmer as citizen. As I showed in chapter four, Gandhian ideas about ethical subject formation and its relationship to non-violent protest movements continue to frame and influence notions of citizen and state in contemporary India. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the conveners of such a massive protest are farmers. Their status as farmers, and associated assumptions about the value and moral standing of those who farm, are at least a part of what has granted the movement so much of its power, including the ability to extend objections from particular pieces of legislation, to larger criticisms of the state as a whole.

The good that Ashrey's citizens seek is rather similar to some of what the farmers possess, but it is chronically elusive. It is especially so because what I called "intersecting affective events" conspire to create conditions under which pursuing, claiming, and being good are all fraught with obstacles. In chapter two, I sketched a distinction between obstacles that are affective - intersecting, challenging, and compounding, but not wholly destructive - and traumatic, which would mean the inability to go on as one's self. I showed that external impositions as to who this community is can come close to the latter. For example, understanding one's community as a tribe, but officially being a caste, is the kind of event that could threaten a community's ability to go on as itself. Becoming a prostitution village, shortly after settlement and despite serious objections, could do the same. Which is why I showed, in chapter three, the deep tensions and serious disagreements over the rise and practice of sex work in the community. I did not find neutrality in the village. Families either accepted and promoted sex work, or insisted that "it is not good for the community." I framed the resulting tension as a split in patriarchal power that can also be tied to ideas about modernity. While some people view their neighbors in sex work as regressive and backwards, the households that are supported by sex work display relatively more indicators of what is imagined to be a modern and progressive Indian family; daughters like Annie have more freedom in terms of where they may roam and in what styles of clothing. They go to school for longer, sometimes private academies, and many work with tutors every afternoon. Women in sex work tend to be baffled by the conservatism of their counterparts who do not work and, in their opinion, do so little for their families.

In chapter four, I showed what happened when a highly-resourced NGO came into Ashrey's intersecting events and splintering patriarchal power and attempted to "empower"

women out of sex work. The intervention itself became an affective event by way of how these organizations are situated in systems of state power. The income women earn from sex work were already developing the village and bringing families out of poverty. Rather than a lack of power on their part, the problem was persistently described to me as the "laziness" of the men who refused to take on wage labor. While the NGO worked to cajole women into grouping together and taking out micro-loans and other endeavors they framed as empowerment, the same women returned home to cajole their "lazy" husbands into earning money. Like most NGO interventions, a quick conclusion due to mistakes and miscommunications was inevitable. As an affective event, however, the departure of this NGO effectively served as passive confirmation that the words of the colonial Criminal Tribe Act still applied to Ashrey's people. By refusing to leave sex work, they remained "addicted" to crime and unwilling to change. Addiction is not good. Drugs and alcohol are consumed in the community, but being seen as addicted is another matter entirely. This is why, for example, multiple interlocutors, including James, would periodically stop drinking altogether so as to avoid being associated with addiction. The accusation that Ashrey's residents are addiction to crime, just as the CTA indicated, is an event that threatens to undo all goodness achieved by the community since their criminal status was first applied.

In the last chapter, I used the notion of bekar to bring out more of the political nature of the good. Goodness is arbitrated through different levels of authority and decision making power. It may be embodied and/or imposed, in the sense that criminality was (and is) applied to individual people, as well as how bekar-ness is recognized by sets of actions and behaviors. The good can be managed by patriarchal power. NGOs, acting as service providers in a liberalized

state, are also situated to make determinations about who is good enough to be worth the effort of serving and supporting. The state, as a taker of higher-level decisions, retains the power to designate who is a tribe, a caste, and even who is Perna. Their entities draw lines around these designations, just as they draw literal lines around the village's borders. It is the panchayat, however, that is felt and experienced as the everyday arbiter and mediator of who and what is good. The public performance of hearing cases, evaluating them, responding to them, and ruling on the outcome is a spectacle that stabilizes notions of goodness through the gossip and discussions that go around before and after their decisions. Goodness grants power in the form of leverage, and that power is used to pursue and win the rulings that people want and need to make real the worlds that they imagine.

An Arundhati Roy quote opened chapter two with mention of "falling people." I used this idea to explain how intersecting events are not the same as a traumatic fall. Given the historical tendency of some writers to wistfully describe sex workers as "fallen women," one might expect to find women who are "fallen" and living in Ashrey. But if anyone in Ashrey is fallen, it is not the sex workers. It is Mosquito. His addiction, stubbornness, violence, and threats are the actions of one who is bekar, fallen, no longer going on as himself, and unable to be good. When the panchayat threw up their hands and placed an official ban on sex work, it was not merely about inter-familial disputes or annoyances over the "bad mindset" or sex work. It was a fear of falling. The project of goodness matters because the good is so closely tied, both within the village and outside of it, to one's ability to engage in world making. Without that power, there is a risk of falling. I will conclude by indicating that a fall, in the sense that the community may not be able to go on as it is, is a fear people have on and off in the background of everyday life. It is indeed

possible that the Ashrey community may not be able to go on as it is, and it may not be able to go on because of what is coming.

The snake in the grass

Ashrey's people have already been pushed to the margins once. Shortly before settlement, they moved around a small range that had its center in what is now Hauz Khas, an expensive area of wealthy south Delhi. This area is now marked by what is called "urban villages" - places that were once freestanding villages but have now been engulfed by the city and transitioned into neighborhoods; "villages" by name only. It is only a matter of time before something similar comes to Ashrey. The Delhi Metro is already closer than it has ever been. It once took me four hours to reach Ashrey from Delhi, but it is getting closer and closer as the hungry city continues its inevitable sprawl.

For now, the spaces around Ashrey that buffer them grant an illusion of rurality. In reality, all these spaces are owned and claimed, and they could change at any time. On an earlier research visit in 2015, for example, I climbed to the top floor of James' house and suddenly wondered where I was; the sweeping bushland I remembered had been cut off into something made of concrete and laced with barbed wire. The lines were so close that the spikes of the wires brushed against the back windows of his house. It turns out that, with estimates saying over a hundred people move to Delhi everyday, the city needed more busses. With more busses, they needed somewhere to store them when they were not in use for repairs or other reasons. The city

needed storage, so they took it. James and other members of the panchayat say there was never any discussion with them, nor were they informed. One day, the brush was gone.

I keep asking questions like that: was there any consultation or discussion? I ask because I often hope I am missing something or merely asking the wrong person. I want to see contestation where there is none, as each question has the same answer that, no, we were not consulted. There is no reason to because the government can do whatever it likes with its own land. However, in keeping with the argument I have presented here, there may be another, concurrent, explanation. There is no need to consult anyone because the Ashrey Perna community is not good enough to consult. Politics requires goodness and, in the absence of it, no negotiations are necessary.

The next land likely to be claimed for development is the field on the Perli Side where the snake was seen. It is unclear what will be built there. Some say it will be a gas station. If so, Laura says she is happy her brother "will not have to go so far" to fill the tank on his motorbike. Some have heard it will be a hospital, and others a police station. No one is certain what will be built there, but the sense that something is coming is widely shared. It is difficult to describe the subtle sense of this foreboding this affords, perhaps intensified by the knowledge that land can be taken at any time. The temporal location of that potential threat is even harder to locate. I do not know if it is near and people are resigned, or if it is too far off to be concerned about. In some conversations, the former seems more likely, such as when James shook his head and said "If the government comes and wants the land, there is nothing we can do."

The government, however, would not take James' land, or at least not that which he and his father hold legally. As original settlers, theres is one of a ring of houses whose owners have

unambiguous title to the land. It is others who are vulnerable to demolition, an attempt at which was described in chapter two. For the original settlers, various attempts on the part of the government to claim and develop land could unfold in ways that are beneficial to these families; as Delhi works through the phases of its official development plan, land and property values in areas around Ashrey are rising. Whether this process is best described as urbanization, gentrification, or something else, is yet to be seen. What is clear, however, is that rural land is shifting into land that is conveniently located and well-connected. Many of the same restaurants, hotels, and businesses that are seen in the upscale neighborhoods of Delhi where Ashrey's elders once lived are now appearing a very short distance from their village. If development plans unfold in ways similar to what happened to Hauz Khas, this could mean more chances for professional work. It could mean better educational opportunities and improved healthcare. It could mean a demand for their land and houses, perhaps even on rent and maybe even at high prices. Perhaps the demand will be so high that James considers selling and moving into south Delhi where the elders once lived but can no longer afford. All of these things could come from development as Delhi continues to expand.

But what about the snake in the grass? What if an encroaching city means more surveillance, policing, and general state interference? It is entirely possible, perhaps even likely, that the state would enforce the original boundaries of the village and demolish any dwellings that are outside it, especially if they land they occupy becomes land desired by high income Delhi-ites with their eye on the idyllic, but accessible, margins of a sprawling metropolis. What if Ashrey's residents who own their land and homes are pressured to sell? What new subjectivities will emerge as people weigh the pros and cons? Will this be a story of indigenous

displacement that gets lost in the terminology of caste? What will happen to the divide between the two Sides of the village, and will it be necessary to overcome it, at least temporarily, in order to resist? Are people willing to fight, like they did the last time houses were demolished?

The good matters because development is a snake in the grass. For now, people in Ashrey derive political power from goodness, and most of the worlds they hope to build have to do with the wellbeing of the family primarily, and the community after. Yet this good will not be good enough if the snake turns out to be a traumatic event; there are ways in which the expansion of Delhi and the government's associated plans for development could result in breaking the community apart such that it "falls" and is unable to go on as itself. The vague sense of foreboding mentioned above that cannot be put into words is, if I were to speculate, likely linked to a widely-held suspicion that what feels like internal disputes among families can be, and has been, interpreted by the state and its agents as evidence of communal shortcomings. A "criminal tribe" is not worth negotiating with, and what I have tried to show throughout these chapters is that they are not worth negotiating with because they are not good enough to have political power.

"Write that we are good." This was not a request that I write politely, but a move to ensure that I wrote politically. My interlocutors described in these chapters are pursuing goodness not just for their own benefit, personal leverage, or dreams for their family. They also need it for political power, and the worlds that are to come.

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