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SISTERS AND BROTHERS: SCHOOLING, FAMILY AND MIGRATION

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Studies of education and schooling consider the family pivotal in decisions taken about schooling choices for different family members. Increasingly, it is recognised that sisters and brothers will not have the same kinds of schooling (Seymour 2002; Sharma and Retherford 1993). This differentiation appears in some form across all social and income categories. Families with higher incomes are able to provide better education for longer time spans to all their children, but whether they actually do so is neither necessary nor obvious. Differences exist between sisters and brothers in the kind of schooling their parents think appropriate and this has as much to do with the cultural location of the family (urban professional or agrarian landowning, for example) as it has with income brackets. The number of daughters and sons in the family also influences decisions about different children’s schooling. Although schooling generates class distinctions, to think of schooling only in terms of class differentiation among siblings would be too limited a view. There is no denying that sons are more advantaged than daughters in parental provisioning. But families orient the transition from childhood to adulthood of all children and schooling is only one aspect. Along with gender, other factors like age, birth order influence decision-making. For example, younger and elder children are differently treated within the family, making age, as well as gender, significant for the kind of education children ultimately receive.

Since differentiation has a social, demographic aspect (age, order of birth, gender) apart from an economic or income aspect, we need to uncover the social reasoning of schooling choices. People evaluate
education in different ways, and this has as much to do with the kind of schools that are available as with a family's cultural location. Many studies of girls' education point to its significance in the marriage market, not just the job market (an issue addressed here as well). Education is valued because it makes girls valuable brides and 'better mothers'. A national survey on Muslim women in India found that education for girls was valued 'for itself', but employment prospects were extrinsic to schooling choices made for and by Muslim boys and the opportunity costs were calculated when making schooling choices for them (Hasan and Menon 2004).

How do social and economic considerations contribute to a family's understanding of what education can achieve for children? When people evaluate any aspect of their lives, they also make decisions on how to deal with it. It is often thought that Indians have a 'futuristic' view of the world, governed by cultural and religious philosophy. What remains unacknowledged, however, is that this is also a public discourse and a style of presentation in the world that can be a façade for evaluation and fairly purposeful action. 'Futuristic' performances may be a way to present the family to public view to accomplish something.

In this chapter I argue that evaluation, assessment and understandings of situations are intrinsic to 'planning' for the family that is taking decisions. The planning process is constrained or enabled by social reasoning in which gender, age and status play a vital role. Giddens (1994) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have argued that life as a planning project marks modernity, especially in contexts with new, risky options and choices appearing on personal landscapes. While they both write about modern individualism in the West, Beck-Gernsheim recognises that individualisation does not mean 'unrestricted juggling in almost free space...in fact the space within which modern subjects move with their options for action is anything but a space outside society' (ibid.: 43). The question is whether the logic of life-as-a-plan exists in contemporary non-Western societies too, and, if so, how this logic translates into personal lives? Do evaluation and balancing options imitate 'rational choice' models of decision-making?

In documenting social life, social groups and collectivities have had a privileged place. Biographies of a single family or ethnographies of single narrative events have not been widely used, yet an edited volume on life histories and biographies demonstrates that life histories are a historically persistent and socially pervasive form of cultural expression in south Asia, as they are in many part of the world. In their introduction, the editors Arnold and Blackburn argue that life histories, in whatever form, can provide valuable insights not simply into the experience and attitudes of the individuals concerned, but also into the wider society or segment of society to which they belong (Arnold and Blackburn 2004).

While life histories are primarily stories of the 'self', different forms such as ballads are cultural narratives about families and lineages, often recited at significant life cycle moments like weddings or funerals, or at the ceremonial investiture of a new king. Life histories of individuals, families and groups are also constructed by anthropologists who gather material from stray snippets of conversation, more structured and self-conscious interviews, participant observation and enquiry (both discreet and deliberate) and gossip. Life history is therefore an interesting source for understanding society (ibid.; Chamberlain and Thompson 1998; Rapport and Dawson 1998).

Using the ethnography of one family and their wider kin, I limit myself to one village in the north Indian state of Punjab to make explicit how education is understood as a value. The social and cultural location of this Panjabi family gives us a way of understanding their assessment of education in general and, in particular, schooling as a strategy deployed for the reproduction of the family. Their evaluation of what constitute appropriate strategies, however, needs to be placed within larger political economies of decision-making in which schooling is one strand.

Panjabi villagers think of schooling as part of the broader category of learning or gyān. While schooling is not regarded as substitutable by any other form of gyān, it needs to be placed within the overall conception of gyān. All formal knowledge is not treated identically. Learning Sikh scriptures is considered appropriate, but schooling is not judged in the same benign light. Panjabi parents have quite articulate and emotive ways of talking about schooling and knowledge. They value schooling—but also think it possesses an actively transformative potential that, like magic, can be benevolent and dangerous. Gold (in her study of Rajasthan) and Seymour (in eastern India) have discussed similar anxieties about schooling, especially for girls (Gold 2002; Seymour 2002). Within Panjabi village communities, then, schooling is something that needs to be thought about with care. Formal education, including schooling, is sought—but it is also evaluated along a sliding scale of 'sufficient' or 'too much'. Schooling is seen as something that might improve or spoil a person. Metaphor and analogy are quite commonly
used in Panjabi and schooling is linked with friendship or food through these speech genres. Just as a person can go wrong or spoil (bigar jāndā) with too much food or unregulated friendships, so it is with school education. Like crops, schooling yields results in the future and, like any investment in the future, schooling is a risk (jokhān).

Within this version of schooling as risk is a discourse about what is at risk and who can be risked. Middle and younger sons are more readily risked to the transformative potential of family experiments in education, migration, employment and so on. Conversely, great efforts are made to offset the risk that education might present to daughters. The judgment of what is adequate or excessive varies with the circumstances in which a family finds itself at various moments of time and at different stages of its domestic cycle. Families try to minimise the risks both that too much education might make a daughter unmarriageable and that not enough schooling might leave a son out of the loop for the labour market. This balance is not a decision arrived at individually. Rather, it forms part of discursive formations within which ideas of ‘sufficient’ and ‘too much’ are located.

THE SETTING

The village on which this ethnography draws lies off a highway that connects the bustling city of Jullundur and its army cantonment with the tehsil (administrative subdivision) town of Nakodar.1 The village was resettled after 1947, and again after land consolidation in the 1950s. The development of technology-laden Green Revolution agriculture from the 1960s on meant an intensive cropping calendar with scarcely a moment when the fields are fallow. Newer crops are constantly experimented with and bands of migrant labour from eastern India arrive through successive harvests. Itinerant traders move in and out of the village, selling everything from milk, traditional rugs (duories/khes) to the more utilitarian commodities of the contemporary world like plastic buckets and toys. Gujar herdsmen from snowbound areas of Himachal and Kashmir settle along the peripheries of the village during the winter, selling milk and labour in the village. The outside world has a large presence in the villagers’ everyday lives.

Significant social developments have contoured the political and cultural landscape of Panjab. Through the1980s, assertive social movements that took the form of separatism and militancy transformed the political landscape of the state. The increasing imbalance in the demographic profile of contemporary Panjab and a sex ratio weighted against female survival is also significant. Added to this is the long history of international and internal migration in districts such as Jullundur. All these developments influence household strategies of reproduction. Here, I concentrate on the interconnections between agricultural modernisation, migration and education.

Whilst migration and movements influence household choices, the commodification of agriculture is fundamental. Every landholder, large and small, feels the pressure of rising costs of innovation and experimentation. Newer technologies and increasing investments mean that landholding cultivators need to be market savvy in order to survive. Economic, social and cultural resources need to be harnessed in new ways to keep from going under. Various strategies are marshalled to overcome the limitation of landholding size, including renting in land, taking loans from banks, grain merchants and money-lenders, and deploying family labour in non-agricultural occupations like truck driving. Modern agriculture and globalised markets have unleashed an anxiety and insecurity about the future and about the family’s potential inability to reproduce itself in known and trusted ways. Within this scenario of bustling change and the uncertainty of flux, formal education and schooling take on a resonance as a possible means of ensuring the future. To quote Beck-Gernsheim again, modern social guidelines are no longer set by class, religion and tradition, but rather by the labour market … the educational system, the judicial system, and so on. The crucial feature of these modern guidelines is that individuals must to some extent produce them through action of their own and incorporate them into their own life history (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 44).

FAMILY STRATEGIES AND EDUCATION

This chapter is the story of three siblings, the daughter and two sons of Sardar Paramjit Singh and his wife, Joginder Kaur.2 It is not a life history in the strict sense of the word, since it focuses on a brief span
of the family’s biography. When I first met them, their household included Paramjit Singh’s bedridden father, his energetic, spry mother, Biji, and the three children, Baby, the eldest child and only daughter, Sonu the son and heir and Goga their teenage son.

At the time, Baby was 19 and had finished school. She mainly lived sequestered at home, helping her mother with the housework in the well-established and extensively documented practice of young unmarried adult women. Towards her family, she maintained a slight air of aloofness that intrigued me but (unusually) did not seem to disturb them. In comparison to her mother and most other village women, Baby was exceptionally meticulous in matters of personal hygiene and beauty care, carefully cleansing her skin with raw milk and shaping her eyebrows. This beauty care regime was familiar to my convent-educated eyes but, truth be told, I never expected to find these practices in the village. Fairly early in my fieldwork, though, I learnt that Baby had been withdrawn from the local school and sent to a very prestigious and well-known convent hill school to complete the last three years of high school. Paramjit Singh was a substantial landholder by village standards and could meet the costs of such an education. St. Bede’s in Simla (in the northern hill-state of Himachal Pradesh, and the erstwhile summer capital of the colonial state) is part of a chain of convent schools and colleges administered by a Christian mission. As a convent run by nuns, it is considered ‘safe’ for girls, in addition to providing the significant language resource of correctly spoken and properly accented English. This is its cachet. St. Bede’s is also regarded as a sort of finishing school for girls who are groomed for marriage. Its students are drawn from middle or aspiring middle class backgrounds, not necessarily urban. I was viewed as a companion for Baby to continue her English where school left off.

By contrast, Baby’s brother Sonu was a virtual illiterate. He had dropped out of the local village school after completing middle school. His mother, in the customary style of many Panjabi parents, professed an inability to force him to continue. A young adult at the time of fieldwork, he rarely spent time at home and was out in the fields all day and sometimes late into the evening. From the comments of Biji and others, I learnt that he spent his days engaged in various activities. One day, I was told that he had acquired a horse and was breaking it in. On another occasion, he was reported to have been in a fight with a labourer. My early impressions of him were of a young man with little to do and under very cursory parental supervision.

The younger son, Goga was a school-going teenager. He attended an English-medium boarding school in a nearby small town and returned home during short vacations. This was a puzzle, since the family was by no means badly off: it would have seemed more logical to send Goga to a colonial hill school and keep Baby at home. Baby spoke to me only in English, but Goga rarely spoke English at home—and when he did, there was a strong Panjabi flavour to his accent and grammar. I never visited Goga’s school, but I gathered that it was privately run and catered to the sons of landowning upper and middle peasantry. The school calendar’s acknowledgement of agrarian rhythms enabled Goga to come and go frequently and help with the harvests at home. For him, the work was seen as useful, not vital, knowledge.

The divergent schooling choices the parents made for their children can be understood by locating them within both the cultural context of the village and the way the village oriented itself to the wider world. Sonu—as the elder son of a landowning family—was a key player within the family, but this centrality limited some of his options. He was expected to follow in his father’s footsteps, harnessing the resources of the jaddi jamin (ancestral property) to reproduce the family. The chronicle of his life was already foretold, as it were, and schooling played only a small part in it. Very little of this chronicle is reported by Sonu—much of it is reconstructed from other people’s ‘tellings’ of his life story, partly because our interactions were characterised by the formalities of avoidance behaviour.

Of course, not all forms of learning were absent in Sonu’s life. He was expected to acquire elaborate forms of knowledge to play his role successfully and encouraged to spend all his time in the fields getting to know the nuanced rhythms of agriculture. Successful ways to manage the labour, the cure of sick animals, transactions involved in fixing a price for cash crops with grain agents were essential gyan for the son and heir of a landowning family. I learnt all this from overhearing Sonu talk about his role in a collective harvest ritual and a fight he had with a labourer. This was a prolonged initiation process into manhood—becoming a Sardar (the polite form of address for those who own ancestral property) and maintaining a sandhari lifestyle. While all Jat landholders subscribe to the sandhari worldview, small landowners in danger of losing their jaddi lands are also the most vociferous and articulate about the norms that constitute sandhari. Jat Sandhars think of themselves as distinct from other cultivators because sandhari is not available to everyone. The over-emphatic rhetorical statement ‘people like us
don’t work as labourers on other peoples’ fields’ conveys what is befitting for sonar. Work as a performance of status is constructed as more than a livelihood: it is understood as an art, a presentation of the self, the lineage, and status to public gaze (Chopra 2003: 43–44).

This art cannot be acquired through the homogenising knowledge of schooling. Sonar’s mother’s expression of helplessness that enabled him to stay out of school was also a construction of him as a decision-maker in his own life, especially in matters like schooling. Her seeming apathy towards schooling and towards his decision to drop out after middle school was in fact an active expression of his parents’ expectations of him: that he would place family above all else, while learning to be self-reliant. The possibility of breaking out of this life story always existed—his continuous mocking of his younger brother’s books and inadequate knowledge of farm and field suggest that he accepted, at least in part, that continued schooling was ‘too much’ and beyond the family’s needs and his own destined obligations.

The life stories of the two children who were sent away—Baby and Goga—fall outside the pattern of brothers privileged over sisters (Seymour 2002; Sharma and Rutherford 1993). The contrast, however, is part of a single logic that links both choices—that the futures of Baby and Goga were tied to one another.

Choosing an expensive and distant boarding school run by English-speaking nuns, a school that undermined the entire normative structure of Punjabi village culture (and was known to do so) could not have been easily resorted to, especially for a daughter. It was clearly not a mechanical or unreflective choice. Nor could it have been made without prior discussions and negotiations. Paramjit Singh and Joginder Kaur could not have sent their daughter away without the consent and the legitimation of a wider set of persons who could stand social security for them. The extreme act of sending Baby away was clearly framed by more than the issue of ‘good’ schooling, given the worldview that schooling could spoil as well as benefit a person. The decision needs to be placed within a larger set of family plans and in this sense was an illusionary act that produced another series of acts and events (Ricouer 1981).

People judged to be better versed in the ways of the larger world than either of Baby’s parents made the choices for her. Paramjit’s mother was crucial at this point and acted as the sanctioning elder as well as a bridge between other powerful and well-connected kin. Paramjit’s sister, Sardarni-ji, was married into one of the foremost political families of Panjab: her husband was a substantial landowner and a senior office bearer of a political party. More to the point, all their children were in well-known residential hill schools (including St. Bede’s). This schooling was intended to enable them to move seamlessly into the diaspora of well-established Sardar families. In fact, their eldest daughter-in-law had grown up in Southall, UK. She came once on a matchmaking visit to her in-laws to arrange her husband’s younger brother’s marriage: I witnessed the negotiations between this young man and Julie, a Punjabi girl from California, whose parents had sent her with the Southall daughter-in-law to ‘view’ the eligible boys of the family. The Southall woman was clearly going to be the conduit for her husband’s sisters’ marriages too. Biji had appealed to her daughter Sardarni-ji to explore the possibilities of St. Bede’s and to convince Baby’s parents to send her there. In time, Baby narrated all of this to me and I presumed that Baby was being groomed and finished for a successful marriage with an NRI Sardar just like her cousins. And, indeed, this was part of the story. Well after I left the field, Baby was married into a family in the USA.

Anthropological tracts often seem to be timeless. But a great deal of anthropological knowledge is acquired through seemingly unrelated events and acts that are not necessarily part of the anthropological present. We sometimes witness consequences of a past that produce a trace in the present. In deciphering these traces, we perceive a configuration of a future from which we are absent. This peculiar position of looking backward and forward enables anthropologists to comment on social relations not only as they appear in the present but also on what possibly produced them and how they might unfold. Baby had already finished school when I knew her and the discussions about schooling choices never happened before me—so I am speaking through traces in my present. Baby’s insistence on speaking English with me and her slightly obsessive attention to beauty care created for her the patterns of a world elsewhere, with its past and its possible future expectations (Jansen 1998: 103; Rapport 1998: 79–80). Her schooling was certainly seen as a form of self-improvement and transformation. At the same time, beauty practices (plucking eyebrows and cleansing skin) brought home the peculiar hybrid nature of her existence, simultaneously capturing past movements to the convent and envisaging future migration for marriage. Her aloofness towards her family perhaps expressed an identity that encapsulated movements away from her present location in the village. Her reserve was respected as proof of having
successfully acquired ways of a ‘foreign’ world towards which she was being oriented.

**Migration and Schooling**

The literature on migration and schooling typically examines the question of migrant parents and children from the perspective and location of the host culture (Ballard and Vellins 1985; Fordham and Ogbe 1987; Gibson 1988; Hall 2002). The literature is rich on the manner in which migrant parents express great ambition for their children. Studies on the performance of migrant children in schools substantiate this: Asian migrant communities perform relatively well in schools in the UK and the US (Ballard and Vellins 1985; Gibson and Bhachu 1986; Gibson 1988). The Indian diaspora is internally differentiated between unskilled workers and educated professional middle class migrants, yet high achievement and good school performance remain similar across class (US Bureau of the Census 1983; US Commission on Civil Rights 1980, cited in Gibson 1988).

Rarely does this literature address how migration as a process might sway choices within the country of *emigration*. Some work has examined the emigration-immigration locales simultaneously (Mitchell 1969; Watson 1977). The networks that migrants maintain in the city receive attention but how migration affects choices within the sending locales is not addressed. Analyses of push and pull factors that govern migratory movements pay attention to the stream of migration rather than to individual choice or family strategy. As Bottomley comments, however, ‘international migration creates international people ... and the continuing interaction between homelands and countries of emigration’ (Bottomley 1992: 4). This continuing interaction shapes sending and receiving cultures alike in terms of tastes, household economics, networks and marriage patterns. Different classes of migrants adapt to host cultures in distinctive ways. Middle class professional migrants with greater social and cultural capital reconfigure their Indian versus migrant identities from positions of power. This may not be the case for migrant groups that have strong peasant worldviews. Nevertheless, values of both cultures are assimilated or accommodated into a social hybrid that has a visible and articulate presence in the host country’s cultural landscape (Baumann 1992; Bottomley 1992; Willis et al. 1990). How these influences travel back ‘home’ is the question being posed here.

Nowadays, migration is more often being seen from the perspective of more than one site since ‘... an increasing number of migrants experience successive movements to second, third, fourth countries of settlement ...’ (Amit-Talal 1998: 45; Bhachu 1996). Understanding the multi-sited experience of migration enables us to re-examine migration from the perspective of the sending culture as one of the ‘sites’ within which migration and choice can be addressed. And multiple sites and the global-local interactions of migration have a particular resonance for schooling choices in the sending societies. Rural Panjab has a long history of migration to Canada, Africa, the UK and the US and more recently to the Middle East, and migration is experienced as multi-sited, or at the very least, doubly-located. In districts such as Jullundur, migration is part of every family’s biography and is incorporated into the lifecycle of the domestic group. In the village context migration is not simply a single event. Migration is an event-in-process that is experienced both in the place of emigration and of immigration and might be viewed as a before and after event, or as a process of becoming migrant and being migrant.

The sense of movement intrinsic to migration is apparent in social lives. The incorporation of everyday objects like ‘western’ kitchen equipment into the home conveys a sense of spatial and temporal orientation to a world elsewhere (Auge 1995; Bottomley 1992; Jansen 1998). French chiffon chumris worn by women in landowning households, new bathrooms constructed along the western model within rural homes, the constant stream of visiting uncles and aunts who periodically return to their villages and address the children as ‘lil’ or ‘ducks’, or the cousins who are conversant with the lingo of American city streets, all stand testimony to constant movement. One of Baby’s aunts continued to use a sicle to cut spinach and green vegetables in her English kitchen—evoking her sense of transnational, hybrid identity through everyday practice. And an older woman who returned from Southall after her husband’s death resettled in the village with two kitchens—one on the Panjabi ‘village model’ with an open hearth and floor seating, and the other equipped with all the mod-cons of a ‘western’ kitchen in which she received important visitors.

From the perspective of rural Panjabi families, migration is a very real possibility envisaged not as a distant dream but an event that is actively sought, talked about and planned for—an event-in-process. Property, and the pressure to keep it intact, is reason enough to migrate.
Property provides more than economic security, for it is a key resource in the creation of cultural capital. For landowners, undivided ancestral property is the cornerstone of a family's survival and of its social belonging to the community of Sardars. Keeping property intact has its own logic and its own harsh imperatives. Wholeness requires sending away some of the entitled members. To reproduce the group and family in the future, movement away is a fundamental strategy. But who will migrate? Entire families rarely do so (Chopra 1995; Friedl 1976). Individual members, usually single young men, are charged with the responsibility to migrate. Studies note the higher number of men than women who migrate (Brettell 1986; Brettell and Hollifield 2000; Hammar et al. 1997). Official statistics—such as the US Census and Department of Justice statistics—record the country of origin, the gender, age and educational profile of incoming migrants (cited in Gibson 1988). But the kinship position (or birth order) of incoming migrants is not reflected in demographic profiles. Oral narratives of household histories from the village, however, position younger or middle sons as the most likely choice for internal and international migration, as well as for a whole series of risks undertaken for the sake of the family—although I have no statistics to support the claim. For example, younger sons are the ones sent to work outside the village economy and make their way in the world. Male domestic workers in urban households are often younger sons who are sent away (see also Strathern 1992).

In rural Panjab, the reason for choosing younger sons is twofold. Ancestral land is supposed to be divided equally among all of a man's children (including daughters, who are entitled to claim a share under joint property laws), but the pressure to keep a landholding intact is quite intense. The rising costs of agricultural production and the inability of holdings to remain viable intensify the urgency of finding additional and alternative means to generate a cash flow and sustain the family. Daughters are the first coparceners encouraged to forgo their claims to ancestral property. Sons do not follow suit in quite the same way, but the realities of unsustainable holdings and the consequent inability of the family to retain their sardari lifestyle from a restricted production base are well known and highly visible. Sons and daughters alike are privy to discussions about the family's future reproduction and the anxieties of adults. Younger children learn that the place of the elder brother is to bear the burden of carrying on the family tradition and their own role is to enable him to do so.

Migration, as a potential and possible means to sustain sardari, falls squarely on younger sons.

Going away is an uncertain process that single young migrant men negotiate in the course of reaching their destinations. Many try to overcome border restrictions by migrating illegally or with the help of 'agents' who are a cross between labour contractors and travel agents, and who are not always reliable. Stories circulate of young men who were duped by fly-by-night agents who abscond with all the payments made by trustful migrants, or of young men who managed to get out (nikol goya) in the boots of cars or non-pressureurised luggage holds of airplanes. The predicament of precarious employment in the informal economics of global cities in the West has been commented on, especially for unskilled workers (Sassen 1988; 1991). Labour mobility associated with the economic restructuring of modern global economies is '... conducted without an institutional safety net ... [and] reduced corporate and state responsibilities toward labour ...' (Amit-Talai 1998: 52). The restrictions and uncertainties associated with migration are well known within the village. And, in the face of such insecurity, relatives who can sponsor a young man are the preferred option. Families actively cultivate foreign relatives who can smooth the trail: the closer the relative, the greater the claim that can be exerted and the assurance that the obligation will be met.

From this standpoint, families begin thinking about producing a relative who can enable the migration of younger sons. Baby was clearly the chosen one. Baby's father's sister Sardarni-ji had been expected to help her own brother, especially by looking out for his children—she was Baby's sponsor at St. Bede's, for instance. In like manner, Baby was seen as the person who would and could look out for her own brother. By becoming his sponsor, she would discharge her responsibility towards her family. Her education was an investment in Goga's future as much as in her own. Goga needed 'just enough' education to enable him to migrate and make his way. Sonu needed even less formal schooling. Anything more than he actually received would have been considered wasteful of family resources and therefore 'too much'. In a sense, Baby was a security blanket for her brother, and her schooling was an essential resource in the reproduction of the family, a means to keep the ancestral property intact. Women and ancestral property alike are generally seen as symbolic resources for maintaining family honour. It is not often recognised, however, that women and ancestral property reinforce each other in jointly reproducing it. This mutuality is loaded with expectation and forethought.
Is 'life as a plan' exclusively a mark of Western modernity, as outlined by Giddens and Beck-Gernsheim? Is it possible to see contours of the plan in non-Western societies? What forms might such a 'planning project' take? Through the ethnographic discussion in this chapter, I have attempted to show that forethought and planning are indeed part of survival and is reproductive strategies of rural households in Panjab. A family with a plan is considered best able to withstand the vagaries of the world outside and is valorised for having the capacity to maintain sandāri status and lifestyle. Forethought and planning are marks of the proper Sardar, who must be able to deploy his family resources to the best advantage and not be buffeted by the fickle inconsistencies of life. Foresight is valued as a form of knowledge and constitutes the possibility of reproducing sandāri.

Constructing choices within the 'life-as-a-plan' concept, we need to distinguish between rational choice models and strategies for family reproduction. Rational models draw causal links between choices. By contrast, the family plan as it appears in household reproductive strategies does not present itself in an overt or visible way. Strategies are part of a cultural context, a habitus peopled by actors whose social reasoning often flies in the face of 'rational' choice. Apart from being opportune, choices are underwritten by notions of cultural correctness. Decisions about how a family should proceed with its plan may be the primary responsibility of one person—the male household head (whose knowledge and decision-making power have a socially acknowledged value). At various moments, however, the plan and the decisions are opened out to others (Paramjit's sister for example). Moreover, plans do not necessarily remain static: the same sense of movement that marks social life also configures changes in the plan. A choice that seemed rationally constituted in the eyes of one person at one point in time may be modified, even overturned, by what others think and do subsequently.

Individual actors have their own versions of what the plan is. The links between one act and another are differently drawn, depending on the standpoint of individual actors. From her family's point of view, Baby's schooling was to benefit her brother. In her eyes, being sent away produced a different world altogether. Her parents were clearly unaware that she and her school friends sometimes escaped the confines of the convent and hitched rides on mo-bikes to go for a weekend to Patiala. Her family approved of her beauty regime as a habit that conformed to a global worldview of beauty care. In their reading, her convent-inculcated habits meshed her into a given future and would make her a good bride. But for her, the use of raw milk was a simulation of the branded cleansing milk that she had used through her years in school, a world and a liberty she evoked through her daily practice to distance herself from the women who surrounded her in her village. Individual actors may also disrupt their family's plan. For instance, Sonu, the son who was meant to stay behind, tried to migrate illegally, but was unsuccessful. Biji later told me that he did not have the nerve. His cousin (a younger son as it happens) was part of the illegally migrating pair, and managed to make it from Germany to Mexico and onward in the boot of a car. Sonu's take on his own future interrupted the family plan—although he failed to make the break towards migrating. Thus, life as a plan shifts and changes by the choices, acts and agencies of those who are part of it and may themselves disrupt it.

On the face of it, Paramjit's family plan might be viewed as an aberration. The schooling choice that made their daughter more privileged than their son is clearly not typical of patterns in which schooling brings particular worldviews to the surface and enable ethnographers to see connections that are otherwise veiled. Nevertheless, this family's schooling strategies were not a complete oddity, for Baby's schooling fits the larger gender pattern in a particularly individualistic way. Her schooling is harnessed for the sake of her brother and is not seen as something that is solely 'for' her. In this sense, her schooling is still underwritten by socially constituted gender divisions in which girls are not thought of as repositories of value unless they can be geared toward particular felt needs of others. In some senses, Baby's life also fits Dasgupta's contention that not all girls in a family are undervalued. Demographically speaking, it is not the firstborn daughter but the later ones who face the greatest challenges to provisioning and survival in Panjab (Dasgupta 1987).

Telling a life story of any single individual or family in its completeness would require a different time span to be addressed and certainly a greater attention to 'voice'. Nevertheless, drawing out one single strand—schooling choice—from a family's biography and the matrix of family strategies of reproduction does allow us to see how this thread is braided with seemingly unrelated social patterns and choices. It enables a view of how a single act of choice becomes the mirror for other choices that might not be visible in the same way—in this case the connection between Baby's schooling and the larger story of migration.

Moments of uncertainty produce an imperative for strategising that always exists but remains unnoticed. Movement as an intrinsic part of
my fieldwork. The work was funded by a Junior Research Fellowship, under the Centre of Advanced Studies, University of Delhi.

2. The name of the village has been deliberately obscured. I use pseudonyms throughout.

3. Villagers generally treated me as a family member of my host’s household. However, within the home I was liminal—a stranger, and a woman on her own. Codes of gendered interactions were therefore extremely elaborate.

4. In the well-established pattern of migrant communities who settle in urban enclaves and create distinctive cultural landscapes within cities, Punjabi migrants to the UK have made Southall a virtual ‘little Punjab’.

5. Modern anthropologists imagine themselves as travellers and storytellers of a kind, and understand anthropological narratives as derived from movement (Clifford 1992). Approaches that conceive of narrative itself as a form of movement, recognising movement as intrinsic to social life (Chambers 1994; Robertson et al. 1994), also shape anthropological writing (Geertz 1988).

6. Two Jat families from another district had settled in the village and worked as labourers. I was told how children would query their mothers ‘eh jat hidden dat? Eh tali inari karnia? (What kind of Jat is this? He’s a wage labourer).

7. Despite the gains of agricultural prosperity, rural Punjabis have very articulate notions of wasteful expenditure and they embrace frugality as a virtue. Money is usually kept in the innermost pockets of undergarments and dispensed with care. The first thing to be queried about any new acquisition is the cost, more exclaimed over and commented on than anything else. Cash is not readily disbursed and heated arguments ensue over the price of everything from a bucket to a bus ticket.

8. Knowledge of a family’s labour power rests with the household head. At harvests, for example, decisions about deploying labour are taken by the household head. Harvests are a time when the whole village labours in the fields and the planning, knowledge and decisions of the head of a family are judged and evaluated by everyone. The assumption that this is ‘male’ knowledge is clear. In the numerous instances of women-headed households in the village, however, women (like sons) are thought able to assume this knowledge, though they may choose to surrender this ability to a male collateral.

9. This period coincided with the start of my fieldwork. The two years I spent in the field were not marked by incidents of militant violence in the village (which did occur later), but the increase in political aggression and the discourse of grievance and separatism was certainly developing during that time. Militancy meant that I could not go back to attend the panchayat elections that followed closely on "Operation Bluestar" in 1984 and the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. My subsequent visits in the peace that followed were brief. This certainly has a bearing on the brevity of the life stories that I can present.

Notes

1. I did the fieldwork as part of my PhD in 1982–84 and then in a shorter spell in 1989. I am grateful to everyone in the village who looked after me throughout the period of


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