

Status, Caste, and Market in a Changing Indian Village

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When social and economic conditions change dramatically, status hierarchies in place for hundreds of years can crumble as marketization destabilizes once rigid boundaries. This study examines such changes in symbolic power through an ethnographic study of a village in North India. Marketization and accompanying privatization do not create an independent sphere where only money matters, but due to a mix of new socioeconomic motives, they produce new social obligations, contests, and solidarities. These findings call into question the emphasis in consumer research on top-down class emulation as an essential characteristic of status hierarchies. This study offers insights into sharing as a means of enacting and reshaping symbolic power within a status hierarchy. A new order based on markets and consumption is disrupting the old order based on caste. As the old moral order dissolves, so do the old status hierarchies, obligations, dispositions, and norms of sharing that held the village together for centuries. In the microcosm of these gains and losses, we may see something of the broader social and economic changes taking place throughout India and other industrializing countries.

Keywords: status, symbolic power, marketization, sharing, caste

In recent years, several scholars have closely examined the spread of markets and consumer culture in India (e.g., Askegaard and Eckhardt 2012; Dorné, Sharma, and Sethi 2014; Eckhardt and Mahi 2012; Mathur 2014; Mazzarella 2003; Nakassis 2012; Pandey 2014; Srivastava 2014; Varman and Belk 2008, 2009, 2012). Yet the impact of markets on social hierarchies in India remains

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underexamined. We study marketization or the spread of market forces (McAlexander et al. 2014) and related privatization and individualization in a village in North India in order to answer the underexamined question of how actors holding different status positions respond to disruption in an orthodox social order.

Although markets have existed in India for thousands of years, for a considerable part of this period market access and roles were defined by status positions within caste orders (Fuller 1989; Ray 2011; Roy 2012). These positions are now undergoing a dramatic change with the spread of marketization created by capitalist relations of production. This helps us to comprehend transitions in a status hierarchy through the redistribution of symbolic capital or honor and prestige (Bourdieu 1990). It helps us understand new social obligations, contests, and solidarities that are created because of marketization and related processes.

Karl Polanyi's (1944) *The Great Transformation* is one of the most influential works on the spread of markets and has shaped several discussions of **the role of marketization in the contemporary world** (e.g., Nisbet 1953; Varman and Costa 2008, 2009). Polanyi criticizes the role

of self-regulating markets, primacy of economic over social motives, and condemns their 19th-century imposition through active state interventions. He interprets the separation of economic and noneconomic aspects of the social world as artificial, unsustainable, and destructive. We draw on Polanyi's call for a substantive analysis and attend to marketization, subordination, symbolic violence, and altered socioeconomic ties.

Our understanding of marketization helps us to offer important insights into status hierarchies not yet studied in consumer research. Marketization and related processes of privatization and individualization are creating new norms of behavior in the village and changing the village hierarchy and socioeconomic behaviors in several ways. These are altering socioeconomic ties that were outcomes of a caste-based moral order and relied on hierarchical norms of gift-giving and sharing. We found reconfigured norms of sharing and relationships within the changing symbolic power in the setting. This helps to understand moral order, gift-giving, and sharing as ambivalent social structures and processes that are steeped in symbolic violence, which get cast in high relief under the influence of a new heterodox order that emerged with markets.

Past studies do not sufficiently explain modifications in Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus and how subordinates can countervail the symbolic violence of the elite. As a result, higher status groups are persistently seen to create distinctions from lower groups (cf. Üstüner and Holt 2010; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). This reading allows the elite's symbolic power and their ability to unleash symbolic violence to remain intact, and it fails to capture the complete dynamics of economic and social change. While we do find that the elite cultivate new tastes based on their habitus in order to distance themselves in a social space, we find several contradictory features that call for revising this popular interpretation of social hierarchies. We also found that younger high caste members adapted to new ways of life in a market economy, and these once-dominant actors are forced to coexist in the same social space with lower groups with a consequent alteration of their symbolic power. Moreover, we find that *younger elites* come to imitate the popular practices of *lower* groups, which results in a reduction, if not an inversion, of social distance and the symbolic power previously associated with these distinctions. These insights help us to develop a more comprehensive reading of marketization and the changing political economy of culture.

MARKETIZATION, SYMBOLIC POWER, AND CASTE

Marketization involves the spread of market forces to domains that were otherwise outside their fold

(McAlexander et al. 2014). It often results in privatization and a rise in individualism. Consumer researchers have identified several areas such as education (Varman, Saha, and Skålén 2011), medicine (Thompson 2004), and religion (McAlexander et al. 2014; Srivastava 2011), to name a few, that have been deeply penetrated by markets in recent years. These studies have broadly examined the questions of identity construction, consequences of marketization, and resistance to or devalorization of non-market-based processes. Many of these researchers have adopted a critical perspective in which markets are viewed as harmful institutions that should be restricted to ensure consumer welfare (Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2012; Klein 1999; Varman and Vikas 2007). Others have challenged this interpretation of markets as harmful institutions and have argued in support of market-based exchanges (Arnould 2007; Marcoux 2009). Despite such insights, the impact of marketization on social hierarchies and new status contests created in its wake has not been understood.

In his seminal work on the rise of markets, Polanyi (1944) critically examines the question of marketization with the spread of capitalism. In a scathing criticism of market economy, resulting privatization, and attempts to establish self-regulating markets through commodification of land, labor, and money, he argues that the project is unnatural and unsustainable. At the outset, Polanyi (1944) differentiates between "market society" and "market in society." Market in society, as it prevailed in different parts of the world until the 19th century, implies that markets reflect the prevailing social order and are embedded in it, whereas market society implies that the unnatural laws of markets imposed from outside through state interventions become fundamental and govern the social order (Polanyi 1968a).

Polanyi (1944) saw only a limited role of markets before the 19th century. Accordingly, long-distance trade or external markets were kept separate from local markets that only had a restricted presence in societies dominated by household economics. Polanyi (1968b) further carefully separates gift trade and administered trade from the more recent idea of market trade based on the logic of supply and demand. Polanyi (1968b, 170) particularly interpreted higgling-haggling or "exchange at bargained rates" as harmful for social solidarities. He further observed that imposition of self-regulating markets created a spontaneous double, or counter, movement to restrict their spread through state and social interventions (Polanyi 1944). Moreover, he challenges the "formalist" or rational and universal notions of market society and contends that a substantivist view that attends to specific contexts and embedded economic motives must be developed.

Polanyi's biggest contribution to our understanding of markets is his emphasis on how economic and social motivations become intertwined and produce particular outcomes. Drawing on this idea, Parry (1989) offers a brilliant analysis of how Gregory's (1982) moral

distinction between gifts and commodities on the basis of noncommercial/commercial separation is limiting. Parry (1989, 66) observes “the poison of the gift” and prevalence of the belief that alms given to the big Benaras pilgrimage priests cannot be used for productive economic investments and gets wasted by them in nonproductive activities. On the contrary, Parry (1989, 81) shows that acquisition of commercial wealth, despite its moral dilemmas, is a legitimate and laudable objective in the setting as long as it can be “justified by the generosity with which it can then be disbursed.” Thus, as Polanyi has suggested, Parry’s (1989) substantive analysis shows the intertwined nature of economic and social, and how these conflicting motives come together to produce social and moral outcomes.

These contributions do not imply that Polanyi’s work has not been questioned for certain limitations. Some scholars criticize Polanyi (1944) for failing to understand the precolonial spread of markets, money, and of profit motive in non-European societies (Braudel 1979). Moreover, his passion for nonmarket ways led him to, as Gerlach (1997, 43) observes, a “Rousseauistic vision of harmonious, integrated primitive societies.” He has also been criticized for his failure to understand how contemporary gain-centric markets were never disembedded from social relations (Braudel 1979; Heejibu and McCloskey 1999; McCloskey 1997). It can be argued in his defense that Polanyi’s (1944) passionate rejection of the primacy of markets stemmed from his deep concerns about the displacements caused by capitalism to the 19th-century social world.

A similar rejection of markets and yearning for community or social ties is central to several classical writings in sociology (see Nisbet 1966). This can partly be traced to Tönnies (1887, 18), who in a classic critique of capitalism introduced the concepts of *gemeinschaft*, or community, and *gesellschaft*, or society. According to Tönnies (1887, 95), *gemeinschaft* founded on *wesenwille* or natural will, fosters development of human beings in harmony with their habitats, with close identification with other human beings. On the other hand, Tönnies (1887, 95) argues, *gesellschaft* is based on *kurwille*, or rational will, that estranges one human being from the other, with the external world as an object to be acted upon and controlled. This celebration of community by Tönnies, Polanyi, and others became particularly influential in shaping conservative writings in which social ties become a bulwark against the tyranny of the state or markets (e.g., Nisbet 1953).

Instead of setting up a market versus community dichotomy, we wish to examine how economic and noneconomic motives interact under marketization to produce social outcomes. More specifically, we examine a caste-based social order working on the principle of centrality that exploits the majority of its population with gains accruing to a few occupying the center. This helps to attend to symbolic power and changes in entrenched social hierarchies.

Symbolic Power

In developing a critical understanding of the intertwined nature of economic and noneconomic motives, Bourdieu (1979) is particularly helpful. Bourdieu (1979, 2005) interprets the social as a field constituted by relations of force. He observes that the force attached to an actor in a field depends on his or her volume and structure of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

Recent writings in consumer research offer a sophisticated understanding of status and symbolic power, largely based on Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of symbolic capital. For Bourdieu the power stemming from symbolic capital is based on its ability to legitimize existing economic and political relations, and to create unequal social relations. In consumer research, Holt (1998) used Bourdieu’s framework in his analysis of American consumption and offered insights into different dimensions of taste among low and high cultural capital groups. Similarly, Allen (2002) in examining the idea of consumers’ choices emphasized the roles of social class-based habitus and ongoing practices. And several consumer researchers have focused their attention on in-group social hierarchies (e.g., Arsel and Bean 2013; Arsel and Thompson 2011; Kates 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). In the last few years, several authors have closely examined status and stratification in less industrialized countries (LICs). For example, Üstüner and Holt (2007) found that among poor women in a Turkish squatter community, three patterns existed with regard to the dominant consumption ideology: shutting out the dominant ideology, pursuing this dominant consumption pattern, or giving up on both practices and suffering a shattered identity project. In offering a theory of status consumption in LICs, Üstüner and Holt (2010) show that low cultural capital consumers are situated within an indigenized field and are influenced by local elites in consumption choices that determine status in Turkey. For their part, high cultural capital consumers copy Western consumers and their mythical lifestyles to assert their superiority over subordinate groups. In the same cultural context, Üstüner and Thompson (2012) observe that market encounters in stratified settings are marked by status struggles and by contested forms of symbolic capital. They further report acceptance of the symbolic power of the elite as reinforced by attempts of subordinate groups to reconfigure their habitus to match the dominant groups.

The idea of power is central to Bourdieu’s analysis, and he reads it as domination by an actor in a field. Domination is an outcome of combinations of the various forms of capital that people possess that help them to gain an exalted position within a field. Thus, in a situation of marketization, when market relations transform an existing socioeconomic field, the ability of the person to draw on the available capital and to generate new capital from external sources is an important element in the process of



transformation. This makes marketization a process of social change that creates conflicts between old and new interests or alignments as it transforms relations of force in a field. In Bourdieu's reading this conflict often manifests itself in a contest between actors holding on to the older habitus that valorizes tradition and others who are willing to adapt and adopt the entrepreneurial logic of markets (Swedberg 2010). Bourdieu (2005, 86) interprets habitus as socialized subjectivity or a screen through which actors interpret and create "intentional action without intention." Accordingly, those in a field with a particular habitus that resulted from traditional socialization have to deal with newer social forces that challenge it. This results in a detraditionalization of earlier social institutions (McAlexander et al. 2014) and can create gaps between habitus and the structure of the economy (Bourdieu 1979). Accordingly, markets require a different social rhythm that those with traditional habitus have to adapt to because it leads to a redundancy of older ways of life and authority. In this analysis, Bourdieu (1979) is close to Polanyi's (1944) reading of the rise of markets that results in the older ways of life in which social and economic concerns were deeply intertwined to be forcefully separated.

Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) key theoretical concern was to understand how arbitrary choices and relations in a social space, or a field, get transformed into legitimate relations that help to create widely recognized distinctions and status hierarchies. In particular, Bourdieu offers insights into disguised forms of domination in a field. In this conception, the ideas of symbolic capital and symbolic power are of great importance. Bourdieu (1990, 118) interprets symbolic capital as "capital of honor and prestige which produces a clientele as much as it is produced by it." He believes that exercise of power often requires its legitimation, and that comes with prestige or status. Bourdieu does not interpret symbolic capital and power as post hoc outcomes. Instead, he locates symbolic power in habitus and fields of practices when he points to the "double historicity" of dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 139). Accordingly, ideas of symbolic capital emerge out of habitus that is a product of initial socialization into social structures, which, in turn, are results of the historical work of succeeding generations.

Bourdieu delves into political functions of dominant symbolic systems and questions their taken for granted character as worldviews of a society. Accordingly, status hierarchies are based on social domination but often go unrecognized as a form of power under the veneer of a status culture that legitimizes domination by presenting it under the guise of disinterestedness. Such a system of power fulfills a political function by creating symbolic violence in which the subordinates accept as legitimate their own condition of domination (Bourdieu 1977).

In his analysis of symbolic power, Bourdieu (1990, 281-82) attaches great significance to the role of the threshold in a society, and he illustrates that thresholds are where

social battles take place. Accordingly, practices at a threshold can be a threat to an established order and entrenched groups make efforts to ward off these dangers. This makes it necessary to pay close attention to such places and to the discourses and practices that take place within them. Bourdieu (1990, 228) further suggests that consumption in such places should be closely attended to because "consumption visibly mimes this paradoxical inversion."

In existing consumer research, private and public places have been defined according to ownership of the place. However, many of the ordinary places in our daily lives do not fall neatly into the categories of private or public places and are ambivalently situated. We interpret the threshold place as a hybrid and ambiguous place. Here the hybridity and ambiguity of the place stem from contradictions between ownership, consumption, and in-betweenness.

Our understanding of thresholds to a considerable extent is based on the conceptualization of Bourdieu (1977, 130), who describes it as "a sort of sacred boundary between two spaces, where the antagonistic principles confront each other and the world is reversed." Accordingly, the threshold can take spatial, temporal, or seasonal forms. For example, the physical space at the entrance of a house is a threshold place between inside and outside, male and female, and private and public places. Similarly, the season of spring is a threshold because it "is an interminable transition, constantly suspended and threatened, between the wet and the dry, ... or, better, a struggle between two principles with unceasing reversals and changes in fortunes" (Bourdieu 1977, 131). In Bourdieu's understanding, ambiguity is an essential feature of a threshold and is also marked by the order of things being turned upside down. Thus Bourdieu has conceptualized the threshold physically and temporally as being pregnant with internal tension. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of the threshold is similar to the liminal of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1974). However, Bourdieu's (1977) threshold is more commonplace and is not located in some special, spectacular, or magical space. It is located in the daily or ordinary space of a common person.

Bourdieu contends that meanings of movements across thresholds are often contested. For example, women and men give opposite importance to the meaning attached to movements across threshold in Kabyle society (Bourdieu 1990). A man is ordinarily expected to be seen outside and the socially acceptable movement is his coming out of a house, whereas for a woman, who is expected to be inside, her outward movement is extraordinary and related to acts of expulsion. Moreover, he suggests that the meaning of a threshold is intersubjectively determined. This aspect, in particular, draws our attention to the role of our participants in not only inheriting aspects of the threshold that have been naturalized to them as objective facts through symbolic violence, but also to their subjective actions in the domain of consumption that create new thresholds or transform the old ones.



In sum, a Bourdieusian perspective helps to understand social orders as contested fields that are constituted by power plays, domination, and distinctions. Despite offering a rich social analysis of forces that constitute a field, this perspective does not delve into how contests between the dominant and dominated unfold under conditions of marketization. More specifically, how symbolic powers of different groups undergo transitions due to marketization is underexamined. In this ethnography, the focus of our study is on exchanges and consumption in threshold places and their influence on transitions in symbolic power and status positions of different caste groups. We next turn to the issue of caste.

The Caste System in India

Caste, which means pure or chaste, is one of the most enduring features of Indian society, and Dirks (2002, 3) observes that it “defines the core of Indian tradition.” This system of stratification originated thousands of years ago and continues to imprint social and economic relations in the country despite its official prohibition as a basis for discrimination (Teltumbde 2010).

The central idea of the caste system is a hierarchy that works against the two cardinal principles of equality and liberty (Dumont 1970). The caste system discriminates between groups of people on the basis of the ritualistic norms of purity and pollution, high versus low status, and rules of commensality (Dumont 1970). While Dumont’s focus on the caste order as a unified system had shortcomings (cf. Fuller 1989), an enormous amount of literature available in the social sciences on caste shows that it propagates inequality or social stratification through symbolic power. According to Dumont (1970), *Brahmins* (priests) are considered at the top, followed by *Kshatriyas* (soldiers) and *Vaishyas* (traders), who are all considered *Dwijia*, or twice born. These upper castes are followed by *Shudras*, or low castes, and at the bottom of the hierarchy are *Dalits*, or outcastes, who were untouchables. Many *Dalits* do not consider themselves to be Hindus and have actively resisted attempts to incorporate them into the Hindu caste hierarchy (Ilaiah 1996).

Social stratification of caste can be explained through the vertical axis of hierarchy and horizontal axis of difference, repulsion, and segmentation (Bouglé 1991). Caste is a system of distinctions that allows intergenerational transfer of symbolic power and corresponding economic, cultural, and social capital. Béteille (1991, 1996) draws attention to these differences in terms of fairness of skin, house, dresses, food, education, and rituals to emphasize the various forms of capital possessed by the higher castes. Therefore, the symbolic power of the caste system in India has been its ability not only to classify or stratify, but to achieve this in practice by making itself natural and taken for granted or through symbolic violence.

Jajmani was an important characteristic of the caste system that underpinned the working of the socioeconomic system in many parts of North India (Wiser 1988). The term *Jajman*, or patron, was initially used in a limited sense for the relationship between a *Brahmin* and his clients and included fees that *Brahmins* charged for the performance of any solemn or religious ceremony (Dumont 1970; Mayer 1993). Unlike Dumont (1970), Fuller (1989) does not see caste as antithetical to modern property rights, and interprets *Jajmani* as an amorphous order that defined division of labor in varied forms across the country. Because agriculture was the most important economic activity in the past, the landowning upper castes were at the epicenter of the *Jajmani* order. In this system, low caste workers were expected to serve their high caste patrons according to the caste-based division of labor. The rights and remuneration of workers were defined according to unwritten norms that were primarily determined by the upper caste. The *Jajmani* order functioned as a moral economy in which “the mechanism of exchange has so little detached itself from normative contexts that a clear separation between economic and noneconomic values is hardly possible” (Habermas 1987, 163; see also Sayer 2004; Scott 1976; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012). Although many scholars have interpreted earlier moral economies as humane orders and have criticized markets for their commodifying and dehumanizing influences (e.g., Booth 1994; Etzioni 1988; Polanyi 1944), the normative framework that impelled the *Jajmani* system is considered oppressive and exploitative by the lower castes (Dirks 2002; Omvedt 1995).

The system’s fixity does not mean that the symbolic power encoded in the caste system did not witness struggles, contests, and changes (Fuller 1989). The caste system had its own dynamics in which groups could change their positions over a period of time, and the occupational categorization was not completely ossified. Gupta (1991) has further argued that there were several vertical hierarchies in the caste system and some of the lower and outcastes also proclaimed exalted origins (see also Béteille 1991).

Srinivas (1991) further adds that the country witnessed several caste-based movements, including a strong anti-caste struggle under the leadership of Bhimrao Ambedkar, to challenge the authority of the upper castes (see also Jaffrelot 2003; Omvedt 1995). This struggle has meant that some of the earlier status positions cannot be taken for granted, and lower castes are more assertive and free to resist the upper castes in many parts of the country. Furthermore, over a period of time some old castes have disappeared, merged with each other, and new ones have been formed (Teltumbde 2010).

Miller (1986) suggests a more congenial view of the *Jajmani* system in which the social embeddedness of exchange relations between castes was seen as nonalienating. Furthermore, he contends that rather than opposing and threatening the *Jajmani* system, the market economy both

within and outside the village allows the balance of excess and insufficient production of secular exchange goods that help to reinforce the *Jajmani* system. Thus, to Miller, the market poses no threat to the traditional *Jajmani* system and even supports it. However, two points are worth noting. First, Miller was concerned with the external exchange or sale of goods (pottery) rather than labor. Second, his fieldwork was carried out in the early 1980s before the Indian market liberalizations of the early 1990s. Nevertheless he has subsequently made the same arguments, suggesting that *Jajmani* is “an ideal form of exchange, which expresses the moral and ideological aspirations of the participants” (Miller 2002, 241). As will be shown, not only does the contemporary labor and service market economy of India change things, the *Jajmani* system involved exploitative power dynamics.

In summary, caste-based stratification in India has existed for more than a thousand years. The *Jajmani* order underpinned the accumulation of symbolic capital within the caste system and created symbolic power that was intergenerationally stable and acted as a bond on the lower castes. The moral economy created by the *Jajmani* system is under increasing threat with the deepening of capitalism across the country and with increasing politicization of the lower castes. In more recent times, high castes’ symbolic power or legitimacy has come under increasing attack from the lower castes. As would be expected, people who are forced to forgo their privileged status try their best to retain their positions by hindering free exchanges and by monopolizing market goods. While caste struggles are extensively documented in social theory in India, the role of marketization and its impact on the symbolic power of different groups within this theorization are still minimally studied. In the context of this struggle between the dominant and the subordinate, it is this new political economy of culture that we particularly attend to in our ethnography in order to understand the changes in exchanges, consumption, status, and symbolic power in Chanarnapur.

ETHNOGRAPHY IN A NORTH INDIAN VILLAGE

This research is a study in the village of Chanarnapur (pseudonym) in North India. We conducted an ethnographic case study (Atkinson and Hammersley 1983; Spradley 1979). The first author conducted the fieldwork. For the sake of simplicity we have used “we” in this and the other sections of the article.

Chanarnapur is located in the North Indian or Indo-Gangetic plain in the state of Bihar. Bihar is one of the poorest states of India with the lowest per capita income in the country at Rs 7875 (\$131) in 2005–06 (Planning Commission 2008). The village is situated 2.5 kilometers to the west of Robertsganj (pseudonym). Robertsganj was

central to revenue generation in the region during the British rule in India (Bayly 1988; Yang 1998), and it continues to be an important market city in the region.

The village contains seven hamlets. People from the same caste or friendly castes live together in each hamlet. Several caste groups reside in the village. The total population of Chanarnapur is 3028; there are 406 houses in the village. The villagers speak Bhojpuri, and the village is well connected with an asphalt road. It has a school and a bank. Literacy in Chanarnapur is 67% among men and 48% among women. There is an increasing emphasis on sending children to school, and of the 219 students, 53% go to the state school and the rest go to private schools outside the village (refer to the village layout in figure 1).

Until recently, land ownership in the village was an important factor that decided the economic status of a household. Since agriculture is one of the main occupations and dependence on land is high, 79% of the landowners own less than one acre of land. The size of land holdings is highest among the high caste *Bhumihars* (averaging nearly 2.5 acres). About 23% of households are landless. The agricultural fields are divided into two types based on the location: *chaur* and *goeda*. The former are fields that are far away from the settlement and relatively low lying. Paddy, wheat, and other crops that are produced in dense quantities per acre are farmed in *chaur*. *Goeda* fields are near the settlements and used for crops such as vegetables that need day-to-day cultivation. In recent years, economic conditions have made agriculture unsustainable in this part of the country. Landowners prefer to rent their land and engage in alternative sources of income generation in the village or in cities (see Varman, Skälén, and Belk 2012).

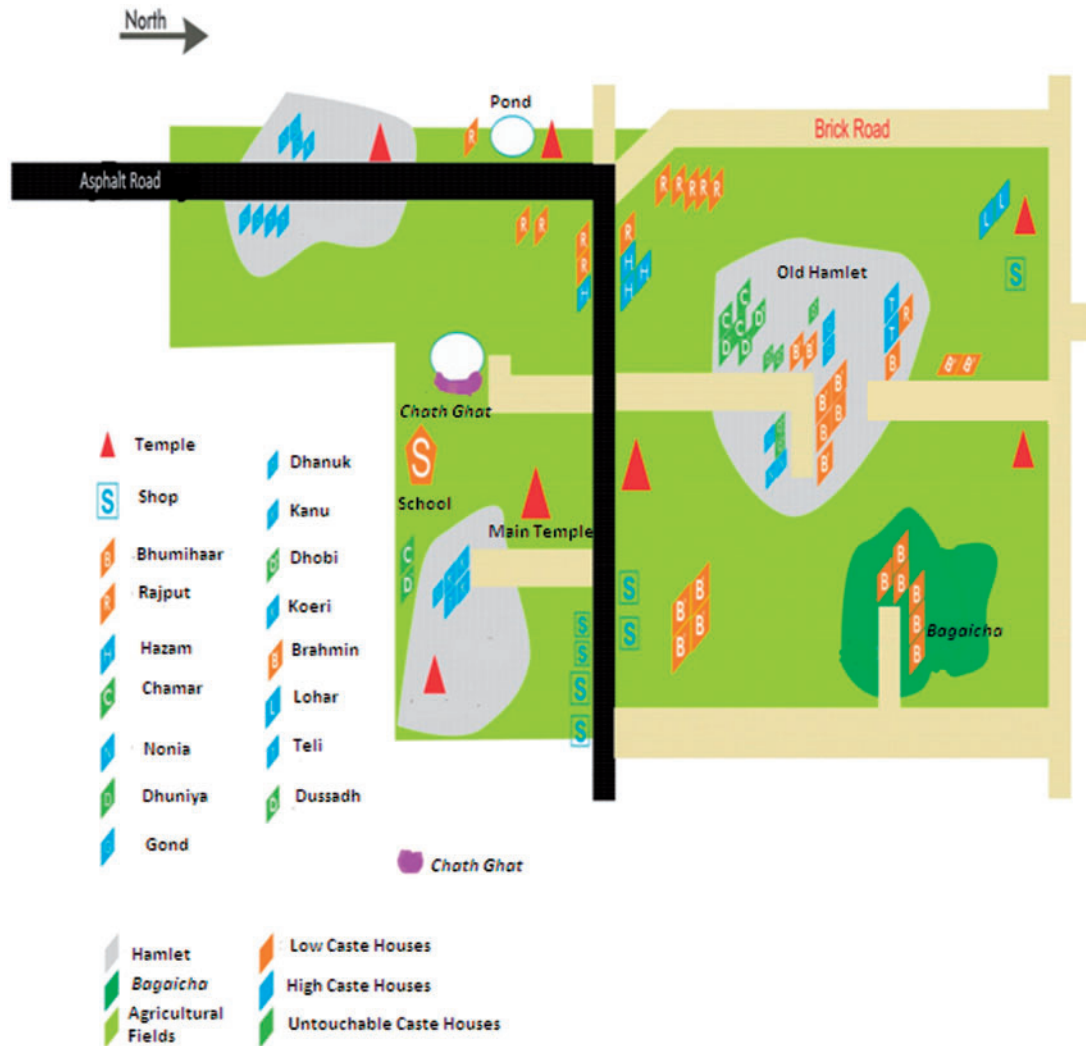
In Chanarnapur the Hindus can be divided into three categories of *Bar Jaat* (high caste), *Chot Jaat* (low caste), and *Achut* (untouchables). *Achuts* also include *Dhuniya*, who are Muslims. *Rajputs* are the largest caste group. The three high castes of *Bhumihar*, *Brahmin*, and *Rajput* together comprise 42% of the population of the village. In the remaining 58% are 14 lower castes. Muslims constitute 5% of the village. The Scheduled Caste is the lowest in the caste hierarchy, consisting of *Chamar*, *Dusaadh*, and *Dhobi*, and constitutes 12.5% of the village population. Caste is not a matter of researcher interpretation but an objective position that is preassigned based on heredity. However, within the broad categorization of castes, such as low or high, there can be specific local interpretations. For example, in this region, *Bhumihars* are considered higher than *Brahmins*, who in turn are higher than *Rajputs*. This is not a matter of external or self-designation but a locally determined objective position.

Methods

Chanarnapur is also the ancestral village of the first author. We maintained a separation between our research

FIGURE 1

LAYOUT OF CHANARMAPUR VILLAGE



interests and personal ties by keeping away from any engagement with personal issues of the villagers and refraining from interfering in village politics. In order to gain access, we participated in the village festivals. The first author also taught schoolchildren of the villagers without charging a fee. Since most of the villagers aspire to educate their children, they perceived his effort as a welcome offering to the entire village. This helped us to gain access at a deeper level.

The first author is a *Bhumihar* and belongs to an absentee landlord family. There was suspicion because his ancestral house was locked for more than a decade and nobody from the extended family came to live in the village after the death of the first author's father's uncle, who was the head of the joint family. When the first author started the

fieldwork, no one except members of his own kin recognized him as a village resident. He introduced himself as a grandson of his father's uncle. His local cook was his ethnographic guide and also introduced him to the villagers.

A naturalistic inquiry cannot be fully designed before entering the field. The emphasis is on a dynamic research design that is a reflexive process (Atkinson and Hammersley 1983). Following this design, we started without any assumptions, and the first step was to observe and record market and consumption phenomena in detail striving for thick description (Geertz 1993). We followed an iterative process and continued with our fieldwork until we achieved interpretive sufficiency and reached a point of redundancy, making further data collection unnecessary (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988).

During the initial phase of the research we used purposive sampling and selected participants on the basis of their caste. Various castes of the village represent distinct social groups, and hence we chose participants from all the castes. Later we realized that there were issues of articulation and access. We subsequently adopted a theoretical sampling technique to focus on stratified consumption practices and the question of status. To address variation, we selected our participants on the basis of caste, age, gender, and economic status. We conducted 35 interviews with the villagers and included every caste group in our sample. A concise description of participants is shown in Table 2.

We used multiple sources of data generated through participant observation (Atkinson and Hammersley 1983; Patton 2002), interviews (McCracken 1996), and photography (Belk et al. 1988). Some of the topics that we pursued were names and meanings of the important sites in Chanarnapur, ownership, exchanges, and consumption practices connected with these sites, and perceived changes in exchanges and consumption in the past decade. We also asked our participants to narrate local lore about the important sites and consumption practices. We asked them to narrate their interpretations of *Jajmani* relationships and how they have changed in the last few years. We also asked them to share their meanings of these changes. We observed consumption in different places and also participated in conversations with the villagers who congregated at religious sites. This helped participants to explain consumption rituals during marriages, betrothals, and festivals such as *Holi* and *Chath*. We visited different places, such as sports grounds, religious places, the burial ground, the school, and the small shops of Chanarnapur. We walked and cycled through the village and neighboring villages to observe whether similar changes were happening in the vicinity. More specifically, we examined consumption in the threshold places of *Duar*, *Chath Ghat*, and *Bagaicha*. A *Duar* is the place in front of a house, the *Chath Ghat* is the bank of the local pond, and the *Bagaicha* is an orchard (for descriptions of these places, refer to appendix A; hereafter we use house-front, pond-bank, and orchard for *Duar*, *Chath Ghat*, and *Bagaicha*, respectively). These are the key areas within the village.

Analysis of the data was done throughout the fieldwork (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to aid interpretive tracking and comparative analysis through a grounded reading of the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). We conducted a hermeneutical analysis by comparing interviews or observations in light of emerging theoretical concepts and underlying themes (Thompson and Troester 2002). We facilitated the iterative process of interpretation and comparison by using memos. Post field interpretation was done through formal coding. We used open, axial, and selective coding approaches. The open codes helped in the identifying concepts, whereas axial coding helped in the identification of

different subcategories, and selective coding helped in integration with existing theories. Rigor in the research was maintained through different processes of pursuing trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985), such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checks. We were in the field for one year. Regular interactions with our participants and observations during our visits to the neighboring villages helped us to understand transitions in the status hierarchy in Chanarnapur. We shared our observations with our colleagues for peer debriefing. We conducted member checks by sharing our interpretations with the participants and by inquiring about their adequacy.

MARKETIZATION, STATUS, AND TRANSITIONING POLITICAL ECONOMY

In this section, we provide a description of how marketization has come to alter the status of upper caste *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* in the village. We use the term *low caste* to include all the castes that are below *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins*, who were traditionally at the top of the caste hierarchy in this region. This is a context of poverty, and all consumption levels in this village are still low by Western standards. We delve into marketization and the lower castes' consumption of food, furniture, housing, religious objects, services, and other consumption aspects of everyday life. We confine much of our analysis to changes in consumption in threshold places of house-front, pond-bank, and orchard as a consequence of marketization and accompanying privatization, and their ramifications for the distribution of symbolic power in the village.

Marketization, Freedom, and New Dependencies

The *Jajmani* system was a guarantor of privileges for *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins*. This moral order involved low caste dependency on the high caste *Bhumihaars* through patron–client relationships. These ties created moral obligations for the lower castes, and domination was “disguised under the veil of enchanted relations” perpetuating a form of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1990, 126). Until a few decades ago, landlords and high castes controlled the economic and social lives of lower castes. Lower castes were dependent on landlords and were not allowed to work for others or to start their own entrepreneurial ventures. They had to get approvals from landlords before entering into economic transactions with others. The *Jajmani* system was so dominant that low castes had to either run away from the village or lose their lives if they violated this principle. Even the low caste artisans had to sell their produce through patron landlords, who acted as middlemen between producers and traders. Trading of goods was also scripted on the basis of caste affiliations as early market transactions were defined by *Jajmani* ties (e.g., *Telis* dealt

TABLE 1
CASTE AND CHANGING OCCUPATION STRUCTURE IN THE VILLAGE

Caste category	Castes	Traditional occupation	Present occupation
High	<i>Bhumihar</i>	<i>Zamindar</i> , or landlord, agriculture	Absentee landlords; migrated to cities where they work as doctors, engineers, professors, clerks, government workers
High	<i>Rajput</i>	Army men of <i>Zamindar</i> , agriculture	Agriculture, politics, government jobs
High	<i>Brahmin</i>	Priest of <i>Bhumihars</i> and low castes	Agriculture, work as security guards in cities; priests
Low	<i>Teli</i>	Oil seed collection and pressing	Agriculture on rent, retail shops in a nearby town, agents of insurance and financial products
Low	<i>Nonia</i>	Agriculture workers of <i>Bhumihars</i>	Agrarian workers, migrated to city as construction workers
Low	<i>Dhanuk</i>	Village merchants	Agriculture on rent and also works in the local brick kiln
Low	<i>Kanu</i>	Purchased and processed jute and flax	Agriculture on rent and also work as workers in the local brick kiln
Low	<i>Yadav</i>	Milk products	Milk products, Agriculture
Low	<i>Gond</i>	Parching of grains for clients	Parching of grains, agriculture on rent, government services
Low	<i>Koeri</i>	Vegetable farming	Agriculture on rent, retail shops, rice mills, interior decoration business
Low	<i>Hazam</i>	Hair cutting of clients	Hair cutting by opening salon in a nearby town and other cities
Low	<i>Lohar</i>	Iron work related to agriculture	Iron workshop in local town to fabricate windows, doors, gates, construction contractor. Workers in bus body building shop
Untouchable	<i>Dusadh</i>	<i>Godait</i> , or army men, of <i>Bhumihars</i>	Agriculture on rent, agricultural work, and construction worker
Untouchable	<i>Chamar</i>	Plowmen of <i>Bhumihars</i>	Agriculture on rent, construction work, motor driving
Untouchable	<i>Dhobi</i>	Clothes cleaning for clients	Clothes cleaning shop in the market
Untouchable	<i>Dhuniya</i>	Cotton carding, agriculture worker	Agriculture worker, construction worker, construction contractor, electrician

TABLE 2
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Gender	Age, years	Caste	Profession	Interview duration, in hours
Bharan Ram	Male	73	<i>Chamar</i>	Agricultural worker	7
Bharat Singh	Male	62	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Living on pension, Landlord	8
Chunnu	Male	40	<i>Brahmin</i>	Entrepreneur	10
Pukar Sah	Male	70	<i>Gond</i>	Agricultural worker	6
Hanuman Singh	Male	44	<i>Rajput</i>	Farmer	6
Irfan Mia	Male	75	<i>Dhuniya</i>	Living on pension	8
Jagan Ram	Male	75	<i>Chamar</i>	Agricultural worker	8
Janak Tewari	Male	55	<i>Brahmin</i>	Priest	10
Janam Sharma	Male	65	<i>Lohar</i>	Contractor	10
Jitender Ram	Male	30	<i>Chamar</i>	Agricultural worker	8
Jyoti	Female	50	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Housewife, teacher	8
Lakhan Bo	Female	45	<i>Nonia</i>	Agricultural worker	7
Mahato	Male	54	<i>Nonia</i>	Agricultural worker	10
Matin	Male	20	<i>Dhuniya</i>	Worker	10
Narender Singh	Male	20	<i>Rajput</i>	Student	8
Pravind	Male	34	<i>Bhumihar</i>	MBA, entrepreneur	8
Radha Singh	Male	80	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Living on pension, landlord	10
Rajinder Ram	Male	70	<i>Chamar</i>	Living on pension	8
Raju	Male	28	<i>Chamar</i>	Private tutor	6
Ramavtar	Male	60	<i>Chamar</i>	Agriculture	10
Ram Singh	Male	75	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Landlord, politician	8
Ramji	Male	70	<i>Nonia</i>	Agricultural worker	10
Ramesh Singh	Male	58	<i>Rajput</i>	Agriculture and politics	5
Salim	Male	48	<i>Dhuniya</i>	Contractor	8
Samran	Male	66	<i>Chamar</i>	Agricultural worker	6
Sanjay Singh	Male	38	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Landlord	8
Satendra Singh	Male	54	<i>Bhumihar</i>	Physician	10
Satish Yadav	Male	28	<i>Yadav</i>	Politics	10
Sita Singh	Female	45	<i>Rajput</i>	Housewife	8
Sohan Lal	Male	36	<i>Teli</i>	Professional	10
Suganti	Female	60	<i>Nonia</i>	Agricultural worker	4
Sujodhan	Male	45	<i>Brahmin</i>	Worker	5
Sunita	Female	40	<i>Nonia</i>	Agricultural worker	6
Susant Pande	Male	20	<i>Brahmin</i>	Student	8
Zainab	Female	23	<i>Dhuniya</i>	Agricultural worker	4

in oil, *Dhanuk* in jute, *Awadhiya* in sugarcane, and *Kanu* in cereals). In the *Jajmani* system, landlords also collected taxes from these transactions. These taxes were collected both on the purchase of raw materials and at the time of market sale. In the absence of a sufficient number of marketplaces and limited economic opportunities, the low caste found it extremely difficult to escape the clutches of landlords.

In the moral economy low castes were dependent on their patrons to fulfill even their smallest desires to consume. Samran, an elderly untouchable lamented, "In the *zamindari* era in evenings before proceeding to the market we used to go to the landlord. He would ask why we were there. We would say 'O Landlord! Please give us one anna (Rs 0.06 or \$0.001) to buy tobacco.' The landlord was our patron, and he would give us money in the evening to buy tobacco." Tobacco is a very commonly consumed product among the men in the village. It is also considered trivial and commonly shared if a fellow villager demands it. Several participants told of their anguish about this period, "We did not have money even to buy one pinch of tobacco. We had to depend on our landlord to buy tobacco for us."

In the last few decades, with the expansion of the Indian economy and deepening of capitalism, many markets have developed in and around the village that have reduced the dependence of the villagers on landlords. These markets offer opportunities to the low caste to have their own small shops or offer their services. With the expansion of economic activities in the area, there are several businesses that require workers, and low caste villagers have found opportunities there. Migration to large cities and in the east to the tea gardens of Assam and West Bengal has also brought in much needed money for the low castes. In the 1970s, many Muslims from the region went to the Middle East. Their remittances suddenly catapulted them from lowly untouchables to those with high respect in a marketized social order in which economic capital was beginning to be one of the key assets to possess. Pahariya, a town near the village, became a big market of consumer products because of the newfound wealth of the lower castes. A manager of a large national bank informed us that his local branch has the highest turnover in the entire state. In the nearby district, the General Post Office had the distinction of receiving the maximum amount of remittances in a month in the entire country.

This process of marketization came about because of internal tensions in the village and also due to extraneous factors. The agrarian economy was already in decline and offered unsustainable returns (see Varman et al. 2012). This created greater pressure on both the high and low castes to shift to other occupations. When the young low castes got economic opportunities outside the village, they started breaking the bonds of subservience. The market economy also offered riches to several high castes as they started migrating to urban centers. The low caste migrants were able

to save money from their market-based activities and subsequently able to buy land. This has led to some change in land ownership and has offered freedom to the low castes because they do not have to fear their patrons any longer.

Access to education also helped the lower castes to make use of market opportunities. Education is considered important by the lower castes, and when we offered to teach children in the village, most low castes were happy to send their children to us. They realize that the lower castes who have done well with the onset of marketization are also the ones who could widen the scope of their worldviews and make use of the opportunities that markets present to them (see also Bourdieu 1979).

For example, Rajinder, a *Dalit* who migrated to Kolkata, after getting a basic education from the village school, got an opportunity to work as a clerk in a jute mill. His children are educated and work for the government. Most *Dalits* look up to them, and they are the new village role models. In the past this process of getting a basic education was not easy, and Jitender, a poor *Dalit*, complained about the prior domination of the landlords: "Those were difficult times. My grandfather told me that he could not study because his landlord did not allow him to study. One day the landlord went to the school and he dragged my grandfather out of the class and beat him. The landlord abused him and said that if he goes to school who will plough the field."

This became a vicious cycle in which those not allowed to get schooling got further trapped in their *Jajmani* ties, and there was no escape from the domination of landlords. Although there are some, largely dysfunctional, government schools, private schools that charge tuition now dominate in the region. But access to such private schools is still difficult for the poor. Those families that have managed to become educated, such as Rajinder's, access the opportunities presented by markets. However, those who are not educated slip deeper into the abyss of poverty.

Another factor that has contributed to the greater independence of the lower castes is a shift in the political field. The politics of the village have changed in the last 20 years. While the high caste *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* were competitors in the first few decades after India's independence, in the last two decades several low caste political parties have captured state power and challenged the dominance of these high castes. *Rajputs*, who were at the bottom of the high caste hierarchy, have become politically powerful in the region. Ram Singh, an elderly *Bhumihaar*, told us,

I will tell you that today no other caste is ready to support a *Bhumihaar* candidate. You might be aware what happened to the *Bhumihaar* candidate of JD-U [Janata Dal United, the ruling party in the state that had nominated a *Bhumihaar* candidate, who lost in the last general elections] in the MP [Member of Parliament] by-election. A Rajput won. The politics has become very bad. *Bhumihaars* have no role now. We do not have the numbers.

In the absence of any formidable challenge from *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins*, *Rajputs* are the new dominant caste of Chanarnapur. Some *Rajputs* are politically powerful and economically rich. Although *Rajputs* are powerful, the caste relationships have changed, and there is far greater independence for the lower castes as compared to the past. There are several poor *Rajputs* in the village who are in subordinate positions to the richer low castes. A high caste *Rajput* won the last parliamentary election, but he could only do it with the support of low castes. *Rajputs* had to negotiate with the *panchayat* (local government) leaders, many of whom are from the low castes and had to concede the responsibility for a state-run grocery store or Fair Price Shop, chairmanship of a local development committee, as well as concede control of a local primary school. The government's welfare schemes are operated through the local self-government, which is in control of the *Rajputs*. This has made low castes associate with the *Rajputs* in order to reap the benefits of the schemes. Hence change in the political structures with the formation and popularity of the low caste parties has further contributed to the independence of the low castes from the upper castes.

Marketization has, however, created a new group of subaltern from people who have failed to convert capital from their traditional field to the new economic field. The *Bhumihaar* families who stayed back in the village have faced difficult times and are now economically poor. Their symbolic power has diminished because they do not own sufficient land. Markets have also not offered opportunities to many *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* of Chanarnapur were not conversant in Sanskrit and did not own land because traditionally their survival was based on the alms from landlords during the harvest season. Although they arranged with other *Brahmins* to carry out rituals for their patrons, they never carried out religious rituals themselves. The new market economy has restricted the idea of alms and has only offered opportunities to the *Brahmins* who conduct rituals and are conversant with Sanskrit. Some low castes, particularly *Dalits*, who traditionally worked in the *Jajmani* system, are unable to sell their labor in markets and remain poor. They were at the bottom of the erstwhile moral order and never had sufficient economic, social, and cultural capital to make a transition to markets. In many cases they are under severe strain because *Jajmani* was also a covenant for the sustenance of life in which right to food for survival was not denied. Many low castes members who were already old could not adjust to the dominance of the new market logic. They found it difficult to change their habitus and did not like the idea of living in settings that were commercial and impersonal. The village has many elderly who refuse to live with their children in cities and prefer hardships of the village life to the relative material comfort of the city.

Consumption and Shifting Symbolic Power

As a result of marketization, many practices of dependence on the high caste, especially *Bhumihaars*, have changed in the past three decades. The symbolic violence perpetrated by the higher castes ceases to be visible as the old feudal ties wither away. However, this is a slow and difficult process of change. Ramavtar, an elderly low caste, knows how tough it was for him to send his son to city to find a job. "He ran away," he had said to his patron with a sullen face. Ramavtar was too poor to afford the wrath of his patron who was angry because Ramavtar's son has escaped from his domain of power. Ramavtar was too old and ill equipped to migrate. Later when his son returned, he brought gifts of a tape recorder and a suitcase to his patron's house. Ramavtar's son had brought a tape recorder for his family's personal use. But he was pragmatic and intelligently offered the gift to his patron as a future investment. The tape recorder was a buffer during the transition period. We also heard stories of how the son of a low caste villager returned from Kolkata with a new Raleigh bicycle. The poor person rode it only once, and the patron was furious. "How can a low caste ride on a bicycle as his patron walk on foot?" said a high caste villager. Before the matter got out of control, the father took his son's bicycle to his patron's house-front and offered it to him as a gift. Ramavtar recounted a number of such episodes. However, with subsequent trips to the village, the size and quality of gifts deteriorated. In the meantime, Ramavtar's son earned enough money to construct a house, and finally he freed himself and his family from the umbilical cord of the *Jajmani* patronage system.

Ramavtar's son no longer goes to the house of his ancestor's landlord. He perceives that a visit to Bharat Singh's house-front is tantamount to carrying on the ancestral tradition of *Jajmani*. Many low castes in the village believe that visits to a landlord's house-front furthers the traditional hierarchy enacted through the ritual of the landlord sitting on a cot or chair and low castes being made to either squat on the ground or stand in front of him. This is now considered an insult by the younger generations of low castes. This perception has led to rejection of the practice by younger lower castes and a resulting subversion of the symbolic power wielded by the upper castes.

The reluctance of a low caste to visit the house-front of a high caste villager results in dismay and frustration among the old elite. It is very much evident as elderly *Bhumihaar* Bharat Singh complained,

Now no low caste goes to any high caste house-front. On the contrary we have to go to their house-front to request them to come to the agricultural field for work. It was so difficult to get the agricultural work done that I gave all my land on rent to Sipujana [a vowel 'a' is attached at the end of a name as a mark of contempt] of *Chamtoli* [the hamlet of the *Chamar* or low caste].

Bharat believes that the avoidance of their house-front by the low caste signifies a challenge to the local hierarchy. He argues that such defiance has coincided with changes in the farming practices of the village and marketization. In order to avoid daily or routine visits to low caste house-fronts to recruit laborers, the high castes prefer contract farming. Land is offered to low caste for rent of about Rs 4000/acre (around \$67/acre) for one crop season (there are two crop seasons in a year). This assists in maintaining market-based transactional relationships and helps the high castes to maintain distance.

Marketization is leading to accumulation of wealth for some and is creating a new consuming class among the affluent of the lower castes. Far from becoming an order that is equal, we see a shift to a new hierarchy in which economic capital plays a significant role in creating symbolic capital. A part of economic capital finds expression in demonstrative expenditure. According to Bourdieu (1990, 131), “demonstrative expenditure (as opposed to ‘productive expenditure, which is why it is called ‘gratuitous’ or ‘symbolic’) represents, like any other visible expenditure of the signs of wealth that are recognized in a given social formation, a kind of legitimizing self-affirmation through which power makes itself known and recognized.” In popular understanding, informants used their *Ghar-Duar* (house-front) to describe a family’s status, saying, for example, “*ghar-duar ke theek ba log*—the family is well off.” Demonstrative expenditure on the house-front is a source of distinction within the village hierarchy. The house-front appearance is affected by different conspicuous decorative objects. For example, erstwhile *Bhumihhaar* landlords kept elephants and horses in their house-front area, along with furniture, as representations of taste and culture of the owner and the family residing in the house. Even today erstwhile feudal landlords keep tall oxen at their house-fronts. The oxen do not have any functional use because tractors are now used for tilling land (see also Miller 2010). The physical size of the house-front and the location of its material objects is a “natural refinement” (Bourdieu 1984), termed in the local parlance as *khandani* or *badka* (i.e., “cultured” or “big”). Most of the high caste families decorated their house-fronts to express wealth and power.

Low caste villagers now attach great significance to their house-front. In Chanarnapur, we came across a *Dusaadh* (a low caste) family with a red velvet sofa kept inside a small *palani* (a hut made of dried grass) at their house-front. When we inquired, the head of the household told us that good furniture increases the value of a house-front. He said that the aesthetic appeal of a house-front increases with furniture. The idea and the widespread success of this practice are further expressed by the increase in the number of furniture shops at local fairs. Sofas and chairs, in particular, are seen as modern furniture and thus represent contemporary status practices, and they are considered to be of higher aesthetic value.

In the hamlet of blacksmiths we observed a two-story building being constructed by Janam Sharma, a low caste villager. Three to four years ago there was a small thatched roof house in its place. Janam was a carpenter who made and mended house furniture and plows under the *Jajmani* system. He later migrated to a plant construction site in Mumbai and started working as a carpenter for a wage. While working at the site, in the 1990s he got an opportunity to work as a supplier of carpenter labor. Since his caste is traditionally engaged in woodwork, he could manage to assemble a team of carpenters comprising distant relatives and men of his caste for one of the largest construction firms of India. It was also a period when the economy had opened up and there was a boom in the construction industry. This business helped him to make a good amount of money. He could convert his capital from an earlier field into relevant forms of capital in the new field (Bourdieu 1979). While Janam has now retired, his sons continue to look after the business. His sons live in Mumbai with their families and have bought flats there. When we asked the purpose of constructing such a big house in the village, Janam told us, “It is our mother land. In the end you have to come here. All my life I lived a wretched life. Now we have money. I constructed this house so that people would come to my house-front and they would feel good about me.”

Consumption of idols during the festival of *Chath* at the village pond-bank serves as another marker of social hierarchy and of caste-based tension. By the side of the pond-bank is a series of small pyramidal stepped structures of idols of the *Chathi* goddess. On the northern side of the pond are two rows of idols, relatively larger in size and painted in different shades of white and off-white. The first row of idols belongs to different *Brahmin* families; the second belongs to *Bhumihhaars*. A short distance from these two rows of high caste idols are the boldly red and green-colored idols of low caste *Nonia*, *Gond*, *Dhobi*, *Dussadh*, and *Chamar* villagers. *Rajput*’s idols are located at some distance from the idols of the *Brahmins* and *Bhumihhaars*. Their idols are closer to those of the lower caste. The pond-bank is a threshold place that was earlier controlled by the high caste Hindus, and only they constructed permanent idols of the goddess there. However, in recent years, low caste consumers have changed this ritual through their participation, construction, and consumption of permanent idols. There are fewer low castes’ idols compared to those of the high castes, but now they construct their own idols and do not pray to the idols of the high caste villagers.

The low caste groups not only imitate the high caste but have also created their own novel codes of consumption that are distinct from those of the upper castes. These novel codes of consumption are, as Bourdieu (1990, 119) observed, “exhibitions of symbolic capital” that allow the lower castes to challenge the upper caste domination. A good illustration of such an exhibition is found in the

change in the shape of the idols at the pond-bank. The idols of the low caste maintain the traditional nonanthropomorphic geometric form of a stepped pyramid. However, the design of the idols of the lower caste *Chamar* is circular, which is a deviation from the prevalent high caste square design. In the circular stepped pyramid form of the goddess idols of the *Chamar* are provisions made to receive offerings as well as lamps that are not present among the high caste idols. Carvings and sketched patterns on the idols of low caste consumers make them more trendy and conspicuous. Lastly, the color and texture of the surface finish makes their idols stand out in the crowd. In contrast to the light color and matte finish of the high castes' idols, the low castes' idols are painted in bright colors with a glossy finish. Jyoti, an old female *Bhumihaar* teacher, lamented,

The low castes color and decorate their idols to express that they are better; that they are equal to us. Through color they express that they are colorful. Earlier they were under pressure of the high castes. Low castes were suppressed. They were not allowed at the pond-bank. Now they are free. They try to outdo us. This year I observed that *Teli* and *Lohar* have erected (a) beautiful *Chandani* (tent like structure) with *jhalar* (flounce or frills). I also observed an arrangement of projector at the pond-bank. Videos were displayed throughout the night. There are also cases of installing anthropomorphic idols on the conventional stepped pyramid idols. I believe that there is a quest among the low castes that they can worship goddess in a better way compared to the high castes.

These comments represent a put-down of lower caste consumption practices as being gauche and characteristic of nouveau riche consumption. According to low caste consumers, the color and deviation from the usual form is a sign of a shift in the village hierarchy. Sunita, a middle-aged female *Nonia*, informed us, "We paint idols with deep color to decorate it. Deep color looks beautiful. You can see it from a distance." The light color of high caste consumers symbolizes simplicity, and the bright colors of the low castes symbolize happiness and newfound prosperity.

Rejecting and Embracing Bonds of Sharing

The old moral economy functioned at multiple levels of sustenance. The quest to achieve independence is furthered by a rejection of other relics of *Jajmani* including those of the orchard that was a site for collecting cooking fuel. The daily requirement of fuel of low caste households was met by collecting twigs and dry leaves from the orchards of the high caste. The fuel collected in the orchard was not entirely free. The price of collecting fuel was to abide by the norm of reciprocity and work for the high caste owner for low or no wages. The deepening of market ties has changed this economic field. Subordinate groups with

higher disposable incomes from market-based wages or entrepreneurial ventures now prefer to buy liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders from the market. Lakhan Bo, a middle-aged low caste woman, observed that "recently three families in *Dhuniya Patti* [a section of her hamlet] purchased gas cylinders for Rs 5000 each [LPG stove and cylinder for around \$83]." Members of these families work in nearby cities and have saved enough to make this transition. Rather than collecting so-called free twigs, spending money to buy LPG is the preferred route to freedom. Lakhan Bo reiterated that the high caste villagers do not allow access to their orchards to collect fuel without an expectation of service and indebtedness in return. This creation of dependency and symbolic power is recognized by the low caste, and the market is seen as a freer alternative that gives them more autonomy.

Chath rituals at the pond-bank are also important markers of marketization in the village. In the past, the landlord provided all ritual objects and the new clothes that lower castes wore to participate in *Chath* festivities. Mahato, a low caste, informed us,

In the past the landlord provided everything to observe *Chath*—a cotton sari for my wife and cotton handloom cloth for my children and me. The local weaver provided cloth for free to the landlord that he passed on to us. Salman Mia, the village tailor, stitched bush shirts and pajama for my sons. The times have changed.

Mahato further informed us that lower castes do not go to higher castes for clothes anymore. In his own case, his son works in a city as a mason and earns enough money to buy clothes for himself and his family. In fact, Mahato added, "my son purchases branded jeans trousers and a polo T-shirt now. He is no more interested in tailor-stitched clothes." With the fading away of the *Jajmani* system and deepening of marketization, ready-made clothes are new markers of freedom. Moreover, T-shirts and jeans are interpreted as modern market-based attire and more sought after than the traditional Indian shirt and pajama (also see Nakassis 2012). Marketization has allowed them to use their freedom to become socially mobile and has resulted in a greater urge to consume objects that were denied to them for generations. It has also meant that the control exercised by the high caste landlords on the socioeconomic system is fading away. This has contributed to a greater democratization of consumption, a process that was absent for most low castes under the *Jajmani* system.

However, there are some old and poor low castes who are still dependent on the old norms of sharing with their patrons. The new logic of markets has left them particularly worse off because some high castes refuse to share their wealth with the poor because they are relatively independent of social obligations of the local field. Satendra Singh, a *Bhumihaar* who works in a nearby city and whose

children work in Mumbai, is not dependent on the low caste in the village for his survival. He said,

We are not interested in the orchard. We do not get benefit from it. The low castes use our orchard. The low castes would not do any work for us but they graze goats, collect fuel and consume fruits in my orchard. They steal fruits. We get nothing. We cannot do anything. Do you think that I will go to the village to guard [my] orchard or my sons would go to the village leaving jobs in the city? No, it is not possible. We can buy and eat much more and better quality mangoes in the city. It is better to plant Mahogany and Sissoo instead of fruit trees.

It is evident that Satendra wants to keep away low castes from accessing his orchard with the withering of the old patron–client ties. While he could stop the low castes from accessing his orchard by constructing a boundary wall or by posting a guard, both options are too expensive. Hence he decided to plant non–fruit-producing commercial trees. In this way he can both stop low castes from using his orchard and increase the commercial value of his assets. The high castes' actions to privatize and to keep away low castes from the orchard, not even allowing them to collect dry leaves, also creates situations of conflict. In one case, Sanjay Singh stopped low caste Suganti from collecting fuel from his orchard. Sanjay Singh, a *Bhumihaar* landlord, shouted at Suganti, "Not for once did you come to my house-front during the month of *bhado* [June–July]. When I went to your house during June–July, the transplanting season of paddy, you refused to come, and today you are collecting dry wood from my orchard." From the top of the open balcony we observed the 38-year-old Sanjay shouting at the old woman as her four grandchildren looked in another direction. "I was sick with unpredictable bouts of stomach-ache. I am old now, and I do not have strength left for agricultural work," defended Suganti. "But you do not feel weak when you collect wood and graze goats in my orchard," Sanjay shouted back. Suganti responded, "The orchard is yours so what; many generations of my ancestors 'melted' into yours (while serving them)." The orchard is the private property of Sanjay, and yet Suganti wants to consume the dry wood produced in this place because it is considered an ambiguous threshold. In the conversation she reminds Sanjay that she can collect and consume wood by virtue of the intergenerational relationship between them, which he refuses to consider. Thus the poor low castes, who have not been successful in making the transition to the market economy, continue to be dependent on others who are better off.

Interdependence creates the need for sharing, and social respect is accorded to high as well as low castes willing to share their good fortunes with others without the coercion of the *Jajmani* system. Even though creating distinction by constructing boundary walls is the new norm of exclusivity among the high caste and the rich, there is an important

low caste exception in the village. Salim, now a successful construction contractor, has not constructed any boundary wall around his house in spite of having sufficient space to do so. Instead we found many red-colored plastic chairs on his house-front. He has local prestige, and both low and high caste villagers come to his house-front and spend time. He is considered a compassionate person and a savior of the low caste and poor. Low caste poor villagers of Chanarnapur often come to meet Salim at his house-front in order to seek work opportunities. He offers them unskilled work on a monthly basis. His workers are primarily from the low castes, but some high castes also find employment in his business. Low and high caste villagers both value the suggestions and advice of Salim more than that of high caste residents. It is common to hear in Chanarnapur that "Although Salim is a *Dhuniya*, high caste Hindus go to his house-front. There is always someone or the other sitting at his house-front."

Salim owns an electric generator, a sound box, and employs electricians. During *Chath* he offers his generator and electricians to provide light during the night and in early morning on the penultimate day of *Chath*. Satendra Singh, a *Bhumihaar* and a popular physician in the area, told us, "Salim is a very good person. He is also very generous. Every year, he spends Rs 20 000 (around \$330) to install hand pumps on roadside temples." Similarly, we found evidence of his generosity in a meeting organized in the village to raise funds to renovate the village temple. A local politician had called this meeting in which both the high and low castes participated. Salim declared that he would contribute Rs 25 000 (around \$415) and promised that he would provide masons for free. Such novel acts of philanthropy help Salim to generate symbolic capital and to create a sense of solidarity among the low castes. In this village the prevalence of the old, or *Jajmani*-based, and new, or market-based, dispositions create an "ambiguous gestalt" that means symbolic capital requires market-based success and sharing of wealth as it prevailed in the traditional social order (Bourdieu 1979).

In the course of the fieldwork it was common for the low castes to offer us tea or food when we visited their house-front. The low caste villagers were happy when we drank water or tea and ate food offered by them. In socially divided Chanarnapur, drinking water or tea and consuming food offered by the low caste are still considered taboo by many high castes. Many elderly high castes did not appreciate our consumption of food at the low caste house-fronts. With great dismay Bharat Singh told us, "We would prefer if you do not go to low castes' house-front. Even if you have to go to their house-front, you should not eat or drink there." They would, instead, advise us to come to their home and eat. Any public sharing of food with the low caste was in violation of the caste norms and reduced the distance between the high and low castes. However, reducing social distance for the low caste by sharing food is

an important part of the process to reconfigure symbolic power in the village.

A similar novel exhibition of symbolic power is found in TV and video shows organized by Ramjas's family, a low caste household. The owner's son often hires a color TV, a compact disc (CD) player, and a dry cell to organize movies for fellow low caste residents at his house-front (cf. Iyer 1988). The house-front of Ramjas is big, and there is a huge Banyan tree that provides shade during summer afternoons; a pleasant breeze helps cool their house-front on summer nights. This house-front is used by the low castes as a place to socialize and for organizing TV shows. These shows help the low castes to come together and to bond socially with each other. This activity is unique and only conducted among the low castes. In the last few years, projectors are increasingly being used by the low caste to further augment such shows. Mahato, an old low caste villager, explained, "The women and children get together and collect donations of five rupees each and hire a TV and a battery. They organize video shows almost every alternate day." Ramjas's house is by the side of the road and offers both accessibility and high visibility. The shows also challenge the earlier norm of large gatherings being confined to the house-fronts of high caste households. A house-front used for a large gathering is considered to be a symbol of high status and popularity. It is not uncommon to hear high caste residents remembering large gatherings, the buzz of activities at the house-front in olden days, and the host's ability to afford the expense of sharing eatables and tea. Ramjas's ability to share and to hold large gatherings on a regular basis is construed as a challenge to the traditional authority. The old high caste villagers call him a leader of the low castes with contempt and reject these shows as a vulgar display of wealth.

UPPER CASTE ATTEMPTS TO RESTORE THEIR STATUS

In this section, we provide a description of how the high castes react to changes in their symbolic power and status. We also describe how high caste *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* adapt to changes in their symbolic power with alterations in their own consumption in threshold places.

New Differences and Commonalities across the Field

The dominant castes in the old hierarchy created higher status for themselves by creating spatial, cultural, and social distance and through a regime of denials. The richer and older high castes are best equipped to attempt to create such new distinctions and denials. They do this through a regime of privatization and refusal to share what the new logic of marketization encourages in the village.

Constructing boundary walls is the newest symbol of status. The richer among the high castes own bigger plots of land so they are best able to construct such walls. Even though there were no physical barriers to demarcate house-fronts, previously caste-based norms influenced movement across this threshold place. Strangers and guests used these house-fronts to access their hosts. In more recent times, cases of construction of boundary walls have increased among richer higher castes, and use of a house-front by others as a path is now impeded and discouraged by high caste residents. This privatization is also part of a new ritual of exclusion (Morley 2000). Their house-fronts are enclosed by boundary walls, and access to them by an outsider is through a big steel gate. Exclusivity is also expressed through high and ornate boundary walls and big colored steel gates. Now the idea of a "complete house" is being propagated by the high castes. Radha Singh, an elderly *Bhumihaar*, informed us, "After constructing a boundary wall the house becomes complete. In the absence of a boundary wall people trespass; the children of low castes destroy things on the premises." A house-front left available for trespassing indicates ordinariness, and gates at the boundary walls have become new signifiers of status.

Another threshold place in which privatization is created is in the orchard. Public, and more specifically the low caste, access to an orchard was earlier allowed, and trees were spaced in such a way as to facilitate farmers processing agricultural products in the trees' shade, for the poor to collect dry leaves, and for children to play. Pukar Sah, an elderly low caste villager, informed us,

Now people are planting useless Mahogany instead of fruit trees. I still remember different types of mango trees that grew in the orchard. I was a child at that time. There was a *laduiya* [in the] shape of a *ladoo* [a small sweet of spherical shape], (a) mango tree on the extreme north side, a *senuriya* [vermillion color] mango by the side of it, and a *tairiya* [cart full] mango tree in the same line. There was also a tree of big mango named *gobarahwa* [like dung]. *Laduiya* was my favorite. It hardly had any pulp but every drop of its juice was like *amrit* [ambrosia]. During the mango season, we spent the entire day in the orchard running from one tree to another to eat mangoes. In the night, we searched orchard to collect ripe mangoes. Sometimes villagers thought that thieves have come to the village [laughs].

Pukar Sah reports that although the orchard was a private place and fruit trees were privately owned, the villagers have an informal right to access the orchard. He further suggests that the children of the low castes were often allowed to consume fruits, and the orchard was converted into a ludic place of consumption. The orchard also provided fuel to the poor as they collected dry wood for their kitchens. The old trees are still there, but those that wither are not being replaced with fruit trees. The owners

have migrated to cities, and they do not find utility in planting fruit trees or making the orchard bigger.

In the village we also witness a contradictory habitus among the young high castes that allows them to form new bonds with the low castes. Many young and middle-aged high castes, who were born after the 1950s, after abolition of the *zamindari* system, display a habitus more in tune with a market economy than with the old *Jajmani* system. The younger and middle-aged generations of the high castes have also been brought up in a social context in which *Jajmani* ties are fading as markets are gaining significance. This immersion into a market economy was further deepened after the 1990s when neoliberal structural adjustments were introduced into the economy and dependence on agriculture reduced in the region. The younger high castes realize that the old markers of status and symbolic capital are being replaced by a greater emphasis on economic capital. This has meant a shift away from the old habitus situated in a system of distinctions, segregations, and symbolic violence to a new habitus located in a social order of coexistence and generation of economic capital. Marketing and consumption of several services in the village are important signifiers of this transition in habitus and, in certain cases, of the tension between old and new dispositions.

In earlier days, all the plowmen in the village were low caste men. Fields were always plowed by the low caste, and *Bhumihaars* were never expected to do this work. There is a *Bhumihaar* tractor owner in the village now who tills the land of low castes for money. Similarly, Pravind, a *Bhumihaar* landlord's 34-year-old son, has started the business of selling milk. After a long time the low castes have started coming to his house-front again. This change has happened primarily because with this high caste seller a new business sense has prevailed over the old social sense. After completing an MBA, Pravind worked with a private bank but quit his job after three years and returned to his village. When we asked him about the reasons for quitting his bank job and for starting the milk business he told us,

The amount of work I was doing for a company was too much. I realized that if I would do similar hard work for myself my life would be better. At every month end, with every target missed the language used by bosses was disgusting. It was humiliating. Here, I am on my own. I do not have to listen to anybody's command. I am free. Rs 5000/month (\$80) is good enough for me. I am satisfied with my present work.

A good illustration of this different habitus emerging from the new logic of markets is found in the consumption of tea at his house-front. Mahato, an elderly low caste, recalled, "There was a time when the house-front was full of men; neighbors of the hamlet and outsiders would assemble and there were bouts of tea drinking. He [the erstwhile landlord and milk seller's father] would call me and ask me to prepare tea. ... I knew all those habitual tea drinkers

who would come to consume tea." When we asked whether tea was served to everyone including the low caste, Mahato replied, "It is obvious that the low caste would not drink tea. How can the low caste drink tea with the high caste?" However, more recently with the landlord's son getting into the milk business, we observed that in violation of the caste norms, tea was now served to low caste customers who gathered in front of the house to buy milk. Although this consumption practice is despised by elderly high castes, Pravind believes that the pragmatics of doing business makes such compromises necessary. Some elderly high caste neighbors of Pravind who are *Bhumihaars* secretly make fun of his milk-selling business and keep predicting its end.

When we asked Pravind about these comments, he told us, "I do not talk to many people. I maintain limited contacts. If somebody is making fun of me behind my back why should I care? I know what is good for me." The landlord, Pravind's father, also feels bad about the business, and he told us, "I despise Pravind's business of milk selling. In our family nobody has cleaned cow dung. He is. I am sick of it. He has depreciated our family prestige and status." Yet they live together. Pravind's father remains unhappy and complains that his son does not listen to his advice. Despite their criticism, the high castes of the village come to buy milk from Pravind. Thus a market-based system has forced the younger high castes to modify their old norms of symbolic power and transform their habitus that resulted from the old moral economy.

A similar change is evident in the case of Ramu Pande, a *Brahmin* who formed an orchestra to make his living. Initially, the elders in his family were upset and asked him to leave their house. Ramu shifted to a rented accommodation in a nearby village to house his orchestra troupe. In recent years, orchestras are commonly invited in marriages and on other festive occasions, which has led to their commercial success. As Ramu started making money, his sins were absolved and his family accepted him back into the fold. The dance troupe returned to Chanarnapur. Ramji has a constructed a two-story brick-and-mortar house that others look up to. Many people have started citing the example of Ramu and praise his hard work. His economic capital has helped him to gain legitimacy and symbolic capital. Ramu also reciprocates through free performances during village festivals and also during special ceremonies organized by the villagers.

The old symbolic order is also broken when a *Brahmin* goes to the house-front of a low caste to perform rituals. In earlier days, *Hazams*, or low castes, who assisted *Brahmins* during marriages of the high caste villagers, conducted marriages among low caste villagers. *Brahmins* believed it was below their dignity to perform these rituals for the low castes themselves. Recently, the situation has undergone change, and during our visit to the *Sarswati* (goddess of knowledge) idol of *Chamar Toli* (the hamlet of low caste

Chamar) we noticed that the *puja* (rituals of prayer) was being performed by a *Brahmin*. When we questioned Janak Tewari, the *Brahmin*, on his participation he told us,

The low caste households pay more than high caste groups. I have a greater number of low caste clients. They do not haggle for money. A *Rajput* would expect me to conduct all the rituals for free. They will also speak rudely. I avoid conducting a *puja* for them.

For generations the low castes did not have the privilege to get a *Brahmin* to conduct their religious rituals. *Hazams* were their priests, or in some cases men from their own caste conducted rituals. A *Brahmin* would not enter into the house of a low caste. The deepening of the market economy has brought about a change in habitus, and *Brahmins* are now willing to offer their services to the low castes for money. *Brahmins* have also become poorer because many of their rich high caste patrons have migrated to cities. *Rajputs* are rich but offer little money to *Brahmins* for their services. *Rajputs* are perceived to be arrogant and are mocked for their supposedly low intelligence. There is a popular saying that the brains of *Rajputs* are in their heels as they pick fights without any reason. The low caste clients offer a new opportunity for livelihood to *Brahmins*. For the low caste it is not only about the ability to pay or about affordability, but more importantly it is about the legitimization of their new social status. Thus with the onset of a new economic imperative, many younger high castes display a different habitus from the older generation, and they adjust to the changing requirements of the market economy and abandon their old habitus and symbolic system.

With the deepening of markets in the village, new specialists and experts have come to the fore from the younger generation of low castes. For example, Sohan Lal, a *Teli* insurance agent, is educated, rich, and owns one of the biggest houses in the village. During our fieldwork we observed that many young and middle-aged high caste *Bhumihaars* went to his house-front to consult him about financial investments. Even an old and a retired *Bhumihaar* who avails himself of his services told us that Sohan Lal is an honest, hardworking, and well-mannered person. It was common for these younger *Bhumihaars* to consume tea offered by Sohan. Many poor low castes who have saved money by working as migrant workers are also his clients. Hence it is common for high and low castes to gather at Sohan Lal's house-front to get his expert advice. Salim organizes a *Mahlud* (an event in which a Muslim clergy gives a religious discourse) on the Hindu festival of *Viswa Karma Puja* (celebration of the Hindu God of tools) at his house-front. Many low and high caste Hindus assemble at Salim's house-front, and he personally sees that they also eat during the feast offered after the *Mahlud*. Sujodhan, a middle-aged *Brahmin* told us, "I am Brahmin but I eat here. We do not believe in purity and pollution

concepts. Salim is a Muslim. So what? I come to his house-front and I do not go without taking food. It is all about love and affection." This high caste's love, affection, and changed habitus are also based on the fact that Salim employs many high castes in his real estate business.

New Imitators among the Old Elite

We found that younger high caste villagers from diverse economic backgrounds now emulate several low caste consumption practices (see also Blumberg 1974; Field 1970). This is particularly a result of shifting symbolic capital and status systems. Consumption activities in the threshold place of the pond-bank are good examples of this process of emulation by the younger high caste consumers.

The pond-bank is a ritual place for high caste women in which the sun god and *Chathi* goddess are worshiped. The rituals of the festival are observed over a period of four days. They include holy bathing, fasting, and making offerings to the setting and rising sun. Traditionally this ritual was associated with simplicity and purity; material consumption was to be minimized. The objects used in the *Chath* festival create a system of purity, and the festival is recognized as the purest among all the Hindu festivals in the region. The objects consumed at *Chath* can be divided into eatable and noneatable items. The eatable items are cereals, *saathi* (variety of paddy), rice and wheat, sugarcane, and seasonal fruits and vegetables such as custard apple, pomelo, banana, snake beans, ginger, turmeric, *suthani* (Chinese potato), and radish. The noneatable objects include new clothing, *sup* (winnowing fans made of bamboo), *daura* (basket containers made of bamboo), and cloths to cover the *daura*.

Many older high caste villagers accuse the low castes of encroaching on their festival and transforming its meaning. They believe that the earlier simplicity of dress for the ceremonies has been replaced by conspicuous consumption and status contests on the pond-bank with people from low castes donning expensive clothes and using cars to arrive at the site in order to create distinctions (Bourdieu 1984). The pond-bank is now consumed by the rich low caste married women to exhibit their material wealth by putting on their best dresses, ornaments, and makeup. Bharat Singh, an old *Bhumihaar* landlord, told us, "today they shamelessly come in Maruti and Bolero [brands of cars], in Banarasi Sari and ornaments." These older high castes believe that walking to the pond-bank brings more *punya* (cosmic blessings) as compared to using a vehicle. Older members of the high caste ridicule low caste consumers' displays of wealth in this setting as gauche conspicuous consumption by the nouveaux riches of the village. Bharat's utterances also betray a belief among the old elite that the lower castes should only consume at the subsistence level and wearing ornaments and expensive saris or doing fashion is tantamount to not only "vulgar and irresponsible but also immoral" behavior (Liechty 2003, 77).

In contrast, the younger high caste members, whose habitus has been shaped to a lesser extent by the old *Jajmani* system, use the low caste conspicuous consumption on the pond-bank as a reference for their own conduct. Instead of merely dismissing the behavior of the low caste as gauche consumption, these young high castes transform their own conduct by aping them. The young and middle-aged high caste women try to replicate the low caste by indulging in their own competitive conspicuous consumption. It is now common to see the high caste women wearing expensive silk saris and gold jewelry on the pond-bank. The poorer women who cannot afford gold wear silver or artificial jewelry. Unlike in the past, many of the rich high caste also arrive at the pond-bank in their cars. This, in turn, led Suganti, a middle-aged low caste *Nonia* woman, to remark caustically, “have these women come to the pond-bank to perform *chath* or they are here to do *numaish* (exhibition) of their jewelry and clothes?” Recently, Ramesh, a young high caste contractor, arranged an orchestra to perform at the pond-front. The orchestra costs around Rs 20 000 (\$330), which is by no means a small amount in the village. Ramesh organized it to celebrate the birth of his son. Satendra, an old high caste physician, noted this event with surprise and said, “Ramesh did something unique this time on *Chath*. Has anyone ever heard of an orchestra at the pond-bank? Last year he distributed fruits to the *Chath* observant, and this year he arranged orchestra on the pond-bank.” Satendra belongs to a generation in which the ritual purity of *Chath* was associated with simplicity, while in contemporary times *Chath* has become an expression of economic wealth and status.

The other important change observed at the pond-front is a proliferation of shops during the observation of *Chath*. There are shops selling crackers, eatables, and toys. The pond-bank during *Chath* converts into a fair. Matin, a low caste shop owner, informed us, “Last year I sold crackers at the double the rate I purchased. I earned lot of profit. At the pond-bank there is a competition among the boys of different castes as if there is a fight between India and Pakistan. As they run out of crackers they keep coming to my shop. Nobody wants to lose while they have money, and I have crackers.” A festival that was initially defined by simplicity and quiet celebration has become a tournament of display in which the young high and low castes try to outperform each other through imitation and excess.

The pond-bank is also a place for feminine expression. The color and fabric of clothing, use of ornaments, the color of vermillion, and makeup items are discussed among the villagers as transforming the religious rituals. The low castes have made two more important changes to consumption rituals at the pond-bank that the young high caste women have emulated and adapted according to their own habitus. First, the young and middle-aged high caste women ape the low caste women in preparation of baskets used for carrying offerings to the pond-bank and their

embroidered cover cloths. The handmade grass baskets and embroidered or appliquéd cloth used for covering the container are considered as emblems of femininity. Apart from their newness, the personal effort expended to construct these items makes them special. Traditionally, hard work was associated with low status, and only women of low caste were expected to do it. The high caste preferred to buy baskets rather than to make them. However, with the increased use of handmade goods by low caste women, there is a tendency among the young and middle-aged high caste women to copy them. These handmade baskets and cover cloths have become new markers of purity and superior taste. Sita Singh, a middle-aged Rajput woman, explained how she learned to do this:

Last year when I went to the pond-bank I was impressed by the *croisia* [made with a crochet hook] work of cloth cover of Sunita [a low caste woman]. It was beautiful. On a deep bottle green cloth, appliquéd work of light pink cloth was inscribed with a floral pattern and the edges were protected with lace made of white thread by *croisia*. I asked her to tell me the design. This year I also made a similar cover during the *Chath*. ... Previously we used plain cotton cloth as a cover.

Second, the new idols of the goddess constructed by the younger high caste Hindus do not conform to the conventional light color exterior of the older existing idols. The earlier adherence to high caste modesty is giving way to emulation of the low caste conspicuousness on the pond-bank. The new high caste idols either have a deep color pigmented plaster exterior or glazed tiles applied to the exterior of the idol. This is to both emulate and to create distinctions from the deep color oil-based painted finish of the new low caste idols. The high caste owners of the new idols contend that pigmented plaster and glazed tiles increase the aesthetics of the idol. Moreover, they argue that this is the new trend. This trend, however, originated among the low caste, whose taste was previously dismissed as loud and garish.

One of the important areas of aping by the high caste of the low caste involves food. All the cereals or food items consumed by low castes are now termed “magic cereals” or “magic food” in the popular market-based discourse. Younger high castes draw on popular advertisements and associate important health benefits and symbolic value with the low caste foods, which were dismissed with contempt in earlier days. For example, finger millet, the staple diet of the low castes, was considered a nonvegetarian or impure food by the upper castes and rejected. Similarly, boiled rice (rice obtained by boiling paddy before dehusking) was a staple food of the low caste but was considered impure by the high castes and not used in religious rituals. The high caste offered puffed fox tail millet to the low castes as food wages under the *Jajmani* system. Puffed fox millet was also used in rituals for the dead and was

considered impure by the high castes. The high caste offered the worst category of land to their workers, which produced coarse grains that needed no irrigation or fertilizers. Millets grew even during droughts and helped the low castes to survive. Thus the low caste food had little symbolic value for the high caste.

In the last few years, this low caste food has captured the imagination of the rich, and the local health discourses are imbued with the virtues of finger millet, oats, brown rice, and flax. Satendra, a high caste and a general physician, informed us,

Whatever was consumed by the low castes has become magical now. Medical sciences now report that finger millet has very high iron content, oat is highly fibrous, flax has properties to bring down cholesterol, and so forth. I think the discovery of modern sciences is now new. How else could the poorest of the poor have possibly survived considering the worst quality of life of the low caste? That in itself was a magic.

Satendra's views are complemented by the proliferation of multigrain biscuits and flours in the region. Several popular Indian brands spend big amounts of money to advertise the health benefits of coarse grains. This in particular has added to the symbolic value of coarse grains and has resulted in its adoption as a high caste food. The low castes realize this shift and the imitation by the high castes. Bharan, an elderly low caste, satirically told us,

Who has thought that finger millet would be beyond our reach? I know how we have survived. You cannot. Year after year all we ate was gruel made of maize and chapatti of finger millet. Both were heavy foods difficult to digest. During bad times the chapatti was made of flour of barley and peas [called *jau-motara*]. You eat it once and you would not feel hungry for the entire day. The stomach gets bloated with wind. I hated it, but what else was our option?

The low castes were poor and landless with very little food for daily consumption. They did not have the money to farm crops that required irrigation and posed the risk of complete failure. The yield was so poor that each family needed to find the next supply of food quickly. Millets, maize, barley, oats, and flax were low investment crops. Since these crops were designated as low caste foods, the high caste neither demanded a share nor intervened in their marketing activity. This also helped to segregate low and high caste foods and to maintain distinctions. However, with the lower caste food being adopted by the high caste, a significant marker of distinction, the lowly coarse grains, have been elevated in significance. It is now common to hear from the lower castes that they eat and live like high castes and are equal to them. The health discourse is also impelled by functionality of food (cf. Bourdieu 1984). This creates a greater sense of parity in the setting and lowers the ability of the elite to create symbolic violence.

The high castes imitate low caste consumption of coarse grains and have brought them into their cuisines through two routes. First, high castes started consuming these millets as ritual foods and thus did away with the stigma of impurity associated with this consumption practice. For example, in a local festival named *Jivtiya* (long life) that is observed by women for the longevity of their sons, chapatti prepared of finger millet flour is consumed. It is argued that finger millet can grow in any condition, it is not affected by insects, and a handful of seeds are sufficient to sow a big field. Thus it is a signifier of strength and longevity. The second route, which is a more recent development, draws on the health qualities of millets emphasized by experts. For example, physicians recommend finger millet for its high iron content for women during their pregnancies. These superior qualities have been further reinforced by the availability and advertising of several branded and processed versions of coarse grains in the local market. Thus the food that was earlier consumed by the low caste is now a desired food of the younger high caste consumers.

In summary, with marketization in the village the status hierarchy is undergoing a transition. These changes become mirrored in privatization and consumption at these threshold sites that remain powerful markers of the social order. The villagers acknowledge that the earlier *Jajmani* system is giving way to a market economy. We found a weakening of bonds of patronage, breakdowns of old feudal collectives, and status contests. These can be seen as instances of what Appadurai (1986) calls tournaments of value. The high caste groups, especially the elderly, respond by privatizing, and younger ones with a different habitus are trying to coexist in the market economy and by reducing distance from the low castes.

MARKETIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF A SOCIAL ORDER

In this ethnography of Chanarnapur we found that in the past the consumption within village thresholds helped to maintain the local hierarchy, one full of deprivations and humiliations for the lower castes. Our ethnographic analysis shows how social and economic motives get intertwined to produce outcomes under conditions of marketization and privatization. Our findings show that within the old moral order, the low caste had limited freedom to consume or produce, and they were confined to the role of being appendages to landlords, who controlled these social orders. In the earlier field, symbolic capital constituted by cultural, social, and economic resources was cornered by the high caste leaving the low caste in a state of vulnerability and dependence. The deepening of markets has disrupted the social field and created a mismatch between the old habitus

and newer ways of accumulating capital. Our findings show that younger members of the low caste groups have used this disruption to their advantage and have a reconfigured habitus that allows them to make use of marketization. Unlike the participants in the Burning Man ritual examined by Kozinets (2002), these low castes “escape to markets” as a form of liberation from the clutches of the oppressive communal order of *Jajmani* (also see Arnould 2007; Marcoux 2009). And unlike hipsters’ resistance to marketization reported by Cronin et al. (2012), these low castes embrace the logic of markets by conspicuously consuming to create a status contest with the upper castes. Our low caste participants found the earlier social markers of purity and pollution that defined the caste system and determined who could be at the center of the *Jajmani* system to be highly exploitative (see Dumont 1970).

This process of marketization creates its own winners and losers. We found that some of the old elite of *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* have struggled to come to terms with the disruption caused by markets, resulting in a lag between their habitus and the new configuration of the marketized field. We do not claim that markets are a panacea to the problems of inequity, and we realize that marketization creates its own subordination, exploitation, and vulnerabilities. We also show that there are some low castes who are worse off because they cannot make adjustments to a marketized field or deal with privatization and do not have the safety net of the earlier *Jajmani* patronage system. This dark side of markets and privatization is particularly reflected in the crisis in Indian agriculture and a spate of farm suicides over the last 20 years that many see as a consequence of marketization (Sainath 2009; Varman et al. 2012). The objective of our work is to show that the disruption of the old social order and spread of markets in our setting have reconfigured the old hierarchy. This disruption has created a new status contest in which many from the low castes are able to mount a challenge to the old elite.

Although marketization is changing the nature of the status hierarchy in the village, we do not see marketization as a panacea for the problem of caste-based divisions. The onset of marketization is leading to a reconfiguration of the caste hierarchy without completely removing the caste-based divisions. We witness shifts in the old social order and formation of newer caste solidarities that are influenced by marketization. For example, we show that with the decline of *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins*, *Rajputs* have gained ascendancy because of their economic and political clout in the changing political economy of the region. Thus, unlike Dumont (1970), we do not see a clear separation between modern and premodern or economic and religious motives. Instead we see a new heterodox order prevailing with its own contests and solidarities (see Fuller 1989; Parry 1989). In doing so we adhere to Polanyi’s (1944, 1968b) call for a substantive instead of a formal

reading of markets. We concur with his critique of economic determinism and find it useful to interpret marketization as an instituted outcome created through external interventions in which multiplicity of economic and noneconomic motives prevail.

Our work also helps to question a very dominant reading of social hierarchies that goes back to Veblen (1899), Simmel (1904), and Bourdieu (1984) in social theory and is strongly manifest in several recent writings in consumer research (e.g., Üstüner and Holt 2010; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). In this reading, the dominant actors are viewed as privileged creators of distinctions and social distance from lower groups. In the following sections we elaborate on how our ethnography contributes to consumer research.

Sharing in a Withering Moral Economy

Our findings have important implications for the idea of sharing as it is developed in consumer research. We partly agree with Belk (2010) that sharing can help subaltern groups to survive as is evident from Suganti’s request to Singh, a high caste patron, to continue with the sharing arrangements that his forefathers had created and that helped earlier generations of her family to survive. Belk (2010, 717) further points to a dark side of gifting behavior and celebrates the idea of “sharing in” as “a communal act that links us to other people.” However, Belk (2010) does not examine noblesse oblige or obligatory sharing across a social hierarchy. He also does not delve into the question of who is sharing that we find to be of great importance in the village. These oversights by Belk (2010) lead to a more celebratory reading of the idea of sharing and a neglect of its darker side.

We offer a more nuanced reading of sharing that contributes to an ambivalent interpretation of the phenomena. In examining sharing across a social hierarchy, we identify a dark side to sharing-in behavior that exists in a stratified society. In a stratified society sharing in can lead to a perpetuation of an oppressive communal order in which the advantaged actors extend themselves through less privileged groups. As an attempt to deflect envy in a token way, these mere crumbs are known as a *sop* (Belk 2011). The effect is to create a beholden community of dependence. We further suggest that such forms of sharing are in turn resisted and subverted by more affluent lower castes to create greater positions of freedom and agency. The orchard that helped to sustain the *Jajmani* system through sharing is giving way to private sites of production that do not sustain the earlier ties of patronage. In certain cases this has helped the rich high castes who have moved out of the village to make more money and has left the poorer low castes who were dependent on these shared resources worse off. However, the low castes recognize the symbolic violence in sharing, and the younger ones are unwilling to accept it.

The low castes increasingly valorize private consumption and market-based goods in the changing social order. They see these goods as a sign of their lesser dependence on the higher castes and use their market-based consumption conspicuously to challenge the might of the old elite. This means that privatization is linked to the question of symbolic capital, and rejection of sharing has to be understood from the perspective of how symbolic power is getting redistributed in a transitioning society. This problem cannot be understood by merely replacing an “egocentric” idea of sharing with the notion of mutuality as Arnould and Rose (2015, 10) have proposed. We show that inclusivity and normative sociality in the *Jajmani* system were fraught with symbolic violence that low castes increasingly recognize and refuse to accept (cf. Arnould and Rose 2015).

This issue of symbolic power gets cast in particularly high relief in the new forms of sharing created by the low caste. It also helps to understand how marketization is not replacing the social or creating a disembedded economic actor but is contributing to new social configurations. We found new forms of sharing created in the market-based system by Salim, a low caste villager. Salim shares his wealth and resources with both high and other low castes. It is the equivalent of ceremonial village feasting that is another form of envy reduction (Belk 2011). Others in the village look up to Salim for such acts of sharing, and he possesses symbolic capital because as a low caste he shares his wealth and resources with other castes from a position of ostensive social subordination (see Parry 1989). This form of sharing by subordinates with socially equal or higher-ups along with private consumption is an important prerequisite in the new market economy taking roots in the village.

It is here that Polanyi's (1944, 1968b) emphasis on a substantivist analysis is particularly useful in explaining the nature of marketization in the village. In this setting, we do not see a rise of a pure economic domain, but instead closely intertwined social and economic spheres with each getting renegotiated with the deepening of capitalist ties. We found that sharing among equals leads to solidarity, reinforcement of common bonds, and social respect, but sharing across the village hierarchy of caste under the shadow of *Jajmani* is a sign of dependence and repression that the low caste increasingly refuse to legitimize. Moreover, low castes in the village share food with the upper castes when they visit their house-fronts. In the erstwhile *Jajmani* system, this form of sharing was disallowed because of the norms of purity and distance. Far from the congenial picture of embedded exchange envisioned by Miller (1986, 2002), the *Jajmani* system in Chanarnapur is cast, at least in retrospect, as forging only formal obligatory ties rather than friendships. This is not to say that the current marketized system necessarily breeds friendships either. But within this marketized setting, the lower castes now take the privilege of sharing with the local elites, and

this sharing is resisted by some of older high castes. Thus sharing is closely tied to a circuit of privileges and power that gets altered with marketization and privatization. This offers insights into inextricable linkages between sharing and symbolic power that have not been articulated in the past.

An alternative to the mode of sharing is to regard the goods, courtesies, and services that flow within the village as gifts (Belk 2010). Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) show that moral and market economies continue to be intertwined in the contemporary world. While we concur with their findings, our research uncovers a neglected domain of what happens when the old moral economy gives way to a new market-based system. Our research is able to offer insights into how a moral economy can be an oppressive system of norms that allows little space to less privileged consumers. We show that the rise of markets in such settings can be liberating and helps more affluent low caste consumers to access marker objects that were monopolized by hereditary privileged castes under the old moral regime.

Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012, 85) further suggest that intracommunity gifting grants cultural authority or symbolic power to givers. Our research raises some basic questions about such assertions that need to be understood in the context of changing moral economies and fields. When the high caste groups offered goods such as clothes to the low caste villagers under the *Jajmani* system, these offerings were interpreted less as free gifts than as resented ways to obligate reciprocal duties (Marcoux 2009). In another Indian village, Raheja (1988) has labeled this phenomenon “the poison in the gift.” Furthermore the reciprocal labor and gifts that flowed in the other direction were not perceived as gifts either. When Ramavtar gave the tape recorder his son got for him to his high caste patron and when another low caste villager gave his new bicycle to his landlord, these offerings were not interpreted as gifts but were rather deferential bowing to the so-called natural order of things. This discourse of duties was contained within a specific normative framework of symbolic capital that prevailed under the *Jajmani* system. Thus these were not freewill gifts that helped actors to achieve hegemonic cultural authority, but obligatory poison gifts made legitimate by the earlier moral economy. We further show that with the withering of this earlier moral order, the discourses of gifts, duties, and cultural authority are shaped by the new framework of a market-based system. Thus our research is able to offer important insights into the working of a moral order and changes within it. This reading of the moral order is consistent with Marcoux's (2009) critique of the axiology of gift-giving in consumer culture theory.

Marcoux's (2009) useful analysis, however, does not examine the question of symbolic power in a field. Our analysis of symbolic power in a field helps to offer some important additions to his reading of marketization. Our substantive analysis shows that symbolic power in the

village continues to depend on the creation of legitimacy and respect that come with sharing in a marketized or privatized setting. In the rising consumer culture, consumption levels are important markers of status. However, a spread of markets and privatization does not completely replace sharing in the setting. In a field in which different actors are jostling for positions of power with the old moral order withering away, sharing by the low caste has become a way of gaining symbolic capital. Similarly, some of the higher castes who continue to live in the village and depend on local markets have to participate in the local process of sharing. Thus the younger high caste villagers such as Pravind are forced to share with the low castes. Similarly, high castes who previously refused to share the house-front of low castes or to accept their food are now willing to participate in such sharing processes. Those actors who have left the village and exist in an independent field can forgo this requirement of the local field. However, for the generation of symbolic and economic capital in the local field, sharing continues to be an aspect from which there is no escape in the village.

Recasting Social Distance

In the dominant reading of status, emphasis is put on distinctions and especially on elite groups distancing themselves from lower groups based on their tastes (Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1899). The idea of distinction is considered one of the most fundamental drivers of social processes. In consumer research, this reading of status has been extensively translated into different settings. For example, according to Üstüner and Holt (2010), higher status groups persistently create distinctions from lower groups. Similarly, McCracken's (1988) "chase and flight" model envisions the elite continuously trying to differentiate themselves. Moreover, while the low cultural capital (LCC) consumers follow collective and functionalist consumption practices, the high cultural capital (HCC) consumers are seen to pursue individual aesthetic goals (Holt 1998). We partly agree that the elite cultivate new tastes based on their habitus in an effort to distance themselves in a social space. However, we also point to a more nuanced reading of this process in the context of marketization and privatization in our data.

Our findings challenge the existing framework of symbolic dominance in an important way. While in earlier days low castes relied on the symbolic veil of honor from the high caste to classify the world, in more recent times this practice is changing. Younger and more affluent low caste members believe that they are equally endowed with the capacity to impose their own classifications on the village, and they use this empowerment to challenge the earlier status hierarchy. We have investigated a social setting that has gone past the hypothesized tipping point at which envy avoidance changes to envy provocation

(Belk 2011). In his study of the low caste Muria Gond in an Indian village, Gell (1986) found that despite their newfound wealth, they were unwilling to engage in visible acts of conspicuous consumption for fear that they would look like a morally different person and provoke the envy of others both above and below their wealth and caste. For example, one wealthy Gond, Tiri, wore the simple loincloth, turban, and blue shirt worn by all men of his generation and disdained acquiring a wristwatch, bicycle, or radio. Likewise his food and drink consumption were modest and in keeping with village norms. Although his wealth was evident in his cattle and buffalo, he avoided the *nouveau riche* conspicuous consumption that would invite comment. Clearly the newly wealthy low caste villagers of Chanarnapur have lost any sense of such constraints. Their consumption patterns are conspicuous and in a state of dynamic flux. While some elderly villagers are critical of conspicuous consumption and commercialization, most low castes see this as an opportunity to leave past experiences of oppression behind. The result is a challenge to symbolic powers of *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* and their place in the traditional caste hierarchy.

In the theory developed by McCracken (1988) and Üstüner and Holt (2010), there is a marginal engagement with questions of local economy and politics. We expand their treatment by engaging with the political economy of status in Chanarnapur. The field of consumption overlaps with the fields of economy and politics in our setting. We show that the high caste *Bhumihaars* with their dominance in the economic and political fields did not allow the low castes to consume beyond sustenance in the earlier *Jajmani* system. However, in recent times with a market economy and mobilizations through political parties, the low castes have broken the shackles of the old system. This has allowed them to exchange and consume more freely and to challenge the prior status hierarchy. It has further resulted in the younger high castes developing a habitus that differs from that of their parents as an outcome of being raised in a market economy. Thus we witness an intergenerational shift in the elite habitus that plays a role in status contests in the village and the rise of an *economic habitus* with emphasis on monetary gains that emerge from participating in the market economy (Bourdieu 2005). This economic habitus is not the disembodied market outcome of neoclassical economic theory or the rise of an atomized *homo economicus*, but is instead a disposition emerging from a capitalist economy that emphasizes a market-based calculus within a specific social matrix (Bourdieu 1979, 2005; Polanyi 1944). On this point we agree with Miller (2002).

The new logic of the market economy as it pervades in the region also does something fundamentally different from the social process of distinctions and from the creation of distance in the setting. Surviving in a market

economy creates a greater independence for actors and at the same time a higher level of dependence that is more voluntary in nature. Durkheim's (1933) theory of organic solidarity based on division of labor helps in understanding that markets offer new opportunities to create social bonds as actors realize their interdependence. This voluntary nature of interdependence or solidarity requires actors to make attempts to be like each other as well. The habitus of the younger elite is adapted to new ways of life, and once-dominant actors try to coexist in the same social space with lower groups in an effort to generate sufficient economic capital for their survival in a capitalist economy. For example, high caste Pravid has to share tea with low caste villagers for his milk business to flourish. Similarly, *Brahmins* in the village are willing to eat in low caste houses in order for their services to fetch rewards in the marketplace for rituals. Thus, as much as the old symbolic power rested on distance, in the new capitalist economy of the village these distinctions become unproductive and dispensable. The new economic field discourages distance as a form of socioeconomic irrationality.

Another feature of the reduction of distance is visible in the high caste imitation of low caste consumption practices. We found that younger elite caste groups emulate several consumption practices of affluent lower caste groups as they become popular and then adapt these practices to their own changed habitus. We do not merely see these upward movements of subordinate consumption as "status float" or a movement driven by the logic of fashion (Field 1970, 45; Trigg 2001). Our elite participants do not create distance from *nouveau riche* as envisaged by Bourdieu (1984). Instead, the new set of dispositions that emerge from immersion in a capitalist economy make some of the older distinctions and features of symbolic power irrelevant. Thus upward status markers do not aimlessly float around or trickle up in this village (cf. Field 1970; Trigg 2001), but are specific results of social and dispositional changes that we witnessed in this setting. In the new political economy with its own winners and losers, the younger of the erstwhile elite attempt to learn from the new victors and adjust to the ways that are needed to win in a capitalist economy. This outcome about an *ijjat* (respect) economy or symbolic order adds to the insights offered by Liechty (2003), who repeats Bourdieu's (1984) script of distinctions constituting the middle-class field in Nepal. We offer insights into a transforming *ijjat* economy in which old distinctions become less relevant, as there is a moral and economic necessity to reduce distance. Hence creating further distinctions is not the only response of the dominant when their symbolic power is challenged.

A decline in distances has also resulted in the waning of old distinctions that separated HCC and LCC consumers. For example, Bourdieu (1984) interprets the HCC consumption to be influenced by aesthetics, whereas the LCC consumers as functionalists are seen as driven by the logic

of necessities (see also Holt 1998). In the village we see a cultural shift that challenges this classification. In the high caste imitation of the low caste's consumption of coarse grains, along with market-based symbolism, we see an emphasis on the functional advantage of physical survival that was earlier considered purely a domain of the low castes. This consumption of coarse grains takes precedence over the idea of traditional high caste food that was associated with refined tastes and social dominance. In contrast, low castes use handmade, carefully crafted, and visually appealing appliqué cloth in their rituals on the pond-bank as important aesthetic expressions. These expressions of low caste aesthetics are found appealing by the younger high castes as they adapt to changing classifications and to a wider canon of good taste. Thus aesthetic appeal and functional value are floating signifiers, and their locations are not merely coterminous with cultural capital (cf. Holt 1998) but are also a part of the nature of status contests and transitions in the structures of fields in which capital is located.

Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) offer insights into several capitalizing practices adopted by at-home fathers, consumers with a high cultural capital habitus, when situated in the lower social status field of home. These capitalizing practices help consumers to improve their status in a situation of a heterology or a mismatch between earlier gender socialization and corresponding status in contemporary consumption fields. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) identify these capitalizing practices as having roots in the original socialized disposition or habitus of masculinity. In Chanarmapur, besides privatization by the old elite, we found that the economically declining younger high caste *Bhumihaars* and *Brahmins* were willing to abandon their earlier socialized roots and to follow the codes of a lower social field in an attempt to sustain their positions. For example, these high castes abandon their customs of distance and purity by allowing low castes to consume with them. They are also willing to offer their services to low castes, to visit their house-fronts, and to consume in low caste households. These responses do not emanate from a modified habitus rooted in the past but from a new disposition that is cultivated as a result of their location in a market economy. This is also a form of capitalization as reported by Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013), but in the present situation the change in habitus and the rejection of earlier practices are decisive features. Thus we witness a rise of a different disposition from what prevailed in the past. Moreover, our research shows that older high and low castes who are unable to make transitions in their dispositions to be in line with the spreading market economy are left behind. They attempt to live their lives with their traditional habitus but find themselves increasingly at the margins of the new field. This results from a transition in the dominant classificatory scheme that is making the earlier dispositions that defined status positions less relevant.

Threshold Places and Rituals of Status Transformation

In this research we found that spatiality is a significant feature of the village hierarchy of Chanarnapur. An important feature of the liminal or threshold for Turner (1974) is the transition associated with special events of life and religion. Accordingly, a transition is pregnant with uncertainty and hence fraught with its own risks. Turner (1974) further suggests that liminal times and places involve an anti-structure that has a negative and ambiguous ambience. Thus liminality is out of place, dangerous, and in itself is lacking in rituals of transformation. Unlike Turner's (1974) characterization, threshold places of Chanarnapur, in spite of their ambiguity of ownership and usage, have specific codes and structures that foster symbolic struggles with specific rituals of transformation. Changes in consumption in threshold places contribute to and signify changes in symbolic power. It is not the passing through these threshold places that leads to transformation, but rather changes in the configuration and use of the threshold places themselves. The threshold in this setting is a performative space of new alignments in which status contests unfold and become an important marker of class (see Liechty 2003). Thus affluent low caste members indulge in conspicuous consumption in their house-fronts and at the pond-bank in order to gain symbolic capital. Similarly, the younger high caste members share at the house-fronts of low castes and imitate them on the pond-front to signify new forms of symbolic struggles and transformations that markets create. This accords with Bourdieu's (1990) observation that thresholds are where status contests take place. However, Bourdieu's analysis of threshold places does not specifically engage either with the idea of hierarchy or with consumption. In highlighting these facets of thresholds we add to the existing understanding of distinction and rituals.

Spatiality is of great significance in our inquiry because we study subordinate and dominant groups who live in the same geographic area. Despite their coexistence in the same village—spread over just one square kilometer—we find rigid spatial boundaries that do not allow the subordinate groups to move their homes from their hamlets to the areas inhabited by the dominant groups despite having the economic capital to buy land there. These restrictions on spatial movements are unique and different from the experiences of Üstüner and Holt's (2010) LCC consumers who could move to gated communities inhabited by HCC consumers. We demonstrate that Chanarnapur's current threshold places are characterized by an inversion of the old hierarchy and by the opposing principles of the old feudal and new capitalist social orders in which high and low status groups collide. Our interpretation of the threshold as being located between the private and the public also helps us to understand how consumers in a transitioning economy respond to the deepening of market-based systems

with implications for social mobility, consumption of the commons, and uses of private goods. As Bourdieu has insightfully observed, these inversions and collisions threaten the stability of a social order and cultural formation. Our examination of status contests on the pond-bank and at the house-front and orchard highlights the significance of space in the creation of consumer subjectivity (see also Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2011; Srivastava 2011). Thus in highlighting threshold places our findings offer insights into an important, albeit neglected feature of symbolic power.

In conclusion, our research helps us understand symbolic power in a transitioning society. It helps to understand the new socioeconomic obligations and status contests that are created when a hereditary ascribed status system disintegrates in times of marketization and accompanying privatization. Several questions for further research arise out of this study. How do gender relations within the village hierarchy change with the changing consumption in threshold places? How do the status dynamics in this caste-based context differ from status dynamics in non-caste-based marketizing economies? With the insights into a transitioning hierarchy in this village, we hope to offer important insights into changing consumer culture across the globe. As Ger and Belk (1996) suggest, in market economies it is at times of rapid economic change that consumers attempt to materialize their status aspirations and thereby often achieve them. It is not only economic growth that provides conditions for status dynamism; conditions of economic decline or cataclysm also provide fertile grounds for examining the impact of potential reversion to moral economies as a strategy for survival. The same is true of rapid marketization such as the cases of formerly communist and socialist states. Changing religious dominance such as is occurring with the Islamization occurring in Europe and the sudden affluence of parts of the Middle East are other relevant contexts that are ripe for study. And the impact of American and Canadian immigration policies favoring immigrants who are wealthier and more highly educated than prior residents offers another opportunity to study changing status contests that are more likely to follow the patterns we detect than those hypothesized by Veblen, Simmel, and Bourdieu. Class dynamics are put into sharper focus under such conditions, and all of these are promising areas for future study.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author conducted all of the in-person fieldwork himself from September 2005 until October 2006. Data were discussed and analyzed on multiple occasions by all three authors using the first author's field notes and interview transcripts. The final ethnography was authored by all three authors.

APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIONS OF THRESHOLD PLACES

House-front or Duar

A *Duar* is an open and unmarked space in front of a house with furniture, cattle, agriculture-related equipment, and vehicles in it that signify the status of the house owner. The rough equivalent in the West might be a combination front yard, patio, and driveway but without landscaping, fences, or other boundary markers. The area of land that constitutes a *Duar* is a private space because it is owned by the house owner. However, the residents of the village use it as a path because there are no formal roads or walkways between homes and areas of the village, and local norms support this form of public consumption. The ambiguity of ownership and usage, and of being in between a private and public space, makes the *Duar* a threshold.

Orchard or Bagaicha

A *Bagaicha* is an orchard with different species of fruit trees that are mostly owned by the high caste. It is a place of production of fruits and wood. A *Bagaicha* is a threshold because the physical space and trees belong to an individual, but there is a tradition to allow collection of dry leaves and twigs by any villager.

Pond-Bank or Chath Ghat

In Chanarnapur, both Hindus and some Muslims assemble on the *Chath Ghat* or the bank of the village pond to perform the *Chath Puja*. This place is a threshold because the place in which the *Chath* is organized is a public space, and the state owns the land. However, the villagers construct stepped pyramid-like idol structures and personalize the space by deploying an idol; the idol and the place around it are identified with the family that constructs it.

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