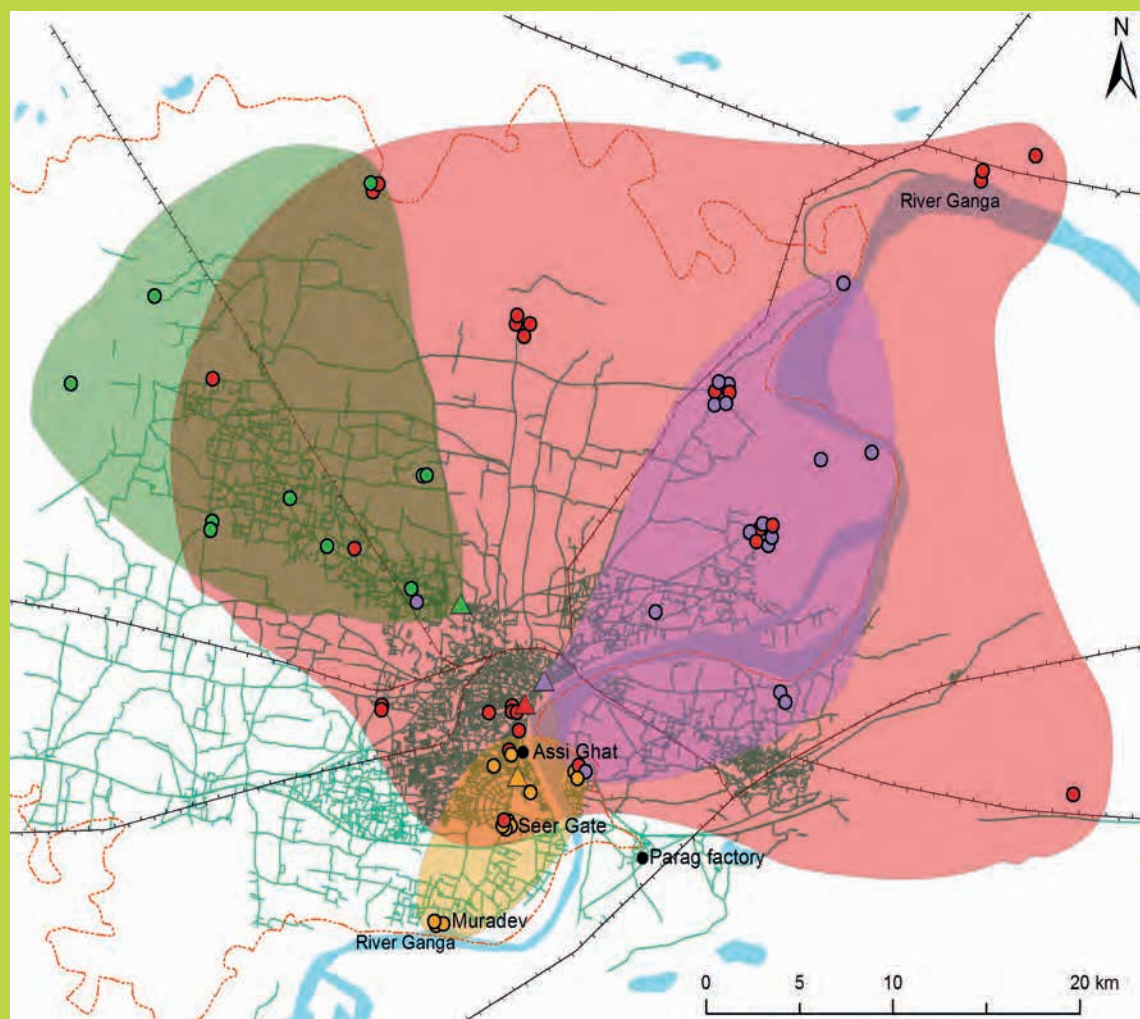


Making a living in Varanasi

Social place and socio-economic space



Edited by
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ISSN: 1869-3377

BERLIN GEOGRAPHICAL PAPERS

Vol. 44

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2015



Fig. A: Street life in Madanpura, Varanasi (Krauthausen 2015)

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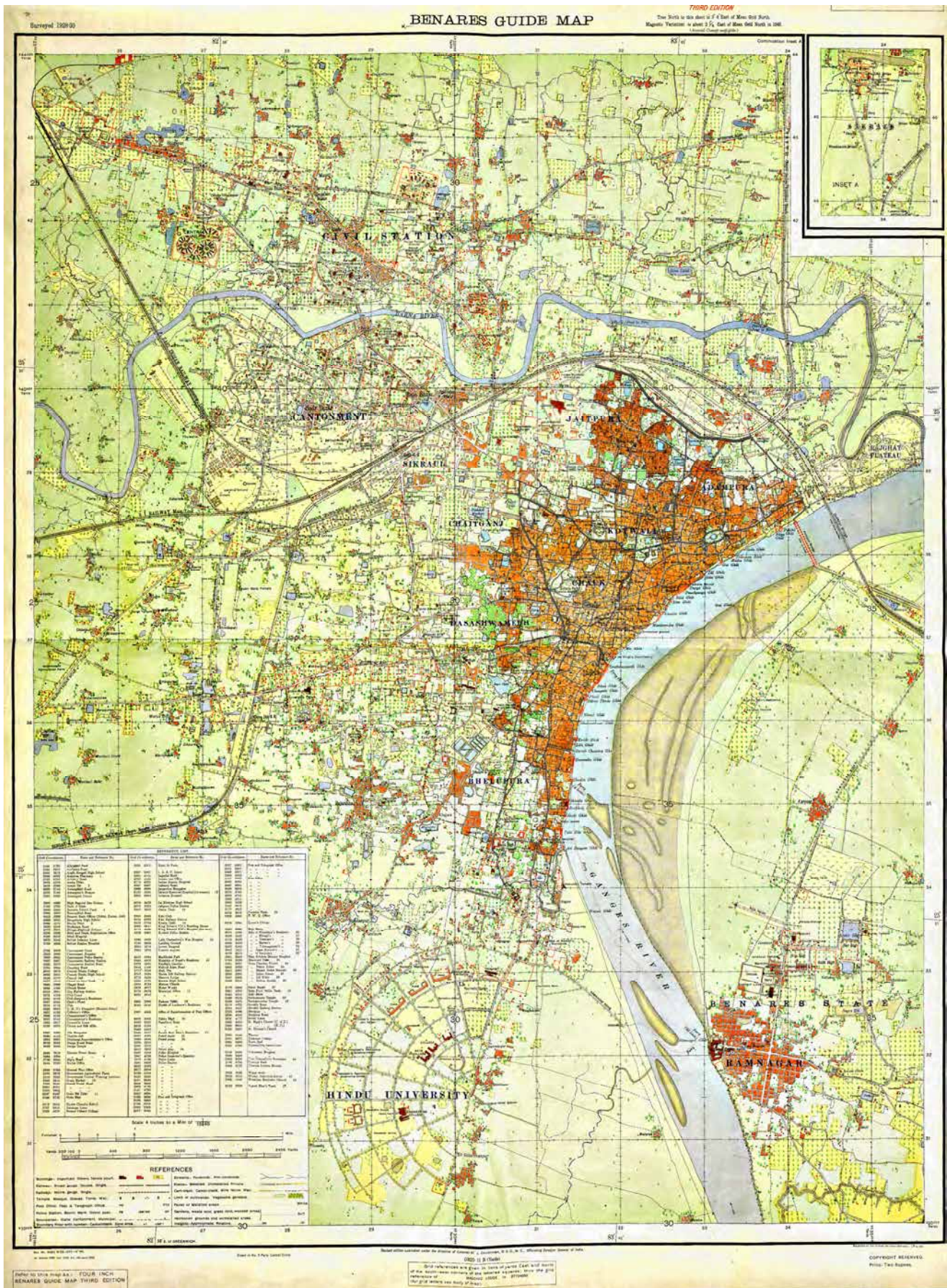


Fig. B: Benares Guide Map 1933, Surveyor General of India (Maßstab 1:15.840 = 4 inches to a mile)

Preface - Perceiving living conditions between social place and socio-economic space

Academic training in the field of geographical development research requires a sound basis in theoretical concepts and methodologies for explaining differences and gaps in well-being of human communities, a critical reflection about the scope and range of development practice and its strategies for implementation. However, studying in the secure environment of a university campus and its libraries linked to the outer world by internet connectivity cannot provide for personal experience, being exposed to participant observation and becoming involved in defining a personal viewpoint at certain locations.

Consequently, the Master programme in geographical development studies at our department is based on two pillars. First, a critical understanding of the genesis of development research and practice is needed in order to understand present approaches, concepts and fashions. Second, the conceptual insights and findings need to be grounded and embedded in real life situations. At the Centre of Development Studies in the Freie Universität Berlin the focus is on a certain region that could be described as Central and South Asia, or Crossroads Asia. Regional expertise and thematic knowledge about communities and societies, economic paths taken, historical embeddedness of contemporary developments, ecological properties and environmental frame conditions form the spatial and place-based fundament for designing empirical courses. In recent years such projects were executed in India, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where the lecturers of our team had long-standing contacts and thorough fieldwork expertise. In every case a certain thematic constellation formed the starting point for our investigations that were carried out by small groups of junior experts and participants of the Masters programme. We have simulated situations that are similar to those challenges international development consultants are confronted with when being asked to give advice on a short-term assignment. The latter part we have abridged and constructed a set-up that asks for designing a manageable research approach to serve the objectives of the common endeavour, broken-up into particular themes. The challenge for all participants has been to implement in a real life situation the abstract conceptual frameworks that were devised, discussed and refined during a preparatory course. The expected outcome was a logical projection of the designed research questions into a given local socio-economic space constructed of a community and/or a social place. The attempt to apply everybody's research design to a specific research question was expected to result in empirical findings based on that analytical approach. In certain cases when the results are of interest beyond the educational purpose of learning how to do fieldwork and how to convert the findings into a scientific text it might be justified to share the results with a wider readership, as is the case with the papers presented in this report.

The three-semester long project was implemented in Varanasi in close cooperation with Prof. Rana PB Singh and his colleagues and students from the Department of Geography at Banaras Hindu University and with the help of a number of established contacts in the city. We could form nine mixed groups of people with local knowledge and orientation that paired with a couple of students each from the Berlin team. The thematic focus was

directed on 'Making a living in Varanasi - social place and socio-economic space'. Beyond Varanasi's attraction as a holy pilgrimage destination and place for worship we primarily looked at professions and locations that provide opportunities for making a meagre living by hard work. Consequently, certain trades and professions, groups and communities, individuals and office-bearers who kindly allowed us to observe, follow and sit with them during their working hours and to visit them at home contributed to form a selective mosaic of living conditions in Varanasi. All nine contributions in this volume are based on the findings from these joint-endeavours that were regularly discussed and re-adjusted during our bilateral discussions and plenary meetings at night in our temporary home in Varanasi. During a follow-up seminar back in Berlin the outcomes and results were again refined and processed to such a state that we could prepare the manuscripts in a manner that they fulfilled the formal requirements which a scientific journal would demand for.

The case studies begin with a paper by Ilias Dimakopoulos, Kunal Kishor Vivek & Marina-Elena Hey-ink that is devoted to the economy of paan which is analysed with an emphasis on governance and value chain considerations around the "paan dariba" in Kali Mahal, Chaitganj. The following case study by Celia Krauthausen, Jakob Kroneck & Valeska Mildenberger focuses on the urban quarter of Madanpura that has been dominated by saree weaving since generations, but where the local weaving industry has undergone significant transformations in the last decades. The division of labour and the organisation of cooperation along the production lines in the local handloom industry are investigated. Maike Metzkow & Hans Trebus devote their case study to economy of milk, one of the most important nutritional sources for the city population that has to be distributed in its fresh state to consumers. Rural-urban linkages and value chain analyses of milk are examined here. One of the most common opportunities to make a living in Varanasi is street-vending. The case study by Nina Brauneis & Nicolas Patt asks the question whether this is a strategy for new arrivals in the city or whether it could be the base for economic security. Melissa Bayer & Vanessa Holm connect commercial and spiritual considerations in their study on temple economies at Sankat Mochan, the most prominent Hanuman temple in Varanasi. Julia Fülling & Juliane Meyer studied the interesting case of the Muslim shrine Ghazi Miyan that has a local importance for Alai Pura and draws numerous visitors from different religious beliefs and orientations far beyond the neighbourhood. The case study by Eva Bunn, Sarvesh Kumar & Laurenz Virchow has a multi-local scope as they followed the washermen to several locations in town and participated in heated debates about caste politics, community representation and administrative plans and responses. Lisa Maria Klaus & Bianca Möckel attempted to understand social relations in a dom sweeper neighbourhood and studied transformations and re-orientations. Anubhav Dubey, Janaina Nunes Muniz & Tim Polster have succeeded in adopting an interesting conceptual approach for their analysis of life as politics in Durga Kund, known as a Chamar Basti. All case studies revealed certain aspects that have contributed to perception of making a living in Varanasi that is characterised by numerous strategies and a faceted and flexible approach to counter competition and to face administrative interventions.

We appreciate the support and cooperation of our close partners in Varanasi, namely Prof. Rana PB Singh, Hemant Sarna and Vrinda Dar. We also thank the research partners who joined the students from Berlin in the field: Pintu Kumar, Sarvesh Kumar, Palash Debey, Dr. Anand Rafiq, Miss Rashmi, Kunal Vivek, Sanghamitra Ramaswary, Anubhav Dubey, and Shubham Sharma. Last but not least we gratefully acknowledge the financial endowment by the Promos programme of Freie Universitaet Berlin and its Department of Geography that made the project feasible and enabled us to publish the results in this form.

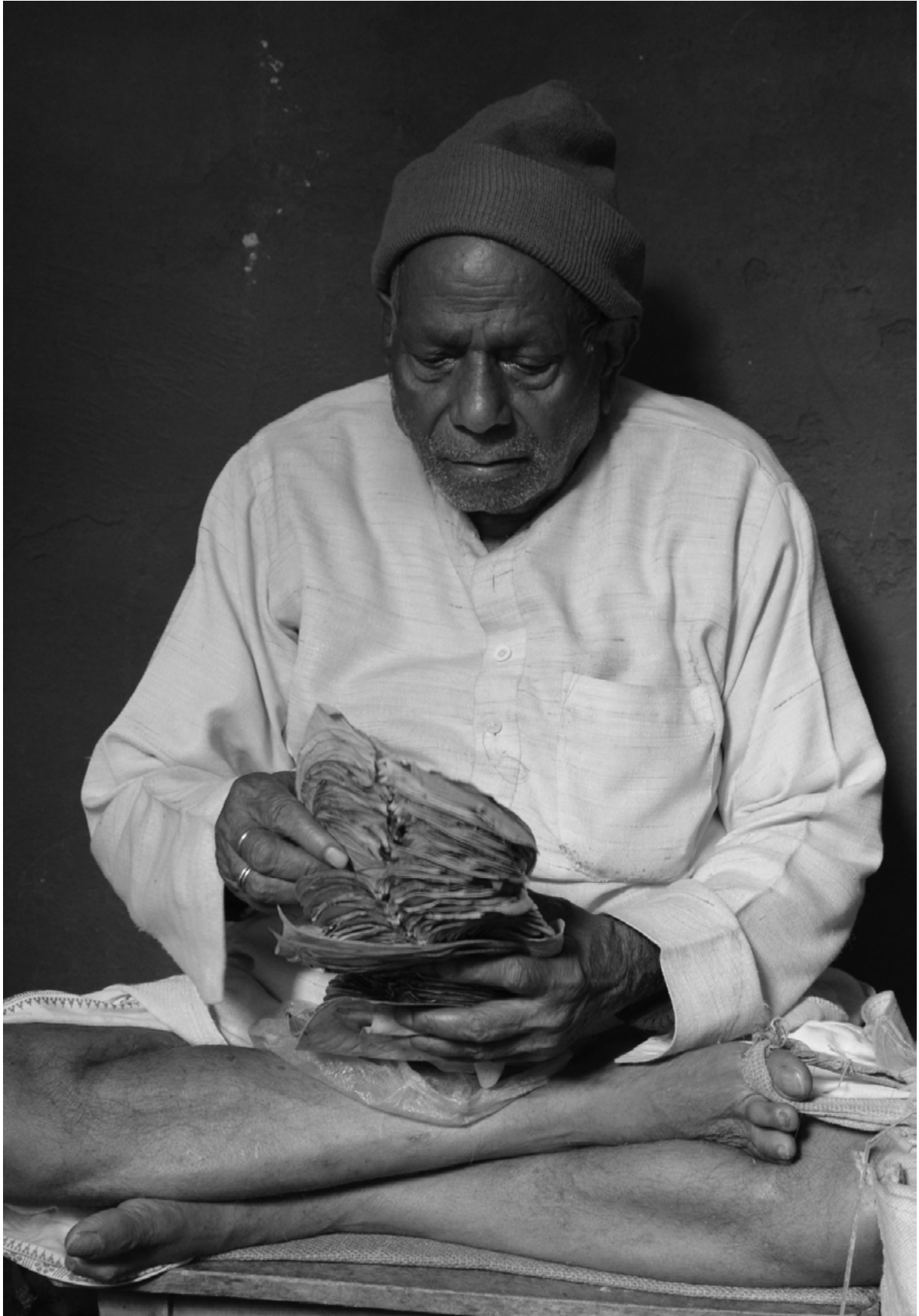


Fig. C: Paan leaves are counted several times in front of potential buyers (Schütte 2015)

Governing the *paan* leaf value chain

Keywords: Paan, Chaurasia, Economic geography, Value chains, Governance, Urban geography

1 Introduction - analysing regional value chains

The analysis of value chains and market governance continues to be an important issue within development research and is increasingly seen as a tool for poverty reduction (cf. Bolwig et al. 2010, 175). The value chain approach is mainly used in regard to global transactions and aims to analyse socio-economic advantages and disadvantages of actors' integration into international and liberal market spheres (cf. Sturgeon 2001, 9). However, India's trade landscape is much more dominated by the flow of agricultural goods between regional and domestic markets, rather than by economic transactions across national borders (cf. Mattoo, Mishra and Narain 2007, 3). To that effect, the basis for a significant number of livelihoods in India's State Uttar Pradesh is provided by spatially limited markets (cf. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2014, 25-27). The *paan* (betel) leaf trade with its important nodes located in the city of Varanasi is an exemplary case for such a regional and spatially limited market and, as such, remains disregarded by value chain approaches with their international focus. Against this background the present paper takes a closer look at the *paan* leaf value chain and its governance established around the Varanasi district.

The paper begins with an introduction of the so-called *paan* or betel leaves, which are an indispensable ingredient of *paan*, "*the favourite pastime of 15-20 million Indians*" (Bera, Mahapatra, and Moyna 2011a), and contextualises the commodity within its socio-economic landscape. The paper then turns to a more detailed exploration of the *paan* leaf trade in its social and spatial dimensions. The subsequent section unravels the processes occurring along the value chain and explores the market's social organisation and governance. Unless otherwise indicated, all information provided in the paper is based on empirical fieldwork in Varanasi over two weeks in February 2015 that included open interviews and participatory mapping. Against the background of a development driven and increasingly liberalised Indian economy the findings of this study are discussed and possible impacts on the market related livelihoods of actors involved in the *paan* leaf trade exposed. Hence, as a contribution to the vast field of value chain analysis, this paper wishes to highlight the advantages of a micro perspective on value chains for development research.

2 Varanasi's *paan* leaf market

Residents of Varanasi consider the local *Paan Dariba* (*paan* market) (Fig. 1.1) to be "*the centre of the Indian paan leaf trade*". The geographic scope of the value chain of *paan* operates within definable borders limiting the market's influence to North India. It is

noteworthy that the *paan* leaf trade is not only bound by limits in geographical terms, but is also inseparably linked to one specific actor group. Cultivation, processing and selling of the *paan* leaves seems to be performed exclusively by members of the *Chaurasia*, also referred to as the *Barai* caste.¹ Inevitably, the question arises of how the *Chaurasia* actors establish and maintain their monopoly on the *paan* leaf business on a social and geographical level. This paper seeks answers by following the commodity as such. So in the first instance it is necessary to have a closer look at the good itself.



Fig.1.1: Inside the Paan Dariba building - farmers and businessmen attending the paan leaf auctions (Dimakopoulos 2015)

2.1 Paan as a cultural commodity

Varanasi's cityscape is shaped by thousands of small *paan* stalls. *Paanvalas* (*paan* stall keepers) throughout the city serve freshly prepared *bidas*, the triangularly folded *paan* leaves, filled with pieces of stimulating betel nut and individually refined by the addition of further ingredients (Fig. 1.2). Following a *paan* stall employee to the venue of his daily purchase the way will definitely lead to *Paan Dariba*, the central *paan* market located in Varanasi's district Chaitganj. Within the *Paan Dariba* building the local



Fig. 1.2: One of Varanasi's most famous paan stalls near Godoulia Crossing (Dimakopoulos 2015)

betel leaf salesmen are sure: "*Banaras is famous for its paan*". Indeed, India's holy city is known nationwide for its deep association with *paan* and for generously supplying a huge variety of it to customers for ritual and daily consumption. Apparently, the *paan* leaf, picked from the betel vine, is offered as a gesture of hospitality as well as an expression of affection and beauty already since 400 BC (cf. Bera, Mahapatra and Moyna 2011a). Although there is some controversy surrounding the leaf as people who use it sometimes suffer from health problems and it contributes to environmental pollution (cf. Barnagarwala 2014), chewing Banarsi *paan* is still a symbol in itself. It has served Bollywood productions to characterise their acclaimed heroes as *paan* users,²

¹ The terms *Chaurasia* and *Barai* are used as synonyms. For more detailed information, see: Hasan A., Rizvi B. R. and Das, J. C. (ed.) (2005): *People of India: Uttar Pradesh*. Vol. XLII, Part I. New Delhi.

² E.g., in the films *Charulata* (1964) and *PK* (2014) the protagonists' habit of chewing *paan* is shown as an integral part of their personality.

and the championing of *paan* has helped politicians improve their reputations amongst voters (cf. Economic Times 2014 2014). As such, in order to cope with the city's extraordinary daily consumer demand for fresh *paan* leaves, an elaborate system of logistics and market management is entrenched.

2.2 The *paan* leaf business within its socio-economic landscape

This study looks at the *paan* leaf trade established around Varanasi's *Paan Dariba* and its area of influence defined by spatial, social and economic distinctions. The examination of this specific socio-economic landscape has been approached by viewing the value chain as constituted through the entanglement of actors and material resources (cf. Ouma 2012, 204). Within the socio-economic space, knowledge in the form of the actors' skilled handling of resources is put into economic practice on a daily basis, e.g. the cultivating, supplying, processing or trading of leaves. Thereby, actors are differentiated through work division into various actor groups all along the value chain. Cultivators, middle- or businessmen, differ from each other with respect to their access to knowledge and resources and in regard to their ability to exert power along the chain (cf. Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon 2005, 89). Seeing it this way, the existing and specific power-knowledge relations link the several actor groups involved in the trade to their available resources and define their specific position within the economic landscape. As a result, power relations as expressed in performative actions organise the market and affirm the established social institutions in the day-to-day work (cf. Law 1994, 22). In this context institutions are understood as tools of governance. Thus a contingent socio-economic landscape is defined and limited by the value chain and its governance (Fig. 1.3).

Demand for *Banarsi Paan*

Residing at Varanasi and not recognising the popularity of *Banarsi paan* is hardly possible since the omnipresence of the commodity manifests not only in Varanasi's streets but also in daily news. On February 22, 2015 the Varanasi edition of Times of India reports:

„Not only Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, but also the famous 'Banarasi paan' stole the show at the pre-wedding ceremony of SP supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav's grandnephew Tej Pratap in Saifai on Saturday. More than 60,000 'bidas' of Banarasi paan were delivered in the first round which fell short in a few hours only and an urgent order was placed for immediate supply of another round from Varanasi. "We received information that the stock of paan had finished by 2pm and more was demanded," said Rajendra Chaurasia, the owner of famous Keshav Tambool Bhandar, who had also supplied paan in the wedding ceremony of chief minister Akhilesh Yadav. [...] A team member Yatindra Charasia informed Rajendra that the entire stock of paan was consumed by the invitees, and additional quantity is required urgently. Rajendra diverted a consignment of 5000 bidas of pa[a]n [...]. The fresh stock of paan was carried to Saifai from Lucknow with some guests through a plane." (Singh 2015)

Rajendra Chaurasia's *paan* stall at Lanka Crossing is said to be the city's most successful shop, delivering the best quality. According to information provided by *Chaurasia* residents more than 100 workers were hired for a shift exceeding 20 hours to comply with the demand of freshly prepared *bidas* for the celebrities'

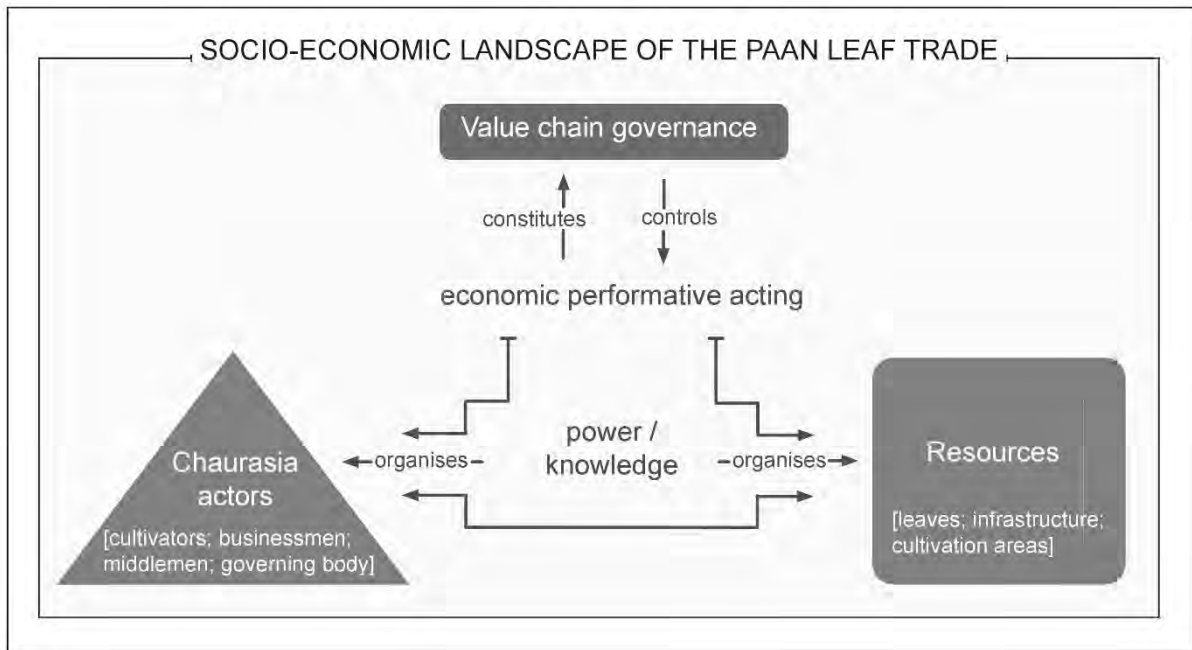


Fig. 1.3: The defined socio-economic landscape of the paan leaf business established by its value chain (Source: own design)

The socio-economic landscape of the *paan* leaf trade was approached and analysed by looking at the everyday economic practices. Processing and trading were recorded in participatory observation. All in all, 16 formal interviews were conducted at the respective workplace of respondents. For this purpose, four families were visited at their Varanasi residences and a group discussion with the twelve acting committee ministers was attended at *Paan Dariba*; two city warehouses as well as the cultivation area in a village close to the city of Varanasi were visited. The Secretary of the *Barai Sabha* acting committee, the President of the *Paan* Material Dealer Association (PMDA), two farmers, two *paanvalas*, two warehouse owners, four shopkeepers and four businessmen were interviewed as experts to extend the information acquired from numerous conversations held during the participatory observation. In addition, mappings were done within a participatory process.

The paper continues by looking at the material dimensions of the *paan* leaf value chain, focusing on a detailed exploration of the *paan* leaf market's geographical scope as well as the leaves' cultivation, supply, processing and trading techniques.

3 The *Paan Dariba* - framing the spatial landscape of trade

Because of the outstanding position of Varanasi inside the Indian *paan* business the *Paan Dariba* as the city's centre of *paan* leaf trade exhibits a substantial part of the socio-economic landscape. The landscape of *paan* leaf business is constituted by the geographical confines of the *paan* trade around the main market building of *Paan Dariba*, located in Varanasi's district Chaitganj. The central space of *paan* business in Varanasi is situated along a main road and several crossroads around the *Paan Dariba* as the space where most of the ingredients shops, *paan* stalls and warehouses can be found in a correlated conglomerate (Fig. 1.4).

The focus of fieldwork was on the *paan* leaf trade, which passes through various stages and is finally carried out inside the market building. The *Paan Dariba* building is only used by members of the *Chaurasia* community to trade leaves and is open for business and customers every day. The building is the very centre of trade and has two floors and an open inner courtyard (Fig. 1.5). The whole market space is covered by trees and roofs to protect the sensitive *paan* leaves. Different shops for *paan* ingredients and betel nuts are located at the ground floor, although the building is mainly used for the trade of fresh green leaves. These leaves are classified as unprocessed raw material, differing in quality depending on their origin and freshness. The first floor of the building is utilised by *Chaurasia* businessmen to offer and sell leaves, which have already been refined in their houses' private heating

chambers. These processed leaves are characterised by their lightly bleached exterior and hence have a higher value. Further, the office rooms of the management committee and a few storage chambers are situated on the upstairs level.

4 Following the leaves - the value chain of *paan* leaf business

The value chain of *paan* leaves (Fig. 1.6) shows the way the leaves take from their rural origin until they reach consumers at the *paan* stalls all around the city of Varanasi and beyond.

4.1 The *paan* leaves

In *Paan Dariba* more than ten different types of *paan* leaves originating from several regions of India are traded on daily basis (Tab. 1.1). They are cultivated and harvested in various parts all over North India by *Chaurasia* farmers. However, the major production takes place in the states of Orissa, West-Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Mainly, the *Jaganatthi paan* from Orissa is used while the *Magahi paan* leaves from Bihar are said to be the most valuable.

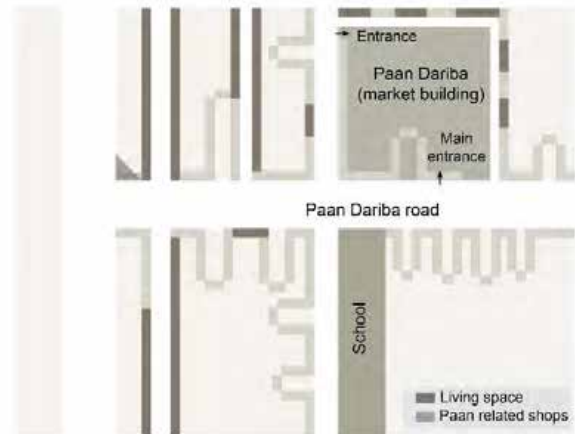


Fig. 1.4: The central *paan* market - *Paan Dariba* - located in Varanasi's district Chaitganj (Source: own design based on the survey by I. Dimakopoulos, February 2015)

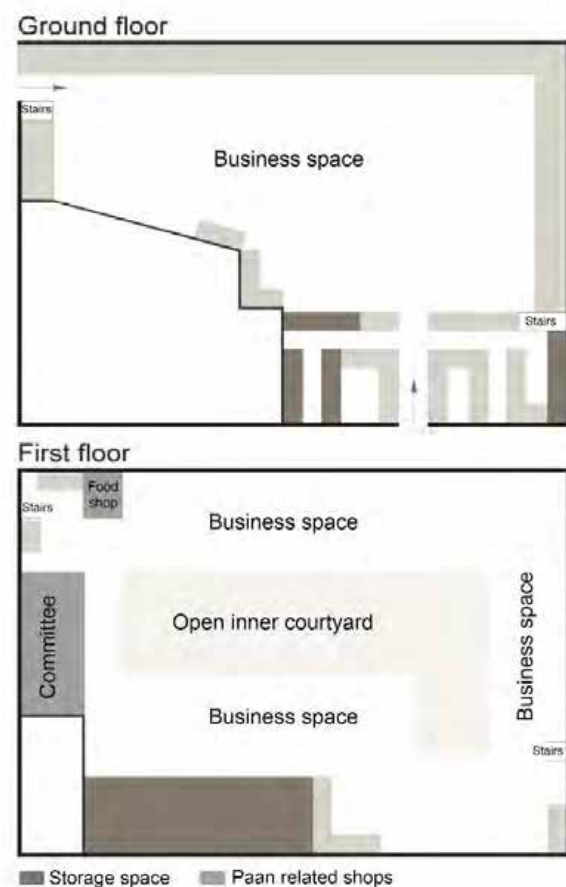


Fig. 1.5: The *Paan Dariba* building with its two floors (Source: own design based on the survey by I. Dimakopoulos, February 2015)

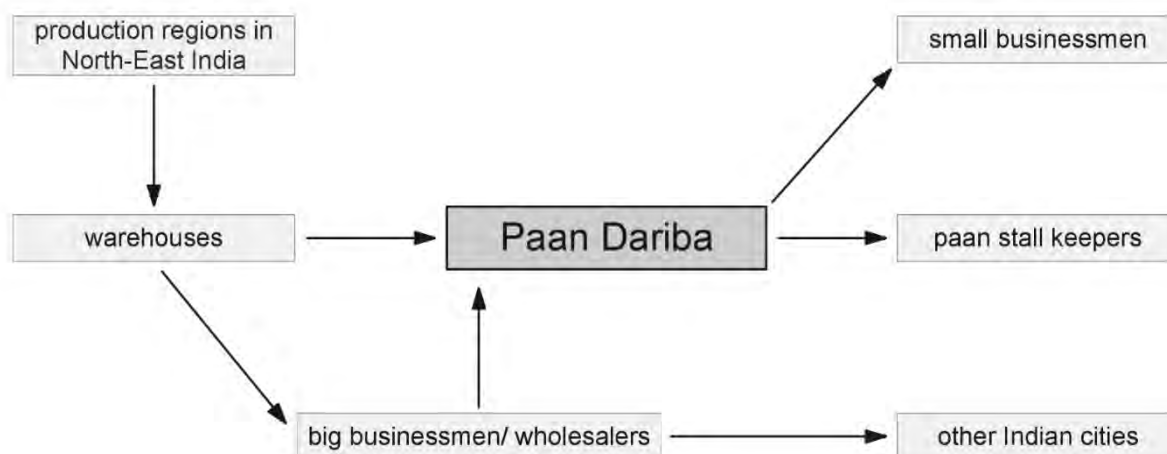


Fig. 1.6: The value chain of the paan leaf trade (Source: own design)

There are significant quality differences depending on the unprocessed leaves' characteristics. Taste, maturity, outer appearance and smoothness are important factors of sale and price building. The amount of leave-production increases during the peak season (February to April) and ceases significantly after that period. The fact that fresh leaves deteriorate quickly during the humid months (April to July) determines the necessity of storing large quantities of raw material. This, in turn, leads to rising prices during the season.

However, the peak season of the various producing areas differ. The leaves are very vulnerable and therefore safely packed in reed baskets padded with saris and rice straw. The *paan* leaves are transported from the countryside in baskets and sold in the same format. The price e.g. for a basket of *Jaganatthi paan* is calculated as follows: one basket contains 15 *dolhi* with the price in Indian Rupees (Rs) always attached to each single *dolhi*, which costs from 50 to 100 Rs. One *dolhi* is composed of four *muha* containing 50 leaves each. Accordingly, a basket of unprocessed *Jaganatthi paan* leaves is comprised of 3000 leaves and is traded for 750 to 1500 Rs depending on the season and quality.

Tab. 1.1: The main traded paan leaves and their region of origin (Source: own design)

Paan leaf type	Region of origin
Jaganatthi	Orissa
Bilkuli	Orissa
Chandrakala	West-Bengal
Jukki	West-Bengal
Sanchi	West-Bengal [Medinipur]
Magahi	Bihar [Gaya, Nawada, Nalanda]
Ketaki	Bihar [Gaya, Pipra]
Deshi	Uttar Pradesh [Jaunpur, Haidar Garh] Maihar
Chhapra	Chhapra
Hajipur	Hajipur
Agali	Agali

4.2 Agriculture and transport

The *paan* leaves traded at *Paan Dariba* are gained from betel plants cultivated in rural areas. According to the review of the early Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta from the 14th century, "the betel is a tree which is cultivated in the same manner as the grape-vine. It

has no fruit and is grown only for the sake of its leaves" (cited in Gibb 1962, 387). In order to get an inside view into the *paan* leaf production a site visit was carried out to the farm of Kumar Chaurasia³ in the village of Baharipur (25 km from Varanasi). The farmers in this region grow the typical Uttar Pradeshi *paan* type called *Deshi* (Fig 1.7). The betel plants are cultivated in fields that are generally located on island-like arable land in the middle of ponds. The water has a dual function: to protect against animals and used for irrigation. The plants are very sensitive to climate factors and therefore are covered by straw roofs to prevent damages caused by fog and direct sunlight. The *Chaurasia* farmers' plant new betel vine in the cold season between February and the beginning of March while they put cut branches of older plants into the soil. A vine is profitable for about five to eight years, during which time it is trimmed down several times. The most profitable cropping period in this region is between April and August. The visited farm enterprise produces 200 *dolhi* per month on average during this period. Because these months are also characterised by a very hot climate the betel plants need more intensive labour to manage the harvest and irrigation. In the example case it is necessary to involve the whole extended family of 51 members in the working process.



Fig. 1.7: Betel vine cultivation in shade provided by a straw cover in the village Baharipur, Varanasi district (Dimakopoulos 2015)

The main production of betel leaves takes place in the Indian states of Orissa and West-Bengal, where *Jaganatthi* and *Chandrakala paan* originates. The peak season for cropping is between January and April. The Varanasi businessmen order their needed amounts of *paan* leaves via middlemen, who stay directly in touch with the governing body of the *Chaurasia* in the respective region of production. During the main season trucks from the agricultural areas run twice a week to deliver the product at six warehouses inside the city of Varanasi located in the



Fig. 1.8: Paan leaf warehouse located in Lallapura, Varanasi (Dimakopoulos 2015)

³ In consultation with interviewees all personal names are changed.

areas of Pishach Mochan and Ishwargangi (each two warehouses) as well as Lallapura and Nati Imli. These locations are not next to *Paan Dariba* in Chaitganj but still well accessible for transport workers' cycle vans and three-wheeler-autos. To understand the transportation and logistics of *paan* leaves two warehouses were visited. The warehouse run by Kiran and Manu Chaurasia is situated in Lallapura at the yard of the Muslim Inter College (Fig. 1.8). In the nights before Tuesday and Saturday four trucks loaded each with 800 baskets of *Chandrakala* and *Jaganatthi paan* from West-Bengal and Orissa respectively (about 3200 to 3400 baskets in total) arrived at the place. The total quantity of the load to be delivered depends on the need of the businessmen and wholesalers who order the baskets according to the individual size of their business. The specific warehouse in Lallapura provides employment to 15 workers from rural areas around Varanasi who are not part of the *Chaurasia* caste. They assign the delivered baskets to the corresponding businessmen and transport the load to *Paan Dariba* by means of eight cycle vans and four three-wheeler-autos. In addition, using own means of transportation some businessmen individually bring great amounts of the delivered raw material directly to their private houses, where it is further processed and value added. A money collector is placed in the middle of the warehouse to collect the *chungi* (transportation costs) from the businessmen. The fee for a basket of *Chandrakala* leaves from West-Bengal amounts to 120 Rs, while the transport from the warehouse to the businessmen's houses costs a mere six Rs.

4.3 Leaf processing and distribution

From the warehouses the baskets are distributed directly to *Paan Dariba* where the *paan* leaves are sold on the ground floor by the businessmen to individual *paan* stall keepers or to smaller wholesalers. Parts of the commodity are brought to the businessmen's houses, where they have the space and facilities to store, sort and further process the raw material. To get an impression for the way these businessmen refine and further sell the *paan* leaves from their home a visit to Avan Chaurasia was carried out. At the family's estate several rooms are designated to the storage of raw materials. Further sorting of the leaves into different quality groups is done by members of the family from all generations. After sorting, the leaves are bleached in a specific way said to be known and used only in Varanasi. As Avan Chaurasia stresses: "*Wherever you find a processed leaf, it is from Varanasi.*" The leaves are put into a heating chamber of about six square meters heated by coal-ovens to roughly 70 degrees Celsius. For the purpose, the leaves are packed into particular baskets (2,500 leaves each) prepared with textiles and other kinds of plant materials to protect the leaves from the heat needed for the bleaching process. After about 20 hours the leaves are again sorted and those leaves that remained rather green go again into the heating chamber for a second session. The processed leaves differ from the raw material in colour, taste and, importantly, also in storage life (six months) and are considered to be more valuable. Accordingly they are sold for a higher price; for instance the value of a processed *Jaganatthi paan dolhi* is four times higher than that of an unprocessed and costs 200 to 400 Rs. A significant proportion of the raw leaf material is individually processed in the described fashion and afterwards brought to *Paan Dariba* where it is sold on the first floor to smaller wholesalers or *paan* stall keepers. At the same time, an amount of probably 30 to 50% of the already processed leaves is exported by

Varanasi businessmen to other Indian cities, mainly to Gorakhpur, Delhi, Allahabad, Bengaluru and Deoria. Smaller wholesalers purchase quantities of processed leaves or unprocessed material at *Paan Dariba* to resell it to their own customers. In a few cases smaller businessmen also have a heating chamber at their house to process raw leaves and to retail it to private customers outside of *Paan Dariba* for slightly higher profit. However, most of the trading transactions take place inside the main market building in Chaitganj. Generally all types and qualities of leaves are offered on both floors inside *Paan Dariba* by Varanasi businessmen on daily basis. Twice a week auctions take place in the peak season (February to April) for *Magahi* leaves from Bihar. However, the Bihari farmers are not allowed to sell the leaves on their own and Varanasi middlemen from the group of *Chaurasia* called *arhtiya* lead the auctions.

5 Market organisation and governance

So far the paper has explained how the value chain is set up based on the cultivators' and traders' technical knowledge of the material resources. However, the question remains as to how the *Chaurasia* actors establish and maintain their monopoly on the *paan* leaf business within that limited economic landscape. Consequently, it must be asked whether and to what extent the social exclusivity is linked to the spatial borders of the market. The authors argue that analysing the value chain's specific governance is the key to understanding the relationship between the social and geographical dimensions of the market. With a binding set of regulations the value chain governance ensures the *Chaurasia* community's single dominance within the *paan* leaf cultivation, processing and trade. As described in more detail below this way of governing does not only protect the *Chaurasia*'s monopoly on the *paan* leaf business against non-*Chaurasia* competitors but it further organises the community itself in a highly differentiated manner. Certain parameters are set by an acting committee and its subcommittee all exclusively run by *Chaurasia* traders. Small-scale cultivators depend on businessmen who operate as dealers and middlemen between farmers and customers. Hence the *paan* leaf market is characterised by a high degree of trade control established through a setting of market access requirements in regard to social, spatial and economic criteria (Fig 1.11, p. 17).

5.1 The *Chaurasia* community as an economic interest group

The title *Chaurasia* is carried by citizens throughout India and can merely indicate the belonging of an actor to the *Chaurasia* caste also referred to as the *Barai caste*. The *Barai caste* is strongly associated with being involved into *paan* growing and trading (cf. Bera, Mahapatra and Moyna 2011b). By far not all Indian citizens carrying the title *Chaurasia* are concerned with the *paan* leaf business, but those *Barai* members who are actively involved in the *paan* leaf cultivation and trade deduce their professional success from that social affiliation. Thus in practice, social belonging to the *Chaurasia* community is an indispensable prerequisite for an actor's successful integration in the *paan* leaf business. To preserve their monopoly on the *paan* leaf business in several parts of India *Chaurasia* caste members are organised in exclusive economic interest groups (cf. *ibid* 2011b). Indeed, the various local *Chaurasia* associations are in touch with each other on a supra-regional level. However, each single local interest group must be viewed as a self-reliant corporation.

Responsible for the trade activities formed around the *Paan Dariba* Varanasi is the *Sri Barai Sabha, Kashi*⁴.

5.2 The *Sri Barai Sabha, Kashi*

According to the information provided by its current members, the *Sri Barai Sabha, Kashi* was founded in the early 1950ies. In those days the leaf market took place in the open air which provided little shelter for the vulnerable commodity.⁵ With the objective of strengthening the *paan* business the *Sabha's* establishment was accompanied by the construction of the *Paan Dariba* building in 1952. It is said that back then about 40 local *Chaurasia* businessmen involved in trading *paan* leaves in Varanasi joined together and provided financing for the building's construction. Until today the building is the shared property of these *Chaurasia* families considered to be "*highly important families*" (Shopkeeper in *Paan Dariba* on February 14, 2015) amongst the *Barai Sabha, Kashi* members.

Nowadays, from every *Chaurasia* family in the district of Varanasi involved in *paan* growing, processing and selling one man who is said to be "*the chief of the family*" (The Secretary of the *Barai Sabha* acting committee on February 18, 2015) is registered as a member in the *Barai Sabha*. According to the data collected in February 2015 the *Sabha* counted about 900 registered members. Consequently, not only the social membership but also spatial belonging is a relevant criteria for an actor's successful integration in the *paan* leaf value chain established around Varanasi (Fig. 1.11, p. 17). Only inhabitants of the Varanasi district can apply for a membership in the *Barai Sabha, Kashi* and hence benefit from market advantages, such as toll-free access to *Paan Dariba* or agricultural subsidies. The registration in the *Sabha* is free and not obligatory, but is regarded as a necessity by all members. As a grower from the Varanasi district points out: "*As farmer you must be part of the Barai Sabha if you want to sustain in the field.*" All members of the *Barai Sabha* make a clear distinction between two main actor groups within their community. There are the cultivators who are residents of the rural areas, and the city-based businessmen. That means even within the Varanasi community spatial belonging plays a prominent role in shaping the economic landscape.

Once a year, all 900 registered *Sabha* members get together in a public meeting to discuss about arrangements and requests. Each five years the *Sabha* meets at *Paan Dariba* to vote for an acting committee that at present contains 51 members. Even though the *Sabha* consists of both actor groups, businessmen and cultivators, the acting committee members are exclusively recruited from the group of the businessmen. The acting committee is not only the policy maker, but also responsible to support the various interests within the whole community. The *Barai Sabha* acts as an economic as well as a social organisation that aims to strengthen the *Chaurasia* community by supporting its needier members. For instance in 2014, 30 cultivators were assisted by the acting committee in applying for

⁴ *Sri Barai Sabha, Kashi* can probably be best translated as "Respected Barai Assembly, Varanasi".

⁵ Today being a fallow area, the former market place can still be visited only a view minutes walking distance to the 'Neya Paan Dariba' (new paan market) in Varanasi, Chaitganj.

governmental agricultural subsidies. However, success is not guaranteed and only four out of these 30 cultivators were actually granted subsidies. To take responsibility for the fulfilment of all duties the acting committee meets at least three times a year in its main office located on the *Paan Dariba* building's second floor. From there issues relating to the *Sabha*, the cultivation, the supply, the trade activities, as well as the security and maintenance of the *Paan Dariba* building are monitored, discussed and decided. For financing their interests the acting committee uses funds from various sources: each basket which is brought to *Paan Dariba* from non-Varanasi districts is charged with a fee of 25 *paisa* (¼ Rs). Further, all shops in the building offering betel nuts, tobacco, spices and various other *paan* related goods are rented out. The committee's members act in an honorary function and hence draw no salary. Nevertheless being a committee member offers several social and economic advantages including a high reputation within the community and the possibility to have direct influence on the parameters set along the value chain. Therefore the committee announces twelve management board members by election who are specialized in various resorts (Fig. 1.9). Further, the acting committee votes for 21 men who form a subcommittee called the *Paan Byawasayi Samiti*⁶. This *Samiti* is not responsible for the issues of all 900 members but takes particular care of the businessmen's interests and needs. By forming a representation of interests exclusively supporting the Barai Sabha's businessmen, the actor group's predominant role inside *Paan Dariba* is protected against other actors' potential claims for greater say. Moreover the *Paan Byawasayi Samiti* enables its members to govern the value chain more efficiently by announcing seven specifically qualified management board members from its own side (Fig. 1.9)

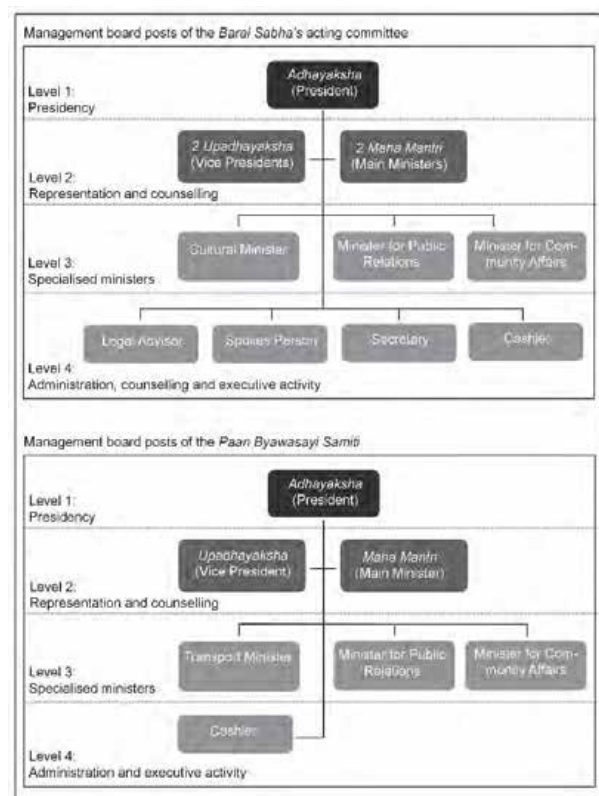


Fig. 1.9: Organigram of the Barai Sabha's acting committee and the Paan Byawasayi Samiti (Source: own design)

5.3 Inside *Paan Dariba*

The governance body comprising of the acting committee and the *Paan Byawasayi Samiti* consists exclusively of businessmen (Fig. 1.10). Although the acting committee is voted for by all *Sabha* members, conversely only the acting committee is in charge to approve the accession of the *Sabha* members. In this respect, all *Sabha* members' economic

⁶ "Paan Byawasayi Samiti" can be translated as „Paan Businessmen Association“.

participation is highly dependent on the governance body's policy. Especially the cultivators' interests are given a subordinated status within the value chain organisation as they are not allowed to sell their commodity personally. Thus cultivators are not only excluded from the administration and market management but also from the trading action itself. The businessmen's argument for their exclusive right to trade is that "*farmers have no experience in business*" affairs and therefore must be assisted by the *arhtiya*



Fig. 1.10: Members of the Barai Sabha's acting committee meeting in their office (Heyink 2015)

as middlemen. The title *arhtiya* refers to businessmen who conduct auctions within the *Paan Dariba* leaf market. On each market day there are about 40 *arhtiya* present. These include businessmen who perform the role of an *arhtiya* by offering their own goods as well as actors who function as representatives for certain cultivators. On the so called special market days, Fridays and Saturdays, Bihari farmers arrive at *Paan Dariba* bringing their highly demanded *Magahi paan* leaves. During these occasions seven additional and specifically authorised businessmen act as *arhtiyas* to conduct the *Magahi* auctions. These men are not chosen by election or by application but inherited their position from their fathers or grandfathers who were chosen by grace of their membership in Varanasi's "*highly important families*" (Shopkeeper in *Paan Dariba* on February 14, 2015). Among the actor group of businessmen further differentiation with regard to rank and reputation can be found. The economic benefit of being an *arhtiya* and to represent farmers within auctions pertains to the commission received. The height of the commission varies from eight to twelve percent of the negotiated price per basket, which in turn depends both on the specific value of the *paan* leaf type and on the seasonal supply and demand. At the end of the auction day the remaining amount is given to the farmers by a cashier. As such, when cultivators come to *Paan Dariba* to deliver their commodity personally they are obligated to completely entrust their leaf baskets to an *arhtiya*. According to the information provided by *Paan Dariba*'s businessmen, the cultivators choose the *arhtiya* on the basis of the auction leader's talent for sales. Simultaneously it was mentioned by several actors that a specific *arhtiya* is continuously responsible for the same group of cultivators. It might be reasonably assumed that the dependent relationship between a group of cultivators and a specific *arhtiya* is the result of former governing processes rather than to the cultivators' actual choice. The obvious fact that cultivators respect the ban on selling does not necessarily imply their unanimous approval of this regulation. However, according to a farmer cultivating in the Varanasi district they see "no other way" to otherwise participate profitably in the market.

6 Governing the *paan* leaf value chain - Findings and conclusions

This study has provided an overview of the *paan* leaf trade established around Varanasi's *Paan Dariba* and its area of influence defined by spatial, as well as social and economic distinctions.

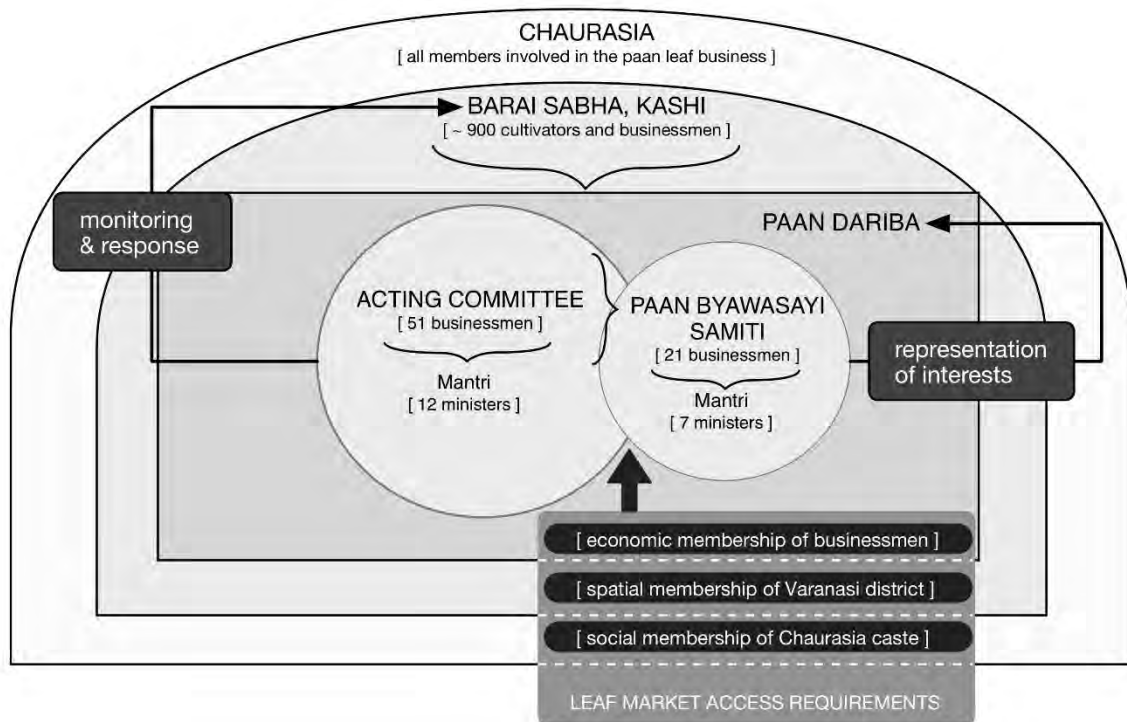


Fig. 1.11: The paan leaf market with its differentiated spheres of influence (Source: own design)

The examination of this socio-economic landscape has been approached by viewing the value chain as constituted through the entanglement of actors and material resources and its specific governance. The paper emphasised how the *paan* market is constituted by establishing access requirements that are directly linked to the social organisation of the actor groups involved. Actors organise themselves in a differentiated and highly exclusive manner which is also reflected in the spatial setting (Fig. 1.11). Market access is strictly limited by the criteria of social belonging and is dominated solely by members of the *Chaurasia* caste. To preserve their business and ensure their community members' livelihoods the *Chaurasia* governance establishes unsurmountable access barriers that make the market entry for non-community competitors virtually impossible. By organising themselves within the *Sri Baria Sabha, Kashi* as a body that is only concerned with strengthening the *paan* business within the borders of the Varanasi district the value chain remains spatially limited. At the same time the *Sabha* is differentiated within itself. Work division defined by the actors' geographical area of residence as well as by specific family membership divides the *Sabha* into two major actor groups; namely into the group of the cultivators residing in the rural areas and the inner-city businessmen. The latter actor group ensures its greater authority and influence by the institution of the *Paan Byawasayi Samiti* and the *arhtiya*-principle. As a result the highest value generated along the chain remains bound to the economic actor group of businessmen.

6.1 Implementing the value chain analysis of spatially limited markets in development research

While the findings presented so far clearly indicate that there is a huge interest in *paan* as a highly demanded good, simultaneously the Varanasi *paan* leaf traders, *paanvalas* and cultivators admit: "*The paan trade will go down within the next ten to fifteen years.*" (President of the acting committee on February 18, 2015). The latest available data presented in the literature is consistent with that statement. Uttar Pradesh's acreage used for the *paan* leaf cultivation has declined from 2,850 ha in 2006, to 2,200 ha in 2011 and has since dropped steadily (cf. Bera, Mahapatra and Moyna 2011b). This downward trend can be traced to several developments within the economic sphere. Consumers' demand for *paan* seems to gradually decrease as demand for more extensively traded alternatives like cigarettes, chewing tobacco and *gudka*⁷ increases. Also the Indian government's attention and support turns more and more towards market participants whose businesses can be profitably integrated into an international market (cf. Bera, Mahapatra and Moyna 2011b). In contrary, the international integration of the Varanasi *paan* leaf market does not seem to be a practical possibility at all. Even though there is still a demand for *paan* throughout South and South-East Asia and ambitious *paan*-advocates see high business opportunities for the "*Neglected Green Gold of India*" (Guha 2006), the present analysis suggests that the Varanasi *Paan Dariba* will certainly remain a regional market. The reason for this lies within the specific organisation of the *paan* leaf trade itself. The socio-economic landscape of *paan* with its centre in Varanasi *Paan Dariba* is dominated exclusively by members of the *Chaurasia* caste and therefore is rather comparable with an exclusive cartel (cf. Varian 1996, 419). As a result the resources involved remain economically linked to the dominating actors and the trade landscape remains spatially limited. In that respect this paper aimed to provide insights into the regional circumstances, disparities and prospective challenges of value chain analysis. The most commonly applied macro-perspective value chain approach is usually viewed under a liberal or a critical perspective to identify possible strategies to either optimise it economically or to find ways that reduce social disparities and poverty relations linked to the chain. However, since the *paan* leaf trade is neither a liberal-, nor a state-regulated market these perspectives hardly apply. It is in fact more challenging to identify and address the causes of existing disparities in the *paan* leaf trade and the situation of marginalised people. Findings of this study show that there is a huge social and economic difference between rural *Chaurasia* farmers and *Chaurasia* inner-city businessmen. The distribution of power, knowledge and market access is completely consolidated inside the *Chaurasia* community. The upcoming challenges of shifting demands for recreational drugs will likely even deepen the social asymmetry inside the community over the next decades. Expected difficulties in the near future will not affect those people who have adapted to perceived changes by engaging already in other professions or who have generated additional financial means of subsistence. This is reflected in the statements of most people involved in the *paan* leaf business: "*I want my sons to get education and to study so they can find another profession and work in governmental jobs*". However, it is evident

⁷ Industrial produced and packaged variation of *paan*.

too that only the already economically privileged actors among the *Chaurasia* community have the opportunities to provide higher education to their children and to search for new strategies directed at improving their financial situation.

As a regional market the *paan* leaf trade still provides the economic basis for a significant number of livelihoods. The socio-economic landscape of *paan* in Varanasi can be considered exemplary for many among the inclusive economies in India that function very well without the integration into global markets. It is the responsibility of development research also to focus on such spatially limited markets.

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Fig. D: Saree weaving is undertaken in a niche in the household (Krauthausen 2015)

Transformation processes in the saree weaving industry in Madanpura, Varanasi

Keywords: Weaving industry, Trade, Craft, Modernisation, Sector of economic activity

1 Introduction

Since independence in 1947 the Indian weaving industry underwent deep processes of economic transformation (Wood 2013, 48, Raman 2013, Tanusree 2015). Modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation led to severe changes with different impacts on social, political and economic structures. Neoliberal policies implemented after 1991 affected especially small scale urban industries and the handloom weaving industry in India started to decline and lost its market due to industrialisation processes and consequences of trade and market liberalisation (Tanusree 2015, 48).

The city of Varanasi has been a centre of the silk weaving industry and a commercial capital since the late 1700s (Wood 2013, 46) and the saree weaving industry still forms an important economic base for the city (JNNUMR 2006, 28). Particularly the handloom weaving industry of Varanasi has a long tradition and the typical *Banarsi* saree is famous not only all over India but also worldwide. However, also in Varanasi this industry has undergone drastic transformation processes in the last decades, affecting the social and economic structures of weaving communities. Those suffered especially from the competition from new technologies in form of powerlooms, increasing yarn prices and decreasing wages.

This paper discusses the effects of these transformation processes within the handloom weaving industry of Varanasi with the objective to analyse and understand the outcomes of macro-level processes on the micro-level unit of the weaver household, exemplified by the saree weaving community in the city quarter of Madanpura as an important production centre of the local weaving industry. The fieldwork in Madanpura aimed to assess the current social and economic structures in the local weaving community and the impacts and influences that recent economic and political changes have had on these structures.

The paper proceeds by exemplifying the political and economic transformation processes and changes in the weaving industry since Indian independence to establish an explanatory framework, followed by the introduction of the research area and the presentation of the methodological approach of this study. In the subsequent parts the findings of the research are presented, discussed and finally summarised within the frame of the research questions.

2 Transformation processes in the weaving industry - historical and political framings

The historical and political causes of transformation in the small-scale weaving industry that developed in post-colonial India provide the background against which an analysis of the local situation in a Varanasi weaving quarter takes place. These essentially refer to the

macro policy environment and recent economic reforms governing social and economic relations in the weaving sector.

2.1 Macro policy environment - from handloom to powerloom

Transformation processes within small scale industries and artisanal groups were a worldwide phenomenon in the 19th and early 20th century caused by industrialisation and emerging technological innovations (Tanusree 2015, 48). In that overall context also the traditional handloom weaving industry in India experienced profound structural transformations. With the independence of India new economic policies were implemented leading to trade and market liberalisations that built the basis for increased industrialisation in the handloom weaving industry, causing an economic crisis affecting in the handloom sector (ibid.). This crisis of the handloom industry affected a huge number of workers as it constitutes the second largest sector of employment in the Indian economy next to agriculture (Raman 2013, 43, Tanusree 2015, 48). For Varanasi, with its centuries old tradition of silk weaving industry, such small scale industries form an important pillar of the urban economy too (JNNURM 2006, 28). It is estimated that the handloom industry is a source of livelihood for about one million people in and around Varanasi (Raman 2013, 43).

The first decade after the independence can already be considered as “[...] *a watershed in the growth of [the] silk industry [...]*”, *forcing a multitude of [handloom] weavers to change their profession from weaving to e.g. rickshaw pulling or construction work* (Jaiswal 2012, 89f). The government focus on economic progress through modernisation and industrialisation favoured the growth of the powerloom sector, leading to the decline of the handloom industry. It is estimated that today one powerloom displaces 14 handlooms (Raman 2013, 50) which had a severe impact on the livelihoods of handloom weavers (ibid, 46).

The ongoing crisis within the handloom saree industry was further reinforced through market orientated economic reforms during the 1970s and 1990s that led to increasing prices of raw materials, further sharpening of the competition from the powerloom sector and an overall lowering of wages (Raman 2013, 43ff). Hence, the government policy during the liberation phase has been identified as one of the “[...] *overarching reason[s] for the crisis*” (Raman 2013, 44).

2.2 Government policies and economic reforms

Since 1991 the Indian economy went through several episodes of liberalisation (Wadhva 2004, 260). As many other developing countries, India launched its market-orientated economic reforms with the aim to reshape the country’s economic policies based on more export-orientated and more globally connected strategies of development (Wadhva 2004, 259ff).

Policies working towards establishment of a liberalised market economy already played a significant role in the economic development of India during the leadership of Prime

Minister Rajiv Gandhi (1984-1989), as exemplified through the New Textile Policy (NTP) implemented in 1985 as part of a paradigm shift from a state controlled import substitution to an export-oriented growth (Raman 2013, 44). In contrast to the former emphasis on the generation of employment, social justice and equality in the textile sector, the new policy focused on modernisation, efficiency, productivity and market competition, thus providing several advantages and benefits for the powerloom sector (ibid.). In order to better compete with the international market within a globalising world, one of the principle objectives was the modernisation of the handloom weaving sector by "*shifting to powerlooms and computer aided designs*" (Raman 2013, 49f). Initiatives to protect the handloom sector from competition from the powerloom and mill sector such as the Handloom Act of 1985 were initiated, but not implemented after all, as they got challenged in court by powerloom and mill sector lobbies (Raman 2013, 45).

The 'New Economic Policy' in the course of the exchange crisis in 1991 intensified the problems that emerged with the NTP of 1985 through further neoliberal economic reforms in the Indian textile industry (Raman 2013, 48f, Panagariya 2003, 2). In this context the Indian government implemented an embargo for Chinese silk imports in 1996 to promote Bangalore silk being used for weaving the traditional *Banarsi* saree. This strongly affected the weavers of Varanasi, as until then approximately 60% of local annual silk usages were imports from China (Raman 2013, 51). However, in 2001 as per requirements under the World Trade Organisation regime, the government abolished the quantitative restrictions by a drastic reduction of import tariffs, leading to increasing imports of cheaper silk fabrics from China on the one hand and Chinese yarn, which was more expensive than Indian yarn at that time. That again worsened the situation of the handloom weaver in Varanasi (ibid.). A further major cause for the crisis of the handloom weaving industry was the enormous increase of the price for silk yarn between 2001 and 2010. In 1990 one kilogramme of silk cost around 100 Rupee and rose to 3.500 Rupee per kilogramme in 2010 (Tanusree 2015, 51). This trend hit the textile industry in general, but particularly the handloom weavers very drastically. The governments' attempt to address the plight of the handloom industry by trying to increase the import tariffs for Chinese silk fabrics in 2003 was not realised because the WTO imposed to further liberalise manufacturing and industrial trade and aimed for the elimination of import tariffs, e.g. in the textile-sector (Raman 2013, 51f).

Although the weaver communities were and still are "*[...] struggling with direct threats to their occupations and livelihoods [...]*" caused by these transformations, the government refrained from implementing programmes and schemes to protect and support the handloom weavers adequately (Wood 2013, 43f). In addition, the weaving community appears to be highly unorganised and until today the weavers were not able to form permanent associations that work to support their own interests, neither on a political nor on an economic level (Wood 2013, 44, Rai 2014).

3 The Research area: Madanpura

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Madanpura⁸, representing one of several weaving wards within Varanasi and mainly inhabited by a Muslims (Fig.2.1). The ward is located in the old part of Varanasi adjacent to the Ganga river (JNNURM 2006, 35f) and is supposed to be “[...] one of oldest locations of the weavers in Banaras” (Kumar 1988, 68). The long established history of Madanpura as a weaving quarter makes it a very suitable site for analysing the effects of transformation processes in the industry, both looking at the effects on social and economic structures within the local weaving community and on the localised spatial organisation of the industry inside Madanpura as a weaving quarter. Kumar states that (1988, 71) “*Madanpura is officially one mohalla⁹ [...], but in everyday usage the name refers to a group of mohallas surrounding Madanpura proper*”. She also describes that “*it is described most succinctly by the occupation that predominates there [...]*” (ibid.). In respect to the difference between administrative and subjectively perceived borders and keeping in mind that the borders of the official municipal wards are usually not congruent with a neighbourhoods as perceived by residents, the present study aims to describe Madanpura as a weaving quarter, and to portray its inherent structures with regard to the subjective perceptions of the resident community.

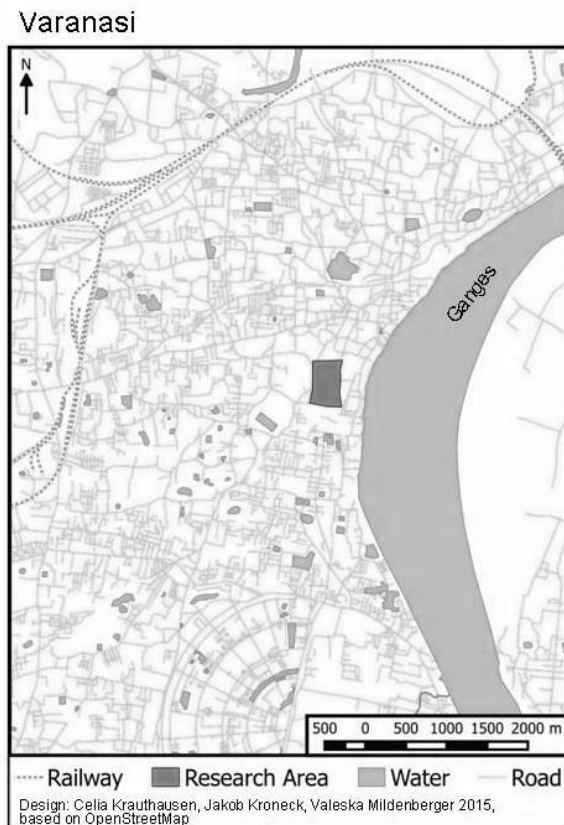


Figure 2.1: Location of Madanpura (Source: own design, based on Open Street Maps)

The majority¹⁰ of the handloom weavers in Varanasi belong to the *Momin Ansari* community, which is represented as a ‘low-ranked’ or ‘backward’ Muslim community. (Wood 2013, 43). The *Momin Ansaris* constitute the bulk of Varanasi’s Muslim minority (Wood, 2010, 15). Besides being an occupational group, the *Ansaris* also represent a ‘caste’ group¹¹ (Wood 2010, 14). Most *Ansaris* are weavers and one major characteristic of the *Momin Ansari* community, especially if compared to other artisanal communities, is the important role of solidarity and social cohesion in the community, which used to be based on the home-based production process and the family acting as a production unit (Raman 2013, 28). However, with the macro policy changes in the weaving industry during the last decades the community has undergone drastic changes, leading to the emergence

⁸ Administratively Madanpura comprises one of Varanasi’s 90 wards (Municipal Corporation of Varanasi 2015)

⁹ Mohalla is a Hindi term meaning street or neighbourhood (Raman 2010)

¹⁰ Data from informal estimates range between 60% and 90% (Wood 2013: 43)

¹¹ „While Islam is supposed to be a ‘casteless’ religion, Muslim communities in India have over several centuries developed something like a caste system” (Wood 2010: 14)

of new social classes (Raman 2013, 27). Today, the *Ansari* community is stratified with different actors fulfilling specified tasks and possessing different power: the *Gaddidars* are wholesalers being mainly in charge of the selling and business processes and are often described as the economically and socially powerful elite of the *Ansari* community (Wood 2014, 55). *Girhastas* act as intermediaries between the *Gaddidars* and the weavers and are mainly responsible for managing and controlling the different steps of production and the work of weavers and other occupational groups involved in the production processes. Weavers are responsible for the actual weaving process and economically often highly dependent on *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*. Compared to the more successful weavers who “[...] moved up the economic ladder by [investing in] powerlooms [...]” and entering the business market, the handloom weavers can be described as an “*extremely poor and marginalized*” group (Wood 2010, 14).

The production process of handloom woven sarees in Madanpura can be subdivided into pre-weaving (designing of pattern, design card preparation, purchase of raw material, colouring or bleaching of yarn and preparation of the loom), weaving and post-weaving processes (cutting, colouring, cleaning, washing and ironing of the sarees, embroidery work and packing of the sarees). Finally the finished products are sold. These separate steps are managed by different actors in a hierarchy of economic relations, which will be further described within this study.

4 Researching a local weaving industry: the methodological framework

With the aim to gain a broader understanding of the transformation processes in the context of industrialisation and modernisation and its impacts on the weaving industry in Madanpura, three analytical dimensions were identified to structure the methodological approach: the spatial dimension, the dimension of power relations and hierarchical structures within the local weaving industry and its occupational structures and social roles.

In a first step, the spatial and socio-economic settings within Madanpura were analysed through interviews and observations. This went along with mapping the main structures related to weaving within the research area in order to get an overview about the spatial distribution and patterns of the production units and households (Fig.2.2). In addition, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted on a household level, focusing on the main actors of the handloom saree weaving industry: handloom weavers, *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*, supplemented by twelve short interviews with further actors involved in the processes of saree production and marketing. 17 out of the 26 interviews were conducted in weaver households, four in households of *Gaddidars* and six in those of *Girhastas*. In the interviews it was aimed to assess how weavers themselves experience and perceive changes in the production process and what possible coping strategies they developed in that context. An interview with Mr. Ajay Kumar Pandey who is a professional research assistant based in Varanasi and highly experienced on the issues of *Banarsi* weavers places the findings gained on a local level in a broader context.

5 Madanpura as a microcosm of weaving

The map of the research area gives an overview about the spatial concentration of all actors, production units and products related to the weaving process within Madanpura as a weaving quarter (Fig.2.2).

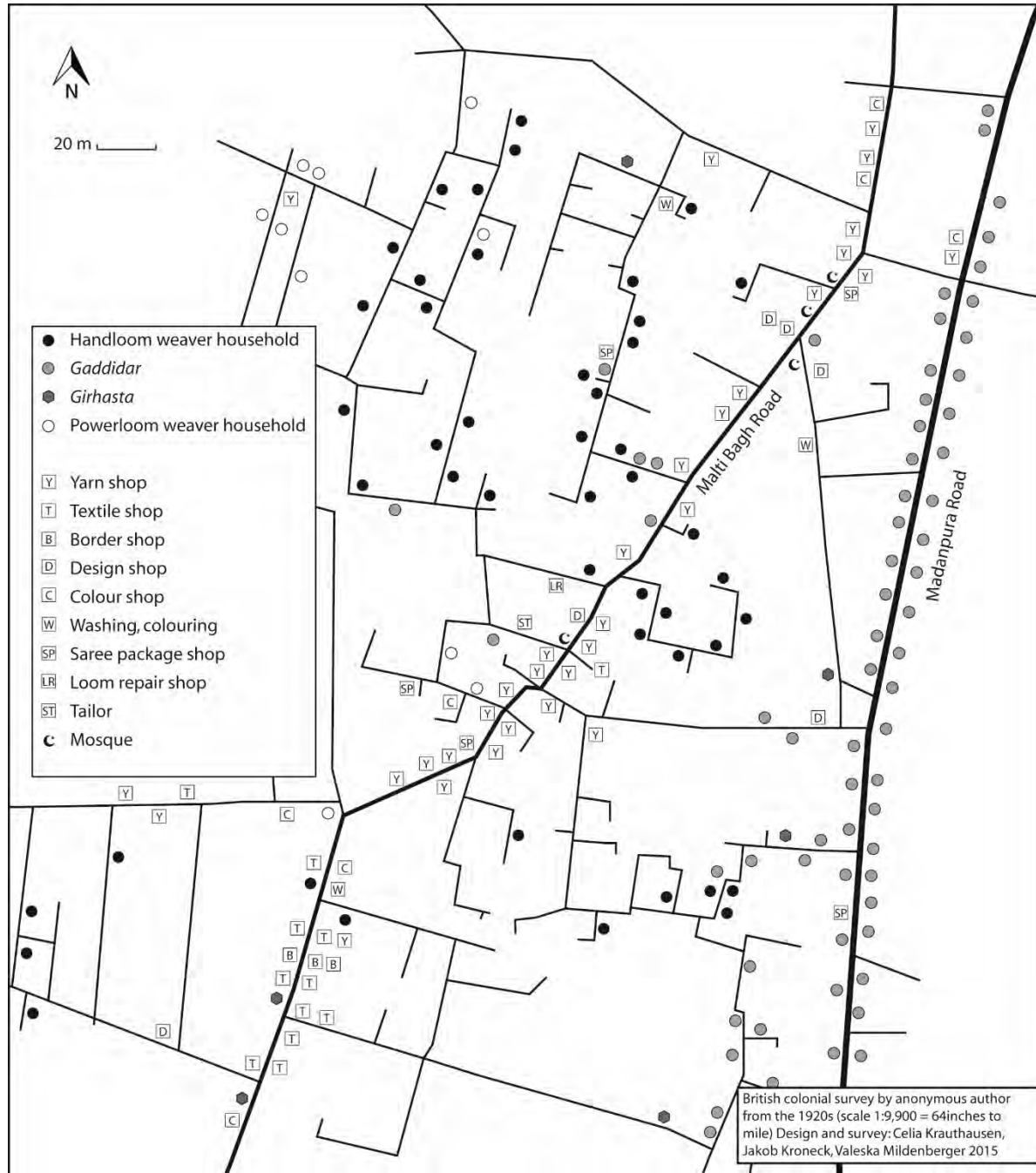


Fig. 2.2: Spatial pattern of the weaving industry in the research area (Source: own design, based on Murray 1907)

All main actors of the saree production and selling processes are present in Madanpura: *Gaddidars*, *Girhastas* and the actual weavers themselves. The weaver households are mainly located in the narrow side streets and distributed across the whole research area. The majority of weavers in Madanpura still weave on handlooms. The households of *Girhastas* are evenly distributed across Madanpura. In contrast, a significant number of

saree shops and showrooms of *Gaddidars* concentrate along Madanpura Road as the main street passing through the city quarter. In large part the sarees produced in the neighbourhood by handloom weavers are sold in these shops. The high concentration of *Gaddidars* and their businesses is a particular characteristic for Madanpura.

Along the second main street Malti Bagh Road there are located many shops for raw material such as yarn, design plates and borders as well as textile and colour shops. All of the interviewed weavers stated that they obtain all necessary raw materials for weaving from Madanpura itself. Furthermore, all required services defining the pre- and post-weaving processes take place in the research area.

The pre-weaving process starts with the designing of patterns. This activity is rarely done by the weaver himself. In special design shops at Malti Bagh Road design cards for the handlooms are prepared and sold. After the purchase of raw material and the preparation of the yarn and the loom the weaving process itself takes place in either the handloom weaver households or the households or production facilities of specific *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars*. Afterwards, the nearly finished sarees pass through different post-weaving processes, such as cutting, colouring (likewise the dyeing of yarn can be a step within the pre-process), ironing, washing and cleaning (Fig. 2.3). Even the production of saree boxes and services for broken handlooms and tattered sarees are provided and done in the neighbourhood itself.

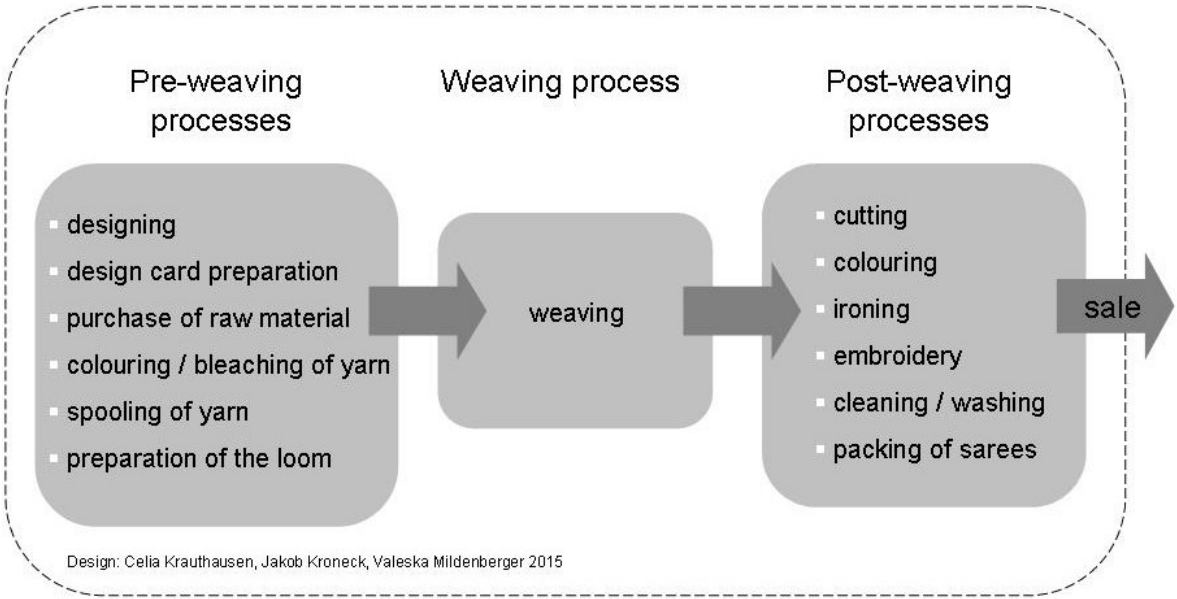


Fig. 2.3: Handloom saree production processes in Madanpura (Source: own design)

Madanpura can be considered as a ‘microcosm of the weaving industry’ because all necessary production units, products and stakeholders related to the weaving process are concentrated in the quarter, joint by a significant accumulation of saree shops and trading centres. Additionally, the dominant number of handlooms and only a negligible number of powerlooms gives Madanpura a rather special role in comparison to other weaving quarters of Varanasi where powerlooms dominate. This points to the fact that the recent transformations in the weaving industry might have different impacts on this quarter and

its resident weaving community in comparison to other places and weaving communities. The local impacts of these broader transformations are described over the following.

6 Transformation processes within the weaving community of Madanpura

The diverse transformations in the weaving economy that occurred over the past decades led to drastic changes within the weaving community of Madanpura. Increasing raw material prices, competition from a rising number of powerlooms and powerloom products in the city, a shrinking demand for traditional handloom-woven sarees all lead to a decline of real wages with severe impacts on the economic situation of the handloom weavers. These impacts are further aggravated by a rigid social hierarchy. The local transformations pertain to the evolvement of certain hierarchical patterns, transitions in power relations and dependencies, changes in occupational structures, as well as impacts on social structures within the weaving community of Madanpura.

6.1 Changing power relations and hierarchical patterns

Traditionally, the production of a saree has been a family enterprise, conducted home-based by a weaver using his own handloom (Wood 2014, 49). There used to be a direct connection between the weavers and the (mainly Hindu) merchants or investors, called *Mahajans* (Jaiswal 2012, 94). With the gradual growth of the powerloom saree industry after India's independence and especially during the 1980s and 1990s when the industry reached its economic peak point, new business opportunities for weavers led to a new upward social mobility within the weaving communities (Jaiswal 2012, 90). The weavers who possessed sufficient capital and market-knowledge were able to take the opportunity to invest in powerlooms and benefitted from the flourishing business. With the gradual growth of the silk industry in post-independence India, they became *Girhastas*, a group newly emerging during that period, acting as intermediaries between the weavers and the *Mahajans* and controlling the production activities (Jaiswal 2012, 94, Wood 2014, 49). Later on some *Girhastas*, while gradually controlling the production process, moved further up to the position of *Gaddidars* by establishing contacts to buyers from outside Varanasi and becoming wholesalers themselves (Jaiswal 2012, 95). This new group emerged within the last three or four decades, finding that trading directly with retailers is much more profitable than sale through *Mahajans* (Jaiswal 2012, 95). While the *Mahajans* were slowly pushed out of the market, the *Gaddidars* were not more generous with the weavers than the *Mahajans* (Wood 2014, 49). The increasing number of hierarchically placed actors within the weaving communities led to drastic changes especially with regard to the division of work and power relations. This transition and its impacts are clearly visible in Madanpura, where the groups of *Gaddidars*, *Girhastas* and weavers are placed in a hierarchy of power. The roles and tasks of these groups within the weaving community of Madanpura and the relationships between them will be described in the following.

The *Gaddidars* are the most powerful actors within the saree weaving and selling processes in Madanpura. They possess good knowledge about the handloom weaving process and the traditional handicraft itself. In their role as wholesalers they are mainly engaged in the marketing and selling of the finished saree products and profit from business connections

to retailers. They are in the position to give orders to either *Girhastas* or weavers directly and set the type of raw material, designs and the number of products to be woven. Above all and most important, they themselves define the price they pay for the finished product. According to the results of the survey *Gaddidars* realise a profit margin of 20% up to 40% for one saree. All respondents of *Gaddidar* households stated that their families are involved in the saree selling business since two generations. In all cases the fathers still learned the profession of handloom weaving and managed to establish a business during the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast the younger generation of interviewed *Gaddidars* still have the basic knowledge about the weaving processes but never learned how to weave themselves. Hence, the high presence of the *Gaddidars* in Madanpura can be considered as a phenomenon directly related to the macro-political changes that took place since the 1980s.

The *Girhastas* can be described as middlemen, acting as intermediary between weavers and *Gaddidars*. In literature they are also referred to as *Master Weavers* (Tanusree 2015, 49, Wood 2014, 49, Jaiswal 2012, 94). *Girhastas* accomplish the orders of *Gaddidars* by managing and controlling the different steps of production. Often *Girhastas* own several looms and employ contract weavers to work at these looms. Besides controlling the actual weaving process they are often in charge of managing the different pre- and post-weaving processes, such as the provision of raw material and design or the cutting, colouring and ironing of the woven product. Several among the interviewed *Girhastas* or members of their households are also still involved in weaving.

The weavers are the actual workers and responsible for the saree weaving processes itself. Almost all interviewed weavers stated that they felt not earning enough money, especially considering their long working hours and the filigree work involved in the weaving process. Average working hours of the interviewed weavers are up to eleven hours per day. The earnings for one silk-saree vary depending on the quality of the material, the fabric thickness, the complexity of patterns and embroidery, and the time needed for weaving (between seven up to 30 days). While the weaver may get 1.000 rupees for a simple light saree, which takes seven to ten days they might get 2.500 Rupees for a heavy and labourious saree.

The weavers of Madanpura can be differentiated between *contract* and *independent weavers*. *Independent weavers* are financially capable to buy their own raw material and designs and are not dependent on *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* for supply of materials. Some are even able to afford several handlooms and hire other weavers themselves. However, due to the changed and increasingly difficult economic situation of the industry the number of independent weavers in Madanpura is decreasing. Approximately 60% of the interviewed weaver households were households of *contract weavers*. *Contract weavers* weave for wages typically on piece rate, either on their own looms or on those of an employer. This means that they are neither responsible for the choice of the design or the quality nor for price making decisions. The raw material is provided by either *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* directly and the contractors financially depend on the suppliers.

Overall, the rising raw material prices and low wages have led to a worsening of the economic situation of handloom weavers. As a consequence they often cannot afford to

purchase raw material or designs by themselves anymore. Their increasing reliance on *Gaddidars* or *Girhastas* for the provision of raw materials and designs forces them into relationships of dependency. One interviewed handloom weaver who is owner of two looms explained that he would prefer to sell his finished saree to a *Gaddidar* directly, but is not in a position to do so. This is because *Gaddidars* only buy bigger stacks of sarees and often only pay after the sarees were actually sold in the shop. Therefore weavers like him depend on *Girhastas* who pay immediately, but less.

This example illustrates how weavers are forced into relationships of dependency due to their weak economic situation giving them only restricted room for manoeuvre. Accordingly, the different steps of the production and selling of sarees are nowadays almost always controlled and organised by *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars*. As a consequence the *contract weaver* has become the weakest and most vulnerable actor within the hierarchy, endowed with the least power and voice.

It has to be remarked that it is not easy and sometimes impossible to clearly classify an actor as *Gaddidar*, *Girhasta* or weaver, because they often hold several tasks and responsibilities within the production and selling processes. An independent weaver, for example, can still weave himself, employ other weavers as contract weavers and act as a middleman between other weavers and a *Gaddidar*. He could also be seen as a transitional form between an *independent weaver* and a *Girhasta*. Furthermore, there are many variations of the chain of command. Sometimes there is no *Girhasta* linked between the weaver and the *Gaddidar* and in some cases the *Gaddidar* himself can directly employ contract weavers and fulfil tasks of a *Girhasta*. Obviously, the borders between the various social and economic roles in the weaving industry are fluid.

6.2 Transformations in occupational structures

Several of the transformations in the weaving industry have led to a severe crisis among the handloom weavers. The rising yarn prices, the competition from cheaper fabrics from China due to lower tariffs on imported silk fabrics, competition from powerloom products and a consequential decreased demand for the traditional *Banarsi* saree can be seen as the major factors leading to shrinking incomes and wages and a deteriorated economic situation among the handloom weavers of Varanasi (Wood 2014, 48). It is estimated that as of 2013 around 100.000 looms have been abandoned within a 15 km radius of Varanasi (Raman 2013, 68).

The results of the survey show that the crisis also hit the handloom weavers of Madanpura quite drastically. As a consequence, many gave up handloom weaving because it ceased being profitable and attempted to change their occupation within the saree production chain, now specializing on pre- and post-weaving services like ironing, washing or colouring. In consequence of this trend various specialised saree colouring-, ironing- and washing-centres were established and are now visible in Madanpura. These pre- and post-weaving processes were traditionally part of the weaving-production process itself and conducted home-based by the actual weaver and his household members (Kumar 1988, 15 ff.). However, today these tasks are almost always outsourced and not in the responsibility

of the actual weaver anymore. With this growing diversification the number of actors in the saree production process has increased and the concept of the *independent weaver* responsible for almost all steps of production rarely exists in Madanpura anymore. Even the interviewed *independent weavers* were outsourcing most steps of pre- and post-weaving processes.

Another strategy to escape the difficult economic situation in Madanpura is labour migration. In the past 20 years many local weavers left their homes and migrated to other states of India, especially to Gujarat where they found employment in large textile factories. A prominent destination for weavers is the fast growing city of Surat where incidentally a new neighbourhood also called Madanpura has been established by the migrant population from Varanasi.

The technological transition from handloom to powerloom weaving can be observed in many parts of Varanasi, where powerlooms dominate and handlooms are an exception. Madanpura appears to be one of the few locations where the otherwise prominent shift to powerloom is much less notable and the weaving process is still dominated by handlooms. This suddenly came to advantage as with the decreasing number of handlooms the market for the remaining handloom-products seems to have improved and a more or less profitable niche for traditional handloom-woven products has emerged. Many *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas* from Madanpura seem to have benefited from these market conditions. In contrast, almost all weavers interviewed stated that they felt threatened by the competition from powerloom products and would change to powerloom weaving if they were able to afford it. This demonstrates that the weavers themselves as being financially dependent on *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars* do not seem to benefit from the improved market conditions for handloom woven sarees.

6.3 Impacts on social structures

Formerly daily life structures and routines in a weaver household were shaped by the weaving process. Women (and children) of the family used to be in charge of the pre- and post- weaving processes, combining those with domestic labour and childcare. In fact, the work of women and children used to be an important part of the saree production (Raman 2013, 33). According to survey results, with many of the pre- and post-weaving processes having been outsourced, tasks and work structures within weaver households of Madanpura have changed. In addition, many weavers who worked as independent weavers before and engaged the whole household in the weaving process are now contracted by *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* and often not work at their own looms and in their own houses anymore. This also reinforces the transformation of family and social structures. With the decline of this traditional division of labour, many women in Madanpura today work separately in embroidery, sewing or cutting of the saree and get orders and payments for these tasks from *Girhastas* or *Gaddidars* directly. As a consequence, the already existing dependency-relations are even more intensified.

7 Conclusion - winners and losers of economic restructuring

The study aimed at analysing the social and economic structures that shape the weaving community in Madanpura in the context of external political and economic changes.

The gradual growth of the powerloom saree industry after India's independence led to new business opportunities for weavers and a new upward social mobility within the weaving communities with the consequent emergence of the groups of *Girhastas* and (since the 1980s) *Gaddidars*. At the same time rising yarn prices, the competition from cheaper fabrics from China, due to lower tariffs on imported silk fabrics, competition from powerloom products and a consequential decreased demand for the traditional *Banarsi* saree led to decreasing incomes and wages and a deteriorated economic situation among the handloom weavers. The macro political and economic transformations and changes in the Indian weaving industry had and still have big and diverse impacts on the handloom weaving community in Madanpura. With the neoliberal reorganisation of capitalism the mode of organisation and control over labour processes has altered strongly (Tanusree 2015, 48). This is obvious in Madanpura too, as the increased number of actors within the production and selling processes is one of the most drastic changes in the context of this study. The formerly typical and common concept of the independent weaver being able to work independently and with the assistance of his family was difficult to find in Madanpura. The emergence and rise of the two classes *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas*, gradually taking over control of production and selling processes had severe impacts on many structures, relations and processes in the weaving community. It led to a rigid hierarchical differentiation of the weaving community in Madanpura. Due to low incomes and their deteriorated economic situation handloom weavers are forced into unequal relationships of dependency with *Girhastas* and *Gaddidars*. These dependencies make the weaver, and especially the contract weaver, the most vulnerable actor within that hierarchy. Also spatially the consequences of transformation are evident. Although the transition from handloom to powerloom appears to be omnipresent all over Varanasi, the example of Madanpura represents a notable exception. *Gaddidars* and *Girhastas* profit from the subsequently developing niche for traditional handloom saree products, while the weavers themselves are left out. The diversification of occupations within the saree weaving processes can be interpreted as a strategy to cope with the decline of the handloom weaving sector and the loss of employment. Due to the externalisation of pre- and post-weaving processes a new allocation of social roles within weaver households and thus the weaving process itself has developed.

The findings of this study show that the overarching macro-political and economic changes led to severe and dramatic consequences for small scale industries like the handloom weaving industry of Madanpura. The political and economic changes had multidimensional impacts on economic and social structures within the weaving community of Madanpura and changed production and selling processes, the division of work, power relations as well as modes of social organisation. This case study demonstrates how political and economic decisions and strategies of governments and international organisations affect structures of daily life at the local level. It also exemplifies that industrialisation and globalisation processes have enlarged the gap between winner and losers of economic restructuring. To

prevent an even further decline of the handloom saree industry the plight of contract weavers should find more attention in politics, and public and scientific debates.

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Fig. E: The milk sold in Assi ghat is transported on bikes (Metzkow 2015)

Economies of Milk

Keywords: Value chain, Economic geography, Transport, Mobility, Animal husbandry

1 Introduction - milk and milk trade in India

Milk is one of the most important staple foods in India. It has cultural significance in the Indian diet. As many people are lacto-vegetarian for religious reasons, milk and dairy products are an important source of protein. Even though dairying is still mainly a smallholder activity, within the last decades milk production has increased tremendously. Today, India is the world's largest producer of milk. It accounts for more than 15 per cent of the world's total milk production and consumes almost all of its own milk (Kumar and Prabhakar 2013). The per capita consumption of milk and dairy products is one of the highest in Asia and is still growing due to factors such as population growth, urbanisation, increases in income levels, and changing food habits and lifestyles (Delago 2008).

Milk trade historically has been a local and small-holder activity in India. Just within the last few decades, an industrial milk processing sector has developed which uses a western-style dairy processing (pasteurisation), packaging and marketing (Jesse 2006). There are many studies about the industrial milk processing sector, while studies about the local milk trade are hard to find. However, the local dairy sector still attributes to 75 per cent of the milk trade and thus, is an integral part of the milk business in India (Jesse 2006). This paper aims to contribute a better understanding of the local dairy sector by analysing the economic, spatial and social organisation of the rural-urban dairy production, marketing and distribution in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), using the commodity chain approach promoted by Gereffi (1994, et al. 2005). As the industrial dairy sector has grown rapidly during the last two decades due to deregulation policies, its impact on the local dairy sector is investigated as well.

2 Conceptual framework - The Global Commodity Chain Approach

The global commodity chain approach of Gereffi (1994, et al. 2005) is commonly used on a global scale. In the context of globalisation, many labour-intensive steps of production were outsourced in the last decades through multinational companies. The global commodity chain approach was developed to enable the analysis of the cross-linking and allocation of different production sites and their stakeholders. Originally, the approach focuses predominantly on the production of goods. Within this context, a commodity chain could be defined as a network of labour and production processes. The result of those processes is a finished commodity (Hobkins and Wallerstein 1986). Beyond that, Gereffi (1994) distinguishes four dimensions to analyse the structure and organisation of a commodity chain: input-output-structure, territoriality, governance-structure and institutional framework. Socio-political, institutional and cultural aspects were included along with the pure economic issues. The analytical framework intends to point out how the different economic agents are linked (Hassler 2009) and examines "the spaces through

which consumers are connected to producers" (Hughes and Reimer 2004, 1). The approach offers a suitable framework for the analysis of dairy production and trade in and around Varanasi as it can be used on a local or regional scale too. Addressing the four dimensions with reference to urban and rural dairy producers it allows identifying the different terms on which they are working and what different challenges they face. The framework isolates key variables that provide a clear view of fundamental forces underlying specific empirical situations such as the production and processing of milk in and around Varanasi (Gereffi et al. 2005). In the following, the four dimensions are briefly presented.

Input-Output-Structure

The input-output-structure examines the process of adding value itself. The different steps of a commodity chain are described as nodes. By analysing the inputs, outputs and their differences it is possible to contrast rural and urban dairy production and distribution. The inputs can comprise resources as well as know-how, labour or certain techniques that increase the value and quantity of milk. Looking at inputs and outputs in local dairy production the hierarchies between different producers, merchants and/or nodes can be made visible.

Territoriality

The dimension territoriality focuses on the geographical dispersion of commodity chains. The different locations of dairy production and their connections to the local milk markets are analysed. In this way areas of activities of the different stakeholders can be identified. In addition to aspects of production, the consumers' locations, competitors, innovations and industrial capabilities can deeply influence the dimension of territoriality (Gereffi 1994, Hassler 2009).

Governance-structure

Within the scope of governance-structures, the possibilities of controlling, regulating and influencing the production network are examined. It is possible that interactions between different stakeholders are characterised by asymmetrical power relations that determine how financial, material, and human resources are allocated and flow within a commodity chain (Hassler 2009). Gereffi (1994, et al. 2005) especially emphasises this dimension and analysed different types of commodity chains according to their governance-structure. He distinguished producer-driven and buyer-driven commodity chains. Producer-driven commodity chains are mostly dominated by one powerful stakeholder that controls backward and forward linkages. This type is typical for mass productions where production patterns shape the character of demand. Buyer-driven commodity chains are often more flexible and the producing and buying stakeholders within the commodity chain are more at one par with each other. The consumption patterns influence where and how manufacturing takes place. Typical for a buyer-driven commodity chain is high pressure of competition and partly changing consumer behaviour (Gereffi 1994, Gereffi et al. 2005).

Institutional framework

National laws and rules can provide the institutional frame for the production and trade processes of dairy products, and state policies can play an important role for commodity chain analysis.

3 Research Framework

The main objectives of the study in Varanasi were the analysis of the rural-urban dairy production, the commodity chains of the local dairy sector and the impact of the industrial dairy sector. Figure 3.1 illustrates the research framework including the objectives, research design and methods. After an initial period of theoretical preparation and literature review, the empirical research was conducted within two weeks in Varanasi and its surrounding suburban and rural areas. In order to investigate the production process, nine dairy farms were visited and examined, which included farms in rural (Muradev village), urban (Assi Ghat) and suburban (Seer Gate) areas.

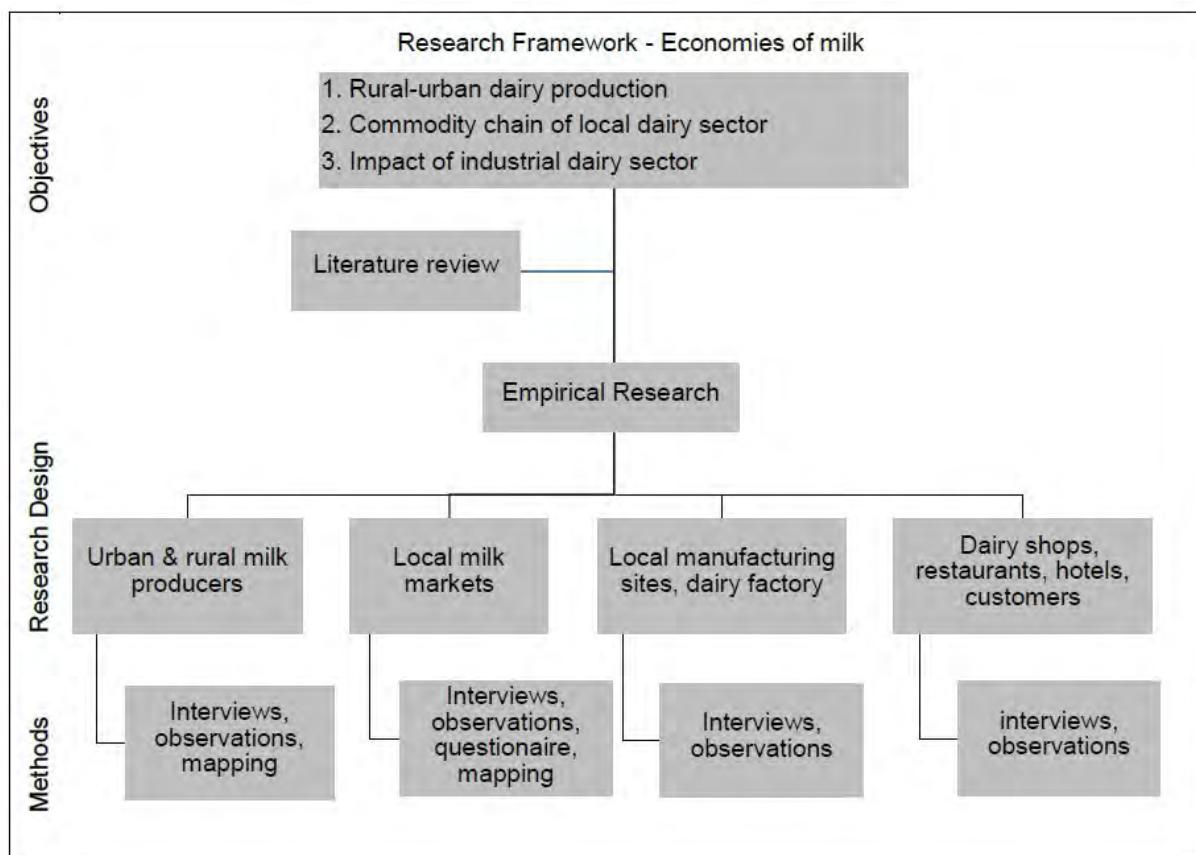


Fig. 3.1: Research Framework - Economies of milk (Source: own design)

At each farm an in-depth qualitative interview was conducted with the owner of the farm. To get a better understanding of the local milk marketing and distribution system, four local milk markets were visited: Godaulia and Visheshwarganj in the old town (city centre), Kaccheri north of and Lanka south of the old town. The markets look rather unorganised and crowded. There is no reserved space with tables or booths for the merchants, no entrance or gate, no sign indicating the presence of a market. There is

simply a crowd of milk men standing next to their large milk cans in a small ally or along the street. Observations and ten in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted, as well as a brief questionnaire survey (n=70). Furthermore, the production-based catchment area of each market was mapped.

In order to get a deeper insight into the commodity chain, several short interviews were conducted at a variety of small local manufacturing shops including *ghee* shops (two interviews), curd shops (two interviews), *paneer* production sites (two interviews) and *paneer* shops (one interview), sweet shops (two interviews). To gather information about the organisation and influence of the industrial dairy sector, a processing plant of the private company *Parag Milk Foods Pvt. Ltd.* in Ramnagar was investigated and a manager interviewed. Also, the owners of three dairy shops selling packaged milk and processed dairy goods were interviewed. To evaluate the consumer side of the chain, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses (three each) and customers - both at the local milk markets and at small dairy shops (ten each) - were interviewed. The research process was facilitated by an Indian interpreter.

4 Rural-urban dairy production in Varanasi

Before taking a closer look at the commodity chain and its dimensions, some basic aspects about the organisation of the milk production in rural and urban areas in the study area have to be dealt with. It has to be pointed out that milk production is mainly a rural and smallholder activity. About 70 percent of the milk producers in the conducted survey have less than 20 cattle. Only two out of 70 producers have nearly 100 cattle. Most dairy farms are family-run and dairy is generally the main income source. More than 80 percent of the rural milk producers interviewed are also involved in subsistence agriculture.

The milking is usually done once or twice a day (in the morning and afternoon). Afterwards, the unprocessed raw milk is immediately transported in large milk cans (*balta*) to an urban milk market as the raw milk deteriorates quickly and has to be fresh. This task is done by a male member of the family, e.g. the father or the eldest son. When it comes to other tasks such as milking, feeding, or bathing the cattle, cleaning the shed and milk cans, there is no clear division of labour. In addition to selling the milk at the market, some producers offer a home delivery service to regular customers.

Generally, about 30 percent of the produced milk in India is retained in the villages for food and feed (Jesse 2006). The interviewed farm owners reported to keep between seven to ten litres per day for their own use. In the countryside, it is very common to keep at least one or two cattle for subsistence even if the family is not involved in dairy business. Consequently, the demand for milk in the countryside is comparatively low. In the densely-populated urban areas, on the other hand, only few people keep cattle, and the demand for milk and dairy products is high and still growing due to socioeconomic and demographic factors such as urbanisation, rising income levels and changing food habits (Delago 2008). Although a number of urban milk farms exist in Varanasi city (among others in the Assi Ghat district), they cannot meet the high demand of the urban population. This leads to a close rural-urban linkage between the rural producers and urban consumers.

Around 90 percent of the milk sold at the milk markets is buffalo milk and only ten percent is cow milk. It has a higher fat content (six to seven percent) than cow milk (four to five percent) and is used for many traditional dairy products such as butter, *ghee* (butter fat), *dahi* (curd), *malai* (cream), *paneer* (fresh cheese) and sweets. Cow milk is used in particular for religious ceremonies, special kinds of sweets and as baby food (due to its higher nutrient content).

5 Commodity chains in rural-urban dairy production

Figure 3.2 shows the different possibilities how the raw milk or the milk products reach the customers in the local dairy sector.

- The producer sells his milk directly to customers and processing sites.
- The producer brings his milk to a local milk market where he offers his product to different customers.
- The producer sells his milk to a milk man who sells it at the local markets. This milk man acts usually also as producer and simply buys additional milk to increase the amount to be sold at the market (cf. chapter 5.1).
- The milk that is processed to dairy products such as *paneer*, *ghee*, *malai*, sweets, curd, butter etc. is sold mostly to private customers. Many bigger restaurants process the raw milk by themselves.

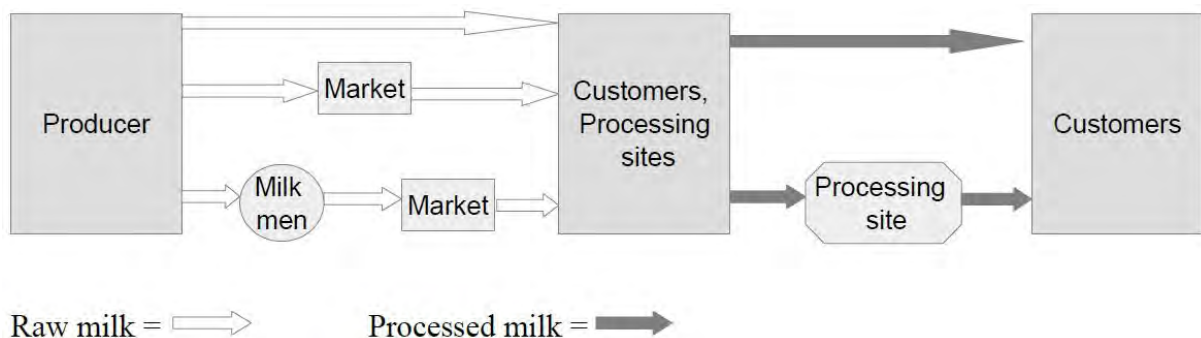


Fig. 3.2: Commodity chain of the local dairy sector (Source: own design)

Some shops also buy processed dairy products such as *malai* and just do the further processing on their own (for example *ghee* shops may buy *malai* and make *ghee* from of it).

Figure 3.3 shows the commodity chain of the industrial dairy sector. The producers give their milk to a committee (village cooperative societies). This is only common in rural areas (cf. chapter 6). After the collection, it is brought to the factory. After several processing steps, packaged milk and different dairy products are transported to the wholesale market. From there they are delivered to the different shops in the city where the customers finally buy the products.

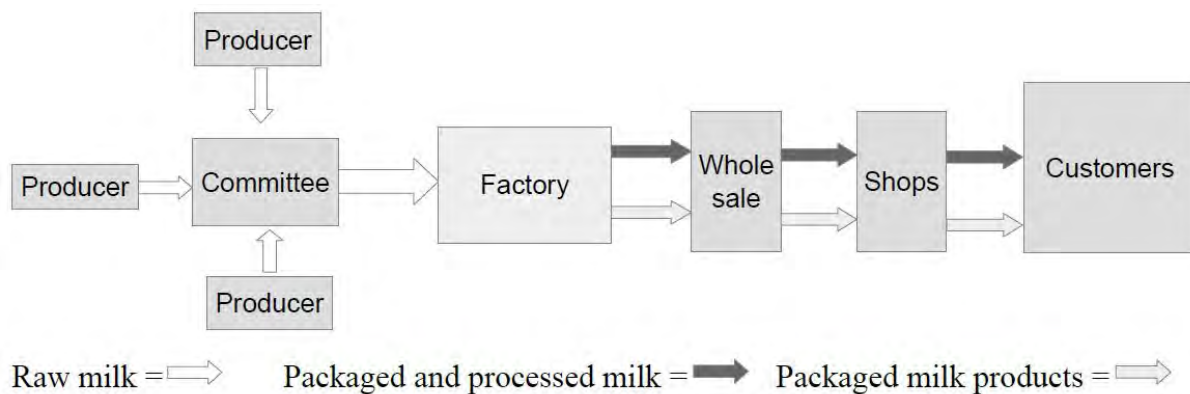


Fig. 3.3: Commodity chain of the industrial dairy sector - the example of Parag Milk Foods Pvt. Ltd. (Source: own design)

5.1 Input-output structure

The input-output-structure examines the process of adding value between different nodes of production. However, as the survey essentially examines the production and trade of raw milk, there are not many different nodes of adding value to be distinguished. Only three out of 70 interviewed clients are not merchants and producers at the same time. These three just act as merchants and milk men (cf. chapter 5). One third of the remaining 67 clients buy milk in addition to their own produce to sell it at the markets. They are producers, milk men and merchants at once. It can be assumed that this part of the milk trade is based on partner-like relations. The additional milk is mostly bought from neighbours and other smallholder producers from a closer social environment of a particular merchant. The production and trade of milk is not the main activity of these smallholder producers that sell their left over milk for a lower price. Due to the regional allocation of all stakeholders and the short distance of the commodity chain they are all underlying similar producing and market conditions. This reduces the chance that big hierarchies arise. However, differences that have to be considered between producers are their location (urban or rural) and their herd size, both determining the input-output ratio.

The amount of milk a cow or buffalo gives is highly dependent on the amount and composition of the forage. The vast majority of the rural producers (80 percent of the interviewed clients) are involved in agriculture. They are able to grow up to 50 percent of their feed by themselves. By-products from crop production and *chari* (fresh green grass) are mainly used as forage. They contain many nutrients that are essential for the cattle's health and the production of a good amount and quality of milk. The rural and, therefore, more natural environment are beneficial for a healthier life of the cattle in general. They move more, breathe cleaner air and are not endangered by the consumption of garbage and plastic. These conditions are not given in the city. The restricted space of the city does not enable to produce forage by means of own agriculture. The availability of *chari* is very limited and so an urban producer has to supplement the cattle's forage with additional nutrients, vitamins, medicine and concentrated calories (butter or/and glucose). Table 3.1 gives an overview about the usual components of forage.

Tab. 3.1: Usual components of forage (Source: own data)

Forage	Price per Kg
Bhusa (dry wheat, straw, broken particles)	10 Rs./Kg
Chokar (broken particles of wheat and rice)	15 Rs./Kg
Khari (waste material of mustard oil production)	50 Rs.
Chuni (pulsus/hulls of pulses)	8 Rs./Kg
Chari (resh green grass)	No fixed prices - only available in the countryside
Concentrates (Butter, Sugar)	-

The cattle receive a daily forage mixture of 10-20 kg per animal. The daily ration of forage should be around 3.4 percent of the live weight of a buffalo (assuming an average buffalo weight of 500 kg) and 4.2 percent for dairy cows (assuming an average cow weighs 400 kg) (Powell 2010). The final amount in kg highly depends on the actual composition of forage.

The restricted space also limits the number of cattle a producer can manage in the urban areas. Urban producers need higher monetary inputs as they have to buy supplements of different kinds to compensate the described disadvantages of urban milk production. However, they save costs and time due to the spatial proximity to their customers (cf. chapter 5.2). The rural producers, on the other hand, need much more time for transporting their milk to the urban market and may have to invest in a motorcycle and petrol to cover long distances. The distance can also be understood socially referring the milk buying customers (cf. chapter 5.2). The non-existing private network regularly forces the rural merchants to spend much more time at the milk markets, where sales are nearly exclusively determined by the price and quality of the milk. Rural producers need more monetary and non-monetary inputs in the section of transport and selling (petrol, capital in kind, time).

The size of the herds also influences the needed input to gain a certain amount of output. With an increasing number of cattle the additional input for each further animal is decreasing until a critical point to achieve a certain amount of milk per animal (economies of scale). The results of the survey are not clear enough to prove this effect in monetary expenditures per animal. The clients were asked for monthly expenditures and the number of cattle they have, but how the producers split their expenditures between animal breeding, transport, agriculture or other private investments and consumption was not distinguished. Further research is necessary to clarify the monetary input-output calculations. Nevertheless the described economies of scale apply also to non-monetary inputs such as bathing the cattle.

Another important factor is the seasonal variation of inputs and outputs. Due to heat stress the cattle are giving less milk in the summer months. Again, additional inputs such as fresh forage, more liquids or a higher bathing frequency are needed to keep the output close to the winter level. If the producers cannot afford the supplementary inputs the output is decreasing in the summer months, directly influencing the milk price (cf. chapter 5). Apart

from milk, *ghori* can be seen as another output. *Ghori* is the dung of the cattle, which is formed into a round cake and dried. It generates just a fraction of the whole income but it can be used in many ways as fuel for cooking and heating. Fresh manure is used as fertilizer on the fields. In a few cases producers also rent out their bulls for reproduction. One of the interviewed clients charges 200 Rs. per session. Many producers, however, lend their bulls for free or use sperm injection (around 150 Rs. per injection).

In addition to primary production sites further processing sites were investigated. Figure 3.4 exemplifies the added value using the example of the production of *paneer*. The interviewed client is using 500 l milk per day for the production of *paneer*. He is buying the raw milk at the market rate. After processing all the milk he added a value of about 2500 Rs. The price for raw milk as well as for *paneer* is increasing in the summertime.

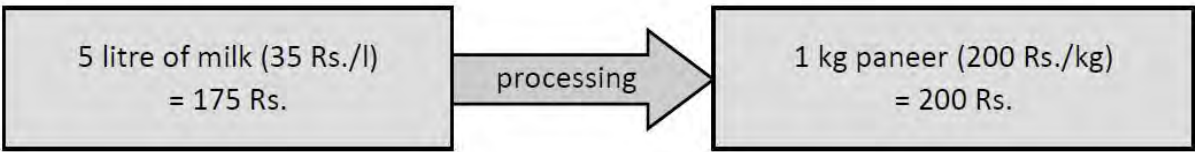


Fig. 3.4: Proportion of milk/paneer and its added value (Source: own design)

All in all, the production of milk is labour intensive and a large number of non-monetary inputs are needed. The main tasks, i.e. milking, feeding, cleaning the barn etc., are time consuming and often have to be done repeatedly a day, seven days a week. In that field, urban and rural producers face similar challenges of everyday life in the local dairy sector in and around Varanasi. Moreover, the profit margins of the producers are small. For most milk producers and merchants a low milk price directly causes lower input factors. Especially rural smallholder producers are vulnerable to droughts, fluctuating milk prices and increasing prices for petrol.

5.2 Territoriality

With respect to territoriality, the commodity chain is regional and concentrated within close rural-urban relations in the daily milk supply. The majority of the milk production takes place in villages around Varanasi (Fig. 3.5). Distance is a major factor for choosing the milk market. This is quite obvious considering that most of the transport is done by bicycle, which is time consuming and hard labour. Figure 3.5 shows that the markets Visheshwarganj, Lanka and Kaccheri have a sectorial catchment area with respect to the origin of the milk. The catchment area of Godaulia market is larger than all the other ones, including and intersecting the other catchment areas. The dairy farms are dispersed and milk men travel up to 36 km to reach the milk market of Godaulia even though other markets are much closer to their farm. Thus, distance is not the only factor for choosing the market.

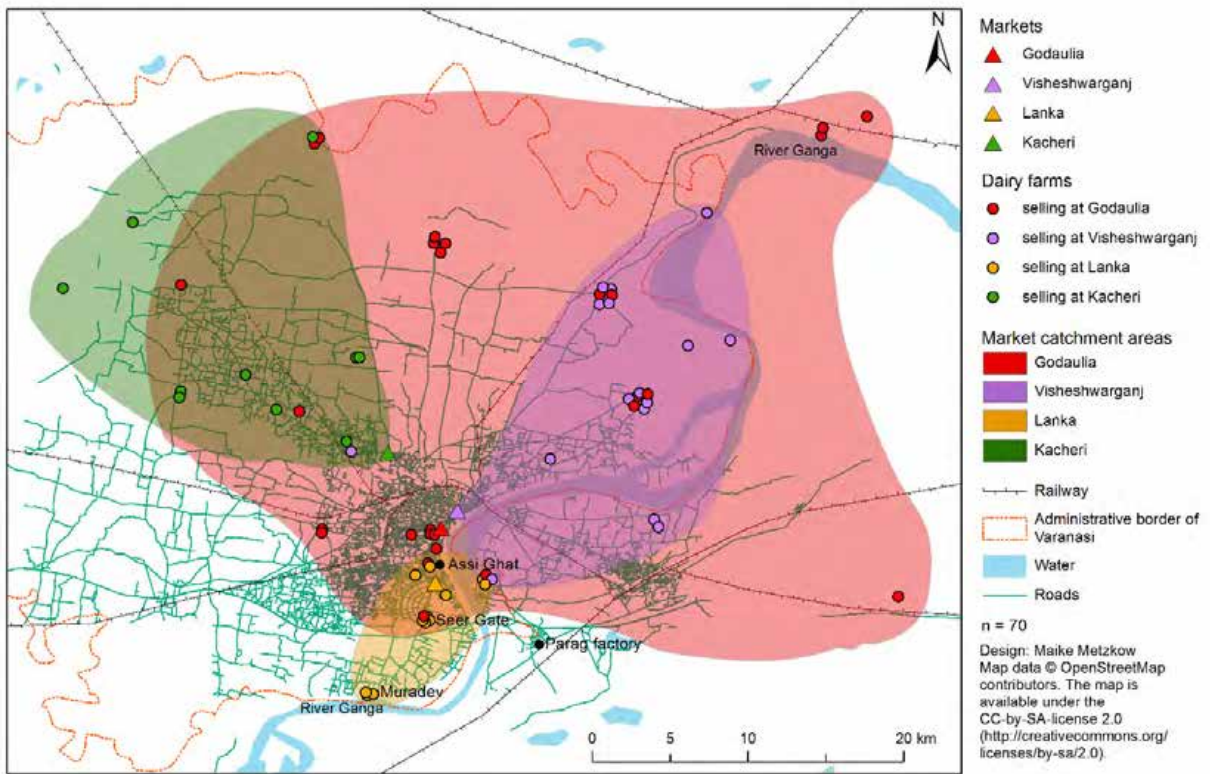


Fig. 3.5: Milk production catchment area (Source: own design)

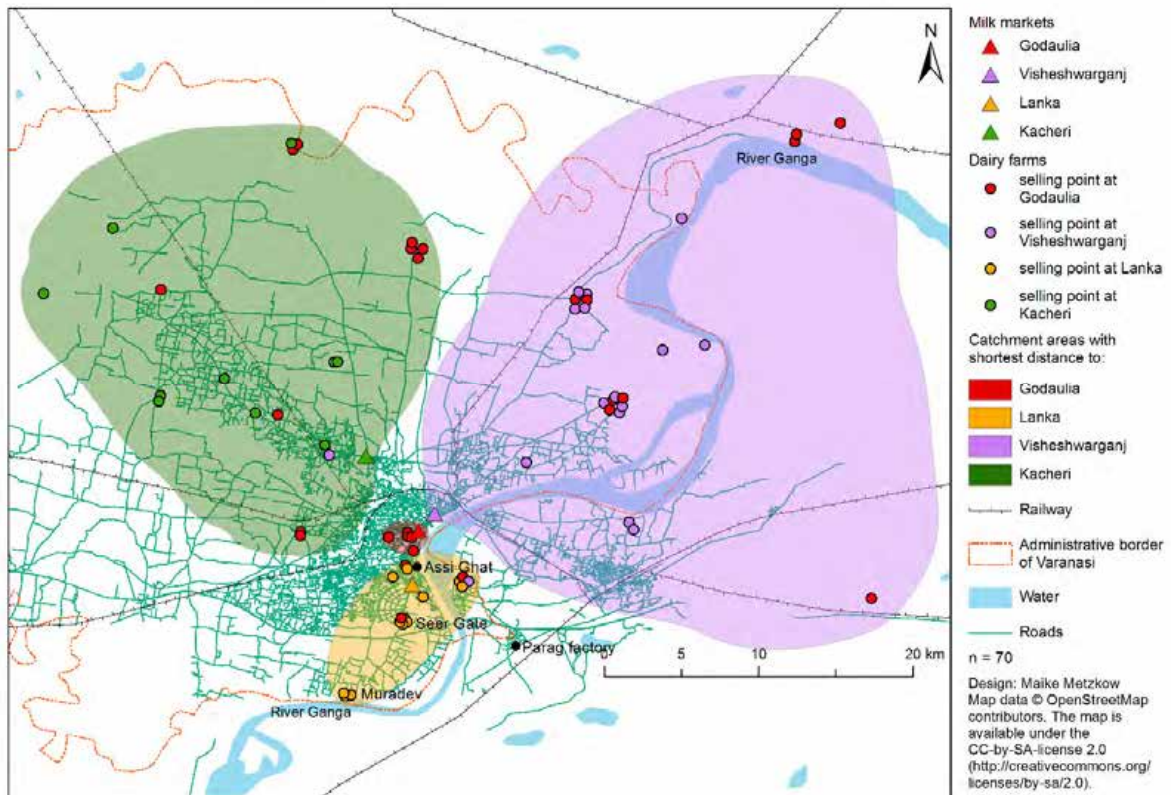


Fig. 3.6: Distance-based milk production catchment areas (Source: own design)

This is also illustrated by Figure 3.6, which shows the catchment areas of the markets with respect to the shortest distance between farms and markets. The large and disperse catchment area of Godaulia can be explained by its high degree of centrality. Godaulia market is located in the centre of the old town, a busy area with many tourists, guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, dairy shops and the most important temple in Varanasi (Vishwanath). Consequently, the demand for milk and the frequency of customers are very high. The market is also the only one that is open 24 hours a day, which again exemplifies the constant demand of milk in Varanasi day and night.

The urban producers often only sell a part of their milk at the local milk markets and sometimes none at all. The reason is that they have established a network of regular customers in their neighbourhood and surrounding areas. They mostly sell their milk directly from their urban farm or deliver it to their regulars. Figure 3.7 exemplifies the catchment area for an urban producer residing at Assi Ghat. The farthest customer is only two kilometres away and when including all customers, the total route is about eight kilometres long. The spatial proximity to the customers is a major advantage for the urban producers with regard to milk marketing and sale.

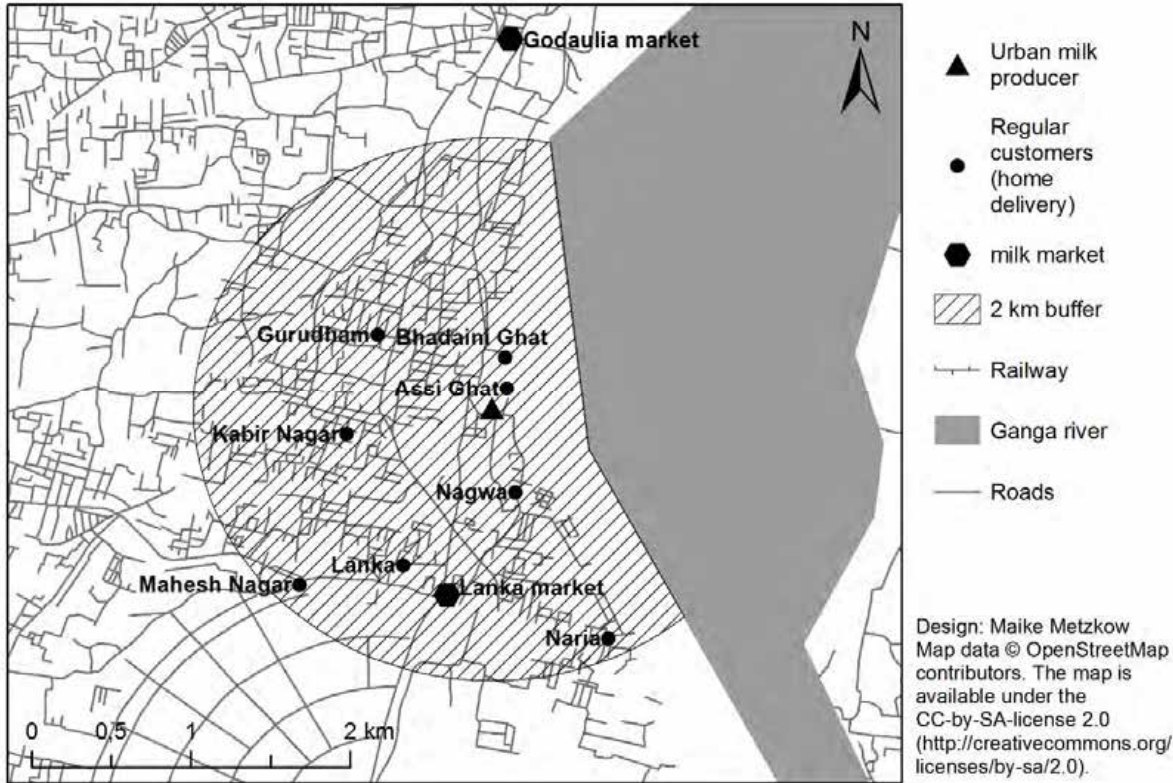


Fig. 3.7: Customer catchment area of an urban milk producer (Source: own design)

The manufacturing of traditional dairy products takes place on a local level in small manufacturing sites or shops scattered over the city. The consumption of the milk and dairy products takes place locally, i.e. in Varanasi city. As such, the geographical dimension of the commodity chain is concentrated in the city of Varanasi and its closer surroundings.

5.3 Governance

The local dairy sector is only slightly influenced by specific governance mechanisms. In general, it works on open competition without particular social entry barriers. The fact that more than 90 percent of the interviewed clients belong to the caste of *yadav*, which is the traditional milk producing and trading caste, can be explained by the traditional division of labour along the caste system. However, the conventional order was neither translated into contemporary legally binding market guidelines nor is it preserved in another way by any authoritarian structure. Supply and demand influence the price directly. They are the most important market regulating factors which is why a closer look at the price mechanisms is appropriate.

The following information is applied to the local milk markets and predominantly rural producers as most urban producers not depend on these markets. The price for one litre of milk was on average around 33 to 40 Rs. per litre in winter 2014/2015, whereas the average price in summer is up to 50 percent higher. In general, the demand is increasing by rising living standard due to changing food habits and lifestyles. The income elasticities for milk are between 1.07 in rural and 1.36 in urban areas in India (Jesse et al. 2006).¹² The price is further influenced by the quality of milk (fat content, water mixing). The customers test the milk for its fat content by putting their hand into the milk. Moreover, the sales skills have an influence. Seasonal changing prices can be explained by the fluctuating output (less in summer) which reduces the supply. The demand for milk is influenced by social aspects and religious events during which there are much more people in town. Especially hotels, restaurants and guest houses demand more milk (e.g. for tea, for coffee and milk products). The annual festival of *Shivaratri* as an important religious holiday is a good example where thousands of pilgrims and visitors come to the city and the demand for milk increases erratically. A temporary stronger demand can be partially explained by the preferred usage of cow milk for religious reasons although this factor might be often overestimated.

Another important aspect is the wedding season in rural areas. Around 80 percent of the interviewed clients are involved in agriculture, where most work has to be done in wintertime. That is why there are more marriages in summertime which strongly correlates with the demand of milk. More milk is retained in the rural areas because of the increased demand. Thus, less milk is distributed to the city where the demand is still high and the price at the local milk markets can rise significantly. Prices are also fluctuating over the day. Milk is a valuable product but it deteriorates rapidly. Due to a lack of storage possibilities the merchants have to sell all of their milk each day at the local markets. The demand for milk is generally high in the morning hours and the merchants get best prices during this time. Over the day the demand is decreasing, especially for milk that is not bought for the purpose of further processing. The price can be up to 50 percent lower than in the morning if there are still many merchants that offer milk but fewer customers. If the merchants cannot sell their milk at the local markets there are different possibilities to

¹² Income elasticities larger than one mean that with rising income the demand increases disproportionately. Goods with income elasticities larger than one are called superior goods in economics.

sell it for lower prices. Leftover milk can be sold to different processing sites and the price can go down to less than 50 percent of the local market price at the end of the day.

In one particular case soft forms of governance that are not related to the complex of price, demand and supply could be found. One market director arranged the trade of leftover milk at the end of the day to bigger customers such as hotels for a low price. He tries to implement additional incentives to get more merchants to his market. That way he can collect a higher municipal fee and the merchants can be sure to sell all of their milk. It is a mutual positive behaviour and a good example for the whole character of the local dairy production. Although the different merchants face hard competition at the local markets they are working on equal terms. In addition, there are no stakeholders with disproportionate potential influence. This also applies to urban producers. Mostly they sell their milk by home delivery or it is picked up directly. Compared to the rural producers and merchants they are the minority at the local markets. Another peculiarity is that they mostly offer stable prices all over the year (about 50 Rs per litre milk in 2014/2015). The relations between these urban producers and their customers are often long and steady over generations. They are more personal as they are at the local markets. All in all, the type of the dairy products commodity chains in Varanasi can be identified as buyer-driven. The producers are almost at one par with each other and face high competition, whereat the customers buying decisions at the local markets is influenced by small price and quality differences.

5.4 Institutional Framework

While the private and cooperative sector are subject to formal regulations (for instance the Milk and Milk Products Order) and the cooperative sector even receives subsidies and policy support, the Indian government has adopted quite a laissez-fair approach to the local dairy sector (Jesse 2006). Thus, formal institutions do not play a significant role in the interactions between agents in the commodity chain. Only the milk markets are formally organised (Fig. 3.8). They are generally located



Fig. 3.8: Godaulia milk market (Metzkow 2015)

on an open and public space such as an ally or the side of a road and are supervised by a market director. The market director is a private employee who obtains the authority over the market from the municipality against payment of a certain yearly fee. In turn, he collects a municipal fee (10-20 Rs. per day) from every merchant. There is no vendor license necessary nor do any other restrictions apply for selling at the market.

6 Impact of the industrial dairy sector

The industrial production of milk is carried out by dairy cooperatives and private processors. Within the scope of the liberalisation of the dairy sector since 1991 the market of Uttar Pradesh was opened (Kumar et al. 2011). All companies could sell their milk and

milk products nationwide. Today, industrial processed milk and milk products of three different suppliers can be found in Varanasi. A big factory operated by *Parag Milk Foods Pvt. Ltd.* exists since 1975 and is located close to Ramnagar. It is the only cooperative milk factory in the region of Varanasi. The other two companies are called *Shyam* and *Amul*. *Shyam* is also based in Uttar Pradesh and it is a private company while *Amul* originally started operating in Gujarat as a cooperative.

Especially within the last two years all of them scaled up the supply of packaged milk and other packaged milk products to the city. As *Parag* is a cooperative the milk is collected by a committee in rural areas. It consists of agents of the milk producers. They elect a representative in a democratic process. He is responsible for the daily transport of approximately 40,000 litres milk to the factory where the processing and packaging takes place. In return for the steady milk supply the *Parag* company supports the milk producers through the organisation of transport, the guarantee to buy all of their milk and by providing subsidised forage for the cattle. The prices of packaged milk are stable all over the year and range from 34-48 Rs. per litre according to the fat content. The factory can balance the lower milk supply in summer times. The surplus milk in winter is processed into milk powder and butter. In summer, when the demand is high, these ingredients can be mixed together with water to form milk.

The demand for packaged milk has increased. Its consumption is more convenient (fixed price, no water mixing, no bargaining, shorter ways to buy milk) and is sometimes seen as an expression of a more modern lifestyle. However, the competition between the local milk market system and the industrial system is not seen critically as it serves different target groups. Local production sites prefer milk from the local milk markets as they need fat buffalo milk to get a good amount of traditional dairy products such as *paneer*, curd, *malai*, *ghee*, sweets etc. per litre. Packaged milk is mostly preferred by the upcoming middle class and just a few customers switch in summertime from fresh raw milk to packaged milk when the prices for the fresh products are high. It can be assumed that the industrial milk production system will not threaten the local system in the near future.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to contribute to a better understanding of the local dairy sector in Varanasi using the commodity chain approach promoted by Gereffi et al. (1994, 2005). Milk production is mainly a rural, smallholder and household-based activity. Regarding the local milk supply, there is a tight rural-urban relation with a net flow from the rural areas (low demand) into the city (high demand). The milk is mainly traded at urban local milk markets subject to the price-building mechanisms of supply and demand. Rural and urban milk producers face different challenges. Whereas the rural producers face long distances to and price fluctuations at the milk markets, urban producers are mainly constricted in space and forage supply.

The commodity chains of the local dairy sector are small-scale, local and concentrated on the city of Varanasi and its surrounding rural areas. They have been identified as buyer-driven commodity chains. Despite varying profits and welfare between the interviewed

clients no dominant stakeholder or structures could be found. Distance from production site and centrality are major factors for choosing the milk market as they determine time constrictions and sales opportunities.

Although the global orientated commodity chain approach is putting emphasis on power relations and hierarchic structures, it proved to be a beneficial tool in creating a better understanding of the dairy production and its value flows in Varanasi. By using the four dimensions of the approach the central economic concerns and connections could be supplemented by social, institutional, geographical and partly religious explanations.

The industrial dairy sector has been growing during the past decades, so far without posing a threat to the local dairy sector. Yet, the major disadvantage for the local milk producers refer to the price building mechanisms at the local milk markets which leaves them vulnerable to fluctuations of the milk price. Milk producers supplying their milk to private or cooperative firms have more stable revenues.

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Street Vending - A Sustainable Livelihood Strategy for the urban poor?

Keywords: Street Vending, Varanasi, Informal Economy, Vulnerability, Sustainable Livelihood

1 Introduction - The informal economy

Due to massive rural-urban migration, many urban settlements in India are growing without control. Large numbers of people are moving to the cities searching for work and the hope for better livelihoods. The urban economy is not growing as fast as its population does so that many cities are characterised by massive underemployment and poverty. In the past, a wide spectrum of modernisation strategies and employment programmes did not result in the generation of sufficient job opportunities for the masses and the promises of an automatic “trickle-down-effect” were not fulfilled (Singh 1996, 15).



Fig. 4.1: A Varanasi street vendor after preparing his cart in the morning (Brauneis 2015)

The urban poor are usually neglected and ignored by the public authorities and have to come up with their own solutions to survive within the urban economy. Without any support from the state, the informal economy is providing employment, income and essential services and goods for the urban poor where formal employment and public services cannot meet local demands (Hemmer/Mannel 1988, 298). Low levels of education and skills can be reasons for not finding formal employment, but there are also a lot of workers who have the required skills but are not able to find a proper job within the formal economy. In addition, a high number of workers have lost their jobs in the wake of rationalising processes in large parts of the formal economy. All these people are trying to make their living through informal jobs (Bhowmik 2003, 1543).

Informal labour has been part of scientific discussions for decades. In 1972 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined the term “informal sector” for the first time. Accordingly, the sector was defined as small-scale, self-employed activities with a low level of organisation and technology with the main objective to generate at least a minimum of employment and income (Escher 1999, 658). Usually these are not properly recognised by the public authorities and bear numerous potentials and risks. On the one hand the access to informal activities is easy due to the lacking control of public authorities and the minimal necessary skills. On the other hand they lack any support or protection from the government and are usually not offering any sustainable solutions, but

only daily survival (Escher 1999, 658). The concept has been rethought in the last decade and nowadays the ILO is talking about an “informal economy” instead of an “informal sector” to make clear that there are not two strictly separable sectors. The focus has shifted from characteristics of enterprises to the nature of employment relationships. In this context, those employment relationships lacking formal contracts, worker benefits and social protection are categorised as part of the informal economy. The significance of the informal workforce in India is immense. It represents an estimated number of 370 million workers which accounts for 93 % of the total workforce and this proportion is even growing (Chen 2005, 10).

2 Research Framework

2.1 Research objective

The principal aim of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the street food vending business in Varanasi in particular and to stimulate the ongoing debate on working conditions in the informal economy. The main food markets and the importance of street vendors in the city's food supply are analysed. Concerning the street vendors in particular the main research goals included the gathering of general socio-demographic characteristics and the classification of purchasing and selling strategies. By identifying these aspects the question can be addressed whether this part of the informal economy is an important livelihood strategy for many Varanasi citizens or whether it should rather be considered a niche strategy for a very specific group of people. Analysing the impact of informality and its political environment shall contribute to a better understanding of the situation. Another question that guided the research process was if street vending is able to provide a secure livelihood.

2.2 Methodological approach

During a two weeks period of field research interviews with street vendors in different parts of the city were carried out. Almost every street vending business starts at one of the main food markets in Varanasi as the majority of the vendors are mobile petty traders. Hence, the initial contact points were exactly those markets. Participatory observations of interactions on the markets and exploratory interviews with wholesalers and street vendors served as an initial entry point to the field. The different characteristics of the markets were analysed, price fluctuations recorded and the range of products assessed. The exploratory interviews of street vendors at these markets provided a first impression about the organisation and logistics of their work. The important links between the street vendors and the wholesale markets became apparent. A questionnaire survey with a randomised choice of respondents at different places in the city provided the basis for analysis. The field survey started at the markets, and interviews were conducted while the street vendors purchased their products and prepared their carts. During these periods the respondents were very busy and so the questions had to be chosen with care. The questionnaire contained ten questions about socio-demographic situations and economic strategies. and sixty of those interviews were conducted at six different locations. In order to localise the coverage of the street vending business within the city an additional 100

short interviews were carried out asking about place of residence, living conditions, choice of markets and selling areas. These provide additional information about the ways and routes of the mobile petty trade in Varanasi. Finally, participant observations paired with a qualitative and biographical interview with a single street vendor and his household provided a deeper insight into the life of a Varanasi street vendor.

2.3 Analytical framework

To answer the questions why a street vendor has been choosing this business to provide a living for him and his household and whether street vending could act as a secure livelihood strategy the Sustainable Livelihood Framework was applied as the analytical framework. This holistic approach enables to analyse connections between the assets of street vendors, the institutional framework,

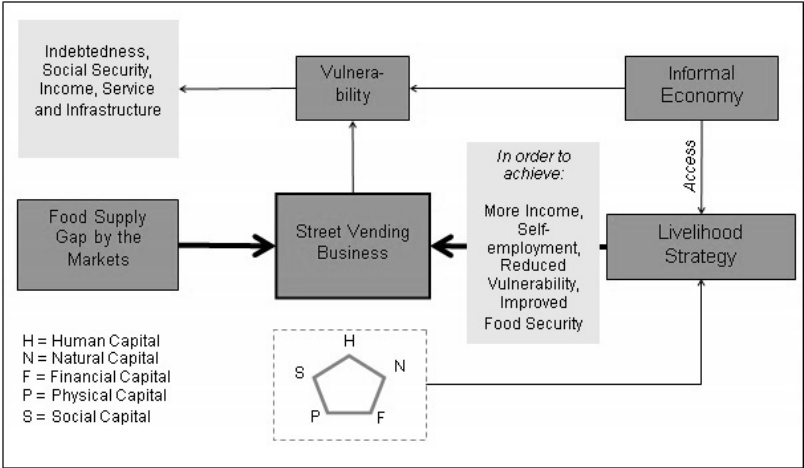


Fig. 4.2: Analytical framework (Source: own design, based on Rauch 2012, 338)

livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes (Rauch 2012, 338). The underlying assumption was that street vending itself is a livelihood strategy which is chosen in order to make for a sufficient and secure living. The modified analytical framework displayed in Figure 4.2 puts the street vendors with their respective capital endowments in the centre. Following Rauch (2012, 338) each individual has a specific allocation of human capital (knowledge, health, skills), natural capital (soil, water, vegetation), financial capital (savings, loans, other stating cash), physical capital (infrastructure, transportation, means of production) and social capital (social networks, social fall-back systems). However, the trader’s decision to work in this business is not solely based on his/her capital endowment. Additionally, economic demand for the business has to be persistent in order to make street vending an attractive livelihood strategy. Such demand can be induced by the insufficiency of other components of the Varanasi food supply chain. For instance, the food supply gaps by local markets may induce a street vendor to choose mobile petty trade as a livelihood strategy in order to achieve higher income and improved food security. The informal economy on the other hand provides access to such strategies. However, it also increases vulnerability risks for the street vendor with regard to social security, income safety and possible indebtedness.

3 Research Outcomes

3.1 The Role and Importance of the Street Vending Business in Varanasi

For many Varanasi citizens fresh vegetables and fruits belong to the daily diet, making it necessary to provide a steady and affordable supply of these kinds of comestible goods. For that matter, there are three main food markets located in the north, in the south and in the city centre respectively. The Pahria Market in the north is the largest of the three and unlike the other two markets is owned by the government. Its main function is the large scale provision of local wholesalers with comestible goods for further distribution. Consequently, retail business with private costumers is rather unusual as they require much smaller trade volumes for their daily demand. The Sundarpur Market is located in the south of Varanasi in the corresponding area of Sundarpur. The Chanduaa Market can be found in the city center in the area of Chaitganj close to the Varanasi Junction. Compared to the Pahria Market the latter two markets mainly serve to supply the local population with less emphasis on the wholesale business. Still, depending on the food article, a significant share of the conducted transactions involves large quantities which raise the question of how individual daily demand is met. For the discussion of the informal economy and the local street vending business the markets of Sundarpur and Chanduaa are of great interest as they represent the points where the day-to-day business of many petty traders starts. Figure 4.3 shows the localisation of these two markets within Varanasi. The Pahria Market appeared to be of little importance for the street vending business because of its general focus on the wholesale business. Further discussion will therefore concentrate on the role of the Sundarpur Market and Chanduaa Market in the Varanasi food supply chain. Despite the possibility of retail business at those markets a vast number of the people living in Varanasi have to satisfy their own demand for fresh produce differently for two reasons. Firstly, the population is quite spread out so that not everyone lives within walking distance of the markets. Yet, taking different measures of transportation would lead to higher costs, which are unbearable for many people in Varanasi, especially the urban poor. Secondly, the markets carry on a wholesale business for specific food articles such as potatoes, tomatoes and onions. However, for the daily diet mostly smaller amounts are demanded by the customers. They often lack financial resources and means of transportation for bigger transactions. It therefore becomes apparent that the markets alone do not sufficiently serve the demand for fresh produce by the population. This observation shows that there must be other mechanisms at work when it comes to the local food supply. One such mechanism is the street vending business. Street vendors in Varanasi constitute for an integral part of the day-to-day food trading business, compensating for the excess supply provided by the wholesale markets with regard to the daily food demand of Varanasi citizens.

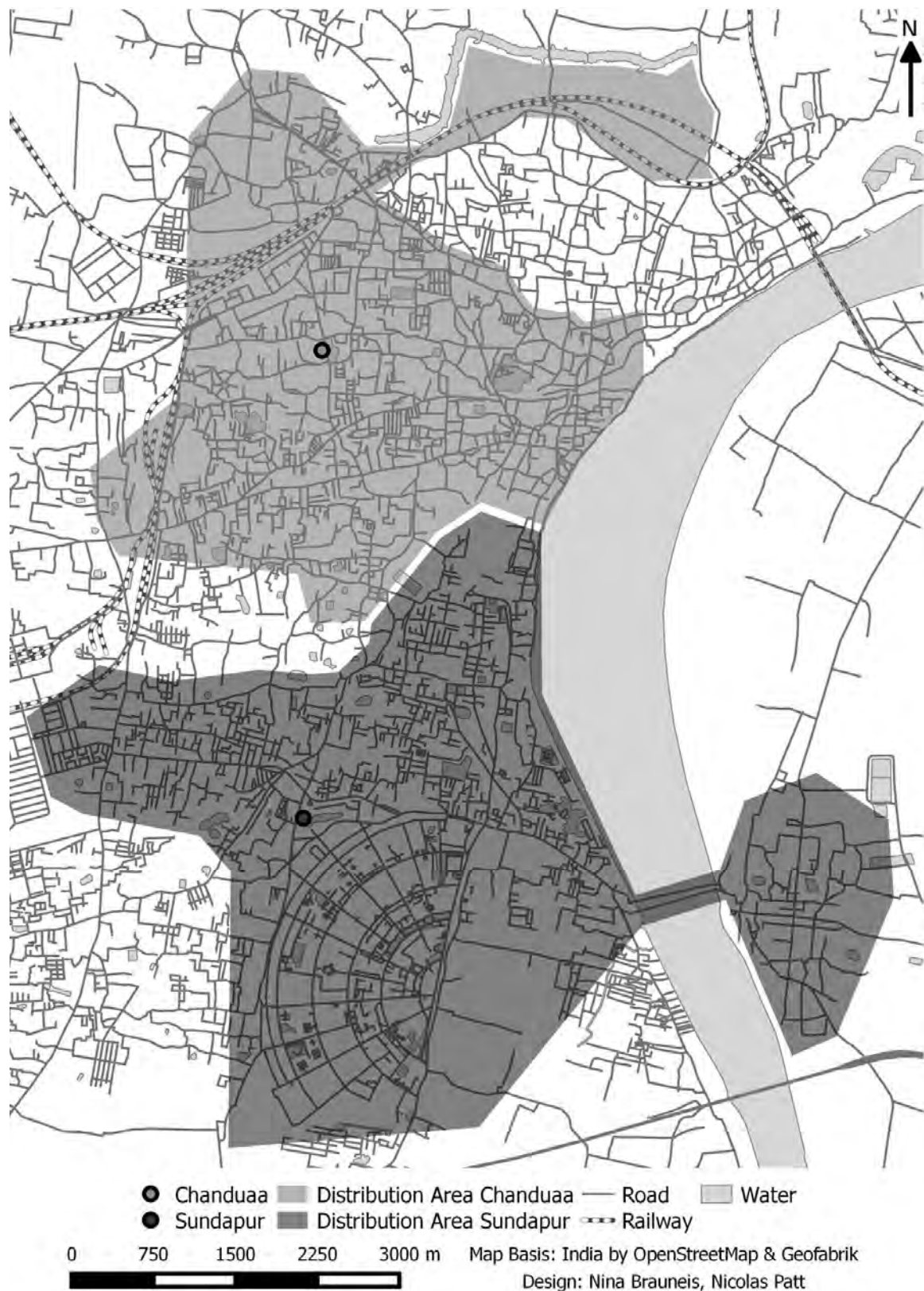


Fig. 4.3: Trading area of the street vendors in contrast to the markets (Source: own design, N = 100)

To illustrate this interpretation, Figure 4.3 additionally shows the dimension of the street vendors' distribution area in correlation to the market where they initially bought their trading goods. It seems that comestible goods are distributed within extensive areas in the vicinity of the markets. In that sense, they function as intermediaries between markets

and private customers while breaking down the wholesale offers of the markets to meet local demand for smaller quantities. Also, they surmount the problem of increased transportation costs on the individual level by implicitly increasing the reach of the markets themselves. Overall, it can be concluded that street vendors represent an important part of the Varanasi food supply chain for a large segment of the resident population.

3.2 Characteristics of Varanasi Street Vendors - A Local Survey

In order to illustrate the importance of street vending businesses as livelihood strategies for a large number of Varanasi citizens the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with 60 local street vendors provide important insights. The examination of socio-demographic and economic characteristics as well as general market entrance requirements shows the functioning of the informal economy in practice.

3.2.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Street Vendors

In general, the street vending business demands good levels of physical fitness. The vendors purchase up to 200 kg of fresh produce at the markets and move them around in their equally heavy carts, often for time periods of eight hours or more. Accordingly, enquiries have revealed that the business is dominated by young and middle-aged men. Female street vendors mostly work in the evening, selling the remaining products that their husbands, brothers or sons did not manage to sell during the day. Still, they represent a minority among the street vendors. Additionally, the interviews showed that about three quarters of all vendors are younger than 45 years with 59% being aged between 25 and 44 years (Fig. 4.4). Nevertheless, people of all age groups can be found among the petty traders showing its relevance throughout the whole life cycle of respective Varanasi citizens. Even teenagers own their private cart, younger children support their parents working stationary at the end of the day and sometimes the elderly of the family still have to contribute to the family income by working as street vendors.

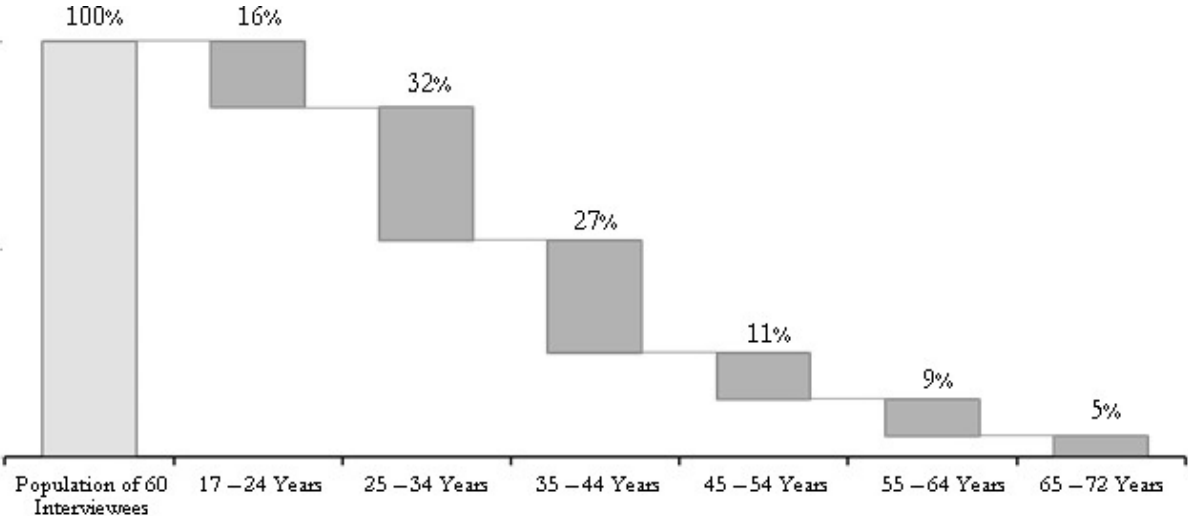


Fig. 4.4: Shares of age groups of Varanasi street vendors in years (Source: own design, N = 60)
 Note: The age groups are categorized in ten-year intervals. For the youngest and oldest group the lowest and highest reported ages respectively, mark the interval limit.

Concerning educational attainments it has become clear from the responses that the street vending business does not require any formal education. Although 65% could verify some kind of school education, 35% claimed to be illiterate. The average years of schooling in the study sample amounts to 8.5 years which considering a nationwide average of 4.4 years in 2013¹³ indicates that the answers to this particular question should be treated with care. Thirdly, interviews show that mobile petty trade appears to be quite promising for migrant workers in Varanasi; 42% of interlocutors migrated for economic purposes to Varanasi and started working in the street vending business. With regard to the remaining 58% it was found that many petty traders inherited the business of their parents implying rather low intergenerational social mobility in the street vending business. Additional results reveal that the informal economy is neither dominated by any religious group nor specific caste, further broadening the spectrum of possible participants. However, the more profitable wholesale activities in the food sector of Varanasi are dominated by the social group referring to themselves as *sunkar*.

Overall, it can be stated that the socio-demographic characteristics of Varanasi street vendors are very diverse. People with many different backgrounds and people of all age groups work in this segment of the urban informal economy. Hence, it appears to be a livelihood strategy for a large share of the Varanasi population.

3.2.2 Economic Characteristics of Street Vendors

Similarly to the socio-demographic diversity of mobile petty traders in Varanasi, survey findings show a variety of applied business models. The street vending business is highly competitive and every participant has to find his/her specific niche market and sales strategy in order to sustain a successful business. Individual sales strategies depend on the choice of products. Whereas some street vendors offer a wide range of fresh fruits and vegetables in order to reach more customers, others narrow their product selection in order to gain purchasing price advantages. Mobility patterns play an important role in the determination of the sales strategy too. Table 4.1 displays a classification of observed mobility patterns of street vendors in Varanasi. It becomes apparent that the petty traders differ widely in terms of their degree of mobility that is determined by individual socio-demographic characteristics. For instance, new market entrants and the physically fit tend to exhibit more mobility throughout their day-to-day practices, walking along more or less fixed routes for the whole day trying to reach as many different customers as possible. More established vendors who managed to acquire some kind of customer base during their business career focus on supplying their goods to their individual customer network. Most of the mobile or semi-mobile traders become stationary in the afternoon and early evening sometimes receiving support by family members. Elderly and physically challenged petty traders show much less mobility as they try to sell their products at one particular spot or by changing their position from time to time during the day.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme (2013): Human Development Reports: Mean years of schooling (of adults) (years). <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/mean-years-schooling-adults-years#footnote> (Date 21.06.2015).

Tab. 4.1: Classification of street vendors' mobility patterns (Source: own design)

Type	Characteristic	Mainly done by
Mobile	The street vendors keep moving the whole day and make short stops at hot spots such as temples and street junctions	Beginners, youngsters, physically fit
Semi-mobile	The street vendors focus on building and maintaining individual customer networks. They mostly sell their product at the doorstep to familiar customers	Established vendors of all age groups
Semi-permanent	The street vendors serve certain localities. They only commute between few places. The knowledge of profitable hot spots is necessary	Elderly, physically challenged
Permanent	The street vendors are visiting one selling point and remain there during the day	Woman, elderly, physically impaired

In addition to diverse business models, Varanasi street vendors also differ in their financial endowments during their day-to-day practices. The investment pattern displayed in Figure 4.5 shows a variety of daily investments in fresh produce by the traders, ranging from below 1,000 Rupees up to over 3,000 Rupees per day. Yet, a significant share of the vendors in the study sample invests between 1,500 Rupees and 3,000 Rupees for their daily trading goods. Accordingly, profits range between 100 Rupees and somewhat over 400 Rupees per day as is evident from the profit diagram (top right). An analysis of collected micro data reveals that irrespective of the chosen sales strategy almost all street vendors yield a return of roughly 10%. However, the numbers should be taken with some caution as information about profits and income is difficult to come by anywhere. Limiting problems of personal interviews such as response heaping are widely known (Holbrook et al. 2014, 1) and may affect the validity of interpretations. Nonetheless, it can be stated that the applied business strategies do not exert crucial influence on the profitability of the street vendors' day-to-day practices. Additionally, the choice of sales strategy does not seem to impact the work load of mobile petty traders in Varanasi to a large extent (Fig. 4.5, bottom left). A majority of 75% works between eight and twelve hours per day. Lastly, it should be noted that the street vending business is not only a livelihood strategy for the petty traders themselves, but is of great importance for close relatives and household members as well. The dependency pattern in Figure 4.5 (bottom right) shows that all participants in the survey have relatives depending on the street vending business. An analysis of risks and threats imposed by the business therefore involves a larger population than the study sample might initially imply.

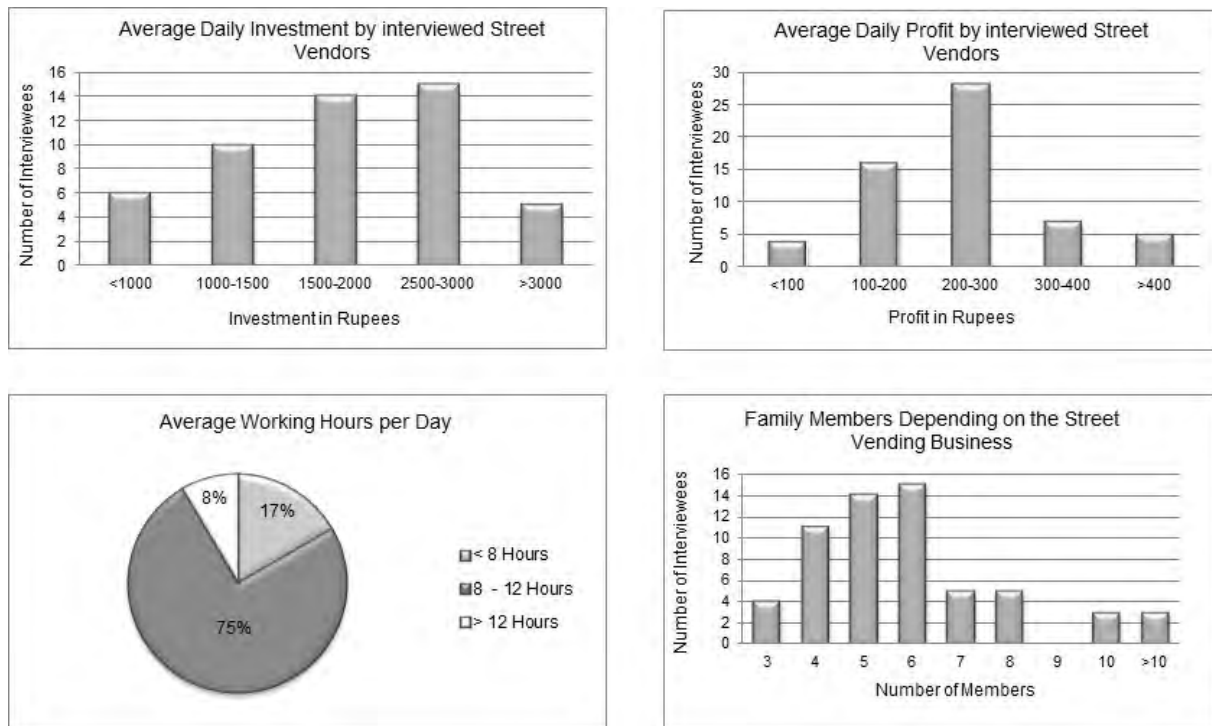


Fig. 4.5: Economic Characteristics of Street Vendors (Source: own design, N = 60)

3.2.3 Entrance Barriers of the Street Vending Market

The market entrance barriers are supposed to reveal important hindrances for street vending contributions to the livelihoods of many Varanasi citizens. Easy market entrance increases its attractiveness for possible participants, thereby also increasing competitiveness and the vulnerability of market actors. Based on the work of on Etzoldt and Bohle (2009, 16) who analysed the street food business in Dhaka, Bangladesh¹⁴, six findings that have distinct implications for the entrance barriers to the street vending market in Varanasi can be found:

1. The physical aspect of the street vendors' work requires physical capability.
2. The business does require limited financial capital. Market entrees can buy a basic cart for about 4.000 Rupees which opens up the market to locals and migrant workers alike.
3. Accordingly the vending equipment is in most cases owned by the traders themselves and they do not have to cope with on-going costs such as rents and interest payments.
4. Street vendors are self-employed and often receive help by their close relatives who also depend on the income generated by the business.
5. The business does not require any formal education. Naturally, basic arithmetic skills are beneficial, but most skills can be learned on the job.
6. The demand for fresh products requests a rapid turnover of the trading goods. This implies low short term investments, so that the costs are kept at a glance.

¹⁴ Etzoldt and Bohle (2009: 16) state that „an analysis of the street food system can provide important insights into the dynamic relation of formal and informal interaction in Dhaka and beyond.” Their methodological approach directly involves the analysis of market entrance barriers which is why their work provides a useful foundation for our discussion.

It becomes apparent that the market has low entrance barriers. Put differently, it can be stated that the street vending market does not require any huge endowment with specific kinds of capital. New market entrees need cash to buy a cart and the first batch of trading goods. In terms of human capital, new market entrees need to be physically fit in order to move around the heavy loads. They do neither have the in-depth knowledge of profitable hotspots nor do they have a customer base which they can rely on, basically forcing them to apply a very mobile mobility pattern as suggested in Table 4.1. Endowments with physical and social capital are no precondition to enter the market, although they benefit the profitability of the business itself. Customer networks and better trading equipment open up new sales strategies increasing the flexibility of the respective street vendors. Overall, the street vending market is anything but a closed shop. Starting a new business is quite easy which opens up the mobile petty trade as a livelihood strategy for a large segment of the population.

3.3 Vulnerability within the Street Vending Business

The analysis of the street vending business in Varanasi is an impressive proof of the immense absorptive capacity of the informal economy. Previously it was shown how informality enables a wide range of people to make a living in an economy which is essential to the urban economy and therefore guarantees a constant flow of customers. Despite these advantages it has become apparent that working in this business is not creating a secure environment for those who rely on it and bears a lot of risks and threats. Street vendors in Varanasi suffer from a highly vulnerable situation which will be elaborated in line with a discussion about vulnerability as influenced by internal and external factors (Fig. 4.6).

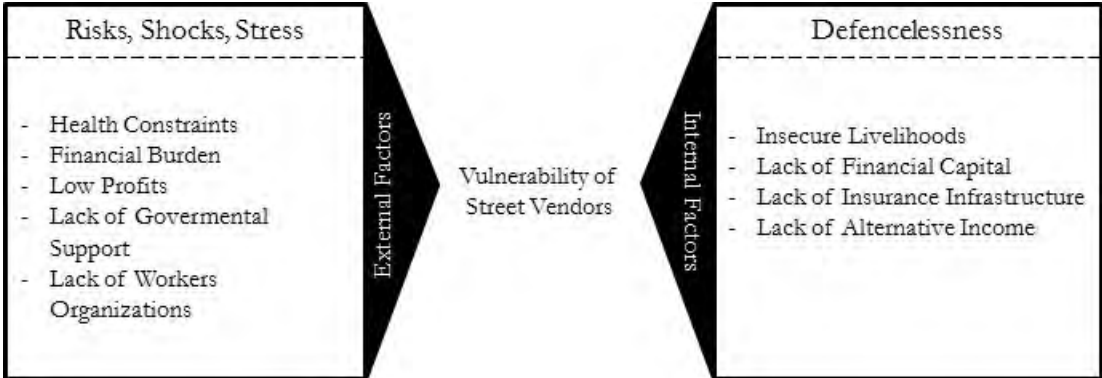


Fig. 4.6: Vulnerability of street vendors (Source: own design)

Potential external shocks like illnesses, necessary and unexpected financial burdens or low daily profits can always occur and catapults the vendor and his family into a challenging situation. The analysis of the economic profile showed that the vendors are able to make a meagre living, but no real savings as their daily profit varies between 100 and 400 rupees on which up to ten, sometimes even more, household members depend. The age structure of workers active in the business showed that the households depend on every possible income. The financial vulnerability is immense. The vendors usually lack any kind of security which would protect them in times of financial demands. The total lack of any supportive measures of the government is a clear disadvantage of the work in the informal economy and leaves the vendor completely dependent on his individual support network.

3.3.1 Depending on Street Vending - The Case of Loku Bind and his Family

The case study of a street vending household exemplifies many of the survey findings. Loku Bind is the head of the household who grew up in Jaunpur, a rural district 60 km north from Varanasi. Today he lives in the Durgakund District in central Varanasi. His household share a small house with three of his cousins and their respective families. One of his cousins works as a street vendor too, while the others work as an ice cream sellers and a tailor. All in all sixteen people (the four cousins, three of their wives, the mother of one of the cousins, and their eight children) are living in the tiny house which is split into four flats and made of stone. The flats are not all the same, but all are split into two parts. One room is mainly used to store things like the bicycle or unsold vegetables. The other room is some kind of a living room where the family sleeps and cooks. Loku, his wife and their four children share a room which is barely ten square meters in size and a wooden bed which is not even two meters wide. The house is the property of the family and they do not have to pay rent. Loku's father had worked as a street vendor and Loku helped him when he was a child. When he got married he started his own business at the age of twenty. Due to his low level of education he saw no real choice but following his father's business as it was the only way of earning money he knew. His human, social and financial capital as well as the easy access to the business let him to choose this profession. He is working as a street vendor for more than fifteen years now and does not see any alternative due to his lack of professionalism. He works six days a week and makes an average profit of 300 - 400 Rupees per day on which the six family members solely depend. The share of income which does not have to be reinvested is spent on food and the education of the children. At the end of the day Loku is not able to make any savings from his earnings, a fact which leads to his extreme financial vulnerability as one of the main problems faced by most of the street vendors. Some years ago one of his sons broke his foot. The necessary medical treatment of 72.000 Rupees had to be paid by the family. This amount of money is equal to the profit of 200 days of work. This situation was solved with the help of family members and friends who lend money without asking for high rates of interest. The family's social capital gave way to procure financial capital and to overcome this emergency situation. This case shows the high importance of social capital which can reduce the vulnerability of informal work. Without this support the family would have been forced to take a credit from a moneylender and pay a high rate of interest.

The missing support from governmental institutions is a striking disadvantage of the informal economy. There have been calls for effective policies improving the situation of millions of workers who depend on informal incomes and are left in their miserable situation. These aspects are addressed through a discussion on policy-making in India with regard to street vending.

3.4 Policy

The necessity of improving the situation of street vendors has been highlighted by activists, NGOs and scientists for decades. The Government of India reacted by appointing a National Task Force on Street Vendors. This Task Force prepared the "Draft National Policy on Street Vendors" which was published by the Ministry of Urban Development and

Poverty Alleviation in 2003 (Bhowmik 2003, 1543ff.). This national policy was regarded as a landmark for the urban informal economy as it gave hope for legal recognition and improving working conditions for those who are making their living in this business. It demands that the role which street vendors play in economy and society must find recognition. Hawking should be properly regulated and street vendors should be part of urban planning. The policy criticises the license system which should legalise street vending but is not improving the vendors' situation in reality. Instead, the policy recommends a simple registration of street vendors. It also supports the idea of hawking and no-hawking zones but strengthens the vendors' rights to participate in the decision-making. Another objective is to promote workers organisations which would be the basis of credit, social security and insurance programmes (Bhowmik 2003, 1543-1546).

The research policy network WIEGO developed a working policy framework which should increase the visibility and voice of the informal workforce worldwide (Chen 2005, 8). This framework strengthens the necessity of insurance coverage as protection against illnesses, disability or old age. It also highlights the necessity of workers' organisation and their representation in policy-making and rule-setting. Policy-making must be participatory and inclusive, involving informal workers and their organisations and as many different stakeholders as possible. There will not be any successful policy without including all relevant stakeholders (Chen 2005, 8-9).

The fieldwork among street vendors showed that none of these progressive ideas were implemented in Varanasi. More than a decade after the publication of the national policy, street vendors are still suffering from harassment by the authorities. Nearly every single vendor reported about negative experiences with policemen acting disrespectful and even taking from the vendor's products without paying. There is no organisation which would represent the interests of these workers. Services from the government which would support street vendors are totally missing and their activities are not regulated or legalised. The license system which was already criticised in the policy of 2003 is still in practice and still not working properly.

4 Mobile vending: insecure livelihoods without public support

The study proved that the street vending business represents a livelihood strategy for a large share of the population with different socio-economic backgrounds and works as an entry point for those who do not find formal employment. Street vending is easily accessible and does not require insurmountable preconditions. However, it also became clear that the street vending business is very insecure and exposed to high vulnerability conditions. The financial vulnerability seems to be the most urgent problem for most street vendors as the income usually does not exceed the costs of daily survival. It was also proved that the street vendors play a primary role within the city's society and economy as they offer a service which is in every day demand by the broad population all over the city. Therefore street vending plays an important role for urban food security.

Unfortunately mobile trade does not find any recognition by the authorities. The vendors are still totally neglected or even harassed, while their business is continuously illegalised.

Governmental attempts to improve the working and living conditions of street vendors in India have not resulted in sustainably satisfying solutions. The license system which in reality is not working at all and hence does not contribute to a legalisation process is still the latest governmental attempt to solve the situation. Any attempts to find solutions by including the vendors in some kind of participatory process such as discussions about hawking- and no-hawking-zones are completely missing in Varanasi.

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Fig. F: Sankat Mochan Road, the main street leading to Sankat Mochan Temple (Bayer 2015)

Temple Economies: The *Sankat Mochan* Temple as a business enterprise

Keywords: Religious economy, Qualitative research, Hinduism, Worship, Temple

1 Introduction: The *Sankat Mochan* Temple as object of research

India is a country with a variety of religions, but with a share of 80.5% Hindus constitute the most numerous group among all religious communities in India (Government of India 2001). Being a religious Hindu implies the performance of different rituals of worship that constitute integral parts of a devotee's daily life because "to the traditional Hindu the religious and the secular life are never truly distinguished" (Michell 1988, 49). These rituals do not just take place in private but also in public. The most obvious places to worship are temples, which are "designed to bring about contact between man and the gods" (Michell 1988, 61). The present research paper takes a closer look at one particularly important temple: the *Sankat Mochan Temple* in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India (Fig. 5.1).

In Varanasi, approximately 23,000 temples can be found (Bansal 2008, 48). The *Sankat Mochan Temple* however is a comparatively famous entity, attracting visitors from all over the country, especially around the time during which festivals take place at the temple. The main god at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is *Hanuman*, also referred to as the "monkey god". He symbolizes devotion, intellect, immortality, power and protection. The latter arises from *Hanuman's* prominent part in the epos *Ramayana*, in which he is portrayed as the "protector of Rama" and "son of the wind" (Lutgendorf 1994, 211). Thus, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* includes not just an idol of *Hanuman* to worship, but also one of *Rama*. It is a popular belief that the temple's establishment can be dated back 500 years: one day, while *Tulsidas*, one of the most famous Hindu poets, sat at the Ganga to recite his epos of *Rama*, *Hanuman* sat down beside him disguised as a leper and listened to him. Thereafter, he led him out of the city into a wooded area, where *Hanuman* revealed his true form, blessed *Tulsidas* and gave him instructions on how he could attain a long desired vision. To show his gratitude *Tulsidas* had an image of *Hanuman* built at the spot where they met - the very place where the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is located today (Lutgendorf 1991).



Fig. 5.1: The main entrance of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* (Bayer 2015)

However, temples like the *Sankat Mochan Temple* are not just buildings with a mythological background providing a place for devotional worship. On the contrary, these temples are complex institutions, constantly in need of keeping the balance between organisational management on a profane level as well as protecting and maintaining its holiness and attractiveness for pilgrims and worshippers.

2 Religious Economy as conceptual framework

Religious Economy as an analytical concept has been affiliated with the field of Rational Choice Theory and contributed to a better conceptualisation of the profane aspects of religion (Bankston 2002, 311). Against this background, religious environments - such as temples - are treated as specific economies. In this light, religions, religious groups and religious organisations become business enterprises operating according to market laws. Apart from their role as sanctuaries they can also be regarded as suppliers of goods and services, competing with each other for customers, who make (rational) choices among available products (Bankston 2002, 311). These choices are made based on anticipated rewards the customers want to achieve and on the costs they are attempting to avoid (Stark and Finke 2000, 85 ff., Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 115). It becomes thus apparent that religion is subject to the forces of demand and supply just like material goods are. This includes the notion that belief is not free from an economic interpretation because individuals seek suppliers to satisfy their desire for belief (Bankston 2002, 322). Nevertheless, the employment of Rational Choice Theory should not lead us to overlook that decisions made in the contexts of religion are not mere results of rational thinking aimed at benefit maximisation because they always include the factors of belief and commitment (Bruce 1993, 203 ff., Bankston 2002, 313). Following this thought, "*human reasoning often is somewhat unsystematic and 'intuitive'*" (Stark 1999, 265).

Contrary to secularisation theory, which claims that secularisation and individuation are consequences of the functional differentiation in modern societies (Dobbelaere 1987, 131 f.), the concept of religious economy and its viewpoint of religions as business enterprises is useful for understanding why religion is still surviving in contemporary pluralistic societies and why the existence of more temples in a certain region leads to even more worship (Bankston 2002, 311, Lang et al. 2005, 150).

Based on the conceptual foundation of religious economy, this study aims to understand how the *Sankat Mochan Temple* functions as a business enterprise in terms of its positioning within the market forces of demand and supply. Against this background, three dimensions will be addressed:

- (1) The supply side: Which features and characteristics constitute the temple's organisational basis, creating the 'final product', which is placed on the market by the temple?
- (2) The demand side: Based on what motives and beliefs do devotees, i.e. customers, choose the *Sankat Mochan Temple* as their preferred place to worship?
- (3) The supply-demand interrelation: How do the visitors contribute to the temple's ability to maintain its offered product on the market?

3 Methodological approach

The research was conducted by using different methods from the field of empirical Human Geography: qualitative interviews, participant observation, counting and mapping. The most frequently utilised method was the problem-centred guideline-based interview, which was conducted with the head of *Sankat Mochan* temple, the employees and the visitors of the temple as well as with the shop owners located in the vicinity of the temple. The outcomes of the open participant observations supplemented the information gained through the interviews and contributed to developing a deeper understanding of the subject. Because the observations were performed without standardisation it was possible to change perspectives during the fieldwork without being constrained by a prior selection of specific aspects (Reuber and Pfaffenbach 2005, 123 ff.)

Mapping and counting are special forms of observation. In this case, the temple visitors were counted at different times of the day and days of the week. This data was used as a basis for an extrapolation in order to gain insight in the popularity of the temple and for an estimation of monetary donations. Finally, the buildings inside of the temple area as well as the surrounding area were mapped to give an overview of the functional segmentation of the temple premises. Following an interpretative paradigm, it needs to be pointed out that the worldview of the observed and interviewed people cannot be fully accessed by these methods. The interviewees' social reality is constituted by subjective interpretation. In turn, qualitative research is always a subjective interpretation of these individual interpretations and therefore absolute neutrality and objectivity cannot be claims of this research (Lamnek 2010, 32; Reuber and Pfaffenbach 2005, 107 ff.). Keeping this in mind, this study's objective is to better understand and put into context the temple's and the devotee's realities.

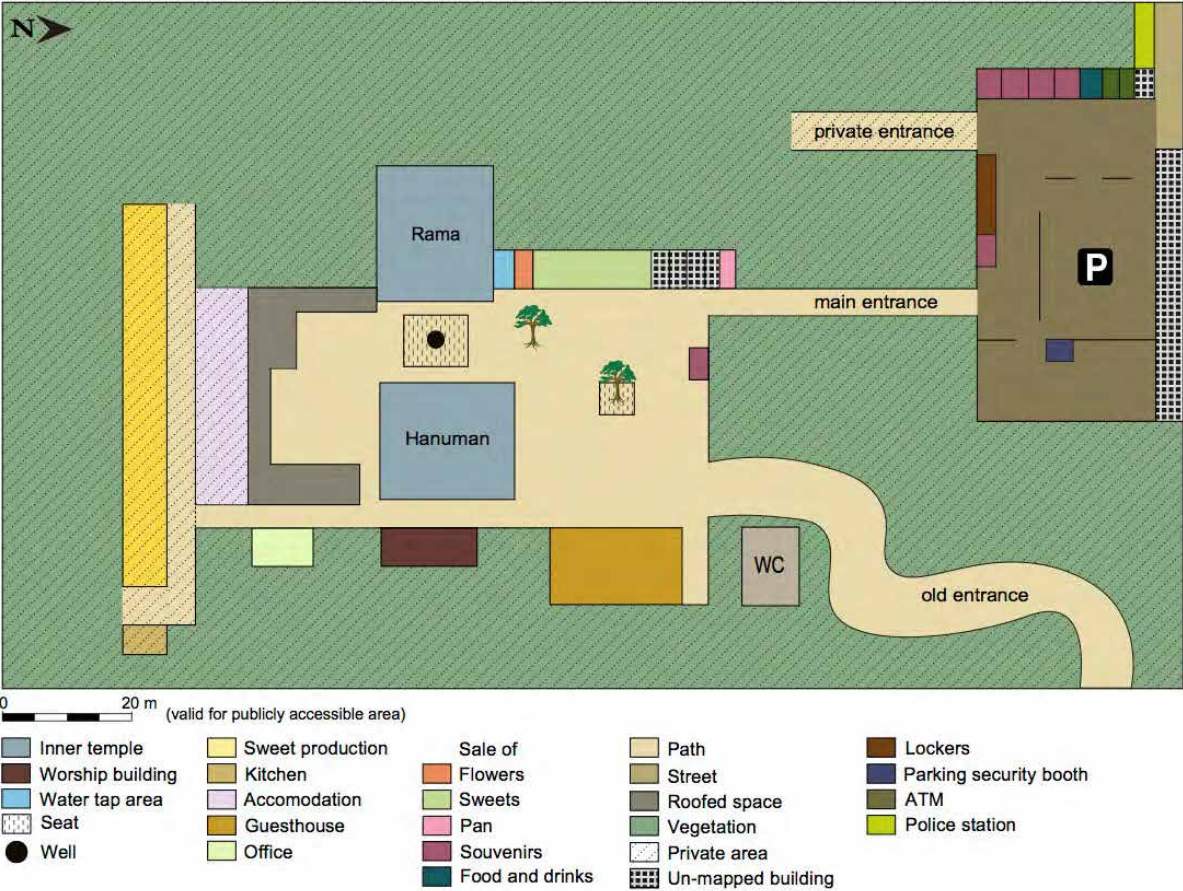
4 Results: Taking a secular look at the *Sankat Mochan* Temple

4.1 The supply side: The temple's organisational basis

The temple's offered product consists of various features like its "*location, size, design, and the variety of services and goods that is available on-site*" (Lang et al. 2005, 152). A closer look is taken at the characteristics which distinguish the offered product of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* from that of other temples.

The *Sankat Mochan Temple* comprises an area with different functional buildings (Fig. 5.2). The two most significant buildings are the inner temples facing each other: the *Hanuman* and the *Rama* temple, which share three main characteristics concerning their interior design. First, there is the god's idol - *Hanuman* or *Rama* - on the back wall of the temple. Second, there is the donation area in the front space of the inner temples, which comprises of an elongated box for monetary donations and a desk for other types of donations. There are usually one or two priests sitting next to this desk, receiving the donations and giving blessings. Third, there is an idol of the god's feet on top of the donation box, which is also used for receiving blessings. In addition to the inner temples and the other constructional elements, the temple property contains a big green area of around eight acres, sometimes referred to as 'the lungs of Varanasi' that gives home to

several monkeys. This is why the temple serves also as a recreational place, being “a refuge for the urban population” (Lutgendorf 1991).



Design: Vanessa Holm & Melissa Bayer

Figure 5.2: The Sankat Mochan Temple (Source: own design)

The temple is open to the public 20.5 hours per day, 7 days a week. *Aarti* are worship rituals performed by the temple priests whose timings structure the temple’s daily routine, together with two periods during which the inner temples are closed so that the god’s idols cannot be seen (Tab. 5.1).

Tab. 5.1: Opening hours of the Sankat Mochan Temple and daily structures; all times may slightly vary from day to day (Source: own design)

3:30	Opening of the <i>Sankat Mochan Temple</i>
4:30	<i>Mangla</i> (Morning) <i>Aarti</i>
11:00 - 11:15	Inner temples close for <i>Bhog</i> (Feeding of <i>Hanuman</i>)
12:00 - 15:00	Inner temples close (Resting of <i>Hanuman</i>)
15:00	<i>Aarti</i>
20:30	<i>Aarti</i>
23:00 (on Tues. and Sat.)	<i>Shayan</i> (Sleeping) <i>Aarti</i>
0.00	Closing of the <i>Sankat Mochan Temple</i>

In order to keep the temple businesses running it engages a pool of employees and non-employees, who are organised in a complex hierarchy. On the top, there is the main head of the temple (*Mahant*). This position was long occupied by Veer Bhadra Mishra who was

also a professor of hydraulic engineering and founded the *Sankat Mochan Foundation*. Established in 1982 as a registered non-governmental organisation, the foundation's main purpose is to raise public awareness on the pollution of the Ganga and to engage in the political process by providing scientific studies and proposing solutions (Ahmed 1994, 11 ff.). After Veer Bhadra Mishra's death in March 2013 his son Vishwambhar Nath Mishra became the head of the foundation as well as the *Mahant* of the temple, being the spiritual leader and holding the main power of decision with respect to all temple issues. He is also a professor of civil engineering at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). In addition, there are about 172 people who make a living by working at the temple (Tab. 5.2). The exact quantity is difficult to grasp because it consists of a core of permanent employees and a bigger number of additional people working part-time at the temple. The size of part-time employees varies according to the time of the year (e.g. high seasons due to festivals) and is tied to the temple by loose working agreements, making the labour situation difficult to measure in terms of Eurocentric perspectives on employment.

Table 5.2: Quantity of people working at the temple and type of labour (Source: own design)

Quantity of people	Type of labour
People employed and paid by the temple (or through a contractor company)	
~ 1	Supervisor of the employees and other temple issues
~ 15	Inner temple priests, performing the most important worship rituals and living at the temple
~ 6	Temple premises priests, performing smaller worship rituals and living outside of the temple
~ 8	Security employees inside of the temple
~ 15	Security employees at the two visitors' entrances
~ 55	Personnel of the sweet shop inside of the temple (sales and production)
~ 7	Sales personnel of the flower shop inside of the temple
~ 4	Sales personnel of the pan shop inside of the temple
~ 2	Sales personnel of the souvenir shop inside of the temple
~ 2	Cleaning staff for the restrooms
~ 2	Sweepers
~ 3	Kitchen personnel for the daily meals received by some employees
~ 23	Employees at the locker space in front of the temple
People using the temple as a working place and receiving payment from their own clients	
~ 15	<i>Jajman</i> (= freelance priests operating on a private basis, i.e. doing worship rituals for their clients)
People using the temple as a working place and receiving donations from the visitors, while having to give some of it to the cleaning staff	
~ 9	Shoe-guards who watch the visitors' shoes at the entrance area of the temple
People volunteering at the temple, being allowed to keep donations from the visitors	
~ 4	Men guarding the smaller one of the two parking areas in front of the temple
~ 1	Distributor of water at the water tap-area inside of the temple

The spiritual employees are the priests, who also eat and sleep inside the temple and are the only ones allowed to give blessings and perform certain rituals. In his book on Hindu temples, Michell points out that the priesthood and the performed rituals are needed “to maintain the continuous presence of the god” (Michell 1988, 62), emphasizing the priests’ high position and relevance.

The security personnel are the only group of employees that comprises not only men but also women. One can differentiate between the personnel working inside the temple area and the personnel working at one of the two visitors’ entrances. Their salaries vary between 3,500 and 5,000 Indian rupee (INR) per month that is received through a security company that in turn is paid by the temple. The high presence of security at the temple is a preventive measure that was put to use after a terrorist attack: one of three parallel bombings in Varanasi in March 2006 occurred at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* during a wedding ritual. Consequently, safety measures were intensified, marriages were prohibited at the temple, and bringing objects like cameras, mobile phones or any kind of weapons was forbidden.

Another major group of employees are the vendors working at the different temple shops. The most profitable is the sweet shop that also accounts for the biggest amount of employees. The sweets are not just sold but also produced at the temple premises and have a citywide reputation for their superior quality. Salaries vary from 4,000 up to 12,000 INR per month, depending on the employee’s position. The hierarchy among the employees is not just represented by different salaries but also through a system that regulates who receives daily meals provided by the temple and who lives at the temple premises.

As depicted in Table 5.2 not all people working at the temple can be seen as temple employees. For example, there are many freelance priests, so-called *Jajman*, who use the temple as their workplace and operate on a private basis. Clients solicit *Puja* (worship) from these *Jajman*, often regarding difficulties with their job, family, relationships or marriage prospects. Against this background, a link to the *Jajmani* system might be drawn. This system establishes exclusive right to services whereby the clientele of an individual who offers these services is called his *Jajmani*. The term stems from the Sanskrit expression *yajman*, meaning ‘the one who employs a Brahmin priest to offer a sacrifice’ (Mayer 1993, 359). This translation directly corresponds to the *Puja* offered by the *Jajman* priests at the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. Usually, a *Jajman* inherits his occupation as well as his clientele by his father (Mayer 1993, 359 ff.). At the *Sankat Mochan Temple* the contact between a *Jajman* and his customers is often long-established through personal networks and their attendant exclusive rights to service. They however also exist beyond these established relations on a more market oriented level when the contact is made through an astrologer who operates his business close to the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and often sends his clients to the temple for the performance of certain rituals. As such, a *Jajman* is either paid by the astrologer or directly by his clients. A special feature of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is that there is no compulsory payment to use the temple premises for this kind of freelance work, contrary to the rules at other temples.

Similarly, the temple does not employ the shoe keepers but tolerates them as long as they pay the cleaning personnel a certain amount of money. In return, they are allowed to keep monetary donations they receive from the visitors.

Aside from the temple's architectural characteristics and the activities performed by the people working at the temple there are some less regular but still important features that contribute to the constitution of the temple's offered product. First, there is the characteristic of "*tributary economy*" (Yang 2005, 146), referring to religious festivals organised by the temple in honour of the gods. In case of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* those include for example the *Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh*, which is a music and dance festival celebrated each year in April and attracting performers and visitors from all over the country. This shows that the temple functions not just as a religious but also as an intellectual and artistic centre of Hindu communities (Michell 1988, 50).

Second, there are the welfare activities of the temple often addressed to the poor (Michell 1988, 60). An example at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is a regular *Bhandara* during which free food is provided for everyone visiting the temple. Yang summarises those charity acts in his study on Daoist priests in Shanghai under the term "*gift economy*" (Yang 2005, 146).

The above mentioned aspects are directly visible for the visitors. In addition, part of the temple's offered product consists of a less tangible feature. This is the characteristic of non-importunity, meaning that the temple does not explicitly ask for monetary donations from its visitors, contrary to other temples.

Apart from the physical presence of the gods' idols, another important characteristic of the temple is the commonly believed spiritual presence of *Hanuman*. Hence, the temple does not just provide a place for devotional worship in general but a place that offers the specific possibility to contact *Hanuman*. Altogether, these elements create a unique atmosphere together constituting the product offered by the *Sankat Mochan Temple*.

4.2 The demand side: visitors and devotions

The model of religious economy implies that there is a competition between different suppliers. Having established the nature of the offered product of the *Sankat Mochan Temple*, a closer look at the demand side is needed to understand why devotees choose precisely this temple among other suppliers. Undoubtedly, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* has a strong market position as becomes evident when looking at the high numbers of daily visitors (Tab. 5.3). The amount of visitors varies according to the daily closing times of the two inner temples and to the common belief that Tuesdays and Saturdays are the best days to worship *Hanuman*. But what brings the devotees in such remarkable numbers to the *Sankat Mochan Temple*? The visitors' main motive is *Darshan* as one of the most important aspects of Hindu worship enabling the visual perception of the sacred. It is believed that the contact between devotee and deity is established through the eyes, and seeing is perceived as touching while the touch is the ultimate connection between devotee and deity (Eck 1998, 3 ff.). One of the best places to constitute this contact is a temple because it is assumed that the temple "*is setting out to dissolve the boundaries between man and the divine*" (Michell 1988, 61). This becomes apparent while looking at

Tab. 5.3: Number of temple visitors coming through the main entrance within one hour at different times of the day and days of the week (Source: own design)

Day of the week	Time of the day	Total visitors
Friday, 20 th Feb. 2015	10:40 - 11:40	480
Saturday, 21 st Feb. 2015	12:00 - 13:00	643
Monday, 23 rd Feb. 2015	12:20 - 13:20	277
Tuesday, 24 th Feb. 2015	09:40 - 10:40	1,591

important aspects of Hindu worship enabling the visual perception of the sacred. It is believed that the contact between devotee and deity is established through the eyes, and seeing is perceived as touching while the touch is the ultimate connection between devotee and deity (Eck 1998, 3 ff.). One of the best places to constitute this contact is a temple because it is assumed that the temple "*is setting out to dissolve the boundaries between man and the divine*" (Michell 1988, 61). This becomes apparent while looking at

the different steps of a typical temple visit that form one whole devotional process. Among others, those steps include leaving the shoes at the entrance area, getting blessed by touching the symbolic feet of the god, and the circumambulation of the inner temple while touching the exterior walls with one's fingers or forehead to be closer to the god. Here it becomes evident that even though religious experiences are very personal, a common emotional experience can be distinguished, and this shared experience is likely to be evoked by architectural and decorative temple items (Finlayson 2012, 1775).

Even though the interviewed visitors associate *Darshan* with more individual aspects like mental peace, strength, relaxing, meditating and spirituality, *Darshan* remains a general motive for worship and does not yet explain why the devotees choose the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and not any other temple. One answer to this question lies in the temple's name: *Sankat Mochan* means "removal of all sufferings" (Ahmed 1994, 11) or "liberator from distress" (Lutgendorf 2002, 72). This connotation is reflected in the different problems named by the interviewed visitors for which they want to receive blessings while being at the temple. Those include marriage, family troubles, job problems, upcoming exams or sickness.

Moreover, all devotees agree that coming to the *Sankat Mochan Temple* does not just mean to get into contact with any god, but specifically to be close to *Hanuman*. The popularity of *Hanuman* is also represented by the *Hanumanalisa* - forty verses addressed to *Hanuman* written by *Tulsidas* - which is a commonly known religious text in Northern India (Lutgendorf 1991). According to the visitors, *Hanuman* gives strength, intelligence and knowledge and does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. The latter aspect is connected to the temple's feature of not intrusively asking money from its visitors and therefore constitutes a major motive of the devotees.

Nonetheless, nearly no one is actually visiting the temple without giving an offering. The most popular donations are flowers and sweets, either bought at one of the shops outside of the temple or at the temple-owned shops inside. Less obvious, but not necessarily less frequent, are monetary donations. However, the interviews show that the intention of donating is to give something to the god, not to the temple. This is not just an intention but also a strong belief, which becomes especially evident in the devotees' perplexity when asked what they think the temple does with their donations. Hence, donating at the temple can be interpreted as an exchange between devotee and god, while the donation serves as an incentive for the god to help the devotee to overcome his or her problems. Lutgendorf adds that *Hanuman* is an "easily propitiated god" and that he "gets things done" (Lutgendorf 1994, 243). This characteristic of *Hanuman* is directly linked to the devotees' belief that *Hanuman* has the power to release them from their problems. Thus, 'liberator of distress' is not just a translation of *Sankat Mochan* but also serves as a title given to *Hanuman*.

4.3 The supply-demand interrelation: Maintaining the market position

The devotees make use of the temple as they choose it for worship, but in turn the temple profits from them. First, by communicating their belief they contribute to the popularity of the temple and thereby attract more visitors. Second, they fund the temple on a monetary basis because the revenue of the worshippers can be assumed to be the major income source of the temple (Lang et al. 2005, 150). This revenue is either created in the form of monetary donations or in the form of profits made by the temple shops. Concerning the latter, the temple decides the final prices of the flowers and sweets: at the sweet shop *Laddu* are sold for 220 INR per kilo, *Peda* and *Khowa* for each 240 INR per kilo, and special types of sweets for around 300 INR per kilo. The employees claim that they produce an average of 500 kilos per day and that usually everything is sold. Assuming an average price per kilo of 230 INR this would make a daily income of 115,000 INR. Moreover, the additional costs of the production are comparatively low because the *Mahant* owns his own cows and buffalos for milk production. All other raw materials, including ghee and sugar, are bought at a market and brought to the temple where they are further processed. Consequently, it can be assumed that the profit made by the sweet shop is very high. Even if it assumed that everybody of the 55 sweet shop employees would gain 8,000 INR per month, all those salaries could be paid by the income generated by the sweet shop within less than four days, excluding the cost of material.

The issue of monetary donations remains rather unclear in terms of their quantity. Yet, when taking the results illustrated in Table 5.3 as a basis an hourly average of 748 temple visitors can be extrapolated. Since the temple is opened 20.5 hours per day, this would amount to 15,334 visitors daily - and this number only refers to the visitors who came through the main gate. While these figures are not representative, they give a coarse impression of how many donations the temple gains on a daily basis when imagining that every visitor would donate only one INR. Because these monetary offerings are usually made anonymously they are not perceived as income and therefore do not need to be taxed, making them an attractive source of revenue for the temple (Gosh 2011). Additionally, there are larger donations made by wealthy private persons, who use the donation receipt to lower their tax payments. In the past, those persons also donated in the form of construction work at the temple, keeping the maintenance costs of the temple at a lower level. These contributions from the outside have a long history. Michell states that private individuals, groups of individuals, royal patrons and guilds of wealthy merchants always played important parts in the support of temple architecture (Michell 1988, 51 ff.).

According to all informants involved in the temple's affairs, the monetary donations are used for institutional and not for personal purposes, namely to pay the salaries of the employees, to cover maintenance costs and expenses connected to festivals organised by the temple, as well as to provide welfare activities. In addition to the devotee-temple interrelation, the temple also has a connection to its neighbourhood, and numerous shops are located at both roads leading to the two entrances of the temple (Fig. 5.3). All of these shops benefit from their location since their customers are almost exclusively visitors of the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. Even though one could argue that these shops pose a threat

to the temple shops in terms of competition, the observations in the field did not prove this to be true. On the contrary, the outside shops seem to be beneficial for the temple because their existence plays a part in the perception of the temple in the eyes of potential visitors. For example, a devotee might be more likely to visit the temple when he or she can combine the temple visit with a meal or tea at one of the shops next door.

Moreover, there is a special economic relation to the shops and the ATMs located at the ground floor of the building next to the parking space (Fig. 5.2) because Vishwambhar Nath Mishra's family owns the building. Hence, all shop owners and both banks need to pay rent. Yet, the rent cannot necessarily be seen as income sources of the temple because it remains unclear if the landlord is Vishwambhar Nath Mishra as a private person or as the *Mahant* of the temple. It is a common feature of Hindu temples to become landlords because many of them invested in land as they became wealthier. This land was usually leased to tenants in the name of god, reminding them "that they only temporarily held sacred land" (Michell 1988, 59). This feature corresponds with the statement of the

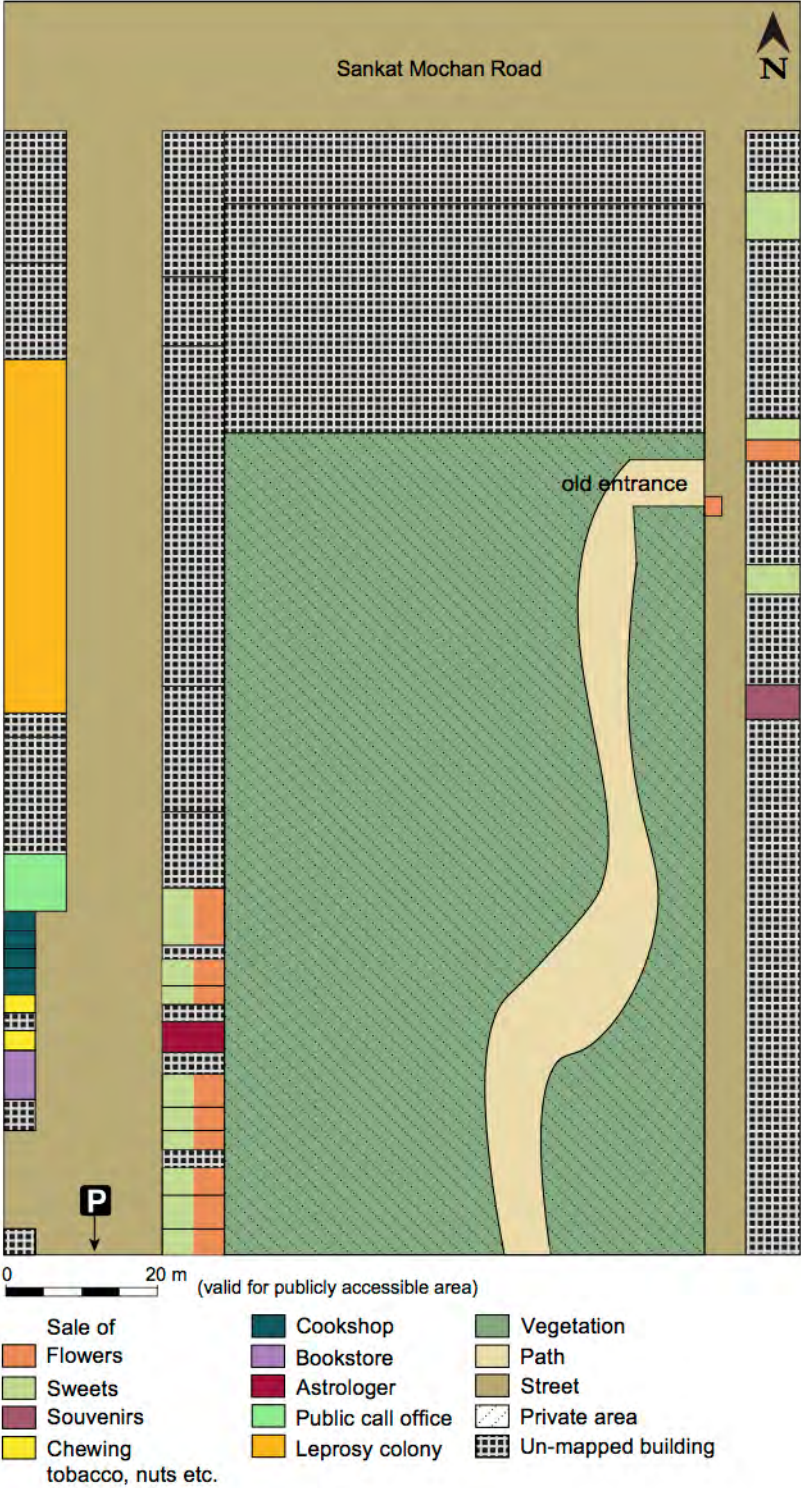


Figure 5.3: The neighborhood of the Sankat Mochan Temple

interviewed tenants that they would have to leave immediately if the *Mahant* asked them to. Aside from the visitors themselves and the contribution of the outside shops, the temple has another way of maintaining its market position: it communicates its festivals

through poster advertisement and it has a high presence in daily life in Varanasi because of the activities of the identically named foundation.

5 Interpretation: The *Sankat Mochan Temple* as a business enterprise

5.1 The supply side

The final product offered by the temple comprises of different dimensions. First, there is the physical temple environment. This aspect includes the structure and architecture of the buildings, the statues, the idols and pictures of the gods, the green area hosting the monkeys, as well as the symbolism of the colours, shapes and orientations of the temple elements (Kong 1992, 8 ff.). Following the concept of *Darshan* the importance of the physical characteristics should not be underestimated since the contact to the god is established through the eyes. As Kong puts it in her study on religious buildings in Singapore, "*seeing is believing*" (Kong 1992, 10).

Second, the different activities fulfilled by the temple employees play an important role in constituting the temple's offered goods and services. The most important ones include the rituals and ceremonies performed by the priests since "*performing these ceremonies [...] re-infuses the temple and its images with sanctity*" (Kong 1992, 5). In this context, non-employees like the *Jajman* are important as well. They are attracted by the temple as consumers and at the same time they contribute to the temple's final product in their role as suppliers of ritual expertise offering their services at the temple premises. Aside from these ritual activities there are the secular services offered by the temple shops, out of which the sweet shop attracts most visitors.

Third, specific events like festivals and welfare services organised by the temple are important factors because they contribute to a specific common and very positive perception of the temple.

Fourth, there is the atmospheric characteristic of the temple, namely that it constitutes itself as a place for everyone most importantly reflected by the feature of not intrusively asking for monetary donations.

Fifth, the temple offers the possibility to contact *Hanuman* who is "*one of the most popular and ubiquitous of Hindu deities*" (Lutgendorf 2002, 71). Hence, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* does not just place a product on the market, but the temple itself can be seen as the final product that available to the public 20.5 hours per day, seven days a week.

5.2 The demand side

As a result of the temple's characteristics a remarkable quantity of visitors is attracted. Uniting all of them are deep beliefs in their gods, and devotional processes like visiting the temple are main elements of their daily routine.

While *Darshan* reflects the general desire to get into contact with the god, the meaning of *Sankat Mochan* in terms of 'removal of all sufferings' and 'liberator from distress' is the main motive for choosing to visit the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. The belief that being released from one's problems through worship at this temple stems mainly from *Hanuman* as a deity, who is perceived to have the power to fulfil wishes without asking for much in return. Hence - even if all characteristics of the temple's organisational basis contribute to its popularity - the most important feature for the devotees seems to be the possibility to

contact *Hanuman*. While this appears to be a very religious motive, it is at the same time very profane because it is related to the worldly desire of getting one's individual wishes fulfilled. Consequently, the above-mentioned exchange between deity and devotee in the context of donating food, flowers and money to the god can be interpreted as a patron-client relationship (Rösel 1983, 56). As Stark puts it, "*the single difference [...] between exchanges involving only humans and exchanges when one of the partners is a god is that the latter can involve far more valuable payoffs. Aside from that, in their dealings with the gods, people bargain, shop around, procrastinate, weigh costs and benefits, skip installment payments, and even cheat*" (Stark 1999, 286). Thus, the relationship between god and visitor fluctuates between the world of the secular and the sacred but takes place within the temple setting. This setting is commonly perceived to be sacred and to have a transcendent and transformative nature, which induces the visitors' emotional experiences (Kong 1992, 4 f., Finlayson 2012, 1763).

5.3 The supply-demand interrelation

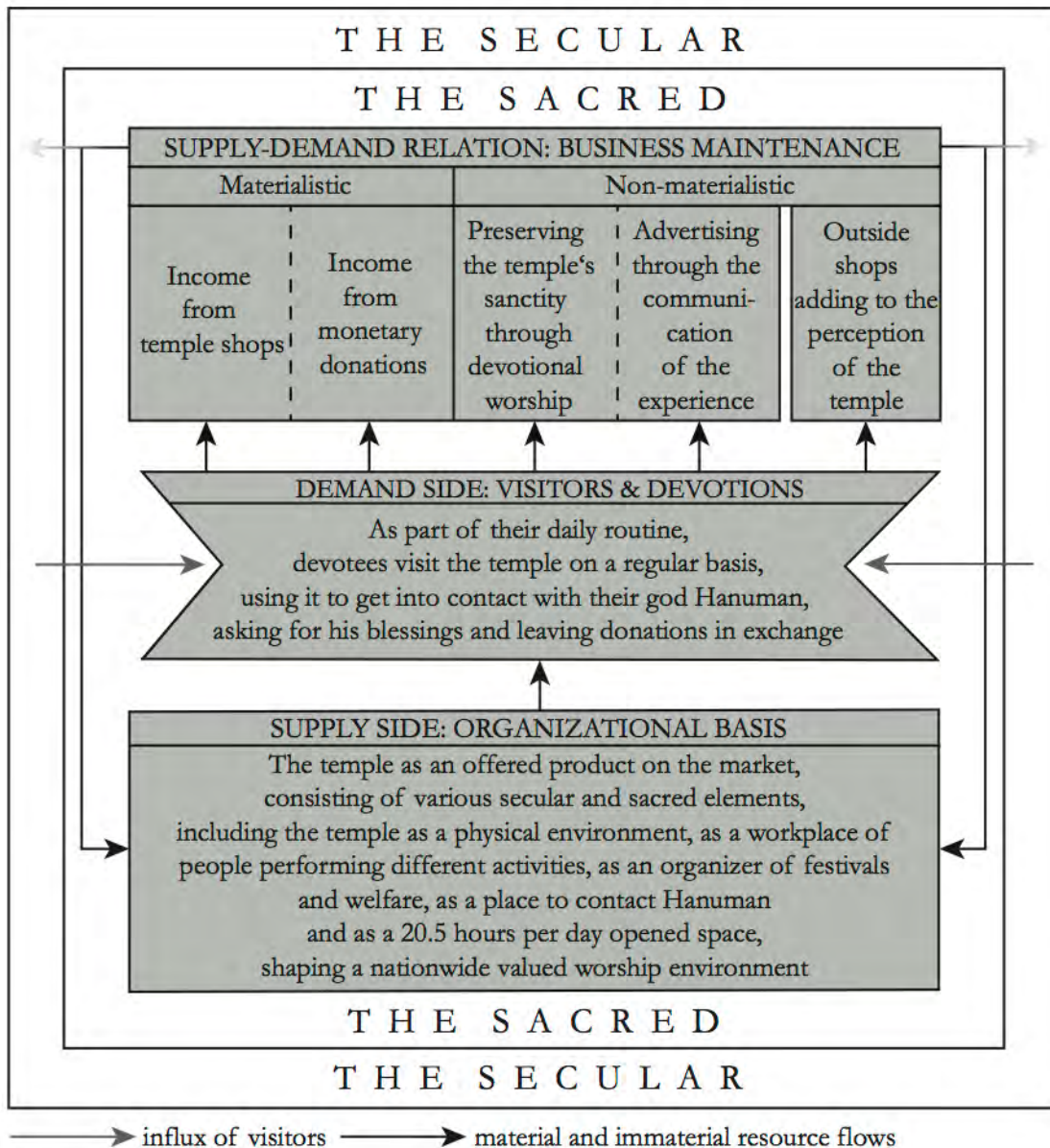
The devotees, i.e. the consumers of the goods and services of faith provided by the temple, are at the same time producers (Bankston 2002, 322). This becomes evident as they contribute to the maintenance of the temple's market position in both a non-materialistic and a materialistic way (Fig. 5.4). Concerning the former, two different activities can be distinguished. First, the devotees communicate their sacred experience and thereby advertise for the temple. Second, the devotees contribute to the preservation of the sanctity of the temple. One perspective in research is that nothing is inherently sacred but is made sacred by ritual (Smith 1987, 104). By contrast, in the case of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* it is believed that it has an inherent sanctity stemming from the myth regarding its establishment. Either way, it can be said that through a "*process of sacralization*" (Finlayson 2012, 1776) the temple is (re-)infused with sanctity. This is done through rituals performed by priests but also through the devotees' devotional worship (Kong 1992, 16).

In terms of the materialistic contribution it is true that the donation boxes at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* are not obviously placed and do not have any indicating labels as is often the case at other temples. Yet, it is not deniable that people leave money anyway - either at the donation boxes or the temple shops - and that this is the temple's major income source even though the donations are meant for the god, not the temple.

The information on the quantity and the direction of the cash flows stay rather opaque. An explanation for this circumstance is given by the concept of the god "*as a mighty landlord*" (Rösel 1983, 54). Hereby, *Hanuman* is perceived as a territorial landlord and as the managing director of the temple. On the one hand, he is seen as a god living in the world of the sacred but, on the other hand, he has mundane desires like eating and sleeping that need to be met by the social reciprocity between deity and human. Hereby, the god enters the world of the secular and "*becomes predictable, a prognostic fact*" (Rösel 1983, 55). This phenomenon is also reflected through the aforementioned patron-client relationship in terms of donating.

Apart from the devotees, the shops surrounding the temple also contribute to the temple's market position as they add to a positive perception of the temple in the minds of the visitors. Moreover, the temple has its own way of increasing its public presence, e.g. by

advertising its festivals. Even if not intended by the temple, this can be described as strategies of promotion and marketing (Lang et al. 2005, 152).



Design: Melissa Bayer

Fig. 5.4: The Sankat Mochan Temple as a business enterprise

6 Conclusion: The interconnection of the secular and the sacred

In India, there is no clear-cut separation between the secular and the sacred and the boundaries between these two spheres remain blurry (Michaels 1998, 260). This is true for the visitors' daily lives as well as for the temple's constitution. The study showed that within the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and also beyond there is a strong interrelation between the three spheres of economic, social and ritual activities because a single activity might include elements of all three dimensions (Rösel 1983, 45 ff.). The difficulty of revealing the temple's economic activities, i.e. the financial resource flows, lies within religion

itself because it functions as a cover for certain economic aspects. Depending on the acting agent this masking is performed either purposely or unintentionally. How this is done becomes most evident in the concept of the god as a landlord and temple manager because this model serves as justification for an alleged lack of knowledge concerning the quantity and use of monetary donations.

A useful concept for understanding how the different spheres are connected is the model of religious economy that was utilised in this study to reveal how the *Sankat Mochan Temple* functions as an extremely successful religious business. It became clear that the temple as a sacred place has to be organised and managed in a secular way, like every other institution of modern society. Likewise, its organisational basis comprises sacred as well as secular elements together forming the temple into a unique product. Hence, we need to look at temples not as passive constructions but as “*active players*” (Lang et al. 2005, 178) and treat them as part of the secular economic market system if we want to expand our knowledge on how they are functioning and surviving.

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Fig. G: Inside the shrine of Ghazi Miyan (Fülling 2015)

The shrine of Ghazi Miyan: multi-religious space in Alai Pura, Varanasi

Keywords: Religious geography, Construction of space, Identity, Sacred space, Muslim shrine

1 Introduction

In contemporary social science literature the constitution of places is of major interest (cf. de Certeau 1988, Foucault 1984, Lippuner 2014). The central assumption of these authors is that *space is practiced place*. This means that geographical places are not provided by nature but are socially constructed through the charging with specific meanings by means of certain practices and interpretations (Lossau 2014, 25-37).

The city of Varanasi is a place which is charged by a multiplicity of religious meanings that have evolved over a period of many centuries. As a sacred space for the Hindu religions but with a significant share of Muslim populations this process is also characterised by rivalries between Muslims and Hindus (cf. Desai 2003). However, the analysis of the construction of religious spaces in Varanasi was largely focused on Hindu beliefs and religious practices, as Varanasi is considered to be one of the holiest cities in Hinduism. As the permanent abode of the deity Shiva and an important centre of pilgrimage, many places and routes in and around the city have been ascribed religious meanings, dating back to the *mahatmyas* (hymns of glorifications) and the *puranas* (ancient stories of gods, kings and saints). Today, these meanings and narratives shape the identity of the city as a Hindu place (cf. Eck 1983). In this paper the focus shall be turned away from the almost exclusive concentration in the literature on Varanasi as a Hindu city. In fact, the city also has a considerable Muslim tradition, which goes back to the time of the Islamic Mughal Rule from the 12th to the 18th century (Desai 2003, 24). With a Muslim population of about 30% in Varanasi City, Islamic sites and social and religious practices shape the city in significant ways (Singh 2009: 36).

Despite the rivalries and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in India that are mainly carried out on a political level the two religious groups do not only share an everyday life, but many also visit the same religious sites. The shrines of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid, located in the north of the city are important examples of these shared practices. This paper aims to assess how the "*accumulation of meanings in an immobile place*" (Foucault 1984, 26) works in the context of multi-religiousness in the Muslim dominated area of Bari Bazar / Alai Pura in the north of Varanasi.

2 Researching the construction of religious spaces

This paper takes a closer look at the two shrines Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid and aims to figure out how multi-religiousness is practiced and meaning ascribed. It aims to analyse how rituals carried out separately or together by Muslims and Hindus, beliefs and aspirations shape the Ghazi Miyan area as a multi-religious space and the religious

identities of the visitors. For this purpose three dimensions deserve scrutiny: the organisation of the shrines, the social structure of the visitors, and the religious rituals performed.

These different dimensions were approached mainly through qualitative interviews with the visitors, the employees and the heads of the different shrines and complemented by several observations and a mapping of the area. Specifically, 50 interviews were carried out with visitors, mainly in context of the shrine of Ghazi Miyan but also with people visiting the four other shrines in the closer neighbourhood that partly share visitors with Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid. Also vendors selling devotional items used by visitors of the shrines were interviewed to learn about their perceptions and the role of the shrines for their livelihoods.

Additionally, several interviews were carried out with the heads of the shrines, the employees and other local residents. They were questioned about the economies, the organisation and the maintenance of the shrines, as well as on the legal status of the whole area of Ghazi Miyan. In order to get a deeper knowledge of the performed rituals and to complete the findings from the interviews, participatory and non-participatory observations were made. The data gained through this methodology is analysed in light of the construction of the Ghazi Miyan area as a multi-religious space and the production of multi-religious identities of the visitors.

3 Historical Background

The shrine of Ghazi Miyan is dedicated to the martyr Salar Masud Ghazi. In fact, there are no sources which prove that he actually existed. There are, however, several separate sources which tell a similar story about Salar Masud (v. Schwerin 1984, 146). The prefix "Ghazi" can be found in many places scattered over North India, for example in the names for Muslim warrior shrines or saintly shrines, which memorize several *Ghazis* (warriors) and *Shahids* (martyrs) (Amin 2005, 6).

Salar Masud (*1015-†1034) was the nephew of the Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, a conqueror from today's Afghanistan. According to the myths, he was killed in a battle at Bahaich, close to the present-day border between India and Nepal, against a Hindu ruler just one night before his wedding (Schwerin 1984, 146, Gaborieau 1975, 238, Singh 2013, 128, Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam 2006, 112). Therefore, the main shrine of Ghazi Miyan today can be found in Bahaich, but all over India and also in Karachi, Pakistan, about one hundred further smaller versions can be found. According to v. Schwerin 1984, 148 and 156), Salar Masud was buried at the site of an unspecified original Hindu temple either dedicated to the Sun or to Shiva. Since the spot had therefore been sacred before, the local population might have continued to visit the place and transferred attributes originally attached to Shiva, such as power, generosity and wrathfulness to Ghazi Miyan.

While Salar Masud was bound for Bahaich, he dispatched Malik Afzal Alavi and a part of his army towards Varanasi. Although being defeated there, Muslim civilians were permitted to settle down in today's Ghazi Miyan-area which was renamed "Alavipura/ Alaipura" after

the Muslim conqueror Outb-ud-din Aibak devastated and captured the city of Varanasi. According to Visuvalingam and Chalier Visuvalingam (2006, 112), "...almost the entire building scheme around the Bakaria Kund were constructed, generally on the site of and with the materials obtained from demolished Hindu temples."

4 Organising and practicing sacred space

The area Bari Bazar in Alai Pura is today mainly inhabited by Muslim weaver households (*ansari*). In an area of about two hectares, five shrines and at least nine mosques can be found. These buildings are surrounded by several graveyards with numerous tombs (*mazar*)

of unknown *shahids* but also inhabited by residents of the neighbourhood (Fig. 6.1). The two shrines of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid are closely connected as visitors are obliged to visit Alvi Shahid first before going to Ghazi Miyan. Because of this connection, all statements that will be made on the composition of the visitors, their backgrounds and their aspirations apply to both places. All shrines receive Hindu as well as Muslim visitors, although they are places where Muslim saints are buried. However, during fieldwork it became soon apparent that in fact, only the shrines of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid receive a considerable number of Hindu visitors. Accordingly, the main focus of this paper is on this pair of shrines, while the other sites found in the area will not be considered in much detail.

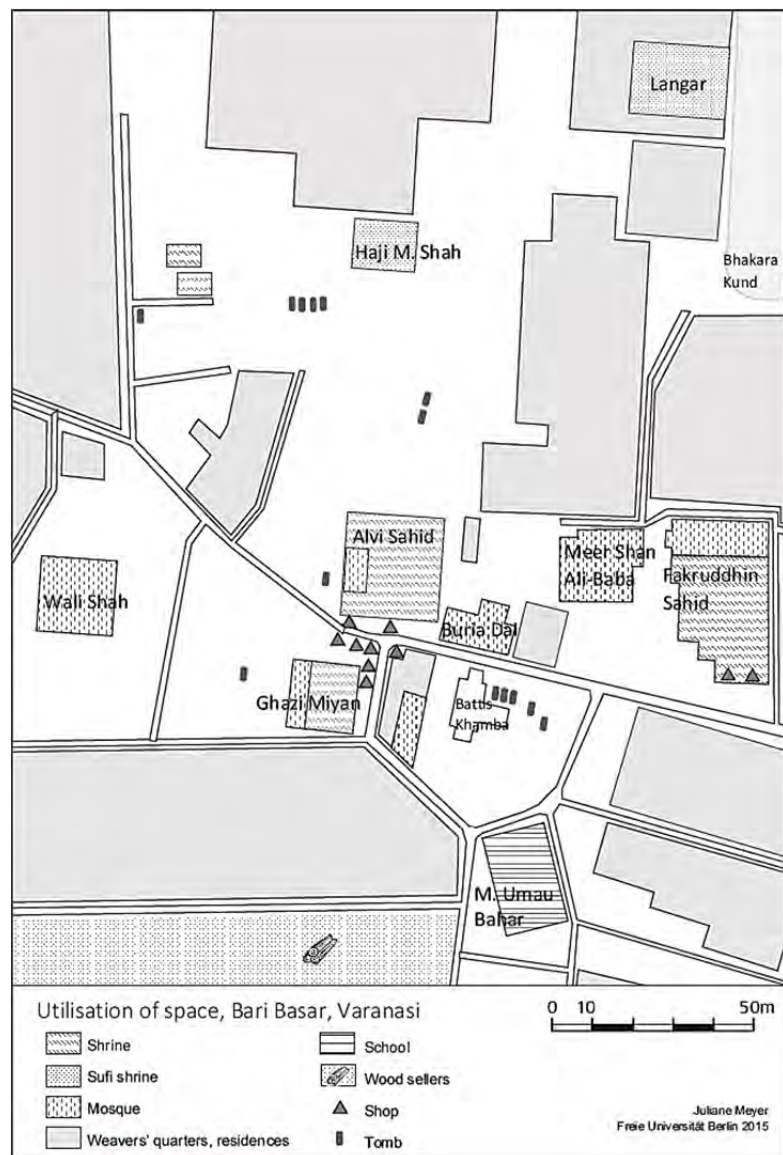


Fig. 6.1: Shrine-Area at Alai Pura, Varanasi (Source: own design)

4.1 Organisation of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid

The two shrines are opened on Thursday and Sunday from 7am to 7pm. During the other days of the week, the caretaker of the shrines who is a local resident will open the shrines for visitors if they ask for it. According to the head of Ghazi Miyan 150-200 visitors visit the

shrines on Thursdays and 300-500 visitors on Sundays. The head of the shrine has exercised his function for the last 30 years and his family holds this hereditary position since 1835, when the shrine was restored. The exact age of the place is however unknown. The head mainly fulfils tasks concerning the assistance of visitors in conducting the rituals and giving devotions to the saint.

He is also a representative in the Sunni Waqf Board, an institution attached to the Indian Ministry of Minorities that administers all Sunni *waqf* property. *Waqf* is a specific form of religious endowment that refers to the practice of *zakat* (obligatory alms), representing one of the five pillars of Islam (Strothmann 2012, 50). Usually *waqf* properties include land or buildings for a special purpose such as a shrine or a school. Most Muslim religious sites in India are this kind of religious property. The *waqf* Board provides guidelines for the management of the places and collects a yearly amount of 7% of all donations. The yearly donations at Ghazi Miyan sum up to Rs 15.000-20.000. For historical and today unknown reasons the legal status of Alvi Shahid however differs from Ghazi Miyan, which is why the donations collected at this place are kept for the private use of the head of this place.

Once a year a large festival takes place around the shrine, attracting a huge number of visitors. The organisation of this Ghazi Miyan *mela* commemorating the yearly death anniversary of Salar Masud is one of the central tasks of the head. This task is supported by a committee, consisting of ten visitors of the shrine chosen by the head and confirmed by the Sunni Waqf Board. The *mela* takes place on the first Sunday of the Hindu month of *Jyestha*, between May and June. The organisational and ritual preparations of this large event start around March.

The shrine has no formal salaried employees but the family of the caretaker undertakes different tasks concerning the maintenance of the shrine and building as a family tradition. While the caretaker is the key holder of the two shrines, his mother is responsible for the cleaning of the places. She also provides different religious services like the distribution of sacred water at the door of the shrine and the ritual shaving of the heads of babies and small children (*mundan*). The brother of the key holder slaughters the chicken used as offering to the saint. The payment for these services depends on the economic situation of the visitor and can range between Rs 51 and Rs 501. The additional amount of 1rp should reinforce the effectiveness of the rituals and is sometimes also added to the regular donations. None of the employed family members has a formal contract. They hold the position as caretakers and key holders since generations and derive their incomes from the payment for their services and donations given by the visitors.

In front of the shrine several small vendors offer devotional items needed for the rituals carried out at the shrine. Their presence fluctuates and on Thursdays there are three and on Sundays eight shops offering their goods. The vendors are not obliged to pay rent for the place. All vendors are Hindus, except of the family members of the caretaker who also run a shop. The income from such a small business varies between Rs100 and Rs1,000 per day, depending on the assortment offered at the shop and especially on the weekday as the number of visitors is significantly higher on Sundays.

Five of the shops are run exclusively by women who all stated to be single. They are either widowed or left behind by their husband and fully dependent on these earnings, whereas the male shopkeepers all have additional sources of income.

4.2 Social Structure of the visitors

The visitors of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid mostly belong to lower social groups; many are weavers and small shop owners from the neighbourhood. This social structure also corresponds to the accounts of v. Schwerin (1984, 145) and Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam (2006, 112-114) who state that the worship of saints is more characteristic for lower Muslim castes who are not so familiar with Muslim traditions and its doctrine, but rather follow Islamic folk religion. The Hindu visitors as well belong to lower castes, which is typical for many shrines in India. Apart from the visitors residing in the close neighbourhood a considerable number of visitors come from longer distances up to 20 km. Most of them visit the shrine on a regular basis every Thursday and Sunday or just every Sunday. The gender ratio and also the ratio of Hindu to Muslim visitors are about equal (Fig. 6.2).

In comparison to the big catchment area of these two shrines, the visitors of Fakhruddin Shahid, a nearby shrine which shares a number of visitors with Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid, were without exception power loom weavers from the direct neighbourhood.

Visitors at the Shrine Ghazi Miyan

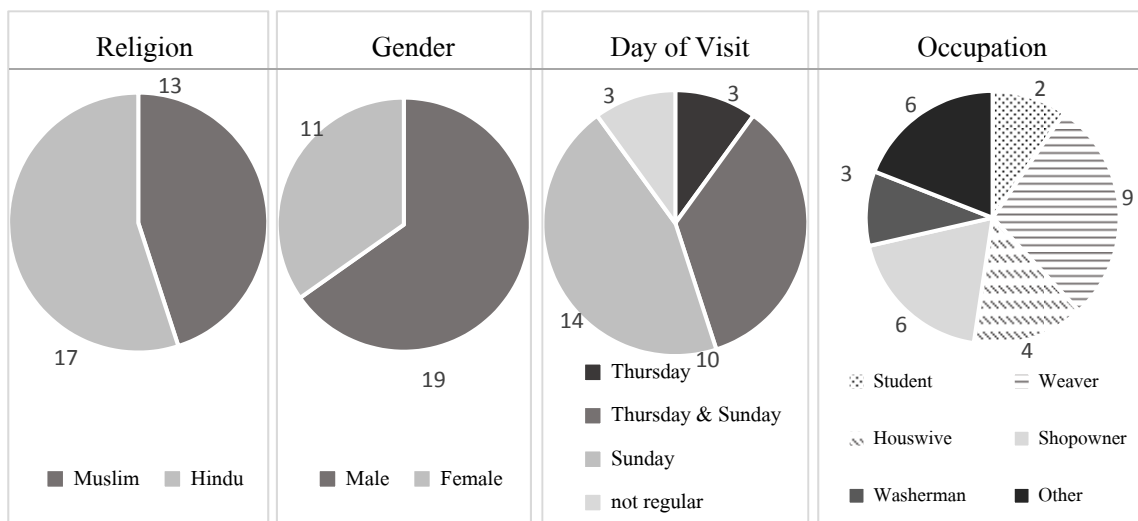


Fig. 6.2: Visitor-Structure at the shrine of Ghazi Miyan. (Source: own survey, N = 30).

However, apart from the vendors only few other people make their living at the shrine and are dependent on the generosity of the visitors. Between three and ten beggars can be found directly opposite of the entrance of the place. Most of them come on a regular basis and occupy their fixed places. The negotiations on claims on the places mostly depend on traditional or established rights, for example through relatives who occupied that place before. Their income varies, but can amount up to Rs 100 on a Sunday. The interviews with the beggars revealed that beyond the income aspect they also appreciate to sit near the

shrine and feel the presence of Ghazi Miyan. They sense or expect an improvement of their situation from that meditative sitting near a holy site.

4.3 Religion and Rituals

Muslims as well as Hindus have equal rights and follow similar rituals when visiting the shrines. None of the surveyed persons, neither Hindu nor Muslim feel disturbed by the other religion. The head of the shrine repeatedly emphasised the equality of the two groups. For the visitors, there is no contradiction in Hindus worshipping a Muslim martyr. According to the narration of one visitor, the ruler fought by Salar Masud was said to be cruel and violent, especially towards Hindus of lower castes, so his death was a relief for many. Moreover, the fact that the original shrine in Bahraich continued an already existing worship of Shiva and also that Ghazi Miyan was built on an originally Hindu site might have initiated the togetherness of the two religions at a very early stage. However, as none of the surveyed visitors actually knew the historical background of the place or the story of Ghazi Miyan this presumed background does not influence the attitudes of the visitors at all.

Hindus adore Ghazi Miyan directly as a God. Because of his sainthood, Muslims see him as amplifying their communication with Allah. Many visitors of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid have visited both shrines for several years; some people do that already for their whole life. They come with their families, their spouses or alone. In most cases the reasons for the first visit are on health grounds, for example a disease of a family member. Because of the critical financial situation, many people seem to prefer to visit Ghazi Miyan over the visit of a doctor. Fifty per cent of the regular wishes from Ghazi Miyan are about the general health and welfare for themselves and their families. About twenty-five per cent of the visitors have a specific request for health. Asked about the satisfaction of their demands, most of the visitors affirm an improvement of their own or their family-members' health. The other twenty-five per cent ask for a better business and an improved economy in general. Some younger visitors also demanded to improve their education.

Although the nearby shrine of Fakhruddin Shahid is said to be visited equally by Hindus and Muslims, the observations and interviews showed that Hindu visitors are only a small minority at Fakhruddin. The likely reason for this observation is that classical and more orthodox Islamic teaching is much more present at the place. Female visitors are required to cover their head with a scarf and their areas of visit are strictly separated from those which are visited by men. Furthermore, the reading or citation of Quran verses is part of every *fatihah* carried out at Fakhruddin, whereas at Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid the provided Quran books were never used by visitors during times of observation. Another major difference to the shrines of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid was the duration of visits. While visitors of Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid stated that they prefer quick stay of merely ten minutes at each shrine, visitors tended to stay for a much longer period at Fakhruddin Shahid, often up to one to two hours. Especially women often lingered and prayed together for much longer periods than they do at Ghazi Miyan. Visitors also stated that they appreciate the calmness of the place when compared to Ghazi Miyan. As such, the shrine

of Fakhruddin Shahid appears to differ from Ghazi Miyan in terms of religious strictness and in the kind of atmosphere people search for.

4.3.1 Rituals

During their visit at the shrines, Hindus and Muslims share most of the rituals they carry out. Some rituals, however, are only performed by one of the groups. Both Hindu and Muslim visitors use white sugar pearls flavoured with cardamom called *elaichi dana* and flower garlands as a part of their praying ritual. Ready-made packages of devotional items needed for prayers include incense sticks (*agarbati*), sugar pearls and flower garlands that are sold by the vendors around the shrines. Some of these packages also include *chadar*, a red scarf used for rituals by laying it on the grave. Whereas *fatiha* is an invariable praying ceremony for Muslims, Hindu visitors rather speak individual prayers. Only Hindu visitors use sticks fragranced with rose water (*itrafaha*) for their praying. They also use *kapoor* or *camphor* to burn. *Nara*, small red and orange bands, are offered at the shrine too. Hindu visitors strap them to the windows for offering prayer to Ghazi Miyan and remove them again when Ghazi Miyan has satisfied their demand. During the *mela*, there are also some rituals performed only by Hindus. The handprints (*panja*) at the shrine are made only by Hindu pilgrims from *ubtan*, a turmeric-based paste used as a part of the Hindu wedding procedure.



Fig. 6.3: Muslim visitor praying *fatiha* in front of the grave (*mazar*) of Salar Masud. The offering of flowergarlands, originally practiced by Hindus is also conducted by Muslims (Fülling 2015).

Important special requests to Ghazi Miyan are directed via individual papers called *arsi* (Fig. 6.3). The pilgrim or visitor writes his request on a paper to be hung above the grave so that the wish is located very close to Ghazi Miyan. They pray and donate some money for supporting their wishes to Ghazi Miyan. For illiterates, it is possible to get some help from the head of the shrine who writes the paper for them. Once a year, before the *mela* starts, all papers are removed, burned and buried at the graveyard.

Especially during the *mela* and on Sunday, the offering of a chicken (*kanuri*) is very common. Visitors usually bring the chicken on their own and can also take the giblets home to prepare and eat them. The ritual itself starts with the chicken being decorated with flower garlands and being blessed by the head while at the same time the prayers are said. Afterwards, the chicken is slaughtered and eviscerated in the inner yard next to the shrine.

Another ritual which is executed at Ghazi Miyan is *mundan*. This Hindu ritual belongs to *samskara*, a collection of rites of passage which vary in number and type, depending on the region and tradition (Pandit 2005, 125). *Mundan* is the removal of a baby's hair by shaving.

The children are usually 1-3 years old (Pandit 2005, 128; Fig. 6.4). According to Pandit (ibd.), this ritual is performed to clean the head of the child to ensure the growth of the hair. Visitors of the shrine who carried out this ritual referred to it as gratitude to Salar Masud for fulfilling the wish for a child. Although the ritual is a traditional part of Hindu culture, Muslim families conduct *mundan* as well and stated that they expect this to be beneficial for the future life of their child.

Although both rituals can be performed both at Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid only few such cases were observed during fieldwork. The reason for this is likely of practical nature as the rituals are usually performed after the daily prayers. Because Alvi Shahid is always visited before Ghazi Miyan it would be the obvious choice to carry out the rituals there.

Another reason is the greater attraction attributed to Ghazi Miyan. Although there is no official hierarchy between both places, it appears that Ghazi Miyan is perceived by visitors as more central and more important. This is also evident when looking at the scarce literature dealing with the shrine where Ghazi Miyan takes centre stage, whereas Alvi Shahid is not mentioned at all (Singh 2013, Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam 2006). The *mela* also supports that thesis: the festival



Fig. 6.4: Head shaving of a child (*mundan*) (Fülling 2015)

celebrated in May at the anniversary of the death of Ghazi Miyan does not include Alvi Shahid. Alvi Shahid does not have its own *mela*.

4.3.2 The *Mela*

Every year, the Ghazi Miyan *mela* as a huge festival attracting large crowds takes place in the shrine-area of Bari Bazar, mainly financed by donations. During the preparation for the *mela* there is a close cooperation between the Ghazi Miyan shrines in Bahraich and in Varanasi. According to the head of the shrine about 35.000 people visit Varanasi on the first Sunday in the Hindu month of *Jyestha* that corresponds to May-June in the Gregorian calendar. From Sunday evening to Monday noon the death anniversary of Salar Masud and his wedding procedure (*barat*) are celebrated. Many rituals are performed in and around the shrine of Ghazi Miyan. Besides this *shadi mela* (wedding party of Ghazy Miyan) another 15 *melas* are celebrated at different shrines in the city of Varanasi between the first and the third Sunday of the month. The main Ghazi Miyan shrine in the town of Bahraich attracts several hundred thousands of Muslim and Hindu pilgrims every year, and the *mela* (referred to as *urs* in Bahraich as the term used for commemorating the death anniversary of a saint) is also celebrated in spectacular fashion. In Varanasi an additional *urs* for Ghazi Miyan takes place whose date is fixed according to the Islamic calendar. On this occasion a special *fatihah* is performed for the Muslim visitors. However, the attendant festivities are much smaller and not even known by most of the visitors. The *mela* is held at all Ghazi Miyan shrines in India.

One month before the *mela* the caretaker and the resident community start to prepare the shrine. *Lagan* is the preparation for a wedding ceremony that is symbolically celebrated during the *mela*. At the shrine the preparation starts with whitewashing the shrine. Afterwards, it is decorated with electric lighting and artificial flower garlands. The caretaker rubs the shrine with a mixture of turmeric powder, sandal, rose water and sacred *kiva water* to commemorate the wedding of Salar Masud. Fifteen days before the *mela*, the caretaker joined by a delegation from the resident community travels to Bahraich to pay their respects. Traditionally this annual pilgrimage was performed by foot and took fifteen days; nowadays the delegation travels by bus. In Bahraich the pilgrims buy flags called *balam* for bringing them back to Varanasi and presents are exchanged between the heads of the shrines.

The actual ceremony starts at Saturday night when Muslim women bring offerings to the shrine and pray. On Sunday during the *shadi mela* all visitors from all religions celebrate together. The rituals *mundan* and *kanuri* are practiced frequently, and the *barat* ceremony is carried out around noon. During this symbolic procession, the community sings marriage songs and a groom walks through the area to represent and re-enact Salar Masuds wedding, which never took place. After a break on Monday until the third Sunday the *mela* is shifted to the shrines of other noble men, who came with Ghazi Miyan every evening and a “scenic landscape” emerges during this period of time (Singh 2013, 136).

The festival outside on the shrine’s graveyard is attended by a huge crowd and catered by many shops offering toys, food and flowers. The pilgrims offer *malida* to Ghazi Miyan, a sweet and thick bread made with milk. *Langar*, a free meal, is prepared at the shrine and distributed to visitors and pilgrims. Contrary to other shrines such as the *sufi* shrine named Langar located in the north of the research area (Fig. 6.1) *langar* at Ghazi Miyan is not exclusively aimed at needy people but is prepared to serve the regular visitors. Nevertheless, some visitors bring homemade food and distribute it to the beggars at the shrine.

5 The construction of space and identity in a multi-religious place

The Ghazi Miyan area in Bari Bazar is a religiously loaded place where everyday life and spirituality are closely linked together. The whole area as the former home and the graveyard of numerous *shahids* becomes a holy place. Through the practice of the rituals during regular visitations and the *mela* as the major annual event attracting large numbers of visitors this special religious landscape is reproduced by the visitors as well as by the institutions such as the Sunni Waqf Board.

The two shrines Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid stand out because they attract Muslim as well as Hindu visitors. Whereas this practice might go back to the very beginnings of the worship of Ghazi Miyan (cf. v. Schwerin 1984), this intermingling is especially relevant today. At a time when Muslims and Hindus seem to be pushed into new rivalries for political reasons they exercise their religions in peaceful co-existence at this place. The return to more conservative interpretations of religion often driven by the need of distinction (cf. v. Schwerin 1984, 159) is not evident in the area of Ghazi Miyan. As a

matter of fact the visitors did not care at all about the presence of the other religion at the two shrines. The mutual adaptation of certain rituals rather shows openness and mutual respect. Visitors, no matter if Hindu or Muslim, share the same wishes and aspirations when visiting the shrine. Both groups of visitors belong to the economically lower strata of society and this similarity concerning life situations might also contribute to harmony as was evident for example in the non-participation of Muslim weavers living in this area in communal riots in the 1990s amongst the weavers in Varanasi (Showeb 1994 in Singh 2013, 153). Pandey (1990) cited in Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam (2003, 96-97) even interprets such Hindu-Muslim unities as a form of "*agency of the subaltern castes*" in organising resistance against the British during colonial times. Visuvalingam and Chalier Visuvalingam (2003, 97 and 113) in contrast prefer the perspective of the Ghazi Miyan cult as an example for successful Islamic proselytism facilitated through the common occupation of former Hindu (architectural) structures and ground. V. Schwerin (1984, 158) suggests that the worship of Ghazi Miyan "*had been integrated in an already existing religious framework*", as both sites in Bahraich and in Varanasi were already perceived as sacred spaces before.

The scientific literature and the empirical findings show that the Ghazi Miyan area as a multi-religious sacred site is a product of a long historical process, shaped by negotiation and occupation and today's religious everyday life. As an originally Hindu-place which was subsequently taken by Muslims, the inhabitants and visitors of the places managed to find a mode of behaviour which allows all stakeholders to jointly realise their religious beliefs. The opportunity for community which is offered and the shared experience of worshipping Ghazi Miyan is obviously a more important aspect than the emphasis on religious differences. Visitors not merely receive and consume the multi-religious spirit of the place in a passive way but actively shape it through their actions. The learning and exchange of previously estranged rituals and the usage of non-traditional devotional items creates a space which differs significantly from other religious sites which do not allow such kind of togetherness. The religion-based acculturation process lead to practices and rituals which can be considered as syncretic as certain beliefs and rituals were adopted by both sides. Still, all the visitors clearly considered themselves either as Hindus or as Muslims. The worship of Ghazi Miyan therefore does not result in a change in religious identity, although the pure religious doctrine of their religions might suggest otherwise.

The sacred space of Ghazi Miyan holds significant meaning for individuals. They experience community with people who share a similar reality and at the same time have - on an individual level - the opportunity to contribute to their own and their family's well-being. This aspect was especially important to nearly all of the interviewees. Therefore the shrines evolve into sites perceived as a compensation for the otherwise limited opportunities for social and economic uplift.

6 The accumulation of meaning in an immobile place

The objective of this paper was to analyse how the process of place-making and the shaping of religious identities takes place in the area Alai Pura, at the two shrines Ghazi Miyan and Alvi Shahid. It was pointed out how the historical background of the place, but

more importantly the joint practice of religious rituals among Muslim and Hindus both lead to the emergence of a multi-religious space. It can be assumed that the similar social status, the shared beliefs and aspirations outweigh religious doctrines and therefore contribute to the peaceful togetherness.

Looking at the constitution of shrines and sacred places reflects the complexity of everyday life in a society characterised by diversity and difference and points at the ways how these contradictions and possible tensions are solved in everyday life by ordinary people. The case of the Ghazi Miyan area is an exciting case of place-making in the context of multi-religiousness and syncretism in Varanasi (Fig. 6.5). It surely offers huge potential for further research, for example concerning the relationship of Ghazi Miyan to the other shrines in the area that were not considered in detail in this paper.

It remains to be seen how such places of unity will develop in future in the face of Hindu nationalistic tendencies rising in Indian society. The common identification as worshippers of Ghazi Miyan and members of a "lower caste" is the dominating influence on the community of Alai Pura. On this scale, it defuses the sharpening of religious and cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims.

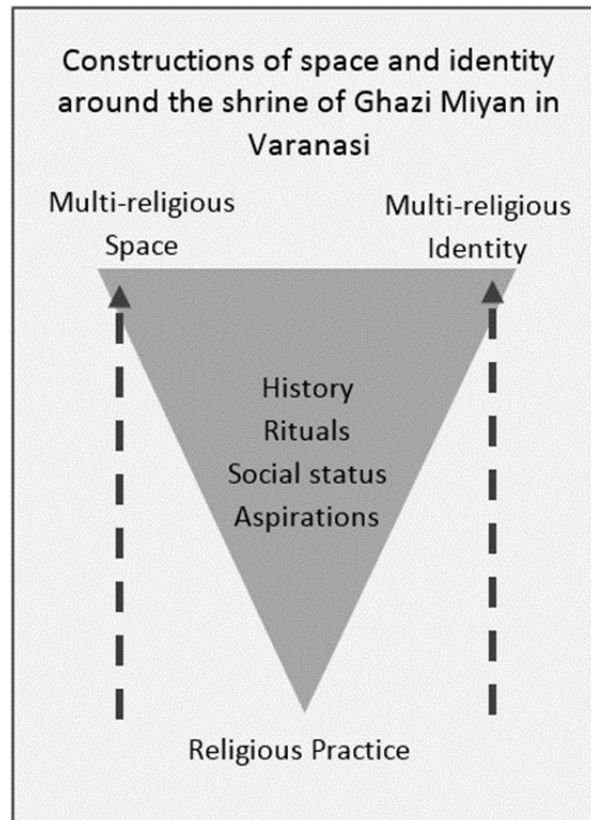


Fig. 6.5: Construction of religious space and identity around the shrine of Ghazi Miyan: The history of the area and the shared social status, rituals and aspirations of the visitors lead to the emergence of a multi-religious space (Source: own design, based on Lossau 2015, 73)

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Caste politics of the washermen in Varanasi

Keywords: Politics of caste, Invention of history, Ganga Action Plan, Urban planning

1 Introduction

How do marginalised groups cope with their low status in society and exclusion from political decision-making and what strategies do they make use of in order to change this? This paper deals with the washermen (*dhobi*) community in Varanasi and its attempts to participate in an internationally funded development project planned in the framework of the Ganga Action Plan (GAP). In this context, the construction of inner-city washing places (*dhobi ghats*) has been agreed upon to provide washermen an alternative from washing at the Ganga River. However, this process has been anything than straightforward and the paper attempts to show how the struggle of the washermen to be heard as citizens of the Indian state anchors around a process of inventing history and the enshrinement of the saintly figure of St. Gadge. This is done in order to raise political awareness and mobilise the community for collective action directed at gaining direct influence on the city planning project. The case study identifies the community's dependence on the city administration (*Nagar Nigam*) as well as internal leadership conflicts as major obstacles for achieving this goal. More generally, an attempt is made to place the problems faced by the washermen community in Varanasi in the larger context of Akhil Gupta's (2012) work on national poverty alleviation policies of the Indian state.

1.1 The *dhobi* community in Varanasi

About 15,000-20,000 washermen live in the region of the Varanasi municipality and belong to the community of the *Kannujiya*, a sub-caste of the *dhobi*¹⁵ (Schütte 2003, 98). In the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh the community is officially categorised as 'scheduled caste'. This term integrates many of the former *dalit*-communities or groups of 'untouchable'-castes. According to an orthodox Hindu perspective these groups are 'polluted' because of their daily contact with 'impure' materials (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 2000). In the case of the *dhobi* community that contact exists through their traditional occupation of washing and ironing of cloths. Even though the *dhobi* are today less exposed to forms of open discrimination because of their low caste status, they are still vulnerable due to their limited income opportunities. This goes along with a low level of job diversification as well as their high dependency on the contested resources water and public space. As a strategy to deal with this social and economic vulnerability the washermen community has established complex forms of social and spatial networking structures that date back to precolonial times (Schütte 2003).

¹⁵ In the following we use the term *dhobi* or washermen when referring to the local sub-caste '*Kannaujiya*'.

1.2 The Ganga Action Plan

The *dhobi* community experienced a drastic change in their everyday labour activities through implementation of the Ganga Action Plan, a programme launched by the Central Indian Government in 1985 in order to control and reduce the pollution load of the Ganga. Different sources for the pollution were identified; inter alia the washing of the clothes by the *dhobi* as 'non-point pollution'. Consequently, the measures of the plan included the eviction of the *dhobi* from the Ganga *ghats*, the steps leading down to the River Ganga many of which are traditionally used for the washing activity of the *dhobi* (Das and Tamminga 2012). This forceful eviction endangered the livelihoods of the *dhobi* and led to collective forms of resistance and the foundation of political self-organisation by the *dhobi*. For the first time, they expressed their needs and demands beyond their own caste boundaries and directed their demands to a broader audience. The struggle for their right to wash at the Ganga led to an agreement with the city administration. It allowed the *dhobi* to continue washing at the Ganga as long as the Nagar Nigam does not provide an adequate alternative. In early response to the *dhobi*'s claim, the Nagar Nigam constructed two inner-city *ghats* until the year 1990 that however were not adequately constructed and insufficient for the accommodation of the numerous washermen in the city. As their demands were not fully fulfilled, the *dhobi* continued their struggle for the construction of inner-city *ghats* and meanwhile established their continued right to maintain washing activities at the Ganga.

While the implementation process of the first phase of the GAP can be described as a '*poor top-to-down communication*' that could neither integrate the needs and suggestions of the affected population groups (Ahmed 1995, 154) nor improve the water quality of the Ganga, the activities of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) try to overcome these shortcomings (Das and Tamminga 2012, 1662). The 'Japan International Cooperation Agency' (JICA) assisted the follow-up GAP Phase II Project at Varanasi under NGRBA that specifically aims to '*improve water quality and river ecology of the Ganga / Varuna / Assi Rivers*' and '*tackle the non-point sources of pollution to improve the hygienic condition of city and surrounding areas and aesthetics of Ghats*' (Varanasi Nagar Nigam 2015). While the loan agreements on these projects were signed on March 31st in 2005, the implementation process only started in 2011 specifying a completion by the year 2015 when the funds released by JICA ought to be put to their agreed use (N.A. 2011). The implementation is to be realised by the state government and water board of Uttar Pradesh (UP Jal Nigam) and the Varanasi Nagar Nigam. Apart from institutional development components and 'sewerage components' the project also includes 'non sewerage components' that are directed and planned by the Nagar Nigam. That specific part of the plan is directly related to the *dhobi* community as these 'non sewerage components' include the construction and renovation of nine inner-city *dhobi ghats* planned to accommodate all washing activities in future (Varanasi Nagar Nigam 2015).

2 Research framework

2.1 The *dhobi*'s role in the planning process

The long history of protest against the displacement from the Ganga *ghats* and the successful struggle for the construction of the official inner-city *ghats* show their importance for the *dhobi* community. The aim of fieldwork was to find out which challenges and major problems the *dhobi* themselves identified in the process of the construction and implementation process of these *ghats*. While checking the status of the implementation process of the planned inner-city *ghats*, it became apparent that most parts of the construction work are under delay. As the money has been already allocated by JICA the question emerged why the construction does not progress. Accordingly, it was sought to gain a deeper understanding of the power relations between the *dhobi* as a marginalised group and the public institution of the Nagar Nigam. Therefore, the focus was directed on the *dhobi*'s perception and evaluation of their own influence on the planning and construction process of the inner-city *ghats*. Moreover, it was aimed to learn more about the community's perspective on the relationship to the city administration as the second phase of the GAP tried to alter the top-down approach of the first phase of the GAP. A second issue of interest were the strategies used by the *dhobi* to gain influence on the planning process.

Schütte (2003) has emphasised the role of the complex network systems maintained by the *dhobi* community which highly contributed to a process that ultimately led to a successful protest and an increased politicisation of the washermen as a group. Looking at the new JICA-financed city planning project of the inner-city *ghats*, it was aimed to assess how these networks of the *dhobi* are used in order to influence the direction of the project and how challenges of exclusion from participation in the planning process were dealt with. In this regard, strategies evolved by the *dhobi* in the course of the prolonged delay of the construction process were analysed.

2.2 The politics of caste

In India, strategies of *dalits* that aim to participate in politics are often related to the caste system. Although the caste system is officially abolished it still has enduring discriminative effects especially on lower castes. Nevertheless, there exist remarkable efforts of these groups to challenge the restrictions and disadvantages which are inflicted on them by the caste hierarchy. This process can be dated back to the 20th century and has been termed as 'politics of caste' (Rudolph and Rudolph 1969). In the wake of a growing *dalit* consciousness many groups started developing strategies in order to participate in politics and thus revise their position in society (Skoda 2014). One of these strategies which can enhance a politicisation and mobilisation of the caste has been referred to as 'invention of history' (Narayan 2004) and can be seen as a '*vehicle of social, religious and political protest against the inequitable distribution of power and wealth in this social order*' (Schaller 1996, 116).

As Narayan has elaborated, *dalit* groups in India were - and still are - often historically marginalised due to lack of documentation. '*This has inspired them to invent their own*

traditional myths, associations and memories in accordance with their new political aspiration' (Narayan 2004, 196-97). Often these invented narratives are personalised and connected with saints, socio-religious reformers or nationalist freedom fighters whose origins lie in the own caste (Narayan 2004, 197). This strategy can be observed e.g. in the case of the *chamar* (leather workers) and their worship of the Guru Ravidas (Cohn 1958, Schaller 1996, Nunes Muniz and Polster in this volume) or in that of the *pasi* (pig tenders) and their narration of the anti-colonial freedom fighter Uda Devi (Narayan 2004).

Aiming to create an image of themselves as respectable citizens these narratives are used to reinterpret the caste's role in society and to point out its contributions to the making of the Indian nation. Most of the time these narratives are accompanied by traditions and customs which target to support and emphasise political aspirations (Narayan 2004, 196-200). As Schütte (2003) has pointed out, the invention of history and the enshrinement of the saintly figure St. Gadge are of high importance in the case of the *dhobi* community in Varanasi concerning their expression of political claims and the strengthening of social cohesion and self-respect among community members. Therefore, it is an important question in how far the invention of history can be seen as a strategy to actively influence city planning, safeguarding the community's livelihood and increase their self-determination.

This invention of history among the *dhobi* in Varanasi has been channelled through the intricate mechanisms that keep the traditional network structures of the *dhobi* working to ensure social self-organisation, security, dignity and collective actions (Schütte 2003). The practice of multi-layered caste-*panchayats*¹⁶ contributed significantly to the politicisation of washermen in the last 30 years that started with the exclusion from the Ganga *ghats* in the context of the GAP.

2.3 Methods

The arguments laid out in this paper are based on two weeks empirical fieldwork carried out from the 12th to 24th of February 2015. In a first step all proposed sites of the planned inner-city *ghats* were visited in order to evaluate the implementation status and to gain a better understanding of the locations and surroundings. As the *dhobi*'s traditional washing places are located at the Ganga those places at the urban riverside were also visited to establish initial contacts. In addition, many residential quarters of washermen (*dhobiana*) in different parts of the city were visited. There, interviews were carried out with women, youth and children who are underrepresented at the *ghats*.

Further, detailed open interviews were conducted with three leading personalities of the washermen community. The proceedings of a *panchayat* meeting were documented where members of different *dhobianas* met to discuss important issues around the constructions of *dhobi ghats*. Additionally, the preparation meetings and the festivities of annual the St. Gadge festival were observed.

¹⁶ Caste council

3 Obstacles and strategies in the implementation process

In the following the invention of history shall be discussed as a major strategy of the *dhobi* to influence the planning process. Subsequently, the role of Nagar Nigam and leadership conflicts in the community are evaluated and presented as major obstacles for the timely construction of washing places. Further, it shall be assessed how the traditional networks are used in order to cope with the challenges of internal conflicts and exclusion from participation in the planning process.

3.1 The invention of history

The *dhobi* community in Varanasi actively attempts to confront the city administration and to strengthen the unity of the group. In this context a historical figure of the *dhobi* by the name of St. Gadge plays a central role and is employed for the political mobilisation of the community and the communication of strategies.

Originating from a local sub-caste of the washermen St. Gadge started initiating several social projects in the Indian state of Maharashtra at the beginning of the 20th century. These aimed to fight the social exclusion of those who were formerly called the 'untouchables'. He promoted their social uplift and especially advocated for an improved access to sanitation and education for these groups and demanded the abolition of the stigma of 'untouchability'. Since then he is known and worshipped by various *dalit* groups in India.

In Varanasi, the saint and his history were initially discovered and introduced to the resident *dhobi*-community by the leader of a political network of the washermen established in 1998 called *Dhobi Kalyan Mahasabha*. Washermen in Varanasi learned about the existence of St. Gadge around the turn of the millennium. This newly-discovered history is not only communicated in form of oral narratives, but also in form of large celebrations, self-published booklets, posters and leaflets that can be found in many *dhobi*-households. This practice of creating awareness among disadvantaged groups through booklets and the textual celebration of hero-figures is congruent

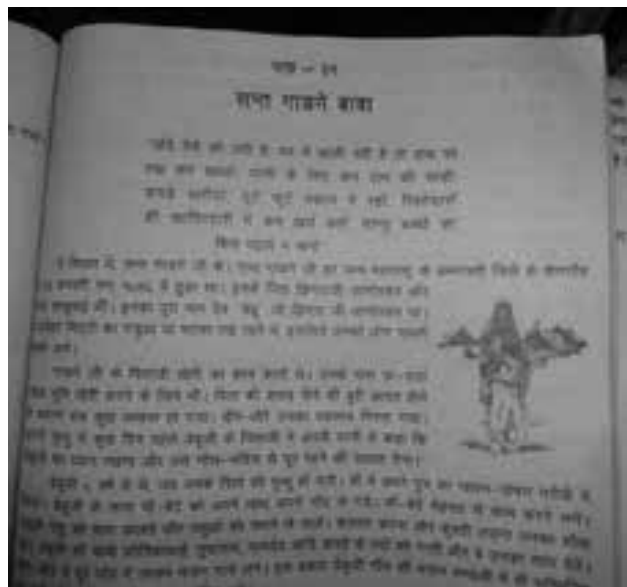


Fig. 7.1: A text in a schoolbook that narrates the history of St. Gadge, (Bunn 2015)

with wider strategies that emerged in Indian *dalit*-politics since the 1980s (Narayan 2001). Today, the history of the *dhobi*-saint is widely known and very popular among the community and his presence has become part of everyday-life. Even the children already know the stories of the deeds carried out by St. Gadge as they are re-narrated in

schoolbooks too (Fig. 7.1). The history of St. Gadge introduces hitherto neglected forms of social and political behaviour and can be used effectively to communicate strategies to members of the washermen community. This includes a strong focus on formal education and the attendant hope for a gradual liberation from washing as the sole economic basis which is a major goal for many *dhobi* families in their quest for social upward mobility.

The figure of St. Gadge is highly politicised. The notion of a saint belonging to the group of washermen provides pride and a new sense of self-esteem to community members. Many *dhobi* assert that their newly discovered spiritual leader had influenced other important Indian personalities such as Dr. Ambedkar or Mahatma Gandhi. In doing so, they refer to their caste's contribution to Indian independence and nation-making.

The popularity of St. Gadge and its present ubiquity in everyday-life as well as the new self-respect that it provides become an important basis on which further political action can be facilitated, as it has further established a strong sense of unity among washermen. St. Gadge's political significance is also crucial in regard to the negotiations with the city administration about the construction of inner-city *ghats*. This especially became apparent in the annual birthday festival held in the honour of the *dhobi* saint on every February 23rd. A large number of washermen were involved in the preparation of the festival that is accurately planned in special committees.

In the celebration of 2015 several hundred washermen participated in the festivities. The event started with a public demonstration through the city of Varanasi and was accompanied by music, performances and the public display of larger-than-life depictions of St. Gadge. The *dhobi* youth headed the procession and swept the streets, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has launched the 'Clean India' media campaign in October 2014 and swept pavements himself in Delhi in a media-effective manner. After the march a big celebration was held close to the Ganga in the area of Chetsingh Ghat and a large number of speeches were delivered. Among the speakers were not only community members, but also a lawyer and religious supporters who expressed their discontent with the city administration and demanded the quick completion of the inner-city *ghats*. *Dhobi* used the festival to confront the city administration through publicly articulating their demands with high visibility in the city and the public demonstration of their unity.

The reference to Modi's 'Clean India' campaign has been employed with the goal to change their image as major polluters of the Ganga and emphasise instead their interest in a clean river. This is an attempt to reverse their image from 'polluters' to 'saviours' of the Ganga. Instead of accepting the role that was imposed on them by the city administration in the implementation of the GAP they call attention to the fact that they do important work for the city society by cleaning the laundry of public institutions. *Dhobi* also formed an alliance with the popular religious leader Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati who has dedicated his life work towards the preservation of the Ganga. He is aware of the fact that the *dhobi*'s contribution to the pollution of the Ganga is of minimal extent. As the *dhobi* seek to present themselves as 'saviours' for the Ganga, they share a common aim with Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati. He gives religious credibility to their protest and their demands for a proper construction of the inner-city *ghats*. *Dhobi*

thus self-confidently demand support for their work in the urban society of Varanasi from the city administration.

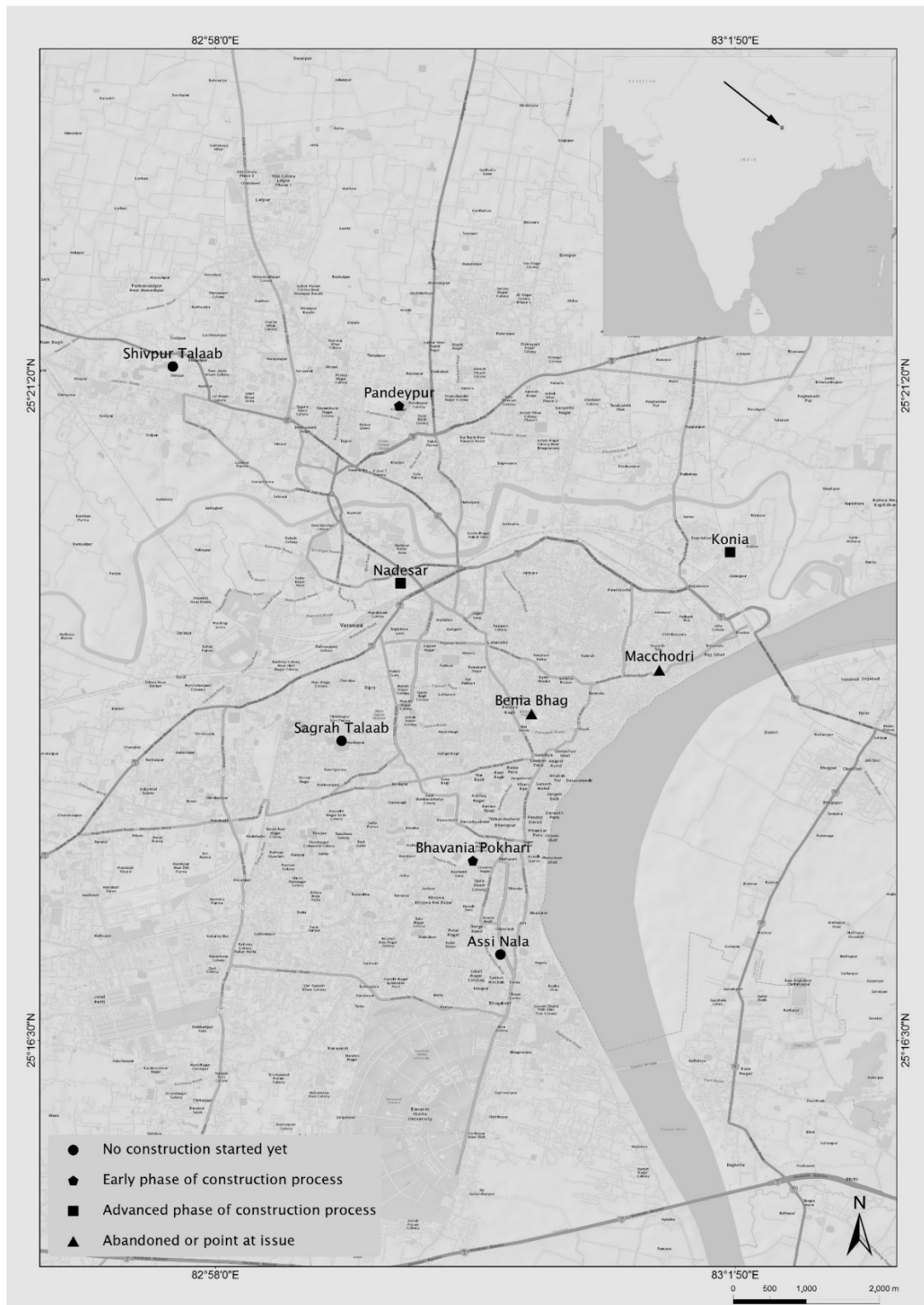


Fig. 7.2: Location and implementation progress of the inner-city ghats in Varanasi
 (Source: own design, based on World Street Map, Environmental Systems Research Institute, 2015)

The *dhobi* community possesses vital network structures on which the washermen can rely in safeguarding their livelihood. The successful invention of history commemorated in the

annual the festival of St. Gadge is an effective instrument to strengthen the community's unity and to raise increased social and political consciousness among the washermen. A collective protest against the city administration stabilises, intensifies and keeps vivid the social and political network structures. The unreliability of the city administration, the enduring police controls and the lessons learned from the initial phase of the GAP with its successful protest marches have confirmed the opinion that a rapid mobilisation for protest and resistance is necessary and essential for safeguarding the basis of the community's livelihoods. Indeed, the interviews conducted revealed a high sense of political consciousness and decisiveness to mobilise and protest against the city administration in case it will again try to evict the washermen from the Ganga without providing alternative washing places.

3.2 Status of the implementation process

As of today, none of the nine planned inner-city *ghats* has been completed yet. The planned areas are evenly distributed across the city and have a varied functional status (Fig. 7.2). The sites of Nadesar and Konia that exist since 1990 provide basic facilities for washing activities but a proper refurbishment is required. Modernisation of Bhavana Pokhari has commenced and in Pandeypur construction of a new *ghat* seems to have started. The proposed sites of Shivpur Talaab, Assi Nala and Sagrah Talaab show no sign of any construction work to be commenced in the near future. In the cases of Benia Bhag and Macchodri there was successful protest of local residents against construction and the sites were abandoned, albeit without providing alternative spaces. Although the money has been provided by JICA the project is far from being accomplished. As explained in the following, the delay can be understood as an indicator for the Nagar Nigam's failure in carrying out its public function. Additionally, leadership conflicts are hindering the *dhobi* to collectively claim their demands.

3.3 The role of Nagar Nigam in the construction of *dhobi-ghats*

In the frame of the JICA assisted GAP, the Nagar Nigam has taken on the commitment for realising the 'non sewerage components' or 'pro-poor component' and received funds from JICA. As the components shall contribute to a 'social development' and an improving water quality of the Ganga River the city administration is obligated to construct the nine *dhobi ghats* in a manner that ensures the participation of the affected group (Varanasi Nagar Nigam 2013).

Washermen put responsibility for the delay in constructing or refurbishing the planned *dhobi-ghats* to the city administration. The main obstacles in this process are in particular the issues of the unreliability of agreements, the uneven power-relations shaping the planning process, the scapegoating of the *dhobi* community as Ganga polluters, the seemingly corrupt and non-transparent behaviour of city officials and the abuse of internal conflicts that have occurred in the washermen community over leadership questions (see below).

In the wake of their protest against the GAP in the 1980s the *dhobi* successfully managed to re-establish their right to wash at the Ganga River until the new *ghats* are completely constructed. Nonetheless, official and written agreements were never issued by the city administration. As such, *dhobi* find themselves in a constant 'state of insecurity' as their right to wash at the Ganga *ghats* is not officially secured. Some *dhobi* reported that they were regularly exposed to police controls and sometimes even violence. These incidents reflect the unreliability of the oral agreement with the city administration that is not perceived as legally binding by officials.

The permanent state of insecurity to which the *dhobi* are exposed reveals the uneven power relations between the *dhobi* and the Nagar Nigam. Washermen feel dependent on the city administration's benevolence to construct the inner-city *ghats*. As there was no visible and coherent strategy on the side of Nagar Nigam in spite of the funds for construction having already been allocated many fear a continued procrastination or even complete interruption of the construction process. This would increase the vulnerability of the washermen community as their livelihoods highly depend on the public resources to be allocated by Nagar Nigam. N. Kannaujiya neatly summarised the problem: '*Proper and adequate washing facilities are related to my food. If I can't work at the Ganga or another ghat, what can I do? It's my employment*' (N. Kannaujiya, February 23, 2015). Some *dhobi* feel further threatened through the recent introduction of taxes by the city administration to be paid for using the Ganga-*ghats*: '*Why should we wash here and pay taxes instead of washing at the Ganga for free?*' (S. Kannaujiya, Raja Ghat, February 15, 2015).

Many *dhobi* also accuse the Nagar Nigam for laying the blame on their community for the arbitrary outcome of the city planning project. In the frame of GAP, the washermen understood the city administration's attempt to exclude them from the Ganga as a strategy to detract from the real polluters (e.g. factories) and the poor condition of the city's sewage system. As the weakest actor at the *ghats* they feel misused by the city administration in their need to show successful action in relation to the GAP. Meanwhile, more powerful actors such as factory owners continue their activities and pressing issues such as the modernisation of the city's sewage system are put on hold.

Dhobi further criticise the arbitrary policy of Nagar Nigam that claims to fight against the pollution load while in reality the pollution of the Ganga has not diminished since the launch of the GAP. Still, *dhobi* are ready to leave the Ganga once feasible alternatives have been put in place. However, the view prevails that the city administration does not fulfil its function to ensure provision of the infrastructure needed for the *dhobi* to carry out their profession. In doing so, washermen feel deprived of their right to benefit from a development project: '*If you don't like the dhobi, give us another job! [...] If you don't provide us jobs, then please finish the inner-city ghats!*' (S. Kannaujiya, Raja Ghat, February 15, 2015). In this vain, also the missing refurbishment of the three already existing inner-city *ghats* is cause for concern.

Particularly in Konia the state of construction does not sufficiently respond to the essential needs of the *dhobi*. A large part of the structure built in the early 1990s is in bad

shape and is not in use anymore for reasons of safety. In addition, the demand for the construction of sanitation facilities is not fulfilled yet. The concern about the quality of construction also leads to doubts as to the quality of the new washing places. Corruption and missing transparency are identified as important factors for the delay of the construction process. Accusations of corruption on part of the city administration and the contractors prevail but cannot be proved.

The issue of missing transparency in the implementation process is mostly related to dubious land deals. Urban land on which the inner-city *ghats* were supposed to be built originally belonged to the Nagar Nigam. However, some *dhobi* report that before the construction process started parts of these lands were sold to real estate companies which made the progress of construction impossible as land use conflicts have to be resolved before.

These problems and challenges are based on the perceptions of the *dhobi*. They express the feeling that Nagar Nigam fails to fulfil its function and does not keep to its promises towards the construction project. *Dhobi* feel that the city administration does not contribute to the 'social development' of their community through the provision of secure washing places. The assessment of the power relations indicates a missing integration and participation of the *dhobi* in the planning process.

3.4 Leadership conflicts

In the wake of increasing politicisation of the washermen community facilitated through the employment of the historical figure of St. Gadge a schism in the community has occurred that is characterised by a conflict about who shall be the most suitable leader. While the initial protest against eviction from the Ganga was carried out unified under the late Laxman Shastri Kannaujiya, the discovery of St. Gadge was facilitated through a party politician belonging to the group of Kannaujiya. This person established a political washermen network in the late 1990s, the '*U.P. Dhobi Kalyan Mahasabha*'. Under his supervision washermen carried out political rallies, posed their demands to wider society and the government and through this found a wide followership among Varanasi *dhobi*.

However, the old leader who showed his competence in the past maintained his followership too, and from the time onwards washermen never again acted with a unified voice. The schism went along the borders of the traditional network structures as defined through the spatial practice of caste *panchayats* (Schütte 2003). Even when the party politician lost most of his followers during the first decade of the new millennium because he could not deliver what was promised there still are a significant number of washermen that keep their solidarity, esp. in the North of Varanasi where the *Kalayan Mahasabha* maintains their office at Nadesar Ghat.

After the passing away of Laxman Shastri his nephew took over and successfully unified a majority of washermen around the issue of the construction of inner city *ghats*. He was also successful in facilitating the communication with the city administration. After this initial success however the current problems in construction have been partly attributed to the new leader. More generally, however, the schism in the washermen community

gives the city administration sufficient reason not to engage in serious negotiations with washermen. The city maintains that *dhobi* shall first solve their leadership issue and sort out their demands.

While followership has shifted, and the annual celebration of St. Gadge nowadays takes place during two different festivities in the North and South of Varanasi respectively, the new leader has disappointed many members in the community with the signature of an agreement with Nagar Nigam in 2014. That signature allows the city administration to collect a monthly tax to be levied for the use of *dhobi-ghats*. As per contract the collected tax funds shall be kept on a community account and used for public expenses around maintenance of the facilities. However, the old *panchayat* structure still channels all communication among washermen but the exact nature of the tax was not conveyed and made public knowledge. This led to a growing frustration about the new leader among many members of the *dhobi* community who do not feel represented and start to question their leaders' legitimation: '*I am not fighting for our leaders. I fight for the dhobi!*' (M. Kannaujiya, Sonapura, February 24, 2015). Moreover, the will is expressed to reunite the community along different lines and boycott all leaders in order to strengthen position of the community in the process of implementation: '*We have to unite against the leaders to reunite!*' (M. Kannaujiya, Sonapura, February 24, 2015).

The leadership question was also subject in various *panchayat*-meetings. The talk about a tax discredited the new leader, and the political figure heading the *Kalyan Mahasabha* today only speaks for a minority of washermen. So far there is no solution to this problem, but washermen have decided to call a *panchayat* meeting of all washermen, rural and urban, to discuss this question and come up with an elected leader that will again unify the entire community - be it one of the two contesting persons or a fresh leader who will continue the task of negotiation with the city administration about the construction of new *ghats*.

Although the schism due to leadership conflicts represents a major obstacle in the implementation process the attempts to solve the conflict also shows the capability to cope with it. In this context the traditional network systems play a significant role and may be critical in working towards a reunification. They are used as communication platforms that can be used to discredit leaders abusing their power or neglecting collective decision-making processes.

4 The limits of caste politics

The implementation of the GAP highly influenced the *dhobi* community in Varanasi during the last 30 years. In order to cope with its impacts the community calls on its vital network structures: traditional and political. As such, the community seems to be ready for a renewed resistance shall the need arise. It is evident that many community members have clear political views about how to deal with the city administration and believe that collective political action is necessary. The invention of history and the figure of St. Gadge can be seen as a vehicle to enhance and strengthen this process and to increase the influence of the community in the planning and construction process of new washing

places and its negotiation power with Nagar Nigam. Further, the traditional network structures help to resolve conflicts that rise in the community and strengthen the position of the *dhobi* in the planning process.

The experience of the washermen of Varanasi resembles the argument put forward by Akhil Gupta (2012) in the context of national poverty alleviation policies. Gupta identifies three major elements embedded in the administrative levels of the nation state (national, provincial and district) that are responsible for the persistence of poverty in India. The first reason is, what Gupta calls, '*the scandal of the state*' (Gupta 2012, 4). By neglecting the fact that poverty and its '*life-denying consequences*' exist in a high manner but are not regarded as a status that requires massive state intervention, the state normalises poverty. Secondly, Gupta objects to the usual explanations for the continuity of poverty such as the exclusion of poor from development projects, democratic policies and cultural citizenship. He argues that instead '*the paradox of the violence of poverty of India*' consists of the persistence of poverty despite the inclusion and participation of the poor in national projects (e.g. elections) (Gupta 2012, 6). Thirdly, Gupta blames bureaucratic action and endemic corruption for the systematic and repeated production of arbitrary outcomes in development or welfare projects. Consequently, the state and his administrative levels fail in their function and are seen as a critical factor for the persistence of poverty that is posed by Gupta as a form of 'structural violence'. As Gupta put it: '*The smooth operation of bureaucracies thereby depends not only on Weberian bureaucrats performing their roles, but also on those people who are the objects of their intervention performing their structurally given roles*' (ibid, 190); i.e. the poor as a population category perform their structural roles of 'being poor' in the day-to-day running of state bureaucracies.

In the context of the project of constructing inner-city *ghats* through development funds in Varanasi, Gupta's work is useful to explain the arbitrary outcomes of the planning process. Instead of accusing single officials at the Nagar Nigam, it is rather the capriciousness of development projects and the way they are carried out that led to the present impasse. The representation of the *dhobi* as main polluters of the Ganga through the GAP and the subsequent endangerment of their wellbeing without providing an alternative were instrumental. Although the *dhobi* successfully protested for the integration of their needs and the second phase of the GAP aimed to overcome the former programmatic shortcomings, the present situation shows quite clearly that the city administration and its bureaucracy fails to fulfil its function to facilitate the construction of new *ghats*. Following the viewpoints of the washermen the Nagar Nigam as a state institution might reasonably be perceived as arbitrary, indifferent and corrupt and can be made responsible for the delay. The community, although being somehow part of the project, faces a structural obstacle that roots in the normalisation and neglect of poverty through the Indian state. In order to tackle this problem the washermen can only rely on their capacity to quickly mobilise all members for protest as they have done repeatedly in the past. They are well aware of the necessity to be 'all-time prepared' and ready to react upon the capricious shifts in the city administrations attitude towards their work at the Ganga.

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Fig. 1: Collectibles gathered during the daily routine are carried away by hand-driven carts (Möckel 2015)

Livelihood security strategies of the *dom* sweeper in Varanasi

Keywords: Livelihood security, Affirmative action, *Dalits*, Faith-based communities

1 Introduction

Whenever state institutions fail to provide security for people's livelihoods they are forced to come up with alternative strategies themselves. In India, welfare state institutions face the challenges of an omnipresent hierarchical social order that is based on the marginalisation of great parts of society. Although there have been political attempts to undermine the role of caste, the vast majority of *dalits* ('broken' people) continues to be marginalised socially, politically and economically. Affirmative action programmes (e.g. reservations) started in the 1950's but often failed to adequately identify those in need of state support. These programmes generally only benefited a small portion among the hundreds of millions of *dalits* (de Zwart 2000, 14; Sheth 2006, 1094).

It is non-state institutions that have emerged in response to the lacking welfare-promotion by the state, especially since the 1990s with the onset of economic liberalisation policies in India (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2010). In addition to civil society organisations (CSOs) especially faith based organisations (FBOs) and local faith communities have increasingly become important players in the context of development politics. A survey by the UN Research Institute for Social Development from 2010 suggests that FBOs in South Asia '*play an important role in people's daily strategies of survival by being in and of themselves repertoires of social networks and connections*' (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2010, 10). In this article it is aimed to assess the livelihood security strategies of a sweeper community in Varanasi, a social group that is assigned with the stigma of untouchability. A number of strategies have been identified that are leveraged by the group in question, but it appears that conversion to Christianity is the most striking one.

It will be shown that the results of this study match the assumptions made in literature about the adopted role of local faith communities as non-state welfare promoters. The article seeks to explain how a certain Christian community actually succeeded to provide the assets for improved livelihoods of its converted members.

In the first section an overview of the official attempts aiming at equalising 'backward castes' is given, followed by an explanation of why these policies of affirmative action have largely failed. After introducing the study group as a caste in the second section, the third part analyses the different livelihood strategies among sweepers' households.

The examined possibilities for safeguarding livelihood assets are not equally promising. It will be shown that education and (social) networks have a rather limited scope in terms of securing households' livelihoods. A more important provision of security is generated through wage labour; however it is lacking a function for social advancement. Hence, the article seeks to illuminate factors and processes that restrict these security sources and result in the success of religious conversion in the study area.

2 Policies on 'backward castes'

In order to support deprived groups the Indian Constitution provides reservations of 27% of government jobs and educational institution placements to so-called scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backwards classes (de Zwart 2000, 235 , Gupta 2005, 417). Half of India's population belongs to these 'socially and educationally backward classes'. After India's independence these affirmative action policies were implemented to address the needs of groups defined in such manner. However, obtaining information necessary at the individual level to implement these policies correctly was too expensive for the government. As a result it addressed the affirmative action to lower castes as a general category because "*in India economic backwardness is often a result and not the cause of social evil. [And] to combat this evil, therefore affirmative action had to benefit castes*" (de Zwart 2000, 241). The policies of affirmative action address castes as a homogeneous group because information on castes was already available through the many censuses conducted by the British colonial power. Although affirmative action policies are addressed to 'socially and educationally backward classes', these are not officially defined by the government. Only 20% of India's population belongs to the defined category of 'scheduled castes and scheduled tribes'. They are entitled to 15% of the jobs in public institutions and places of higher education.

Therefore 30% of India's population (the approximately 386.6 million people who belong to the 'socially and educationally backward classes' but cannot be further defined) are entitled to affirmative action benefits corresponding to 12% of public service positions and the equivalent number of higher education places. This equates to only thousands of jobs available to employ millions of people. The benefits of affirmative action are therefore spread so thin among the 'socially and educationally backward classes' that most people never experience any effect. Furthermore, the allocated quotas were being consumed by the more powerful among the backward classes which led to subsequent demand for further quotas within existing quotas (de Zwart 2000, 235-245).

3 Sweepers in Varanasi - social status and professional practice

The city of Varanasi attracts millions of pilgrims and national and international tourists each year and is home to approximately 1.3 million people. The waste produced by those masses is ubiquitous and visible in every small lane and street as well as at the riverside of the *Ganga*. The waste management is performed by about 10,000 sweepers belonging to social groups (*dom, mehtar*) considered as polluting and 'untouchable' in the Indian caste hierarchy.

Caste is a concept that sustained communitarian identities over time and defines certain groups as ethnically, culturally and socially distinct from other groups. It also held the various communities together embedded in a wide network of hierarchies. Untouchable groups did not have an assigned role in its system of production and exchange which led to increasing economic deprivation and forced them to live in a situation of moral and social exclusion. The untouchable groups are mostly involved with work perceived as 'unclean', which prevented upward mobility. Nowadays caste has lost some of its meaning as a ritual-status group but survived as a 'community' (Sheth 2006, 1087-1091).

The sweepers in Varanasi still live in close-knit localities called *basti* (Hindi for colony) strictly separated from other castes. Even if caste-members do not work in the sweeping business they tend to remain in the same location. Varanasi as a city is still growing therefore the amount of sweeping work needed will still increase in the future. Nevertheless the demand for sweeping work is not proportional to the population growth of the sweepers so additional sweepers were hired by the city administration (*Nagar Nigam*).

In some towns the authorities have been able to insulate themselves almost entirely from state directives relating to the working conditions of sweepers by increasing the number of temporary employed sweepers as a less protected category of workers. In Varanasi the *Nagar Nigam* serves as the public employer of sweepers and defines the working conditions as laid down in a general way by the state government. The task of a sweeper comprises of sweeping of the city streets and *ghats* and collecting and disposing of garbage, as well as the cleaning of drainages. Each sweeper employed at *Nagar Nigam* is officially responsible for the cleaning of an area of exactly 111,48 square meters and attached to a sub-office which supervises several areas (Chatterjee 1980, 269-284). The size of a cleaning area is the same for men and women employed at *Nagar Nigam* and there is no difference in payment (Chatterjee 1977, 196). It is a pensionable job and permanent employment with the city administration is highly sought after.

As a matter of fact most of the sweepers at *Nagar Nigam* are permanently employed. They are paid monthly and have the rights to clothing supplies every summer and winter, 14 days of 'casual' leave, one month 'privilege' leave, one day off per week, 12 months sickness leave in a lifetime but not more than one and a half months at a time, pension when they retire and for women 42 days maternity leave for up to three children. However, these conditions are not always met on time and weekly holidays are often cancelled when important figures visit the city. A common practice is to pass on the permanent employment to a family member who is not yet permanently employed when someone in possession of a permanent status passes away or retires.

However, many teenage sweepers who enter their working life at *Nagar Nigam* are only temporary employees and hence not entitled to the conditions mentioned above (Chatterjee 1980, 274-275). Sweepers are also employed in banks, universities or other institutions where they may earn a higher salary than municipal sweepers but are not entitled to pensions. It is only in rare cases that a sweeper is promoted to the position of a supervisor in charge of larger city area. This demonstrates that there is no special policy to promote social mobility in relation to supervisor jobs (Chatterjee 1974, 1978-1979). Sweepers who are not employed by the *Nagar Nigam* work in private households where they clean the drains in the garden or inner courtyard or do certain kinds of garden work. It is common for sweepers to work in addition to their municipal job for up to ten private households. Sweepers working in private households do not receive pension or fixed holidays but are generally given leave on festival days (Chatterjee 1980, 276).

Sweepers of one caste reside all over the city in different segregated colonies but are culturally and socially a community. Sweepers from different castes in Varanasi form a professional community with same interests when referring to overall working conditions. Unions are formed that lobby to improve working conditions and ensure that the workers rights are upheld. Due to the high demand for their services in urban areas sweepers have

been able to secure certain legal rights (Chatterjee 1977, 194-200) and have succeeded in obtaining a doubling in wage rates, reduction of the working day to seven hours, introduction of a regular weekly holiday, festival days, expansion of the work force and general improvement of conditions in terms of services and special facilities (Chatterjee 1974, 1979). However, it will become apparent that their current working conditions have stagnated when compared to the achievements of the 1970s. In particular, the study group of *dom*-sweeper is lacking adequate working facilities and promotions of security in high degrees.

Unlike other 'untouchable' groups such as the *chamar*-caste, the *dom*-sweepers in Varanasi have struggled to find their place in post-Independence India. They were never keen to adapt the behaviour of higher castes in a process of 'sanskritisation' or attempted to claim a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Among the *dom* divorces are permitted, as is the remarriage of widows, the eating of pork meat and drinking of alcohol. Sweepers are not likely to leave their traditional occupation in order to gain a higher social status because of the high benefits that come along with their work. Until very recently there were no endeavours to escape their untouchable status through religious conversion as was the case among many *dalit* groupings in post-independence India (Chatterjee 1974, 1978, Schaller 1996, 95). However, the recent mass-conversions to Christianity that occurred among the *dom* only during the last three years may not be explained by solely escaping untouchability but are likely motivated by other reasons that are further examined over the following.

4 Methodology

The research conducted for this study aimed to assess livelihood strategies pursued at the household level. The analysis established different types of strategies and revealed the obstacles people face in their quest for social and professional advancement.

The research-approach made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods with a major focus on interviews with household members of the *basti*. Altogether 25 open interviews were conducted with men and women aged from 28 to 60 years. In addition a questionnaire-based household survey was conducted with all 84 households of the neighbourhood. In combination with the information of the interviews a social mapping of the study area was carried out in order to visualise the social and professional structure of the *basti* (Fig. 8.1).

5 Livelihood security strategies among the *dom* of *Durga Kund*

The research area of the *basti Durga Kund* is situated in southern Varanasi and was established as a *dom*-settlement about 80 years ago. The expression *dom* refers to their caste affiliation which in Varanasi is traditionally related to the burning of the dead at the *Ganga*. Today the *dom* who control activities at the burning *ghats* are transformed into a caste group of its own. *Dom*-sweepers have switched to sweeping after the municipal corporation *Nagar Nigam* had introduced a quota for this profession. The area of the *dom-basti* covers about 4,480 square meters and accommodates 541 inhabitants in 87 households (Fig. 8.1).

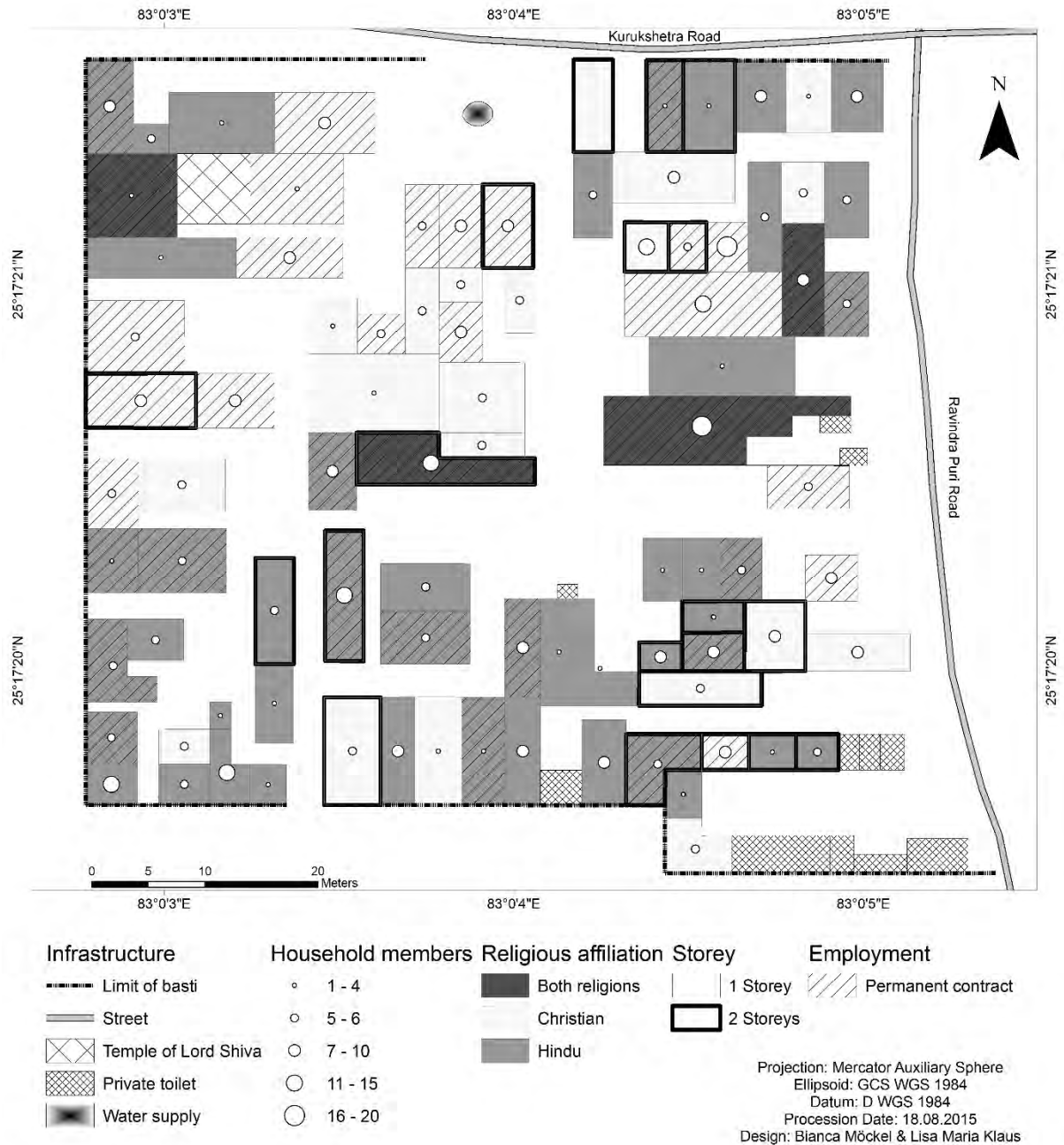


Fig. 8.1: Sweepers basti, Durga Kund

Livelihood security strategies were analysed on a household level whereby the following attributes emerged as especially important: 1. economic activities (wage labour), 2. human capabilities (mainly education and health) and 3. social networks.

Figure 8.2 illustrates the conceptual framework that was developed during the field research. The centre of the Figure comprises structures that determine the social status of the *dom*-sweeper which is primary shaped by family structure and caste affiliation. However, national, federal and municipal politics as well as the legislation contribute to their standing in society. The green arrows indicate the room for manoeuvre available to sweepers within this social setup. They correspond to the major strategies that are being leveraged in order to establish livelihood security and enable social mobility. Livelihood

security is thus mainly constructed through work activities, education, (social) networks and religious conversion. However, the strategies are limited by various factors as illustrated in the red frame and they are used in very different ways across interviewed households, either individually or in combination.

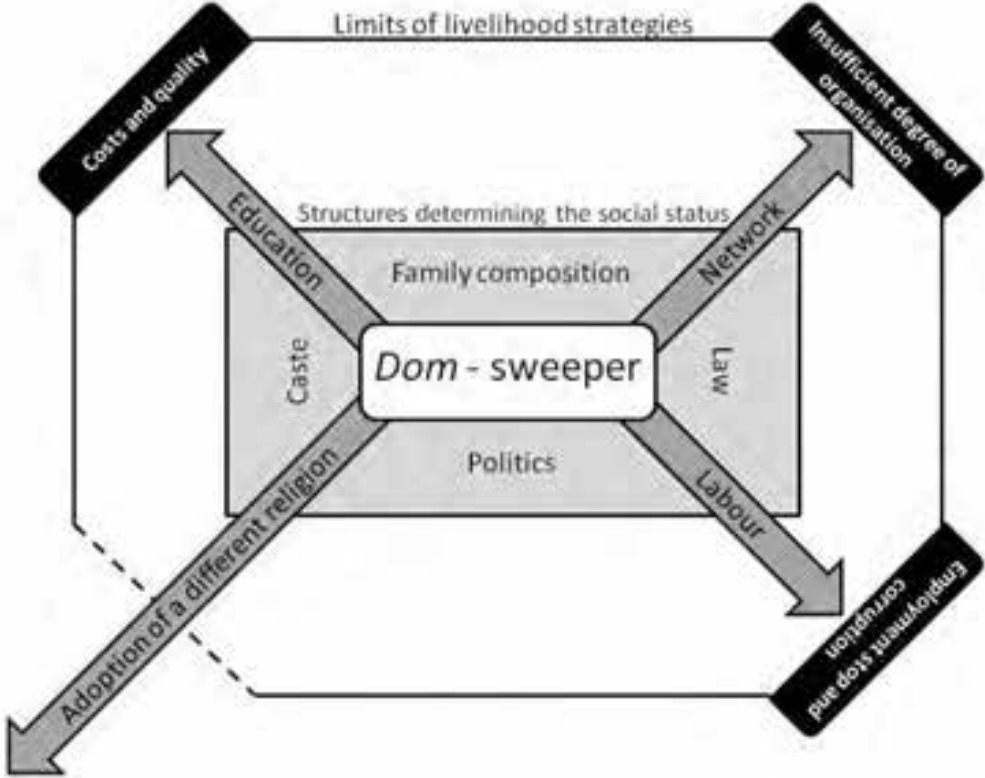


Fig. 8.2: Conceptual framework (Source: own design)

5.1 Work activities

The general professional structure of the *basti* residents is very homogenous with only 0.5% of surveyed wage earners not employed as a sweeper. There were no gender disparities identified in terms of sweeper work. However, the households' economic situation is heavily influenced by the type of job contract their members hold. The average number of breadwinners per household is two while the average household has six members. The majority of the *dom*-sweepers have temporary contracts at the municipal corporation *Nagar Nigam* (Fig. 8.1). Only 25% of the *dom*-sweepers are employed on a permanent contract at *Nagar Nigam*. However, permanent contracts are unanimously favoured by the *dom* as they result in a salary which is five times higher than those of temporary employed workers. Secondly, permanent employees have health insurance and a right to pension whereas temporary employees can be made redundant at any time and are often forced to work another job on a private basis to secure their family's well-being. As a consequence many sweepers clean private houses or work to clean temples on half-day basis and in addition to sweeping as part-time temporary employees for *Nagar Nigam*. These are unsatisfactory conditions when compared to permanent contract holders' and professional

advancement is sought in the way of getting a permanent contract. The highest position people of the *basti* hold are supervisors of sweeper teams. Their task is to check the presence of all sweepers in a certain area (usually around 20 persons) and forward complaints to the municipality if there are any.

Research findings suggest that every sweeper is pursuing the ultimate goal of getting a permanent contract. However, there are several factors that prevent most sweepers from realising this objective. Firstly, the *Nagar Nigam* suddenly ceased issuing permanent employment contracts in 2008 due to financial reasons and has stopped converting any temporary contracts to permanent employment. Secondly, bribery is reportedly very widespread within the municipal corporation resulting in employment of so-called 'non-caste sweepers' who apply with fake records, certifying a greater experience. Moreover, even if a person holds a permanent contract the nature of work is potentially health threatening as the vast majority of sweepers still uses basic, self-made equipment for waste collection. They are not provided with proper gloves or masks for the cleaning of drainages and often not even with shovels. Hence, as the source of financial security wage labour plays a crucial role for the creation of livelihood security of the *dom*. Nevertheless, it fails to enable social advancement due to the politics of the city administration and poses a threat the workers' health due to the reportedly precarious work conditions

5.2 Educational strategies

Education represents another strategy aimed at securing household security. Some parents invest into their children's future by sending them to school as long as possible. Most of the interviewees started working as a sweeper already at the age of ten to twelve in order to contribute to household incomes. However, in households whose children attend secondary schools or even universities additional breadwinners are lost. This explains why not many households put too much emphasis on education.

The decision to invest in education is also significantly influenced by the perceived poor quality of government school education and the high and mostly unaffordable financial costs associated with the attendance of private schools. Among surveyed households there were only 16 children attending private schools out of in total 106 who were attending primary school which corresponds to 15%. Reportedly, teachers of government schools are often absent and children are not provided with food as promised. Parents must also be able to afford books and school uniforms after 8th grade which is an additional financial burden for the family. Those parents who send their children to school unanimously claimed that the high costs for education constitute their biggest monthly expense apart from food. Although there ought to be affirmative action programmes that allocate scholarships for *dalit* children there is only one such incidence in the entire *basti*. The relative neglect of education among sweepers also has to do with the fact that being educated is not a decisive asset for obtaining a higher position as a sweeper. Here, work experience is perceived as more helpful than higher education. Consider the case of one of the resident supervisors who went to school only for two years whereas his brother with ten years of schooling only holds a temporary job contract. Such examples are disheartening for many and explain the prevalent critical stance towards education and lead most parents to send their children to work already at an early age. As aiming a high

level of education is a costly undertaking which does not necessarily result in a higher social status education as a capability does not create enough incentives. Investment into education might be worthwhile in the long term but fails to promote security in the present and must therefore be described as a non-strategy of the *dom*.

5.3 Networks

Social networks represent another component for the creation of livelihood security. Generally, the community of the *basti* is perceived as very important and can be seen as a network in itself. For instance children are very often looked after by neighbours when parents are at work. Some respondents stressed that the identification with the *basti* is more important for them than the identification with their professional group. Two elected persons function as community leaders representing the *basti* whenever the community poses demands to the municipality. Requirements for the sweeper settlement at *Durga Kund* are mainly infrastructural and comprise the construction of new sanitation, stones for paving paths and improvement of the electricity supply.

Apart from the informal *basti* network, there are two types of formal networks the *dom*-sweepers are engaged in. Firstly, there is a 'dom-caste' committee (*panchayat*) meeting irregularly to solve caste related issues like family disputes or wedding issues. Secondly, there is the workers union. In total, 45 sweeper *bastis* are associated within the union that was established in partnership with the municipal corporation in 1959. Of the 10,000 sweepers of Varanasi, around 2,500 appear to be actively engaged in the union. Its main requests address unpaid salaries and the freeze in issuing permanent contracts as well as the absence of wage increase. The provision of cleaning equipment like gloves and proper tools for sweepers is another demand of the union. In spite of their many years of service the majority of the sweepers are not given promotion with a permanent contract by *Nagar Nigam*. Hence, career prospects are another contentious issue between the union and the city administration. However, the realisation of their demands often fails due non-cooperation on the side of *Nagar Nigam*. Reportedly, available vacancies are regularly allocated unofficially through the municipal corporation and the established successor arrangement is often not followed.

While most inhabitants are aware of the work of the *dom*-committee and the union the majority of the *basti*'s dwellers are not actively engaged. The findings from interviews suggest that political organisation is not perceived as a way to improve one's living conditions. However, some sweepers also explained that the low level of education and widespread addiction to alcohol among community members are responsible for the unwillingness to engage socially and politically. Thus, while the community feeling within the *basti* contributes to their inhabitants' social well-being, formal networks do not display a source of social security.

5.4 Religion

The most striking finding during the field research was the high number of religious conversions that took place in the *Durga Kund basti* only very recently. It was found that 44.2% of the households converted to Christianity within the last three years. In terms of population this figure refers to 244 inhabitants in *Durga Kund* that have become Christians.

The newly formed Christian community of the *basti* has established its own church in a nearby building where they rent a room for services and events. The parish comprises of around 120 active members that regularly attend services. The location is decorated modestly but comprises two huge posters depicting a portrait of Jesus and some of the church members.

The priest is a young Indian man residing in close neighbourhood to the *basti*. Although he denied being part of a certain confession or sect, he admitted having been evangelised by Baptists from the US. After giving up his former lifestyle marked by 'petty crime and alcohol problems' and turning to Christianity, he is 'eager to pass his convictions to others'. According to the interviewee the inhabitants of *Durga Kund basti* are known for their blind faith, heavy drinking, gambling and violent quarrels. Those impressions and a personal relation to the neighbourhood determined his decision to start evangelising the *dom*-sweepers.

Conversions started around three years ago when he began visiting the neighbourhood for the first time. Although the personal reasons cited by *dom* respondents for converting were homogenously described only in a very vague way the data allows some interpretations. When being asked for the reason of their conversion a lot of people named *bhoot-pret* (bad spirits/ the devil) that they were suffering from. These bad spirits have to be understood as physical restrictions (e.g. infertility), addictions (e.g. alcohol) as well as financial difficulties. Commonly these problems are attended to by a local exorcist (*ojha*) belonging to the *dom* community but apparently this person was not able to find a cure. In contrast, both the priest and many other interviewees reported sudden physical and mental improvement after converting to Christianity. The converted sweepers have adopted common Christian rites that are being taught by the priest. These include joint praying within their families, the celebration of Christian festivals and baptisms at the riverside of the Ganga. At the same time the interviewees claimed to have stopped Hindu traditions such as offerings of food and money for the gods.

Although respondents in most cases assigned themselves to one of the two religions, hybrid belief systems are practiced too. Some among the converted respondents take part in Christian rituals (like Sunday services) but likewise continue both cultural and religious Hindu traditions. This refers to the way of dressing, putting on make-up and jewellery or celebrating Hindu festivals such as Shivaratri.

Nearly all of the Christian households started to put Christian symbols on their houses such as painted crosses and pictures of biblical figures decorating the inner walls. However, the style of these decorations strongly resembles the pictures and artefacts of Hindu Gods. Most of the Christian households owned a bible written in Hindi although some were not able to read it. It was further found that the church is providing health promotion for their members. Financial support is reportedly channelled through a foreign umbrella organisation or sect. However the case, the money received from abroad is used for doctors' visits and medical treatment among the church community. The church also serves as a classroom where reading and writing classes take place for children of *Durga Kund* and other nearby *bastis*.

Although no actual proof could be found it is likely that the Christian umbrella organisation is providing financial support for their new church members. The majority of the Christian houses among the *dom* had newly built floors and a lot were freshly renovated (Fig. 8.1). Given the fact that the vast majority of *Durga Kund* inhabitants practice the same profession, the rather obvious greater wealth that quite suddenly appeared among the new Christians supports the argument of support from abroad. All in all, being part of the Christian community indeed seems to be a successful strategy for the *dom*-sweepers to improve their livelihood security, at least on a short-term basis.

6 Christian communities as new welfare promoters?

The results of our study suggest that conversion to Christianity is perceived as a way to solve both personal problems such as health issues but also to overcome caste related stigmatisation. There are less rules and traditions that have to be followed when compared to Hinduism. People stated that the otherwise very costly dowry in marriage negotiations is now voluntary while at the same time inter-caste marriages have now become theoretically possible. Although an end of caste stigmatisation might remain a mere hope that might be bound to fail due to social and political realities, the new religious community is capable of delivering important components of a securer livelihood. It creates a new and religiously defined social network that appears integrative and supportive for its members. Neither the 'caste community' in form of the *panchayat* nor other networks like the workers union enable social cohesion. The religious community however serves as a space for exchanging hopes and worries, finding social and medical support and accessing education. Thus, it manages to close a gap initiated by an absence of public welfare promotion. While these are very recent impressions it remains to be seen whether those features of Christian faith-based communities succeed to establish as a strategy for livelihood security also in a long term, especially when dependent on resource flows from abroad.

Nevertheless, the research findings suggest that faith-based communities have gained increasing significance in development and community politics among the sweeper of Varanasi. Faith-based community development may be characterised as social capital to the extent that it builds on relationships within the community of interest and then expands these relationships to include external individuals, associations, and institutions. When religious institutions join with labour unions, schools, banks, and other enterprises, the chances for transforming the community increase dramatically beyond what typically occurs when 'top-down' planning approaches are imposed by external agencies. Hence, there is a significant multiplier effect for faith-based community development in such contexts (Kemper and Adkins 2005, 95).

In the case of the sweepers more research is needed in order to better understand the structures within the new faith based community. For now it remains unclear who is the actual organisation working in the background, and what the new parishioners are expected to contribute in exchange for the benefit of financial and health support by the church. It also remains an open question if the Christian community is really able to improve people's living conditions in a sustainable way. These questions demand further

inquiry to adequately confirm the success of faith based communities as development promoters among untouchable groups.

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Fig. 1: Statue of Dr. Ambedkar in front of Durga Kund Chamar Basti (Polster 2015)

Life as politics in Durga Kund Chamar Basti, Varanasi

Keywords: Varanasi, Chamar, Political organisation, Caste discrimination, Minorities, Social groups

1 Introduction - The Chamar as an untouchable group

The Chamar form the largest caste community amongst India's so-called Dalits¹⁷, also labelled as the untouchables or - in government terminology - scheduled castes. Known under different names and divided into several sub-castes, the Chamar can mainly be found in Northern and Central India. In the federal state of Uttar Pradesh, where the city of Varanasi and the Durga Kund Chamar Basti are located, they also represent the biggest group among Dalits (Ciotti 2006). The term Chamar is derived from the Sanskrit word *chamakara*, which translates to *leather worker* (Singh 1993). In the past the large majority of the Chamar earned their living as tanners, shoemakers and, as the names says, leather workers - professions that were referred to as impure and polluted. Hence, in the Indian caste system the Chamar were depicted as untouchable and stigmatised as an immoral and inferior community. As a result, their access to educational institutions, temples or general government services has been strongly restricted and constitutes a permanent obstacle for an equal participation in Indian society (Ciotti 2006). Suffering from such high levels of discrimination, Dalits have been part of a recent process of political mobilisation to achieve social uplift, while their shared history of experienced discrimination and claims to (constitutional) rights enables them to construct a unified Dalit identity (Kaviraj 1997).

In this continuing process of mobilisation different strategies have been followed by the Dalit communities whereas the Chamar are considered as the most successful and advanced amongst these groups in terms of their integration in educational institutions and government jobs via affirmative action laws (Ciotti 2006). Referring to influential personalities who belong to the Chamar community, such as Saint Ravidas¹⁸ and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati, certain authors describe the Chamars' outstanding political engagement as one of their secrets of success (Lynch 1969, Indian Mirror 2015, People groups of India 2015). These leaders, representing success in the struggle for equity and against caste discrimination, seemed to have had a major impact on self-esteem and collective identity building processes within the Chamar caste. Also,

¹⁷ In response to insulting labels the term Dalit was chosen by untouchable groups as self-ascription. It is a political term derived from the Sanskrit word *dal*, which means *to split* and should remind of the age-old oppression to which these people are exposed (Dalitchristians 2015). According to the census of 2011 Dalits constitute 201 million people in India, not including the large number of Dalit communities who converted to other religions (IDSN 2015).

¹⁸ Saint Ravidas supposedly lived in the 14th, 15th and 16th century as a shoemaker (Chamar) and is considered as an important leader for the Chamar community. He will be introduced in the subsequent sections.

their effort to promote education¹⁹ has been quite effective (Ciotti 2006, Ramakrishan 2007, Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007).

Against this background the present article aims to reveal in what ways the Chamar can be considered as politically engaged and how they are attempting to improve their status in Indian society. Different strategies and processes of mobilisation are analysed by means of a case study in the Durga Kund Chamar Basti²⁰. The Basti is located in the Southeast of Varanasi, around 500 meters north of the Banaras Hindu University. The Basti harbours around 60 households with nearly 400 inhabitants, out of which 90 percent attribute themselves to the caste of Chamar, while the others belong either to the Brahmin community (upper caste) or to other low- and middle-ranking communities (Fig. 9.1).

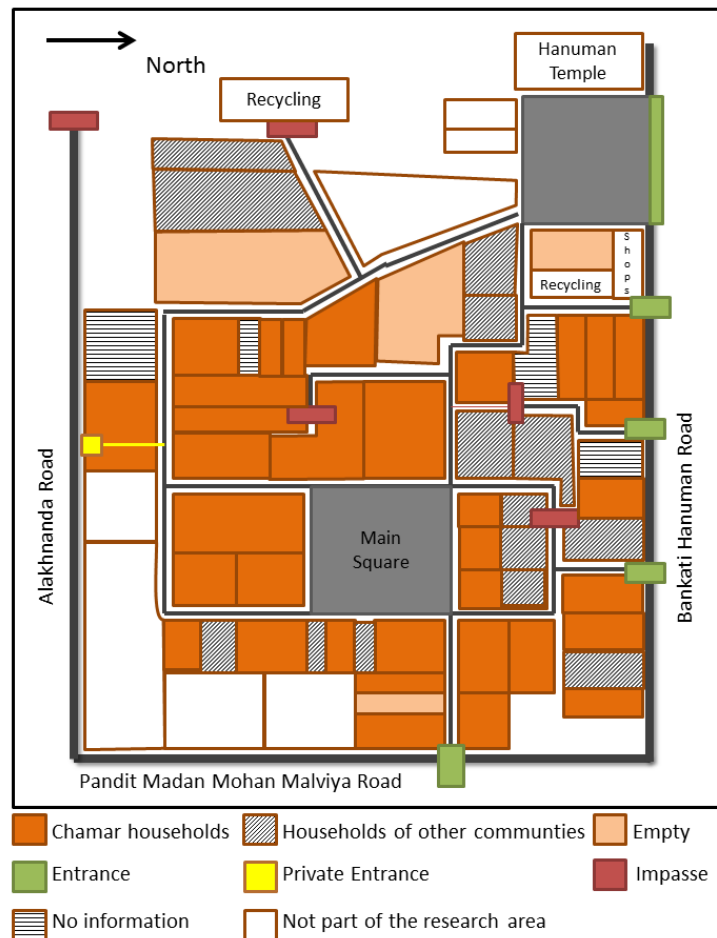


Fig. 9.1: Mapping and population structure of the Durga Kund Chamar Basti. Recycling means collection and processing of waste (Source: own design)

Five small entrances not accessible by car connect the Basti with the surrounding city. The enclosed and private character is underlined by the small alleys leading to the main square, where daily community life takes place. The differences in the housing situation seem to indicate the inhabitants' unequal financial status. While some households live in multi-storeyed ornate houses shared with only a few family members, others inhabit simple tiny shanties with their large family.

In order to gain a first overview a mapping of the area was conducted. The individual households were identified and interviewed using a standardised household survey. Subsequently, ten open qualitative interviews were realised with different representatives and inhabitants of the Durga Kund Basti. Also, the leader and volunteers of the famous Ravidas temple located in Seer Goverdhan Pur in southern Varanasi were interviewed. Observations during fieldwork provided useful information and led to important conclusions for this article. In the following section a conceptual framework will be introduced that

¹⁹ In the context of this article the term *education* is understood as formal education acquired within educational institutions.

²⁰ The term Basti is used by the inhabitants when referring to their neighbourhood. However, as a lower government official explained, some people use the term as synonym to slum area.

helps to interpret the empirical findings in the context of discourses about development, identity and social (non-) movements.

2 Life as politics

"Economic globalization in India has directly benefited only a small slice of the urban population" (Gidwani 2006, 12), and the Chamar have mainly not been part of it. Samuel Huntington (1968) identifies the poor as a possible threat to an existing order or as a destabilising force. Others propose ideas of the passive poor, of people that are only preoccupied with survival and are not able to articulate themselves in a political arena (Lewis 1966). In this article a different point of view shall prevail. What Huntington (1968) and Lewis (1966) identify as "the poor" are in reality very heterogeneous groups of individuals having many more attributes than being poor. The act of reducing people to one attribute, such as poor or underdeveloped, belittles them and defines them as "the others" who are victimised and not able to articulate themselves or to produce anything of value (Esteva 2010). A more appropriate expression is the term subaltern, or in this context urban subaltern. This is a political term referring to the *"politics of the people"* (Guha 1982, 4). It is affiliated to the anti-elitist "history from below" approaches (e.g. Thompson 1963) and has been widely examined through the subaltern studies project that *"began in 1982 as a series of interventions in some debates specific to the writing of modern Indian history"* (Chakrabarty 2000, 467). More specifically, the urban subalterns are people living on the margins of urban society who mainly lack the institutionalised political and economic power to enforce their claims or demands. Nonetheless they cannot be considered poor or apolitical per se, but do rather possess a very distinct kind of political power, which is to be described in the following paragraphs (Ghandour-Demiri 2013).

In institutionalised settings people tend to exert pressure on authorities through formal protest, such as going on strike or demonstrating. These actions would correspond to the idea of conventionally organised social movements, like e.g. environmental movements, anti-globalisation movements or workers unions. However, people that lack this kind of institutionalised power (e.g. informal labourers, housewives) and / or are located in very repressive (e.g. Iran) or mostly unresponsive (e.g. India) political settings need to find other ways to express their discontent (Bayat 2012). According to Bayat (2010 and 2012) this happens through so-called social non-movements that emerge in un-articulated ways:

"[...] [N]on-movements represent the collective action of non-collective actors, who are oriented more towards action than being ideologically driven; concerned more with practice than protest [...]. Unlike the conventional forms of activism, which by definition are extraordinary practices, non-movements are merged into, and in fact are part and parcel of the ordinary practices of everyday life" (Bayat 2012, 124).

It is argued that those collective actions are only in exceptional cases collectively organised, but are in general rather individualistic, meaning that their power mostly arises from the sheer number of urban subalterns simultaneously committing small acts of resistance or articulating their claim to rights of certain spaces through direct action

(Bayat 2010). In this sense, every action that challenges the existing order or power structures is to be understood as political (ibid.). To put it in the words of Ananya Roy: "*Subaltern politics is [...] popular politics and popular culture*" (Roy 2011, 226). Gidwani (2006) argues that even though the urban subaltern are literally able to speak, they do not command speech that is powerful enough to actively change policy or resist opposing forces. This is then another reason why the urban subalterns tend to articulate themselves through direct action, rather than political organisation. In fact most of these actions, such as the building of squatter settlements or the occupation of space for subsistence purposes, are very silent and will thus be weaved slowly into official policy. Consequently, when noticed by opposing forces, it will often be too late to revert or stop them (Bayat 2000).

By making the connection to urban space these ordinary life practices of the subalterns become political in the same sense as expressed by David Harvey: "*The way life gets lived in spaces, places and environments [...] is the beginning and end of political action*" (Harvey 2000, 560). Therefore the political actions of the urban subaltern must take place in the public spaces accessible to them. In an urban setting such as Varanasi, these are mainly streets and squares. For many people streets are indispensable assets of subsistence and cultural life (Bayat 2010), but streets are also territories of conflict and struggle over possession. This is true especially when people occupy streets for subsistence purposes and are using these spaces actively, even though they are supposed to use them only in a passive way through walking or driving (Bayat 2012). Additionally, streets serve as arenas where people "*forge collective identities and extend their immediate familiar circles to include also the unknown, the strangers*" (Bayat 2012, 120). Those identities are influenced by space and social practice, e.g. Chamar leatherworkers repairing shoes in the streets, even though unknown to each other, are part of a passive network and share common attributes. The moment they pass by each other on the street, they will recognise one another through instantaneous communications by means of their communalities, such as carrying around their working tools. They most probably will not engage in active communication but are able to recognise their common (marginalised) position from experience (cf. Bayat 2012). In those spaces communities arise that are able to realise their goals through direct action, without feeling the need or seeing the opportunity to engage in formal politics or form a political group (Dear and Dahmann 2008). Groups that share common identities, spaces or social practice are more likely to unite in moments of retreat or when a common threat arises. In those cases the passive networks might turn into active networks and the formal organisation of a social movement commences (Bayat 2010).

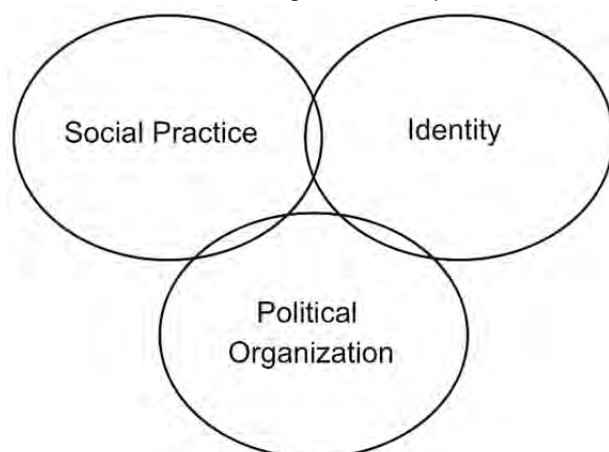


Fig. 9.2: Analytical categories. This three categories do not only overlap but as well influence each other. (Source: own design)

In this article it will be shown to what extent the Chamar of Durga Kund in Varanasi might be identified as a social non-movement and how their collective actions might be described as “life as politics”. It will be assessed how their group identities are forged, how their social practice might be interpreted as political and what role formal political organisation plays in their lives. The relations between those three categories are exemplified in Fig. 9.2. Furthermore it will be shown which strategies are pursued by the Chamar in Durga Kund to overcome social stigmatisation and cast discrimination.

3 Identity

Identity and thus identification as a group is very important for the Chamar in Durga Kund. Many Chamar in Durga Kund are very proud of their heritage and feel that belonging to the Chamar community is their unifying factor. Interestingly enough this feeling ceases when being outside their own living area. The Durga Kund Chamar Basti with only five very small entrances is a very secluded area (Fig. 9.1). This might be traced back to city planning practices that sought to accommodate certain caste groups in their own living spaces, but nowadays people feel that their living area is a safe space. This safe space is constructed

through an inside and an outside. The inside is constituted as a private space, where people communicate freely and interact mainly on the streets or the main square (Fig. 9.3). Many important activities such as group meetings, preparing of food or small scale animal husbandry take place here. The main square is especially important for women and children. It might be described as an extended living room where people engage in common human interactions, and it is also used as a playing ground for the children. The



Fig. 9.3: The main square of Durga Kund Chamar Basti (Nunes Muniz 2015)

The importance of this space was stressed frequently in many interviews. The inside plays a major role in forming group identity and group solidarity. This is in contrast to the outside depicted as unsafe or a space where caste discrimination and social stigmatisation happen. Being part of the inside is compared to being part of a family. At the same time the borders between the inside and the outside are porous and flexible. Members of other castes living inside the area are partly described as outsiders, meanwhile other Chamar living in Varanasi are partly seen as insiders.

Another very important aspect of group identity is the common identification with Saint Ravidas. Saint Ravidas was a Chamar shoemaker living in the 15th Century and is considered among many Chamar in India as a god or guru (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007). Ravidas is referred to as a humble and god-loving man, who despite all opposition of the ruling Brahmin caste taught his followers about equality and the importance of education. Stories about him often include tricks he played on higher castes and once even Mother Ganga came to his aid, which is a sign of his purity and holiness. His followers often associate him with the fight against caste discrimination (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007). Varanasi is the

birthplace of Saint Ravidas and many important places are dedicated to him, such as two big temples, a park and a newly built area of *ghats*²¹ in Nagwa directly at the River Ganga in the southern part of Varanasi. His importance for all Chamar in India was mentioned repeatedly during interviews. Saint Ravidas is not only part of a collective Chamar identity but also outsiders connect him directly to their community. In the eyes of the Chamar in Durga Kund this helps to find a higher position and recognition in the hierarchical order of Indian society. However, even though many Chamar in Durga Kund approve of Saint Ravidas as a spiritual leader, most of them would not visit his temple on other occasions than the main festival in his honour, the Ravidas Jayanti. During Ravidas Jayanti, his birthday is celebrated and many thousands of pilgrims come to Varanasi to celebrate his memory. The festival takes place during the first full moon of the Hindu month Magha²² and is celebrated at the Ravidas Temple in Seer Goverdhan Pur, west of Banaras Hindu University. During those festivities his followers engage in singing, prayers and readings of his teachings. The temple community serves communal meals for all the people in need in Varanasi (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007). Devotion to Saint Ravidas is not contradictory to the worship of other Hindu gods. While other Hindu gods are often consulted for spiritual guidance, Saint Ravidas and his teachings of equality are recurrently referred to as political guidelines. This corresponds to Roy's (2011) idea of subaltern politics being popular culture. Therefore, simply approving of Saint Ravidas teaching appears to be a political decision, challenging the existing social order. Furthermore the yearly pilgrimage of many thousands of people worshipping a Saint that teaches equality and the abolishment of caste discrimination and who is recognised even by members of other castes as a Saint of the Chamar community stands as a symbol for their political struggle for equality. In addition, Saint Ravidas is an example of a new writing of history that includes also the past of the Chamar as subaltern group in Indian history writing. This creation of and insistence on Chamar history is another part of group identity. It is a political statement, contesting the established social order that widely excludes Dalit and Chamar history from the centre of society. The fact that in many prominent locations in Varanasi spaces dedicated to Saint Ravidas were established indicates that the Chamar have been quite successful in their fight for recognition in India.

4 Social practice

Most of the Chamar in Durga Kund do not exercise the traditional caste related profession as leather workers any more. The majority of the male inhabitants nowadays work as labourers; others earn their living as salesmen, rickshaw drivers or in other private occupations. Just one resident remains that still works with leather. The widespread dissociation from the profession as leather worker seems to have different reasons. Replaced by the large scale industrialisation of shoemaking and general leather work in the past the Chamar had to find other occupations, mainly as daily labourers (Fuchs 1976). In addition, the change of profession apparently demonstrates an intentional decision of not

²¹ In Varanasi the main Ghat area stretches over the whole eastern river banks of the Ganga. Ghats are stairs that are used for washing clothes, ritual burning of the dead, animal husbandry, ritual washing, playing cricket or other communal activities.

²² Magha corresponds with the months January/February in the Gregorian calendar.

identifying themselves with an occupation that represents the origin of their discrimination. Therefore, according to Bayat's idea of non-movement, this process can be interpreted as political action with the objective to achieve social uplift and recognition in society.

In line with the teachings of Ravidas a majority of the Durga Kund inhabitants attaches great importance to their children's education. Accordingly most children attend school and youth literacy rates are very high. This is supported by different elected community leaders as well as NGOs that promote the importance of formal education and try to motivate the inhabitants to take care of their children's needs. In consequence just a small amount of the interviewed people indicated not to send their children to school, mostly out of financial reasons. In the generation of parents and grandparents approximately 80 percent of the male inhabitants have at least a primary education whereas the majority of women (60 percent) are illiterate. However, regardless of their degree the women of Durga Kund are usually working as housewives. It is expected that their children will have more prestigious jobs and higher incomes due to their increased levels of education and parents hope to improve their own and their children's living conditions. This strategy has been explained against the background that discrimination nowadays does not solely arise along lines of caste affiliation but also of socio-economic status. Through formal education the Chamar have continuously been seeking to achieve better remunerated jobs. As an example the BSP leader Mayawati was mentioned repeatedly who through higher education could escape the inferior position ascribed to her caste in Indian society.

This increasing trend of ascribing importance to education can also be attributed to the teachings of certain role models, such as Saint Ravidas but also Dr. Ambedkar. Belonging to the Dalit community, Dr. Ambedkar was an influential politician in the beginning of the 20th century. As a very rigorous fighter against casteism and untouchability in India his actions have affected Dalit's living conditions enormously. The fact that practicing untouchability is officially prohibited provides the political mobilisation of lower castes with a legal foundation and enables them to claim their rights. Dr. Ambedkar promoted education for everybody as a tool for fighting discrimination (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007). However, in interviews it was asserted that only when there is a high level of education in the whole Indian society discrimination will come to an end. Following this logic it is important for low-caste communities to educate themselves in order to gain proper respect in society. Nevertheless, people from higher castes need to be educated as well to be able to show respect to others.

At this point it is important to emphasise how Chamar have internalised their upward movement from a backward traditional and subordinated position to an educated modern identity. The strong belief in the education paradigm defines literacy and education as the key factor for community development, and as a tool of social mobility that is needed to overcome inequality. In doing so, Chamar themselves accept the idea of their former backwardness. Even though education by no means automatically guarantees social inclusion, uplift mobility or higher chances to obtain employment, people tend to cherish their new educated identities as opposed to those as traditional non-educated leather workers (Ciotti 2006). In this respect the educational discourse in fact creates new

marginalised groups as became apparent during interviews. Chamar still working with leather were referred to in a derogatory way, stating: "*There are still people [of the Chamar caste] who live like animals*". This new marginalisation also has a spatial aspect inside the Basti where the only person still working with leather does not have direct access to the central places of the Basti. Furthermore, formal education is not evenly spread amongst the Durga Kund Chamar with the effect that the intended homogenising effects of education at the same time create new differences among community members (Ciotti 2006).

Dr. Ambedkar's idea of converting to other religions does not play an important role in Durga Kund. Whereas several oppressed Dalit groups in India tended to change their religion to Buddhism in order to reject the caste system (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007, Lynch 1969) the situation in the Chamar Basti is different. Despite a few Christian households²³ that are located at the northern border right next to a sweeper Basti where a lot of people converted to Christianity quite recently all interviewed households describe themselves as Hindu. Even though many people would go to church on Christmas or sometimes even every Sunday, they still consider themselves as Hindu.

Also the concept of sanscritisation is not followed by the Chamar of Durga Kund. According to this strategy, upward mobility can be achieved by emulating middle or upper-class rituals, practices and lifestyles. An example often described in literature is the education of the younger generation for the purpose of performing their religious rituals by themselves instead of depending on Brahmin priests (Ciotti 2006). However, the inhabitants of the Basti are proud to be able to afford the services of a Brahmin to conduct their religious rituals and life-cycle events. Apparently, people do not seem to reject or contest the caste system as such but rather their prevailing individual or collective discrimination, whether as a result of caste affiliation or socio-economic inferiority.

5 Political organisation

It was shown how the Chamar group identity in Durga Kund is forged and how everyday social practices can be considered political in the sense of Roy (2011) and Bayat (2000, 2010 & 2012). Nevertheless formal political organisation is an important part of life in Durga Kund too. In India many Dalit and especially Chamar find official political representation through the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The BSP was founded in 1984 by the Dalit Leader Kanshi Ram. Its main goals are the "*Social Transformation and Economic Emancipation of the Bahujan Samaj*" (BSP 2012). The Hindi word Bahujan translates to the "majority of the people" (Chandra 2000) and the BSP defines their voters base as all Dalit or Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other communities, such as Muslims, Sikhs or Christians that together account for over 85% of India's population (BSP 2012). Even though the BSP tries to include all these communities as a voter base it is predominantly seen as a party of Chamar for Chamar (Chandra 2000). Accordingly, a majority of Chamar in Durga Kund cast their vote to the BSP and describe it as "the Party of our community". Party leader Mayawati who also belongs to the Chamar

²³ Those Christians households considered themselves as Christian-Hindus. Their identification with Jesus as one of their spiritual leaders could be influenced by the neighbouring sweeper Basti, where many people quite recently converted to Christianity (cf. Möckel and Klaus 2015, also in this issue). A conversion in order to reject the caste system could not be observed.

caste was a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and the most important promoter of building the Ravidas Park and Ravidas Ghat in Varanasi (Times of India 2009). She was mentioned frequently by the Chamar in Durga Kund when asked about political leadership. This very successful formal political representation symbolised by several electoral victories of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh is a factor that separates the Chamar from other Dalit groups in India that mainly have no formal political embodiment. Nevertheless some Chamar in Durga Kund have stated to be very disappointed with Mayawati and the BSP since in their opinion she has not done enough to change their lives for the better. Only a tiny minority of households stated not to vote at all. This result can be interpreted as a high interest in formal politics or as Benjamin (2008, 724) has put it: *"Moving beyond the 'patron client' conception allows us to read this [...] as evidence of a popular political consciousness of how to pressure municipal and state administrations."*

Other formal means of political organisation can be found outside Durga Kund Basti in form of low to middle government officials. These government officials are consulted when problems arise that cannot be solved inside the community or to assist with official bureaucratic requests such as the issuance of voters ID cards. A lower government official claimed to have upgraded the infrastructure in the Durga Kund area by building public toilets, establishing electricity connections and having plastered the streets. In connection with high voting outcomes this might be interpreted as what Benjamin (2008) calls vote bank politics. Lower Government officials in India tend to secure votes by establishing visible infrastructure projects especially in slum areas to secure re-election or public support in pursuit of higher ambitions. In this context the Chamar in Durga Kund are not to be seen as the passive or exploited part of the political trade, but rather as very active voters who could cast their vote to the highest bidder and if promises are not kept would not re-elect that person.

In addition to this institutionalised political organisation other systems have been established by the community. The group of Chamar in Durga Kund have chosen two leaders on the grounds of age and wisdom and higher education. The installation of these two leaders by the Chamar again shows how much the inhabitants of the research area identify as a group. This group identity manifests in problem solving strategies. While some problems that are considered as private are solved domestically others such as conflicts between neighbours that affect the whole group or parts of it are solved collectively through consultation of the two group leaders. In those matters intrusions from the outside are rejected. Only in cases when problems, like complications with the admission to government schools, arise that cannot be solved from the inside people will seek counsel and help from lower to middle government officials or NGO's. In the sense of Bayat (2010) the rejection of intrusions from the outside must be considered as political because it represents a claim to space considered private and belonging to the community. This is one example as to how group identities manifest in direct political action and self-organisation. As argued before and shown in Fig. 9.4, the community space plays an important role in forging a group identity. The actors inside this space are connected through passive or semi-passive bonds, e.g. family relations. These bonds are activated in moments of retreat and when a common goal or need is identified. For instance on several occasions, e.g. during state-wide elections in 2012, a political group called "Ambedkar Kalyan Manch" was formed and an active social movement emerged among the Chamar. This social movement

has been identified by the Chamar in Durga Kund as a powerful weapon to get attention and fight for their rights. It was mentioned that for a fight to be successful many persons will be needed, suggesting that Chamar would have to reach out to other groups or individuals with similar goals. This whole argument is consistent with Bayats (2010) argument of life as politics. The Chamar in Durga Kund are very political, but not in a sense of active social movements and it is certainly not their only preoccupation, but when they identify the need to fight for their rights or claims, they have the capacity to organise and do so. Nevertheless most of their actions connected to political organisation are rather direct and individualistic and not formally organised.

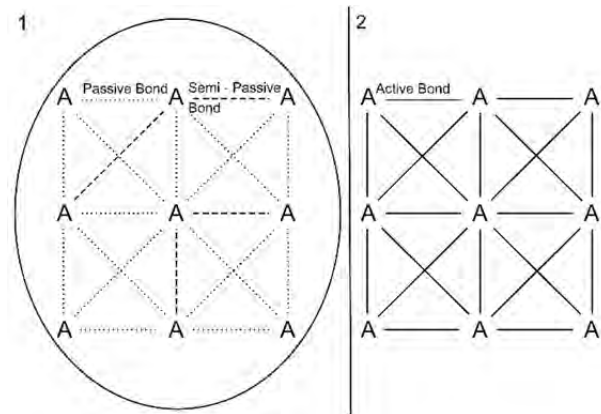


Fig. 9.4: Influence of Space and Identity on possible political organisation in Durga Kund Chamar Basti.
 1: Normal situation: Individuals brought together by space, no organised action is needed
 2: Emergence of a social movement in moments of retreat or when a common goal is identified

(Source: own design, based on Bayat 2010, 23)

6 Conclusion - Life as politics in Durga Kund Chamar Basti

The Chamar of the Durga Kund Basti follow different strategies to overcome hierarchical relations and their inferior position in society. Contrary to the claims of certain literature (e.g. Lynch 1969, Indian Mirror 2015, People groups of India 2015), their mobilisation is not primarily characterised through political involvement and formal organisation. Even though community leaders exist who work as counsellors and representatives of the Basti and communicate the communities' interests and concerns to higher authorities, in general the inhabitants' actions should rather be considered as claim-making actions within the notion of Bayat's social non-movements.

Bayat (2010) argues that those claim making actions are conducted by non-collective rather than collective actors. However, the Durga Kund Chamars are not only united through a shared identity but also their spatially based solidarity, which lets them appear as collective rather than non-collective actors. The process of identity building is therefore influenced by spatial proximity when the Basti is described as a big family where people take care of each other. Yet, it is noticeable that the few inhabitants belonging to another caste (e.g. Brahmin, Yadav, Bania) seem to be less included in the community's living together. A father, belonging to the Brahmin caste, stated for example that he would avoid letting his children play with other youngsters in the Basti because they had bad manners. The shared identity is influenced through the common recognition of Saint Ravidas as an important leader of the Chamar, and intensified by collective practices of worshipping him. This strong identification with Saint Ravidas and his teachings can also be seen as claim-making action to overcome their inferior and inequitable status in society. Even though Dr. Ambedkar does not play an equal important role as a leader he appears to influence the Chamars' direct action. His idea of the importance of education is deeply internalised by the community. The field research has shown that there is a social and

political effort to improve living conditions and status in society. Even though there is no enduring political form of organisation, the inhabitants' actions, intended or unintended, might be interpreted as political and clearly demonstrate their daily struggle for a better life. This does not exclude formal political organisation when a common goal or threat is identified. In that case, the passive or semi-passive bonds become active and the power as a group can be used to insist on their claims and objectives. The common space and group identity play a major role in forming an active social movement.

The dis-attachment from traditional occupations as well as striving for higher education, financial resources and development seem to be the prevalent ideas of how to improve status and living conditions. This reflects a rather common development discourse which characterises underdevelopment as the lack of peoples' effort to improve their situation and neglects the reality of systematic discrimination that is experienced by many marginalised groups in India (Ciotti 2006). Nevertheless, based on the Chamar's perception their actions can be interpreted as a political statement and strategy of challenging hierarchical relations.

The results of this study also respond to the widespread assumption that social development depends on having a directing leadership (Aycan 2002). According to Bayat's idea of non-movements, identity building and emerging social mobilisation through silent claim-making actions supersede this paradigm of leadership as a major necessity.

Finally, this study has illustrated how life itself as politics has helped the Chamar in Durga Kund to improve their status. It was shown to what extent Bayat's concept of social non-movements and life as politics can be applied to another context. Many of his thoughts are reflected in the lives of the Chamar in Durga Kund. Thus this study can also be seen as an important empirical validation of his ideas.

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