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Everyday Movement Patterns of Women in Assi

A socio-spatial approach

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Abstract

This essay seeks to explore the societal institution of caste from a socio-spatial perspective. The focus is on everyday routine of individuals and on the places this routine is connected with. A special interest is the access that different people have to different places. For this purpose, information has been collected from interviews and observations with women of different caste belonging in the area of Assi, Varanasi, India. A time-geographical approach has been used. It is argued that caste, which is a social concept, and space, which is a geographical dimension, are related to each other in a socio-spatial dialectic. The conclusion is that not all castes do have access to the same kinds of places, i.e. some religious or public spaces. Although caste is not the only factor that influences, it still has a major impact on people’s actions and feelings of belonging.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Caste is one of the most basic social institutions in Indian society. Closely connected with Hindu religion and over 3000 years old\(^1\), it has survived both the Moghul invaders who ruled present day North India between the 10\(^{th}\) century and over 800 years onward and the British rule between 1857 and 1947\(^2\). Today the world is changing and there is challenge to the traditional professional and hierarchical order imposed by caste, but it still influences the life of individuals more than what an outsider usually can see at first glance. The caste system implies a hierarchical order between different groups in society and caste belonging is decided by birth. Many castes have a traditional profession (which initially defined them) like the potter, the barber, the vegetable grower or the priest. Some still practice these professions, some do not. In some castes, both men and women participate in the traditional work; in other cases women serve as assistants who enable their men to do the main work. Research about caste has hitherto focused on men, but how women relate to caste and how caste influences their lives are questions of equal importance. Without considering women, conclusions about the whole society cannot be made.

Space can be seen as a mirror of social life and how it is used reflects the society structure. Also, space in itself influences society – we can here talk about a dialectic.\(^3\) This essay seeks to explore how Indian women use space in their everyday life and how it is related to their caste. It will be based on background theory about caste and on an empirical study.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

This study uses a human geographical frame of reference and seeks to explore how caste and space are interrelated. The two concrete questions that are focused upon are

- How do women from different castes in Assi use space in their everyday life?
- What is their everyday movement pattern related to?"

A subordinate question is whether caste membership or any other factor has an impact on the access a person has to certain places. Are there places where some people are supposed to go and others not?

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\(^1\) Caste is believed to have appeared with the Aryan invasions 3500 years ago.
\(^2\) de Blij and Muller (2006) p.385
\(^3\) Gren and Hallin (2003) p. 154
1.2.1 Focus of the study and delimitations

The conclusions in this essay will be based on the analysis of data obtained from eleven interviews along with seven observations. A time-geographical approach has been used. The place of study is the neighbourhood of Assi, an area in the city of Varanasi, India.

Suggested factors that might determine an individual’s use of space are caste, age, family situation and education. Caste will be considered in particular. These variables being different from one person to another, it is assumed that people’s use of space as well as their routine will also vary. Besides these mentioned factors, there might also be others that exert influence. These will, if possible, be considered.

This study is qualitative and does not claim to be representative. It is purposely kept small-scale, in the hope of providing deeper insight into eleven individuals lives and to allow comparisons between these. In order to see if the relations I found out are representative for society as a whole or not, literature studies have been made. I have tried to find respondents who represent the variety of castes in the area. All respondents were women, which was another criterion. They were also all Hindus. They were asked about their morning routine, that is, what they do every day from when they wake up until noontime, and where they do these things, and why. The morning routine was chosen as this is usually the same every day and would allow a better comparison between individuals than asking for information about a whole day. In the afternoons, a person might be freer and have more variation on different days which would have given too much data.

As mentioned, I have chosen to explore the above question with the help of a human geographical frame for understanding. The topic, however, dealing with women in the caste hierarchy, implied also a lot of references to sociologist and feminist literature. Especially the chapter about caste is of course inspired by sociological books.

1.3 Disposition

First, I am going to give an account of the human geographical methods that have been used to generate qualitative data through different field studies. I will describe how interviews and observations were structured and according to what principles the respondents were chosen. A special focus will be on the difficulty of culture meetings and how this affects the reliability of results. The theoretical part consists of an introduction to the situated knowledge of geography and to time-geography, but mostly of a description of caste as a basic concept in Indian society; its history, significance to women and how it is expressed in space. To exemplify, a kind of mythological “body-geography” will be described, as well as caste related settlement patterns. Finally, some remarks about text and context are added. The empirical part consists of a description of the interview results. In the analysis, three spheres (domestic, ritualistic and outside-the-home-employment) are identified and the influence of variables like education, age, family situation and caste is discussed. In the conclusion there will be an answer to the research question and further research suggestions.
As appendixes there are a list of Hindi words (to facilitate understanding), a map that shows the distribution of the homes of the respondents in Assi area, a list of the interview questions and the descriptions of all the eleven interviews. These will be helpful for understanding as the findings of this essay are based on them.
2. Method

2.1 What is knowledge?

The purpose of any science is, as we all know, to produce knowledge, and to relate different “pieces” of knowledge with each other. In the following I am going to concentrate on the methods of gathering information that have been used in this study and explain the perspectives and tools with which the information has been analyzed.

2.1.1 Abductive knowledge seeking

The aim of study is to connect (mostly written) theory with new, “fresh” data from the field, and to find relationships between these two. The creation of knowledge is a process where new information is gathered and placed within an already existing body of knowledge. This is crucial and there are different ways of doing this. In the abductive method, which I have used, a research question, originating from curiosity, has provided the base and the reason for going out in the field, equipped with a specially designed questionnaire. This proceeding proved to be a good start which though – just as expected – had to be adjusted back and forth as the project advanced. A smaller pilot study, which will be referred to later on, was very helpful here. The following sections will explain the type of qualitative data I collected and some of the difficulties encountered when conducting this type of research in a developing country.

2.1.2 Truth in human sciences

One common problem in research, not least in the humanities that base their findings on rather “soft” data, is to decide whether found connections and conclusions are true or not. If they can logically be connected to premises already commonly and officially stated as “true” or “valid”, then we usually consider the findings as true as well. Logical reasoning is, in consequence, a source of knowledge. So are observations with our five senses. We decide that these observations are valid, although our eyes, ears and other senses can and do cheat us, as will be explained later on. Another source of knowledge, more recognized in the humanities than in rather positivist influenced sciences, is empathy. Empathy allows us to understand how people are feeling, because we can put ourselves in their situation. However, the same caution as with relying on our five senses is needed here. Empathy and observations can vary very much according to cultural background and to who is the observer. This will be more elaborated in the part about situated knowledge, 3.1.

4 Gren och Hallin (2003) p. 36
5 Thurén (1991) p. 16
6 ibid, pp. 45-46
2.1.3 A qualitative study

It is important to note that the aim of this study is not to provide a representative amount of data from which generally valid conclusions can be drawn. It is a qualitative study, which is supposed to give a deeper insight and understanding of the topic; not generalizable facts that can be applied to a whole society. I am going to look at the time-space relations eleven people have in their everyday life, not more and not less. The result will only be valid for exactly these particular eleven persons. Anyway, many of the results, as we will see, fit very well with different theories and findings in other studies, and conclusions and connections can be established.

The use of space seen from a sociological perspective generates very "soft" data, that is, we can find general features, but there will always be exceptions. People do not behave like predictable machines but have their own will and their actions will depend on more reasons than any essay can capture.

2.2 Material used

The book *Caste, its twentieth century avatar* by M. N. Srinivas (1996) has been a basic book for the background of this essay and many references are taken from it. Most general features are still true, in spite of the fact that Srinivas wrote in the 1950ies. His theories are also based on data from South India and often from the countryside, which makes them less useful in an essay about a North Indian city. Nonetheless the results from my essay often fitted very well with the theories in this book. I should also mention that especially the author Leela Dube who is co-author of the book edited by Srinivas, has been important for inspiration to many of the perspectives in this essay, especially in the chapter on women (3.5).

The eleven interviews with residents in Assi form the empirical part which had a major importance. Parallel to them, I made many what can be called informal interviews, that is, I discussed ideas and experiences with different residents, including my assistant, in order to complete my impressions and interpretation. My supervisor in the field, Rana P. B. Singh, has been one of the most important sources of information. Within five meetings he gave me advice for the interviews and helped me with their evaluation. Especially he helped me to put the particular findings into a wider Indian context and to find out which results were representative and which ones were rather exceptional. I am grateful for his comment that most literature in India, including literature about caste, was written by *Brahmin men*. It is important to be aware of this, as it means that theory is not free from influence of both caste and gender.

2.3 The field study

The field study consisted of a pilot study in which I “tested the field”, further of altogether eleven interviews and seven observations. These were then analyzed and compared with theory.
2.3.1 Pilot study
One smaller pilot study was made, consisting of an interview, which was evaluated before I went on with the rest of the interviews. In this first interview I tested the interview technique, found out how it was to work with an interpreter and saw which questions were easy to ask and easy to answer, and which ones were not. Afterwards I eliminated some questions from the question list, as they obviously caused inconvenience to the interviewee. The pilot study interview was made with a young lady from Kahar caste (water carriers) and lasted about 45 minutes. Its results have been included in the empirical part of this essay.

2.3.2 Interviews
Interviews were suitable to get first hand material, and they formed the most important part of the study. Eleven interviews were made, each lasting between 20 and 45 minutes. The interviews had to be quite structured. This because my interpreter had to see the questions beforehand to be able to translate them one by one, which left little space for spontaneous follow-up-questions. Anyway, I managed to add some, and the atmosphere became quite relaxed and more similar to a conversation than to an interrogation. I can say it was semi-structured (see appendix 3). I began with background questions about name, age, caste, family situation etc. Sometimes my assistant could tell me some of these facts beforehand so I did not always have to ask. Then I went on by asking the respondent about her morning routine, the places she visits and how she relates to them. So I went from less sensible to more personal questions. The English summary of each interview is added as appendix (appendix 4) at the end of this essay. I concluded by asking if I could go with her the next morning, just to see the places where she goes.

I rely on my interpreter in that he told me the truth about what the woman answered on my questions. I have no other option but doing so. While they were talking in Hindi, I usually had a good opportunity to observe the respondent’s body language and in this way see how she felt about the question.

2.3.3 Observations
With most of the interviewees I also made an observation, but the observations played a less significant part in the study. This because firstly, it was not possible to make an observation with every individual interviewed, due to various reasons (see appendix 4), and secondly because all observations were of different length, were done at different times in the morning and had very different structure. This makes it impossible to compare them with each other. The function of the observations was rather to confirm that what the person had said in an interview was true and to prevent misunderstandings. As misunderstandings were very common, owing to language and culture problems, this form of “double checking” was indeed useful.

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7 Flowerdew and Martin (2005) pp.119-120
2.3.4 Results and analysis
As a next step, information obtained through the interviews was classified according to features that repeated themselves throughout the interviews. For example, different types of morning activities were found, taking place in different places, at different times. One such sphere is housework, another are religious rituals, etc. In the analysis, the fact whether a person performed a certain activity is in first hand put against the background variable caste, and different caste characteristics from theory are analyzed in order to see whether the behaviour is typical for the caste or not. The behaviour of the different caste members is then compared. Other determining background facts are also drawn upon, such as education and, where possible, wealth.

A time-geographical perspective has been used in the gathering of information (3.2) and a focus will be on the notion of situated knowledge (3.1). I have tried to be conscious about my own perspective during this whole work.

2.4 Being sensible to cultural differences

When conducting interviews in a country that is as entirely different from one’s home country as India is from Sweden, I venture to say that usually something will go wrong in the communication. There will probably be some misunderstandings that are due to both language problems and different cultures. A high degree of openness and sensitivity is needed to be able to deal with this.

2.4.1 Power relations
It is important to note the power relations that are always prevalent in an interview situation, or in any field research situation indeed. Usually the interviewer is in a superior position with respect to the interviewee, and this is particularly true when a westerner is making interviews in a developing country. Being comparatively rich and well-educated and then interrogating a poorer, maybe illiterate person might create tensions, and these were definitely present in many of the cases.

One more power inequality appears when a man is interrogating a woman, which might be perceived as threatening in itself. Me as a female doing interviews with women is actually a good situation, but I worked with a male interpreter most of the time. On the other hand, he knew the respondents from before and had already a good relationship to them.

Apart from gender, other differences may also play a role. Respondents might not be willing to talk about personal things with a foreigner, nor might they want to do so with a person of higher or different caste. My interpreter, of course, belonged to a caste (though not a particularly high one), while with me that question was more unclear.

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8 Flowerdew and Martin (2005) pp.124-126
9 Ibid p.113
2.4.2 The background decides

Indians and Europeans have a very different perspective on many things. Information might have been lost on the way from the respondent, over the interpreter, to me, and vice versa. My respondents have another cultural understanding than I have, due to their background.\textsuperscript{10} So what they say can and will not always be understood by me in the way it was intended to. I have tried to avoid this by discussing every detail with my interpreter; but anyway, something was surely lost. The strong point is that exactly this difference of cultural, religious and experiential background makes my survey more interesting, and as an outsider I might reveal things which an insider might not see or pay attention to.

What I see in an observation depends very much on who I am. My background and previous experience decides what among all seen objects/features I focus my attention on.\textsuperscript{11} I will probably see things which strike me because they are different from what I am used to, or because they, in contrast to what I expected, are similar to what I am used to. If I had had other experiences and expectations, I would definitely have paid attention to other things. Relevant findings are dependent on what I consider as such. So the whole essay will be coloured by my personal previous experience and understanding which is, of course, unavoidable in any scientific essay, especially in the human sciences.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Hofstede (2005) pp. 2-4
\textsuperscript{11} Thurén (1991) pp. 16-17
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid p. 53
3. Theoretical frame

3.1 Geography as situated knowledge

To connect to what was said at the end of the previous section; I want to emphasize again the importance of being conscious of the perspective to which we refer when we produce “objective” knowledge. Knowledge is indeed never objective. The context in which it is produced is equally important as the knowledge itself, whatever it is about. Livingstone (1992:2) argues for

“a contextualist history of geography, one which acknowledges that the nature of geography has always been contested and negotiated; one which recognizes that geography has meant different things for different people in different places; and one which focuses on accounting for how and why particular practices of geography get to be legitimated at different times and in different places.”

This little quotation explains the idea of situated knowledge quite well, an idea that is central also in feminist geography. Knowledge is never pure but defined by the social location of both its producers and audiences. This means, in our case, that considering the production of knowledge by a westerner (Swedish university student) for a western audience (Swedish home university), the acquired knowledge is situated in a western, intellectual environment, despite the fact that the research was carried out in North India and potential audience hopefully will have some background knowledge about the country of its origin. One must be very careful here with generalizing and polarizing. Defining myself as a “westerner” implies the definition of the geographical field of study as part of the “east”, which of course is not a homogeneous entity. Polarizing the world into dualistic entities is very common, not only into geographical regions, and it is part of a very western way of thinking. Without going further into details, I would like to mention a piece of self-critique in this place. The notion of “active” versus “passive” is a dualism often referring to the “west” as active, and the “developing world” as rather passive. The active is often associated with the male, the passive with the female. In the case of this study I, the westerner, could be seen as the active part, doing research on some “other” or “different” subject of study, that is, North Indian people, who in this context get a passive role. This is a matter which typically reflects the value-charged dualism criticized by i.e. Said. It is therefore essential to recognize the active, “subject” nature of the object of study. I have tried to do this.

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14 Haraway (1991) pp. 183-201
16 Young Yun Kim (2003)
18 Cloke, Crang, Goodwin (1999) p. 43
19 Said (1978)
3.2 Time-geography

The idea of time-geography that was introduced by Hägerstrand offers tools for the analysis of people’s movement in space and about their way of using time. It consists of methods useful for the analysis of the position and movement of persons and objects in space and, as the term tells, time. The central idea is that time and space are integrated, which can be depicted in a 3-dimensional diagram. Two dimensions describe the object’s position in space while the third is the time axis. In this type of graphic, i.e. a person’s movement related to time and space can be described (see Figure 1).

As this study focuses on individuals and their movement in space, the time-geographical way of understanding can be useful. But graphics like Figure 1 become difficult to draw when the places a person visits within a considered time are more than, let us say, three or four. And when eventually the road, the lane or the territory the person crosses on her or his way from one place to another, also become centers of interest, then it will be even harder.

There are people who argue that in the area of study there is a weak time discipline compared to North European countries, and that therefore, time-geographical tools are not so suitable. I disagree to this. Most of my respondents, especially those who were employed, knew exactly at what time they had to be in certain places and perform certain actions. Except of + or – 10min, what they said was true, as confirmed in the observations.

![Basic terms in the time-geographical model. r represents an area, big or small, and t the time. An object or individual describes a path/trajectory that consists of stays at different stations (s1 ad s2). (Gren & Hallin (2003) p.121)](attachment:time-geography-model.png)

Figure 1: The time-geographical model
What remains is nevertheless that every individual draws a path in both time and space, regardless of what project he or she is doing. Where somebody performs something, when, and why is equally important to the geographer as why somebody is not performing something, avoiding certain places and the reasons for this. What is done / not done is probably due to the different restrictions that frame an individual’s life. Gren and Hallin (2003) refer to capacity restrictions that consist of, broadly speaking, the practical factors that set limits for a person’s activities, including i.e. biological needs (i.e. food) and access to certain means of transport. Other restrictions are set by the need of agreement with others (i.e. need to organize one’s time for being able to meet someone) which includes i.e. the organization of a workplace. Finally, laws and regulations, initiated by the state and other power instances also direct an individual person’s actions.

3.2.1 Routine

Many people do very similar things every day. Many Indian women are examples of this. Their morning, for example, follows more or less the same pattern every day. Their life is determined by different tasks, like earning money or raising children, which lead to a certain routine on a day-to-day basis. But also in many so-called developed nations an individual’s morning may look very much alike every day. You will wake up at probably more or less the same time as always, get dressed, prepare coffee or breakfast or both, depending on your habit, eventually make children ready for school, read the newspaper – all this before going to work where you may or may not have the same task every day. Singh (2004) explains:

“Time-space routine is a set of habitual bodily behaviours which extends through a considerable portion of time. The time-space routine has a certain holistic pattern which, like movement itself, is an essential component of daily living.”

Such routine actions also have their particular places, not only their particular times. Singh writes further:

"The focus of study in such purview is an exploration of everyday movement in space, and the creation of place by human activities in time, i.e. the two functions in the ‘totality of environment’, viz. time-space routine, and body ballet.”

Everyday life is, on the other hand, not perceived as something static that is repeating itself into eternity. Societies change, and so do the routines of the people.

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20 ”Individbana” in Swedish, Ellegård (1990) p. 10
23 Ibid
There are few things that are only geographical or only social. In fact, society and space are closely interrelated, and almost all phenomena have both social and spatial aspects. Singh (2004) quotes Seamon:

"Geography studies the earth as the home of man; and phenomenologically it seeks to understand how people live in relation to everyday places, spaces, and environments."\(^{24}\)

Space is not only a scene where economical, social political and other processes take place. By means of the different conditions it offers, space also reversely influences these processes. This is called socio-spatial dialectic, a concept that the Marxist geographer Edward Soja (1980) formulated like this:

“The structure of organized space is not a separate structure with its own autonomous laws of construction and transformation, nor is it simply an expression of the class structure emerging from the social (i.e. spatial) relations of production. It represents, instead, a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial.”\(^{25}\)

Places, as units of space, can be said to be not only passive, but active, having own “personality”. This argument gets support from Singh (2004) who describes places as follows:

"Places (my emphasis), as perceived, consist of a physical setting in which the complexity of natural aspects and the diversity of their qualities make the ground. Moreover, places are also constituted by their human setting where people live or have lived, perform their works in their ways, create images and evolve their emotions. Thus, the combination of physical and human settings results into a personality of place that is reflected in the life style and lifeworld of the people living there."\(^{26}\)

Places influence people in their everyday lives, and people influence the places.

If we look at caste, which highly determines societal structure, we find that caste can be described in terms of social inequality, as a social system, as a subject to social change and as a concept of social identity and values. Primarily, caste is seen as something social. In this essay I will, though, argue that caste, like most social phenomena, also has a spatial dimension. How it is expressed in space has not yet been in the centre of much research. This essay is based on the idea that caste is a social and spatial concept.

Settlement pattern, as we will see, clearly reflects caste structure, especially in villages, which are a most basic entity in Indian society. But space can also be bodily space; moreover, space needs not be geographical – i.e. we talk about “someone’s place in the

\(^{24}\) Singh (2004) p.299  
\(^{25}\) Soja (1980) p. 208  
\(^{26}\) Singh (2004) p. 299
hierarchy” or “in society”, which indicates social place. Space and place have both a horizontal (geographical) and a vertical (social) dimension.

3.4 Caste – a basic institution of society

The word "caste" has no counterpart in the Indian languages. The Sanskrit and the modern Indian languages use two words for what we call caste: varna, which means "colour" and jati, which means "birth". When the Aryans invaded the northern parts of today's India 3500 years ago, it is believed that a racial division appeared which then turned into four varnas:

- Brahmins (priests)
- Kshatriyas (warriors and kings)
- Vaishyas (merchants) and
- Shudras (craftsmen and servants).

The Aryans did not want to mix with the native population. They structurally kept themselves apart and thus kept their race “pure” more or less successfully. This division into castes was not only a racial one, but initially also a purely practical one. The fact that families of one caste would only intermarry with families of the same caste made sure knowledge about the profession would be accumulated instead of lost. This division into professions and different tasks of life also had a hierarchical dimension. Brahmins constitute the highest varna, Shudras the lowest. According to the Hindu belief in reincarnation and karma, a person’s actions in her or his former life decided which caste she or he is born into. Caste plays an important role and in a simplified way, one can say that a person's caste decides his or her life.

The most common word for caste is not varna but jati. One can say that every varna is subdivided into jatis, and there are several thousand jatis in today's India. They are usually associated with a certain profession and/or a certain geographical region. Most people clearly identify themselves more with their jati than with their varna. There are also some groups of people who, according to some definitions, do not belong to any varna, as will be outlined below. Nevertheless, they do have jati. Examples of jatis within the different varnas will follow in section 3.4.5.

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27 www.landguiden.se 2005-08-11
28 de Blij and Muller (2006) p.385
29 Lejonhud (2003) pp. 43-44
30 www.landguiden.se 2005-08-11
31 Lejonhud (2003) p. 43
32 www.landguiden.se 2005-08-11
3.4.1 Pollution and purity

How do castes relate to each other? Apart from in different duties (Dharma) ascribed to any individual (roughly speaking the work someone is supposed to do), relations between castes are invariably expressed in terms of pollution and purity. Members of different castes were traditionally not likely to interact except according to strict rules.

The group of people who are not included in the four varnas were previously called untouchables. They occupied the lowest rank within society. They were considered as polluted/impure because of their occupations, which often had to do with taking care of waste or doing other jobs that the higher castes did not want to do. Because of this, higher castes avoided to come near them. The complicated rules for food preparation and dining clearly underline this. Mahatma Gandhi gave these people the name Harijans which meant "children of God", but presently they themselves prefer to call themselves Dalits, that is "the oppressed" or "downtrodden", the latter being a political name. Their official name used in government statistics etc. is "Scheduled castes" and “Scheduled tribes”.

According to the Indian constitution, no one may be discriminated against because of his or her caste. Anyway, as G. Kolanad (1994) puts it metaphorically in her introduction book to India,

"Caste continues to raise its ugly head again and again in modern India. It still determines who gets ahead and who does not for the majority of Indians."

3.4.2 New terms

The government has taken many initiatives to decrease inequality of opportunities and discrimination based on caste. The caste classification has been reordered and renamed aiming at a more accurate description or naming of groups and to fight the traditional ranking. Some new terms for the existing entities are for example STs (Scheduled Tribes), SCs (Scheduled Castes, meaning Dalits) and OBCs (Officially Backward Classes).

With the help of these categories a complex reservation system has been implemented in universities, work places, scholarship distribution etc. It is heavily discussed whether birth (caste) should be allowed to determine access and chances of individuals more than e.g. marks, competence, or effort, and what institutions should possibly be excluded from reservation.

33 Kolanad (1994) p. 42
35 Lejonhud (2003) p. 44
36 Ibid
37 www.landguiden.se 2005-08-11
38 Lejonhud (2003) p. 45
39 Kolanad (1994) p.41
40 All kind of categorization seems to be problematic, due to intra-caste heterogeneity. For example, within the OBCs, one can identify LBCs (Less Backward classes) and MBCs (Most Backward Classes). (Srinivas, 1996)
41 See hereto Sivaramayya/Srinivas pp. 221-242
To a certain extent, material well-being is today less based on caste than before. There are nowadays factory owners who are Dalits and Brahmins who pull rickshaws. Anyway, still most Dalits are poor and most Brahmins are richer. A recent tendency is that education is more and more considered as a means for upward mobility. As mentioned, reservations in government jobs, universities and so on facilitate the access of lower caste people, provided they have a sufficient education.

### 3.4.3 Caste, names and professions

The jati actually indicates a person’s profession. The different jatis have a hierarchical order, which though can change over time. An individual can hardly move up in the social system, however, an entire jati can. The different jatis sometimes enjoy a different status in different geographical areas.

From the family name alone, an Indian can usually conclude the caste and sometimes even the region of origin of an individual. In the Vaishya and Shudra castes family names usually indicate the traditional profession, like i.e. "Yadav", which simply means milkman, and "Mallah" which means boatman. An informed Indian can then place a person in the local hierarchy. Doing the traditional work of the caste is still common but not anymore in majority.

In the high castes, that is the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the surname does usually not indicate profession. However, according to Rana P.B. Singh, "all Brahmins are involved in some kind of ritualistic work, but many Kshatriyas are now doing business work, while earlier they were mostly landlords. In the countryside they are still or have been landlords, but in the cities nowadays they are shop keepers." So even in a changing society, caste, name and profession are still associated.

### 3.4.4 The different castes (jatis) included in this study

It is here impossible to describe all jatis one-by-one, as they are several hundreds. Below, only the castes of the women who were interviewed are briefly described. All of them, except Kahar, are common castes in Assi, the study area. Most common are Brahmin and Yadav.

**Brahmin**

Brahmins constitute the highest caste. They have the power in the religious sphere. Hindu culture is dominated by the ordinances of Brahminism, therefore a Brahmin is perceived

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42 see appendix 1 for a translation of Hindi words
43 according to Rana P. B. Singh
44 Ibid, see 3.6.4
45 Kolanad (1994) p.39
46 according to Rana P. B. Singh
48 according to Rana P. B. Singh
as equivalent to a divine being. All Brahmins are involved in some kind of ritualistic actions.

*Kshatriyas*
Kshatriya members often belong to families with a long history who traditionally were landlords and on whose land other caste members were working. Today they are often shop owners.

*Kurmi (Vaishya)*
Kurmi is a caste of vegetable growers. They had/have a respected place in the village system.

*Yadav (Vaishya)*
Yadav are the milkmen. Traditionally, in the countryside, their position is not so high, but in Banaras they have had a strong situation since the 12th and 13th century. This is due to the strong population of Yadav since that time, which has given them a higher rank than in other cities. A proof for this is found in Shivprasad Singh's novel "The Blue Moon", where he mentions about the medieval Kashi that "Guvalpalli (a neighbourhood of milkmen) was famous for it's physical strength".

*Mallah (Shudra)*
The Mallahs are boat people. They work by rowing boats for others. On special occasions, like Ganga worship ceremonies after marriage, the couple, together with family members, will go out on the river in a boat. Then the Mallah takes the role of a priest. Otherwise, this is a quite low caste.

*Kahar (Shudra)*
Kahar is a quite rare caste in Assi. This cast are traditionally water carriers.

*Nai (Shudra)*
The Nais are barbers. For any wedding ceremony they are indispensable. On some occasions (post cremation rites), the Nai man can take the role of an assistant priest. Even his wife will assist and be respected.

*Dhobi (Dalit/Shudra)*
Dhobis traditionally wash clothes, often for other people. They are considered as very low caste among Shudras, but they are part of the upper layer among Dalits.

*Dom (Dalit/Shudra)*
The word Dalit means "downtrodden" and is a rather political name for this group. They were also called “Harrijans” or “Untouchables” (see above). One group is the "Doms". The Doms can be said to be the lowest Jati in the caste hierarchy of India. Doms, again, can be divided. In Banaras, where so many people come to die and to be cremated next to the holy river Ganga, there is one group of Doms, called funeral priests, who fulfil an important, highly respected function. Anyway, many high caste members refuse physical contact with them, just like with any other "untouchable". Other Doms are basket makers or scavengers, who often live close to garbage heaps, and live from what

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50 Ibid p.81
51 according to Rana P.B. Singh
52 Not all sources agree on the classification of Dalits as Shudras, as will be discussed in 3.6.1.
53 according to Rana P.B. Singh
they can find there. Many of the Doms do not have fixed jobs but take occasional job opportunities.  

3.5 Caste and women

There has been a lot of writing on the issue of caste through the centuries, but the writers have invariably been men. Women have seldom been such writers, but gender has got an influence on how caste is experienced. As Leela Dube (1996) argues, caste has been the subject to endless controversies and debates, but "the significance of gender in understanding the caste system and the way caste impinges on women's lives, although not totally ignored, have not received the attention they deserve." This is one of the reasons why in this essay I will focus my attention on women.

_Jati_ as one of the basic institutions in Indian society is, as mentioned, originally based on profession within a hierarchical system. Although it is/was mostly the men who practised these professions (like the potter, the weaver etc.), they cannot carry out these jobs without the help of women. Sometimes women are directly involved in their jati's traditional work (like the water carriers, the washer men etc.); sometimes more indirectly by keeping the household going, establishing contacts with clients etc.

The chances and freedoms of men and women in Indian society are definitely not the same. In all of Indian society we can see that the “do’s and don’ts” of men and women differ extremely. What is right for a man might be wrong for a woman and vice versa. What is interesting, though, is that these values can vary from one caste to another: What a woman from one caste may never be allowed to do may be fully accepted for a woman from another caste.

3.5.1 Upward mobility – gender differences

While within lower castes many men try to move up socially and go into more high status professions, their women often continue to do the traditional occupation. Often they work e.g. as household servants, which the men would not do, as they would consider it to be below their dignity.

3.5.2 Purity - impurity

As mentioned before, caste relations are expressed in terms of pollution and purity. This means for example that there are strict rules that tell who is allowed to dine with whom. Also, a member of a caste that is considered as less pure (low caste) is not allowed to

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54 according to Rana P.B. Singh  
55 Srinivas (1996) introduction  
56 Dube/Srinivas (1996) p. 21  
57 Ibid p. 3  
58 Ibid p. 3  
59 Dube/Srinivas, p.5
cook food for “purer”, upper castes. Here women play a key role, as they are the ones who are mostly associated with food and food preparation.\footnote{Dube/Srinivas, p.6}

### 3.5.3 Religious rituals

Depending on (among other factors) caste, Hindu people perform a different quantity of regular religious rituals. Often both men and women are involved. But if the man is out working professionally and has got less time for puja\footnote{see appendix 1}, the responsibility for the “religious welfare” falls upon the woman in the house. Women do special pujas and fasts for the wellbeing of the husband and the family.\footnote{Dube/Srinivas (1996) p.8} Within the religious sphere, women (especially older women) are often in a position of control and power.\footnote{according to Rana P. B. Singh}

### 3.5.4 Marriage, divorce and widowhood

Inter caste marriage is still very rare. If it happens, it is more accepted and more common that the man is from a higher caste than his wife.\footnote{Dube/Srinivas (1996) p. 11} In terms of education, women in Indian society are generally disadvantaged. If a girl gets a good education, then this is usually not, like in the west, in order to increase her job opportunities, but in first hand to increase her chances to get a good groom. An educated girl is expected to be better at promoting her family’s reputation.

When widowhood strikes, it is seen as a punishment for things the woman committed in her former life. She is now expected to live the life of an ascetic and is prohibited all pleasures of life. If she, according to law, has inherited property, she is expected to give away everything.\footnote{lecture by Anjoo Upadhyaya, 2005-10-10}

Divorce and remarriage are very rare, but also depending on caste. Some very low caste women (Dhobi caste, washer men) are allowed both to divorce \textit{and} to remarry. In higher caste, on the other hand, you will find \textit{absolutely no} remarriage. Generally, this can only happen in extremely enlightened sections of society and then, regardless of caste.\footnote{according to Anjoo Upadhyaya}

### 3.6 Caste and space

Not much research has been done on the topic of giving caste a geographical dimension.\footnote{according to Rana P. B. Singh} But if we extend the meaning of space to including \textit{social space}, within which there are certain rules of movement and of the amount of such space a person is allowed to occupy, then we can find interesting things. We can look at \textit{Purusha},

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\footnote{Dube/Srinivas, p.6} \footnote{see appendix 1} \footnote{Dube/Srinivas (1996) p.8} \footnote{according to Rana P. B. Singh} \footnote{Dube/Srinivas (1996) p. 11} \footnote{lecture by Anjoo Upadhyaya, 2005-10-10} \footnote{according to Anjoo Upadhyaya} \footnote{according to Rana P. B. Singh}
symbolizing a kind of body-geography that includes a hierarchy (see below). We can look at the socially and geographically fixed system of production in a village, so basic for the traditional functioning of India. We can glimpse on the differences in power and status that the same caste can occupy in different regions. Here, I admit, is a topic where still a lot of research can be done. Finally, I will present a few things about the possibilities of an individual to move upward in the caste hierarchy. These things serve as background on the topic “caste and space”, but they will not be referred to in the analysis of the field study.

### 3.6.1 Mythology of caste - "body geography"

A way to explain and/or justify the caste system has been to compare it to a human body that has different parts. *Purusha*, in Hindu mythology, is a "man", a giant being, representing the original primeval male, and by extension the whole world. He was supposed to be “a form of Brahma himself”. From his mouth came the Brahmins, from his arms the Kshatriyas, from his belly the Vaishyas and from his feet the Shudras.\(^{68}\) This can be depicted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body parts</th>
<th>Varna</th>
<th>Jati</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mind:</td>
<td>Brahm(\text{in})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest and arms:</td>
<td>Power, strength;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshatriyas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belly:</td>
<td>Food, subsistence:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vaishya)</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legs/feet:</td>
<td>Service (Shudra/Dalit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every Varna is again subdivided into the many different Jatis.

**Figure 2: The basic Purusha model**

Graphically, we see an intended order from top to bottom. The hierarchy is clear. Within these four varnas, there are the jatis. They have a complex hierarchical order among each other. This is the basic idea of varna.

There is a second way to depict the above model, if we want to include the formerly so-called "untouchables". Then it becomes as follows:

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\(^{68}\) Walker (1995) p. 263
1. Brahmins
2. Kshatriyas
3. Vaishyas
4. Shudras (including Dalits)
5. Achhutas

Figure 3: Modified Purusha model

In this model, the Achhutas (untouchables) are somewhat included in the Varna system. Anyway they are, just like theory supposes, in a way standing outside the varna system (they are under the feet of the man-model).  

The problem is that in fact, it is not that simple. This Purusha model functions in theory, but not in practice. Jatis as well as Varnas cannot be placed in a strict line. See here the chapter about Text and context. Also, the Purusha model is not widely known among common people. It works to explain the general idea of caste but has, apart from that, no practical significance.

3.6.2 Villages: the system of production

In the villages in ancient days, the caste system organized the entire system of production. Somebody’s future work was decided by his or her birth, and consequently there was no discussion about it. All castes were interdependent, from the Brahmin who gave the blessings over vegetable grower who produced food down to the sweeper whose duty it was to sweep the street and to take care of waste. This was a fixed system which nobody questioned. The different castes lived and still live close to each other, because they are depending on each other, and at the same time they live strictly segregated in space. There are often separated housing blocks; one for higher, one for middle, and one for low caste people. The low caste settlements are often on the south side, a bit outside the village centre. This is connected to Hindu cosmology: the south is associated with the God of death.

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69 I thank Rana P. B. Singh for the information about the Purusha models.
70 It is important to stress the word often, because this settlement system does definitely not apply in all cases.
71 Singh and Khan (1999)
Today, and especially in the cities, production is not very caste dependent anymore, and if it prevails, then in a very loose form.

**3.6.3 Regional differences in caste hierarchy**

In different regions, the same jati can have different status. As mentioned before, e.g. the population of milkmen in Assi is very high and they enjoy a higher rank than in most other places. Another example one can mention is the Bumihar caste which in Banaras has got an unnormal position: Traditionally, in Bhojpur, they come on third rank, after Brahmins and Kshatriyas. But in Varanasi city they are at first rank because the king of the city belongs to Bumihar caste.

**3.6.4 Upward mobility (social space)**

If we look at the chances an individual of low caste has to move upward and to gain status, we find that still this is not an easy matter. But there are an increasing number of people who find their way; an example is the former home minister of India, Jagiwan Ram, who actually was a Dalit. There are three main means to gain status:

- high education
- high economic power (wealth)
- high political power.

These can lead to a major change in the caste hierarchy and acceptance. Of course these three things are connected to each other. If a person is rich, he or she will certainly make

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72 region around the city of Banaras
73 according to Rana P.B. Singh
74 Ibid
sure his/her child gets a good education. With economic power, also political power increases. And so on.

3.7 Text and context

Both written texts and visual images have the weakness that they have to depict things separated from each other. For example, events happening at the same time have to be told one after another. Spatial features that all taken together characterize e.g. a landscape are usually drawn on different maps – depending on what the map makers consider as interesting to show. Social units, like castes, are often described as being separated from each other and in a strict hierarchical line (see Figure 5A). In reality, though, they overlap, and within every caste there is a huge variation (see Figure 5B). Every caste has also got its interior elite (small upper section) as well as its lowest members, which in both cases form a community apart.75

Figure 5: Text and context in comparision

3.7.1 Differences between theory and reality

Just like outlined above, texts about caste do describe the Indian caste system as containing clearly defined different castes that have a hierarchical order.76 Moreover, the four varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) are described as basic categories for the system of castes. This is a way to explain the system of castes to a foreigner who is not familiar with it in a simplified way. In a local Indian context though, varna categorization is unsuitable. Personal experience reveals that local people do usually not know about the varna system. They knew very well to which jati they belonged (whether i.e. potter, barber, boatmen etc.) but they could not tell whether their jati (in these cases) was Vaishya or Shudra. “It is a caste in the middle”, was a usual

75 Information from Rana P.B. Singh
76 See i.e. Lejonhud (2003) and www.landguiden.se 2005-08-11
answer. According to Rana P. B. Singh, the only ones who know about varna are well-educated Brahmins. To others, it is unknown.

It is true that castes are well-defined, that everyone seems to know very well where he and his family belong, and that they seldom intermarry. But it is more difficult to place the single jatis in a hierarchical line. That Brahmins and Kshatriyas occupy the highest status is known to everyone but within Vaishyas and Shudras hierarchy is not always that important. Their hierarchy can be said to be overlapping.

3.7.2 In conclusion: the role of caste in this study

A varna is not a homogenous entity. Within a varna, the different jatis might not have much to do with one another. Moreover, they have a hierarchy within the varna. There are high ranked Brahmins and lower Brahmins, the high ones constituting almost an own community. There are higher Shudras and lower Shudras. The lowest Shudras are the Dalits, who are often commonly called "sweepers" and who by many Indians are seen as a community apart – sometimes they are not even recognized as members of the Shudra family. There is a hierarchy among all the jatis but it is overlapping and changeable due to time or region.

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77 according to Rana P. B. Singh
4. Case study – women in Assi

4.1 The area

Assi is a neighbourhood within the city of Varanasi, which since British times is wrongly called "Banaras" or even "Benares", and which since ancient days also bears the name “Kashi”. All four names are still in use. Assi faces the river Ganga in the east. Assi ghat is one of the 84 ghats in the city. Assi Ghat marks the southern-most ghat. The ghats and the river play an important role in the people’s everyday routine. Assi Ghat is a part of the larger Assi area, which is one of the “mohallas” of Varanasi:

"The city of Banaras is divided into over 350 mohallas/localities (neighbourhoods, or wards), identified by separate revenue records, settlements and closed boundaries. Assi is one of the mohallas, bounded by a sense of place (my emphasis), and marks the southern oldest settlement in the city. The essence of the concept of neighbourhood is the common recognition of an area's identity by residents and visitors (...). However, there will be a constant suspicion between insiders and outsiders (my emphasis).

Sense of place and a clear recognition of insiders versus outsiders means that the inhabitants all have a place identity connected to Assi. This does not mean that they are homogenous:

"Assi's social diversification has been accompanied by a polarization of the population into a hierarchy of classes and groups: upper and lower castes, pure and polluted, rich and poor, landowners and tenants, businessmen and commoners, modern professionals and traditional functionaries, old settlers and recent migrants, conservatives and westernised, Indians and foreigners, and so on.”

It is this socio-cultural diversity that makes Assi an interesting area and provides the reason for me to choose Assi as the setting for my study.

In their home environment, residents in Assi see not only a collection of buildings, streets, stairs, people, animals etc., but a religious landscape filled with temples, holy places, holy people and even holy animals, in for them logical patterns. Religion plays an important role. For an outsider, this complexity can be difficult to fully understand.

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78 The name Varanasi is thought to be derived from the names of Varana River and Assi Stream, between which the city is situated (Singh and Rana, 2002, p. 29). It is a city with 1.5 million inhabitants in the north-east of India. It is situated along the banks of the river Ganga (in English commonly called "Ganges") and is often referred to as a holy city for the Hindus, because of its association with the holy river Ganga.
79 see appendix 1
80 Singh and Rana (2002) p. 87
81 Singh (2004) p. 300
82 Ibid p. 313
4.2 Organizing the interviews and observations

In the following I am going to present the principles that guided the choice of respondents and explain how the interviews and observations worked in practice. In the end there will be some comments on the difficulties that were encountered.

4.2.1 Choice of respondents

All interview respondents were residents of Assi, chosen mostly according to their caste belonging, as will be explained below. Two of the respondents were Brahmins, one was Kshatriya, and the rest belonged to middle and lower castes. Two respondents were Dalits. The list below indicates their traditional caste hierarchy in the region. I have listed the middle and low caste group in the order from more to less status that is prevalent in Banaras. 83 This hierarchy could be a bit different in another region. The eleven women interviewed were

2 Brahmins
1 Kshatriya
1 Yadav (milkmen)
1 Kurmi (Vegetable growers)
2 Mallahs (boatmen)
1 Kahrar (water carrier)
1 Nai (barber)
1 Dhobi (washer men, Dalit)
1 Dom (Dalit)

The choice of respondents was limited by two factors. Firstly, all respondents were supposed to live in Assi. This way, the location of the home would not influence their answers, because it would be almost the same for anyone. Anyhow, even in Assi there are definitely variations in location. Secondly, all respondents taken together should be approximately representative for the social layers in the area. That means, in an Indian context, I wanted to have as many different castes as possible represented, and at least one respondent from the most common castes in Assi: The most common castes are Yadav (milkmen) and some Brahmin families. 84 The criteria were location of home and caste. When I had two respondents of the same or of similarly ranked castes, I tried to get some variation: either of age, wealth, education or family situation. This was not difficult, because there was always some variation between them.

Apart from two respondents whom I found through own contacts, all remaining nine women were contacted by my assistant.

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83 according to Rana P.B. Singh
84 according to Rana P. B. Singh
4.2.2 Questionnaire and interview setting

As explained in section 2.3.2, the interviews were semi-structured. For a list of the interview questions, see appendix 3. Most of the interviews were conducted in the respondent's home, except two that were done in more public places. Sometimes I and my interpreter were alone with the woman we interrogated, but most of the time children or other relatives were around. This might have restricted some respondents from answering correctly, but anyhow, the questionnaire was not too personal. Having other people around was unavoidable, as most of the people did not have more than one, two or three rooms for a whole family to live in.

The length of every interview varied between 20 and 45 minutes. A tape recorder was used.

4.2.3 Observations

With most of the respondents I made an observation in the morning. At the end of the interview I asked if I could go with the person one morning for some time, just to see what she was doing, keeping myself in the background. It was usually okay. The time the observation lasted varied very much. In the cases where the person would not leave the home at all or have a very monotone occupation for several hours, I just came and looked in for a short while. When they had a very varied morning, like doing housework, going to several temples and going to work, then it could happen that I followed her for several hours. The observations were not very structured, and they became very different. Sometimes observation was easy, sometimes it was not. Sometimes the person carried out her morning routine without bothering very much about me; sometimes she changed all her way of doing things because I was there, and sometimes she totally refrained from action, which was definitely not the way she normally did. So the observations did not always give me the desired information. A communication problem was added, because I did the observations without an interpreter.

The main function of the observations was to give me a visual understanding of what I had heard in the previous interview and to confirm that what they had said to me in the interview was true. It mostly was true, in spite of the few difficulties we had.

4.2.4 Difficulties in interviews and observations

There were some difficulties in both the interviews and the observations. As mentioned before, questions about caste had to be asked with care, if at all. Another, for westerners seemingly simple detail but for the respondents rather difficult one, was the question about age. The age of the interviewee was important as a background. Many of these women did not know their exact age but said something approximate. However, when I calculated the age of their eldest child and added a reasonable age for marriage, the real age of the person became always significantly higher than what she had told before.

Most of the women did not mention that they performed religious rituals in the morning (I did not ask about the afternoon). It is possible that they forgot to mention it, if their
puja was short. Anyhow, the fact that they did not mention it also shows that probably, rituals were not so important to them.

There were many misunderstandings about the time for observation. Sometimes I was waiting for somebody in vain; sometimes they wondered why I did not turn up earlier. Something must have gone wrong in the communication with the interpreter. I solved the problem by just coming by some other day, which was easy, as their morning routine is more or less the same every day. Sometimes, though, the situation just did not allow any observation as I felt it would disturb the person’s personal life too much, or due to other reasons (see appendix 4).

All in all, I can say that doing field research in a totally different country with an unfamiliar language is not an easy task. Personally, I learned loads of tricks and ways of behaviour that would make people talk. Anyway, the possibilities were limited.

### 4.3 Description of results

The respondents were between 25 and 52 years old. All of them were married and had children. All upper caste members, except one Kshatriya, had some education. All middle and lower caste members, except one barber woman, had none. Among the high caste women, only one was working to earn money (and that was in a telephone shop of her husband's family). The others were housewives. All middle and low caste women were working outside the home, except one Dalit, who did nothing but housework.

Two of the middle/lower caste women, Yadav (milkmen) and one of the Mallahs (boatmen) were alone responsible for the family economy. The Yadav woman's husband refused to work, and the husband of the young Mallah woman had recently died in a tragic accident, leaving his wife, who was working as a dish cleaner, alone with her two daughters and one son.

Two of the low caste women were running own businesses, in which the husband and the rest of the family were just helping. One had a street kitchen and the other one a laundry business.

In most of the cases, caste and economic situation were interdependent. The two Brahmin women were comparatively well-off, and so were the two Vaishya members. The Mallahs, Kahar, Nai, Dhobi and Dom were rather poor. But the exceptions confirm the rule: The Kshatriya woman was both poor and illiterate, despite her high caste, and the Nai and Dhobi, who belong to some of the lowest castes in society, seemed to have a better economic situation than some members of higher castes. The link between caste and wealth is apparent but nothing which we can claim for sure nowadays.

When asked about what they feel about their daily work, only one woman (a Brahmin housewife) said that she enjoys it. All the others said that they are helpless, that they are
bored, or that they do their job only because they need money, or that they are housewives because it is hard to find a good job.\textsuperscript{85}

4.3.1 Place attitude

Everyone had a personal opinion about the places they liked or disliked. One did not like crowded areas; two others did not like the newer and cheaper neighborhood of Nagua, south of Assi. Another (Dhobi/Dalit) did not like villages, although or because she grew up in a village. Most of the women liked their home, which for them represented security, except one well-educated Brahmin girl, for whom it seemed a little bit like a prison.

No one had any prohibition to go to certain places (by husband or other relatives), although others sometimes did have their opinion about where the woman should go or should not. Usually the respondents stated that they were very free in the choice of how and where they moved in the city.

4.3.2 Action radius

All the respondents had a daily action radius that was restricted to the Assi area. The two Brahmin women did never move far away from the home. Those who went to the temples (Kshatriya, Kurmi and Yadav) often made circular walks to the temples of the neighborhood. Those who worked outside the home (middle and lower castes) had to walk to their respective workplaces. When they worked in several workplaces, which most of them did, their path (or trajectory, to use the time-geographical vocabulary) was also circular: from home to one workplace, after some time to the next and so on, until they went home again. No one worked further away than what could be walked within at most fifteen minutes. Probably they could not work further away because they could not “afford” to spend too much time walking: they all had a home to manage as well, with children going to and coming from school and duties calling. No one had any other form of transport to work at their disposal than their own feet.

An interesting point to note is that in their everyday life, the action radius of these women was rather small. But they had all made one huge geographical movement in their past: They had almost all once lived in places far away, before they got married and moved to Varanasi/Assi.

4.3.3 Background characteristics of respondents

Some variables have been identified that allow some classification. In most of the variables the respondents differed from each other and sometimes this was indeed dependent on caste, just as assumed. These variables are shown in two different tables. \textit{Table 1} depicts caste belonging, age and level of education of the 11 respondents. It is visible that higher caste people generally have higher education. \textit{Table 2} will be

\textsuperscript{85} For a detailed description of results see appendix 4
introducing the analysis chapter (5.1), as here caste belonging and the performance of certain actions will be examined.

Table 1: Caste belonging and background variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jati</th>
<th>Varna</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>postgraduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadav (milkmen)</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>class 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmi (vegetable growers)</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>class 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallah (boatmen)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallah (boatmen)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahar (water carriers)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nai (barber)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>class 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobi (washer men)</td>
<td>Shudra/Dalit(^{86})</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>Shudra/Dalit</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{86}\) See here the section 3.6.1 about Purusha: some include Dalits in the Shudra varna, others do not.
5. Analysis

5.1 Daily routine variables - 3 spheres

Among the things an Assi woman does every morning, one can easily identify three "spheres": The domestic sphere (housework), the out-of-the-house-work ("money earning") and the religious, ritualistic actions (*puja*). Only one of my respondents (Yadav) does all these three every day. The others are involved in some of them. Caste belonging and actions performed are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Caste belonging and actions performed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jati</th>
<th>Varna</th>
<th>Housework</th>
<th>Work for earning</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no/no info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no (except help)</td>
<td>yes, a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadav (milkmen)</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes, a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurmi (vegetable growers)</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes, a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallah (boatmen)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallah (boatmen)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no/no info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahar (water carriers)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no/no info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nai (barber)</td>
<td>Shudra</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no/no info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobi (washer men)</td>
<td>Shudra/Dalit</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no/no info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>Shudra/Dalit</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 shows the type of action the different individuals are performing in the morning. This is just an overview on whether a specific action is performed or not – it is hardly indicating the quantity or quality of the action (for details see appendix 4). A relation between earning work, rituals and caste is visible.*

5.1.1 Domestic work

Housework is a central part in every respondent's morning. It includes cleaning the pots, making food, cleaning the house, washing clothes, preparing and bringing children to school and more. Some women are busy with these things the whole day; others,
especially when they are working outside the home, get help with these things from a daughter, son or the husband.

**Analysis**
This was common for all respondents, regardless of caste or other variables. It confirms the overall common image of Indian women.

### 5.1.2 Work outside the home

All of my middle and lower caste respondents are involved in some kind of money earning jobs outside the home. One young Brahmin woman (the only respondent who had a post graduation) is also working, but in a much lower qualified job than what would fit her high education. Her work is also situated in her home (public phone booth). All other higher caste women did not work in the public sphere. The only not high caste respondent who only did housework was one of the Dalits.

**Analysis**
That this Dalit woman is not working is surprising as she is poor and should need to earn money, just like most of her fellow caste members do. But probably, and as she told, she has got relatives who take care of her. In most cases, the tendency we can see is that the higher the caste and the better the economic situation, the less likely it is that the women are working outside the home. This will be discussed in one of the following sections.

### 5.1.3 Morning rituals

The needs of money, of taking care of children etc. define the path a family mother takes every morning. There is though one range of actions that seems to be self-chosen, and that is the amount of morning *puja*[^87]. Some made a short, five minute worship at the Puja-niche in the home; others (often busy family mothers) spent an entire hour every morning preparing *Prasad*[^88] and going to at least five different temples. One woman (Kurmi), when asked why she does worship, answered that it was for the well-being of the family, especially her children. Seen in this light she might consider puja as equally essential as preparing food, bringing her child to school or earning money.

Except of one respondent, who did not give any information on this, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Yadav (milk men) and Kurmi (vegetable growers) members spent a considerable time on rituals every day (between 5 minutes and 1½ hour). The lower castes (Mallah, Kahar, Nai, Dhobi and Dom) did not do any worship, or in fact they did not consider it as important as to be worth mentioning.

**Analysis**
The respondent's relation to rituals is typically reflecting the caste structure in society. The higher the caste, the more likely is a person to perform rituals. Brahmins and

[^87]: see appendix 1
[^88]: see appendix 1
Kshatriyas belong to the Brahmanic ritualistic system\textsuperscript{89} and according to traditional rules they have to do morning worship. Yadavs have a strong situation in the area, and the higher a caste is considered to be, the easier is their psychological access to the religious sphere, and the more they will also be expected to perform rituals for i.e. the benefit of their family. According to Rana P. B. Singh anyone, including Shudras, could go for Puja and has got access to the temples, but they will not do it due to \textit{traditional and psychological barriers}.\textsuperscript{90} Just as Leela Dube (1996) states, women do take the responsibility for the religious welfare of the family, especially if their husband is working and has not got the time.

\section*{5.2 Influence of education}

Most high caste members were quite high educated, while the lower caste members were mostly illiterate. The higher caste people were both educated and they seemed to have an economically stable situation, except of the Kshatriya woman who was both poor and illiterate. In the same way, but the other way around, one Nai woman was the only lower caste member who had at least eight years education. However, she also seemed to have an economically stable situation, in spite of, or due to, hard work.

Caste obviously has an impact on the likelihood of performing rituals and on the likelihood of working to earn money. As high education and high caste membership were variables mostly appearing together, we can assume that education also has to do with rituals or money earning jobs. The latter is a striking paradox to the western eye: The higher the education (the higher the caste-), the less likely is it that a women will work to earn money. This indicates that education for women is not seen as a way of preparing them for the working life. Instead, education is a way to gain status and to assure a girl to get a good groom.\textsuperscript{91}

\section*{5.3 Age and family situation}

In my cases, age did not have any influence on the kind of morning routine a person had.\textsuperscript{92} Family situation definitely had an influence, but as it was the same for every respondent (they all had a family to manage, that is, to work and/or earn money for), there was nothing else to compare with. In the two cases where the husband did not contribute to the family economy, of course the wife took more responsibility.

\textsuperscript{89} according to Rana P. B. Singh
\textsuperscript{90} ibid
\textsuperscript{91} confirmed by Anjoo Upadhya
\textsuperscript{92} According to Rana P. B. Singh and other sources, older women do often have more power than younger women, especially in the religious sphere, so probably they spend more time on e.g. rituals than younger women do. But this was not confirmed in my study.
5.4 Caste and caste related professional work

The professional work was determined by caste in a few cases. No Brahmin member was a priest and no Kshatriya member owned land. The Yadav (milkmen) woman said (in the author's own words): "If we had a cow or a buffalo, we would do the dairy work. But we have no cow or buffalo, so we have to do other kind of jobs." The Mallas (boatpeople) women were both working as dish washers in several different houses. One's husband had actually been working as a boatman. The other one's husband was working as a rickshaw puller. The young Kahar (water carrier) woman was working as a cook and her husband drove an auto rickshaw. In the Nai (barber) woman's family, since many generations no one had been practising the traditional work of the caste, except of her son who now owns a barber shop. The only one who fully engaged in her caste's traditional work was the Dhobi, the washerwoman. When asked why she does this kind of work, her whole family sitting around started laughing and was obviously surprised about the question. "All ancestors have done this," they explained. "It is the order of the God."

In conclusion, caste was not very important for the choice of professional work. The need of income was more important than caste in the kind of work a person had to do. They did the kind of work they found where it was the easiest to earn money.

5.6 Other findings

Everyone was cooking for their own family members who, naturally, belonged to the same caste as the cook. One respondent worked as a cook for other families. She mentioned that this would not have been possible if she had been a Dalit. This illustrates the purity-impurity rules that still govern caste relationships.

That castes enjoy a different status in different areas becomes clear in the case of Yadav. In most places, Yadavs occupy a rather low status in the hierarchy. In Varanasi though, the Yadav woman who was interrogated definitely felt she had access to the temples – that is, the religious sphere - as well as an obligation to go there. This is rather typical for high castes.

The differences between men and women can be expressed in the view of education. Education serves different purposes depending on whether a child is a girl or a boy. For boys, it aims at giving them skills for a future working life. For girls, education is often a means of gaining status, to assure a good marriage and to make her able to promote her family’s reputation in a proper way. This is especially true in the high castes. In the lower castes, both women and men have to work to earn money. Following this, they might have to share household tasks as well. This would be an interesting topic for further investigation, including the question whether there is more equality between the sexes among lower or among higher caste people.
6. Conclusion

6.1 Answer to the initial question

To come back to the original questions "How do women from different castes in Assi use space in their everyday life?" and "What is their everyday movement pattern related to?" we can firstly and simply conclude that: where these women are going in the morning depends - of course - on what they are doing, and what they are doing depends again on what they have to do to manage the family. Action is thus not subject to totally free choice. But the way and pace of the action can be decided individually. Other people have their opinions but do not interfere very much in the respondent’s decisions about where to go and where not to go. Where they go is less determined by other people than by a feeling of responsibility; the need of earning money or managing the family. But probably, these actions in these places are also what society expects from these women: They are expected to feel responsibility and to act according to it.

Caste, wealth and education often go hand in hand: High caste people tend to be rather wealthy and educated. But this does not apply to all cases - in Indian society upward mobility for low caste people is increasingly promoted. Rituals and money earning jobs are related to the factors caste and wealth. The higher the caste, the easier is it for an individual (woman) to gain access to the religious sphere, and the more difficult is it to enter working life outside the home. Low caste women, on the other hand, have access to working life but hardly to the religious sphere. Following this, people from different castes do have access to different places, as will be discussed below.

6.1.1 Place access and caste

Three spheres relevant to the use of space have been identified. The home was a place of belonging for all women, regardless of caste. Home was associated with house work, including kitchen work and childcare.

There was a difference in the access the different caste members had to the temples – the religious sphere. Legally, everyone has the same access. But according to traditions Brahmins and Kshatriyas are almost obliged to visit the temples regularly because they belong to the Brahmanic ritualistic system. Low caste members, on the other hand, obviously do not have any sense of belonging there and prioritize other places to spend their time in.

Out-of-the-house-work is generally considered as unsuitable for women and is to be avoided if possible. There is a social binding that any woman will not work outside the

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93 In my cases the Brahmin women did not go to the temples in the morning. They might be going in the evening. More probably, their husband was performing the religious duties for the family.
home as soon as the family economy allows it. Earning work is, in consequence, most common for low caste and economically poor people. Therefore, low caste women have an easier access to the economic sphere than upper caste women. When going to work they will also be moving around more and thus have a larger everyday action radius than upper caste women. On the other hand, high caste women might visit different temples and extend their action radius accordingly.

It is true that the geographical places (kitchen, temples, work place) which a person has access to typically reflect the social place, whether high or low, a person occupies in society. Below is a way these tendencies can be depicted. I have chosen the respondents R. (2005-11-24), M. (2005-11-08) and S. (2005-11-15), whose morning routine typically reflects the found caste relationships.

2-Dimensional time-geographical diagram of the movement pattern of three women in Assi between 05.00 and 13.00. For details see appendix 4.

Figure 6: Time-geographical model applied to three women in Assi

It is important to bear in mind that this is a tendency, but that the material it is based on is not sufficient to make statistically significant statements. This study is qualitative.

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94 according to Rana P. B. Singh
6.2 To reconnect to time-geography: the restrictions that control actions and use of space

The trajectories people draw in space are determined by their own will in combination with certain restrictions. Capacity restrictions in the case of the interrogated Indian women consist of (among other things) biological needs that must be fulfilled for themselves and for their family, such as preparing food, earning money and making sure children get what they need. The location of the home and the non-access to any other form of transport than the own feet sets limits to the choice of i.e. workplace: It must not be too far away from the home. The need for cooperating with others is highly determining these Assi women’s actions: whether on the workplace (a dish cleaner can only clean dishes when the others have eaten) or in the home (someone must be at home to take care of children coming from school and this must be organized). Laws and regulations from (among others) the state, are in these cases usually in favor of the people and their values: Everybody’s access to holy places, children’s right to go to school, laws that prevent crime (even if they are not always effective). Other legal favors, especially for the poorer, low caste people who constitute the majority in my study, are the measures taken to facilitate upward mobility. These will be felt in the long term rather than in short time and they make life easier for some people and more difficult for others. Caste was long time constituting the rules that governed the people’s actions and place access. It still is. But the state tries to provide competing rules and laws – and the people live in the interplay between these two.

6.3 Further research suggestions

The topic of caste in relation to space is yet not at all well explored. A more quantitative study about the daily life of different caste members could maybe reveal more interesting data, that would be of a different kind than this small study has done. Also the question whether the use of space by different castes has any variation according to where in India the people come from would be interesting to explore.

Also, any research in this area has hitherto focused more on men than on women, so more focus on women is definitely needed. In this essay overall human geographical along with sociological literature has been used. A different and certainly very interesting approach could be from a feminist literature point of view.
Summary

The purpose of this essay has been to examine the phenomenon of caste from a spatial perspective. The focus has been on everyday movement in space, and on the factors that determine it. A special interest has been the access that different people have to different places. Background information has been collected from literature and a qualitative empirical study has been made, consisting of interviews and in some cases observations with eleven women in the neighbourhood of Assi, Varanasi, India. These women, who belonged to different castes, were asked a number of questions about their morning routine and how they relate to the places they usually visit in the morning time.

Indians and Europeans have a different cultural understanding, something which it is important to be conscious about. Throughout the work, the cultural perspective of the author versus the respondents has been taken into consideration. Research questions have been designed with the help of a time-geographical approach: time and space of the performed actions have been central.

As caste is a basic institution in Indian society, there has been a lot of research on the topic, but as traditional caste professions are usually carried out by men, women have not yet received much attention. However, women are important in the caste tradition as they are concerned most with the pollution and purity rules and also with religious rituals, which both are important factors to confirm caste status.

In the analysis, the findings from the interviews have been compared, before conclusions were drawn about the connection between caste belonging and use of space. Although caste hierarchy is often overlapping, the main findings of this study are that there is a difference in the use of space between members of different castes. The higher the caste, the easier it is for an individual (woman) to gain access to the religious sphere, that is, e.g. the temples, and the more difficult is it to enter working life, that is, the public places outside the home. Low caste women, on the other hand, have access to working life but hardly to the religious sphere. Caste is not the only variable that influences. Factors such as education and wealth are also important, but they are also connected to caste. Low caste members are still underprivileged in terms of wealth and education. Although modern laws and regulations try to change this, caste still governs people’s actions and place access.
References

Oral sources

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Conversations with Anjoo Upadhyaya, Varanasi, December 2005
Conversations with Rana P. B. Singh, Varanasi, September-December 2005

Printed sources

Books


**Articles**

**Websites**

[www.landguiden.se](http://www.landguiden.se) 2005-08-11

Appendix 1

List of Hindi words

arthi – way of offering prayer to God. Often the devotee makes circular movements with an oil lamp or candle in front of the image of the God.
bhang – marijuana, offered to Shiva
bindi - dot, usually red, that married women wear on their forehead. Women who have never been married also wear it, but widows are not supposed to.
betel business – or paan shops. Paan is a little green parcel of betel nut leaf wrapped around sauces and spices which is usually chewed after the meals.
chai - milk tea
chapatti – thin, unleavened bread, made of only wheat flour and water.
Chowk - neighborhood in the centre of Varanasi
dhaba – restaurant/food
dhal - lentil stew; popular dish all over India
ghat - name of the stone steps leading down to the holy river Ganges. Along the riverside of Varanasi, there are 84 ghats. They are very important for religious rituals but also for the people to meet.
Kartik – bathing festival in October-November
kumkum - red powder which is used to place a red dot in the middle of the forehead at the end of puja.
Nandi – bull; God Shivas vehicle
Prasad – material substance (usually sweet) that is first offered to a deity and then consumed with the faith that the deity's blessing resides within it. Prasad is created by a process of giving and receiving between a human devotee and the divine.
puja - worship. Most Hindus have a small altar in the house, where they perform their own daily puja, while in the temples the priest performs the puja.
rickshaw – three-wheeled vehicle that functions like a taxi. There are motor/auto rickshaws and cycle rickshaws.
rohri - cow dung
shanti – “peace and happiness”
Shiva Linga – form of Shiva, often made of stone in different sizes, symbolizing the Trinity of the states of the cosmos: creation (Brahma), preservation (Vishnu) and destruction (Shiva).
sindhoor - orange color; associated with the God Hanuman.
tikka – red color, used in rituals
turmeric - yellow ayurvedic powder

Sources:
www.wikipedia.org
Location of the homes of the respondents in the Assi area, indicated by black dots. In order to keep the people’s anonymity, names or castes are not pointed out. (Map from *Cultural Landscapes and the Lifeworld, Literary images of Banaras, fig. 52.*, Rana P.B. Singh, 2004)
Appendix 3

Interview questions

Background

Name?
Age?
Caste?
Profession?
Do you have any education?
Are you married? When?
Children? Male/female? What age?
What is your husband's profession? Where does he work (location)?
Were you born in Assi or did you move here? /When/why did you settle down in Assi?

Morning routine

Where are you going between when you wake up in the morning and 12.00 noon?
Why are you going there? Purpose and acts performed?
What are you doing? Describe one-by-one systematically.
What do you feel when doing it? Religious, social or with respect to traditions?
Who is with you? Eventually: Who is not with you?
What items do you have with you? Ritualistic or others?
Who has decided the route you go every morning? And how?

(Do you think your caste has an influence on the places where you decide to / have to go? Explain.
Do you think your education has an influence on the places where you go/don't go?
Do you think you would go the same path if you were married/ not married? If you had children / if you had no children? If.....?)

Place attitude

How do you relate to the places where you go every morning?
Are there places where your husband, parents-in-law, friends or others do not want you to go? Which are those and explain why?

Can I follow you tomorrow morning? Just follow you from some distance and take notes on where you go - I'm a geographer so I would also like to draw maps of your routes.

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1 These questions were asked when the situation allowed it, otherwise not. They turned out to be rather sensitive questions.
Appendix 4

Interview descriptions

Interview 2005-10-17
with L. (Kahar; water carriers)

Pilot study

I am around 30 years old but my exact age I do not know. I belong to the Kahar caste, that is, originally those who carry water. I work as a cook in two different houses, and in my own home. I go to both houses every day to prepare lunch and dinner.

I got married when I was seven years old (only ceremonies) and moved to my husband's house when I was fourteen. I have got four children; a fourteen-year old daughter, a twelve-year old son, a ten-year old daughter and an eight-year old son. My husband is an auto rickshaw driver, he works in whole Banaras. I live in Assi but I was not born in this area. I was born in Golapur. I have never been to school.

Morning routine
I wake up at 6 or 6.30 am and make tea and breakfast for my son who goes to school at 7.00. Then I go to the first house to make breakfast there between 8.00 and 9.30, sometimes 10.00. At 10.00 I go to my second workplace, another house, to make lunch there. I come back from there at 12.30. At the second house I prepare four kinds of vegetables, rice, dhal and chapatti, together with another servant. After that I go back to the first house to do some work and then I come back home, take a bath and eat lunch. My first work place is quite close to my home, it is called Ganga Mahal1, and the second one is near the park. Between 2.30 and 5.30 I am at home and take care of the children. Sometimes I do some shopping (vegetables) for the first family I work for on my way to them, but normally I have nothing with me and I walk alone.

I found my work through another woman who informed me about the first house. My mother-in-law's sister informed me about the second house. I started to work for a test period, and the families liked my work.

Caste, place and attitudes
The members of my caste were originally those who carried water. They can give the water to everybody and everybody will accept it. Lord Ram received water from these people and he accepted it. Kahar belonged to the third of the four main castes (Vaishya) until one week ago the government decided to categorize them into the fourth (Shudra) caste. This gives us for example scholarships and access to reserved places in universities and workplaces.
A member of any caste could have the same work as me, except the "sweepers", the Harijans, whom the people don't accept in their kitchen. Not even my caste would accept them.

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1 not the Swedish study centre, (the author's remark)
How do you feel about your work and your work places?
My feelings towards work and workplaces are that I get no rest, sometimes I am stressed, there is no break and no free time. I feel bored so I would like to do something else, but have got no opportunity. I go to these houses for work; they have a big house, a beautiful house, but I don't want to live there. I just want to do the work and then I want to come back.

Are there places where you are not supposed to go?
My family and friends want me to stay in the Assi area. At least for residence, the Assi area is best. Then I can move freely. But I should not go to Nagua. I don't know why I don't like that place. But since the beginning we've been living here, in Assi, and we know all the people. The other place is new for us. And in Nagua...you can find cheaper houses there - other areas are more expensive (so is Assi). But there, in Nagua, it is cheap, everybody wants to buy the houses there.

Observation, 2005-10-18
The next morning I arrived at 7.50 at her house inside a yard behind a wall (geographically about in the middle between Ganga Mahal and Assi road). Several people were in the yard, looking curiously at me. One autorickshaw was parked in front of a wall.
Her room measured about 5x3m; it had a large bed (mattresses removed) in the middle, further a small mirror on the wall beside the door, a new clock and a TV. One elder woman was present (maybe her mother-in-law) while L. prepared herself. In this room, L. lives with her husband and her four children.
At 8.00 L. left and went by the northern narrow lane to Assi road, turned left and after some hundred meters reached the entry of another yard. There she went to the back door of a big house which is facing Assi road. Altogether, the walk took about 5 min.
At around 9.30 she left the house again and walked past Assi crossing to her second workplace near a small park.
Interview 2005-11-08  
with M. (Yadav; milkmen)

I am 48 years old. I am employed as a housekeeper in the Canadian Office and in the Swedish Study Centre that are both situated in the same building next to Assi Ghat. I have got the keys to the house and the responsibility for the whole building. I take care of guests to the Canadian Office; sometimes I am cooking for them, and I have to clean the guest’s clothes and clean the building.

I have got education till class 10. I got married when I was 17. I have six children, three sons and three daughters, who are now between 30 and 21 years old. My husband is not working. He is at home. I was born in Pachaganga Ghat (a few kilometers down stream) and moved to my current location 16 or 17 years ago. Before, I had a house in Chowk, but then my husband, who never worked, got in conflict with his brother, so we had to move away. And this house where I live now was empty.

**Morning routine**

I wake up between 05.00 and 05.30. After refreshing myself I have to clean the pots from the day before and to empty the dustbin. Then I take a bath; when I am in a hurry in the house; when I am not in a hurry in the river. Then I do worship at home, and after that, in the temples. If I have no time for worship in the morning I will do it later during the day or in the evening. Bath and puja take about one hour. Before that, I am not allowed to eat anything.

Between 07.30 and 10.30 I work in the Canadian Office. After that, if I did not do it in the morning, I will go to the temples. Then I take some breakfast, take 1/2h rest or do some work for my house before I go to the Swedish centre. I have no exact time when I have to be there, but usually it will be between 12.00 and 12.30. There I stay until 15.30; then I go downstairs again to the Canadian Office, where I stay until 17.30. Then my working day is finished.

When doing puja at home I am alone, but if I go to the temples there are always people. In the Canadian Office I am working alone, and in the Swedish centre I am helping another servant. In the morning and when I come home in between I am also alone.

**Attitudes to work, places and different influences**

*Why do you worship?*

Everyone has to do worship. If I would not do it, I would afterwards feel that I have made a mistake. I would think of it all day.

*How do you relate to your work?*

No one likes to do this kind of hard work. But I have to. Now my children earn money but when the children were small, and my husband did not work, I had to. But in the Canadian and Swedish centre the people are nice so I do not feel bored. And I have no good education so I cannot get a good job. My job is no fun but the atmosphere is good.

*Has your education any influence on the things you are doing in the morning?*
Yes, because sometimes I feel nervous because I have not got much education. If I had more education, I would have a nice job. But I have to work anyhow. Everything is getting more and more expensive, but the salaries are staying the same. Except for the people who have education – they will get a good salary. But it is expensive for anyone.

**Would you do the same things if you were not married?**

No. But if I had another husband than the one I have, then I would certainly do different things. If he worked, then, traditionally I would not have to. But like this, I have to earn money. If I had no children then I still would have to work but not this hard. With children, I have to earn money to buy food for them.

**Has your caste got any influence on what you are doing?**

We belong to milkmen. But we don’t have any buffalo, we don’t have any cow. But if we had a buffalo or a cow, then we would have to do that kind of job: Getting the milk, cleaning away the cow dung, and these kinds of things. But as it is, caste has got no influence on the family life.

**Are there places where others do not want you to go?**

No, because I have got all the responsibilities, I am deciding myself. And I do not know many places in Banaras; I have not been so much around. But the people from the Canadian Office are going to travel every year, and I go with them. So I have seen quite many places in India.

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**Observation 2005-11-10, between 06.00 and 08.15**

When I arrived, M. had been taking a bath in the river and was just coming up to the house again. Now she started to clean the puja niche from yesterday’s puja, removing old flowers etc., and pouring the remaining Ganga water into a pot of Tulsi flowers. All the time, until her home worship was finished, she was whispering or singing verses and songs, containing the God’s names. The next step was to carefully wash her feet under the tap water, before she entered the puja room again. This little room is about 1,5x1,3m large, has no door and has two small windows toward the other rooms of the house. On one side there is a shelf with images of the Hindu Gods and with Shiva Lingas. All the time murmuring, she cleaned all the objects with fresh Ganga water, put red tikka color on the foreheads of the images, offered some rice and then her son came and handed her a small basket with flowers from the tree in front of the house. Carefully M. distributed flowers among the figures, offered an apple and lit a candle.

While she was in the room, her daughter and her son walked around in the house, brushed their teeth, washed clothes and cleaned dishes. They did not hesitate to ask their mother questions, while an alarm clock nobody cared about was ringing hysterically in the room beside.

M. finished her worship by speaking special verses for each piece of a chain, made swinging movements with a candle before she still singing extinguished the candle with Ganga water. Then she went to another room where she had a small niche with an image of a Mosque. “This Muslim”, she said and stayed a while in prayer in front of it. When she finished her home puja it was approximately 07.00. She prepared flowers, water,

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2 She probably cannot imagine not to be married (the author’s remark.)
sweets (pieces of sugar), then went barefoot to the temples. She visited five temples in the neighborhood, offering Prasad in all of them.

Then she walked home again to leave her puja things and to take chai. Around 07.30 she went to the Canadian Office. She locked up all the doors and signed in. Then she started to sweep the floor. I said thank you, then I left.

One thing I observed is that she was never stressed. She was doing every step in a calm way, and she had always time to talk with her son, with me, or with anyone else.
Interview 2005-11-09
with H. (Kshatriya)

I am 44 years old. I belong to Kshatriya.\(^3\) I have no education. I work as a housewife with the specialty that I collect *rohri*\(^4\) for fuel. I spend around one hour on that every day. I married 30 years ago, when I was 14, and I have six children; three sons and three daughters; between 19 and 30 years old. My husband works in the betel business on Assi road. I was born in Kolkata, and moved here with my marriage.

**Morning routine**
I wake up at 03:00 or 03:30. Then I clean up and do some housework, wash my face etc. After that I take a bath at the Ghats and then I go to the temples. At 06:30 I go to my business (rohri) for one hour. After that or at 07:30 I do puja at home, make tea and food for everyone, and do housework till 14:00. Most of the time in the morning I am alone, but sometimes my daughter is with me to help me. Puja I do alone. Usually I am alone when taking a bath in Ganga, but not now, because it is the end of the month of Kartik. These days there are lots of people, and I also go to Panchaganga Ghat. Normally, I take my bath closer by.

For my rituals (puja) I need rice, *kumkum* (red powder), *sindhoor* (orange color), nara (thread), camphor, a garland, Ganga water, *turmeric* (yellow powder), sandalwood, a candle, *bhang* and some sweet. For the rohri job I need water, a basket, a stick and hoosa (cow food)*.\(^5\) I mix the water and the hoosa into the cow shit. The stick I use to take down the dry cow dung from the wall.

**Reasons and attitudes**
I make rohri because I need it at home for cooking as gas is expensive. Everyone is helpless; they have to work. I myself have decided to do this kind of work. If I had any education then I could educate my children better and manage the family better. This time, my family is not very well economically, so if I were educated I could also work in the service somewhere. If I had no children I would anyway have the same routine. There is no choice. Puja is important when there is tension at home and so many things, then I go to the temple to pray, and then I get peace. Peace and happiness.

*So, is there any connection between your work and your caste?*
No, my caste has not got any traditional profession. These days you have to do hard work for anything.

*Are there places you like or dislike?*
I do not like crowded areas like on festivals. For some festivals I would like to go to the village side but I cannot, because I have got responsibilities at home.

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\(^3\) My supervisor Rana P.B. Singh doubted if she was really a Kshatriya, because she had a lifestyle that was more close to the one of low caste people (especially as she was poor). Her family could just have transformed their name into one that sounded identically with a Kshatriya name, in order to gain status. However, she said she was Kshatriya, and the quantity of ritualistic actions she performed indicate that indeed, high caste belonging was quite probable.

\(^4\) *cow dung,* *(the author’s remark)*

\(^5\) actually: straw
I do not like to go to Chowk and the old city because it is crowded. For worship I sometimes go to crowded places far away from my home area. The others (my husband, son and daughter) do not like it but I do it anyway because I want to do worship.

**Observation, 2005-11-10, 07.30-08.00**

In her house there was a bed, a fan, cassettes, a TV, pictures on the walls, and other things (behind pieces of cloth) that I could not identify. She herself wore glasses, a golden Bindu and had her arms covered with bangles.

I arrived at her home at 07.30, the appointed hour, but obviously there had been a misunderstanding about the time. H. was already gone and I had missed her temple walk, people explained to me. But H.’s daughter took me with her to one of the dirtiest lanes in Assi, where H. was sitting on her heels with a bucket of water in front of her. She had a heap of cow dung beside her as well as some straw, and with her hands she mixed these two ingredients with the water (bangles on!). Then she threw hand sized pieces of the cow dung mixture on the stone wall with routine movements. Her part of the wall was soon covered. Meanwhile, her daughter took down already dry pieces from another place where they had put them to dry some days ago.
Interview 2005-11-15
with S. (Mallah; boatmen)

I am about 22 years old. My caste is boatpeople. I work in five different houses as a dish cleaner. I have got no education. I am married since 10 years and have got three children; a son of 10 years, a daughter of 7 and a daughter of 15 years. My husband died about one year ago in a tragic accident. He was a boatman. I was born in a village which is about 10 hours of bus trip away. I moved to Assi with my marriage.

Morning routine
I wake up at 06.00 and take a bath and clean some pots until 08.00. I do no worship. Then I go to work in the five different places until 13.00. I stay in every house for about one hour.

Attitudes and reasons
I go to these places because I need money. No one wants to do this kind of work but I feel helpless. I cannot do anything else because I have no education. I am working alone. It was my neighbor who introduced me at my first workplace and helped me to get the other jobs. I have got no husband, and my children are small, so there is nobody who tells me which places to go and which places to avoid. I have to decide myself where I want to go and where not. Right now I am not feeling well, so I do not want to go anywhere. I am weak, so I will not even go to work.

Observation
My assistant strongly discouraged me from insisting on doing an observation.

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6 If she had a daughter of 15 years she could not be 22 and she could not be married since only 10 years. She must be at least around 30 years old.
Interview 2005-11-19
with L. (Dhobi; washer men, Dalit)

I am around 40 years old. I belong to Dhobi caste, which is washer men. My daily work is to wash and to iron laundry. I have got no education. I got married about 30 years ago and have 6 children; one son who is 17 and five daughters who are 26, 23, 20, 18 and 12 years old. My husband is doing the same work as me, in the same location – we have the business together. Our house/shop is at a busy corner of Assi road.

I was born in a village 6hours by train away from Varanasi.

Morning routine
At 6:00 I wake up. First I do some housework. From 07:30 till 08:00 I wash myself at home. Then I take the clothes and go to the river to clean them. There I stay until the evening. My husband is with me and another family member (usually son or daughter) will come and bring lunch for us. Another washer man is usually also there and sometimes the neighbor. I clean the clothes, then put them to dry, fold them, count everything, bring them home and iron them at home. I need different kinds of soap and soda, a brush, a bucket and a string to bind the clothes with.

I do this work because it is my caste and because there is no other way to get money and food.

Attitude to work and places
I also do this job because all my forefathers belonged to this caste and God has given that task. And I don’t have any other job. I like Varanasi, and I do not like the village. In Varanasi I like all places. There is no one who will tell me what places not to go to. River Ganga is my workplace but I do not relate to the holy river in any particular way. I need much water, that’s why I go there.

Observation
L. wore Bindi, earrings and necklace. Clean clothes in the shelves and in front of the house indicated that she has her business in her home. There were pictures, photos, a fan, a TV and a CD-player. The road outside was busy and noisy. Some of her children as well as 3 small kids were in the room. I asked about observation in the morning and it was okay. However I was sick next morning so I could not go. Other practical things hindered me from organizing a new observation date.
Interview 2005-11-21
with A. (Brahmin)

A. was my only respondent who spoke English.

I am 25 years old. I have a post graduation (12+5). I work as a housewife and in my and my husband’s shop (a public phone booth). I got married five years ago and I have one four-year old daughter. My husband is a lawyer and works close by. I was born in Lucknow where I also studied. I moved to Banaras with my marriage.

Morning routine
I wake up at 06:00. After taking a bath and making myself fresh I make food and do some cleaning. Then it is about 10:00. From then until the afternoon (between 12:00 and 16:00) I will be sitting in my shop. There I take the money from the customers who come to make a phone call. I have to do this job because my family needs money, but it is boring and the same every day, and I am mostly alone there. The shop belonged to my husband’s family, but he is away on work, so I have to do this job. If we had an employee he might not be careful enough and reliable; he might put some money in his own pocket.

Place attitude
I miss Lucknow very much. People there are better (nicer) than here, and I spent all my childhood there. It is also better for business than Banaras. But here it is also okay. In Banaras I do not like Assi, the area where I live. It is like a village. Women cannot go out openly. Otherwise there are no places I really dislike.

Observation
In the shop there was a table with chairs around, a telephone on it, and there was a closed phone booth. Apart from these things the room was almost empty. There was no use to make an observation in the morning, as there would not be much to see. A. looked as if she felt uncomfortable when I asked her, so I dropped the idea. However, I often saw her in her shop when I passed by.
Interview 2005-11-21  
with M. (Dom; Dalit)

I am around 40 years old. I do no work except housework. I have got no education. I had seven children but two sons died so now I have got three sons and two daughters. My eldest son is now 30 or 35 years old. My husband is not working, but my son is. He is cleaning bathrooms or sweeping the road or doing other things when there is the opportunity. He has got no fixed job. I was born in another place in Banaras from where I moved to Assi about 30-35 years ago. By that time I had three sons and one of them (or the husband?) found work in Assi. That’s why we moved. We built our house in a place where there was previously nothing.

I live with my three sons of which two are married, so their wives live here also. They have five small kids altogether. My daughters have moved to their husband’s houses.

Morning routine
I wake up at 05:00. Then I clean the house, make food and give food. Sometimes I can manage everything within one hour; otherwise I do it until 08.00. Then I stay at home because I have got no work.

Place attitude
I have not got any favorite places in Banaras; I just want to stay in my home area (Assi). I dislike the place where I was born, because there has been a family fight and also because my parents, who lived there, are now dead. I do not like any place except here (my house), where I can find peace and happiness (“shanti”).

Observation, 2005-11-22
I arrived the next morning 07:00. M. was sweeping the ground in front of the house. She stopped when I came. We sat down. We could not talk (as I hardly knew Hindi). I asked if I could look around, and it was okay. She continued sweeping. Her hut consisted of three low walls (about 50cm) and an improvised roof (sticks, cloth, tarpaulin) which covered only about half of the house. I do not know what M. and her fellows do during monsoon time. Inside there were cooking utensils, a blanket and very few other things. Two kids came. They were dirty and did not look healthy.

Beside were a garbage heap, and other huts of the same type. The hut beside hers had got real beds (not only mats that are rolled out on the floor to sleep on). There was music coming from a temple close by. Otherwise it was quiet. I felt uncomfortable, and left.

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7 If he is between 30 and 35 years old, his mother M. must be elder than 40.
8 This cannot be true if her eldest son is between 30 and 35 now. Sometimes things she said were contradictory.
9 Information remained unclear even though I tried to ask more specifically whether it was the son or the husband.
Interview 2005-11-24  
with R. (Brahmin)

I am 32 years old. I am a housewife. I have 12 years of education. I got married 15 years ago and I have a son who is 10 years old and two daughters who are 8 and 12. We have a dairy business with our own cows. We have a shop where we sell milk, so my husband works at home. I was born in Kodherma, a city in Jharkand. That is about 500km from here. I moved here with the marriage.

Morning routine  
I get up at 06.00. I take a bath and do a 5 min puja. Then I make tea for my husband, my mother in law and my children. I prepare the kids and then either I or my husband takes them to school. After that I wash clothes at home, clean the house and prepare lunch; all this at the same time. I do this until 12.30, and then I go to our shop and stay there while my husband goes to fetch the children from school.

Feelings, attitudes and place preferences  
I enjoy doing all my housework. Only when I a not feeling well then I feel bored. I learned to do this work since I was a child, and now that I am married I continue it. I do puja for my own belief and own satisfaction, so the God shall bless me.

Are there any places you like or dislike?  
I like my mother’s home, because there I can meet my mother. I also like Jaipur. I have been there and I have some distant relatives there. I do not like the neighborhood of Nagua because the people’s mentality is like in a village. They are not good and they use slangy words. This is my own feeling.

Observation  
I arrived the next morning at the appointed hour at the place where I was going to meet my assistant who was supposed to take me to R.’s home. However, he was not there and I never got the opportunity again to make a second try.
Interview 2005-11-26
with V. (Nai; barber)

I am 47 years old. I have eight years of education. I run a small shop where I sell readymade dhaba\(^\text{10}\). My husband helps me. I got married 35 years ago. I have one son and four daughters; they are between 32 and 22 years old. I was born in a village 41 km away. I moved here with my marriage.

**Morning routine**
I get up at 05.30. First, I wash myself, and then I go to the shop and clean the pots from last night, cut vegetables, clean rice and light the stove. I prepare everything to make food for the customers. At 06.00 I open the shop, but most customers start coming at around 09.00. From 10.00 on they can get everything. I serve rice, vegetables, dhal and chapatti. Every morning I buy vegetables from the vegetable seller. If I do not buy from him, I go and buy myself or I send my husband to go shopping. Usually there are two of my daughters, my husband and me in the shop. I have been doing this since 1992. It has always been similar; it is not easy to make a change. The customers are mostly rickshaw pullers and workers.

**Attitudes**
I have to do this job because I need it to run the family. I do not do it for fun. When I am sick I also have to. In the beginning it was a chai shop. It was a rickshaw puller who had the idea that we could sell food. He made the oven and started the business. One day he did not come back. Since then, I have been the boss. This work has nothing to do with my caste. We belong to the barber caste, but no one in my family is a barber. Only my son owns a barber shop now. If I was not married or if I did not have a family it would be impossible to do this job. We have to be two people.

*Are there any places you like or dislike?*
I like the places where my relatives live but I don’t go there often. I like to stay here: it is my own house. My family would miss me if I went away. There are no places I don’t like. I have no time for traveling. If I travel then only for one day. I prefer to stay at home.

**Observation, 2005-11-27, 06.00-08.00**
When I arrive, V. is in the bathroom. Then she goes outside and washes dishes under the tap, then goes in again and wakes up her children. After that she is in her shop all the time. She places benches and tables outside, one table for the customers and another one for her to sit on. She brings a small clay stove which she puts on the table, squats herself down and puts clay water on the stove. She fills it with dry cow dung and lights it, then she puts some coal. With the help of her daughter she cuts and peels vegetables. She puts a pot of water on the stove (It will take a very long time to make it start boiling). While her husband is sweeping the street outside she cleans rice and dhal. Today the shop opens late because yesterday there was a wedding party in the street in front. Still there is music and people are busy tidying up.

\(^{10}\text{restaurant food}\)
I am around 33 years old. I am a housewife. I attended school for eight years. I was married 16 years ago and I have two sons and two daughters who are between 15 and 8 years old. My husband works in Bhadaini in his father’s business. My husband’s father owns about 30 to 35 rickshaws\(^{11}\) which they rent out. I was born in Gola, near the neighborhood of Chowk, and moved to Assi with my marriage. By that time I was 17.

**Morning routine**
I get up at 05.00, take a bath at home, and at 05.30 I go to the temples. After that I make food for everyone and make the children ready for school. At 07.00 they go. Then I clean the dishes, do other house work and prepare food. My husband comes home between 12.00 and 13.00 and I supply him and the children with food. After that I have time to relax.

**Attitudes and place preference**
I am a housewife because out of the home it is difficult to get a good job. Except of my temple walk I spend the whole morning in my home. I seldom go out; even the shopping will be done by my husband. About one or two times a month I will go shopping myself. I like the Vishuna temple in the BHU\(^{12}\) area. I do not like the old city market because it is crowded.

**Why are you doing Puja?**
For peace and happiness for the family, especially for the children.

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\(^{11}\) probably cycle rickshaws (the author’s remark)

\(^{12}\) Banaras Hindu University
sugar. This she put on the Shiva Lingas and Nandi\textsuperscript{13} figures. Before going to the other temples further away she left the basket in her home. After returning from her temple walk she started to dress up children and to prepare them for school.

\textsuperscript{13} Nandi: bull that is God Shivas vehicle
Interview 2005-11-28  
with L. (Mallah; boatmen)

I am 52 years old. I work in the kitchen in four different places. I have got no education. I got married 35 years ago. I have got five sons and two daughters; they are between 27 and 5 years old. My husband is driving a cycle rickshaw everywhere in Banaras, depending on where the customers want to go. I was born in the old city and moved here with the marriage.

Morning routine
I get up at 05.00. Then I go to the market to have some chai. At 05.30 I go to my first job. I stay in each place for about one hour. At 09.00 I go back home. Usually my son makes food; otherwise I do it. I do some cleaning, take a shower, give food to the others and eat. Then I make the children ready for school and bring them to their school in Ganga Mahal. They come back at 12.30. My eldest children do not go to school. Between 14.30 and 18.00 I go back to the same four places for work. I clean the pots and do other kitchen work. Usually I am alone while working.

Attitudes to work and to places
It is hard to wake up early, especially in winter when it is cold. The people I work for are nice. The need of money decided that I would do this work. When I had started in one place I got respect and my work was recommended to the other places where I work now. I like villages because they are green and I feel good there. But I would never like to stay in a village for longer. There is no place that is no good.

Observation
Seven people lived in the only room they had. It had got stone walls and cement floor but the roof was made only from straw and bamboo. It was a very poor home without furniture; without a fan, but with wires along the roof that supplied electricity to a few light bulbs. The next day in the afternoon, L. took me with her and showed me three of her work places that are all in the Assi area. The fourth one was too far away to show, she said. Her 14-year old son, who spoke English, was with us to translate. They showed me where she works, and then she stayed for work in the third place. All people we met were friendly.