

# Global Cultures of Consumption and the Suburb: A Study of Changing Cultural Geography of three Urban Villages of South Delhi

Rani Tokas

*Department of Sociology, UGC-Human Resource Development Centre, BPS Women University, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat, HR, India*

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## ABSTRACT

The study attempts an understanding of the impact of the global on the local taking space as a mediator. Using a constructivist perspective it utilizes the already existing rich literature in cultural geography and documents re-negotiation of identities with the restructuring of the social and cultural universe of three villages of South Delhi. It proceeds through analysis of narratives obtained from inhabitants of the villages as well as from participants in the process of these inhabitants' interface with the changing architectural and cultural landscape around their habitat. The arrival of consumerist cultures, media convergence and a world of hyper reality in the post-globalisation phase has given rise to deep conflicts and identity strain for these tradition bound village dwellers. In its final analysis, the paper highlights unique adaptive mechanism resorted to by those impacted with new currents of change and transition.

**Keywords:** Culture, Identity, Space, Consumerism, Malls, Cultural Geography

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The idea for this study germinated in my mind when I heard from a friend that people in Munirka (a village in south Delhi) call it a 'mini-America.' It was then that the 'space' metaphor struck me. As the original inhabitants of Munirka mostly have a rent-economy, space is a very powerful mediator in their lives. There has been an

emergence of new utilities in the suburb in the form of business-centres, malls, hospitals, flyovers, a multiplex, restaurants, private school, business management institutes etc. It is perhaps the impact of these coupled with the arrival of global consumerist cultures that the image of America comes to the mind of Munirka's inhabitants. This can also be seen as a process of identity re-negotiation in a symbolic space.

It was Alfred Kroeber who defined 'culture areas' as geographical regions sharing particular distribution of cultural traits. Also in his attempt to understand and conceptualise culture, Kroeber studied the ways of mapping associations of cultural traits, the

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## Address for correspondence

Department of Sociology, UGC-Human Resource Development Centre, BPS Women University, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat, HR, India

**E-mail:** rani.jnu@gmail.com

distinctiveness of a particular people and the interaction of traits to finally map a total way of life. Kroeber opines that “The concept of a culture area is a means to an end. The end may be the understanding of culture processes as such, or of the historic events of cultures.”<sup>1</sup> It is this only that cultural geographers also attempt.

Mike Crang elaborates in her book that “Cultural Geography is about the diversity and plurality of life in all its variegated richness, about how the world, spaces and places are interpreted and used by people, and how these places then help to perpetuate that culture”<sup>2</sup> It is about how practices and places, cultures and space, ideas and material interrelate.

Cultural geography advanced with Carl Sauer’s work which shows that it “wasn’t nature that caused culture, but rather culture, working with and on nature, created the contexts of life. Sauer was especially concerned with material aspects of culture, particularly the landscape, which he saw as manifestations of culture’s traffic with nature.”<sup>3</sup>

It is believed that Carl Sauer’s ideas were formulated in reaction to the theoretical models of environmental determinism as well as social Darwinism. He is thus seen as pointing out the crisis in western culture with the seeds of environmental disaster being planted by those who privilege instrumental and technological rationality. Carl Sauer argued in his essay ‘The Morphology of Landscape’ (1925), that older cultural theorists stressed upon time as cultural traditions were passed on from generation to generation. Unlike them, new cultural theory, as it is developing in cultural studies and many allied disciplines, stresses space, understanding culture to be constituted through space and as space. Spatial metaphors have become indispensable for understanding the constitution of culture.<sup>4</sup>

Denis Cosgrove and Peter Jackson argue that culture should be understood as “the medium through which people transform the mundane phenomena of the material world into a world of significant symbols

to which they give meaning and attach value”<sup>5</sup> and consequently culture “is the very medium through which change is experienced, contested and constituted.”<sup>6</sup>

Duncan argues that culture must be seen as a process and not as a thing. He says that “the term culture could be saved if it were not treated as an explanatory variable in itself but used to signify contexts for action or sets of arrangement between people at various levels of aggregation.”<sup>7</sup>

A Cultural geographer Edward Soja (1989) argues that place is a socially constructed phenomenon apart from only being a physical and material entity. The identity of a social place is constructed symbolically and meanings attached are relationally operational. He further contends that social and cultural theories have ignored the idea of space which is an important variable in the organization of social life.

With similar analysis, James Duncan and David Ley have looked at the idea of place in the new era of consumerism and media technologies. Their book, ‘Place/Culture/Representation’ (1993) explores representations of place as reflexive cultural practices which resist power equations. The questions posed by cultural geographers today are similar to that of cultural studies. The analysis of meaning, identity, power dynamics and relational dimension of representations has acquired a prominent position in studies of space and place.

Landscapes become live stages for the ‘spectacle’ of life and the very notion of ‘spectacle’ here implies something orchestrated or something designed. Landscape can be seen as a system of signs.

*“The power of landscape does not derive from the fact that it offers itself as a spectacle, but rather from the fact that, as mirror and mirage, it presents any susceptible viewer with an image at once true and false of a creative capacity which the subject (or Ego) is able, during a moment of marvellous self-deception, to claim as his own. A landscape also has the seductive power of all pictures, and this is especially true of an urban landscape.”<sup>8</sup>*

1 Kroeber 1936:1.

2 Crang 1998: 3.

3 Sauer, Carl as cited in Mitchell 2000:21.

4 Mitchell: 2000.

5 Cosgrove, Denis and Jackson 1987:95.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Duncan 1980:197.

8 Lefebvre 1991:189.

According to Don Mitchell “Malls are landscapes that are all about signs: they are clearly meant to be read. As landscapes, the meaning of malls (and similar spaces like festival marketplaces) seems particularly obvious. Their job is to provide us with an exquisite sense of expectation—the expectation that through the magic of money, one can transform one’s self into anything one pleases, the expectation that one can be glamorous and desirable as the wares on display and the people who pass by in the corridors. Malls aren’t just about signs; they are elaborate systems of signs. They are texts.”<sup>9</sup>

Consumerism, Robert Bocoock says “involves consuming ideas, images on television and in advertisement. Symbolic meanings affect modern consumers in buying clothes, cars, discs, pre-recorded videos and home furnishing, for example. It is not merely a material object with a simple, direct, utilitarian usage which is purchased, but something about who the consumer aims to be at that time. Consumer goods are part of the way in which people construct a sense of identity through the use of symbols in consumption patterns.”<sup>10</sup>

Robert Bocoock cites Baudrillard in his book “Consumption”, “that all consumption is always consumption of symbolic signs. These symbols, or signs, do not express an already pre-existing set of meanings. The meanings are generated within the systems of signs/symbols which engages the attention of a consumer. Consumption is to be conceptualized as a process in which a purchaser of an item is actively engaged in trying to create and maintain a sense of identity through the display of purchased good.”<sup>11</sup>

He further elaborates that according to Baudrillard “Consumptions should not be seen as an activity which is simply induced, or produced, in modern consumers by the advertising industry and commercial interests upon a passive audience. Consumption has become an active process involving the symbolic construction of a sense of both collective and individual identities. This sense of identity should no longer be seen as given to people by membership of a specific economic class, or social status group, or directly by ethnicity or gender.

9 Mitchell 2000:129.

10 Bocoock 1993:35.

11 Bocoock 1993:45.

Identities have to be actively constructed by more and more people for themselves. In this process of active identity construction, consumption has come to play a central role. Baudrillard suggests that consumers do not purchase items of clothing, food, body decoration, furniture or a style or entertainment, for instance, in order to express an already existing sense of who they are. Rather, people create a sense of who they are through what they consume” and thus “people try to become the being they desire to be by consuming the items that they imagine will help to create and sustain their idea of themselves, their image and their identity. Clothes, perfumes, cars, food and drinks, all may play a part in this process.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus to decode the *place ballet* of the sub-urban village to the tunes of global capital induced changes, to inquire into the interaction of social structures with the new architectural landscape, to sense the underlying moral and psychological dilemmas, to differentiate between adaptability and seduction, to decode the hidden maps of meaning and explore the discourse of identity with living space (*lebensraum*) forms the core of the study.

## Methodology

The Universe of my study included the villages—Munirka, Kishangarh, Masoodpur and the Malls in neighbourhood including Priya PVR Complex, Promenade, Ambience (showrooms’ and restaurants’ employees and commuters). Being a purely qualitative study which uses the interpretivist mode of analysis, I preferred formulating a set of research questions instead of hypothesis.

## Research Questions:

- ❑ How are the socially constructed cultural meanings (reflected in beliefs and practices) being reshaped by the emerging patterns of the sub-urban landscape and living space?
- ❑ How the utilities are altering the perceptions of self-identity?
- ❑ Discover the psycho-cultural responses (threats and hopes) of the new architectural landscape

12 *Ibid.*

- ❑ What are the new markers of status-negotiations?
- ❑ How the new breed of advertising messages influencing the actors?
- ❑ How does landscape negotiate with the generation gap?
- ❑ How the food habits and lifestyles are changing?
- ❑ How are the new landscapes reshaping the gender roles and gender identities?

Being a qualitative study, the data collection tools and techniques included

(a) Observation and (b) Interview.

Observation was simple as well as uncontrolled. Primary data was collected using random sampling for conducting the Interviews. The interviews were open ended, unstructured and were more of like unorganized conversations. Unfocused group interviews were also conducted as that helped in gathering a wide range of data and reaching into the depth of the problem. The interview process continued for eight weeks which included the original inhabitants and tenants in the age group of 15 to 60 years.

### **Masoodpur, Kishangarh and Munirka: A descriptive note**

According to the villagers all the three villages have existed for over 300 years. In first appearance the three villages bear the look of semi-urban hamlets. As I entered these villages the first scenes included veiled women covering their face in what is called a 'dhatta' style with only their eyes visible. These small villages are inhabited predominantly by *Jats* many of whom see themselves as landlords. The dominating *gotras* are '*Malik*' in Masoodpur, '*Khatiri*' in Kishangarh and '*Tokas*' in Munirka. Munirka and Masoodpur are more congested than Kishangarh village as one can easily make out from the appearance. Landlords' only source of income is rent in majority of the cases. Their property is ancestral as well as acquired in some cases. They have constructed buildings having 3-4 floors each with 4 to 5 rooms on each floor and the rent amount ranges from

Rs. 4000 to 8000 for each room. Both Masoodpur and Kishangarh are adjacent to highly developed urban locality of south Delhi namely Vasant Kunj. Masoodpur village is just behind the well-known schools of Delhi like G.D. Goenka and Bhatnagar International School. Munirka Village is situated just next to Jawaharlal Nehru University. With the effect of new global consumerist cultures, big malls like Vasant Square and retail chain stores like Big Bazar have come up adjacent to the Masoodpur village. In the recent years with these changes in surrounding areas, not only has the village geography changed but the lifestyle, food habits and cultural patterns have also come under its influence. Physical layout of these villages today bears a congested look as the rent economy has led to more and more construction. For a house owner more the number of rooms, higher is the assurance of rent. The villages are seeing a rapid growth of general commodity stores, coaching centres, beauty parlours (some of which are exclusively for males), tailoring shops, Reliance store, 24x7 store, coaching centres, beauty parlours, restaurants, cyber café etc. Cable TV, telephone and electricity wires add to the scenario of congestion.

### **Findings:**

I began my research with observation being my first tool followed by interview. I interviewed 120 people in all (including 30 from each village i.e. 90 respondents consisting of 45 men and 45 women from the three villages and 30 more from neighbouring Malls like Promenade, Priya PVR Complex, Ambience including 15 men and 15 women). I made several visits to all these places and my respondents so as to gain familiarity and built a rapport with them over the period of time. I also visited the malls no. of times which are located in the vicinity of these villages so as to observe the behaviour of people frequenting these complexes for shopping and other purposes. I also interviewed employees of showrooms like Reebok, United Colors of Benetton, Adidas, FreeLook, Louis Philippe etc. as well as restaurants (Nirula's, Pizza Hut, McDonald's etc.) to gain an insight into the behavioural patterns of people belonging to these villages who frequent their stores. The research/field work was completed in about

8 weeks including responses from age group 15 to 60. The respondents belonged mostly to the middle class. Following are in a way representative of the overall responses I received in the field.

What I wanted to explore was the changing cultural meanings which are exhibited in beliefs, practices and changing lifestyles. The first thing that struck me in the responses of the respondents was generation gap as well as gender gap. It is the new generation which is more attracted to and fascinated by the mall culture and brands. As one of my respondent Rajbir Malik, aged 33, said that he finds shopping in Sarojini Nagar more conducive than showrooms at big malls like Promenade, Priya PVR Complex etc. The reason attributed is his budget. He summed up the situation by using the word '*haisiyat*' (status), which according to him is the deciding factor for one's shopping destination. However he added that the teenagers and younger women in the village are the one who regularly visit Priya PVR Complex, Ambience mall and shop at showrooms in Mahipalpur. He himself is not brand conscious. Though he mixes up with the younger people a lot (as I observed in my second visit) yet he considers himself to be a part of the elder generation (he has two kids-a 5 years old son and 8 years old daughter). According to him most of the girls in the village get married between the age group of 18-22 years and very few get proper education. He further said that boys in the village are 'useless' and don't study as they depend completely on family income which comes from rent. He also believes that girls should be accompanied by family members when they go out for shopping otherwise they must not be allowed to go out. Rajbir believes that Masoodpur village is still behind Munirka in terms of development which is reflected in rental rates in these two localities.

The account given by Rajbir of the situation of girls also matches with those of Mr. Santosh Tokas (resident of Munirka and employed with a television channel) and Mrs. Savitri (Munirka) who are of the opinion that girls must not be allowed to shop alone at places like Priya PVR complex neither at any other malls. So, they do not have the freedom to go out alone or even with their friends for shopping or watching a movie until

accompanied by family members. The villagers believe that the presence of a family member is a must to protect them at such places. In my second visit to Mr. Santosh Tokas's house, his daughter Monica told me that she is pursuing correspondence course BCA from IGNOU as her father does not want her to go out of the house for education. Her younger sister Surekha (who has dropped out of school) is a good singer but their father, despite being employed in a national TV channel, has never encouraged her to perform or even learn music. When I got to know this and asked him later about it, he replied that his experience tells him that media performers are have a chance of becoming morally corrupt. Monica, while talking to me, was in tears as she informed me about the discrimination she faces at her home. She said nobody values a girl's desires and she has no freedom at all to do whatever she wishes for.

Mrs. Savitri (35 years), who is a widow, is of the opinion that modernity implies 'nudity' and has snatched away whatever cultural values were present in the community. She said that the youngsters now have no respect for their elders and the only thing they care about is money. Their lives are being ruled by artificiality. She believes that the so called development has ruined their lives.

My other respondents Mrs. Naresh Malik (27 years) and Mrs. Meena Malik (29 years) in Masoodpur village are of the opinion that the so called development has destroyed everything and the demolition drive which seeks to modernize villages and turn them into towns has snatched their sources of income or livelihood. Meena said that it has taken almost 20 years for them to stand where they are and everything will be finished in this drive in minutes. And one interesting thing came up while I was interviewing when Meena said that '*abhi tho dekho kuch nahi hua dus saal baad dekhna Masoodpur gaon bilkul America ban jayega.*' (much has not happened till now. Just wait and watch as in another ten years Masoodpur village will become like America). When I asked her what made her think that, she replied:

*'aur kya hai yeh jaada jaada mall ban rahi hain America ki tarah aur dekho ab log kaise rehte hain..pehle to sadhgi thi par ab tho modern hog aye hain..kapde pehne ke dang mei aur phir dikhawa bhi karte hain sab kuch dekhawati ho gaya hain ab.'*

(What else is this that more and more big malls are coming up now and more and more tall buildings like those in U.S. are being built and look at the way people live now, early they were so simple but now they have become very modern, look at the way people dress up and the way they show off, everything has becoming artificial.)'

To this Naresh further added that now it is a '*game of money*', as those who have lot of money enjoy its benefits i.e. in terms of affording new cars, A/C, costly education for kids, good space i.e. big houses to live but those who don't have it are at a loss. She further said '*Jab hawa badal ti hai tho sab kuch badal jata hai*' (Things change once the whole ambience and condition changes). Here '*hawa*' symbolizes the effect of global culture and modernization in terms of developments happening around). She also remarked that '*Jiske paas ghar, gadi, paisa hai usi ke paas status aur izzat hai aur usiki samaj mei log izzat karte hai aur unke ilaava kisi ki koi aukaat nahi*' (Those who have money, car and house have the high status and standard and even society respects them otherwise those without it don't have any status or say in society). On being asked whether she goes to malls or not, she replied that malls '*mei kharch karne ke liye paise kahase laaye, jiski haisiyat hai who jaata hai*' (where from shall we bring money to spend in malls, people having high status go there). When I asked her where they go for shopping, she replied that their husbands go to these malls and big shops and get clothes or other items from there. However, she said, women like me get their things from their village and nearby shops as everything is available there and sometimes visit the Mehrauli market if necessary (mostly on occasions like marriage or festivals). Otherwise they don't even step out of their house. She further said that this modern trend has polluted the environment as there is very less fresh air to breathe. Construction has led to congestion. Adding to it further she said that their children go to Nirula's and McDonald's most of the times even if it is costly as that has become fashion for the youngsters especially for boys. On being enquired as to where they get themselves treated when sick, she replied that they have these clinics where doctor charges between Rs. 250-300 per visit. So I asked her 'are they good?' She said '*jab itna paisa maang raha hai tho accha hi hai*' i.e. if asking for

so much money than he's good. I also felt that according to them this change is more for the youngsters to enjoy as they have more freedom and exposure now. The same thing came up during conversation with Savitri Tokas from Munirka who said that 'it has taken away everything especially the *sanskriti* (traditional beliefs and customs) as no one is willing to follow this now. With modernity the younger generation is becoming more and more disrespectful towards their elders and some are literally driving away their parents from their own house', she concluded.

Another respondent, Mr. Davinder Tokas in Munirka, said that his son Jitender is doing MBA from IIPM and they are spending almost 5 lacs every year for his fees but he does not even show respect towards them. During an incident, he recalled, his son brought his friends to his house and when his friend asked about him, his son replied in English that 'he is our servant.' That pain could be sensed on Davinder's face while he was narrating this incident. Thus it seems that elders in village are not able to cope up or adapt with these changes and the ways of the young are threatening for them in many ways. But on the other hand Mr. Devinder said he is happy because the more modern Munirka becomes the more rent he earns. He feels his life is getting better as he has more money now to buy good clothes, mobile phone, car etc. The fact that youngsters do not respect their elders and consider their parents to be unmodern and backward came to light in my other interviews as well. This dichotomy proves helplessness of these villagers in coming to terms with the process of change and new surroundings.

A respondent Sandhya Malik (34 years) seemed more open minded as compared to others. She runs her boutique named 'Fabulous' and has one daughter and one son. She said that her children mostly shop at malls as they get good quality products and at least malls are not crowded like other local markets. She said she even allows her children to go to McDonald and Nirula's but not too frequently because of health consciousness. She further said that it is important to change with time as the environment changes and now-a-days it is important to be updated whether in terms of lifestyle or ways of thinking. One should be flexible enough to be adaptive

to these changes. She said that it was not easy for her to open the boutique which she runs alone but she received full support from her husband. She says that development at least for her in village means a move from rural to urban household structure, change in thinking pattern i.e. different from the traditional ways of thinking. Interestingly, she told me that how villagers and almost everyone now-a-days is conscious of their house structure i.e. how well and beautifully houses are designed. Also, Sandhya said that the way house look and the way the people dress up provides them with a feeling of 'class' and this in itself creates hierarchy. As believes that now-a-days everyone competes with others in terms of ownership of household commodities such as TV brand, washing machine, A/C or even how neat their house is. She added that otherwise this never used to happen in the village in earlier days.

During my fieldwork I also saw that people in villages have their own parameters to judge who is more developed or modern in terms of assessments like the kind of school one's children attend with a premium placed on names like D.P.S., Modern school, G.D. Goenka in comparison to schools such as D.A.V., Poorna Pragna, Masonic school etc. which may have a lower fee structure. Also an important marker is the way children speak and their social mannerisms. Sandhya shared that her children want to move out of this village structure and they prefer going to McDonald's, Nirulas or malls. However one thing she was worried about was the health of her children. She said that '*aaj kal bacche ghar ka khana pasand hi nahi karte, waise tho theek hai par health par tho effect padta hi hai*' (now children don't like homemade food, they like going out and it is alright also but this junk food is not good for health). On the whole she felt that the emerging scenario is for good only as this will certainly lead to improvement in their status with their children becoming more and more independent and future oriented.

One very interesting thing happened as I went for another interview just after I interviewed Mrs. Sandhya Malik. Co-incidentally after her interview I went to another house who happened to be her relatives and told me when I mentioned Sandhya's name that her children don't respect her and often fight with her.

Sumeet Malik (26 years) was the most interesting respondent in my fieldwork. She runs a beauty parlour at her home and says that only a few women come from her village and that too married daughter in-law mostly as the unmarried girls are not allowed to go to parlours. Her parlours' name is 'Cutie'. According to her, she feels that her parlour has provided her with an identity of her own which she lacked earlier and sees in this whole process a role of developmental process which has infused certain modern values in the village. This is itself visible in that she is allowed to run her own beauty parlour despite being a daughter in-law of the village. Moreover Suman wears western clothes but only within her house as her husband is open minded according to her.

She said that she often visits the neighbouring malls for peaceful window shopping only as stuff there is very costly for them. So she goes there to listen to music and enjoying the air- conditioned environment of the mall. Her husband, however she said, is very particular about brands so he always buys his clothes or other accessories from big malls or other known shopping complexes.

On being further enquired that why she does not shop in these malls, she responded that more than her own choice she has to follow her mother-in-law in accordance with the village culture and tradition. Thus for buying stuff for herself she goes to Mehrauli market. When I asked her about the change in food habits, she said her son and other children in their family are addicted to soft drinks and fast food.

One more interesting thing was that while talking to her she revealed that that they have a custom of keeping '*ghunghat*' / purdah (veil) when they go out of their house till the moment they step out of the village boundary as than there will be no one to object. But also while in a way justifying the concept of '*ghunghat*' she laughingly said that '*accha hai ghunghat hai, hum tho kaali bhi nahi hoti aur kisi ki buri nazar bhi nahi lagti*' (It's good they have veil as they don't get tanned and no one stares at them). Also she said that '*hum tho ghunghat mei se sabko dekhte hai, nahi tho agar waise dekhe tho sab bolenge 'badmash hai*' i.e. that they can see everyone from within the veil otherwise if they look at someone, they will be called

bad in character. She is happy and satisfied to have big malls near her house as she finds going for window shopping very thrilling and enjoyable. However, these are isolated cases where women are allowed by their husbands to go out once in a while.

Further she said that in modern times wealth and status are very important to live a better life. She alleged that now more than the quality of education what matters is how reputed a school is where people send their child, what model of cars they drive and how much dowry they afford to give and receive. These are new status symbols of being modern and developed. According to her it is money which changes one's thinking and makes people modern. As she said '*agar paisa ho tho sab kuch kharida ja sakta hai*' (everything can be bought with money). Laughingly, she announced if she gets lot of money than on that very day she will leave the village and will prefer staying in VIP areas.

Kaushala (24 years) also reported the same behaviour of removing the 'ghunghat' after crossing the village's boundary. She said that even her in-laws encourage her to work as she is good in stitching. So they tell her to open her boutique in the house, which she will be opening shortly.

Another one of my respondents Mrs. Maya Malik (aged 45) and grandmother of two kids, said one can witness development through the village structure which was rural earlier but is modernized now as many retail shops, schools have opened up which has changed the village environment. But she said that '*mahol bhi kharab hua hai development ki wajah se kyuki aaj kal ki ladkiyo ko tho dekho kitna bolti hai, hum tho kabhi itna nahi bole, ghumne jati hai in market mei, ghar ka kuch kaam nahi hai. Ab tho ladkiyon ko log padhate bhi hai aur naukri bhi karate hai zamaana badal gaya hai*'. (Now-a-days village environment is not good because of 'development' as girls talk too much and even roam around the markets without any purpose. In fact girls are now being taught also and even allowed to work. However, she added, despite these changes, dignity of women has not been achieved so far).

Even those youth who have managed to educate themselves well and consider themselves modern seem to have dual standards. Manish Bhargav who

is employed as an HR executive in IIPM and is originally from Kishangarh was very positive about the developments that have taken place. He is extremely brand conscious, finds malls very pleasing and posed himself as a very broad minded modern person. He also said that the youth have adapted to the changes much more quickly than the elders who are continuing with the old mentality. His father Naresh Bhargav doesn't trust local retail store and says that they are dishonest in weighing and even the quality of the vegetables is not good. So he prefers the local 'sabjimandi' (vegetable market) but his son and daughter-in-law prefer retail stores.

Manish Bhargav's wife, Nitika is a school teacher. She talked to me about the Bhargav household's atmosphere and remarked that it is still governed by traditional norms despite her husband being well-educated and modern. Even her husband, she confessed during the interview, does not give the kind of freedom which any educated female should have. She said '*jab apne pe baat aati hai tho koi broad minded nahi hota*' (people are not broad-minded when it comes to themselves).

My other respondent Mr. Radhe Ram Tokas from Munirka village is one of those elderly people who are fond of branded items, is extremely positive about new developments and even said that demolition drive is for the good as long as it is confined to areas which do not fall under the 'Lal-Dora' territory. However, at the same time he is also concerned about loss of respect towards parents in the younger generation. He said he is happy that with commercial developments rents have increased and thus he is ready to compromise even with the loss of cultural values.

When I asked my respondents about the new breed of advertising messages, I found that most of the youth do not understand the messages completely but are able to identify a product or celebrity in them. As for the elderly, they don't pay much attention to them for example Mr. M.R. Tokas said he gets to know about new products through newspapers and television and never bothers to notice the billboards advertisements in the city.

During my visits to the Priya PVR Complex, I found, as a result of my observation and the interviews I

conducted, that a person's socio-economic background decides how one relates to the place. The effect of the whole atmosphere and the landscape upon visitors from these villages is clearly visible in their behaviour patterns. According to the showroom and restaurant employees most of the people who visit this complex and come from the neighbouring villages are from the younger generation. They also seem to have an inferiority complex about themselves even if they are from wealthy families.

Rohit, a senior employee at a branded garment store said that these youth further learn how to behave and dress up when they visit the complex and this is the beginning of their journey into modern values. Another employee, Anil said that it is rare for girls from these villages to get to visit showroom and even if they come their parents or elders accompany them. He also said that people from these villages are extremely self-conscious while shopping. At times they pose like very rich people in the beginning but very soon lose grip over this show of control. Maya from a reputed fast food chain says that they have regular customers coming from these villages and they show good manners while having their meals. Charanjeet Aggarwal from a Pizza outlet says that only males place orders for home delivery usually and otherwise they do not see many customers visiting their restaurant from these villages as such. Manil Mishra from another famous fast food outlet said that the people coming from these villages feel anxious and nervous while placing their order. They also at times wait for the other customers to finish and usually talk only when the counter is empty. Rahul and Amit from a male garment store said that these people have a language barrier and most of the times come for window shopping except for a few ones. Praveen Negi from a branded shoe store says that he has regular customer from Munirka and Masoodpur and they usually prefer their brand because of quality, prestige and status. Some showroom employees also said that they let such people window shop when the store is not crowded. At other times or if they create some disturbance in atmosphere, they have their methods to make them leave the showroom. For example, the salesmen ask them whether they looking for something in particular? Can we help? He further

said that such customers are very sharp as they get the hint and immediately leave.

### **Analysis and Interpretation:**

The study firstly reveals the villagers to be engaged in a dialectical process with global cultures of consumerism and as a result of experiencing a dilemma which shows their changing ways of making sense of the world. The changing environment of the village is presenting them with both a feel of development and modernization as well as that of a challenge to adapt with. Consumption has increased as a function of this and now the image being modern is an important variable in negotiation of identity as well as a marker of status. However there are deep psychological threats present in the changed scenario for women who are culturally unsupported and constrained in dealing with the changed context. As a result there is a dichotomy prevalent at all levels but its nature differs in the lives of women in different circumstances. These are testing times for the women in the village. These are times of transition and enormous strain.

The youth see malls like Promenade, Ambience and the Priya complex as 'exotic' places. They have become their favourite hangout zones. The experience of shopping itself attracts them besides brands being symbols of status. This is evident in the window shopping thrills of many of my respondents. Those who do not afford a branded outfit, search for the similar styles if available at a low price in places like the Sarojini Nagar Market.

It is the youth who have been captivated the most by the euphoria echoed in the whole atmosphere at a mall or a multiplex. However the dilemma for them is rooted in their background. They are not confident enough when it comes to ordering a meal at eating joints like Nirula's and McDonald's or while purchasing garments from showrooms like Freelook, Benetton etc. They may hide this feeling behind airs of superiority but their language skills prove to be their handicap and ultimately give the salesmen an upper hand. This attempt of acquiring an identity which is modern on the surface further deepens the feelings of insecurity present in them. It is felt that the identity of being a member of a particular community at times leads to a feeling of shame. Inside

the village one may be a proud landlord, elsewhere one can gain status only by showing off wealth. Thus consumerism thrives but the process of reconstruction of an identity gets strained. The attempt of projecting oneself as modern lasts for a limited period of time when they are visiting these places. Back home they return to a reality which may not be very pleasant. They feel that their parents are immersed in a sea of ignorance (about the modern world). This may also intensify feelings of disrespect towards their parents. The antagonism that sets in can take extreme dimensions in a few cases. Thus the changing landscape is widening the generation gap.

The gender gaps, sadly, are not narrowing down. The spatial entrapment of women is very much evident from the study. Men and women have separate spheres with women being confined to homes and neighbourhood. Married women have resigned to their fate in most of the cases. While a few unmarried ones complain of deprivation in comparison to boys, women mostly continue to derive their source of identity from men. A very few of them manage to cross the boundary of the village and its norms to visit malls for a momentary feeling of freedom and pleasure in the air conditioned seductive atmosphere. However these excursions are limited to the domain of recreation rather than being expressions of being rebellion or a sustained effort towards an alternative identity construction. A woman's identity is established through her position in either her natal or marital home as daughter, sister, wife, mother and/or mother-in-law. At the societal level, the individual identity of women is also structured on the basis of their caste, class and family status. This was particularly significant for married women in these villages. During fieldwork, a woman could be contacted only as somebody's wife or daughter-in-law. Women in these villages remain strictly under the vigilance and control of men after marriage. However seeds of frustration are clearly present in almost all of them. Thus winds of change are further deepening the pain of married village women, not alleviating it.

Wealth and size of house was and still remains an important marker of status for the village dwellers. However the cultures of consumerism have deeply penetrated the suburb. Thus the new markers of status

include, especially amongst the youth, branded clothes and accessories, new models of cars and motorbikes, eating out at costly places and watching movies at the Priya PVR complex or shopping at malls like Ambience, Vasant Kunj. This behaviour is also present in some elderly people but they are clearly aware of their limits and means. Some elderly people find it hard to trust the big showrooms and retail chain stores like Big Bazaar, Reliance etc. They are also quite vocal about loss of cultural values amongst the youth. The elderly people find it tough to make sense of the new breed of advertising messages and thus depend upon other means to know about new products.

New spatial developments and utilities are generating dual feelings. The villagers are happy that it is improving their income and purchasing power yet they fear a crisis of environment and cultural values. In case of the youth the march towards modernity means at times constructing a dual identity including a superficially fabricated one and another as the perceived real. However sooner or later realisation comes and they fall back upon their village identity and kinship world.

### **Limitations and the Role of the Researcher**

Findings in this study could be subject to other interpretation as well as my own biases because of my personal links with the place of study. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity and value neutrality, these biases might have shaped the way I observed, understood and interpreted the events as well as the responses in the field. But at the same time it also provided me an edge as my time was saved in gaining entry to the field and access to respondents. This also helped me in establishment of rapport with the respondents. Further, time was a limiting factor as I could not analyse the data at a vast scale and the sample size had to be limited. The interview method itself might have contributed towards introduction of bias in the research on account of its subjective nature.

### **Conclusion**

The research began with an attempt to analyse the changing cultural practices and the processes of identity re-negotiation in the light of the restructuring of the

social and cultural universe of the villages Kishangarh, Masoodpur and Munirka. The study in its final analysis highlights the increase in the consumption levels of the villagers who are under the sway of cultures of consumerism in the post-globalisation phase. Space plays an important role in the lives of these villagers as increased rental rates contribute towards an increase in purchasing power. Space is an important variable in raising the consumption levels of the inhabitants. The impact of mall culture has come to stay in these suburbs. The youth are the most impressionable and vulnerable category for the new cultures of consumption. Thus a process of identity re-negotiation is set in motion in this section of the population which at times leads to construction of a dual identity. However, the study indicates that though by acting in conformity with this new mall culture, they might temporarily assume an identity perceived as modern yet in reality they do not get the satisfaction of being the members of that perceived class of people to whom these centres (malls, multiplexes etc.) cater in their eyes. They can at best take refuge in masquerade for some time but they know that at the end of the day they are bound to return to their original cultural sphere. Thus even though the process of identity re-negotiation is operational at a superficial level and is male centric for these village dwellers yet the path of seduction is clearly laid out before them and they have also taken the road.

**\*Note:** Pseudonyms have been used for all the respondents so as to maintain their privacy.

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