Just Lunch: An Ethnography of School Meals and Poverty in Delhi

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Abbreviations

ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CAA	Citizenship (Amendment) Act
CNNS	Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey
FCI	Food Corporation of India
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
INR	Indian Rupees
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MDMS	Mid Day Meal Scheme
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NFS Act	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NSS	National Sample Survey
OBC	Other Backward Class
PDS	Public Distribution System
RTE	Right to Education
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDCY	Society for the Development of Children and Youth
SDMC	South Delhi Municipal Corporation
SMC	School Management Committee
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

Passing through the city of Delhi, one usually comes across a few simple shelters at the roadside every here and there, or spaces where parked handcars and narrow lanes mark the entrance of a slum settlement. Shelters and settlements, however, are often not visible from the roads, as they are hidden behind fences, walls, small shops, market areas or other physical structures. If one stops at big traffic junctions in a vehicle, one might be approached by people who live in these roadside shelters or slums. They come with flowers, balloons and other things they offer for sale, or with empty hands begging for money. Besides such encounters, most middle- and upper-class residents of the city are in regular contact with people from poor settlements as the latter work for them as domestic helps, cooks, drivers or guards. These are only the most visible forms of how the life of better-off residents builds on the labour of lower classes. What is less visible is that most of the city's buildings and infrastructure that people inhabit or use in various ways only exist because of the work of construction workers, who form a large part of those living in the poor settlements.

The fact that construction labourers and other daily wage service workers in the modern capital city often live in roadside shelters or slums with their families, hints at the persisting inequalities which are so deeply rooted in Indian society. It is those urban poor and the inequalities shaping their lives that this dissertation is concerned with. I examine how a large-scale governmental programme addresses these inequalities, focussing on the example of the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). The MDMS is a national level response of the government to persistent poverty and hunger as well as deficits in the educational sector. It provides a hot cooked meal to students in all government and government-aided schools up to year eight, free of cost. Along with the primary aim to increase enrolment, attendance and the nutritional situation of children from economically weak backgrounds, the scheme is supposed to increase the learning abilities of students and foster equality among them. Regarding the latter, the scheme is expected to enhance socialisation among children from different class and caste backgrounds and increase the female ratio of students. Further, the scheme is meant

to offer employment opportunities for people from disadvantaged sections of society (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:1,24,25).

The guiding question of this dissertation is: *To what extent does the Indian Mid Day Meal Scheme contribute to reducing inequalities?* Before introducing the scheme in more detail, as well as my research area and methods, I start by outlining which inequalities I focus on and how they are dealt with by the government, as this is the perspective from which I approach my research question.

Inequalities on the rise

While India has gained in economic power over the last three decades, deeply rooted inequalities still prevail. In fact, the processes that have generated economic growth have, to a large extent, aggravated inequalities that are based on pre-existing social divisions such as caste, tribe, gender, religion and region of origin. Anthropological evidence, as provided by Alpa Shah et al. (2018:17) for instance, clearly shows that the processes of economic growth (following economic liberalisation in the early 1990s) involve mechanisms of inequality in which the historically disadvantaged Dalits[1] and Adivasis[2] are largely powerless in relation to dominant social groups and institutions. Although some members of these groups achieved relative economic betterment, most of them have ended up in new forms of exploitation – that is, in working and living conditions that are precarious, at the lowest end of the labour force, with few chances to improve this situation (Shah et al. 2018).

Under the current government of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, ruling since 2014, minorities, especially Dalits and Muslims, are experiencing marginalisation, harassment and the suppression of their rights on a new scale. The ongoing harsh treatment of students protesting against the discrimination of Dalits and challenging Hindu nationalist ideology in institutions of higher

[1] Dalits are members of the lowest castes. As predominantly unfree agrarian labourers or slaves and their descendants they were – and to a large extent still are – seen and treated as being outside of the rest of society of all other castes (see e.g. Viswanath 2014:8 and more detailed discussion below and in chapter two). I use the term "Dalit" as it is the most widely established term for this group of people in academia today and it is partly also used by members of the group themselves. Dalits of my research referred to their own group primarily by names of their castes/sub-castes and I also found the term "SC" (Scheduled Caste – explained on page 11) used to refer to Dalits, however, since this category does not include all Dalits using this term would lead to confusion.

[2] Adivasi is the term for the tribal population of India.

education (see, for example, Wazir 2016) demonstrates the new regime's commitment to imposing its political agenda in the educational sphere (see also Bhatty and Sundar 2020). At the same time, violent attacks by right-wing vigilantes on Dalits and Muslims in the name of "cow protection", largely condoned by the state, gave rise to protests which were also brutally suppressed (Govindarayan 2016; Pollmann 2016).

Sexual violence against women in India – and especially rape crimes by upper-caste men against Dalit women – are another brutal means of rampant caste supremacy, occurring in combination with gender domination. Shocking rape cases are increasingly gaining national and international attention and spark massive protests where protesters denounce the fact that despite legislative reforms many upper-caste culprits enjoy impunity while victims often cannot access justice (Dey and Orton 2016; Ellis-Petersen 2020; Godbole 2020; Sabharwal et al. 2015; Werleman 2020). Further, the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA)[3], which discriminates against Muslims, provoked extensive nationwide protests, which the regime responded to in turn with mass arrests and police violence (Ahmed 2020).

While the CAA protests were in full force, the global covid-19 pandemic hit the world and further contributed to the rise of inequalities in a dramatic way. The global spread of the coronavirus and the national level measures taken with the aim to reduce infections have caused a severe humanitarian crisis in India and elsewhere. Already high rates of poverty and hunger are likely to increase dramatically. According to Uma Lele et al. (2020), before the pandemic about 194 million people in India had to bear hunger as they lacked purchasing power – a number that is now assumed to have increased by several million (Lele et al. 2020:13). Deepening the divide between privileged and underprivileged sections, the pandemic has shone a bright light on the inequalities permeating the society, which are at the heart of this thesis. Social inequalities (especially based on race, caste, tribe,

[3] The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was passed by the parliament on 12th December 2019. It offers Indian citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019). The explicit exclusion of Muslims from this provision, in combination with the controversial citizenship rules of the National Register of Citizenship and the National Population Register, has provoked massive nation-wide protests among Muslims as well as non-Muslims defending secularist principles (see e.g. Ahmed 2020).

religion and gender) were increasing before in many parts of the world – in India especially in connection with the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s (e.g. Shah et al. 2018:58). The current example of the pandemic, however, is so powerful, because it unfolded in such short and vigorous way (although presumably with long-lasting impacts).

All over the world, the pandemic exacerbates levels of poverty and hunger, adding to the distress and hardship of large numbers of the poor and marginalised. Through the pandemic, social fault lines become more visible and inequalities deepen, as those who are marginalised and excluded are most negatively affected in various ways. To start with, they are least protected from the disease with difficult access to health care – over 80 per cent of the Indian population has no access to health coverage, according to Lele et al. (2020:16). At the same time, the consequences of measures taken to slow down the spread of the virus hit these groups particularly hard, while their concerns were often not reflected in political decisions and actions. Hence, the situation also demonstrates how the state governs poverty and hunger, or in other words, how it deals with the poor more generally.

Migrant labourers in Indian are among those most severely affected by the crisis. Suddenly, albeit just for a short time, there was an increase in literature and data on this part of the population, while both is usually very scarce. During the moment of the crisis, the precarious and sometimes inhumane conditions under which these people live and work have gained public attention to some extent (e.g. Samaddar 2020:20). The focus of much of the attention was on the immediate implications of the crisis for migrants, that is the hardships it caused to them and the relief measures taken (or the lack thereof). To really understand their situation, however, the analysis needs to go far beyond these immediate concerns.

Indeed, migrant labourers generally experience high levels of exclusion and hardship, as described by Manish K Jha and Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, for instance:

> "Migrant's existence is itself precarious in multiple and reinforcing ways, combining vulnerability of uncertainties at destination and source, state violence, exclusion from public

services and basic state protections, insecure employment, exploitation at work, insecure livelihood, and everyday discrimination and isolation" (Jha and Pankaj in Samaddar 2020:62).

According to Jan Breman (2020), the exploitative nature of the political economy, which keeps migrant labourers as a cheap and flexible workforce, actually created a situation of a permanent crisis that they experience: "The massive army of reserve labour at the bottom of the informal economy is entrapped in a permanent state of crisis." (Breman 2020:8,16). The Indian government has chronically neglected the needs of these people as many infrastructural and welfare programmes have not reached them and most state governments have treated their migrants with apathy, according to the Interstate Migrant Policy Index 2019 (Samaddar 2020:85). Migrants are commonly seen as "illegitimate" invaders. As they are a source of cheap labour, host states offer some kind of charity in compensation for their status, where they are denied full citizenship and their constitutional rights (Samaddar 2020:94).

Unsurprisingly, migrants labourers are also particularly vulnerable to crises or measures of crisis management, such as lockdowns and border closures in the current case. In India, a countrywide lockdown of (initially) 21 days was announced on 25 March 2020 with an advance notice of less than four hours (Samaddar 2020:13-18,56). Hence, most migrant labourers lost their jobs overnight, while others, especially farm workers in rural areas, had to continue working, faced with infection risks and payment insecurity (Samaddar 2020:19). When everybody was instructed to stay home and maintain social distance while public transportation was interrupted, there was no political strategy or plan that incorporated the situation of migrant labourers. In fact, in Ayona Datta's words: "The city failed to provide the most basic survival infrastructures to its most vulnerable migrant workers under lockdown." (Datta 2020). In this sudden state of emergency, large numbers of migrants had no choice but to leave cities and try to return to their places of origin, many of them making the journey on foot (e.g. Samaddar 2020:50). Breman (2020:6), for instance, describes the unimaginable misery this caused: "In their tortuous trek, several hundreds of them died from fatigue, starvation, failing health

or accidents when passing through habitat unwilling to grant permission to proceed to these unwanted and possibly virus affected flotsam and jetsam".

Estimates of the number of migrants who left the cities in this situation range from 22 million (Lele et al. 2020:13) to about 120 to 140 million migrants (Dandekar and Ghai 2020:30,31). Generally, the lack of reliable figures on this part of the population has been highlighted by many scholars (e.g. Shah et al. 2018; Samaddar 2020; Dandekar and Ghai 2020:28). In fact, both official sources of migration data – the Population Census and the migration surveys that are carried out by the National Sample Survey (NSS) Office – do not provide much relevant data on labour migration. The main issue is that seasonal or short-term migration, which is very common for migrant labourers, is not adequately covered[4]. To get a broad idea of the scale of labour migration in the country: Sarmin talks of around 100 million internal migrant labourers (Sarmin in Samaddar 2020:49) and Shah et al. (2018) even estimate that about 560 million people (including non-migrating members of the household) are affected by seasonal casual labour migration (Shah et al. 2018:20). According to Tish Sanghera (2020), in a news article that refers to the Indian government's 2016-17 Economic Survey, internal migrants make up about 20 per cent of the Indian workforce.

The lack of adequate and reliable data on labour migration is in itself telling, as it is part of their "invisibility". Ranabir Samaddar even argues that it was only when they came out while everyone had to stay home during the lockdown, that the "political class" realised that the "migrant worker as a person existed" (Samaddar 2020:16). That, too, was a phenomenon of just a few days before the focus of public attention shifted again (Samaddar 2020:15,16). Talking about (in)visibility might hold true from the perspective of large parts of the society. Regarding the role of the government, however, it is well possible that the lack of data can at least to some extent be explained by a systematic omission of data on migrant labourers, as Breman (2020) argues. In his own words: "Beyond my contention that the government is well known to lack basic information on the scale, shape and

[4] Apart from the fact that Census and NSS surveys do not adequately capture seasonal and short-time circular migration, another issue is the outdatedness of Census data on migration. The migration data from the latest Census, conducted in 2011, were released nine years later (Ahamed in Samaddar 2020:128).

employment modality of the workforce kept footloose, my even more disquieting conclusion is that India's ruling class does not want to know the ins and outs of labour migration." (Breman 2020:8).

Moreover, the lack of data and the extent of invisibility go hand in hand with the absence of systematic policy interventions targeting migrant labourers (Ahamed in Samaddar 2020:127,130). The few governmental relief programmes rolled out during the first wave of the pandemic were deeply insufficient. According to an Oxfam report, the sum of public spending for all relief programmes that the government announced until the end of May 2020 made up merely one per cent of the GDP, of which much has not reached the people who were supposed to benefit (Dutta and Sardar 2021:16). For instance, many of the migrant poor could not access food programmes like the Public Distribution System (PDS)[5] in the cities where they lived, since they were not officially registered as urban residents and as such lacked the required papers (Khera and Somanchi 2020; Economic and Political Weekly 2020:8). According to Breman (2020:5-6), for instance, the system of food grain distribution to migrants was largely ineffective.

Moreover, the directive to practice social distancing and staying home as a measure to reduce infections is not feasible for many of the poor who are dependent on daily wage labour for their survival. There is also the impossibility of keeping physical distance in very densely populated slums, intensified in a situation when people cannot escape this density as they usually do for their work. Hence, what is a measure to save people from contagion with the virus in case of the better-off parts of the population, creates conditions for the poor in which their exposure to contagion is increased as they live in overcrowded sharing basic infrastructures with many others (Khatua 2020:17; Dutta and Sardar 2021:8).

[5] The Indian PDS (also referred to as "Targeted Public Distribution System") has its roots in the food shortage of the mid 1960s and continues to provide households with food grains to highly subsidised prices. Since 1997, the entitlement to food rations is regulated by a system that categorises people according to different levels of poverty (Website of the Department of Food and Public Distribution). Apart from this controversial system of eligibility assessment, many poor people are excluded because they are not officially registered (an aspect that I discuss in more detail in chapters one and four). Moreover, the recent linkage of the PDS to the "adhaar" system adds to problems of access, as the latter is prone to technical failures (see e.g. Khera and and Somanchi 2020; Economic and Political Weekly 2020:8).

As the current crisis and the management of the same have most severely hit the poor and migrant labourers in particular, it did not only increase existing class inequalities, but also caste inequalities. Castes are endogamous groups that are hierarchically organised (also called "jatis"). The focus of this thesis is on low castes and especially Dalits, as the migrants of my empirical research – the schoolchildren and their families – are predominantly from these sections of society (see detailed discussion on the caste composition in the schools in chapter one). Hence, the poorest in this urban setting – the migrants – are primarily those belonging to the lowest castes.

Dalits are the castes at the bottom of society who have suffered and to a large extent are still suffering from exploitation and discrimination. Further, the cruel practices of untouchability, which is still not overcome although it has been constitutionally abolished in 1950 (The Constitution of India 2015:8, Art. 17), caused and continues to cause immense distress to Dalits (see e.g. Ambedkar 1979:39-41). The position of Dalits in society and the phenomenon of caste more largely has been explained in different ways. A very prominent view, which was most influentially advanced by Louis Dumont (1970), is to see caste and with that the position of Dalits as primarily a cultural phenomenon. Based on ancient textual sources, in this explanation the principle of purity and pollution is seen as the central logic according to which castes are organised in the hierarchy of four so-called varnas (larger categories comprising several castes) and Dalits were treated as untouchables (Dumont 1970).

In contrast to this explanation of the social order, I follow scholars who see the roots for the position of Dalits in the political economy rather than in cultural practices and beliefs. In fact, Dalits were largely agrarian slaves or unfree agrarian labourers suffering from exploitation and deprivation by the landed castes, as their descendants still do (Viswanath 2012, 2014, 2016; Shah 2001:17-20; Roberts 2008). As Rupa Viswanath describes in detail in her book "The pariah problem" (2014), their plight has been downplayed until the end of the 19th century by British colonisers as well as by Indian elites in order to keep the agrarian production running. She further emphasises that though the situation of Dalits has been recognised as a problem that politicians and social reformers addressed during the century that followed, the policies were largely ineffective and structural changes that

would actually enable Dalits to access resources and political power remain absent to the current time. Viswanath argues that the reason for this is to be seen in the "caste-state nexus", referring to the coordinated practices of British and Indian state officials and high-caste landlords controlling Dalit labour (Viswanath 2014:38, 39). Hence, many Dalits – as those of my research – even today have no other choice than living and working in highly precarious conditions and experience exploitation and discrimination, in village and city. In fact, the large majority of the families in my research area who migrated to Delhi from rural areas (many of them Dalits) are landless or owning very little land from the returns of which they cannot live. As they also have very limited options to earn money as agrarian labourers or otherwise in the rural areas, they suffer immensely from the agrarian crisis in the country. Considering this general situation of a huge number of Dalits, clearly, they are also particularly harshly affected in the current scenario of the covid-19 pandemic described above.

Further, when looking at social fault lines that have been deepened by the pandemic, it should be mentioned that religious prejudices have also played a role in this situation. This happened, for instance, when – at the beginning of the pandemic in India – after an Islamic event in which many people had been infected with the virus, Muslims all over the country faced a wave of discrimination and hostility fuelled by growing Hindu nationalism (e.g. Krishnan 2020).

Another form of social inequality that plays a central role in my analysis of the MDMS, namely gender inequality, has also been reinforced by the current crisis. Women, who on average do a higher share of (child) care and household work than men and often work in positions with low payment and high insecurity, are more negatively affected by the pandemic (e.g. Deshpande 2020). According to Samaddar (2020), it is a global phenomenon that in the pandemic women are further disadvantaged because traditional gender roles become more entrenched (Samaddar 2020:122).

Further, exclusion and increasing inequalities define the experiences of the poor also in the educational and nutritional sectors. The situation in both of these sectors worsened due to the pandemic. As these aspects are closely tied to the MDMS, I take a close look here, starting with the educational situation.

Regarding numbers of school enrolment, there has been a tremendous increase over the last decades, as the government has been trying to achieve universal primary education. The inclusion of education (for children between 6 and 14 years) as a Fundamental Right under article 21 of the Indian constitution, through the 86th Amendment Act in 2002, was part of these attempts. Further, with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009, which came into effect in April 2010, the government made it a right of all children between 6 and 14 years to get admitted to a neighbourhood school free of cost, and to be promoted until completion of the elementary level (5 years). The RTE substantially reduced the administrative requirements for enrolment and re-enrolment and introduced a 25 per cent quota for minority groups in private schools, as part of a whole set of provisions meant to help children of poor and marginalised sections of society to enter elementary education (Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009). Indeed, school enrolment numbers increased steadily and in 2016 reached 96.9 per cent on average for children between 6 and 14 years even in rural areas (ASER 2017).

However, many children's educational histories are very short and disrupted, as I discuss in chapter one. Further, over the last few decades – in parallel to increasing enrolment numbers – massive privatisation of education has led to an increasing gap between public and private education. In fact, government schools have largely become schools for the poor, marked by poor infrastructure, very low educational quality and extremely limited learning achievements (Dasgupta et al. 2010; Pandey et al. 2010; Majumdar 2011; Basu 2013; Editorial 2013:8). Masses of first-generation schoolchildren entering government schools and huge numbers of children (whose parents could afford so) shifting to private education are two major factors that led to a dramatic decrease of learning levels in government schools. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) of 2018, in fact, assumes a correlation between the implementation of the RTE Act in 2010 and the decline of reading abilities (ASER 2019:9). The report shows a severe decline in learning levels between 2008 and 2018. During this time, the percentage of grade five children in government schools who can read a text meant for grade two, dropped from 53.1 to 44.2 per cent with moderate alternation in between (ASER 2019:9).

In almost all 18 states compared in the survey, the percentage dropped immensely between 2008 and 2012 and then slightly recovered in some of them and stagnated or further decreased in others. The state with the most extreme variation is Madhya Pradesh, where in 2008, 86.8 per cent of grade five students in government schools could read a text for grade two. This figure dropped to 27.5 per cent in 2012 and 2014 and then increased to 34.4 per cent by 2018 (ASER 2019:9). The most extreme decrease with no clear upward trend between 2008 and 2018 was found in Bihar (from 62.8 to 35.1 per cent) and Jharkhand (from 51.9 to 29.4 per cent) (ASER 2019:9).

The covid-19 pandemic has further aggravated this educational inequality as the closure of schools and shift to digital teaching modes have affected schools without digital equipment and students with less opportunities to study at home most dramatically. According to a recent Oxfam report (2021), 96 per cent of Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 96.2 per cent of Scheduled Castes (SC)[6] households with children in school have no access to a computer (Dutta and Sardar 2021:6). The report also found that many government school teachers (close to 40 per cent) fear that a third of the students might not return when schools re-open. Presumably, the dropout rate will be higher among Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims compared to the rest of the population (Dutta and Sardar 2021:5).

Turning to the nutritional situation, as mentioned in the beginning, the pandemic has caused a severe hunger crisis. Beyond the direct threat of starvation or malnutrition, the worsening of the economic situation might also lead to a worsening of the nutritional situation in many cases. The full consequences of the crisis cannot be assessed yet – while I am writing the second wave of the pandemic shakes India with full force causing further unprecedented hardship to masses of people – but the severity of the problem becomes imaginable against the background of the already dramatic nutritional scenario in India. The figures on the nutritional situation reflect the highly unequal access to sufficient and nutritious food, clean water and health infrastructure, for instance, and are as such a mirror of the dramatic inequalities prevailing in the society.

[6] The terms “Scheduled Tribes” and “Scheduled Castes” refer to castes and tribes that are listed as eligible for quotas in the public sector as part of the “affirmative action” enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

On a national average 34.7 per cent of children under five years are stunted[7] and 17 per cent of the same age group are wasted[8], according to the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) of 2016-2018 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF and Population Council 2019:108,109). These figures are much above the global average, as the Global Nutrition Report of 2018 found that 22.2 per cent of all children in the world under five years old were stunted in 2017 and 7.5 per cent of the same age group were wasted (Development Initiatives 2018:12). Unsurprisingly, the CNNS data show that malnutrition levels tend to be higher in rural areas and among the poorest parts of the population (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF and Population Council 2019:108,109). In Delhi, as well, the malnutrition level among children is much above the international average with 28.1 per cent of under five-year-old children identified as stunted and 14.8 as wasted (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF and Population Council 2019:108,109). In the age group of five to nine years, still 21 per cent of the children in Delhi are stunted (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF and Population Council 2019:137). The phenomenon of persistently high rates of malnutrition – of which stunting and wasting are two important indicators – prevailing in India despite economic growth has become known as the "Asian enigma" (see e.g. Guha-Khasnobis and James 2010).

The most recent survey on the nutritional situation, the fifth edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), was released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in December 2020 and is based on data collection from the second half of 2019. Therefore, that it does not reflect the consequences of the pandemic, which started in 2020. As only phase 1 data is out by now, it covers only 22 states and Union Territories, so that figures for Delhi and for the national level, for instance, are not available yet. Nevertheless, the available data points to the alarming situation that, after data from the two previous rounds (2005/6 and 2015/16) showed improvements of the nutritional situation,

[7] Stunting is also known as "chronic undernutrition" and is identified by low height-for-age (Development Initiatives 2018:22).
[8] Wasting is also known as "acute malnutrition" and is identified by low weight-for-height (Development Initiatives 2018:22).

this overall trend has reversed. In other words, even before the pandemic malnutrition parameters have worsened in the majority of the states. Compared to the data from 2015/2016, child stunting increased in 13 states, child wasting in 12 states, underweight in 16 states and overweight in 20 states. Some states improved in certain categories – Karnataka, for example, improved in all categories except overweight, and Bihar improved in the categories of stunted and underweight children (numbers are still very high: stunting dropped from 48.3 to 43.9 per cent and underweight from 43.9 to 41.0 per cent) (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and International Institute for Population Sciences 2020). Among those states in which the situation worsened in most or all categories – such as West Bengal, Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, Nagaland and Mizoram – the results from Kerala are particularly surprising. Kerala is commonly referred to as one of the states with the highest human development indicators, however, the survey found that the nutritional situation in Kerala worsened in all categories, except severely wasted children (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and International Institute for Population Sciences 2020).

Biopolitics

The above examples clearly show how deeply the inequalities this thesis focuses on are rooted in society, and how they are reinforced by a crisis and the way it is managed. On a more abstract level, the example of the pandemic also demonstrates a basic pattern of governmental action that I draw on in my analysis.

The way in which the government finally started action towards supporting the migrants in their destitution caused by the spontaneous lockdown, carries basic characteristics of biopolitics. The Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, or biopower, as a mode of governing in which the management of the population is the goal, is discussed in detail in chapter four. In the situation of the pandemic, the aim of biopolitics is the management of the population in order to control the disease. As became clear, this is done – though to different degrees in different countries – in a way that segregates populations along the lines of class, caste, race, occupation, gender, etc. (Samaddar 2020:12). The basic characteristics of the biopolitics that became apparent in the way the Indian government reacted

to the situation of the migrant labourers are to a large extent comparable to the biopolitics of the MDMS.

In both cases, the focus of attention is on the physical body of the poor. The MDMS focuses on the body of the poor and possibly hungry and undernourished child, whose nutritional situation is to be improved and whose presence in school and learning ability is to be enhanced. In case of the stranded labour migrants, the concern of political action was in the first place motivated by the fear that physical bodies out on the streets in large numbers, defying the call for distance, posed a danger to public health by possibly spreading the virus (Samaddar 2020:96,97). Apart from some transportation arrangements for migrants, the government mainly reached out to the poor by the provision of food and basic goods for survival. Despite the problem that the relief measures did not reach everybody in need and relied heavily on the engagement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society, this kind of biopolitics makes the poor objects of charity (Samaddar 2020:123). The MDMS was in this situation part of the government's strategy to offer humanitarian relief. The scheme has increasingly become tied to a rights based approach, which entitles the poor to receive certain food provisions even beyond the meal in school[9]. However, the crisis is an example that shows how weak and limited these entitlements are and that the management of poverty still inherently has a charity character.

The introduction of the dimensions of inequality, which are at the centre of this thesis, and of some basic features of the relation between the government and the poor, has already revealed the intentions and character of the MDMS to some extent. In the following, I introduce the scheme in more detail.

The Mid Day Meal Scheme

The history of school meal programmes in India can be traced back over almost hundred years. In the city of Chennai, the state capital of Tamil Nadu, a school meal programme for disadvantaged children

[9] See Mid Day Meal rules 2015 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015) and National Food Security Act 2013, which are discussed in chapter four.

was introduced in 1925. The Noon Meal Scheme that was started in the whole state of Tamil Nadu in 1982 is widely seen as the role model for the nation-wide MDMS. In 1990-1991, 16 states – not including Delhi – introduced School Meal schemes with different modes of funding and implementation (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:1). The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), commonly referred to as the Mid Day Meal Scheme[10], was introduced in 1995. Initially it covered schoolchildren of year one to five in 2408 blocks in the country and got expanded to all blocks of the country in 1997-1998 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:2). Through several extensions, the scheme was step-wise expanded to more types of schools[11] and to upper primary classes (which includes up to year eight) by 2008-2009 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2007). Currently reaching out to almost 116 million children[12], the MDMS is one of the largest school meal programmes in the world.

The primary aim of the scheme is to enhance school enrolment, attendance as well as the nutritional intake of students. At the time when the MDMS was introduced, NSS data (from 1995-96) identified 31 per cent of children in the 6- to 11-year-old age-group as not attending school (Ramachandran 2008:71). Since then, (as mentioned above) school-enrolment numbers have increased steadily, reaching 96.9 per cent on average for children between 6 and 14 years old even at the national rural level (ASER 2017).

The alarming figures on malnutrition in India and the trend to the worse have been sketched. Ironically, despite this situation, there are at the same time enormous amounts of food grain stocks piling up at the Food Corporation of India (FCI). The amount of stocked food grains reached a record high of 77 million tonnes in March 2020 – when the covid-19-crisis began – which is almost three

[10] It was officially re-named to "National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools" in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, website of the Mid Day Meal Scheme).
[11] In 2002 the MDMS was expanded to be implemented not only in government, government aided and local body schools, but also schools run under the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and innovative Education Scheme Ministry of Human Resource Development (2006:2). In 2008, it was extended to Madrasas/Maqtabas 2007 (Website of the Ministry of Education).
[12] 115,9 million, according to the official website of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website, accessed: 18 September 2020)

times more than the buffer-stock requirements (Masood 2020). According to Mayurakshi Dutta and Sucheta Sardar (2021:16), public stocks even increased to over 100 million tons by the beginning of June 2020, of which parts were rotting. Already in 2012, according to a media report (Sharma Sandhu 2012), when food stocks were expected to reach a record of 75 million tons, the FCI even warned of the problem that vital food grains are rotting in silos.

The demand that in times of droughts the food grain stocks of the country, which are otherwise rotting, must be used to feed the poor, is also the central point of the "Right to Food Case" of 2001, which has fundamentally shaped the MDMS. What has become known as "Right to Food case", is a Public Interest Litigation at the Supreme Court by the Public Union for Civil Liberties that led to the initiation of the ongoing Right to Food Campaign in India (discussed in chapter four). While the case has been closed after 17 years without a final order, a number of interim orders have been passed. Among them the Supreme Court order of 2001, according to which all students covered under the MDMS must be provided with a hot-cooked meal on at least 200 days per year (Right to Food Campaign 2001). Prior to the implementation of this order, the 'meal' consisted of dry rations in many places.

Many states, including Delhi, had fully introduced cooked meals only by 2004 (De et al. 2005:3). As per the rules of 2015 – applicable at the time of my field research and continuing until today – the meal is supposed to consist of 450 kilocalories and 12 grams proteins (lower primary classes) and 700 kilocalories and 20 grams proteins (upper primary classes) (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015; National Food Security Act 2013:16). In terms of the financial arrangements, the food grains (rice and wheat) are provided free of cost from the godowns of the FCI and fixed rates of transportation costs are reimbursed by the central government. The cooking costs are shared between the central and the state government in most federal states (at a ratio of 60:40), while costs in the union territory of Delhi are fully borne by the central government. At the time of my research, from July 2015 the cooking costs per child/day were set at INR 3.86 for (primary) and INR 5.78 (upper-primary) respectively (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2016). The rates have increased

steadily, currently standing at INR 4.97 and INR 7.45 respectively (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2020, April 14). The other activities involved – such as the cooking of food, provision of cooking fuel, creation of physical facilities and overseeing of manpower resources – are the responsibility of the states (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2016).

Across the country, there are two distinct cooking arrangements. One is the food preparation in school-based kitchens in rural areas where the meal for students is cooked in the schools itself. The other arrangement is that of the centralised kitchens that are run by so-called service providers (mostly NGOs) under contract with the state government in urban places because of space constraints on school premises and shorter distances between schools. My case study in Delhi is an example of the second type of arrangement. Initially, as many as 72 suppliers were engaged in Delhi, which was reduced stepwise to 11 NGOs running 13 kitchens in 2005 (De et al. 2005:6) and increased again to currently (in 2019/2020) 51 service providers cooking in 60 semi-automated kitchens (NP-MDMS Annual Work Plan and Budget 2020/2021:2). The NGOs manage the preparation of the food, the transportation of the containers to the schools and back to the kitchen, and are also responsible for paying and managing distributors who serve the food to the students (Mid Day Meal rules 2015, see: Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015). The schools, too, have certain responsibilities under the MDMS. Teachers are appointed to be in charge of the MDMS, which means supervising the processes and taking care of the related paper work. Further, the School Management Committee (SMC) or Village Education Committees are supposed to oversee the quality of the food and ensure that cleanliness and hygiene are maintained throughout the processes (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015).

Besides nutritional and educational benefits that the MDMS is supposed to generate – monitored primarily via the content of the food and the numbers of students in school – the scheme also aims at reducing inequalities. As the scheme is explicitly meant to target poor and disadvantaged children and improve their nutritional and educational levels, the scheme can possibly tackle inequalities in these spheres. Further, the official guidelines also mention on the first page of the document that the

scheme is expected to challenge caste prejudices and class inequalities through the experience of eating together. It says:

> "There is also evidence to suggest that apart from enhancing school attendance and child nutrition, mid day meals have an important social value and foster equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality." (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:1).

How joint eating should be organised and guided by the school staff is, however, not mentioned in the guidelines.

Another aspect of how the MDMS can contribute to reducing inequalities is the employment policies under the scheme. With the introduction of cooked food employment was generated on a huge scale. Currently, almost 2.6 million cooks and helpers are engaged all over India for preparing and distributing food to students under the MDMS (Ministry of Education, Government of India, website of the Mid Day Meal Scheme). In a further order under the "Right to Food Case", the Supreme Court in 2004 demanded commitment towards disadvantaged sections of society under the MDMS. According to this order, among several other points, "[i]n appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to Dalits, Scheduled Castes [SC] and Scheduled Tribes [ST]" (Supreme Court order 2004). The official guidelines mention that "self-help groups" (preferably consisting of poor women, and women whose children participate in the MDMS) can be assigned certain responsibilities under the scheme, including cooking and serving the meal (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006, paragraphs 3.6 and 4.4). Further, the website of the MDMS emphasises the intention to give preference to women as kitchen staff (Ministry of Education, Government of India, website of the Mid Day Meal Scheme).

For NGOs, which cook food under the scheme, beyond a call for preferential engagement of cooks from "weaker sections" including women, there is a provision in the guidelines saying that they should not discriminate on the basis of religion and caste. The same provision also says that the NGOs are not supposed to use the scheme for propagating religious practices. This can be understood as an attempt to prevent the scheme from being used for recreating religious differences and inequalities.

The MDMS in literature and media

Apart from the range of studies that were conducted in the initial years following the introduction of the cooked meal (primarily based on school registers and survey data), academic literature and especially ethnographic work on the MDMS is scarce. In media, the scheme receives significant attention from time to time. At the centre of media attention are debates on policy amendments, as well as cases of bad food quality and other problems related to the way the scheme functions across the country.

Most available literature on the MDMS, despite raising partly substantial critique on the implementation, talk of the scheme as an important social policy. Regarding its outreach, the scheme is even seen as "one of the most successful interventions by the Indian government in recent years" by Abhijeet Singh et al. (2014:279). A central aspect by which the scheme is judged is its impact on school enrolment and attendance. As Reetika Khera (2006:4744,4745) summarises in her review of nine studies that were undertaken in the years after the introduction of the cooked meal (2002-2005), most of them found that the MDMS led to a substantial increase in enrolment numbers (up to 43 per cent), most significantly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since according to some of the studies, the increase is especially high in the case of girls, Khera (2006:4744,4745) assumes that the meals provided "make an important contribution to the reduction of gender bias in school participation". Stephanie Bonds (2012) also found a positive effect on enrolment rates of children, especially from poor and less educated backgrounds. In a survey in Madhya Pradesh by Farzana Afridi (2007), only a small increase of enrolment rates among girls from disadvantaged socio-economic groups was found when comparing the time before and after the replacement of dry food rations by cooked meals. However, her survey confirmed the assumption that the scheme is successful in reducing the gender disparity in schools, as she found that the average attendance of girls in the first year rose by more than ten per cent (Afridi 2007:7,8).

Regarding the nutritional aspects of the MDMS, there are studies that suggest that the meal has a positive effect on the nutritional level of the students (e.g. Singh et al. 2014; Afridi 2010). Comparing

food-intakes of primary school students over 24 hours with school meal and without it in Madhya Pradesh, Afridi (2010) found that the meal reduced nutritional deficiencies (esp. protein and calories) by up to 100 per cent. She concludes that at least in the short-run the scheme had "a substantial effect on reducing hunger at school and protein-energy malnutrition" (Afridi 2010:153). The study by Singh et al. (2014) examined the long-term nutritional effects of the MDMS as compensation for negative health impacts of droughts. According to a longitudinal econometric survey conducted in 2002 and 2007 in Andhra Pradesh, the meal had no significant impact on weight and height of students who did not experience drought, while for those who did experience droughts it functioned as compensation of health deficiencies (Singh et al. 2014:290,91). Anima Rani Si and Naresh Kumar Sharma (2008) in their study on the MDMS in Orissa, argue that they have evidence for a causal link between the implementation of the scheme and increased motivation and energy of the students. From a quantitative survey on effects of the MDMS on the cognitive performance of students in 18 schools in Delhi, Afridi et al. (2013) concluded that the scheme can improve learning effects of the children.

Besides positive effects of the scheme, problems and shortcomings in the implementation of it figure as matter of concern in much of the literature on the MDMS (e.g. Khera 2006; Chettiparambil-Rajan 2007; Chaudhuri 2010; Deodhar et al. 2010; Basu 2013; Deshpande et al. 2014). Most of the above mentioned nine studies that Khera (2006) reviewed found significant shortcomings in areas such as supply, monitoring, reimbursement of costs and payment of cooks and helpers. Further, literature points to improper implementation due to budgetary constraints (e.g. Chettiparambil-Rajan 2007:13), inadequate infrastructure (e.g. Rani Si and Sharma 2008:48) and a lack of linking with school health programmes (in Delhi) (Deshpande et al. 2014). Strikingly, a better cooperation between school health programmes and the MDMS has been suggested in an official evaluation paper in 2003 (NFI 2003 – a paper which is not available online anymore) already. This evaluation also found that although there have been improvements in the infrastructure and distribution of the food, there has been very minimal improvement of local monitoring and participatory aspects of the program (NFI 2003). However, the same issues were still raised many years later. Anuradha De et al.

(2005) and Rajib Dasgupta et al. (2010), for instance, look at the aspect of involvement or participation of parents (or "local community") within the processes of the scheme with the assumption that active participation/engagement of parents is a crucial factor for the success of the scheme and that such mechanisms need to be improved. Lacking local monitoring and supervision, in which parents are supposed to take a central role, has been raised in a similar way again in a report of the MDMS in 2014. It states:

> "SMC members/parents in all sampled schools were not aware of Supervision and monitoring of MDM. Nor were they aware of their roles and responsibilities […] Members are invited only for signatures in meeting registers. Overall participation by parents/SMC/ and Local urban bodies was poor in all schools." (Vijaisri 2014:48,49).

Further, the sometimes very poor quality of food has repeatedly led to concern, especially in Delhi (e.g. De et al. 2005; Bhatnagar 2013; Shrangi 2013). According to Anuradha De et al. (2005:8), a comparative study in twelve schools in Delhi shortly after the introduction of the cooked meal (which I referred to before), the children generally liked the food very much, although the researchers often found the food to be very simple and lacking nutritious ingredients. The most dramatic incidences in relation to the quality of the food happened in July 2013, when 23 students died from poisoned food in Bihar (Reuters 2013) and a few weeks later 36 students fell sick after a meal in Andhra Pradesh (PTI 2013). The central government reacted to this by issuing new guidelines regarding the quality, safety and hygiene of the MDMS (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013). According to Siddheshwar Shukla (2014), moreover, there are causes for lacking quality of the food that are not touched by hygiene and safety measures. He argues that supplying NGOs in Delhi found ways to generate immense financial benefit by heavily compromising on the quality of the food. Part of the argument is that they get food grains and reimbursements from the government according to numbers of students who eat the food. The lists, however, include all students present and the teachers inflate the attendance lists as the latter secure their jobs. Shukla's assumption is that the NGOs sell the extra food grains and pocket extra money (Shukla 2014:51-57). Khera (2006) also mentions the possibility that NGOs sell some of the rice meant for children. However, she sees the reason for this rather in

inadequate transportation funds, which create an incentive for corruption in order to recover the transportation costs (Khera 2006:4744).

Another aspect in literature on the MDMS is its impact towards socialisation and reduction of inequalities in school. In the initial years of the cooked meal, a few scholars assessed the MDMS' potential towards reducing social inequalities by the common eating of children from different socio-economic backgrounds. While Shashi Bhushan Singh (2004), for instance, expresses strong doubts on the capability of the school meal in challenging social inequalities, Jean Drèze and Aparajita Goyal (2003) and Rana Kumar (2004) are convinced that the meal can contribute to reducing inequalities. Kumar (2004) bases this optimism on findings of common sitting arrangements of students from all socio-economic backgrounds in many village schools in West Bengal. Khera (2006) also states: "MDMs can play a role in eroding caste prejudices and nurturing a culture of social equality, as children from different class and caste backgrounds share a meal together." However, according to the nine studies she reviewed, this aspect has not received much attention in the schools, while incidences of caste-based discrimination have been found (Khera 2006:4746). De et al. (2005) take it as a step towards making the meal a common experience that in one of their sample schools in Delhi, all the children had been given similar steel plates for their food. Beyond this, they found that the meal is not being used for enhancing socialisation or other related issues (De et al. 2005:9).

The social atmosphere in schools is addressed in ethnographic studies by Jyoti Dalal (2015) and Farah Farooqui (2017) who focus on Delhi and in a study on the role of caste-thinking in village schools in Maharashtra by Sameer Mohite (2014), for instance. The authors focus on the role of the teachers in reinforcing inequalities in school arguing that their attitude and behaviour towards the children contribute to a large extent to reinforcing marginalisation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They also address the larger social environment of the students and (in Farooqui 2017) the teaching material and curriculum, but not the MDMS. A study by Human Rights Watch (2014) that covers schools in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, found that discrimination against students from disadvantaged backgrounds and especially Dalits was prevalent.

According to the authors, this included practices during the school lunch, such as Dalit children being made to sit separately and required to bring their own plates from home (Human Rights Watch 2014:22).

The research of Human Rights Watch (2014) also revealed discrimination against Dalit cooks under the MDMS. Overall, caste-based discrimination towards cooks and helpers as well as in the employment practices of cooks and helpers is a prevailing matter of concern in literature and media. According to several studies, a low share of people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been employed in MDMS kitchens (e.g. Sabharwal et al. 2014:175; Ramachandran and Naorem 2013:49; Jain and Shah 2005:5084; Thorat and Lee 2006; Nambissan 2009:17). The employment practices in Delhi's centralised MDMS kitchens are critiqued by De at al. (2005:9) and Khera (2006:4746). Moreover, many studies and reports point to the conditions under which the cooks and helpers have to work and the discrimination that Dalit employees often face (e.g. De et al. 2005:4; Thorat and Lee 2006; Rampal and Mander 2013:57; Human Rights Watch 2014:22; The Logical Indian 2018; Dixit 2019; Senapati 2019).

To sum up, literature generally presents the MDMS as a meaningful social policy for children from poor families. This builds mainly on studies conducted during the first half of the 2000s – when the provision of the cooked meal was new – that confirm a success in attracting children to go to school and in nutritional gains for the students. On educational gains attributed to the scheme, literature is much thinner. Regarding matters of inequality in the classroom, in the initial years of the scheme expectations that the common meal could foster equality among the children had been voiced in literature. However, while the studies that touch this aspect mainly point to discriminatory practices during lunchtime, there is a lack of up-to-date academic literature that thoroughly examines this. More attention has been paid to the situation of the cooks, but here the main focus lies on employment practices and discriminatory conditions at the work place in school-based kitchens, while the role of the NGO kitchens in reducing or reproducing inequalities has not received attention in recent academic literature so far.

Research area

Besides extensive review of secondary literature and primary sources, such as policy documents and legal orders, this dissertation draws to a large extent on empirical research. I conducted my ethnographic research at two government primary schools in South Delhi, at various places in the area where the students of these schools and their families live, including two welfare NGOs that some of them regularly visit, and at an NGO-run kitchen from which the schools receive the food under the MDMS. I chose this particular area because about six years prior to my fieldwork, I became acquainted with one of the welfare NGOs, Khush[13], a local organisation that provides informal education and other support to disadvantaged children. I kept track of educational and social programmes in the area and observed how the families negotiated their relation to these various programmes and institutions. These well-established contacts enabled me access to spaces and people crucial for my research beyond the access to the schools granted by an official research permission.

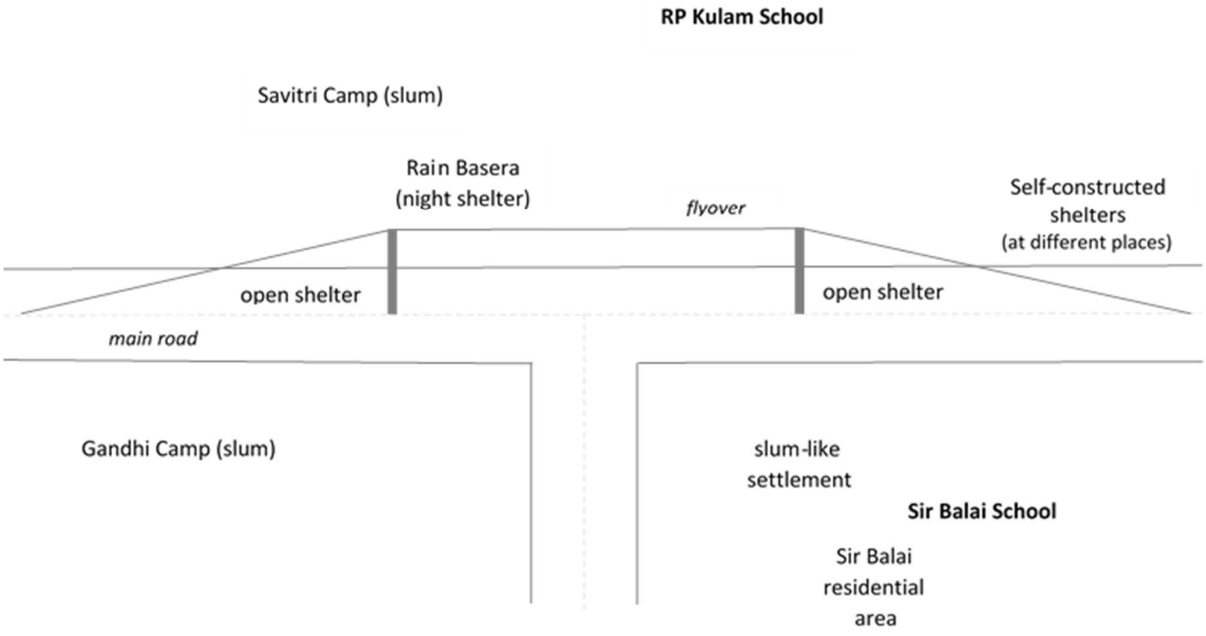
Sir Balai School (with 125 enrolled students) and RP Kulam School (with 470 students) are two of the overall 1222 government and government-aided primary and pre-primary schools that were operating in Delhi in 2015/2016 (Economic Survey 2019/2020:288). Administratively, they belong to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), more precisely, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC). Both schools end with fifth year, RP Kulam School has a nursery class (for children at the age of five) and two parallel classes at each level, while Sir Balai School is a single-track school without nursery. Generally, each class has one teacher who teaches the different subjects. In RP Kulam School, there is one extra teacher (called "special educator") whose task it is to support children individually if necessary. In Sir Balai School, the first class was supposed to be taught by the principal and the second class was taught by a contract teacher who left the school during my

[13] All names of people, local settlements where they live and institutions (including the schools) of my empirical research are changed in order to keep the anonymity of my informants. This also includes the NGO that cooks the food for the schools of my research area, while other NGOs that run centralised kitchens as well as one that provides ingredients for cooking to a local NGO are referred to by their real names – there is no need for anonymity in these cases, as the information I use on them is freely available in the internet.

research period as her contract ended. For about four month of my research period, four interns in their teacher training worked at the school, whom I also include in the category of "school staff".

The two schools are located about 800 metres away from each other, being separated by a main road that runs through an area consisting of residential houses, slums, and markets. Most of the children enrolled in the two schools live in two slums, which are also located on either side of the main road. Others live in very simple small flats in multistorey buildings in the residential area adjacent to Sir Balai School, a small slum-like settlement behind a market, a night shelter (Rain Basera) and in different types of living arrangements around this road – or literally on the road itself in various kinds of self-constructed shelters under a large flyover or on the footpath (see sketched map of the research area below).

Map of the living places in the research area (schematic sketch – not true to scale):



As already mentioned, the large majority of the families whose children go to these schools have migrated to the capital city from rural areas. Notably, while most of them are low caste Hindus and

Dalits, those who live in the most precarious conditions are predominately Muslims. Most of the families earn their living by daily wage labour or low paid service work in the informal sector. [14]

The kitchen of the NGO, Bhojan Foundation, which provides food to Sir Balai School and PR Kulam School under the MDMS, is located at the southern outskirts of the city, about 10 km south from the two schools. The NGO has cooked food under the MDMS since 2004. The government renews its contract as "service provider" on an annual basis, and every three to four years they have to apply again and go through the tendering process alongside the other NGOs that apply. Overall, Bhojan Foundation cooks food under the MDMS for about for 1.3 lakh (130,000) schoolchildren in 260 schools in Delhi (at the time of my research). Of the schools, 229 belong to two administrative zones of the MCD and the remaining schools belong to the Directorate of Education, for which cooking as well as administrative processes are run entirely separate. I focus on the section in which the food for the MCD schools is prepared. In this large, semi-automated kitchen 399 employees are working and almost as many are engaged for serving the food to the children in the schools.

Research methods and data collection

I conducted my fieldwork between 2014 and 2016 (most intensively from August 2015 to May 2016) using a mixture of social science research methods, following an ethnographic approach. I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversations with students, parents, school staff, staff of the NGO kitchen, food distributors and workers of the two welfare NGOs and one NGO which provides raw food to one of the welfare NGOs. Altogether, I recorded conversations with 153 people. Of these 84 are schoolchildren of year one to five (45 in RP

[14] As my fieldwork naturally covers only a particular period of time, it is possible that things that I describe (regarding the research area or on the individual level of informants, for instance) have changed after that. Indeed, a few months after the end of my fieldwork, the MCD redesigned the space under the flyover and evicted the people who lived there (around 20-30 people). To my knowledge, they shifted to places where relatives of them lived (in case of the Muslim families to the Ren Basera and in case of the Hindu families to other traffic junctions). Since this is not far away, the living conditions are comparable and a few families and especially their children have anyway moved freely in all these spaces, their overall situation has not significantly changed due to this shift. Hence, developments like this do not change the overall situation or have an effect on the larger findings of my research.

Kulam School and 39 in Sir Balai School[15]). Of the remaining 69, 32 are parents of schoolchildren, 8 are relatives of them, 19 are school staff members, 6 are staff members of three local NGOs, 3 are distributors and 1 is a school inspector (see detailed list in annex). With the schoolchildren, I conducted short semi-structured interviews (of about ten to fifteen minutes) in school. Of the other conversations some were semi-structured interviews, others were informal conversations and many were a mixture of both. Usually, in situations that I recorded, I had questions to my informants (whom I asked for permission to record), but the way the conversation actually happened depended on the situation and the topics that came up during the cause of the conversation. Some conversations happened in a face-to-face manner with the informants who took time for the conversation with me. Other conversations, especially with the parents, took place while they did whatever they had to do (often cooking and taking care of the children).

Six interviews/conversations happened in English[16], one teacher (of RP Kulam School) switched to English in the middle and one of the interns at Sir Balai School constantly switched between English and Hindi; all other recorded conversations happened in Hindi. I conducted the fieldwork alone, except for visits to four families of students from Sir Balai School, which I did together with one of the teacher training interns who also had an interest in knowing more about the MDMS. For the analysis of the material, a native Hindi speaker (on paid contract basis) helped me translating parts that I did not understand in the recording. Together with the fieldwork notes in which I regularly documented my observations, I analysed the recordings with the software MAXQDA.

Apart from talking to the children and observing them, I also tried another method to assess their perspective on the food at school with one class at Sir Balai School and a bunch of children at Khush. Together with the respective teachers, I asked them to draw pictures of the food they get in school next to the food that they like most. Almost all children drew fruits on the side for what they like

[15] The interviews with the schoolchildren are not in the annex. A list of the (fictive) names does not seem necessary, as I do not directly cite from them.
[16] With one teacher (Shemita) and the special educator (Mr Anand) in PR Kulam School, two of the teacher training interns (Menakshi and Vidya) in Sir Balai School, and two NGO managers (Mr Thomas from Bhojan Foundation and Mr Sharma from MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation).

most, since some took the fruit chart on the wall as an example and others copied what their peers were drawing. I, hence, did not use the results from this exercise in my analysis.

Moreover, I also used data on the socio-economic background of students from enrolment registers of the two schools. The data set from RP Kulam School consists of 919 registrations covering the span from 2008 to 2015. From Sir Balai School, I have data from 327 registrations covering a timespan from 2010 to 2015. However, since my data from Sir Balai School does not cover all categories, I use it only for certain information, which I specify[17]. I analysed this data set by using the software STATA. My interest in the enrolment registers arose when I started visiting the schools regularly and conducted interviews with children, which I complemented with the information about them contained in the register. Beyond the individual cases, the data set as a whole reveals the larger picture regarding the socio-economic composition of students and patterns of drop-out, for example. It turned out that this information fruitfully complements my ethnographic findings. Moreover, I used the registers not only as a set of statistical data, but also as an example of administrative processes, in order to analyse their specific function and logic.

Lastly, during the time I spent at the places where the families live, many of the children asked for my digital camera to take pictures and I gave it to them whenever the situation allowed it. The children who took pictures were primarily those who knew me from Khush, who spend much of their time on the street, in the Rain Basera or under the flyover. Overall, the children took more than 3000 photographs of their living environments. I showed a selection of the pictures to the children at Khush in form of a video and in printed form with which they made collages for the walls. This unplanned collection of material complements my observations, recordings and analysis by a kind of visual documentation of aspects of the children's living environment, seen from their own perspective.

[17] Only in RP Kulam School I was allowed to take photos of the enrolment registers and use it for my research. In Sir Balai School I was only allowed to take hand written notes, so that I did not collect enough data to use it for a quantitative analysis on all categories. From thoroughly looking through the registers of Sir Balai School and the notes it took, as well as from my observations, however, I know that the students of both schools are from the same living areas, communities and in many cases even the same families. Hence, the data derived from RP Kulam School can be seen at least as a very close proxy for information about the students of both schools. The type of registers and the way they are kept by the school staff is the same in both schools.

Chapter outline

The first chapter focuses on the children of my research area and their families. Examining how they manage their lives that are shaped by exclusion and marginalisation, I try to answer the question: what role does the MDMS play for them as an educational and nutritional policy? To locate the MDMS within the larger picture, I discuss the increasing importance that is attributed to education across society, as well as the attempts that the Indian government and other actors have undertaken over the last decades towards achieving universal primary education. Regarding education and policies that are meant to bring children to school, I focus on access and quality, as these are the primary concerns that the families are struggling with. I discuss the problems the families face in accessing basic entitlements in connection to a broader analysis of the relation between poverty, caste and exclusion. The examination of what the MDMS means to the children and their families on the individual level, reveals not only much about their relation to school, but also about food culture and the dignity of people living in urban poverty. On the larger level, the deep and increasing division between government and private education severely reduces the chances that education can be a vehicle to a better future. Hence, positive effects of the MDMS in educational regards for children from disadvantaged families are limited by the overall nature of the educational system that to a large extent contributes to the reproduction of inequalities.

Chapter two focuses on lunchtime in school. As the MDMS does not only aim at attracting children to school and improving their nutritional levels, this chapter focuses on the goal of the scheme to contribute to socialisation and equality among children in classroom. More precisely, I examine how the processes around the meal are organised, what social dynamics unfold during the time of eating and how the attitude and behaviour of the school staff in these processes challenge as well as reproduce inequalities among the students. Here my focus lies on caste, class and religious inequalities. A central phenomenon that I discuss in detail is that while caste is not a category that is openly referred to in the schools, dirtiness figures as a central trope in practices of social exclusion during lunchtime and beyond. Many school staff members as well as children use “dirtiness” as a

marker of individuals or whole communities. I analyse how this refers not only to physical aspects, but is also inherently interlinked with class and caste prejudices. I observed this in both schools, though to different degrees. Generally, while most of the processes are similar in the two schools, I discuss significant differences, too, that concern the overall atmosphere during lunchtime and the role of certain staff members in particular.

In the third chapter the attention shifts to the production of the MDMS food. According to policy guidelines and legal orders, the employment that the MDMS generates shall be preferentially given to people from disadvantaged backgrounds and especially women. This is another way in which the MDMS could contribute to reducing inequalities. Against this backdrop, I examine the extent to which the employment practices and labour regimes under the MDMS contribute to reducing inequalities. In the analysis, I pay particular attention to the position of women and Dalits within the processes related to food production. I examine the employment and management practices of Bhojan Foundation, the NGO that provides MDMS food for Sir Balai School and RP Kulam School. Moreover, I also address other food production scenarios under the MDMS and discuss general patterns in how inequalities are (re)produced by using Charles Tilly's concept of "durable inequality".

In the fourth and final chapter, I take a broader perspective from which I am trying to understand the way the MDMS is governed and how it governs people. The guiding question of this chapter is: To what extent does the governing of the MDMS contribute to reducing inequalities? I follow the method of Mitchell Dean to conduct an analysis of regimes of government (also "regimes of practices"), which builds on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. This provides a structure and technique for the systematic assessment of how, by whom, according to which rationalities and with what consequences the MDMS is governed. It shows how welfare, humanitarian, neoliberal and rights based approaches coexist and intersect in this scheme. In this context, I discuss aspects such as the persisting social stigma that the provision of food for the poor bears as well as the idea of participation that also shapes the way the scheme actually functions. Overall, the analysis of this

chapter reveals fundamental patterns of how poverty and hunger are governed – and have been governed – in society and of the relation between the state and the poor in general.

Chapter 1: Livelihood and education in urban poverty

Every day, shortly after 1 p.m., one can see a large crowd of children in light-blue shirts and dark blue trousers or skirts crossing the main road in the RP Kulam area, close to Sir Balai junction. The big, blue stream starts from the school gate, passing a few small shops of the residential area, where some children spend five or ten rupees for a packet of crisps, and curls around the slum settlement Savitri Camp, where the first children disappear into the small paths leading to their homes. Between the white-green mosque and the open drain of the slum they reach the main road where some children turn left and head towards the Rain Basera or their shelter under the flyover. The still large number of remaining children who live in the slum on the other side of the main road cross the road at a stretch where no traffic light or other kind of pedestrian crossing is installed. This is right at the foot of the flyover where the traffic is fast and difficult to overview. Some children take each other's hand here and the small ones are being accompanied by their parents or elder siblings.

Eleven years old Sahana takes care that her two younger brothers, Aslim and Shayan (in year three and nursery), reach home safely. While others enter deep into the tiny paths of Gandhi Camp, the three of them live close to the road-facing side, just behind the space where the ice cream trolleys are parked if they are not in use. When they reached home – a one-room place of roughly eight square metres – Sahana prepares chai for them on a gas stove in the corner to which they eat biscuits or other small snacks. Then she takes care that the boys take a bath and change clothes and does so herself. Now they leave home again, this time without school uniform and bags. Together with some neighbour children they walk about ten minutes to Khush, an NGO where a freshly cooked lunch awaits them – prepared by their mother who works as cook in the NGO – followed by tuition classes and (according to the day of the week) dance, movie watching and other activities.

Sahana, Aslim and Shayan, as well as most of the other children coming to the Khush and many of all schoolchildren of the two schools of my study are the first generation in their families who receive formal school education. The majority of them attend some kind of informal educational

classes or tuitions in addition. This mirrors of the generally increasing importance that is attributed to education across society (see e.g. Nambissan 2014:19), as well as the attempts that the government and other actors have undertaken over the last decades towards achieving universal primary education. At the same time, not all children of the area are enrolled in school or attend classes on regular basis. Many of them belong to very poor migrant families who struggle to secure the basic means of their daily life. Education, in this context, is subject to difficult considerations in these families.

In this chapter, I give insights into the daily-life realities of the children and their families, the exclusion and marginalisation that shape their lives to a large extent and within this context their relation to school education. Most obviously, class and caste inequalities play a central role here, further many also experience religious and/or gender inequalities that determine many aspects of their lives. Focussing on the central aims of the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) – to attract children to school and enhance their nutritional levels – the chapter is guided by the question: What role does the MDMS play for the children and their families as an educational and nutritional policy?

The examination what the MDMS means to them on the individual level, reveals not only much about their relation to school, but also about food culture and dignity of people living in urban poverty. Further, to answer the question, the MDMS also needs to be seen within the larger picture. Hence, I discuss the problems the families face in accessing education and other basic entitlements also looking at the relation between poverty, caste and exclusion at the broader level. In this context, I discuss the increasing importance that is attributed to education across society, which was paralleled with attempts that the government and other actors have undertaken over the last decades towards achieving universal primary education. At the same time, the deep and increasing division between government and private education severely reduces the chances that education can be a vehicle to a better future for the poor. Hence, positive effects of the MDMS in educational regards for children from disadvantaged families have to be seen within the overall nature of the educational system that to a large extent contributes to the reproduction of inequalities.

At different points in this chapter, I draw on the admission registers of the schools as data set on admission and dropout pattern and source of information on the schoolchildren but also as example of bureaucracy in school, which is an essential part of the daily routines at school. Hence, in the following I briefly sketch the role of bureaucracy in school and introduce the medium of the school admission register.

Bureaucracy in schools

For assessing improvements regarding the goal of universal education as well as measuring the success of the MDMS, commonly school enrolment numbers are used – often together with figures on attendance. Maintaining registers and other paper work are essential aspects of other school level programmes, too, and as such part of the daily routine at school (see, for example Ramachandran 2005 on the high importance attributed to non-teaching activities of teachers in school). I also observed that paper work plays a prominent role during the school day and often disrupts class in different ways. It seems to be a common practice, for instance, to send around a child (who misses class in that time) between the principal's office and the classes with registers in which the teachers have to fill certain information, such as the students' attendance of the day. Sometimes (more so in Sir Balai School) I saw teachers busy with administrational work in the office during class time – leaving the students to themselves. The admission of new students, for example, seems usually to be done by the teacher in charge during school time. In fact, all administrational work has to be completed within the school day (until 1 p.m.) and on the last Saturday of each month, which is free for the children and dedicated to completing the administrational work of the month. Additionally, the last day of each month the children are sent home after lunch (cancelling the classes from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.) so that the teachers can finish their administrational tasks. Several teachers to whom I talked brought up the amount of paper work as a highly problematic issue and one teacher even said that they are kept busier with paper work than with actual teaching (Interview with Pravesh).

The various registers and documents that the schools have to maintain are the link to the state administration, where they are the basis for allocation of funds, teachers, material, etc. The MDMS,

too, entails a lot of paper work that is part of the administrational tasks of the teachers. Each day, three differently coloured forms have to be filled with information on the food (what kind of food they received, the weight of each container and signatures of people who tasted it) as well as the number of students who ate it. The teacher in charge of the MDMS fills in the forms and gets assistance of two or three students who come before the lunch break (hence during class time) and carry (or slide) the containers to the scale and take their weight. This is just one example of how much the school day is shaped by the collection of various data and the maintenance of forms and registers. I will return to the paper work of the MDMS when I look at the processes surrounding lunchtime in school in much more detail in the next chapter. Here I want to emphasise that the maintenance of the paper work takes a considerable part of the daily processes of the scheme. This importance is also reflected in my observation that the school level supervision of the scheme, conducted by the inspector of the schools from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) office, is limited to the collection of the papers.

Turning to the admission registers, my data set consists of 1246 registrations in total. 919 registrations are from the register of RP Kulam School covering a span from 2007 to 2015. From Sir Balai School, I have data from 327 registrations covering a timespan from 2010 to 2015. Due to limited access to the full data from Sir Balai School[18], my data from this school does not cover all categories. I can, therefore, only derive certain information from it, which I specify wherever applicable. The registers have the following columns: date of admission, admission no., name of student, date of birth, mother's name, father's name, religion (caste) sub-caste tribe, father's occupation, residence address, class to which admitted, grade of tuition fee (always left empty), security money (always left empty), class from which withdrawal, date of withdrawal, remarks. A

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passport photograph of each child, which has to be provided for admission, is stuck below the name or covering the columns for tuition fee and security money. Generally, I use the information of the registers on the socio-economic background of the children (the columns on religion/caste, occupation of the fathers and residence) as well as data on admission and dropout to complement my observations on the background of the students and their relation to school. Beyond the written information that the registers contain, they are an example of how children become part of a large statistic of the state that collects the data following its own specific logic.

To start with, regarding the kind of data that is collected in the admission register, clearly, not all columns are necessarily needed for the identification of a child. Why is there, for instance, a column for religion/caste/tribe, especially against the backdrop of the constant assurance of teachers that caste and religion do not matter in school at all? The only information on caste, religion and tribe identity of the children that is relevant for administrative purposes is whether a child belongs to a Scheduled Caste/Tribe (SC or ST) or is Muslim, because that makes the student eligible for a bit of extra financial support. The open formulation of the column, moreover, leaves huge space for interpretation by the person in charge of admissions who often only fills in the religion, sometimes the caste or a caste category (I discuss this column in more detail below). Another question to the logic of the register could be: Why is "father's occupation" considered a relevant information (and why not that of mothers since most of them do work as well)?

Moreover, I found several examples where the registers contain incorrect or imprecise information. While there is always the possibility of wrong reporting or mistakes during the admission process, the column for the date of birth of the children appears to be particularly arbitrary. Because traditionally birthdays are not celebrated in these families, in many cases children and parents do not know the date. Hence, to fill the register a date of birth is invented for those children. In the cases of the children whom I know from the NGO Khush, I even came across up to four different information on their age, which do not match. Besides the age that they told me when I asked them, there is the date of birth on the list of the NGO, the date of birth registered at the first school admission and that

registered at the second admission (at the same or the other school). The confusion around the dates of birth was illustrated to me by a teacher at Khush, who asked me whether I could tell her the dates of birth of some NGO children from the school enrolment registers (she knew that I got access to them). She has been asked to provide a list of birth dates for the head of the NGO, who wanted to introduce birthday parties for the children. The teacher told me that she had come up with many of the dates herself when she got the children admitted at school, but did not keep exact record of it.

Living in urban poverty

The large majority of the families whose children go to the two government schools of my research have migrated to the capital city from rural areas or small towns and cities. Almost all parents and children I have talked to told me that their family has come to Delhi recently or within about the last 20 years. Most of them come from North Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand or the central Indian Madhya Pradesh. Generally, interstate migration is a very widespread phenomenon in India. UP and Bihar are the states with the highest numbers of outmigration (Dandekar and Ghai 2020:28), together the two states are the sources of 37 per cent of all internal migrants in India (Jha and Kawoosa, 2019). According to a study of the Indian Institute of Population Science (IIPS) (in Samaddar 2020:66-69), remittance is even the main source of livelihood of rural households in Bihar, which shows that much of the migration is labour migration that supports relatives who stay back. This is the case in my research area as well. Although in this area in many cases several (extended-) family members live in Delhi, they often have close relatives living in the villages and maintain very strong connections to these places where many of them left their house and in some cases fields behind.

As a reason why they migrated to Delhi, almost everyone told me that they were forced into it because of very difficult living conditions in the villages were they could not find work that could feed the whole family. Most of them are landless or have only small fields. This corresponds to Ajay Dandekar and Rahul Ghai's (2020) description of the situation in the "source" villages of migration,

that 50 per cent of the population cultivate mere 0.4 per cent of the cultivable lands (Dandekar and Ghai 2020:31). In lack of income sources, it was ultimately financial pressure due to which they saw no other option than migration. One of my informants, Jamal, for instance, expressed this when he asked: "Jahā̃ insān ko paisa milta hai, vahā̃ accha life kaṭatī hai, vahā̃ se koi kyon āega?" (Interview with Nasima and Jamal; translation: "Why would a human being come from a place where he gets money and has a good life?"). I was told that the daily wage for labourers in their villages is INR 150-200, which is not enough for sustaining a family, while in the city the wages are double as high or more and they can access government support in form of night shelters and other basic support.

About eighty per cent of the children covered in the RP Kulam admission registers live in the two slums, which are separated by a main road. The number is probably much higher because for many children the address entry in the register only gives the name of the area but not the exact location. Most of the remaining families live in very simple flats in multi-storey buildings of the adjacent residential areas, a small slum-like settlement behind a market and in different types of living arrangements around the main road – or literally *on* the road (see map in the introduction). It is important to note here that these geographical spaces are not clearly distinguishable from each other because people – and especially children – often move between these spaces naturally and many of them, in fact, spend much of their time on the streets, regardless of where they live.

At the road-facing side of one of the slums, Savitri Camp, there is a night shelter (Rain Basera) which is under the responsibility of the government's Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board. Since January 2016, a child welfare centre is jointly run by the Indian NGO – Society for the Development of Children and Youth (SDCY) – and an international NGO in the Rain Basera. The Rain Basera is given as address of 27 students of my sample from RP Kulam School, a number that seems very low considering that it is inhabited by about 200 people of whom many are school age children. I come back to this issue later.

When mapping the socio-economic background of the families, it is interesting that the Rain Basera is a space – the only one in the area – which is inhabited exclusively by people belonging to

one community. All of the roughly 200 inhabitants, plus many more members of this community who live in other places of the area, come from a few villages close to each other in Madhubani district of Bihar. They are Muslims of the Pamaria caste. As this caste is on the official list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Bihar, I count them as OBC in the admission registers, although my empirical evidence (matching that of Anwar – see below) shows that their social status is that of Dalits. A young father, for example, told me that they cannot touch people from other castes in their village and have to stay in the back in religious places. He also told me of an incidence in his childhood when some Pamaria children while taking a bath in the village pond had splashed a bit of water on caste Hindus who then beat the children for that. As the parents of these children got angry, a fight started between the adults in which even the police intervened who had never before or after this incidence come to the village.

Based on empirical research on the situation of Dalit Muslims in Bihar, the journalist and social activist Ali Anwar also identifies Pamarias as Dalits (Anwar 2005:34; see also Trivedi et al. 2016:33). Anwar compares the socio-economic position of Pamarias and other Muslim Dalit castes with that of Hindu Dalits in the same region. According to him, Hindu and Muslim Dalit castes are called by different names, but their occupations and social positions are the same. Nowadays, he argues, the situation of Muslim Dalits is even worse than that of Hindu Dalits as the latter got included in the reservation system, which helped many individuals to uplift in society, while Muslim Dalits do not have access to this. Therefore, Anwar strongly supports the claim that Muslim Dalits should also be recognised as SCs and get access to reservations in the public sector (Anwar 2005:34).

Corresponding to Anwar's depiction of the situation of Muslim Dalits, those people of my research area who live in the most precarious conditions are predominantly from this community. As I have been told by members of the community, traditionally the male Pamarias play music and dance at Hindu houses where a child is born and perform some other rites (similar to Hijras in the city) while the women stay home and take care of the fields. For these performances they get money or jewellery. Some of them still do this in their home villages, but most of them do other work, too, or completely

shifted to other ways of earning money, predominantly as daily-wage labourers. According to the observations of Mr Ram, the head of the child welfare centre at the Rain Basera, 70 per cent of the adults who sleep there work as construction labourers and the remaining 30 per cent live from begging (Interview with Mr Ram). Most of the Pamarias who live in my research area do have some land in the villages, but the returns do not suffice for sustaining the family.

Outside the Rain Basera, many relatives of the Pamarias live either in Gandhi Camp or under the flyover right in front of the Rain Basera. Several of the families keep moving from one of the three places to the other, so that the addresses given in the registers are not always correct. Moreover, those who live under the flyover are commonly registered as living in either the slum or the Rain Basera even though they have been living at their place for years. This observation does not only show a certain inaccuracy of the registers, but also hints to the problem of what it means to have no address and, connected to that, the stigma attached to someone living under a flyover.

In case of three children of the second community (about 25 members of one family – five siblings with their spouses and children) living under the same flyover (about 150 metres away from the former), the admission register indicates "under the flyover" as their address. This family comes originally from Bhilwara in Rajasthan and is part of a community of which other (extended-) family members and relatives have settled at other big traffic crossings of South Delhi – all of them living primarily from selling flowers, balloons and other things as well as begging. They are low caste Hindus called Chauhan, Solanki and Bargujja (exogamous groups), which are not listed in any official caste lists.

From these two example communities I return to the larger picture again looking at what the registers tell us about the castes and religion of the schoolchildren. As already mentioned, there is only one column for religion, caste, sub-caste and tribe which leads to the fact that the nature of entries varies between giving only the religion, only the caste name or a broader category (such as "SC" for Scheduled Caste) and combinations of these. The religion, even if not indicated, can usually

be identified from the caste or names. Here we get the figures of 86.7 per cent Hindus, 12.6 per cent Muslims and 0.7 Christians (data from both schools).

The fact that the share of Muslims is below the national average of their population[19] even though there are many Muslims living in this area, might have many reasons. These could be that there is a higher number of non-enrolled Muslim children, which would reflect the fact that the educational level of Muslims is generally found to be lower than that of Hindus (Sachar Committee Report 2006). Another possible reason is that due to their high presence on the street and involvement in different kinds of work and begging, the Muslim children are the main group of children that is targeted by NGOs, such as Khush, which offer alternative education and assistance in enrolment to private schools. I extent this analysis of the relation between the children from the harshest living conditions and school when looking at patterns of attendance, dropout and non-enrolment later in this chapter. For now, I keep the focus on the religion/caste column.

The caste is indicated for 918 children (of the 1,246 registrations from both schools). The by far largest group (25.8 per cent) belongs to the Valmiki caste (Dalit), followed by Reikvar and Kewat (OBC castes which seem to be sometimes used interchangeably) (8.8 per cent) and Muslim Pamarias (5.9 per cent). Valmikis (also "Balmikis"), who make up for such a high share of the students, are the second largest Dalit community in Delhi (after Chamars) and have with 67.4 per cent the lowest literacy rate among SCs in the city (Ganguly 2017:53, referring to the Census of 2011). For a clearer picture of the overall caste composition, it makes sense to club the castes together according to the broader categories – an exercise that is rather complicated given the fact that only the caste terms are registered, without information of the place of origin[20]. Therefore, we have to bear with possible mistakes for the sake of the larger picture that it reveals.

[19] The percentage of Muslim population in India is 14.23 per cent according to the census of 2011 (http://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php)

[20] I used the government lists for SCs, STs and OBCs. Each federal state has its own lists indicating how the castes/communities are categorised. I used the government SC and OBC lists of Delhi, Rajasthan, UP, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Punjab and MP and identified the child as SC or OBC when I found the caste in one of the respective lists. The SC-lists are accessible under: http://socialjustice.nic.in/UserView/index?mid=76750, the OBC lists under: http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/CentralListStateView.aspx

The highest share of the children whose caste is indicated in the registers, are Dalits with 39.7 per cent. Another 29.7 per cent belong to the Hindu OBC category and 6 per cent to the Muslim OBC category (all of them Pamarias – hence actually Dalits as we know). Only 9.8 per cent are upper caste Hindus and 2.9 per cent upper caste Muslims. Of the remaining children, 0.1 per cent are ST and of 11.2 per cent I could not make out the caste category. In addition to the already very high share of Dalits in this sample, it is not unlikely that the actual share is even higher. Due to the obvious fact that belonging to a Dalit caste is something people would not always want to admit because of the stigma attached to it, it is quite possible that many Dalits have not indicated their caste (and are therefore not counted in the 39.7 per cent). I fact, for admitting a child, the schools only ask for minimal identity proofs (sometimes even accept a vaccination card of the child from hospital), so that the caste identity can remain unreported or potentially also incorrectly reported.

Another crucial factor that reflects the children's socio-economic situation is the kind of work their parents do. According to the register entries of RP Kulam School, the fathers of 397 out of 919 children (43 per cent) work as labourers on construction sites (including "mazdūri", "bailgāṛī" and "daily wage"/"dihāṛī"). Among the fathers of the Muslim children, 60 per cent are listed as labourers. The second largest group (146 fathers, or 16 per cent) is what is called "private job" and can mean pretty much everything. Because being a labourer is also "private" (in the sense that it is not a government job), it is very likely that there are even more labourers hidden in this category. Hence, it can be assumed that the fathers of about half of the children enrolled are working as labourers at construction sites. The other big groups are gardeners, farmers and those whose work is related to cleaning (including "dhōbī", "safāī karmacārī" and "jhāṛū-pōnchā" which refer to different types of cleaning work), most of the latter are Dalits. Only 13 fathers are employed in government jobs (which is in the cases I know also mainly cleaning or other "unskilled" and hence low-paid jobs). Others are, for example, drivers and guards, or work in small shops or their own small scale (vegetable) vending. The occupation of the mothers is not given in the registers, it is clear from my observations, however, that the majority of mothers also contribute to the family income. Many of them work as domestic

helps ("jhāṛū-pōnchā", "bartan", cooking) in the morning when children are in school or at times that they can coordinate with the household chores. Moreover, several mothers – especially of the Pamaria families – also work as labourers. They are mainly doing the supporting work such as carrying the material (bricks, cement, etc.) that is needed at the construction sites.

For a clearer idea of the economic situation of the families, one could look at the income, but this is noted only for 257 children of the sample (of RP Kulam School) in the column of the occupation of the father. The entries range from Indian Rupees (INR) 800 to 12000 (per month) with the average at INR 3413. These numbers, however, do not tell us much about the actual amount of money a family has. Not only because there can be misreporting and because it does not include the income from other family members, but also because most of them do not have a regular income since their jobs are in the informal sector and often on short-term or daily-wage basis. This is especially true for the labourers who – according to several informants – get around INR 300-600 per day (men) and INR 200-400 per day (women). If they are not working with one particular contractor, they have to go to the "labour chowk" early in the morning and hope that someone needs their work, which is often in vain.

Overall, the schoolchildren of RP Kulam School and Sir Balai School belong to the poor and marginalised section of society. Unsurprisingly, those parents with whom I talked about their economic situation see themselves as poor. Amira, a mother of three schoolchildren who I introduce below in more detail, said that there are only poor children in RP Kulam School to which her three children also go. All who are a little richer do not enrol their children there. She and her husband earn comparatively well: about INR 15,000 altogether, of which they spend INR 5,000 for rent and bills and the rest for food (about INR 300 daily). However, this is only possible because she works a lot, which is a matter seen as a problem for her children's education as I discuss below. According to her, a couple has to earn INR 50,000 per month to be rich, which would mean that they can pay a rent of about INR 10,000 (outside the slum) and bring up at least two children.

Beyond the reduction to purely economic terms, the children of this study also match the encompassing definition of child poverty by Renu Singh and Sudipa Sarkar, which is inspired by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: "Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual, and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society" (Singh and Sarkar 2014:1). Another suitable definition of poverty by the Centre for Equity Studies stresses more on its relation to exclusion: "poverty is both a cause and a consequence of exclusion from critical public goods, often pushing those at the margins into a vicious cycle of deprivation that is hard to escape" (Centre for Equity Studies 2014:14). However, apparently the poor – even if people are in comparable economic situation – are not one homogenous group but beyond caste and religious differences there are different degrees and very subjective experiences of poverty and deprivation.

Though all families of the students from RP Kulam School and Sir Balai School despite being from different geographical backgrounds and belonging to different religions and castes are all poor, at closer look there are more or less sharp internal divisions. Such divisions became clear, for example, when a mother, Preeti, of the "Charaha" caste (a cloth-making allegedly upper caste belonging to Thakur) told me how uneasy she is about living in one slum with Dalits (Interview with Preeti). Sharing the toilet and water supply with Dalits is something that they did not have to do in the village. She also said that at least adults from her caste, who live in front of the slum, maintain strict boundaries when it comes to eating and drinking with Dalits, who live in the back of the slum close to the open drain. Instead of seeing Dalits in the worse or more excluded situation, she twisted the argument by saying that for people of her caste it is more difficult to get good jobs than the lower castes. Her nephew, for example, had great problems finding a job suiting his educational status in Delhi and finally resorted to teaching tuitions. By saying that it is easier for lower castes to get a good job, she is probably referring to the reservation system although it is quite clear that only very few Dalits of the slum actually benefit from it.

What this mother expresses has something remarkable to it, which deserves closer examination. I heard uncountable times during my research that caste becomes less important in the city. Talking to teachers, whenever we remotely touched this topic they emphasised almost like a mantra that caste does not play a role here in the city school. Having that in mind, how can we understand this woman's experience? And her very strong caste consciousness and practices? I am convinced that a first crucial point is that caste is not generally becoming less important in the city. It rather seems, for example in case of the teachers, that their emphasis that caste does not play a role can be understood to large extent as political correctness that they have to follow in their official role at least to outsiders (like myself). Of course, there are also certain circles (in academia, for instance) concentrated mainly in urban areas that entirely reject caste thinking. Without getting fully into this fundamental debate on caste in (modern) urban spaces, I examine how higher castes relate themselves to low castes and Dalits in the urban context. My central observation is that in the city people from different (caste) backgrounds live in such an extreme density and with scarce facilities, so that those who cannot afford otherwise are more or less forced to share certain spaces and goods. These include the slum and the school, for example, where caste practices then have to be re-negotiated to some extent. As we can see in the example of Preeti, adapting to these living conditions can be experienced as a fall in social status from a higher position in their village to being a slum dweller living together with mainly low-caste people and Dalits. To understand the dynamics in such a scenario, Marguerite Ross Barnett's concept of 'relative deprivation' is very helpful.

Barnett developed this concept for her analysis of cultural nationalism in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu in the early twentieth century in relation to territorial nationalism and the nation state. Of course, there are huge regional, cultural and historical differences between this context and that of my research. Nevertheless, the dynamics she observed in the social structure in Tamil Nadu, can be recognised in a similar way in my context, too. According to Marguerite Ross Barnett, "[…] relative deprivation describes a sense of disjunction between expectations and reality." (Barnett 1976:24).

Hence, we are talking about individual, very personal feelings of people on their social status in society.

According to Barnett, elite non-Brahmins experienced relative deprivation when they moved to urban areas because they had been highly respected landowners in their villages while the Brahmins in the city saw them together with all other non-Brahmins merely as “Suddhras”. It is important to note that of the generally low number of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu only very few lived in villages and in most places people of other high-castes were at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy. In the cities, however, Brahmins were the dominant group – especially since they were highly disproportionally represented in administrative positions under the British government (Barnett 1976:24,25). Hence, being subsumed under the broad category of “Suddhras” in the city meant a huge status loss for the non-Brahmin elites. In Barnett’s own words: “Many elite non-Brahmins developed a sense of (comparative) loss of status in the urban context. Comparison of urban to rural status was unfavourable. Men who were identified as proud, orthodox landlords in villages were "just" Suddhras in cities.” (Barnett 1976:25). An interesting aspect of this self-perception is that even though there was this moment of an emerging non-Brahmin consciousness, which potentially included all non-Brahmins, Barnett’s evidence shows that non-Brahmin elites heavily dominated political positions without allowing equal share to Dalits (Barnett 1976:42). Hence, a downward oriented distinction from those lower in the caste hierarchy than they themselves, was also part of this self-image.

In my empirical example, it seems that the mother also expresses what Barnett describes as relative deprivation by saying that she did not have to share daily facilities with low castes and Dalits in the village and feels uncomfortable with having to do that now in the urban slum. Different to Barnett’s scenario, the higher caste people I look at do not belong to a rich and highly educated elite as they do in her case. Therefore, in her case they possibly experienced the loss of status even more extreme. On the other hand, the elite of Barnett’s case seems to be rich enough to afford a decent living in the urban spaces and their problem mainly seems to be that the Brahmins put them categorically in the same group as all other non-Brahmins. In the case of my research, the scene is quite different with

the few high-caste people who live in the area that I focus on and send their children to the government schools being economically not better off than the people of lower castes living in the same conditions. This might even enhance their wish to ascertain their higher social status. Hence, the concept of relative deprivation has to be slightly adapted here, but it nonetheless helps to understand the social tensions and fault lines within the large number of urban poor.

Social divisions or some kind of moral dissociation, however, do not only exist between high and low castes, but even between members of the same community who lead their lives differently. The people who live under the flyover or in the Rain Basera are, for instance, being described by their relatives who live in the slum as behaving morally wrong with the decision to save the money for the rent and thereby putting their children at higher risk on the street. A young father who lived in the Rain Basera (and moved with his wife and small child to a place in the slum towards the end of my research) even told me that he himself felt very bad living in the Rain Basera. He had the feeling as if the surrounding put stains on him so that he is getting "ganda" (literally: "dirty") himself from living there. Others expressed this concern regarding their children, saying that they are worried about the "ganda" company of their children from which they cannot keep them away on the street.

Regarding the physical dirtiness, it is to say that people living in the Rain Basera or under the flyover obviously have difficult access to hygiene facilities (such as toilets and clean water). Washing and storing clothes, utensils and other belongings in clean and safe places is often not possible. Many of them are, moreover, involved in activities such as begging for which it is essential to appear (physically) dirty to demonstrate the neediness and which is at the same time seen as morally "dirty". Being physically dirty, hence, can be a result from exclusion as well as an instrument for securing an income that is loaded with moral prejudices. The children and parents, nevertheless, have the habit of bathing at least once a day (even if that means an ice-cold bucket shower in winter). Moreover, they demonstrate their sense for hygiene, for instance, when the children appear very clean and dressed up for certain festivals and events (such as the ones organised by the NGO) or when they prepare for a trip to their home village. Overall, the stigma of physical and moral "dirtiness" plays a

central role in the constant negotiation of the own and other people's position in society (as will also be discussed in chapter two as part of the analysis of lunchtime in school).

School lunch for attracting children to school?

Having introduced the socio-economic backgrounds of the schoolchildren, I now turn to the role that the school meal plays in attracting them to school. Besides looking at the perspective of school staff on the importance of the MDMS for the children, I keep the focus on the living contexts of the children and daily-life considerations in their families.

Several teachers of PR Kulam School and Sir Balai School assume that the school lunch does attract children to come to school, providing different argumentations for this. Some observed that more children attend on the days when "poori" is on the menu, which is by far the most popular item of the MDM. It is served on two days per week. For others the fact that some children come from very poor families or are allegedly not interested in studying, is evidence enough for the assumption that they come to school for the food. Some teachers observed that many children are very happy to eat the food and ask for several servings – which is interpreted as a sign that these children come because they get food.

As mentioned in the introduction, most studies accessing the impact of the MDMS on enrolment and attendance in school also claim to have found a causal link between the introduction of the meal and increased enrolments and attendance (e.g. Khera 2006; Bonds 2012; Afridi 2007). Regarding the nutritional aspects of the MDMS, there are studies that suggest that the meal has a positive effect on the nutritional level of the students (e.g. Singh et al. 2014; Afridi 2010). Others (e.g. Rani Si and Sharma 2008) argue that they have evidence for a causal link between the implementation of the scheme and increased motivation and energy of the students, or positive effects of the MDMS on the cognitive performance of students (e.g. Afridi et al. 2013). However, a study on the long-term nutritional impact of the meal in drought-affected areas, by Singh et al. (2014), found that only for those who did experience droughts it functioned as compensation of health deficiencies, while it had

no significant impact on weight and height of students who did not experience drought (Singh et al. 2014:290,91).

The teachers made their own observations on the nutritional effect of the meal on the students, which they shared with me. A teacher from Sir Balai School, for example, claims that because of the MDMS the students fall less sick. She also argues that with a full stomach, the energy level of the children rises and they get more interested to learn (class 3 teacher, Sir Balai). Inherently linked to the assumption that for some children the MDMS food is an important source of nutrition, is the view of many teachers that this food is the only nutritious meal that many of the children get during the day. One of the MDMS-in-charge teachers at RP Kulam School claims that she observed a visible effect of the meal on the children's physical wellbeing: "Aur health-wise in baccõ me fark paṛa. Hum ne to mahasūs kiya. Abhī bhī jab do mahīne chuṭṭiyõ ke bad, ya ḍēṛh mahīne, sāre aise dikhte hai […] duble-patle." (Interview with Manju; translation: "And health-wise it also made a difference for the children. That's what we/I feel. The way the children came earlier – even now, when the children come after the two-month holidays or one and a half month they all look […] very thin.").

Generally, many teachers say that several students come to school on an empty stomach. According to the third class teacher in RP Kulam, this applies to about 60 per cent of the children in her class. The nursery class teacher of the same school told me that there are children who cry in the beginning of the school day, enquire about the food, and even go out of the classroom to wait for the food. She usually keeps some biscuits with her, which she gives to children if they cry of stomach pain. According to her, they do not know it is hunger, but say they complain of stomach-ache. When she enquires if they require the toilet, and they decline, then she is sure that it is indeed hunger.

A rather simple argument for the phenomenon that children are hungry in school, which both teachers as well as the school inspector (who is also in charge of supervising the implementation of the MDMS in both schools) narrated, is that poor parents cannot provide their children with nutritious food because they do not have the money to buy nutritious vegetables. My research, however,

suggests that the reality is much more complex and such assumptions do not adequately reflect the daily-life realities, priorities and the food culture of these families.

I observed that most families – even those living in the night shelter (Rain Basera), on the footpath or under the flyover – usually have two to three hot meals a day. The most common breakfast is paratha (a kind of hearty pancake which can be plain or stuffed) and the other meals usually consist of different types of vegetables (including green-leafy vegetables such as spinach and methi), pulses and rice or roti. In the majority of households, besides egg being a common food item (especially for children who like to eat it boiled or fried), meat (mainly chicken and sometimes mutton) or fish is cooked at least once a week, in some cases even twice or more times a week.

The daily food pattern of the children differs according to the working situation of their parents. If both parents have to leave for work early in the morning, their children sometimes do not eat breakfast before school or have only chai with fen (a sweet bread type of dry snack), rusk or biscuits. It should be noted that "lunchtime" in these schools is at 10:15 a.m. already. I heard from some parents, as well as from teachers, that for families in which no one has time to cook in the morning, the MDMS has made it easier to send the children to school because they do not have to provide food for them for school. Amira, for instance, a mother who is very outspoken on how little she thinks of the quality of the school meal, admitted that on days when they get up so late that she has to hurry for her work, her three children just go to school without taking along food, while they would otherwise have stayed home. However, even in cases where the parents leave early, they often pack same kind of food for the children (sometimes paratha or roti with jam, or macaroni). Moreover, almost all parents give their children some money with which they buy crisps or biscuits on the way.

After school, in families where the mother works as a domestic help (usually in the morning and sometimes also evening slots), or where the mother or an older sibling is not working outside home, fresh food is cooked for the children for lunch. In other families – mainly where both parents work as construction labourers, or if the mother does another type of full-time job – food is prepared two times a day, in the morning and in the evening. When the children come from school, they eat the

food from the morning again. However, those who live in the Rain Basera or on the street do not have fridges or proper spaces for storing food, so in summer the food from morning would probably go bad during the day. I observed several strategies of these families to cope with this situation so that most children get food at different times from different sources over the day. Many children join tuition and other activities at Khush, which provides a freshly cooked meal to them around 2 p.m. This food is cooked by Amira, the mother of three children in RP Kulam School, and is very popular among the children.

In the Rain Basera, too, food is distributed around lunchtime (which is one of three meals that is distributed here daily). This is primarily meant to be combined with educational sessions for the small and non-school going children, but sometimes there is enough food that the school-going children can eat after school as well and in case of the dinner, all family members can get the food. Moreover, there are several street food vendors and small "hotels" (simple restaurant with open kitchen) in this area, where children sometimes buy hot snacks or a full plate of food for about INR 20. Some children learn cooking at young age and prepare food for themselves and their siblings if their parents come home late. Furthermore, the children, who are begging in the afternoon, often receive food items from people passing by the junctions though this is surely not a safe and reliable source of nutrition.

These observations help to understand the phenomenon that many of the parents do say that the MDMS is a scheme for the poor, but at the same time they – even those living on the street – generally exclude themselves from the group of people who are so poor that the provision of the meal is important for them. This does not only hint to a very differentiated imagination of poverty and dignity in connection to being able to care for one's children, but it also brings up matters of food and eating culture. While most of the students do eat the food, some parents – including of those children who eat it – have their reservations against the MDMS food (see also chapter three). Part of this is a certain suspicion against food that is cooked at some place – which is unknown to them – for such a large number of children. However, parents who mentioned the feeling of being uncomfortable with this idea did not always make clear whether it is the fact that they do not know who cooked it or whether

it is more an issue of hygiene and not knowing how the food is prepared which causes this unease. Some parents told me that they are convinced that it is just not possible to cook food in such a large scale similar to the way they cook at home. To them this different way of preparation not only causes hygiene doubts, but cooking on such a large scale also produces a different taste. By emphasising that their children prefer the tastier (and spicier) home-cooked food, parents underline the importance of their specific food culture.

Interestingly, even though most children eat the MDMS food, most parents provide their children with some food from home as well. Of 76 children from both schools whom I asked whether they bring food from home, 67 (88 per cent) said that they bring food at least sometimes. In conversation with parents, it turned out that they give their children food from home because, on the one hand, they do not want to rely on the school food entirely. On the other hand, to be able to provide the child with at least some home-cooked food is essentially a matter of asserting their dignity. A mother of a child in Sir Balai School formulated clearly, what many other parents told me in similar ways: “Mil gaya to thik hai, nahĩ mila to maĩ to de hi rahi hũ. Yahi nahi ki school se āye to bacce khāyẽ, yeh galat bāt hai. Kabhī der hoga, kabhī saver hoga. Hamare bacce ko kab bhūkh lag gai, kab pyās lag gai, to apne pās rakhi to khā liya. Jab ūpar wāla taufik diye hai, haĩ hamare ghar mẽ to hum apne ghar se apne bacco ko mazbūt nā bhejũ. Ki khā-pīkar jāo, jo dil kare vo le jāo.” (Interview with Nuresha; translation: “So if they get it [MDMS food] it's fine and if they don't get it I'm giving it [home-cooked food] anyway. This way I am not completely dependent on mid day meal. Whenever my children are hungry or thirsty, they have something with them. As long as God is kind to us, we don't have to send our children in bad condition. They can go and eat what they want and take along what they like.”). Another example is the father of an ironsmith family living in a self-made shelter on the footpath who said that they do have some money, but for those who are poor – poorer then his family – it is helpful that their children receive food and money for uniforms etc. at school. According to him “for them it's a great thing”. He said that their own children also eat the school food if they are hungry, but they can eat everywhere because they give them sufficient money (Interview with Sonia and Rakesh).

With this statement he clearly establishes a distinction between those who are so poor that the MDMS is important for them and his own family that does not necessarily need it. This reflects a historically rooted stigma that is attached to state welfare and especially public feeding of the poor, which I discuss in chapter four.

Increasing education for children?

From the nutritional aspect of the scheme, I now turn to the role that the schools play for the children and the families. As already mentioned, overall there has been an increase in school enrolment numbers in India over the last decades, this is true for my research area as well. This trend is reflected, for example, in the growth of the NGO Khush since I got to know them in 2009. The number of children attending their informal classes and activities has increased and the NGO has facilitated the enrolment of about 50 children in Sir Balai School and RP Kulam School as well as in an NGO-run private school since then. The NGO staff proudly claims that by their intervention they have helped many children to get away from the street and the earning activities they were involved in (esp. begging and rag-picking). In a conversation with a woman running a small place where she buys recycling material from rag-pickers, she told me that many children who have been very active in collecting recycling material now are nicely dressed and do not want to make themselves dirty doing that work any longer. There is, moreover, a large (and probably increasing) number of other NGO-run and private initiatives in this area focusing on education, such as the rather recently started education and welfare centre for children in the Rain Basera, jointly run by two big NGOs (Indian and international) for the government. Beyond the intervention of such institutions, many parents of course also enrolled their children to the government schools without such support.

However, seeing a gradual transition from children who work to children who go to school would be misleading. It has been assumed by many that there is a direct causality between child labour and children being out of school leading to the conclusion that ending child labour is the solution to bring all children into school (e.g. Chaudhary 2005:57; Sinha 2005:2571). Based on studies that show other reasons why children are not in school, others argue for a more complex relation between schooling

and child labour (e.g. Husain 2005:143; Banerji 2000:796). The complexity of this relation becomes clear in Sarada Balagopalan's book "Inhabiting 'Childhood': Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India" (2014) which is based on extensive empirical research in Calcutta. Her research focuses on children who joined a shelter and educational centre on a railway track as well as on children of a school in a poor urban residential area. The children of Balagopalan's ethnography neither embrace nor refuse the new normative to go to school. They rather find their ways to combine their money earning activities with going to school and attending the activities of the NGO running the shelter. Generally, they are very realistic about the future perspectives that these schools "for the poor" offer to them and what they expect from school. The children and their parents know that attending such a school will most probably not open up significantly better opportunities for their future, hence children often continue or start working alongside. In one case, some even stopped going to a boarding school, which they were sent to, because the way the school functions did not match their expectations (Balagopalan 2014:117,118).

Disentangling the different spaces the children inhabit and their relation to these spaces, Balagopalan proposes an understanding of childhood that goes beyond the conventional approaches of childhood studies with their tendency to see the child mainly as a victim. According to her, other dimensions, such as the children's own sense of responsibility, equality and dignity, play a more important role in shaping their daily lives and the decisions they take. The way the children interpret these concepts is based on the history of exclusion, the socio-economic and political marginalisation their communities have experienced as well as their daily life realities in their current situations. This does not necessarily match the common understanding of the rights based perspective, which is often taken with regard to children living in poverty. In Balagopalan's depiction, whenever the situation demands it – for an NGO-organised anti-child labour rally, for instance – the children know well how to perform their roles, but these identities always reflect only a very limited aspect of their lives. The children themselves consciously reject to see themselves as "child labourers" or "street children", by

showing and clearly formulating that they have their own sense of their identities, which are less static than what is portrayed on them (Balagopalan 2014).

In the example of the anti-child labour rally that Balagopalan narrates, the NGO running the platform shelter organised a rally to spread awareness on the problem of child labour in the neighbourhood and educate the children about their rights. While the children, dressed in their best clothes, followed the instructions and shouted the slogans, they made remarks on their own freedom compared to children working as domestic helps whom they passed. This shows, according to Balagopalan, that in their logic their own labour and that of the domestic helps does not fall into the same category of being deprived of their rights. At the end of the rally, the children from the shelter decided to collect and sell the plastic cups and bottles provided for their refreshment in order to rent a beamer and watch a movie in the night (Balagopalan 2014:152). This example reveals in Balagopalan's own words "the ways in which a complicated everydayness disrupts pedagogic efforts to 'improve' these children's understanding of rights." (Balagopalan 2014:153).

The description of the children performing their role at the rally reminds me of the inauguration of the educational centre at the Rain Basera. The last days before the event, the whole site had been more or less completely reconstructed and cleaned. In the morning of the inauguration, the interior of the container building still smelled heavily from the fresh paint that showed brightly coloured paintings of smiling children joining hands in front of a rainbow and sceneries of clean nature and animals next to alphabet learning charts. Everything was nicely decorated and representatives of the two NGOs involved as well as from the government were sitting behind a desk in their sarees and suits. The children – those who lived in the Rain Basera, many from under the flyover and a few from the adjacent slums – were gathered to sit on the floor. In the speeches that were held, the children were sometimes addressed directly and told that they should come here to learn from now on every day. The children responded what they thought was expected of them and cheered loudly to the promises they were given. A few times individual children were ask to recite something or sing a song. Knowing that such kind of performances (mostly for external visitors) are almost routine to the

children who are regularly attending Khush, I could see how these children knew what was expected of them and performed in the way they were used to. They seemed to enjoy this almost like a game until a moment of confusion when a bunch of them decided that they have had enough and had to go to Khush now. Emphasising to me many times that they do not want to disappoint their teachers at Khush, they left the scene. The next day attendance at Khush was exceptionally high and some children declared that they would never go to the new centre again.

For others the new initiative at the Rain Basera became a site where they joined some learning sessions and meals occasionally (only those too young for Khush formed a regular group) and some children and parents got assistance in school admission matters. One of the learning sessions of which I have seen pictures included drawing and displaying posters for car drivers saying that they should not give money to begging children at the traffic junction. The children had followed the instructions and had glued these posters to the walls of the flyover where many of them usually beg. Another time, I was invited to a so-called "creative workshop on child rights" that was conducted for the children in and around the Rain Basera but attended almost exclusively by children from other centres of the NGO from where they had been brought for this event. Parallel to such events, the children living in and close by the new centre generally continued their daily routines including begging, other earning activities, household chores, school attendance and leisure activities the way they used to.

As these examples show, parallel activities that offer education and food to children can cause loyalty conflicts but also to some extent go hand in hand in the children's reality in which they negotiate their ways between schooling, work and other spaces they inhabit. Supporting Balagopalan's argument, I argue that these examples show how the children's own values of responsibility, loyalty and the sphere of freedom they create for themselves matters more to them than the official categories of "child labour", "rights", "education" etc. Against this backdrop, government schools are just one sphere for these children where education and food are offered. Bearing this in mind will help to make sense of school enrolment and attendance pattern.

Having looked at the children's relation to educational programmes (combined with food) provided by NGOs, I now focus on how formal school education and the complicated daily-life situations of the children and families go together. I start by analysing enrolment, dropout and attendance in Sir Balai School and RP Kulam School.

As already mentioned, in both schools, most staff members assume that because of the MDMS more children come to school. Some of them said that the scheme has brought up enrolment numbers, but most refer to higher attendance rates. The principal of Sir Balai School, Mrs Verma, even assumes that 50 per cent of the children come to school because of the meal. The teacher of year five at Sir Balai School also gave a concrete numerical guess on this correlation: of the 25 children present (of 30 who are enrolled in his class) at the time when I talked to him (which is the average attendance according to him), he thinks that only 15 would come without the scheme. In fact, with an average attendance of 83 per cent this class is quite exceptional, as in other classes the average attendance is somewhere between 60 to 65 per cent. Another teacher of the same school even reported that the average attendance in her class is as low as 15 per cent.

In RP Kulam School, too, low or irregular attendance of students is a matter of concern. Not surprisingly, for most of the 223 children who were withdrawn from the school before finishing fifth year, "constant absence" ("lagatar anu") is given as the reason in the register. For a few it says that they went to the village or that they will study in the village and often both "constant absence" and "left for the village" are given in combination. Hence, we see that the migration background is a crucial factor often severely disrupting the children's education. Migration is in most cases not a one-way journey but continues to shape the lives of the families that usually go back to their villages for festivals or family-related issues or even seasonal work – often taking along the children. One could argue, on the one hand, that in such cases it is extremely important that the system is flexible enough to handle these absences so that they do not to lead to dropouts. It is, in fact, one of the provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) that students' names are not cut so easily from the register if they are absent, while 75 per cent attendance has been mandatory before. Teachers told me (and showed me

in the class registers) that they follow this new policy and usually keep students in the register for periods of one to three months of absence before they cut them. Moreover, children can be very easily re-enrolled in case they have been withdrawn.

This policy shift, on the other hand, does not seem to prevent the many dropouts. Mrs Sakshi, the principal of RP Kulam School, for example, even sees this new policy as very problematic and with adverse impact for student attendance. Her argument is that due to the former rule of 75 per cent compulsory attendance the attendance of the children was much better than at the time of my research. She is convinced that the parents are well aware of the rules and behave accordingly. Since they know that the RTE made attendance not mandatory anymore, they, for example, go with their children back to their villages for long periods, something they did not do before. Interestingly, Mrs Sakshi draws a comparison between the relaxed attendance policy and the MDMS as an incentive to go to school. She is convinced that the negative impact of the relaxation of attendance on the presence of students is much stronger in her school than the effect of attraction generated by the meal. Although she also sees positive aspects in the MDMS, she is rather doubtful whether there is any such attraction effect of the scheme at all.

Whether the argument of Mrs Sakshi is true or not, it is clear that while provisions have been introduced to increase enrolment rates – including the finance and food schemes – there is a high dropout rate in both schools. According to the admission register data of RP Kulam School (the sample of 919 admissions in total between 2007 and 2015), of the 480 children who have left school, only 307 (64 per cent) left after completing fifth grade (including 21 who were re-admitted after they had dropped out once). Putting it the other way, as many as 173 (36 per cent) dropped out before finishing primary school without returning (see table 1). Further, my data reveals a high incidence of late admissions. The figures show that only 72.8 per cent (of the 914 for whom the admission date is indicated) got enrolled to the first grade and all others joined higher grades. Of those 307 who left school after fifth grade, only 128 children (41.7 per cent) have spent the complete five years or more[21]

[21] The complete regular time in primary schools is five years, but it can be more in case a class was repeated.

continuously in school. If we include the 33 further children who got admitted during the cause of the first grade, we see that 161 children (52.4 per cent of those who stayed in school until the end of grade five) were continuously enrolled for more than four years. The reasons why the remaining 146 children of those who left after grade five, joint school in advanced grades would need further examination for a detailed analysis. Among the obvious reasons is the practice that older children are sometimes admitted into advanced grades (more) appropriate to their age (as envisioned in the RTE) even if they join school for the first time. A further explanation for the late enrolments is that some children were enrolled in other schools before (in the village or city).

An interesting observation is that I found no correlation between the dropout pattern and the caste categories or the religion of the children. Other indicators of the socio-economic background of the children, however, revealed interesting results. Focussing on the children whose fathers are registered as labourers as well as the children for whom the Rain Basera is given as address (see table 1), has a huge overlap with those living under the most precarious conditions. The analysis revealed that of 228 children of labourers who left school only 128 (56.1 per cent) completed primary school. Hence with 100 children who dropped out, this rate lies with 43.9 per cent above low the average of 36 per cent. Focussing on the 12 children living in the Rain Basera who have left school (disregarding a few children for whom it is not indicated at which grade they left), reveals that merely 3 (25 per cent) of them finished fifth grade, while none of them completed more than three years of schooling. The dropout rate of this group, hence, lies at 75 per cent. These are indicators that the dropout rate is particularly high among those living in the most difficult situations.

	Total school leavers of RP Kulam School (2007-2015)	Finished grade 5	Dropped out earlier
All students	480	307 (64%)	173 (36%)
Students whose fathers are labourers*	228	128 (56.1%)	100 (43.9%)
Students living in the Rain Basera*	12	3 (25%)	9 (75%)

* Categories are overlapping

Table 1: Dropouts in relation to indicators of socio-economic background of children (according to admission register of RP Kulam School, covering admissions from August 2007 to October 2015)

Looking at the overall dropout pattern again, a striking result of my statistical analysis is that most of the dropouts occurred within twelve months after their admission. In fact, as many as 147 (84.5 per cent) out of the 173 children who dropped out (only considering those who did not get re-admitted later) were enrolled for less than a year. This means that they have only been present for a very short period if at all. As a side note, it should be kept in mind that all the numbers mentioned above are from RP Kulam School, in which things are running in a more organised manner compared to Sir Balai School (from where I do not have comprehensive data on dropouts), as described later in this chapter and the following chapters. Generally, the fact that a very high share of the dropouts actually happens very shortly after enrolment, clearly shows that the migration argument as a reason for school dropouts does not seem to hold for many cases. The reasons for these dropouts after short time are surely various. The story of eleven-year-old Sabdul is the most dramatic example for this.

Sabdul, a Pamaria Muslim, was the only son of his parents when his father died. His mother re-married a man who already had four children with his earlier wife. After the second husband – with whom Sabdul's mother had another four children – died, the mother allegedly turned to drinking and prostitution and did not care for her children anymore. While the younger four half-brothers of Sabdul are living in Gandhi Camp with the earlier wife of their father and their other half-siblings, Sabdul,

who is not a child of the same father, has a more complicated position in this family. He lives under the flyover with his grandmother ("nani" – the mother of his mother) who lives from begging. In the trend proudly narrated by Khush that the children of this area stopped rack-picking and reduced begging, Sabdul and his four half-siblings figure as exception, as without parents they have to earn their own money (apparently the latter live with their father and stepmother, but have to earn money). Khush facilitated school enrolment for these children. The four younger children are in two different private schools now while the efforts to make Sabdul go to school are seen as failure. According to the Sir Balai School admission register, he was enrolled to the second year of this school from shortly after his tenth birthday until his name was withdrawn, nearly one and a half years later. He had allegedly only come a few times and severely misbehaved in school, so that his former teacher said that as long as he has no guardians who take care of him and who can be contacted there is no capacity in the school to deal with him. The teachers of Khush consider trying it with another school once again, but are convinced that the best option for him would be a child welfare centre, where he would be taken care of and send to a regular school. One of the teachers even said that she is afraid he could become a criminal if he is left to himself. However, she is hesitant to try to admit him to a child welfare centre since this would mean that Sabdul would have to leave his living environment and friends, which the teachers assume he would not want. Indeed, Sabdul seems to enjoy activities of Khush when he is among his friends very much and is the most enthusiastic and gifted dancer who is cheered by everybody for this talent.

Other examples of early dropouts are the experiences of children from another Pamaria family (Nuria and Imran with their three children) living under the flyover and the Hindu-Muslim family (Salina and Yogesh with their four children) living on the footpath. The primary causes of the dropouts in these families are not related to their difficult living circumstances but here concerns of safety in the school and the surrounding figure as central problems. In both cases girls dropped out – two girls because they were allegedly repeatedly beaten by boys in school and one girl because she was attacked (or at least felt severely threatened) by stray dogs close to the entry of the school. Both

families are trying to find solutions for their daughters' education by the help of Khush now. Meanwhile the parents say that they had no other solution than keeping the children out of school where they are spending a lot of their time begging.

Generally, the involvement of children in earning money as well as in non-paid work is still very persistent in this area. The most visible form of this is begging. However, as already mentioned, singling out work – or child labour – as a reason for dropout or being out of school would be too simple. For example, many of the children involved in begging attend either one of the government schools, the classes of Khush or the centre in the Rain Basera. Other children who beg or are heavily involved in household chores (such as collecting water or firewood, washing, cooking, etc.) often at the same time have to take care of smaller siblings who would otherwise be unguarded when both parents are working. Since there seems to be no other solution for the guarding of small children in many families, those older children (more often girls but also sometimes boys) taking care of them cannot attend school regardless of whether they also work or not. Generally, the difficult living conditions and lacking, insufficient or insecure access to basic facilities (such as water and fuel for cooking) hinders or disrupts the education of many children who work as well as those who do not work. For instance, if the families face difficulties to access water, it happens that a child has to stay home while the parents go for work so the child can fetch water whenever it is available.

With the following example of Amira and her family, I intend to show how family responsibilities, work and school can be combined but can also be in conflict with each other at times, even if in rather subtle ways. I chose this example because I am convinced that not only the extreme cases of child labour and dropout are telling, but that these at first sight rather unproblematic cases can reveal much about the way in which education, emancipation, economic pressure and many more aspects of daily-live are negotiated in relation to each other.

Amira, her husband and their three children are Pamaria Muslims living in a typical one-room place in the bigger slum of the area. The children (Sahana, Aslim and Shayan) are in fourth and third year and the nursery of RP Kulam School. We followed them from school to their home and to Khush

in the beginning of this chapter. I already mentioned the combined income of the parents (of about 15,000 INR) as comparatively high and pointed to the fact that Amira's work is a matter of contention. She works as cook at Khush during the day and cleans at some places in the morning and in the evening. Even before I started my research, I knew her from Khush where she is a central figure. Her food is highly appreciated by all – children and staff – and being a very outspoken person she builds a bridge between the NGO teachers (from higher educational and socio-economic backgrounds) and the communities of the children. In cases of problems with children or parents, she always seems to have an opinion and knows of the context. She gets along very well with the teachers and is always part of their birthday celebrations and they even occasionally meet in their free time for outings.

When I first heard her complaining that she had an argument with her husband who wants her to stop or reduce working, her strong rejection of this seemed to be primarily a matter of emancipation demonstrating her strength and independence. After a while it became clear that the teacher of her daughter, Sahana, and the teachers of Khush I talked to, shared the husband's opinion at least to some extent. This demand is primarily a criticism that she should concentrate on children and household rather than seeking to extend the families earnings. The fact that her children, especially Sahana (the oldest), are often absent in school, is taken as a sign that Amira does not see the support of the children's education as priority the way she should.

It is clear from the admission register that Sahana's schooling is a story with severe disruptions. From her first enrolment at an age of five years in April 2010 to the time of my research (the school year 2015/2016) she lost two years of schooling. She was withdrawn from the register in January 2011 for the reason of "constant absence" and got re-enrolled in April 2012, again to the first grade. In the school year 2015/2016 she was eleven years old and in grade four. Her teacher, Shemita, told me that she was very concerned about Sahana's frequent absence and the fact that she lags very much behind other children of her age. According to Shemita, Sahana is a bright girl and initially had a lot of interest in studying, but because of the disruptions she lost track and is not as motivated and good anymore as she used to be. The teacher says that she has talked to Amira many times but is puzzled

by the fact that these conversations are very different to those she has with other mothers whose children are irregular. While she has the impression that others generally need to be convinced of the value and importance of education, Amira seems to be absolutely aware of this. She totally agrees that regular attendance is very important for the education and future of her daughter. The teacher is also aware that Amira works at Khush and wonders even more how it is possible that her children are so frequently absent from school. She said that although Amira denies it, Sahana herself often says that she did not come because she had to do household chores. It seems that Shemita tends to believe the child more than the mother in this regard and assumes that Amira neglects the household and her children's education for the sake of her work.

Whenever I asked Amira on days when Sahana was not in school for the reason of this, she had excuses, such as that Sahana did not feel well – although in the afternoon at Khush she was obviously at good health – that they did not get up early enough or that she did not manage to wash the children's school uniforms. Sometimes she also refused her responsibility for Sahana's absence saying that she told her children to go to school and cannot do more if she is already late for work. In both cases, her work seems to be part of the reason for the frequent absence of the children in combination with her alleged trust in the self-responsibility of her children.

On the other hand, I can confirm from talking to Amira that she really seems very aware of the value of education and care for children in general. She said, for example, that she understands her work as cook and the support for the NGO as an important service to the children. When I asked her whether there are any difficulties in her job, she said that she faces whatever difficulties "[…] kyonki bacce to bhagavān kā rūp hote hai. Aur bacce kī seva karnī cāhiē baccõ ko." (Interview with Amira; translation: "[…] because children are similar to God. And one has to serve the children.").

In this context, Amira's position as cook for the children at Khush and her very strong views on the MDMS in school are also highly interesting. Amira highly criticises the quality of food provided for the children in school by the central kitchen and the way in which (as she assumes) the teachers almost leave no other choice to the children then to accept it or to say that they like it. She claims that

the government provides simple and cheap quality food to the children since they are poor and are assumed to be happy with any kind of food. She knows from her experience that the children have very specific preferences which they tell her directly at Khush and she cooks accordingly. This direct link between those who cook and those who eat the food does, of course, not exist in case of the MDMS. Despite her critical view on the food provided under this scheme, it came through in conversation with Amira and her children that for the mornings when they are running late for school and work, it is an advantage that they do not have to worry about taking food from home. This does not prevent the still frequent absence of Amira's children, but the scheme at least figures as a possible factor for higher attendance.

The example of Amira and her family demonstrates how people negotiate their daily-life between various responsibilities, demands and personal aspirations, which are at times in conflict. It helps to understand how people can have quite paradox relations to school education and the provisions offered by the school.

Poverty, caste and educational inequality

Additional to the food there are other incentives in government schools to attract children to school. For every child in school the parents are entitled to basic financial support of INR 500 for boys and INR 1,000 for girls per year meant for school uniform, books, etc. Further, Muslim children and those of SCs and STs are entitled to INR 500 more. However, while the food is directly accessible to the children, multi-layered obstacles prevent many families from accessing the financial support.

To start with, the high number of Dalits I identified from the admission register stands in sharp contrast to the extremely small number of children who are marked as belonging to the category of SC in the register, which entitles them to get the extra INR 500. For mere 50 children their parents have submitted an official certificate proving their SC status – this is 5.4 per cent compared to the 39.7 per cent that I identified as SC from the admission registers (only considering those whose caste is indicated). Clearly, the large majority of the Dalit families of the sample does not have such a certificate proving their caste identity. I have heard many times that the hurdles to get it are simply

too high. They need birth certificates of their place of origin for which village officials demand bribes up to INR 8000. Hence, many have given up on this and live with the fact that they cannot receive the extra INR 500. When I asked the school staff (teachers and principals) about this mismatch of enrolled Dalits and SC registrations, they said that they encourage parents to submit certificates, but they cannot do more than that. Moreover, many parents told me that they have never received any money from the school. This might be a hint that some parents have justified doubts whether the efforts of getting an SC certificate are actually worth it.

One group of low castes and Dalits has to be looked at separately here: Muslims. Their case is different, as the government does not recognise Muslim Dalits separately, rather, in case of Muslim students, an affidavit proving their Muslim identity – which is very easy to get – suffices to entitle them to the same financial support in schools as SCs. Those Muslim parents I talked to who receive money from the school do receive this extra sum as well.

Regarding the financial support (whatever sum it might be), another obstacle that many face is that since the money is nowadays supposed to be transferred to a bank account, an account has to be opened by the parents themselves or the school staff. In both cases several documents including a residential proof are needed which many cannot easily provide. I illustrate this by an example of the efforts to open a bank account undertaken by the parents of the Chauhan family from Rajasthan living under the flyover, whose three children are enrolled in Sir Balai School.

> The parents asked me whether I would mind to accompany them to the next State Bank branch to support them in opening accounts for their children. I agreed and when I came the next they were well prepared with passport pictures of the children and identity proves (aadhaar cards) copied, including that of the owner of the chai shop next to their shelter (where the father earns a few rupees for dish washing) who has a residence proof. That morning the children (nicely dressed) had to come to the bank, too, to show their faces before joining school later. In the bank, the parents gently urged me to speak to the staff while they remained in the back and only talked to the staff if I explicitly asked them something. The staff seemed neither very

supportive, nor obstructing, rather a kind of indifference of many bureaucratic officials I have experienced at other places before. Whether their behaviour towards the family was different because of my presence, I cannot say for sure. The irony of the situation – me talking to them in broken Hindi on behalf of the family whose background I hardly knew – is in any case telling about the relation of such a family to government officials. It made me feel that either my presence actually mattered for getting their work done, or at least the parents thought it could matter. Once we knew which forms had to be filled, I filled them since both of the parents are illiterate. Finally, we submitted everything, but since the proof of the chai shop owner did not suffice, they were told to come again with more documents of him. The submission of these documents they managed by themselves and some time later the mother asked me again to accompany her for getting the so-called pass books of the accounts of two of the children. After the first person tried to send us to another bank branch and I was asked to sign on behalf of the children's father (who was in their home village at that time) we finally got the passes.

This is a rather smooth story of how this family got their way through the processes required for benefitting from the financial support provided by the school. It is surely much more difficult for parents who do not have such good connections to someone with a residence proof and someone who agrees to help out in writing and in the very common case that they have jobs from which they cannot take leave so easily several times for this purpose.

The lack of residence proof of course also has implications beyond the context of the school. Most of the families I talked to, said, for instance, that they do not have ration cards with which they would get subsidised grains and other basic food items as part of the Public Distribution System. Hence, those who live in the harshest conditions of this area are excluded from this government scheme, which is meant for the poor. This means that most of the very poor people of the area end up spending a high share of their income on vegetables, grains and meat for normal market prices. According to Samaddar (2020), merely three per cent of migrant labourers in Delhi and Lucknow have ration cards registered in the city (Samaddar 2020:20).

Such exclusion from accessing welfare schemes and (in the example before) from programmes that are meant to bring children into school, demonstrates how much deprivation and structural exclusion shape the lives of the urban poor. The discussion of the situation of the urban poor thus far also showed how poverty and caste inequality are deeply entangled. In fact, caste inequality and poverty overlap to a large extent – as also discussed in the introduction of the thesis – even if poverty often is the main factor that people refer to. In his research in a slum in Chennai, Nathaniel Roberts (2016) for instance, observed that poverty and caste are so inherently linked that the social divide between slum dwellers (almost exclusively Dalits) and people outside of it seems to be unbridgeable. Roberts found that, while refusing to talk about caste, the slum dwellers commonly identified themselves as "poor". By doing so they reject the pre-determined nature of caste-belonging and rather see themselves in the current condition because of a strategic marginalisation by the caste Hindus who caused their deprivation and maintain it by excluding them from resources and services.

In a similar line of thought, I argue that the hope for school education as a means to escape the cycle of poverty and to enable a better future for the children is in many cases betrayed by multi-layered exclusion that also encompasses the educational sector. In addition to the already discussed complex obstacles of many families to access school education for their children, a crucial point also is what kind of education they receive. In the case of Sir Balai School, staff members use their caste-loaded stereotypes on poor people to justify their ignorance towards the hopes that the parents connect to the education of their children. These stereotypes seem to be widely spread among middle- and upper-class people (as Roberts (2016) also found) and revolve around issues such as that these people are not able to handle money (they allegedly spend whatever they earn on unnecessary things such as festivals, alcohol and meat), that they are criminals or at least prone to criminal activity and that they do not have a sense for hygiene. In the context of the school, it is also often assumed that the parents do not care for the children's education or even obstruct it, for example, by forcing the children to work. Rita, the teacher who is in charge for the MDMS in RP Kulam School, for instance, told me that she thinks the main failure of the parents is that they do not like to work. She argues that while

the government claims that parents want to send their children to school, she thinks that even nowadays they want their children to work and take care of younger siblings. Rita said that she has such children in class who do not come because they take care of siblings while the mother is pregnant again. Hence, according to her depiction, these children cannot come to school, but are enrolled only to get the minority benefit (Interview with Rita).

Such prejudiced views on the way the poor families lead their lives and especially the alleged lack of educational ambitions and abilities of children and their parents leads to an ignorance of their wish for meaningful education. In fact, Mrs Verma, principal of Sir Balai School, does not see the school as a chance for the children or understands it as the role of the school to help the children to improve their situation – which, one should assume, would per definition be her responsibility as a principal. The following conversation between her and a mother, which I witnessed, demonstrates this reluctance to take any responsibility regarding the children's education.

> Towards the end of a school day a mother, Nisha, came to pick up her children (three boys in the second, fourth and fifth year). Seeing that most children were roaming around as most classes were left to themselves without a teacher, she asked Mrs Verma why there were no teachers. The latter shouted that there are not enough teachers (she used a very rough tone in most of her conversations that I witnessed). She referred to the government set student-teacher ratio being 30/1 and the fact that very few children are coming nowadays as the reason why they cannot employ more teachers. Nisha was not satisfied with this answer – since it was obvious that even the teachers who are working in the school were not all present – and she mentioned that her sons were not learning much in school. Now the prompt (shouted) answer was "take tuition!". Nisha said that she did so but the tuition teacher told her that she cannot substitute everything, so she asked: "why are they not learning in school?" The tuition teacher says that they do not know the alphabets, numbers, nothing. What followed on this was a (shouted) lesson by the principal about how the mother should make the tuition teacher understand that she should not wait for the school, but she has to be instructed to teach the

> children all these things: numbers up to 100, if the child does not know them, then first to 10, then 20, then 30 and so on. And the alphabets in Hindi and English. “That’s the homework from now on, every day!” This “homework” she told the children, too, when they came to their mother. I could see Nisha’s face reflecting a mix of anger and frustration but slowly giving in, being more and more silent, saying “hān jī” (“yes”) and “You are right” from time to time and then leaving with her children.

Besides the reluctance of the principal to take the responsibility, this example also shows how much – in contrast to the stereotype mentioned – the mother actually cares for the education of her children. When I talked to her on the same day at home, she told me how frustrated she was about the fact that the children do not learn properly in school and that the principal always gives the same excuses. She also told me that she spends 300 INR per month for each child on private tuition. Hence, Nisha’s anger is aggravated by the fact that the school which is meant to provide education free of cost pushes them to spend so much money on education. This is especially frustrating considering that, according to several teachers of PR Kulam School, most of these tuition classes are of very low quality. There are up to 20 children at a time in some places so that they can also no bet individually taken care of. In fact, most of the PR Kulam teachers rather discourage parents from sending their children to tuition and say that they should instead focus on what they learn in class. Those teachers who are committed to the education of the poor children have their own perspective on what should be done to enable the teachers to deliver more meaningful education to the children. Their ideas for necessary policy changes are based on their view that under the given circumstances (classroom size, curriculum and teaching material) it is not possible to do justice to the children “from the streets”. In the words of fourth-class teacher, Shemita, it is not possible to teach them properly: “They are shouting, you are shouting and that's it” (Interview with Shemita). She is highly frustrated by the fact that the administration and policy makers allegedly ignore the teachers’ concerns on this and with that also ignore the needs of the children. Shemita assumes that the policy makers are sitting in their air-conditioned rooms and have no idea what is going on in the classroom.

Overall, both a principal, who essentially admits the inability of her school to educate children and her passivity towards that, as well as engaged teachers, who complain about severe structural problems in school that render meaningful education difficult, show how a whole group of people is to a large extent excluded from meaningful education. I made two basic observations concerning education in the two schools: A high incidence of interrupted or not happening classes (especially at Sir Balai School) and very low learning levels of the students.

Regarding the first point, I found classes left unattended by teachers occasionally in RP Kulam School and very frequently in Sir Balai School. In the latter, regular classes stopped for many students after the three months teaching praxis period of the interns in their teachers' training ended (the interns had undertaken a huge share of teaching during their internship). At about the same time, the teacher of class two (who was working on contract basis as compared to the "regular" teachers) got transferred to a different school, hence the three teachers of classes three to five and the principal had to teach five classes alongside taking care of the non-teaching activities. I was told that their system to handle the situation was that the students of year one were combined with year four and the students of year two got either divided into the other classes, or were supervised by the principal and one of the teachers in turns. While such a system already compromises the chances of many children to be taught according to their respective level, I have hardly ever seen the principal in the classroom during my research. Rather, on several occasions I observed that students were left unattended, most frequently those of year one and two. A common practice also is that the teachers appoint a student who is supposed to take care of the rest of the class for the time in which no teacher is present. Interestingly, when I talked to the school inspector, Mr Kumar, about the teaching situation in Sir Balai School, he simply denied that there is a problem, saying that he has not observed that classes are left unattended.

In contrast to the unconcerned response of the inspector, three of the four teacher training interns at Sir Balai School told me that they are quite concerned about the teaching situation at the school. For instance, one of the interns explained recent cases in which parents took out their children from the class in which she was interning, by frankly saying: "Nothing was happening in terms of teaching,

so that was the reason." (Interview with Menakshi). Each of the interns pointed to different problems that they see as main reasons for the very low learning levels of the students. One of these reasons is the lack of permanent teachers. A second one is the high amount of administrative work that the teachers have to do during school time – circumstances that lead to heavy compromises in teaching. A third reason that one of the interns, Shika, mentioned, is the low motivation of many teachers. This is, in her view, at least partly a result of the gap between the daily-life reality of children from poor families and the ideal learning environment in school. To make this third point more clear, Shika's assumption is that teachers might be discouraged when they are faced with the fact that the children come to school without being prepared for this. In her view, a pre-school in which children learn general things – such as how to sit, how to behave oneself in school and how to use scissors and glue, for instance – is very helpful in general. This would be especially so for children such as those in Sir Balai School who do not come from middle or upper class families where these things are learned at home, too. Where such a pre-school is missing, according to the intern, high motivation and efforts of the teacher as well as of the parents and the children themselves are necessary to enable the child to actually learn something in school.

The two occasions that I narrate in the following, are examples of class interruptions that reflect all three of the issues discussed and how they play out in the daily routine of the school also entailing contradictory attitudes of school staff towards such interruptions. One day when I arrived at the school, Mrs Jannat (teacher of the third class) and Mrs Verma (the principal) were examining Kashmeeri shawls from a vendor who displayed his products on a corner of the upper floor of the building during class time. Another day, Mrs Jannat and Mrs Verma were the only staff members present at school when I came. An official visitor was talking to Mrs Verma telling her that a few new boards including a new name board for the school should be installed. According to Mrs Jannat, their arrangement for the day was that she was looking after the classes on the upper floor (years three to five) while Mrs Verma was in charge for the ground floor (classes one and two). They had supposedly giving the students tasks to do, though when I came most of the students where roaming

around. After the man had left, Mrs Verma called Mrs Jannat to her office to tell her about the visitor's requests. In a very annoyed way, Mrs Jannat inquired whether Mrs. Verma had called her just to tell her something she could have told her any other time but not while she has to handle all upper floor classes. They had a short and heated argument about that after which a frosty atmosphere between them remained.

Mrs Verma's low commitment towards the education of the students in her school has already come out in the scene when she told a mother not to expect that the children would actually learn the numbers and alphabets in school. In individual conversation with Mrs Verma, it became clear that her attitude towards the children and their families is closely linked with frustration about the changing clientele that government schools have experienced over the last two decades. According to her, it has always been "low standard" families sending their children to this school. However, according to her, a new dynamic started around 1996 when salaries rose a bit and mothers started contributing to the family income, so that many of them could afford to send their children to private schools. According to Mrs Verma's narrative, only the "very low standard people" ("bahut low standard ke log") remained in the school and all others tried to get away their children from the supposedly negative influence of these children. Moreover, she observed that always if there is an intelligent child in her school, the parents take it to a private school immediately, so she reasons that there are no intelligent children in her school anymore. In her view the students in her school are all "nālāyak" (dictionary translations for "naalaayaq" = incapable/incompetent/undignified/unworthy). She uses this term synonym to "gande bacce" (literally: "dirty children"), a concept that I discuss in chapter two in more detail when I focus on inequalities within the school. Apparently, Mrs Verma denies the chance to get educated to the children, saying that the teachers have to handle too many children to teach them in an adequate way. Additionally, she claims that the parents don not have the capacity to teach the children individually – by which they could become "intelligent", according to her understanding. The only solution seems to be to take private tuitions, which, according to her,

only help the children in some cases, which would then prompt an immediate shift of the child to a "good school".

Unsurprisingly there are huge gaps between the level of the schoolbooks as well as tasks they are asked to do and the actual levels of the students. Yash, a fifth year student of RP Kulam School, for instance, showed me the textbooks from which they have to copy one page per day (50 in total) of Hindi and English over the holidays. He understood hardly any word of the English story he was supposed to work on and hence said that he would need to resort to either asking his elder sister or copy it without understanding the meaning. The latter, it seems, is what most of the children do if they do the task at all.

The low learning results of the children in many cases deeply disappoint the hopes of their parents that school education could enable them a better future. Many parents expressed their frustration about the slow or lacking educational progress of their children to me. A father of two children in second year of Sir Balai School, for instance, who describes himself as not well educated and earns the money for the family by cleaning cars and a job as night guard in a market, said that his children receive even less education that he did in school. While he could write and understand full lines in second year, they do not even know how to write the single devanagari (Hindi alphabet) letters. He is disappointed by the school but also started doubting his own children's intellectual abilities (Interview with Mohit). Similarly, a mother of a family living in a Valmiki dominated settlement told me that she cannot believe that her daughter has not learned anything in three years at Sir Balai School even in combination with private tuitions. Hence, she got doubts in the teachers' abilities to teach in an effective way as well as in the intellectual ability of her child. A mother of students from RP Kulam School (a Valmiki family) also complained that her children (a girl and a boy) in fourth and fifth year cannot count until 100. In this case, although, according to her, the teachers blame the children themselves for their low learning achievements, she is convinced that the school is not good. She also told me very proudly that they are in the process of getting the young sister of the two admitted to a private school so that at least one child will get the chance to study properly. This is indeed something

extraordinary since, according to neighbours of this family, currently only three children of the whole slum (they live in Savitri Camp) are going to a private school.

The low or even declined quality of education and learning outcomes in government schools has been a matter of much concern in literature for over a decade (e.g. Pandey et al. 2010; Basu 2013; Editorial 2013). Corresponding to my observations, and the situation in Sir Balai School in particular, it is bemoaned in literature that the government schools are being abandoned by the better-off population as well as by the government itself. As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) of 2018 shows a severe decline of reading abilities in government schools in their surveys of 2012 and 2014 and still a significantly lower level on the national average in 2018 compared to 2008 (ASER 2018: 9). One reason is seen in the fact that with the focus on achieving universal education educational quality has been neglected (e.g. Balagopalan 2014:17). Further, the increasing privatisation of education is seen as very problematic development in which the government allows education to become a matter of private profit and deteriorating quality. In fact, quality concerns are not only rampant in government schools, but teaching quality in low-budget private schools is also found to be very low in many cases (e.g. Teltumbde 2013; Nambissan 2012; Nambissan 2014; Bhatty and Saraf 2016). Hence, whether those schools offer the families what they hope for is at least doubtful. The educational inequality is, moreover, currently increasing in new scales due to the covid-19 pandemic, which made the gap between private and governmental education even more dramatic, as a shift to digital teaching modes has interrupted education most dramatically for the students of schools without digital equipment and with less opportunities to study at home (see e.g. Dutta and Sardar 2021 and introduction of the thesis).

Notwithstanding the question to what extent education actually contributes to reducing inequalities in society – which is another huge topic – I argue that the current educational system in itself recreates inequalities. Consequentially, the trend towards universalisation of elementary education does not necessarily lead to reducing inequalities in society. Hence, the effect of the MDMS as an instrument to bring children into school and increase their nutritional situation cannot in itself be seen as

contribution of the scheme towards reducing inequality. Manisha Garg and Kalyan Sankar Mandal (2013) also point to the limits of the effects of the MDMS within the given educational system. Based on qualitative and quantitative research in rural Rajasthan, they examine to what extent the MDMS contributes to universalising elementary education and by that to decreasing social inequality, which they see as the central aims of the scheme. Similar to literature mentioned earlier, they found that the MDMS has a positive impact on school enrolment, attendance and nutritional intake of the most marginalised students. Based on this observation they argue that this scheme is one of the rare cases where a social policy actually reaches the disadvantaged (while usually the better-off sections of society fetch the benefits instead). Nevertheless, their central conclusion is that this inclusion of the marginalised in school does not lead to educational equality in the society because the better-off parents put their children in private schools so that social segregation in the educational system is not mitigated but instead increases (Garg and Mandal 2013). As a result, there is an increasing educational inequality on the larger scale – a segregation between rich and poor, that runs largely along caste lines – which cannot be challenged, let alone overcome, by schemes such as the MDMS.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focussed on the families of my research area, their daily-live realities and their relation to school education and the MDMS. My guiding question was: What role does the MDMS play for the children and their families as an educational and nutritional policy? A basic observation I made is that education is considered increasingly important among the urban poor, although the admission registers show that the educational histories of the children are in many cases short-term or disrupted experiences. Together with their parents, the children are negotiate their ways between family responsibilities, household chores, work, leisure activities and the educational offers of schools and NGOs. Their migration background, the difficult living conditions and economic pressure fundamentally shape these children's childhoods. Hence, many families of the area have rather complicated relations to school and they do in many cases not benefit from the financial support they

are entitled to. These migrant families live at the margins of the city and their social exclusion, which is rooted to a large extent in caste discrimination, is reflected in the fact that almost only children of socio-economically low status go to the two schools of my study.

The unsatisfying educational progress of students in both schools – often in combination with private tuitions – is a matter of huge concern to the parents. This is considerably more dramatic in Sir Balai School where a lack of teachers as well as a low commitment of some of the staff members towards the educational progress of the students renders the hope for meaningful education for most of the students in vain. I found different and varying levels of commitment by school staff towards the education of the students and different reasons for class disruptions and obstacles to conduct (proper) teaching, resulting in very low educational progress of many children. Overall, this analysis revealed how a large group of children is deprived of meaningful education. A thorough examination of the multi-layered causes for low teaching time, low quality of education and low learning levels in government schools could reveal many more aspects that are relevant. Hence, further research would be highly valuable in this field.

Generally, with the increasing gap between private and government education as well as private schools that are of very low educational quality, large sections of poor and especially Dalit children are educationally left behind. The thought that the MDMS could by attracting children to school and increasing their nutritional situation contribute to reducing inequalities in society is, therefore, too simplistic. Educational inequality is too deeply rooted in the system to be tackled by a scheme that does not touch the system itself.

Yet, this does not mean that the MDMS is not helpful. My observations clearly show that the food is very much appreciated by most children and by many parents. In this urban context the children, even those living in the most precarious conditions, do generally have their ways to access food – including nutritious food – but not always in a reliable manner, so that the regular provision of a cooked meal is helpful. Further, although for many of the parents it bears the stigma that is attached

to governmental feeding programmes for the poor, the food at school is a useful support for many of them in their daily routines.

I concentrated on the MDMS's contribution to reducing inequalities as a policy to bring children into school and enhance their nutritional levels in this chapter. As this contribution can be assessed on other levels as well, in the following chapter I shift the focus towards the actual lunchtime in school and the social interactions around it.

Chapter 2: Lunchtime at school

It is 10:15 a.m. at Sir Balai School. Ranchi, who is employed for distributing lunch, and Ajeet, a boy of about 11 years who is in grade three, take out the food containers and put them on a table at a central place on the ground floor of the building. Ranchi opens the sealed lids with a strong hit of the serving spoon and both of them start serving potato gravy and "poori". Children come from all classrooms with their various types of plates or tiffin boxes, wait for their turn to get food and then return to their classroom or stay outside for eating. Two of the teachers come out of the office from time to time, where they sit together eating the food they brought from home, and tell the children to stand in line, not to take more than they can eat and be careful not to drop the gravy.

Today I had promised Laxmi, Ajeet's sister who is about 13 years old and also in grade three, to join her for lunch. She is very keen to share the food she brought from home with me and had even asked her mother to pack an extra "daal paratha" for me. So I sit with Laxmi and two of her girl friends in the classroom at two benches which they joined. The girls eat the food that they brought from home and share a bit of the potato gravy and "poori" of which Ajeet offers me a plate, too, when he joins eating after he finished distributing. For a short time, another boy joins us, which seems to be okay for the girls. Then Tanya, a girl who was sitting two rows in front of us, comes to us with her plate of potato gravy and "pooris", puts it on the table and wants to sit next to me, but Laxmi and the others angrily send her away. I ask them what the problem is and say that I do not mind her joining us, but they explain that she eats with hands and did not wash them, which can cause health problems. While I am thinking about whether the main problem is that she eats with hands or that she did not wash them or something else, Tanya – silently but with a disappointed expression on her face – goes back to her place and everyone continues eating.

This scene offers an idea about how distribution and eating of the food are handled in the school and it also exemplifies some remarkable social dynamics among the students at lunchtime.

In this chapter, I concentrate on lunchtime in school and the question to what extent the common meal contributes to reducing inequalities among the students. The idea of the school lunch as "common meal" is introduced on the first page of the official guidelines of the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), where the expectation is formulated that the scheme could challenge caste prejudices and class inequalities through the experience of eating together. As mentioned in the introduction, it says:

> "There is also evidence to suggest that apart from enhancing school attendance and child nutrition, mid day meals have an important social value and foster equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality." (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:1).

A similar idea is expressed by the logo of the scheme, which shows children (boys and girls in equal shares) sitting together in a circle while eating the meal. The guidelines for the logo start as follows: "The concept is evolved from the idea of a group of children sitting together in a circle and having their meal served hot. Equal importance is given to boys and girls with communal harmony." (Guidelines for MDMS logo 2010, on the website of the scheme).

(Official logo of the MDMS; Image source: https://logowiki.net/mdm-logo.html)

None of the guidelines, however, mentions how the "common meal" is supposed to be organised and "communal harmony" is to be created. Hence, how they organise lunchtime is largely left to the schools.

My observations of how the processes around the meal are organised by the school staff in the two schools of my research and the analysis in how far the common meal is used for enhancing

socialisation among the children, form the first part of the chapter. Following this, I try to unravel the social dynamics among the students themselves. Unsurprisingly, the behaviour and attitudes of the staff play a significant role for both, the ways in which the processes are handled and the social dynamics unfolding among the students, hence, I pay particular attention to this aspect throughout the chapter.

Eating together

As on the day when I had school lunch with Laxmi and her friends, distribution of the food usually starts at 10:15 a.m. in both schools and is mainly managed by the distributors who are employed for this task. In Sir Balai School, Ajeet and sometimes other children – usually boys of years three to five – help with the distribution and on days when Ranchi comes late or cannot come, they even handle the distribution on their own while the teachers only supervise the process. The school staff usually only interferes in the distribution processes to discipline the children – which is often done in a rough tone and I even observed an incidence when Mrs Verma (principal of the school) slapped a girl who stood in line for food. In RP Kulam School the distributors, Rani and Sushmeeta, distribute the food parallel on the two floors and separately for each class. Students sometimes get involved in distributing "pooris" and transporting the heavy containers from one place to the other, but usually Rani, Sushmeeta or one of the teachers take the containers from them. A task in which students are regularly involved in both schools is the weighing of the containers, which two to three boys do together with the teacher who is in charge for the MDMS after the food is delivered to the school. The containers have to be weighted, as the weight has to be documented in the forms that are to be filled each day on the food that the schools receive.

In RP Kulam School each teacher supervises the distribution for their own class, if necessary they also help distributing or do it on their own if Rani or Sushmita are absent. In this school I have observed several instances where the teachers, who noticed that a child neither takes MDMS food nor has food from home, inquired what the reason was and tried to motivate the child to take at least a bit

of the MDMS food. In cases when the child said that he or she did not feel well, the teachers told another child to get a portion for the classmate. This not only demonstrates that the teachers in RP Kulam School take more care of the individual students during lunch, it could also enhance social behaviour among the students as they are encouraged to take care of others. Once distribution is over, the teachers come together in one classroom and eat what they brought from home.

The children are usually served according to what and how much they ask for. However, the size of the portion is limited by the size of the plate or box which they bring from home and the estimated overall amount of food in relation to the number of students present on the day. A child with a rather flat plate, for example, does not get much on days with a liquid dish. Further, if the distributors or the teachers have the impression that the overall amount of food might not be enough to serve all children, the children are served only small portions. It sometimes happens, for instance, that the children get only two "pooris" each – although most children can easily eat four or five – while the children whose turn is towards the end, if it is clear that there is enough left, get four "pooris". One day, the teacher in charge of the MDMS at Sir Balai School came out to see that they started the distribution alright, took the required food sample in a glass and a glass full for the teachers to test it (notably after the children had started eating). She instructed the boys to give each child three "pooris". When I asked for the official rule of how many "pooris" each child should get, she said it is actually just two but she thinks they could get three. According to her, two "pooris" and some "aloo" (potato gravy) would come to 200 gram which is the officially calculated ratio per child. To demonstrate this, she took four "pooris" and took their weight, the scale showed 100 gram. Now she tried and pushed the scale several times not really believing that four only weight less than she had said for two. Of the 200 gram, 120 are supposed to be "poori" and 80 the rest, she admitted. Nevertheless, she did not change her opinion that it is best to give three "pooris" to the children because they would otherwise throw the rest and those who want more could come again.

In both schools of my research, the children are left more or less free during the time of eating. They start eating once they have their food, so that the first students are done or come again to ask

for a second portion (which they sometimes get and at other times not, according to how much food is left) while others are still waiting for their first turn. The distributors and teachers sometimes tell the children to go to their classrooms and not to run around with the food, because the floor should not get dirty. In RP Kulam School, where the food is distributed in or in front of each classroom, most children eat in the classroom in small groups at places of their choice or at the places where they sit during class time. In Sir Balai School, the children eat outside or inside in constellations of their preference. In both schools usually friends are eating together and sometimes siblings, as in the example of Ajeet and Laxmi. It is not exceptional that children from different castes are eating together, including constellations of upper caste children and Dalits as well as Hindus and Muslims. In Sir Balai School, for instance, two Pamaria Muslims – I consider Pamaria a Muslim Dalit caste, (see introduction of the thesis) – of fifth year often eat together with their classmate, who is upper caste Hindu. In RP Kulam school, a boy belonging to the Other Backward Class (OBC) category Hindu of year four told me that he often eats together and even shares food from one plate with his three friends of whom two are Muslims (one of them Pamaria). Moreover, some teachers told me that they also do observe such constellations in their classes. However, the school staff does not actively encourage children who are not friends to sit together for lunch. They neither guide the sitting arrangement, nor do they frame the eating by a common start, for example.

The fact that the children receive different amounts of food according to the size of their plates or boxes, appears to be a factor which creates difference rather than equality. More generally, that they have to bring their own plates from home, instead of receiving equal plates from school that are kept in school (as at Khush and the Rain Basera), is also a factor that pronounces inequalities. Children who for some reason come without plate or with a plate or box that is not considered proper (if it is of plastic, for instance), are being scolded in front of the others. In PR Kulam School, in joined effort the staff members made sure that almost all children bring steel plates or boxes (which is regarded as more hygienic) instead of plastic. This is something that the Sir Balai School staff is allegedly trying for a long time, but has not been able to establish yet.

Regarding the management of lunchtime, but also on a more general level, of both schools, in RP Kulam School processes are handled in a comparably well organised manner. For instance, regular meetings of parents and teachers as well as of the school management committee are organised at RP Kulam School, while Sir Balai School does not have a functioning school management committee, nor organised parents-teachers' meetings. This difference seems to have to do much with the personal approach and attitude of the two principals which shape the overall atmosphere in the schools to a large extent. Mrs Sakshi, principal of RP Kulam School, maintained a friendly tone in all interactions I witnessed. She told me that has been working in this school for the past 17 years (first as teacher and then as principal) and therefore knows the parents well and is on good terms with them as many of them are her former students. A friendly atmosphere among the school staff also seems to be important to her. For the festival of Diwali, for instance, she called all teachers as well as Rani, Sushmeeta and me for a small party where she distributed samosa and sweets. The overall atmosphere at Sir Balai School is very different. As has been mentioned before, in interactions I witnessed between the principal, Mrs Verma, and others, she often shouted and refused to act on the request of someone. This contributes to a rather tensed atmosphere in this school.

Returning to the way how the eating of the school meal is organised, in my conversations with some of the staff at Sir Balai School, it came out clearly that they are trying to keep time and effort for lunchtime at a minimum. In fact, many of them perceive the MDMS as a burden on top of the already high amount of non-teaching activities they have to do. That teaching time in Sir Balai School is compromised to a large extent by a lack of staff members and partly also a lack of commitment in relation to the tasks required of them, has been discussed in the chapter one. This situation seems to be one reason for the fact that the school staff is not inclined to invest time and effort for reorganising lunchtime.

Another reason for this could be the fact that the eating arrangement and support of socialisation among students through the meal are no relevant aspects in the monitoring of the scheme. That the guidelines for the MDMS only praise possible social effects of the common meal in classroom but

do not include rules or suggestions how this should be supported, has been mentioned already. Correspondingly, social aspects do not play a role in the supervision of the scheme either. For instance, the school inspector of the two schools of my research, Mr Kumar, who is responsible for inspecting the functioning of 50 schools including the supervision of the MDMS for the MCD, does not talk to the school staff about the eating processes. According to him, it is up to the principals to decide what the best arrangement for lunch is based on, for example, the size of the school. While in most schools under his supervision the food is distributed in the classrooms, in one school the principal makes the children sit in a circular fashion inside a hall. Although he is convinced that in a school as big as RP Kulam School it would be difficult to make all children sit together, he did agree with me, on the notion that in Sir Balai School a common sitting arrangement could be introduced. For this purpose, he suggested a hall, which is directly adjacent to the main school building and supposedly used for parents' meetings, but has never been opened while I was conducting my field study there. Mr Kumar seemed to like the idea that such a system could be introduced. On my question, as to why he does not suggest this to the principal, he said that he usually does not visit the school at lunchtime and therefore is not so aware of the current system.

The processes of distribution and eating are handled differently in other places, as the following examples demonstrate. In a visit to a school in Jaipur before I started fieldwork in Delhi, I observed that the children were sitting on the floor in front of their classrooms in two long lines facing each other and had their food on the same steel plates, which they washed afterwards and stored in the school. Similarly, at the NGO Khush and in the Rain Basera, the children take steel plates from a pile and sit in a circle or in lines on mats that they spread on the floor for lunchtime. After the meal, each child washes the plate and puts it back on the pile. In the Rain Basera the distribution is mainly done by the staff members, while at Khush it is usually done by the children themselves. In both institutions the staff members supervise the processes, help wherever it is needed and then also eat the same food. This is another difference to the school lunch where the teachers do not eat the MDMS food. If the school teachers also ate the same food, it could possibly set a positive sign to students and parents

regarding the quality of the food. It could also be interpreted as an attempt to bridge the social gap between students and teachers. However, in the system of centralised food provision in urban areas, as in the case of the schools in my research, this is not intended and literature generally does not mention whether this is practised in rural areas or not.

Overall, literature that looks at the effects of the MDMS on socialisation in school and especially on the arrangements of how the meal is eaten by the children, is rather rare and often remains brief and vague on these aspects (e.g. Drèze and Goyal 2003; Khera 2006). De et al. (2005) in their study on benefits of the scheme in Delhi are most concrete regarding what possible measures towards socialisation are lacking in the way how school staff handles it:

> "Opportunities to take advantage of supplementary benefits were not used as much as possible. In particular, little attention was paid to the socialisation value of the scheme. A good example of what is possible is provided by a researcher who visited an anganwadi[22] in Tamilnadu, where children were observed to first sit together and wait until they had all been given their food and then say *"thirukuaral"* [Tamil term referring to ethics and morality] in unison before they began to eat. In one of the sample schools in Delhi, all the children had been given similar steel plates for their food, a step towards making the meal a common experience. Ultimately the teachers' role in using the meal for object lessons in socialisation, hygiene, nutrition and so on is crucial, but there was little evidence of this." (De et al. 2005: 9)

Similarly, most school level research that considers this aspect, concludes that not much attention is paid to using the meal for enhancing socialisation among the children, but rather incidences of discrimination during lunchtime were found (e.g. Khera 2006; De et al. 2005; Human Rights Watch 2014). In a comparative study in six states, Vimla Ramachandran and Taramani Naorem (2013) found that in most schools of the study children were sitting in caste groups for lunch. Only one school (in Andhra Pradesh) is mentioned as positive example where the schools staff ensures that every child joins the meal and all of them are sitting together (Ramachandran and Naorem 2013:51). In contrast, Kumar (2004) found that in many village schools in West Bengal, children from all socio-economic

[22] "Anganwadis" are local centres which have been set up under the government run Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), in order to offer health and nutritional care to pre-school children as well as pregnant women and lactating mothers. This includes that those children who participate receive some kind of cooked food or snack.

backgrounds were sitting in one line for lunch. However, instead of looking at the role of the school staff for this arrangement or the possible social effects of it, Kumar merely argues that his study identified good quality of food and a variant menu as the relevant factors, which have "the potential to reducing the social distance to a considerable degree" (Kumar 2004:15).

Against this backdrop, the observation that children from different caste backgrounds do eat together – as I observed at least in some cases – can be seen as a considerable achievement, regardless whether the school staff actively supports this or not. Yet, this is not necessarily an achievement of the MDMS, as the constellations in which children eat together might be the same if they had only food brought from home. However, the fact that through the school meal children from different castes do share the same food (regardless with whom they actually eat together), can also in itself be seen as a step towards reducing social barriers. Khera (2013), for instance, observed that upper caste children who had been instructed by their parents not to do so, ate the food provided in school. Based on this, she argues: "It has provided an opportunity to break the tenacious hold of caste barriers, as children from different communities share a meal, cooked by someone not necessarily of their community." (Khera 2013:13). The question who cooks the food and to what extent that matters to the students and parents is another crucial aspect of the social effects of the scheme, which I discuss in chapter three.

"Dirty" children

Situations as the one I narrated in the beginning of the chapter, when I was sitting with Laxmi and her friends and they sent away Tanya, show that the children follow their own logic for their eating arrangements in which the teachers usually do not interfere. In this case, although it could be assumed that Laxmi and her friends are of a higher caste than Tanya and because of that have a problem in eating together with her, Laxmi herself belongs to the Valmiki (Dalit) caste. Nevertheless, she and her friends refuse to sit and eat with Tanya allegedly because she eats with hands and does not wash them before that. I have not seen anybody else of this group washing hands either and "pooris" are

eaten with hands by everybody. However, compared to Laxmi and her friends, Tanya appeared less neat and clean in terms of the condition of the uniform she wore and the way her hair was kept, for instance. Whether it is a matter of cleanliness more generally or merely the claim that Tanya eats with hands without having washed them before, dirtiness emerges as marker for dissociation among the students in this case.

In general, maintaining physical cleanliness is very important to many children and parents. For instance, that Amira (Pamaria) mentioned the fact that they have not managed to wash the school uniforms of the children as reason for a day of school absence of her children (see previous chapter), demonstrates how much importance they attribute to a clean appearance in school. Moreover, several teachers told me that they observe that the children in their choice with whom they eat or sit during class, only make a difference when it comes to physical dirtiness. One teacher of RP Kulam School who told me that children avoid other children if they are dirty, gave the example that her students refused to sit next to a boy because he does not wash himself properly. In this case, the teacher has tried to do something about it and after talking to his stepmother, with whom he lives, he appeared in cleaner shape in school, though this lasted only for a short period of time.

Another teacher, Amita, (from Sir Balai School) introduced practical education on hygiene for all children of her class (grade two). An intern in her teacher training had the idea to make the children walk in a line (each child puts one hand on the shoulder of the child in front) to the open washing basins before the food is distributed. The children all wash hands and then walk back to the classroom in the same way to pick up their utensils for the food. The children seem to enjoy this procedure and Amita is convinced that it helps them making it a habit to wash hands before taking a meal. By organising hand washing in her class this way, Amita (a "contract teacher" who was shifted to another school during the time of my research) created a common ritual that has the potential to foster a feeling of equality among the students and is unique to this class. Two other teacher training interns in Sir Balai School tried to establish the practice among the students of year one and three to go and wash their hands together in a more or less organised way. In the other classes – if at all – the children

go to wash hands before lunch separately or in small groups of two to three children and the teachers keep a bit of soap in a rack which the children can use and bring back.

Despite not actively attempting to counter social distancing among students based on alleged dirtiness, many of the school staff members instead support such dynamics by their own attitude towards the children. In fact, many of them do not hide their own view on lacking hygiene of students. When I talked to one teacher of RP Kulam School about the use of the MDMS for learning about hygiene matters, for instance, she called a boy to the front of the classroom to show me his dirty shirt. Then she commented in front of the whole class that in such cases they can only try their bit, but the level of cleanliness depends on the family. Such situations not only create an embarrassing situation for the child, but by showcasing a child and his family like this the teacher also sets a negative example for the other children. In a school in Andhra Pradesh, Ramachandran and Naorem (2013:50) even found that a girl had to sit separately on the last bench because she did not wear "proper clothes". The authors of this study further found that most of the teachers were strongly biased against some Dalit children (especially those who were very poor) and said that they were "unhygienic and dull" (Ramachandran and Naorem 2013:50). I found very similar attitudes of school staff, most strongly exhibited by Mrs Verma at Sir Balai school, who even talks about the majority of the students of her school as "gande bacce" (literary: "dirty children"). This alleged "dirtiness" is worth a closer look, which can reveal much about the imagination of dirt and how it is linked to caste and class inequalities.

To start with, there is an element of class inequality in the alleged "dirtiness" of the children. The class background of the teachers (of whom 50 per cent are Dalits) and principals is very different to that of the students – while the former are from the middle-class, the latter are mainly from the precarious labour classes. The large majority of the children in school live in conditions where they do not have direct and reliable access to water – not even to talk of proper sanitation facilities. They have to carry each drop of water they need from the nearest tap to their homes in buckets. In the summer months, when the demand is high while less water is available, I have been told, the queues

for water in the slums get very long, making it a problem for many to access water. As mentioned before, most of the children and their family members still manage to wash themselves and their clothes properly, but this involves a significant investment of time (waiting for one's turn) and work (carrying buckets) in many cases. Considering this situation, each focus on hygiene – even if well-meant education how to keep oneself clean – potentially puts families with difficult access to water in trouble.

Though the school staff is largely aware of the living conditions of the students, many of them do not handle this in a respectful manner. Rather, the children and their parents are often reproached for their poor living conditions as part of their overall living environment, on which many school staff members exhibit strong prejudices. How strong class inequalities between students and teachers are can be played out in school is revealed by Dalal (2015), for instance. She offers a shattering account of discriminating and humiliating treatment of teachers towards students referring to their socio-economic background. Dalal witnessed, for instance, how a teacher used a textbook chapter on cultural practices – designed to sensitise children on social differences – to confront the children with prejudices and hurtful remarks on their social milieu (Dalal 2015:37).

In my observations of lunchtime in school, I have not come across such open insults by the school staff. However, while most teachers assured me that the social atmosphere between the students is good and differences of their socio-economic background did not play a role in their interactions, the teacher training intern in fourth grade of Sir Balai School, Shika, shared a different experience on that with me. She told me that when she started her internship it was a common practice among the students to refer to others by the religion, occupation of the parents or the fact that someone is begging, for instance. Shika recalled that in another school she had witnessed how the students were teasing and embarrassing each other on that basis in a way that she found highly problematic and impairing the learning atmosphere. Compared to that, she finds the interaction of the students in her class in Sir Balai School much better. Yet, she tried to teach them not to use the occupation of anyone in an abusive way pay respect towards each occupation. This seems to have been successful at least

in so far that, according to Shika, the children of her class now only use abusive language if they are fighting with each other.

The regular teacher of year four, Mrs Sharma, did not tell me about observations comparable to that of Shika, nor did anyone of the other teachers talk about such observations. Yet, when talking about the social background of the children, it became clear that many of them themselves do exhibit strong prejudices in this regard. In fact, similar to Dalal's findings that the teachers blame all educational failure on the children's social background, most of the Sir Balai teachers have a very pessimistic view on the children's intellectual abilities because of their background. The principal, Mrs Verma, expressed this most directly as part of the "dirtiness" that she projects on the children. She uses the terms "gande bacce" and "nālāyak" children (as discussed in chapter one) synonymously, expressing her view that these children will anyway not do anything different to their parents in future as they are children "[…] bilkul paṛhne ka śauk nahī̃ hai, paṛhte nahi hai vo āte nahī̃ hai kuch bhī." (Interview with Mrs Verma; translation: "[…] don't have any interest in studying, do not study, are not good at anything at all.").

A study on the teachers-students' relation in a primary school in Delhi, (Iyer 2013) reveals interesting parallels. The author argues that teachers-students' relation is predominantly shaped by an agenda of reforming the students through disciplining them in the Foucauldian sense, for which the teachers distinguish between "gande bacce" and "acche bacce" (lit. 'good children'). While a central concern of the disciplinary agenda is to establish and maintain "physical order" among the students, the teachers employ the term "gande bacce" primarily in connection to weak academic performance or alleged lack of effort. Being put into this category is a strong punishment for the student, since in this morally-disciplining system a strict hierarchy is established by ranking the students according to their academic merit (Iyer 2013:175-189).

Though the usage of the terms "acche bacce" and "gande bacce" in Suvasini Iyer's study overlaps with how Mrs Verma uses these terms, the actual academic performance of the children is not the central focus in her view on "gande bacce", nor did I find an attempt to "reform" students by

disciplinary measures. Rather, their social background and especially the alleged moral degradation of the families appear to be the most crucial factors that make children "gande bacce" in Mrs Verma's view. She and other school staff members (in both schools) maintain strong prejudices on the children's families and social milieu, as I discussed in chapter one. Basically, the precarious conditions under which some families are living are to a large extent seen as result of their own moral failures. A common argument that I heard in different ways many times, is that the parents chose to live from government support and begging instead of working to earn money and that they do not care for their children's education (how far from this is from the reality became clear in chapter one). One teacher (the MDMS in-charge at RP Kulam School) even told me that she is convinced that they are not as poor as it seems as they have got land plots and houses back in their villages which they rent out and now live in the city without paying rent and receive all kinds of benefits. In fact, many staff members of both schools – while they have some understanding for the situation and difficulties that the families are facing – expressed the view that the poor are receiving more than enough from the government so that they lay back and do not try to change their living conditions.

According to Mita Deshpande et al. (2010:16), teachers whom they found exhibiting similar views to those of the teachers that I presented above, applied the "culture of poverty" argument in order to explain the situation of the poor. This argument refers to Oscar Lewis (1966), who indeed argued that a specific culture can be found among people living in poverty which is not the cause for their poverty in the beginning, but the reason that they do not get out of it. Among many critiques of this argument, Carol B. Stack (1976) for instance, argued that the "culture of poverty" is an explanation that mainly served the interests of the rich by providing a justification to cut expenses for the poor which received wide prominence. In her own words:

> "They want to believe that raising income of the poor would not change their life styles or values, but merely funnel greater sums of money into bottomless, self-destructing pits. This fatalistic view has wide acceptance among scholars, welfare planners, and the voting public. Indeed, even at the most prestigious university, the country's theories alleging racial inferiority have become increasingly prevalent." (Stack 1976:23)

Further, with her ethnography on coping strategies of poor people, Stack showed that the "culture of poverty" argument relies on wrong assumptions about values and ambitions of poor people and ignores the structural factors that lead to the perpetuation of poverty. According to her, the welfare system (in the US in this case) by certain laws and policies systematically reduces possibilities of social mobility (Stack 1976:127). Indeed, arguments which see the cause for the persistence of poverty primarily with the poor themselves, have deep historical roots and have been central in keeping up systems based on inequality and cruelty against the poor.

In England, most infamously, the "Poor Laws" – especially the "New Poor Law" of 1834 – demonstrated the widely accepted thought that the poor needed to learn the moral duty of labour. This was attempted by subjecting them to the punitive regime of the workhouse (Vernon 2007:12). Workhouses, which were basically the only option for the poor to get some kind of relief, became known as "cruel bastilles" because of apparently inhuman practices that made them comparable to prisons (Fraser 2009:50). This image was, according to Derek Fraser, exactly what was envisaged to frighten the poor (Fraser 2009:50). In fact, as argued by Fraser and Dean for instance, the "New Poor Law" did not intend to reduce poverty, but its objective was to deter pauperism (Fraser 2009:46; Dean 1991:176,187). This term – "pauper" – therefore, manifests the ultimate negative stigma that was attached to people who were not able to care for themselves (Dean 1991:174). Apparently, the British did not treat the poor with leniency when they exploited their labour while blaming their misery to their alleged lack of morality until around the turn from the 19th to the 20th century[23]. In colonised India, they also played a role – together with native elites – in upholding a system which built on the exploitation of Dalits as unfree agrarian labourers (Viswanath 2014). In the justification of the position of Dalits, argumentations around "dirt" and morality also played a central role (see e.g. Viswanath 2014; Douglas 2002; Bayly 1999). Hence, looking at the historical roots of such arguments

[23] Other welfare measures came up towards the end of the 19th century, which step by step replaced the "New Poor Law", though it was only fully replaced after hundred years, in 1934, with the Unemployment Act (Fraser 2009:197).

in the Indian context, reveals how inherently class and caste dominance are intertwined and what function the "dirtiness" argument has here.

On the most obvious level, the way Dalits have historically been confined to the most exploitative labour conditions and "dirty occupations" of society is the basis of the prevailing subjugation of this group. That many of the traditional occupations of Dalits (cleaning jobs including manual scavenging, leather workers, butchers, etc.) expose them to contact with physical dirt is part of the explanation for the fact that they are also perceived as ritually impure, hence as "untouchable" (see e.g. Douglas 2002). Further, the moral code that is to a large extent linked to pollution rules keeps people in their places (Douglas 2002). However – as noted in the introduction to this thesis – the fundamental roots for the position of Dalits in society, according to Viswanath (2014:8,9), lie in the political economy of agrarian production. Following her argumentation, unfree labour of Dalits of whom many were agrarian slaves, has historically built a fundamental part of the economy. In colonial times, British as well as Indian elites had strong interests in keeping the agrarian labour regime intact. Hence, the immeasurable cruelty of the exploitation and discrimination under which most Dalits have been living – many of them as agrarian slaves – and their continuing plight to the present day, has been systematically denied and downplayed by attempts to justify their position in society, i.e. in the political economy (Viswanath 2014). In fact, the practices how Dalits were tied to unfree agrarian labour were described as mutually beneficial form of land-patronage (Viswanath 2014:4-6).

Later, in the early 20th century, according to Viswanath (2014), when the elites tried to construct the picture of India as modern nation, the cruel concept of "untouchability" did not fit in that project. Hence, upper caste "reformers", such as Gandhi, propagated a caste society without the "evil" of untouchability. However, while more radical reformers – most famously Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar – aimed at abandoning the caste system altogether, a common argumentation was that Dalits needed spiritual redemption, which could be achieved by reforming them through physical and moral "cleaning", without changing the general social system. According to this view, Dalits needed to be "civilized" – of which becoming vegetarians is an aspect, for instance – to conform to "righteous

Hindu standards" (Bayly 1999:247-251; Viswanath 2014). The argument that Dalits need to be "civilised" and "cleaned", hence, is part of the justifications of the social order, by which the plight of Dalits is kept within the social sphere needing a social solution instead of political answers – for instance in form of granting them political power, undertaking land reform or only enforcing already existing laws for their protection (Viswanath 2014:241,256,257).

The idea that physical and moral "dirtiness" is the cause for the persistence of the dismal position of Dalits is remarkably similar to the argumentation of the school staff. It is only against this background, I argue, that we can try to understand Mrs Verma's concept of "gande bacce", which shows how much the stigma of dirtiness with its historical roots is still attached to people from low castes and especially Dalits. The teachers' assurance, which I encountered several times, according to which there is no caste thinking in the school, but only dirtiness is a problem, appears in a different light now that we have seen the close interconnection of the two realms.

It is, moreover, not surprising that the children themselves use dirtiness as a marker of difference and try to establish the own sense of cleanliness by distinguishing themselves from those who do not follow their standard of cleanliness, as described above. As many school staff members openly show their prejudices against "dirty" children, the students most probably pick up such behavioural pattern from the adults and in this way re-produce the social system, even if supposedly they do so largely in an unconscious way.

Further, while most teachers assured me that their students are unaware of caste-matters and therefore do not discriminate on the basis of caste, literature shows that schoolchildren do adapt to caste-thinking. Mohite (2014), for example, found in his study on critical thinking of students on caste that many children show caste-thinking in their behaviour. The teachers of his study do not see caste as a problem and therefore undertake no efforts to counter caste inequality. Hence, Mohite concludes: "At the two schools, there is a complete absence of systematic analysis of the self and society and criticism of inequality, exploitation, oppression and domination on the basis of caste that leads to and perpetuates caste inequality." (Mohit 2014:144). Moreover, in many schools staff members not only

fail to counter caste inequality, but by practising discrimination on the basis of caste and against other minorities they even hinder the education of children (Human Rights Watch 2014). As the discussion of "gande bacce" revealed, even without anybody openly practicing discrimination on the basis of caste, there are more or less subtle ways in which caste and class inequalities are reproduced in school – including at lunchtime.

Religious inequalities

Beyond caste inequality, the situation of religious minorities should also be considered. Regarding the religious composition of students in the two schools of my research, the religious minority I focus on here are Muslims[24]. The educational situation of Muslims in India is found to be worse than that of Hindus (Sachar Committee Report 2006). The main Muslim community of my research are Pamarias who migrated from Madhubani in Bihar to Delhi and live in the worst conditions (many of them in the Rain Basera or under the flyover) and secure their existence by daily-wage labour on construction sites, as domestic helps or by begging. As discussed in chapter one, my sample of school admission data revealed that the children from the Rain Basera as well as those whose fathers are labourers show a particularly high rate of school dropouts. Hence, the multiple socio-economic disadvantages that come together in their case, would need particular attention by the educational system for a serious attempt to reduce inequalities in the society. Instead, as Farooqui (2017) shows for instance, even in a school that is located in an area in which predominantly Muslim live (Old Delhi in this case), Muslim students are alienated in many ways in school. Farooqui argues that the curriculum as well as the way of instruction by the teachers do not reflect their religious and cultural background and daily-live reality adequately and therefore re-creates a feeling of exclusion from the larger society.

[24] 157 of the sample of 1246 school admissions from both schools are Muslims, the only other religion to be found among the registrations are 9 Christians (see percentages in chapter one). Since the number of Christians is very small and I have not come across Christianity as a relevant topic or as a basis for inequality in school, I concentrate on Muslims.

While my research does not cover how inequalities are dealt with in teaching and the curriculum, from my observations around lunchtime and conversations with staff in RP Kulam School I have not come across prejudices against Muslims. Interestingly, Mrs Sakshi, the principal of RP Kulam School who belongs to the highest Hindu caste (Pandit), told me proudly that there is a long tradition in her family to reject casteism and religious discrimination. Her father, grandfather and even grand grandfather were free-minded people who rejected casteism and had no prejudices against Muslims.

At Sir Balai School, in contrast, I came across strong prejudices against Muslims. Again, Mrs Verma formulated this most directly when she talked about "gande bacce" and explained to me that, Muslims are generally "ganda" in her view. It is remarkable how she remains convinced that the Muslim students are not good at studies although she herself handed a reward to Mumtaz, a Pamaria Muslim, for having scored 100 per cent in the exam at the end of the school year. Moreover, when I asked Mrs Verma about the caste and social composition of the teachers in her school and she said that there are no Muslims among them, she emphasised how happy she is about the fact that she does not have to work together with Muslims. In this context, she mentioned that working together with teachers who are Dalits is alright and they would dislike it if she behaved prejudiced against them. This demonstrates how strong her anti-Muslim bias is. Further, in conversations and observations in this school, it became obvious that some of the teachers, too, have prejudices against Muslims and do not hesitate to let the children feel that.

> One day during lunchtime, Saleem (Pamaria Muslim) and a few other year five students were walking around on the schoolyard while eating. Because Saleem had egg (omelette) from home, one of his classmates (a Hindu) made a comment that he would never bring non-vegetarian food[25] to school. Another boy said that it is not allowed to bring non-vegetarian food to school. Saleem's classmates went on teasing him that he eats chicken as well and that they kill goats for the Eid festival. In want of a better question, On my question whether they did not celebrate Eid, they described the Hindu-Muslim difference to me via the fact that Saleem allegedly

[25] In the Indian context, egg is seen as falling under the category of non-vegetarian food.

supports Pakistan while they support India in cricket matches. In this context they and even their teacher, who had joined the group, said that going to Pakistan is very dangerous. A simple omelette had triggered a conversation, which in a matter of a few minutes turned from non-vegetarian food over religious practices of Muslims to Pakistan as a dangerous country.

This scene exemplifies how the normative discourse on vegetarian food that is connected to the MDMS has entered the school space and is used as basis to establish the superiority of one religion over the other. In fact, most children I talked to from the schools – Hindus and Muslims alike – told me that they do eat non-vegetarian food at home. As mentioned in chapter one, in the majority of households, besides egg being a common food item, meat (mainly chicken and sometimes mutton) or fish is cooked at least once a week, in some cases even twice or more times a week. This observation supports the argument that the MDMS menu reflects upper-caste Hindu practices and thereby establishes this as norm, while the majority of children who receive the food do normally not follow these strict rules of vegetarianism (Economic and Political Weekly 2015). While nine states introduced the provision of egg as part of governmental food schemes, some groups of upper-caste Hindus dominate food-politics and strongly oppose eggs in food schemes in other states (Economic and Political Weekly 2015). The discussion on the courtyard, therefore, is based on politically constructed differences between the religions that also manifest in the menu of the school meal.

Moreover, some teachers see it as part of the alleged moral failures of the families that they spend much money on meat – in fact, mentioning it in the same breath with the consumption of alcohol. Non-vegetarian food, hence, is not only generally associated with low castes and Muslims, but also part and parcel of the depiction of "dirty" children and their families. To point to an irony in this context, the same school staff members claim, on the one hand, that some families are unable to provide their children with nutritious food, and, on the other hand, comment negatively on the fact that in these families meat (which is nutritious) is consumed. To conclude on this aspect, the way the MDMS menu is set in my research context together with the biased behaviour of many school staff

members, especially in Sir Balai School, supports the reproduction of religious and caste inequalities rather than contributing to a reduction of inequalities.

Conclusion

As part of the overall analysis of the extent to which the MDMS contributes to reducing inequalities, in this chapter I focused on lunchtime in school following the question: To what extent does the common meal contribute to reducing inequalities among the students? To answer this question, I examined how school lunch is organised, what social dynamics unfold during the time of eating and how the attitudes and behaviour of the school staff challenge as well as reproduce inequalities.

Generally, the distribution of the food happens in a relatively routinised way and for eating the children are left more or less free by the teachers. On the first sight, caste or religious differences do not seem to play an important role in these processes as the children take the food regardless who distributes it and sit or stand together with their friends who are sometimes from different castes or religious backgrounds. However, the school staff, who does not guide the sitting arrangement, nor the start and end of the meal, also does not make the students eat next to someone who is not their friend, which might be a way to make the meal a more common experience for them.

My observations revealed, moreover, that the children by refusing to sit next to an allegedly dirty child – for eating or during class – identify dirtiness as factor for social exclusion. Many teachers also exhibit more or less strong prejudices against allegedly dirty children and by that set negative examples for the children. Mrs Verma, the principal of Sir Balai School, is most direct in her prejudiced view on “gande bacce”. This “dirtiness” refers not only to physical aspects, but is also inherently linked with class and caste prejudices. The “gande bacce” in her view are those children who are not interested in studying and who anyway do not have a future different to their parents. In fact, Mrs Verma and other school staff members put the blame for the poor living conditions of the families to a large extent on the parents themselves and their alleged moral failures. It is part of this argumentation that the latter are unwilling to change their situation and are receiving too much

support by the state. This reflects how the "culture of poverty" argument persists, although it has largely been rebuted.

Historically, seeing their own alleged moral failures as reason why the poor – more precisely those who have been called "paupers" at that time – did not overcome their poverty, has let to very cruel ways of dealing with them. Workhouses in England during the 19th century were examples for this. In the Indian context, British and Indian elites have cooperated in keeping up a highly exploitative and discriminative system that confined Dalits to unfree agrarian labour as class of servants and slaves. Further, as Dalits were – and still are to a large extent – seen as ritually impure (belonging to "untouchable" castes), aspects of alleged physical and moral "dirtiness" are invoked in justifications of their position in society as well as in arguments that they could simply be "cleaned" of this. The usage of the term "gande bacce" as well as references to students' dirtiness more largely, are therefore to be seen as carrying much of class and caste prejudices, which are reproduced by school staff and children.

Furthermore, Mrs Verma and some teachers of her school are strongly biased against Muslims, hence, they reaffirm religious inequalities rather than reducing them. In RP Kulam School, in contrast, I have not encountered any prejudices against Muslims.

In fact, the attitude and behaviour of the school staff – and especially of the principal – have significant influence on the MDMS processes in their respective schools. This refers to the way the processes around the school lunch are handled in the schools and is also reflected in the general atmosphere at the schools. In RP Kulam School, the processes are more organised and mainly build on the involvement of each teacher who take care of the distribution process in their classes. The distribution and eating of the meal in Sir Balai School is less guided by the school staff. Except the adjunct teacher of year two, who introduced group hand washing, the other school staff members usually only interfere in lunch processes to discipline the children. Hence, the way the eating is organised and guided in RP Kulam School as well as the attitude of the school staff towards the students allows for a more socialising effect of the scheme than in Sir Balai School. Yet, the staff of

both schools does not put much effort in finding ways how school lunch could be a more "common meal" supporting a sense of equality among the students.

Overall, there are aspects where the MDMS seems to support tendencies that reduce inequalities among the children. The fact that Dalits and Pamaria Muslims (whom I – as noted earlier – identified as Dalits, too) are particularly active in distributing (in Sir Balai School) is one of them, as well as the observation that some children are eating together with friends from different caste and religious backgrounds. Further, that students are encouraged to take care of class mates during lunchtime (in RP Kulam School) can be seen as another tendency which possibly enhances a feeling of equality among the children. At the same time, more or less strongly exhibited prejudices against students on the basis of caste and class (and religion in Sir Balai School) do exist in both schools – even if in a rather indirect way in case of many staff members who only talk about dirtiness of some of the children. By that inequalities are reproduced during lunchtime and beyond.

Chapter 3: At the Mid Day Meal kitchen

The smell of food and the noise of the machines are in the air when I am entering the kitchen of Bhojan Foundation at the outskirts of Delhi. This is the place where the food for Sir Balai School and PR Kulam School as well as for 258 other schools is produced. My central motivation for this visit is to find out who works here – especially regarding caste and gender identities of the workers – and learn more about the employment and management practices of the NGO. Hence, I talk with one of the top managers about the composition and background of the staff. Mr Thomas tells me that the caste identity of the staff does not play a role here. He says that he himself does not know the caste of many employees and that some even explicitly hide this information. One woman, he tells me for example, wanted to be registered with the surname "Dash", while he is convinced that her real name is "Das" – which he clearly identifies as a Dalit name[26]. When he introduced me to the woman a short time later and left us alone to talk, her answer when I ask her for her name is: "[Dash] Paṇḍit[27] me āta." (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das; translation: "[Dash] belonging to Pandit.").

In the cause of the conversation, while we are talking about the working processes and the food produced in the kitchen, it becomes clear that she and the other female employees are not involved in the actual cooking processes in the kitchen. On my inquiry why this is the case, she says: "Na didi, na. Khāna-wāna nahi. […] Hum log na bana payenge, na didi? Baṛa-baṛa fūfa hai, na?" (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das; translation: "No, sister, no. No cooking. […] We wouldn't be able to do this, right sister? The cookers are very big, right?"). Generally, her relation to the MDMS food is a rather complicated one. In fact, she tells me that she usually brings at least some food from home when she comes for work, which she eats during the breaks because she does not like the food that is cooked here. When I ask why she does not

[26] This is a fictive name (like all others), but I tried to keep the pattern that it is a name which can be understood as Brahmin or Dalit surname depending on just a small variation in the written (devanagari) form.
[27] Pandit is a Brahmin caste, hence belongs to the highest category of Hindu castes.

like the food, she brings up her caste identity again: “Accha lagta hai khāne me lekin man ke vo nahi hota hai. Hum Panḍit admi hai, na? To isliye aise lagta hai koi chu diya aise-taise […].” (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das; translation: “I like the food, but I don’t feel like eating it. I’m Pandit, right? So therefore it seems as if someone has touched it and made it impure […].”) On my inquiry what that means she explains: “Matlab, hum Panḍit admi hai to hamāra jī nahi bharta. Matlab hum sāf suthara rehne wahle admi hai, na? Yeh matlab, choti jāt koi hai, jaise hai, vo hai, sab to aise na hai hamāre jaise jāt. Isliye vahī problem hai aur koi problem na hai. Lekin khā leti hũ, aise bāt na hai.” (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das; translation: “I mean, I’m Pandit so it doesn’t satisfy me. I mean, I’m a person who lives neat and clean, you know? I mean that there are lower castes like these and those, they are not all from a caste like mine. That is why this is a problem, otherwise there is no issue. But I do eat nevertheless.”). Her children, she tells me, also eat the food in their school and do like it. According to Mrs Dash/Das there are rather few Pandits among the kitchen staff. She asserts that the others are Yadavs and Muslims, for example. But when I ask about Dalits, she emphasises – repeating several times – that there is no one from such a low caste.

After many attempts to make sense of this conversation and what it tells us on caste and gender regimes in the NGO, I was able to access a list of the female kitchen staff. According to it, eight of the 18 women employed at the kitchen level are Dalits – including Mrs Dash/Das (on the list it says “Das”), one belongs to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category and the remaining nine belong to the “general category.” This information further complicates the picture. Her statement that she is allegedly not able to do the actual cooking tasks hints at the very rigid gender regimes at the NGO, which I analyse in detail later. Regarding the caste aspect, if we believe Mr Thomas and the list that Mrs Dash/Das is Dalit, why did she tell me that she is Pandit even without me asking about her caste? Whether or not she is Dalit, it is striking that she puts so much emphasis on the Pandit identity, even by going into such detail as to explain to me her alleged pollution concerns regarding the food. If she really follows high caste rules of purity as she said, this means that there is caste discrimination among

the staff. If she is herself a Dalit, she has a strong desire to convince me that she is not. What Mrs Dash/Das conveyed here is the impression that the kitchen is not a place where low castes/Dalits feel comfortable to reveal their caste. Hence, from this scene and the depiction of Mr Thomas it is clear that caste *does* play a role in the kitchen. On a more practical research level, the scene exemplifies the difficulties of assessing caste identities of the workers and what role these play within the labour regimes at the NGO.

Within the overall analysis of the dissertation that examines to what extent the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) contributes to reducing inequalities, this chapter focuses on the question: To what extent are inequalities reduced or reproduced in the production of the school meal? Besides a brief analysis of the larger situation regarding the engagement of cooks and helpers from disadvantaged backgrounds, my prime focus lies on the NGO, Bhojan Foundation, that provides the food to the schools of my research area. I examine the employment and management practices as well as labour regimes of the NGO with focus on the position of Dalits and women. Further, I try to understand the underlying and intersecting mechanisms of the institutional management that reproduce inequalities within the larger context.

According to a Supreme Court order of 2004 – under the "Right to Food Case" – commitment is demanded towards disadvantaged sections of society under the MDMS. Among several other points, the order contains the following sentence: "[i]n appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to Dalits, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes" (Supreme Court Order 2004). Further, the website of the MDMS emphasises the intention to give preference to women as kitchen staff: "the state governments are expected to roll out a mass mobilization campaign to involve mothers". This should include giving preference to women for the positions of cooks and helpers (Website of the MDMS). The official guidelines mention that self-help groups (SHGs) (preferably consisting of poor women, and women whose children participate in the MDMS) can be assigned certain responsibilities under the scheme, including cooking and serving the meal (National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education 2006, paragraph 3.6 and 4.4). Additionally, some states have set up

clear rules regarding preferential employment of female cooks from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. Government of Karnataka; Letter of School and Mass Education Department, Odisha 2013).

In line with the Supreme Court order and policy guidelines, the government laid down terms and conditions for the selection of cooks and helpers in centralised kitchens in a letter to service providers/NGOs. According to this document, priority should be given to "weaker sections", which include women, SCs, STs and others (Unpublished letter of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation, dated Dec. 9, 2016).[28] Yet how exactly this is meant to be carried out and controlled is not specified. Hence, the interpretation and actual implementation of the terms and conditions are largely left to the NGOs themselves. To locate the analysis of how this is done at Bhojan Foundation within the larger picture, I start by briefly looking at literature on how the envisaged engagement of Dalits in the cooking processes is often compromised in reality more generally, before I turn to my example case. Following that, I examine the food production processes and labour management at Bhojan Foundation and then look at the prevailing gender segregation in detail. Finally, I discuss the labour regimes that I found within the larger context of mechanisms in institutional management that reproduce inequalities.

Dalit cooks under the MDMS

All over India 2.6 million cooks and helpers are engaged in the preparation and distribution of food to students under the MDMS (Ministry of Education, Government of India, website of the Mid Day Meal Scheme). For an analysis of the employment pattern of cooks under the scheme, a distinction must be made between school-based and centralised kitchens. These represent two quite different scenarios regarding the working processes and the employment regimes involved. To begin with, I briefly discuss the employment situation in school-based kitchens and then turn to centralised kitchens and the example case.

[28] I only got access to the document from Dec. 2016, but was assured that the clause existed earlier as well.

Large-scale studies addressing the socio-economic background of cooks and their working realities, conducted over the past decade or two have primarily pointed to the fact that the per centage of Dalits and members from other marginalised communities has been very low despite official guidelines on their preferential employment (Sabharwal et al. 2014:175; Ramachandran and Naorem 2013:49; Jain and Shah 2005:5084; Nambissan 2009:17). Ramachandran and Naorem (2013:49) also found that if Dalit women were employed in kitchen, this was mostly in the position of the helpers. As a positive example, a study by the Centre for Equity Studies conducted in 2003 in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, found that, at that time, already all cooks were women, half were Dalits, and about one-quarter were widows (Drèze and Goyal 2003:4676). The major factor that the authors identified as behind these employment practices was that the state government of Karnataka – like some other states – had issued clear guidelines for the selection of cooks. According to the latter priority has to be given to women, especially widows, as well as other "women in distress" and those from SC and ST categories. Interestingly, these policy guidelines also specify that the cooks are to be paid more than double the amount of what the national guidelines suggest (see Government of Karnataka). Drèze and Goyal (2003:4676), moreover, see the success of implementation in Karnataka also as reflective of a widespread social acceptance of low-caste and Dalit women as cooks in schools there. However, a more recent news report paints a different picture: In a Karnataka village with a majority of STs, SCs and OBCs, after the appointment of a Dalit cook more than 80 per cent of the students were withdrawn from the school – including children from the same caste as the cook (Kumar R B 2015).

There is not much literature available on the current situation. According to a report by Neha Dixit (2019) published in the online media source *The Wire*, in Bihar mostly Dalit and tribal women are engaged as cooks – which might be read as a positive development. However, the report, which is based on conversations with 69 MDMS cooks across Bihar, found that the cooks were receiving extremely low and often delayed payment (an issue that is discussed in more detail later) and in many cases faced caste and gender based discrimination and harassment (Dixit 2019:5). For instance, some

teachers designated only high caste individuals to cook food and made those from marginalised castes do the cleaning work, washing of utensils, or even cleaning the whole school premises (Dixit 2019:5,6). Beyond discrimination of Dalit cooks in terms of the conditions of their employment and the way they are treated by school staff, the opposition also of parents hereto has been a recurrent issue in literature (e.g. De, et al. 2005: 4; Human Rights Watch 2014:22; Ramachandran and Naorem 2013:49; Rampal and Mander 2013:57). Spectacular incidents – where parents tell their children to refuse the meal, or where they even take action against Dalit cooks in schools or anganwadi centres – are also reported in the domestic news from time to time (see, for example, Ashish 2019; The Logical Indian 2018).

These examples show that, besides other issues, parental opposition against Dalit cooks is a significant problem that poses a challenge to attempts of providing employment opportunities to Dalits via the MDMS. Notably, cases in which strong caste discrimination obstructs the running of the MDMS or countervails the employment policy of the scheme occur in settings where the food is cooked in the school itself, and it is obvious for the parents who cooks (and touches) it. In my research context and other centralised kitchens, however, where the food preparation happens far away from the schools, the relations between cooks and parents are largely anonymous. In conversations with the latter, it became clear that many of them do not have a clear idea where the food is being produced. Even the MDMS-responsible teachers only had a rough idea about where the food comes from. None of the three who were in charge during my fieldwork had ever visited the kitchen, and neither had the principals of the two schools. This corresponds with Mr Thomas's (manager at Bhojan Foundation) statement that no one from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools visits the NGO kitchen. I also found this observation written in a monitoring report on the MDMS in Delhi (Vijaisri 2014:50).

Many teachers told me that it needed some time to convince parents and students that the food is good and that the children should eat it, but now close to all children eat it or take at least "pooris" – whether along with food from home or the vegetables provided with it. While in direct conversation

some parents expressed that they are uneasy about this non home-cooked food, the vast majority of parents support or at least tolerate their children eating it. This does not mean that parents are not generally more in favour of home-cooked food (see chapter one) and some (maybe more than those who actually said so) having their caste based reservations. However, none of the parents I talked to articulated any caste-based reservations against the MDMS food. Only in two conversations with high caste parents – of which one, Rani, is a distributor in RP Kulam School – a feeling of unease came across about the fact that they have to share the sanitation facilities in the slum with low castes and Dalits, because high castes are in the minority there. The other mother, Preeti, also said that they practice caste-based rules regarding eating and drinking at their home in Savitri Camp. Their children, nevertheless, eat the food provided at school. Generally, it seems that since their lives in the urban slum require that they adjust to the given circumstances to some extent (see chapter one) parents also accept the situation that at school all children have food together and that they do not know who produces the food exactly.

Who distributes the food also does not seem to be a matter of concern in my research setting. As discussed in chapter two, in Sir Balai School, besides the employed distributor, the children who are most active in distributing are a Dalit and Pamaria Muslims (all boys). Despite the fact that the MDMS guidelines prohibit the involvement of children in distributing the food, neither children nor parents or school staff have an issue with those children doing so. Further, the fact that one of the distributers at RP Kulam School, Sushmita, belongs to the Dhobi caste – as discussed in more detail below – does not seem to be a problem either.

Hence, there is an increasing acceptance of non-home cooked food among parents and children and a high amount of tolerance even of high caste families towards the eating arrangements at school, which do not follow caste norms. These observations show that the MDMS in this setting has potential to challenge deeply rooted caste-based eating practices and therefore, it could be argued, contributes to reducing inequalities in this sphere.

In short, my observation revealed that the question who produces and distributes the food is not a factor on the basis of which children eat or not eat the meal in the two schools. Nevertheless, regarding the production of the food, I found that Bhojan Foundation is less engaged in offering employment to people from low castes, Dalits and women than it is practiced in many school based MDMS kitchens. In fact, the guidelines that the NGO received from the government on this aspect are ambiguous, if not contradictory. On the one hand, the set of terms and conditions for the selection of cooks and helpers, which I already mentioned, contains the clause: "While engaging CCHs [cook cum helpers] priority should be given by the service provider to weaker section [sic] of the society like women, SC/ST, minorities, OBC." (Unpublished letter of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation, dated Dec. 9 2016). On the other hand, the terms and conditions that Bhojan Foundation had to sign – along with the contract according to which the NGO has operates since March 2016 – only state: "Voluntary Organizations should not discriminate in any manner on the basis of religion, caste or creed and should not use the programme for propagation of any religious faith/practice." (Terms and Conditions between SDMC and Bhojan Foundation).

Hence, according to Mr Thomas, the NGO does not keep records on the caste identities of its workers – except for lists of the female employees, which include their caste category (to which I will come later) – because they follow a policy of non-discrimination between workers on this basis. Based on my observations and information, I assume it likely that written details on the composition of the employee roster according to the minority categories are never officially asksed for. In fact, this aspect is very imprecisely handled in the monitoring process. In the MDMS monitoring report for Delhi 2013/14, for instance, the question is posed: "Social Composition of cooks cum helpers? (SC/ST/OBC/Minority)" and the answer it gives is: "MDM supplier has recruited helpers and cooks from economically weaker sections. They are Male or Females." (Vijaisri 2014:100). The answer obviously does not adequately address the question, as "economically weaker section" is a very vague formulation that does not have a direct connection to the minority categories mentioned in the question. Moreover, it is striking that no numbers or percentages are given for how many males and

females are recruited. This might have to do with the fact that the report also found that in the supplier kitchens of the sample, no records of "manpower" working in the kitchens were available (Vijaisri 2014:54).

With no comprehensive lists available, I attempted to obtain an overview of the composition of the staff of Bhojan Foundation according to caste, religion and other social indicators through conversations instead. According to Mr Thomas, avoiding records of these social indicators is part of a larger philosophy: "We are a multi-caste and multi-religion organisation, you will not find any gods here – working is our god you know, serving the humanity [...] is our god." (Interview with Mr Thomas). He himself is Christian and allegedly employs Hindus, Muslims and Christians irrespective of their religion and caste. Following the noble goal to serve humanity, Mr Thomas says that he tries to accommodate people who come to him and say that they are needy. These are primarily men who come from villages of northern and central Indian states where they faced droughts and lack of work.

In order to find out which castes the employees belong to, Mr Thomas said I would need to ask the individuals themselves. However, he also assured me that it is very unlikely that they will tell me the truth because those from low castes (and especially Dalits) try to hide their caste identity. One example that he gave for this, is the case of Mrs Dash/Das, which I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. His explanation for this phenomenon is that, generally, people from low castes tend to reveal their caste identity only in situations when this gives them access to any kind of benefit. Moreover, he assumes that in the kitchen they want to keep this information secret from their "boyfriends" (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das and Mr Thomas). If one takes him by the word (their "boyfriends"), he talks of Dalits only among the female employees.

Food production processes and labour management

The above-described internal employment policy of Bhojan Foundation with its alleged humanitarian approach is, according to my observations, closely tied to the way the NGO kitchen is run as a business whose management is primarily concerned with ensuring smooth and efficient processes.

In the course of our conversations, Mr Thomas emphasises several times that the staff roster is composed in a way that supposedly enables most streamlined and peaceful co-working and minimises all possible tensions. with the overall aim to produce "safe food". Mr Thomas was trained in food management by a renowned international hotel chain and combines his knowledge of food preparation with his experience in business management (he runs his own business too) in the handling of all of the NGOs working processes. Naturally, it requires a complex infrastructure and precise coordination of the various sections to prepare and deliver food for 1.3 lakh (130,000) schoolchildren in 260 schools, 149 anganwadi centres, as well as 5 "jan ahaar" stalls[29] on six days per week. Occasionally, food is also provided to other places, such as temples, churches and Residents Welfare Associations. Of the schools, as noted, 229 belong to the MCD (in two administrative zones) and the remaining belong to the Directorate of Education, for which cooking as well as administrative processes run entirely separate. For the MCD schools alone, two to three different dishes are prepared for the morning shift and two for the afternoon shift[30], so that within one zone morning and afternoon servings are never the same – a policy implemented to prevent the possible (re)distribution of leftover food from the morning round. So, everyday rice, "poori" and three to six vegetable or lentil variations ("daal", "rajma", "curry", "chole", "sabzi" or "daliya") are cooked. The menu is planned by nutrition experts and each dish is supposed to consist of 450 kilocalories and 12 grams of protein for grades up to five (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:6; Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015) – this translates into 100-150 grams rice/wheat or "poori" with 80-100 grams lentils or vegetables (Interview with Mr Thomas).

There are several spatially separated sections in the kitchen. In one building, which is also used for storage, a number of preparatory tasks are being carried out. In one area, rice and the other dry ingredients are cleaned from small stones and the like – which is done mostly by hand (during the time when I was there, because the large rice cleaning machine was not functioning). Later, the rice

[29] In 2010 the government in cooperation with NGOs started the Jan Ahaar Yojana under which food "centres" (initially seven of them) offer meals for INR 15 (See for example The Hindu 2010).
[30] Some schools have separate timings for girls and boys who are taught in morning and afternoon shifts respectively.

is washed in water three to five times. Besides this, vegetable is peeled and cut by help of a machine; in another area of this building, the empty food containers that have returned from the schools are washed. In the other building, a large room accommodates the actual cooking and "poori"-making processes. Here, three rice cooking pots – each with a volume capacity of 400-450 litres – and six pots – with a volume capacity of 250-300 litres each – in which "curry", "daal" and similar are cooked, are connected by pipes with two huge water boilers at each end of the room. For this water-steam system about 15 gas canisters (of household size) are simultaneously in use. The "poori" machine kneads the dough, rolls it and cuts out the circles, which are then fried in a large pot of hot oil. In the front of this room the steel containers, which are later delivered to the schools, are filled; in case of certain dishes topped with a serving spoon of masala oil, closed and sealed before being taken outside and straight onto the transport vehicles.

To run all of these processes simultaneously, for the MCD schools alone 399 people are involved.[31] The bulk of them work in shifts, and are allotted to different sections of the kitchen such as the rice section, the "poori" section, the "curry" section and the section where utensils are cleaned. Some of the positions are fixed – these include the tasks of cleaning rice, cooking rice as well as the "poori"-making processes; one individual takes care of the 'curry' cooking procedure, too. Apart from these positions, staff are both switched between the two kitchens and rotated among different positions within them. This is, according to Mr Thomas, a system supposed to prevent a routine way of working that can cause mistakes, but it is also from time to time used as a measure for disciplining too: if there were complains about a certain dish, for example, the cook who was in charge of its preparation is posted somewhere else.

The processes have to be timed in a way to make sure that the food for the morning schools (which represents the majority of it) is ready by 7 a.m. so that the drivers can start their route. This means that a lot of work needs to be done at night. At 10 p.m., someone has to come and soak chickpeas in water; other cooking preparations start at midnight while the actual cooking of the "curry" starts by

[31] Figure derived from wage bills of October 2016, because no comprehensive list of kitchen employees was available.

6 a.m., for which the boilers need to be turned on an hour in advance. Accordingly, a particular form of staff management is part of the system. Most of the employees are young migrant men, who live in dormitories that the NGO provides for them. As mentioned above, they come from rural places in northern and central India. There are, moreover, nine Christian refugees from Myanmar who came to work in the kitchen after someone from a refugee agency contacted Mr Thomas because he is Christian and he agreed to give them a job.

There are altogether ten dormitories in close proximity to the kitchen, in which several men (usually those from one particular area) share a room where they sleep in shifts according to their working times. During the day, they can eat food from the kitchen; in the evening they receive a hot meal prepared by a cook who hired by the NGO for this explicit purpose. Hence, it is part of the overall system that the NGO management is interested in making people work long shifts – namely several ones of four hours each in a row – and paying them more accordingly, instead of hiring more people, which would mean an increase in costs for accommodation and food. Therefore, it suits the business well that many employees are allegedly keen on working as much as possible.

This is a situation that has been observed by anthropologists in other parts of India as well. Brendan Donegan (in Shah et al. 2018), for instance, noted that migrant labourers at a chemical industrial plant in Tamil Nadu regularly work several shifts in a row in arrangements that are highly beneficial for the company. The workers themselves claim that they do this voluntarily, as the whole purpose of their migration was to work (Shah et al. 2018:101). For these migrant labourers as well as ones at other sites that were studied as part of the same research project, we are faced with quite straightforward exploitation, where these individuals often do the dirtiest jobs as "low-skilled" labourers.

At this point, the situation at Bhojan Foundation differs from the circumstances described in Shah et al. (2018), because the former's male (migrant) workers are not those who work under the most precarious conditions. They are largely employed instead as so-called semi-skilled workers, which means that they allegedly have some kind of work experience in the food sector and are in charge of

handling the various machines. The amount of salary they receive as salary varies widely, ranging between INR 8,000 and up to INR 25,000 (which corresponds to between EUR 93 and 290) per month depending on their position, working hours, bargaining power and job performance. Variations of the amount of money paid to them are also part of the disciplinary regime of the NGO. There is a system of so-called incentives (bonus payments of around INR 50-150 per day) and deductions respectively. If, for instance, drivers (or the supervisors, who are going along with the drivers in case of big schools) do not report the attendance numbers of students in the schools for which they are in charge, they get INR 50 less of the bonus payment. Mr Thomas also told me the recent example of a "naughty" driver, who had put the empty containers after collecting them from the schools on another van, so that the driver of this van dropped them back to the kitchen together with the containers that he had collected himself. The driver who did that instead of bringing back the containers by himself, got a salary deduction of INR 2,000 because the counting of the containers got confused.

Another means for disciplining the employees is a camera supervision system, which shows all sections live on a screen in the office. This shows again that Mr Thomas is very much concerned with keeping the workers docile and efficient. Further, he has his explicit strategies by which he tries to keep the workers in their places and prevent them from challenging the power hierarchy. He told me, for example, that he does not share his knowledge about how to prepare food in a way that it stays fresh longer with the cooks. For example, he takes care that only very little tomato and onions are used because that spoils the food easily and that a dry form of ginger is used instead of the fresh one for the same reason, but he does not tell the cooks these reasons because he fears that knowing such details they would start being "innovative" on their own one day (Interview with Mr Thomas).

Gendered labour and segregation

Part of the neatly controlled labour-division regime at Bhojan Foundation is also a very strict gender-segregation policy that goes beyond different working tasks creating entirely different employment conditions altogether. First of all, of the 399 employees in the kitchen (not including drivers and

distributors) only 18 are women, which amounts to a mere 4.5 per cent of the staff at the kitchen level. Clearly, besides not giving preference to low caste and Dalit cooks, the NGO also does not favour women in the food preparation processes either. This corresponds with other studies, which have found that the aim to create employment opportunities for women, parents, low castes and Dalits is not met in Delhi's centralised MDMS kitchens (De at al. 2005:9; Khera 2006:4746).

A statement on the website of Annamrita Foundation, which provides MDMS food to 159 schools in Delhi, for instance, reveals the position to which women workers are confined in this particular NGO: "Local employment is generated by employing ladies of the village for sorting of grains and washing of utensils". Alongside this statement there is a photograph showing men cooking the food in large cauldrons (Annamrita Foundation website). Similarly, the photographs on the website of Ekta Shakti Foundation – an NGO that was founded "for the welfare of women and children" and serves MDM food to 99.471 schoolchildren in Delhi – shows men at the actual cooking devices and women cleaning cereals by hand and serving the food to students (Ekta Shakti Foundation website). Akshaya Patra, India's largest MDM supplying NGO, need to be mentioned here, too. The NGO, which runs 52 kitchens, serving food to 19.039 schools across India, also started cooking activities in Delhi in 2019 (Akshaya Patra website). In 2014, I visited their kitchen in Jaipur where I noticed that only men were doing the actual cooking.

There are, however, other examples, too. One of them is another large NGO, Stri Shakti, which supplies MDM to 543 schools in Delhi (according to their website). The organisation explicitly focuses on women's empowerment and reducing gender inequality by encouraging women from "lower middle-class sections of the society" to join self-help groups that cook food under the MDMS (Stri Shakti website). The Indcare Trust follows a similar approach: via a micro-finance scheme, they support self-help groups formed by underprivileged women, which supply food to 141 schools in Delhi under the MDMS (Indcare Trust website).

At Bhojan Foundation, in contrast to the "male work" already described, the 18 women working in the kitchen are not allowed to handle machines, work long hours or night shifts, nor are they

allowed to do any of the so-called heavy or dangerous work (such as moving large containers, loading or unloading the transporters, working at the "poori" frying pot and similar). Hence, they are mainly engaged in cleaning grains (as well as the machines and overall premises), and also in closing, sealing and wiping the already filled containers of food and other such similar work. From time to time, they are also sent to schools to distribute the food in case a distributor is absent that day (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das).

The prohibition on female staff handling machines is an internal rule of the NGOs, and is represented as ensuring the "protection" of female workers; as such, it does have a certain basis in legal regulations. The Factories Act of 1948 (Section 22.1) contained stipulations restricting women and children from carrying out certain tasks related to machines and limited the working hours for women to between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. (Section 66.1b). Some amendments to this Act were inserted in 1987 and again in 2014 (The Factories Act 1948, Amendments). However, the time restrictions remained, and while the 2014 amendments made women equal to men in dealing with machines in certain particular contexts, the law overall still contains precautions against women handling machines, instead of offering adequate protection to all workers irrespective of gender (see Sethia et al. 2015:125). Hence, gendered differences in work that involves handling machines and nightshifts do have some legal basis, but the praxis of categorically excluding women from working with machines cannot be derived from this. Rather, the MDMS kitchen uses the argument that women need to be protected from potentially dangerous work to keep them outside of the actual cooking processes in jobs of low status and reward.

This points to a fundamental dilemma: the thin line between protection and subordination. According to Wendy Brown (2006), the roots of this dilemma lie in the fact that historically as well as today masculine powers stand behind the politics of regulation and protection that shape women's lives. So the argument that women need protection by and from men can also be a means to legitimate their exclusion from some spheres and foster the construction of female powerlessness and subordination. She formulates this paradox as follows: "Indeed, to be 'protected' by the same power

whose violation one fears perpetuates the very modality of dependence and powerlessness marking much of women's experience across widely diverse cultures and epochs" (Brown 2006:189). In the case of the kitchen, it might not be straightforward subordination or dependence that women face; clearly, however, the argument to protect women legitimises their exclusion from positions that are more stable and better paid.

Overall, the explanations for why women are paid less and why they are allowed to perform only "unskilled" tasks – and thus not occupy positions working closely together with machines and men – reveal a certain argumentative pattern: the women are blamed as being themselves the reason. The very prejudiced argumentation of the management as represented by Mr Thomas, is that women generally are not able to do "heavy work", that they are to be blamed in case of sexual affairs that could potentially disrupt the working routine and that the sheer numbers of women interested in employment naturally diminishes their bargaining power – and, hence, justifies the low salaries offered. To underline his claim that women are not able to work as fast and efficiently as men do, Mr Thomas pointed to a woman who was standing with a serving spoon of masala oil in her hand waiting for a filled container to pour the oil on top of the food in it, and told me that he will have to fire this "lady" because she is always standing idle like at that moment. These employment and management patterns demonstrate how female workers (also representing the only group of staff members who are potentially parents of students from MCD schools) ultimately only work at the margins of food production processes in the NGO's kitchen.

This unequal position is also reflected in the remuneration of female cooks. At Bhojan Foundation, the women working in the kitchen are, in contrast to the men, all employed under a provision for unskilled workers – with a fixed salary of INR 7,000 per month for ten hours per day, seven days a week with two days off per month. This comes to about INR 250 for a ten-hour working day (if we calculate 28 working days per month). Although this is already a meagre salary, it should be noted that the official "honorarium" to the cook-cum helpers in Delhi is even much less than that: INR 1,000 per month, excluding the two months summer vacation (Ministry of Human Resource

Development 2010). Hence, many of the women cooking (or assisting with) meals for schools, work for about INR 35.71 for half a day's labour – or even for much longer work (e.g. INR 33 per 7 hours of work in Punjab, see: Business Standard 2016; INR 37 for 7-8 hours in Bihar, according to Dixit 2019).

The extremely low salary of MDMS cooks is a huge issue in many states. Over the last few years even large protests against this have only led to small payment increases (Khan 2019). The south Indian state of Tamil Nadu is an exception regarding the salaries provided to cooks. These range from INR 5,110 to INR 14,770, corresponding to three wage levels for the positions of Noon Meal organiser, cook and cook's assistant (Government of Tamil Nadu). Besides the extremely low payment that the national guideline and most state governments assign to cooks under the MDMS, the fact that the payment of the MDMS cooks is officially called a "honorarium" says much about the value attributed to their work. These individuals are considered "volunteers" and not "workers" or "employees", hence receiving an honorarium instead of a wage. They also have no social security benefits or pension scheme (Dixit 2019:3).

That the staff members at the kitchen of Bhojan Foundation get higher payments than the allotted INR 1,000 per cook/helper that the government pays to the NGO has to do with the entirely different organisational management and working processes on-site, which also include much longer working hours. The only position that is remunerated to the tune of INR 1000 per month is that of the distributors, which I discuss in detail below. Here, it is my aim to show how the NGO has created highly unequal working arrangements that are segregated along the lines of gender.

While the male workers at Bhojan Foundation are provided with accommodation and dinner in addition to their wages, all female workers live in their own homes. Further, since their working day ends in the afternoon or evening (the main hours being from 7/8 a.m. to 5/6 p.m.), they do not receive dinner from the NGO. Usually, the female staff members start their day with cooking and cleaning at home for their family; after returning from work, they cook again for dinner (Interview with Mrs Dash/Das). Ironically, though women usually cook several times a day at home (unlike men), one

explanation for why they are paid less than men, expressed by Mr Thomas, is that they are employed as unskilled workers. The other explanation that he gave is that it is basically a matter of supply and demand: there are apparently so many women who are approaching the NGO for a job that those employed have absolutely no bargaining power, knowing exactly how easily they will be replaced if they do not comply with what is demanded of them. Hence, the inequality between female and male labourers at Bhojan Foundation is apparently not a matter of unequal payment for the same work; rather, men and women are channelled into different working sections, where entirely different regimes are at play regarding tasks, working conditions and remuneration patterns.

This corresponds to the findings of the India Exclusion Report of 2015. According to that investigation, pay differences between women and men are as high as 20-50 per cent for "casual work" in rural areas (Sethia et al. 2015:130).[32] The authors of the report identify the fact that women are often segregated in jobs that are categorised as unskilled, less valuable and with lower wages as one of the prominent forms of exclusion of women from just conditions of work (Sethia et al. 2015:130). On global level, according to the Global Wage Report of 2018 published by the International Labour Organization, the "gender pay gap" averages about 20 per cent[33] (International Labour Organization 2018:22). This report, too, found one of the underlying reasons for that pay gap in what they call "vertical occupational segregation" – in other words, in the fact that men are disproportionally represented at the top of occupational hierarchies and women at the bottom thereof respectively (International Labour Organization 2018:67). More detailed data analysis also revealed that there is a correlation between the proportion of women within a workplace and the average wage that the employees receive – hence, for the same educational background, work in occupations with a higher degree of "feminization" is paid less (International Labour Organization 2018:75; see also Tomaskovic-Devey 1993:12; Weeden et al. 2018:32).

[32] The CES report derives this figure from a report of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Labour Bureau, that uses NSS data from 2008/2009, see: http://labourbureaunew.gov.in/UserContent/Wage_Rates_Rural_India_2008_09.pdf (accessed: 24th September 2019).
[33] Depending on the measure used (mean hourly wages vs. median monthly wages) the pay gap lies between 16 and 22 percent (International Labour Organization 2018:22).

Two sections of work situated at the periphery of the kitchen, ones which is also to some extent under the control of the NGO, demonstrate the segregation very clearly. These are the distributers, who distribute the food to the students in the schools, and the drivers, who deliver the food to the schools and bring the containers back to the kitchen.

The distributers of the meal

The position of the distributers is distinct from the employees working in the kitchen regarding the workplace, the kind of work done and the working conditions. Usually they are not in direct contact with the NGO, only interacting with the school staff and children. The INR 1,000 which they get from the NGO (via checks, delivered to the school by the drivers), are handed to them by the principal of the respective school; the latter are also the primary supervisors of their work. The task of the distributers is to be at school shortly before lunchtime, to bring the food containers to where they are needed, to serve food to up to 100 children and to put the containers back to wherever they are stored. From my observation, this takes half an hour minimum and a bit more than one hour maximum. There are 284 to 395 women and five men[34] in this position under Bhojan Foundation. The five men are an absolute exception – generally, it is a "female job". This seems to have to do partly with the view that women, and especially mothers, are more suited to interacting with children generally, and that feeding children is widely understood as a female task. Moreover, many of the mothers (at least in my research area) do not work full-time in one job, but often switch work places during the day – combining work inside and outside the home, so that they can integrate this part-time job into their daily-lives better than most working men.

The selection of the distributers is also made by the schools. In the schools of my research, if a distribution position is vacant, the school staff ask parents or tell students to ask their parents who is interested. In RP Kulam School the two current distributers – Sushmita and Rani – allegedly got

[34] I have contradictory information on the figure: according to the bills from 2016 (on the basis of which I also calculated the number of kitchen staff) it should be 400 distributors. Mr Thomas told me that the current total number of distributors is 350, however, he could only find 289 forms of them (five of which are men).

selected because they both appeared to be especially “needy”. Both are parents of students in the school and live in the slum, Savitri Camp, which is located about five minutes’ walk away. Sushmita’s husband is the main income-earner for the family as a caretaker and she does not have other paid work besides the distribution job. They have three children, of whom one, a girl, is in year three at RP Kulam School; another, a boy, lives with his grandmother in a village in Uttar Pradesh; the third, a boy of ten, is intellectually disabled and therefore needs special care. Rani lost her husband, the primary breadwinner of the family, three years ago and now has to take care of herself and her three children on her own. Two of them are in PR Kulam School and one lives in their home village in Madhya Pradesh. In view of Rani’s very difficult situation, the teachers offered her the food-distribution job and also encouraged her to earn money by repairing and altering clothes again, as she had done earlier in her village. I witnessed how some of the teachers gave Rani clothes and explained her what they wanted done, but generally, according to Rani herself, she does not get many orders these days.

Although the food distributers belong to the CCHs engaged by Bhojan Foundation and are paid by the NGO, the latter does not actually hire them on formal contracts (allegedly in agreement with the government). Instead, the NGO only collects some basic personal data of them, such as name, address, mobile number and bank account details. According to Mr Thomas, this is everything he needs in case anything goes wrong, and he calls it “police verification data”. While he assured me that it is the responsibility of the schools to select and oversee the distributers, and that they usually stay in their jobs even when the cooking NGOs change, he also made clear that he has the ultimate power to control and discipline workers in this position. As Mr Thomas himself told me, not employing them on contracted basis has the advantage that he can control them more easily: “Advantage is – there is labour laws and all that, so they can get into unions and then disturb the working. So... I'm a little bad when it comes to that, because I have to maintain the sanctity of the place there, you know? If someone is trying to be over-smart so I tell them to leave.” (Interview with Mr Thomas). He told me of a case where the distributer misbehaved by fighting with the school

principal, taking aside food for herself before serving it (the rule is that they can take food home but only if something is left over in the end) and beating children. This woman was thrown out, but her case has allegedly remained a rare exception: “People know that they are not permanent and so they behave themselves” (Interview with Mr Thomas).

In the forms containing the personal data of the distributers, their caste category is also recorded. It is an interesting point to note that information on caste is only recorded in case of the distributers and the female employees in the kitchen, the only groups that are engaged without contracts. According to the 289 forms that I could access, the majority of them belong to the “general category” (107), but SCs are almost as many in number (97). Further, 34 belong to the Other Backward Class (OBC) category, 11 are indicated as Muslims and for 36 of them no information on caste or religion is provided. The three distributers of the two schools of my research belong to different caste categories. Ranchi, who works at Sir Balai School, is from the Nai caste, which is recognised as OBC. Her husband works as a barber – the traditional occupation of Nais – and Ranchi besides the distribution job and a bit of tailoring that she does at home occasionally, performs some ritual tasks at weddings in their locality, ones traditionally done by Nais. Rani, the distributer at PR Kulam School who lost her husband, is Pandit (as noted, a Brahmin caste), and thus belongs to the “general category”.

Sushmita is a Kanojiya, a sub-caste of Dhobi, on which I have contradictory information. Dhobis, according to the official government lists of Delhi as well as of her home state, Uttar Pradesh, can be both either SC or OBC. While Mr Thomas told me that Sushmita is Dalit, Mrs Sakshi (principal of RP Kulam School) said that she is OBC. Generally Dhobis, with the traditional occupation of washing clothes, are a low caste and members of this group are usually referred to as “untouchable” or Dalit. In view of possible “pollution” concerns, it is, therefore, significant that it is Sushmita and not the high-caste Rani, who does not only distribute food to the students but also serves chai to the school staff. There is an internal agreement that Sushmita prepares chai during the lunch break, which she serves to the school staff once she is done with distributing the food. The teachers collect the money

for the ingredients among themselves and give this to her, but they do not pay her anything extra for making the chai and washing the utensils (including the cups that she collects afterwards). Hence, Sushmita works up to two hours at the school per day for the same payment as the other distributers who are done with their work within half of the time. Mrs Sakshi and some teachers assured me that the INR 1,000 per month are a fair payment for her tasks (including the chai-making), and also referred to the fact that Shushmita in turn takes home food – indeed, she often takes along a lunch box full of MDMS food for her son.

Although a little bit of food does not compensate for a low payment, this aspect should perhaps not be underestimated. In a large-scale comparative study on the relation between food security and occupational choice in low-income households in four countries, Maria Sagrario Floro and Ranjula Bali Swain (2013) not only found that women are likely to earn less money than men, but also that self-employed women of households vulnerable to food insecurity are more likely to work in food-related enterprises. They argue that this can be a strategy to try to secure access to food in a direct way (Floro and Bali Swain 2013:97). For those women who are engaged in MDMS processes in settings where they are allowed to take leftover food, this consideration could possibly play a role in their choice for the job, too. In the case of Sushmita this might play a role in her acceptance of the extra amount of unpaid work. Mrs Sakshi also told me that she appreciates Sushmita's work at the school and as a small sign of appreciation of her work, including the chai making, she refrains from registering all holidays that Sushmita takes. This is relevant because the distributors are paid on basis of the numbers of days they actually work, with each holiday day causing a deduction of payment (Interview with Seema Sakshi).

That the staff of RP Kulam School drink chai which is prepared and served by someone from a Dhobi caste is an example for the liberal attitude towards caste that is cultivated in this school (see chapter two). However, this attitude goes hand in hand with an exploitative arrangement for Sushmita that the school staff created without seeing this as a problem. On the larger level, the fact that about half of the MDM distributers under Bhojan Foundation are Dalits, shows that at these schools it is

generally accepted that Dalits touch the food that the students eat. This may not be very surprising given that, at least in Sir Balai School, Dalit students regularly help serving the food (as discussed in chapter two). The point that I want to emphasis here is that, quite ironically, the only position within the MDMS processes for which poor and Dalit women are preferentially engaged in my research area (besides the 18 female workers in the kitchen), is also the only position in this setting where the question of social acceptance at the school level could potentially arise.

The drivers

There is one more section within the segregated labour regimes under Bhojan Foundation: the drivers, currently 19 in number. This job is exclusively done by men about whose social background no information is provided in the records that the NGO has on them. In fact, they are not directly employed by the latter. Rather, the NGO hires the transportation vehicles from a company who provides them along with drivers who always drive one particular van. Hence, the selection of them is the responsibility of this separate company, which does not follow a particular policy regarding the employment of low castes/Dalits or "needy" people, as far as I have been told. The NGO only reserves the right to reject drivers and demand replacement in exceptional cases. The drivers get INR 9,000-10,000 per month by the NGO for eight hours of work per day, plus possible 'overtime payment' in case they work significantly longer – because of a heavy traffic jam, for instance. They start off from the kitchen with the food containers for several schools at 7 a.m. in the morning and deliver the food to the schools for which they are in charge (according to size and location of the schools one driver covers between 5 and 15 schools). After short time, they start collecting the containers again, along with the lists of the daily attendance of students, and deliver both back to the kitchen. These rounds usually take about eight hours. In case of the larger schools, the drivers are accompanied by 'supervisors' who are employees of the NGO (about 17 in number and also only men) and get paid INR 8,000-9,000 per month. These supervisors are supposed to support smooth and efficient processes, which can sometimes be quite hectic because they have to react to spontaneous demands. As I witnessed when I talked to Mr Thomas, he received several calls from the schools who ask for

more food to which he promised speedy delivery. He then immediately called the supervisors who made sure that they drop one of the extra containers that they usually carry along to the respective school.

Recreation of "durable inequalities"

The examples of the MDMS distributers and drivers show very clearly how certain tasks within the processes of food provision are systematically gendered, and also these positions are highly unequal in many regards. Driving as well as unloading the containers is a "male job", while the actual distribution of the food to the students is a "female job". The distributers do not even have contracts and work for only one to two hours a day – for which they receive low payment. The drivers, in contrast, have eight-hour workdays for which they earn more than the female employees in the kitchen, even though the latter work ten hours per day. Hence, there is a significant pay gap between men and women within the NGO, which is even more obvious in the different salaries of the women and men on the kitchen level (as discussed above).

However, the major factor of the inequality that we observe here is not that they are paid less for the same work, but that they work in segregated jobs. The crux, therefore, is the problem that women often have no chance to occupy the positions that are considered "skilled" (or even "semi-skilled") and with their better salaries and chances of promotion. This is not a situation specific to Bhojan Foundation or to the MDMS, but a trend that is widely recognised as a global phenomenon in fact (see, for instance, Tomaskovic-Devey 2005; Blackburn et al. 2002; Tilly 2009; Bielby and Baron 1986; Weeden et al. 2018; International Labour Organization 2018; Floro and Bali Swain 2013).

Job segregation by gender is, according to Charles Tilly (2009), the "best-documented form of categorical inequality" accounting for more than half of the income difference between men and women (Tilly 2009:164). The main causes for occupational segregation by gender (and in many cases also by race) are commonly seen in individual characteristics, such as rational-choice and human-capital differences, personal preferences as well as in socialisation processes (for instance, Mincer

and Polachek 1974; Hakim 1998). In contrast to this, others, such as Donald Tomaskovuc-Devey and Tilly, are convinced that organisational processes play a more important role in creating segregation and hence recreating inequalities. This does not mean that the organisations – or the people who manage them – are necessarily acting intentionally discriminatory manner, but by managing organisations within the given socio-economic environment typically certain mechanisms are at work that serve to recreate those inequalities.

Overall, the labour regimes at Bhojan Foundation can be seen as providing empirical evidence of the mechanisms that Tilly (2009) identifies as recreating "durable inequalities". He calls inequalities "durable", if they last from one interaction to the next, and especially if they last a whole lifetime, career or organisational history (Tilly 2009:13). One of the basic mechanisms in the recreation thereof that this scholar is concerned with, is 'exploitation', which he defines as: "A response to the situation in which some well-connected group of actors controls a valuable, labor-demanding resource from which they can extract returns only by harnessing the effort of others, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort." (Tilly 2009:66). This implies that in order to solve organisational problems (such as how to control access to certain resources and whom to hire), managers draw internal boundaries between the positions of the different workers (Tilly 2009:14-19). These positions typically differ in terms of the tasks that are ascribed to the staff in this position, the payment and the modalities of the payment, chances of promotion, etc. In my research context, this is most evident if we look at the boundary between the jobs in the kitchen. The bulk of the employees are "semi-skilled" workers whose payment is at least to some extent negotiable (including the possibility of bonuses) and who generally have the chance to get promoted within the organisation eventually. In contrast, there are the "unskilled" workers face only fixed payment (at low rates) and no possibility of promotion – instead, higher insecurity because they can easily be replaced.

Tilly (2009:62) argues that such internal boundaries that divide the highly unequal positions, are typically matched with external, well-established, historically created social inequalities by the management of the organisation. Bhojan Foundation matches the internal boundaries with the socially

widely established inequalities between female and male and partly also Dalit and non-Dalit (as a high share of Dalits is to be found only in the "female-jobs"). The tendency for organisations in these segregation processes to adopt categorical boundaries which already exist in other societal institutions/organisations Tilly calls "emulation". According to him, this functions so well, because the categorical pairs (in my context Dalit/non-Dalit and female/male) are so deeply rooted in society and widely accepted as unequal categories: Dalits and women have far lower social status than non-Dalits and men. Hence, using these categories in the organisational structure as well bears low transaction costs and increases stability of the NGO (Tilly 2009:62). In the Exclusion Report Shikha Sethia et al. (2015:121) also argue that historical gender inequalities as well as gender stereotypes – such as their "natural affinity" for caring tasks, subservient temperament and inability to perform intellectual or physically challenging tasks – are often translated into the work realities. Thus, they determine the job chances, status and payment choices regarding women.

Of crucial importance to the described processes that channel women (or other groups) into particular types of jobs, is an additional mechanism that Tilly calls "opportunity hoarding". It refers to the phenomenon that if a group of people has access to a certain resource (jobs in this case) there is the tendency that this group monopolises access, i.e. that only workers from the same group are recruited, which in turn contributes to the exclusion of others. In these processes community networks play a crucial role as they transmit knowledge of vacancies as well as knowledge relevant for the work – the classic example for this are migrant communities who occupy certain niches (Tilly 2009:69).

Moreover, Tilly argues that the tendency to recruit only people from one social group for a certain type of job can create the impression that a particular group of people are especially suited to that work. This in turn further supports the tendency for people from one particular community to often be channelled into a specific type of job (Tilly 2009:100). In fact, when asked why women only work in the "unskilled" jobs in the kitchen, the argument of the NGO management, as mentioned earlier, especially stressed alleged physical differences (for lifting heavy objects, handling machines, and

similar). Hence, implicit in the strict segregation of their tasks is the perception that men are more suited to working with machines than women. Moreover, the latter instead need to be protected from "dangerous" work and long work days or night shifts, while young men, in contrast, are assumed to be more robust and less in need of protection. Hence, already-existing stereotypes go, as noted, closely together with the tendency whereby if a particular type of job is predominantly done by a specific group of people, then the latter come to be seen as most suited to doing it.

The fourth mechanism, which Tilly sees as supporting processes of exploitation and opportunity hoarding, is called "adaptation", and refers to the fact that people tend to establish social networks corresponding to their position at work and hence to develop a certain interest in staying in this position, to which they adjust to some extent (Tilly 2009:73). This could perhaps partly explain Mrs Dash/Das' answer on my question whether she and the other female staff are also involved in cooking the food at the NGO kitchen (which I narrated at the beginning of this chapter). Her answer was that women are not cooking because they are not able to handle the big cookers. Rather than assuming that she really thinks she and the other female employees are unable to handle the pots, use the machines or fry "pooris", I take her statement as a sign that she has at least to some extent adjusted her expectations to the position and the boundaries that have been assigned to her and the other women. The extent to which women in certain situations adjust to their unequal working positions is also revealed by Ashwini Deshpande (2020:3). Deshpande focuses on various forms of "work from home" done by women, including unpaid work at home (such as for family businesses) or low-paid labour (such as home-based work for factories). She argues that women who do this often see this work as an extension of their household chores, and therefore internalise the low worth that is ascribed to such work.

Generally, the recruitment patterns of women and men into their respective jobs at Bhojan Foundation show that women are excluded from the better positions and that their actual skills and abilities to do certain tasks are not the decisive factors in determining their employment positions. The India Exclusion Report comes to a similar conclusion, with the authors arguing that the ability

of women to access work and just employment conditions depends primarily on "social constructs", such as patriarchy, that are external to their own capabilities and income (Sethia et al. 2015:109). Aradhana Sharma's (2008) ethnography on the Mahila Samakhya programme for women's education offers an example that shows how deeply patriarchal norms are rooted in society and shape the imagination of "women's work". She reveals that even the programme, which is jointly run by the Indian government and feminist groups aiming at women's empowerment, defines women who are a fundamental part of its organisational structure merely as "voluntary workers". This, according to the author, relegates them to unpaid work and thereby reinforces gender inequalities and patriarchal exploitation (Sharma 2008:57,58). This paradoxical situation demonstrates that processes aiming at deconstructing inequalities and the processes that recreate them are not always clear cut or distinguishable, even at times being tied closely together.

The comparative study of Shah et al. (2018) focuses on the situation of people from disadvantaged groups on a larger scale providing much ethnographic evidence of the mechanisms that Tilly (2009) describes. Examining the situation of Dalits and Adivasis in India with focus on what the economic growth of the country means to their economic and social position, the authors argue that Dalits and Adivasis are still categorically disadvantaged and the neoliberal economy has further contributed to this. Hence, Dalits and Adivasis – who have historically been the poorest and most disadvantaged people in India – have not benefited from the growth, rather their discrimination and exploitation have taken new forms but persist. The ethnographic observations of the authors and the conclusions they draw from their material bear huge similarity with the mechanisms that Tilly describes in his concept of "durable inequalities". This becomes evident in their main argument that social and economic inequalities are based on caste and other identity markers, such as tribe, gender and region of origin – moreover, this does not change with economic growth. Rather, capitalist labour regimes explicitly build on existing inequalities – or, in other words, they reinforce "durable inequalities".

Donegan's (in Shah et al. 2018:105) earlier-mentioned ethnography on the effects of employment at a chemical plant in a Tamil Nadu village on the situation of Dalits and Adivasis, for instance, found

that the labour force in the factory is highly segregated according to particular social groups, with the less fortunate having little chances of improving their working conditions or wages. He observed that recruitment typically happens by recommendation so that employment opportunities are monopolised by certain groups (Shah et al. 2018:99). In the case of the Dalit community of this research, the only group whom a better educational level helped to some extent for improving employment chances, were young Dalits of whom some got access to low-ranking government jobs through affirmative action (Shah et al. 2018:99,100). Further, Donegan found that for women a higher educational level did not seem to enable them to access better jobs (Shah et al. 2018:100). This corresponds with my observation at Bhojan Foundation that jobs of the women are not related to their personal abilities. Generally, according to Kannan (in Shah et al. 2018:42), Dalits and Adivasis are the groups for which their educational level has the least influence on their economic poverty, which means that for them it is even with increasing education most difficult to get better paid work.

Conclusion

After the previous chapter discussed the processes and social interactions around lunchtime in school, in this chapter I turned to the production of the meal and those people who are involved in the related processes. Within the overall analysis of the thesis, to what extent the MDMS contributes to reducing inequalities, this chapter focused on the question: To what extent are inequalities reduced or reproduced in the production of the school meal?

According to Supreme Court orders and official policy guidelines women, Dalits, SCs and STs should be preferentially engaged in the jobs that the MDMS creates. The literature reveals that in school-based kitchens (as prevailing in rural areas), generally women are engaged as cooks and helpers. However, only a few states have framed clear rules on this and actually mandate preference to Dalits, low castes and other disadvantaged groups being employed under the MDMS. Generally, there is a widespread reluctance to engage Dalits under this scheme; numerous studies and news reports have revealed that in cases where cooks are Dalits they are often confronted with

discrimination and opposition. In most states, moreover, cooks and helpers receive extremely low pay and no social security.

In the case of centralised kitchens (as prevailing in urban areas), like the one of my case study in Delhi, the interpretation of official employment guidelines seems to be left to the NGOs running them. The women at Bhojan Foundation, of whom about half are Dalits, work almost exclusively as distributors in the schools, while of the employees who work in the kitchen itself some 95.5 per cent are men. The caste identity of the male employees as well as of the drivers (all male) is allegedly not recorded.

Generally, at Bhojan Foundation I found employment tendencies that possibly reduce inequalities as well as ones that reproduce them too. The NGO itself, the system of the centralised kitchen in general as well as the social atmosphere at the schools allow for the recruitment of Dalits in the food-preparation and food-distribution processes. Workers of different religious backgrounds operate alongside one another, and at least among the 18 women in the kitchen Dalits and non-Dalits also do so. This has the potential to reduce religious and caste inequalities. The example of Mrs Dash/Das, however, demonstrates that at least some Dalits may attempt to hide their caste identity and that related prejudices do indeed exist in the kitchen. Moreover, a high share of Dalits is only recorded in the "female jobs", which are less secure and less rewarded. In fact, very strict job segregation along the lines of gender is visible at Bhojan Foundation. Women are only in positions that are regarded as unskilled, with very short working hours (in case of the majority of them, the distributors), low payment, high insecurity and no chances of promotion, regardless of their personal abilities.

Drawing on Tilly's (2009) concept of durable inequalities and the typical mechanisms by which they are reproduced in institutions, I argued that the occupational segregation by gender and partly by caste that I found at the NGO, is a result of such organisational mechanisms. This does not mean that managers are always being intentionally discriminatory. Rather, the organisation – operating within a socio-economic environment where labour is already segmented by gender and caste – follows processes that serve to reproduce inequalities.

Following the overall aim to provide safe food in an efficient way, the working processes and labour management at Bhojan Foundation are tailored according to the internal priorities of the organisation. This includes labour processes in which unequal positions are filled according to well-established unequal divisions in society, such as gender and caste. For the large-scale food production and semi-automated working processes in the kitchen itself, a system of day and night shifts with partly flexible working times has been set up. The positions within this system of working in shifts and handling the machines are filled with male migrant workers who live in shared dormitories. Women are only engaged for the unskilled tasks of cleaning food grains, and the overall space, as well as of serving the food in the schools. It is ironic that the job of the cook – which is traditionally a female task, in school-based MDMS kitchens one also mostly done by women – has become a male domain in most centralised kitchens. This is an example that with more technological and specialised working processes in place, being connected to better remuneration, it is typically men doing these jobs – just like in the 'professional' domain of cooking, generally, the chefs are men.

Generally (apart from a few NGOs that engage women for cooking in centralised kitchens), the "female jobs" under the MDMS are the cooks and helpers in school-based kitchens (who cover all tasks around the food production, distribution and cleaning) and the distributors of the NGO-run kitchens, as well as a few employees in kitchen who do mainly cleaning tasks. All these positions correspond to typical gendered divisions of labour: cooking (mainly in smaller, school-based settings), feeding/caring (for children) and cleaning. The fact that women are expected to do these tasks for a meagre "honorarium" without contracts and without any kind of security shows that their work is not even seen worthy of salary, being rather a kind of part-time extension of the work they already do at home.

The mechanisms of institutional management also include that job recruitment typically happens via well-established systems, which contributes to the fact that often members of a particular group are channelled into certain positions. These groups are then viewed as particularly suitable for the respective jobs. This makes it even more difficult for women to overcome the stereotype that they are

less able to handle machines than men, a perception not only recreated by employment practices, but also to some extent supported by the discourse around protection of female workers at the workplace. Moreover, the tendency for people who work in a certain position to establish their networks accordingly, and to reconcile themselves to their conditions to some extent, further contributes to the functioning of such systems.

To sum up, the state and NGOs as contractors have created a system in which women – of whom a large share are Dalits or members of low castes – are doing cheap labour in positions that correspond to historically produced gender and caste roles. There are certainly examples of employment practices that potentially contribute to reducing these inequalities. Overall, however, the latter are more often recreated within the employment practices under the MDMS.

Chapter 4: Governing food – governing people

> "We may not share an essence, a soul, an identity or any other fixed attributes with others. But there is one status that we do share, and that is our status as subjects of government. That is to say, like so many others, we are inhabitants of regimes that act upon our own conduct in the proclaimed interest of our individual and collective well-being."
>
> (Rose 1999:284)

In the final chapter, I look at the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) from a larger perspective with the guiding question: To what extent does the governing of the MDMS contribute to reducing inequalities? To approach this question, I examine how the scheme is governed and how people are governed through the scheme thereby accessing how inequalities are reduced or reproduced in these processes. More precisely, I analyse under which conditions, based on what type of values and thinking about poverty, hunger and education, with the help of which techniques and through which institutions the government and others seek to reach out to a particular part of the population with the MDMS. This analysis reveals that the scheme is governed by welfare, humanitarian, neoliberal and rights based approaches at the same time, which also shape the role of the people who are governed by the scheme. While there are tensions between these approaches, they are to a large extent closely intertwined in the MDMS.

The welfare character of the MDMS can only be understood against the background of historically changing regimes of how poverty and hunger have been dealt with. A crucial moment was, for instance, that with increasing knowledge on nutrition and its strategical use, public feeding was initially part of strict disciplinary regimes (Fraser 2009; Vernon 2007). This explains much of the stigma that is still attached to food distribution programmes by the state. At the same time, the idea of active participation and empowerment of the local community in a way promoted by neoliberal development programmes, can be found in the guidelines of the scheme. While this is largely not implemented in reality, the effect of such kind of participation towards reducing inequalities is also highly questionable. The fact that much responsibility is delegated to NGOs also shows a neoliberal

influence in the governing of the scheme, allowing institutions with various different objectives and management strategies to gain significant power. Further, the debates and legal decisions around a right to food and food security also shape the governing of the scheme.

I start by introducing my approach to analysing the relation between the state and the poor. I do so by discussing theoretical concepts and approaches on state, bureaucracy and informality in relation to my empirical observations. Following this, I introduce the Foucauldian understanding of government as the "conduct of conduct", on which he builds the concept of 'governmentality', which I use for the subsequent analysis. The underlying idea is that, according to Michel Foucault, governing does not only happen by what we commonly call government (and state apparatus), but everybody governs himself and others by various means based on certain objectives, beliefs and rationalities. As I focus on the MDMS, I also introduce the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, as a mode of governing in which the management of the population is the goal. For a structured examination of the overall governmentality of the MDMS, I follow the method of Mitchell Dean (2010) to conduct an analysis of "regimes of government" (also "regimes of practices"). This method builds on the concept of governmentality and provides a structure and technique for the systematic assessment of how, by whom, according to which rationalities and with what consequences the MDMS is governed. This also includes an assessment of the role of parents within the scheme.

State, society and the governing of the poor

Conceptualising state and society

Generally, anthropologists follow different approaches in studying "the state". The fundamental question, which has been answered differently with different definitions of the state, is the relation between state and society. Can they be understood as distinct from each other? Where and how should the boundaries be drawn between the two? Because of this difficulty, in the second half of the 20th century it was a trend among scholars to get away from studying the state and think of a broader idea of the political system instead (see e.g. Fuller and Bénéï 2001:2). In the 1980s, however, scholars

called for a re-orientation on the state, based on the argument that talking of the political system instead made the distinction between political issues and social affairs more complicated rather than simpler. Evans Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (1985) in the book "Bring the state back in", for example, suggested an orientation back to "the state" in the sense of the Weberian model of "actual organization" (Fuller and Bénéï 2001:2). Weber defined the state as a political organisation, which with the help of the administration "successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" (Weber 1978:54 cited in Das and Poole 2004:7).

For explaining the relation between state and society, I find Timothy Mitchell's approach particularly convincing. He, like other scholars, rejects drawing a clear boundary that views the state as autonomous and independent of society (in Sharma and Gupta 2006:172,173). Rather, Mitchell describes the state not as a structure, but as a structural effect, or more precisely, as a "powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist" (Sharma and Gupta 2006:180). Following this logic, the division between society, economy and state as the modern political order is the effect of practices that make these structures appear. Hence, the state is to be understood as a kind of framework, which appears to provide an external structure for the social world from which it appears to stand separate (Sharma and Gupta 2006:180). Mitchell, hence, sees the importance of a line between state and society, but understands it not as a clear-cut boundary, but "a complex distinction internal to these realms of practice." (Sharma and Gupta 2006:175). An example that he uses to explain this, is law as a legal system in which with all its institutions we cannot draw a clear line between legal structure and the "society" it structures. Hence, Mitchell argues that the two are inseparable aspects of each other, although they are commonly seen in a simplified way as distinct from each other, i.e. the legal structure as the abstract code and society as the realm to which the former is practically applied (Sharma and Gupta 2006:176).

We are thus, if we follow Mitchell's argumentation, faced with the situation that despite rejecting clear boundaries between state and society/economy, we need to acknowledge the fact that in practice these distinctions often appear to be real. His way of dealing with this tension is to look at the complex

ways in which the spheres are intertwined and maybe partly inseparable – as in the example of the legal system – while, at the same time acknowledging the appearance of different spheres in real life. This seems to be a convincing approach to me. Hence, for my analysis I follow Mitchell in keeping "state" and "society" as analytical terms that have an empirical relevance while at the same time I pay due attention to the complex entanglements between these spheres and try to understand how and why these spheres are perceived by the people the way they are.

Other scholars, too, have engaged in the attempt to understand how people themselves experience the state in their everyday lives. In an edited book (Fuller and Bénéï, 2001) that focuses on "everyday action and beliefs of ordinary people, officials and politicians in relation to the Indian state" ethnographic evidences demonstrate that the distinction between state and society is very blurred but it is nevertheless perceived as such. Similarly, Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (2006) argue that we learn most about the state if we examine how people encounter the state in everyday practices. In fact, they emphasise, it is through everyday practices, such as "standing in line to obtain monthly rations or to mail a letter, getting a statement notarized or answering the questions of an official surveyor, paying taxes", that people learn about the state for the first time (Sharma and Gupta 2006:11).

From my observations, the families of my research experience the state basically as provider of some basic goods and services, such as night shelters, food, education and health care. However, for many of them, these services are either not accessible or do not adequately respond to their needs. Hence, the state – or better services of the state – are present in their everyday lives, it is, at the same time, not accessible for many poor. To better understand this situation, the notion of "formality"/"informality" is very helpful. These categories explain much more than the working status of people in the economy. Rather, they mirror the relation between the state and those that it governs from the perspective of social security, but also beyond that. According to Barbara Harriss-White (2010:179), rights to social security depend on rights at work, or in her own words: "the lack of rights to social security is a consequence of lack of rights at work". She argues that in India less

than ten per cent of workers have access to social security at work, while all others (who are highly socially segmented) do not (Harriss-White 2010:178). Hence, more than 90 per cent of workers (and their families) have no access to reliable social security by the state. Of course, not all of those who are not covered by social security of the state are actually poor as there are also rich self-employed people who have their own safety nets. The focus here, however, is on the large majority of those working in the informal sector who are not in such a comfortable position. The second form of state-mediated social security is not reserved to public sector employees, but consists of a set of welfare interventions, that amount to merely 1.5 per cent of state expenditure. While in the individual case, these public programmes might be important safety nets for the poor, on the larger level, its impact as effective social safety net is therefore negligible, according to Harriss-White (Harriss-White 2010:176).

Most of the families in my research are "informal" in various ways. Being part of the informal economy (see chapter one) close to all of the families whose children go to RP Kulam School and Sir Balai School are engaged in work outside of state regulation. Moreover, even the cooks, helpers and distributers of the MDMS are not formally employed – their remuneration is called "honorarium" in the official documents – and are therefore also outside of state regulation. This has been discussed in chapter three. Here I want to emphasise how paradoxical this situation is if we try to understand the role of the state. The people in these positions appear to be engaged in work outside of state regulation although in this case it is by a government-run programme that these "informal" working conditions are created and maintained. This reflects much of the relation between the state and the poor and naturally shapes how the state and government are perceived by those who are neglected in this case.

Another example where the poor of my research area are confined to "informality", or in other words, where the state and its social security systems seem to be out of reach for them, is the problem that people who live at the Rain Basera as well as many others who do not live in formally recognised houses or flats, are not officially recognised as citizens. On the most practical level this means that they have no access to so called aadhaar cards (personal identity cards) and ration cards for accessing

subsidised food of the Public Distribution System (PDS), for instance, as mentioned earlier (chapter one). The management of the Rain Basera sees the cause of the problem in the fact that the inhabitants have ration cards in Bihar and here they do not have a stable address but keep moving. They, however, know that many of the families have been living here for several years and try to support them in accessing aadhaar cards and ration cards. These are just some examples of how people experience the state and government in their daily-life; I discuss many more empirical observations on this later, especially with focus on the MDMS.

The role of bureaucracy

The implementation of governmental policies for the poor always entails a certain amount of bureaucracy. Bureaucrats are therefor in many cases the intermediaries between state and the poor, hence, this is a crucial aspect to examine. Akhil Gupta even sees bureaucracy as the most crucial aspect of how the state governs the poor, as he argues in his book "Red Tape" (2012). He traces the question, why so many people in India have to suffer and die from poverty and the lack of basic facilities (food, shelter, sanitation, etc.). To find answers to this question, he examines the violence of politics, administration, jurisdiction, etc. (which he calls "structural violence") that he sees in their way of acting or not acting towards the needs of the poor (Gupta 2012:3). Gupta's central argument is: "[…] no matter how noble the intentions of programs, and no matter how sincere the officials in charge of them, the overt goal of helping the poor is subverted by the very procedures of bureaucracy." (Gupta 2012:23). One of the examples from his fieldwork for such situations is a scene of chaos and arbitrariness at a so-called camp at a block office when local officials and a medical doctor identify beneficiaries of a pension programme (Gupta 2012:8-13). Other examples are cases where bureaucratic processes (time and documentation requirements) make replacement of non-working anganwadis complicated, so that the centre does not function for long time (Gupta 2012:257-259).

In these examples, Gupta does point at a part of the problem why governmental welfare programmes do not succeed to eliminate poverty. However, keeping in mind that social welfare

schemes (as both examples are) make up for an insignificant amount of the state budget (see Harriss-White above), they cannot in the current form be expected to be an effective means to fight poverty on the large scale. Moreover, from observations and experiences in my research area, anganwadi centres are well-known for only offering food to children once a day and maybe some minimal educational sessions, but no one even expects much from these centres in the slums although the anganwadi workers and helpers come regularly. Hence, the problem that these centres are not of much help to those for whom they are introduced seems to be rooted not just in the bureaucracy. Rather, that the needs of the poor are neglected or answered with half-hearted, under-equipped welfare schemes hints at the larger power relations in society that build on inequalities.

Using Tilly's "durable inequalities" concept again (see chapter three), I argue that even though there are well-intended programmes and sincere officials, generally the inequalities are so deeply enrooted in most institutions that people belonging to the less powerful part of the categories caste/Dalit, men/women, etc. often cannot access what they really need to improve their living situation. By the typical mechanisms of organisational management (that I explained in chapter three) these inequalities are recreated and only a change in fundamental institutional structures (change in land distribution and patterns of job recruitment, for instance) could challenge these inequalities. Hence, the programmes Gupta talks about (such as Integrated Child Development Scheme [ICDS] and a pension scheme of INR 100 per month) would be in Tilly's eyes of no real importance to tackle inequalities, and thus poverty, because they are not suitable to change the causes and mechanisms of inequality (and poverty) even if they were carried out in a properly organised bureaucratic manner.

In an attempt to bring together these two lines of argumentation, one could argue that on top of – or rather because of – the historically grown inequalities that cause masses of people to live in distress, the programmes which are meant to help the poor are not managed efficiently, so that even this bit does not reach the needy reliably. Hence, the processes of bureaucracy seem to add to the continuation of (durable) inequalities, as they are part of the system, but they do not appear to be the source of it or the major target point if one wants to achieve social change. John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey (2013)

raise a similar concern when they criticise Gupta for entirely neglecting the importance of caste, class and gender privileges. They argue that he "depoliticizes the problem of extreme poverty" (Harriss and Jeffrey 2013:508) by focusing too much on the arbitrariness of bureaucratic action as the cause of structural violence instead of looking at systematic errors of state agencies in the allocation of welfare benefits (Harriss and Jeffrey 2013:511). Harriss and Jeffrey are convinced that the functioning of bureaucracy is not as arbitrary and chaotic as Gupta presents it, but rather systematically mirrors caste, class and gender privileges (Harriss and Jeffrey 2013:519). Hence, dominant groups are often privileged and have more power to get assistance from government agencies (such as the police) or cooperate with them in patronage systems (Harriss and Jeffrey 2013:518).

Two further aspects in the critique of Harriss and Jeffrey on Gupta's argumentation in "Red Tape" are crucial to consider in the attempt to understand the relation between the state and "the poor" in India. Firstly, according to Harriss and Jeffrey, the way Gupta uses the concept of "structural violence" when talking about the violence that poor people experience through the action or non-action of state bureaucracy is very problematic. Indeed saying that the violence is not undertaken by a particular person but by the structure obscures that there are of course real persons (and their political decisions) behind the actions. Seeing no one as morally responsible is a politically disempowering message to the poor (Harriss and Jeffrey 2013:513). By acknowledging this as an important point, I, however, do not mean to argue that there is no structural violence. On the contrary, assuming that inequalities are recreated by organisational management means that the perpetuation of inequalities (which can be seen as a kind of violence) is largely a structural phenomenon. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that real persons are taking the decisions how to manage institutions and which measures are taken to respond to poverty. Secondly, Gupta repeatedly claims that the Indian state is fully committed to the goals of reducing poverty and improving the situation of the poor. This is, according to Harriss and Jeffrey (2013:516,517), not the case despite the

progressive constitution and the Nehruvian vision for independent India that included challenging social inequalities.

Government and governmentality

From the role of bureaucracy in governing the poor, I turn to concepts of government and governmentality. To start with, it should be mentioned that there is a certain overlap when I refer to the state and government. I might, for instance, talk of the MDMS as a "governmental programme" or as a "programme run by the state" because, in my understanding, this essentially means the same. In fact, I view the government as the actual governing institution of the state, as – based on Mitchell's definition – the latter is the effect that only appears to exist through practices of institutions such as the government, courts, police and army. Turning to the notions of "government" and "governmentality", most importantly, a distinction needs to be drawn between government as the (elected) representatives who have certain powers, responsibilities and techniques to govern a population and the wider understanding of government that is not limited to the government in the first sense. The quote of Nikolas Rose at the beginning of the chapter points to such a wider understanding of government that needs to be unpacked: What does he mean when he talks of "regimes that act upon our own conduct"? The second part of the sentence – the claim that the regimes act "in the proclaimed interest of our individual and collective well-being" – indicates that Rose is talking about liberal states. For analysing the underlying concept of government, however, I concentrate on the more general first part of the sentence here. This draws on the Foucauldian understanding of government as the "conduct of conduct", which means the (more or less deliberate) attempt to shape aspects of our behaviour or actions of others or oneself according to particular norms and for various possible reasons (Dean 2010:250). This becomes clearer in the notion of "governmentality" that brings the focus to the "mentality" within the "government". The "mentalities" of self-government can be observed, for instance, in our diet – we decide for a particular diet for certain reasons, in a certain way that depends on certain prevailing forms of knowledge, trends

and beliefs, for instance (Dean 2010:26). In a similar way, this happens in case of the MDMS as well. Before turning to the governmentality of the MDMS, however, it is important to understand the centrality of the aspect of power in Foucault's concept of government and governmentality.

Historically, Michel Foucault identifies two different phases of governmental strategies that entailed different types of power. The first one builds mainly on sovereign power and the second on biopower. Sovereign power intensified together with the emergence of the "modern state" with its bureaucratic and the administrative apparatus in the 17th and 18th century (Dean 2010:29). This is when discipline was used as the central technology or instrument of power. Different ways of disciplining where deliberately exercised and orchestrated in institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools (Foucault 1995:215) with the aim to produce disciplined and docile bodies. Thus, "[…] discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Foucault 1995:138). Disciplinary methods or disciplines in the Foucauldian sense are those methods that enable the absolute control of bodily operations which was imposed, for example, in armies, monasteries and workshops (Foucault 1995:137). Foucault (1995:138) formulates this discovery of the body as source and target of power and the development of new strategies to govern it quite drastically: "The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it".

While the sovereign power focuses on making the physical body productive, efficient and obedient, with the shift to biopower (also "biopolitics") in the mid-18th century, the body remained an important point of reference, but now rather as a part of the population, which became the new focus of governing. It became a major concern of government to improve the conditions of the population and increase its wealth, longevity, health, etc. (Foucault 2006:140). In the Indian context, the colonial government began to see population as the target of government only when large parts of the country experienced severe famines between 1870 and the first years of the 20th century (Hodges 2004:1158). With this argumentation, Sarah Hodges counters the view that the colonial

census in the second half of the 19th century already focussed on population in a Foucauldian way. While famines were largely viewed as natural checks on population growth at that time, the colonial government had to deal with the dramatic consequences they had on the people and economy. Hence, as part of the famine policy much attention shifted to enumerating and administrating population data (on deaths, births, diseases, etc.) in order to be able to better contain the famines (Hodges 2004:1158). For the administration of health and life of populations (beyond particular events such as Indian famines) population data needed to be collected in new scales, which (at least to some extent) meant an increase in surveillance and control of the individuals. These new techniques, however, did not simply replace discipline and sovereignty, rather these means of governing remained crucial in the attempt to control population (Dean 2010:29, 30). Forced sterilisations (as practiced during the Indian Emergency 1975-77 under Indira Gandhi, for instance) may be mentioned as an example how brutal bio-political interventions can be.

Governmentality of the MDMS

The MDMS is governed by various institutions and organisations with their rationalities, techniques and goals. For a structured analysis, it seems therefore helpful to follow a method proposed by Dean for the "analytics of government". By analytics of government he means examining under which conditions certain "regimes of practices" emerge, are maintained and transformed (Dean 2010:31). What he calls "regimes of practices" are the more or less organised ways in which certain societal issues – such as caring, counselling, curing, punishing and education – are being thought of, approached and handled by various actors (Foucault, 1991b cited by Dean 2010:31). The various regimes of practices of a society (such as practices of punishing or reducing poverty) go together with systems (health system, welfare system, legal system, etc.), but they go beyond a specific system and the involved institutions. Moreover, these regimes are not clearly separable or static, but they involve dynamic processes and overlap with others (Dean 2010:31).

As a regime of practice in this sense is something larger than a particular programme or institution (Dean 2010:32), the MDMS itself cannot be seen as a regime of practice, rather it is part of regimes of practices. A regime of practices can, according to an example of Dean, concern "problems of poverty and the administration and treatment of the poor" (Dean 2010:80). We can therefore analyse the scheme as part of certain views on poor people that involve particular techniques and practices – by the government as well as other actors involved. Hence, to understand the governmentality behind this scheme, we need to consider under which conditions, based on what type of values and thinking about poverty, hunger and education, with the help of which techniques and through which institutions the government and others seek to reach out to a particular part of the population. Dean suggests to structure the analysis into four dimensions that he identifies as practices of government. These dimensions, which I examine in the following, are: (1) visibility, (2) technical means of governing, (3) knowledge and rationality and (4) identity formation.

1) Visibility

In case of the MDMS, the physical bodies of the children that are targeted with the programme are the basis of the visibility on which this intervention builds. Their high absenteeism from school and poor nutritional status (both visualised in form of figures, reports, etc.) are being identified and viewed as problems that ought to be tackled.

The presence of children in school is primarily measured by figures on school enrolment. As mentioned before, at the time when the MDMS was introduced on national scale in 1995, National Sample Survey (NSS) data (from 1995-1996 (52 round data)) identified 31 per cent of children in the 6-11 year age-group as not attending school (Ramachandran 2004:71). Over the two following decades, the percentage of enrolment rose to over 95 per cent by 2017 (ASER 2017). Further, the daily attendance of students in class is reported as part of the routine paper work for the MDMS and as an orientation for the kitchen on how much food they need to provide the next day.

The persistently high levels of malnutrition among children in India have been mentioned (see introduction of the thesis). As the fifth National Family Health Survey shows, even before the covid-

19 pandemic caused a hunger crisis for many in 2020, malnutrition parameters have worsened in the majority of the states (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and International Institute for Population Sciences 2020). In the MDMS, the government together with nutrition experts monitors and controls the nutritional content of the food that students receive, putting the focus on types of food and the quantity of the individual nutrients that school age children should consume.

Using Dean's concept of visibility also means asking: "[…] by what kind of light it illuminates and defines certain objects and with what shadows and darkness it obscures and hides others." (Dean 2010:41). The MDMS – as all programmes necessarily do – reflects a particular priorisation of issues. Firstly, the MDMS can be seen as part of larger efforts towards achieving universal elementary education, hence putting light on enrolment and attendance rather than on other crucial aspects of the educational sector that need to be improved. Hence, what the focus of the scheme might leave in the dark are, for instance, persisting problems of educational quality and the dramatic decrease of levels of learning levels of students in government schools since 2008 (ASER 2018) (as discussed in the introduction of the thesis). Further, the often very high dropout rates in schools – as in RP Kulam School, where, according to the enrolment registers, 43.8 per cent of the students dropped out before finishing primary school (discussed in chapter one in more detail) – are not directly reflected in the attendance lists and not a focus of the MDMS. Secondly, singling out nutrition as approach of this programme puts much attention to questions concerning what type of food and containing how many calories and proteins children should ideally receive for lunch, while other urgent nutritional and non-nutritional problems that poor children face in their daily-life are not or less considered in this scheme.

2) Technical means of governing

The MDMS entails various technical means of governing, including the numerous regulations, guidelines, etc. that I referred to during the previous chapters, by which the MDMS is governed. This includes the guidelines on (financial) management, monitoring and nutritional standards with the prescribed norms for control and supervision of the implementation, as well as the contracts and terms and conditions between the responsible government agencies and private food suppliers (NGOs) and

the rules and conditions under which the cooks and helpers work. The mandatory maintenance and submission of the various forms on student numbers and on food quality checks, etc. at the school level are also part of this.

While these are the technical means of the government, other actors also shape the governing of the scheme by technical means. Most prominently perhaps, by using legal means civil society representatives involved the Supreme Court in the matter. Hence, the orders of the latter (2001 on hot cooked food; 2004 on employment policies of cooks and helpers) are also technical means of governing the scheme. These means are, however, a more indirect way of governing the scheme as the orders of the court have to be transferred into guidelines for the scheme. While the orders concerning the hot meal have effected a major change in the scheme and its implementation has been monitored and controlled, the order regarding preferential employment of cooks and helpers from disadvantaged groups has not received the same awareness and effect. As described in the previous chapter, in most states this order has not been translated into effective rules that are monitored and controlled – leaving aside the extremely low payment that the government allotted to cooks and helpers. Hence, the implementation of the order on employment policies is left to interpretation and commitment of state or even NGO level administration. This is an example of how priorities or rationalities of different actors are being negotiated in the processes of governing. Another example for such negotiation is the role of media and their instruments. Reports on deficient food quality or discriminating practices in the processes (be it in the preparation of the food or at lunchtime in schools), for instance, play an important role in creating public opinion and pressure regarding the implementation of the scheme. Though surely in an even more indirect way than the Supreme Court orders on the scheme, media representation also governs the scheme to some extent.

3) Knowledge and rationality

Governing is always based on some kind of knowledge, or in other words, everyone who governs needs to gather knowledge and knowhow and have visions and objectives on what he or she seeks to achieve. Hence, they draw on certain rationalities, expertise and strategies that are based on the state

of (scientific) knowledge, prevailing theories and trends, beliefs and so on. That the rationalities behind the MDMS involve an assessment of nutritional and educational status of children has been mentioned, but which historical experiences, thoughts, strategies and rationalities shape the governing of the scheme? This is surely a question too large to be fully answered in this dissertation, therefore, I concentrate on highlighting some (historical) developments and discourses that I consider crucial in this context.

Hunger and poverty: A historical perspective

James Vernon (2007) identifies three historical phases in which different approaches to hunger and poverty prevailed. In the first phase that reached into the 19th century, hunger was seen as the destiny of those who suffered from it – hence there would be no need for intervention. The second period was to see hunger as the natural means and even necessity to teach the poor the moral duty of labour – this was most prominently represented by Malthus. This view was essential in the British debates around the turn from the 18th to the 19th century shaping the New Poor Law of 1834 which did not aim to alleviate poverty or hunger as such, but to get rid of idleness and pauperism in the society (Vernon 2010:3), as mentioned in chapter two. Finally, since the end of the 19th century after disastrous famines in Ireland and India, hunger became to be understood as a humanitarian problem and a failure of the government or international political economy (Vernon 2007). Further, along with new journalistic techniques in the second half of 19th century the "moral innocence of the hungry as victims of forces beyond their control" (Vernon 2007:18) was commonly accepted, which has to be targeted by social welfare (Vernon 2005:696,697). Vernon sees the shift of the second to the latest approach as "the humanitarian discovery of hunger" which "helped establish the right to subsistence, or at least the belief that it was morally wrong to allow another human being to starve to death" (Vernon 2007:40).

While according to this trajectory, the humanitarian view on poverty and hunger became relevant in shaping governmental approaches only at the end of the 19th century, the idea that poverty and hunger need to be eradicated existed much earlier. As Gareth Stedman Jones (2004) emphasises, the

Enlightenment period and the French Revolution (at the end of the 18th century) – that also brought up the ideal of universal education – changed the view on poverty profoundly. With the French revolution assistance for the poor was no longer seen as favour, but became seen as national duty (Stedman Jones 2004:61,62).

Despite these ideas, governmental practices such as the Poor Laws in England and its principal of 'less eligibility', are examples of government interventions of the 19th century that treated the poor in a cruel way to make sure that unemployed people did not receive more than workers, rather than focusing on poverty eradication. Collective feeding, the way it was introduced in England in the 19th century, was also part of this rationality. The fact that inhabitants of workhouses were subject to experiments with minimum diets (Vernon 2007:159,160) shows how food provision, too, was part of the cruel regimes that the poor faced at that time. Britain also increased its knowledge on nutrition in the "colonial laboratories of South Asia and East Africa", where the role of vitamins and deficiency diseases were discovered. Indeed, the discovery of nutritional sciences in the late 19th century brought up new ideas of welfare. Slowly hunger became measurable in terms of nutritional deficit so that nutrition gained a new significance as it could now be controlled and used in new ways. According to Vernon, around the beginning of the 20th century "[…] hunger could be scientifically defined as the failure to reach a minimum nutritional standard, and its social costs could be precisely measured in terms of health, productivity, racial efficiency, and social stability" (Vernon 2005:702).

Provision of food was now used strategically. Industrial canteens, for instance, were set up as workers needed good food to be productive. As this was even more so in times of war, early public feeding can be seen as an example that "warfare necessitated welfare" (Fraser 2009:165,212). Wartime needed healthy army men who could only be "produced" if they were provided with food in school times (Fraser 2009:148). This way, school meals, which were first introduced in England in 1906 on a local basis, became important for creating a healthy army to maintain the Empire. Hence, canteens in schools, factories and workhouses were connected to the nation building project and with that also part of a regime that aimed to improve the "civility" among the poor (Vernon 2007:166,167).

School canteens, therefore, were not only places for food distribution, but also for disciplining poor students. In fact, the notion of punishment that was intrinsically connected to the disciplinary regime, was, according to Vernon, even after the introduction of universal provision of school meals in 1944, intrinsically attached to it. Many perceived school food not primarily as an entitlement, but rather continued to experience it as form of social punishment (Vernon 2007:180). Vernon even argues that the provision of food to particular groups as welfare measure is a result of the interlinkage between the history of welfare and that of discipline and punishment (Vernon 2007:159).

Even today, school food is not free from this stigma. There are still instances of practices of governing that reinforce this stigma. In 2014, for example, a case made it into media, in which a principal of a school in Colorado (US) allegedly got fired because she had tried to stop the practice to mark children's hands if they could not afford the full price for lunch (Edwards 2014). Moreover, as discussed in chapter one, even though the Indian MDMS is free for students regardless of their families' income and according to my observation children from all backgrounds of the two schools of my sample eat it, many parents are keen to emphasise that the scheme is meant for people who are poorer than they are. This fear to be regarded as someone who lives on free support instead of own earnings, seems to have its roots in the history of public feeding and the debates on eligibility to state support.

The question whether poor people should receive food free or whether this would demotivate them from working (see e.g. Russell 2005:36) is still controversially debated. This is also to be seen in connection with the neoliberal logic – another regime of governing – that started guiding India's economy to a large extent in the 1990s and re-constructed the image of the poor as self-responsible for their own fate in a new way. Similar to the historical regimes discussed above, the neoliberal rationality, rather than seeing poverty as a result of unequal structures (political, economic and social), sees it as a consequence of individual failure (Sharma 2008:17) – a rationality that is also reflected in the view on "gande bacce" (see chapter two) in a similar way. Breman (2020), for instance, argues that the way the migrant labourers whom he calls "footloose migrants" are structurally kept at the

bottom of the political economy and the inhuman way they are dealt with – by the neoliberal economy and the government alike – shows that they are in a position comparable to the historical figure of the pauper. He arrives at this comparison based on the observation that the footloose migrants are widely seen as being themselves the cause for their poverty while they are not granted equal status to citizenship so that the assumption of a "natural inequality" re-emerges, comparable to the 19th century thinking (Breman 2020:17).

Indeed, it seems that the poor migrant labourers are left out by the neoliberal logic, according to which poverty needs to be addressed by remaking the self that needs to be integrated in the market. Rose, for instance, argues that in neoliberal societies the disadvantaged individuals were not seen any more just as needy subjects whom support has to be given, but the welfare sector turned into a market in which experts promote their social services and make the subjects consumers and clients in an area of choices (Rose in Sharma and Gupta 2006:155). Yet, migrant labourers and other very poor people are left behind, as they are largely not in the position to access the services of their choice. Globally, as part of this trend states have reduced their costs for welfare and their interventionist activities (Sharma 2008:17). In India, however, the neoliberal regime – although it surely had and still has far reaching consequences on economic as well as social developments in the country – has never fully overtaken the governing of poverty and hunger. As Sharma (2008) argues, for instance, the way how in India welfare programmes co-exist with neoliberal programmes that focus on empowerment, demonstrates that neoliberalism does not necessarily mean "dewelfarisation" (Sharma 2008:34). The case of the MDMS is, I argue, an example showing that welfare and neoliberal tendencies even come together within one scheme. This becomes obvious in the central role that NGOs – as private service providers of the food in urban areas – play in the implementation of the scheme, as well as in the envisaged "empowerment" of mothers through "participation" in the scheme. Both these aspects will be analysed in detail later.

Hunger and poverty: A rights based perspective

There is, moreover, a rights based approach to questions on poverty and hunger, which gained momentum over the last decades. Most prominently, the demands of the Right to Food Campaign go far beyond state welfare, claiming that the government should recognise the right to food of every citizen and ensure that the food surplus that exists in the country is used to prevent hunger and starvation (Right to Food Campaign website). The Right to Food Campaign was initiated in 2001 as reaction to the Public Interest Litigation to the Supreme Court by the Public Union for Civil Liberties, which has become known as "Right to Food case". In a time of severe droughts the petitioners demanded that the rotting food grain stocks of the country must be used to feed the poor. This petition referred to a "right to food" based on Article 21 of the Indian constitution, which grants the fundamental right to life (Bhasin 2013). Although the case has been closed after 17 years without a final order, a number of interim orders have been passed, among them those on the MDMS, which have been discussed in the previous chapters. Moreover, under pressure from the Right to Food Campaign the government formulated a National Food Security Bill in 2011, on the basis of which, without significant changes, a National Food Security Act (NFS Act) was enacted in 2013.

These documents have been highly criticised. Notably, the phrase "right to food" is not used at all in the documents (Bhasin 2013). At the centre of the critique is the weak interpretation of the terms "food security" and "entitlements", which give people a passive right to receive food grains and meals on certain conditions rather than a positive right to access adequate food which they can actively claim (e.g. Bhasin 2013; Aggarwal and Mander 2013; Ramachandran 2014). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines "food security" as follows: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). In the NFS Act, in contrast, the definition is limited to "the supply of the entitled quantity of food grains and meal specific under chapter II" and according to chapter two, priority households shall be identified who "shall be entitled to receive

five kilograms of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices specified in Schedule I from the State Government under the Targeted Public Distribution System" (Indian Parliament 2013). In fact, the NFS Act concentrates mainly on regulating the Targeted Public Distribution System (commonly referred to as PDS) which is much criticised in its current form. Firstly, the PDS grants subsidised food rations only to those people who are defined as eligible. Secondly, that eligibility is now linked to the aadhaar cards and this has created much complication in the daily procedures with many people now facing problems in accessing the rations they are entitled to (Kheera and Somanchi 2020; Economic and Political Weekly 2020:8).

For the MDMS the NFS Act also meant a rather small difference. The MDMS rules of 2015 that are the response to the Act, now talk of the meal as "entitlement" of the children, picking up the language of the NFS Act, while otherwise not much has been changed. New is only that the rules of 2015 now include "food security allowances", for the case that the meal cannot be distributed (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2015). This became applicable in the case of the covid-19 pandemic, for instance. "Food security allowance" is specified as food grains and cooking costs (or pulses, oil, etc. equivalent to the cooking costs) that should, in the case of the pandemic, be distributed door to door or at places like PDS outlets during school closure and summer holidays in 2002/21 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2020, letters of April 20 and 29, August 24 and October 12). In a letter urging for a quick facilitation of the distribution, the Ministry of Human Resource Development now emphasised that the food provided under the MDMS is an entitlement of the children under the NFS Act 2013 (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2020, July 31). However, the provision of the meal or subsidy during the pandemic has in many states only been implemented with severe delay and in many cases falling short of reaching all entitled children (Katiyar 2020; Jafri 2020).

Overall, integrating the rights based approach to some extent, the MDMS has been declared a tool for granting "food security". The latter, however, does not go much beyond entitling people to those provisions that they were already supposed to receive under the food schemes, i.e. the MDMS and

the PDS. This shows how welfare and rights based approaches to hunger and poverty are negotiated or even aligned. Clearly, there has not been a real shift in the recognition of the poor from viewing them as beneficiaries of welfare – the way they have been historically constructed – to holders of rights. Without such a shift, I argue, even the introduction of a right to food that goes beyond the provisions of the NFS Act, would not make a real difference. To say this with the words of Vanita Leah Falcao:

> "India has a long but troubled history of welfare provisioning, plagued by corruption, clientelism and exclusion. This scenario has resulted in citizens having little trust in or expectations from the state. The recognition and realization of a right in such a context requires a shift in how citizens view themselves, and how the state views citizens. A shift that recognises citizens not as beneficiaries of welfare but as rights-holders, entitled to demand welfare from the state." (Vanita Leah Falcao 2018)

Though a shift towards recognising the poor as holders of rights is surely essential, I am convinced that the crucial point here is to also make sure that they can effectively claim what they are entitled to. Drawing on Balagopalan (2019), I argue that the introduction of rights that ignores the (historically produced) situation of poor and marginalised people risks to reproduce the unequal access of them to means of claiming their rights (Balagopalan 2019:14). According to Balagopalan, the introduction of the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 is an example that the children are officially recognised as holders of a right, while at the same time, the state is reluctant to provide for education of adequate quality for them in governmental schools (Balagopalan 2019:2).

To put it in a nutshell, if the assurance of rights to people does not consider the inequalities that shape their daily-life realities – and with that their actual means to claim entitlements – it does not make a huge difference for the people concerned, but rather reproduces the existing inequalities. In fact, while the rights based approach may seem a promising way towards achieving greater equality, the way it is incorporated in the biopolitics of the government makes it not much different from the welfare approach. In case of the MDMS, as I argued in the introduction of the thesis, the concept of rights and entitlements became part of governmental biopolitics in the current crisis caused by the

pandemic, but in a limited and weak form in which it is not very different from humanitarian and charity approaches. The MDMS is in this crisis part of the government's strategy to offer humanitarian relief, which is highly insufficient in quantity and reach. The "entitlements" and "food security allowances" that it contains since 2015, turn out to be very weak and limited here, as the management of poverty still inherently has a charity character.

Hunger and poverty: Humanitarian and ideological approaches

Clearly, in governing the MDMS the government does not fully endorse a rights based understanding of the poor. Rather, a humanitarian rationality is deeply rooted in the scheme (the third according to the trajectory of the major historical approaches to hunger and poverty by Vernon, see above), which partly has a charity character. According to Didier Fassin (2012) for instance, humanitarian reason always identifies those who suffer as "victims", hence, instead of them having the right to claim some kind of support, it appeals to our obligation to give them support. This obligation is usually seen as particularly strong in case of children, as they are not only generally imagined as innocent victims of what happens to them, but at the same time as representing the future generation which has to be taken care of (Russell 2005:179). Moreover, adults who are in need of support are to a large extent aware of the humanitarian logic and also use the "language of humanitarian reason" – they enhance their chances to receive support if they describe their suffering and neediness instead of formulating a demand (Fassin 2012:256).

Governments today, according to Fassin, consciously use the language of humanitarian reason to react to people's suffering and at the same time obscure the larger structural and legal systems and distributional politics that cause or maintain inequalities and suffering in society (Fassin 2012:6). This can be observed in my research when the government with the MDMS (and other programmes that provide food for the poor) demonstrates its efforts to fight hunger (and illiteracy), while the structural causes for the distress of the same people are not addressed with equal enthusiasm. The latter are issues that I discussed earlier, such as an economy that builds on exploitation of their labour and their lack of political power.

That the MDMS has its basis in humanitarian rather than rights based rationalities can be seen in the fact that the Supreme Court order of 2001 that *entitles* children to hot food under the scheme did not stand at the beginning of the scheme. Instead, the national scheme was introduced based on the positive example of the Noon Meal Scheme in Tamil Nadu, which owed much of its promotion and popularity to the state's Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran (a former film actor). He introduced the program in 1982 as his personal initiative of fighting the hunger of the poor. This initiative, allegedly, rooted in the experience that he himself had once been saved from starvation by a merciful woman (Harriss 1991:10).

I also encountered such personal humanitarian motives for providing food under the MDMS. One of these instances was when I visited a kitchen of Akshaya Patra Foundation, the NGO that cooks for the largest number of schools under the MDMS. This NGO is part of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON, also known as "Hare Krishna Movement"), which is active on international scale with their ideology of how to lead a good life in devotion of Krishna. Since 2000, Akshaya Patra is engaged in the MDMS and since 2004 they are active in Jaipur where they prepare the food for all schools that come under the programme in the city in one kitchen that has a capacity to cook for 2 lakh (200,000) children. This kitchen is bigger than that of Bhojan Foundation in Delhi (where Akshaya Patra does not operate on big scale), but still not the largest kitchen of this NGO, which caters to 1,800,907 children in 52 kitchens across twelve states and two union territories, according to their own website (Website of Akshaya Patra).

In the office of the Jaipur based kitchen, a member of the organisation, Mr Kumar, told me how Akshaya Patra came to be involved in feeding schoolchildren: the highly worshiped founder of ISCON, Sri Srila Prabhupada, is told to have seen a child suffering from hunger – an incident that moved his heart. Thus, the Akshaya Patra NGO has been founded as a sub-organisation of ISKCON to prevent children from suffering the way this child had to. This story of a personal experience that triggered the motivation to safe children from hunger is similar to the above mentioned story of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. However, instead of drawing any connection to this origin of

the scheme or even to the MDMS as a governmental programme, Mr Kumar only talked about their own idea and strategy to feed hungry children.

Another time I came across a similar story was when I visited the NGO MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation that provides cooking material for Khush. The founder of the organisation, Master Choa Kok Sui from the Philippines, is a spiritual leader who also established a method for self-healing. At the centre in Delhi, healing, yoga and the food programme are under one roof. According to Mr Sharma (a member of the NGO whom I talked to), when visiting Delhi, Choa Kok Sui saw many people being hungry and wanted to help them as it is part of his philosophy that the world should be "free from hunger, poverty, and helplessness" (MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation, website). MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation is also an active supporter of the Right to Food campaign, hence it combines a spiritual/humanitarian and rights based approach. Interestingly, the NGO only provides food to "balwadi" centres, which are similar to anganwadi centres but mainly run by NGOs and not the government, while it is not involved in the governmental programmes ICDS and MDMS.

These examples show that the humanitarian approach of relieving hunger and poverty by providing food to the poor is an element that figures in both, governmental as well as non-governmental welfare activities, in both cases partly in combination with a rights based approach. The approach and rationalities of NGOs are particularly crucial when it comes to those NGOs that run the centralised MDMS kitchens in urban centres as in my research settings, as the governing of the scheme here builds on cooperation between government and NGOs.

In the previous chapter, I showed how Bhojan Foundation uses the fact that some guidelines (regarding the preferential engagement of disadvantaged people as cooks and helpers) are not very clear and binding to interpret them in the way that suits their own interests. The main interest of Bhojan Foundation is to produce "safe" food in an efficient way. Therefore, they have set up a system that is geared towards this aim without following a policy for preferential engagement of

disadvantaged people as cooks and helpers. Hence, the NGOs have a certain freedom in the way they govern and by that they also shape the character of the scheme to some extent.

In case of Akshaya Parta, whose spiritual background I already mentioned, the power they gained within the governing of the MDMS and the way they use this power to influence the scheme according to their interests, has gained more prominence. In the conversation with Mr Kumar in the Jaipur kitchen office, a very strong emphasis on the ideological background of the organisation became obvious. Besides the story of how the highly worshiped founder of ISCON came to engage in feeding the hungry, the conversation came back time and again to the teachings of this person regarding how to lead a good life. I was repeatedly asked about my personal lifestyle and told that it would be best for me to follow certain rules, such as getting up early in the morning and refraining from consuming meat, alcohol and cigarettes. These moral suggestions were underlined by a 40 minutes long video that he showed me on how to lead a "good" life, according to their philosophy.

In order to prevent religious ideologies to influence the MDMS, the guidelines of 2006 contain the provision 3.9.1 "Assignment of supply responsibilities to Voluntary Organizations" saying that: "The voluntary agencies should not discriminate in any manner on the basis of religion, caste and creed, and should not use the programme for propagation of any religious practice." (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:59). Akshaya Patra, nevertheless, has not only taken a strong position against the provision of eggs under the MDMS, but also refuses to use onions and garlic in the food that it provides (see e.g. Karpagam and Prasad 2020). Hence, they openly follow particular high caste Hindu norms on food. Besides the religious aspect, cooking without onion and garlic does not reflect the local food culture and is, therefore, a practice in conflict with the guidelines for the selection of civil society organisations as providers in the MDMS. According to these guidelines, the organisation that is entrusted with the operation of a centralised kitchen should have a "local presence and familiarity with the needs and culture of the State" (revised guidelines of 2017, point 4.2, page 1, see Ministry of Human Resource Development 2017). The matter showed its full bearing when the government of Karnataka entered into a new memorandum of understanding with Akshaya Patra in

2019 although the latter did not follow the direction of the government to use onion and garlic. Clearly, Akshaya Patra was able to hold on to its policy because they knew that if they stopped their food provision no substitute would be found so quickly in order to guarantee a continuous food supply to the students (Kulkarni 2019). The issue that was taken up by media provoked angry reactions, such as claims to go back to a system of school-based kitchens in Karnataka (where Akshaya Patra is most prominent) in order to avoid religiously loaded food politics (Karpagam 2019). That NGOs are the central institutions for the implementation of the MDMS in urban areas and the power some of them have acquired in this position shows the neoliberal character of the scheme, to which I come back when discussing the position of parents below.

Altogether, I revealed a range of different rationalities that shape the provision of food to the poor and the MDMS in particular. The central rationalities that I discussed are disciplining people, increasing productivity, offering humanitarian aid, charity and social welfare as well as neoliberal and rights based approaches. Bearing these rationalities in mind, I now turn to the analysis of how particular ways of governing influence the formation of identities of the people involved.

4) Identity formation

The MDMS, like any other programme, forms or pronounces particular aspects of identities in a certain way. For example, as already mentioned, being a receiver of welfare services or charity is something different to being a person who receives a good that everybody is entitled to get. Also, being a mother who is, for example, engaged to cook or distribute food for a minimal remuneration, puts her in a certain position with certain capacities and attributes attached to it. Looking at this aspect of governing reveals how the MDMS operates through particular forms of identity and assumes and shapes particular aspects of identity by the way it operates. One of the questions that Dean suggests to pose for analysing this aspect is “What statuses, capacities, attributes and orientations are assumed of those who exercise authority (from politicians and bureaucrats to professionals and therapists) and those who are to be governed (workers, consumers, pupils and social welfare recipients)?” (Dean

2010:43). In the following I concentrate on the capacities and attributes that the MDMS assumes of the parents and how these are negotiated within the everyday processes.

Parents' relation to school

Officially, the MDMS envisages a certain participation of the parents – i.e. of the mothers. That the website calls for a "mass mobilization campaign to involve mothers" has been mentioned in the previous chapter. Besides the provision regarding preferential engagement of women as cooks and helpers that I concentrated on so far, this "mobilisation" primarily talks of giving mothers the role of "supervisors". They are supposed to supervise the preparation, cooking and "critical aspects of the programme", which are not further specified. They are, further, supposed to give suggestions on how to strengthen programme strategies and how to enhance community involvement, for instance. Moreover, mothers are supposed to oversee the feeding of the children, a measure that is meant to ensure the quality and regularity of the meals, as well as to give mothers a voice and enhance their "ownership" of the scheme (Ministry of Education, Government of India, website of the Mid Day Meal Scheme [section "community participation"]; Ministry of Human Resource Development 2006:59 [section 4.4 "community support"]).

As a first note on the idea of involving mothers in this way, it is to say that the fact that beyond the employment patterns in the food production that is strongly based on gender stereotypes, the MDMS also focuses on mothers as those who are supposed to actively participate in MDMS related processes in the schools, matches the argument that the scheme largely reproduces gender inequalities (see previous chapter). Further, a supervision of the preparation and cooking by parents is not feasible if the food is cooked in a centralised kitchen. In both schools of my research, moreover, I have never observed parents supervising the distribution of the food. Most mothers whom I talked to said that they are not involved in the MDMS processes anyhow, nor actively neither by giving feedback. Hence, the figure of the "mobilised" mother who gains "ownership" of the programme is not to be found in these schools. The reasons for this lay partly in the time constraints and priorities of the

mothers themselves, but also in the fact that the school (the institution of the government school) creates a certain status and capacity of the mothers, which is not one of active participation.

The only task within the MDMS processes for which involvement of parents is actually needed for fulfilling the bureaucratic requirements, is tasting the food – or more precisely, signing on a form that the food has been tasted. Every day a form has to be filled with information on the food, the number of students who ate it and signatures of those who tasted it, including two parents. However, since it is difficult for parents to come only to taste the food at a time when they are working, in Sir Balai School they resorted to asking parents who come with other issues to the school to sign on the form – without having tasted the food. In RP Kulam School, too, parents are sometimes asked to sign on the form, but mostly the distributors are asked to sign, since they are also parents. Sushmita and Rani indeed do regularly eat a little of the food if something is left over, which is notably after and not before the distribution. Sushmita even told me that she can see whether the food is good or not so that it is not necessary to actually taste it. In both schools, the containers are usually sealed until they are opened directly before the distribution – a proof of the fact that no one could have possibly tasted the food. This example shows that in daily routine the MDMS processes are managed by interpreting the official guidelines with some amount of flexibility. It also demonstrates that no active involvement of parents is needed in the daily operation of the schools.

In many conversations with parents, I came across the view that they do not consider the schools of their children to be a place where their active involvement is needed or appreciated. Many know from experience that their concerns are not taken serious by the school staff. The mother of Saleem, Halima, for instance, told me that the teachers often do not listen to them or ignore their issues, so that she has the impression that parents are not supposed to talk to the teachers about their concerns. In her own words: “Ye hī ki bāt hai hī ki mā-bāp kuch bol nahī̃ pate hai Sir ke āge. […] Kuch log sunte, kuch nahī̃ sunte... āna-kānī kar dete hai.” (Interview with Halima; translation: “That's the issue, parents cannot complain to the teachers. […] Some listen and some do not… they ignore us.”). Another mother, Anjali, formulated a similar feeling when she told me that she once complained in

school that her son has not learned anything so far and the teacher said it is her fault that the boy is not studying properly but misbehaving. Anjali got the impression that the teachers only teach and the rest is her responsibility, i.e. whether her son pays attention and learns something or not and that any discussion on that is in vain. In the same conversation, the woman told me how she together with other parents in the Rain Basera has successfully engaged in improving the way how teaching activities are running in the Rain Basera. When they had the impression that the teachers taught very little but spent most of their time on the phone and let the children run out, they had complained to their supervisor who has a closer eye now on it through which teaching had improved a little. This reveals how different her relation is towards the staff in the Rain Basera compared to the school. While the NGO figures as much more approachable where their concerns are taken seriously at least to some extent, the school is the site where their voice is not heard. The Rain Basera is the place where she and her family lives and interacts with the NGO staff on a routine basis. The school, in contrast, is part of the government in her view and she finds clear words for how she sees the relation between poor people and the government: "Sarkār public ko pāgal banā rahā hai. […] Jiske mũh mẽ bolī hai uske ūpar sarkār hai. Ham log, garīb log, koi nahi pūchta. Sab paisewāle ko pūchta hai." (Interview with Anjali; translation: "The government is making the public a fool. […] The government exists only for those who have a voice, nobody bothers about poor people like us. They are only concerned about rich people.").

From the interaction I have observed between parents and school staff, too, I am convinced that for many the major reason why they do not raise their concerns is that they do not see themselves in a position to do so. In case of the MDMS, this reflects the nature of the welfare regime that builds on the humanitarian principle of a donor (of welfare) and the recipient/beneficiary. Moreover, there seems to be the underlying view that government provisions for the poor (here in the context of things – education and food – provided at the site of the school) have to be taken the way they are and the "beneficiaries" are in a position where they are expected to behave according to the rules that the school staff sets. Two mothers in Mahatma Gandhi Camp – Halima and a neighbour – for example,

told me how at admission time it is usual that the parents are being repeatedly send back by the school staff and are told that they should come again the next day. In this situation, the neighbour referred to her job at a neighbouring private school arguing that she cannot take leave there to come back again and she directly got her admission done. In her words: “Admission ke liye gaye the to kaha »āj nahĩ kal āna, kal nahĩ...«. Jab maĩ ne bola maĩ vahā̃ naukari karti hū̃ tab unhone kaha ki documents leke āna. Kāfi logõ ko unhone kaha »kal āna, parson āna...«.” (Interview with Halima; translation: “When I went for admission they said »not today but tomorrow, not tomorrow…«. When I said that I work there, they said I should bring the documents. They told many people »come tomorrow, day after tomorrow…«.”) In her narration of this scene, she emphasised how important it is to claim the own status and importance of work, so that the school staff understands that not only their work is important: “Ye to āpki naukarī hai to āpke liye zarūrī hai, merī naukarī hai to mere liye zarūrī hai, time to hamāre pās bhī nahĩ hoga... tumhāre pās time nahĩ hai to hamāre pās ho jāyega?” (Interview with Halima; translation: “This is your work which is important to you, my work is important to me, so I would also have no time… You don’t have time, but I’m expected to have time?”).

Part of the unequal socio-economic status between school staff and parents is the unequal educational level, which contributes to the feeling of many parents that they are not taken serious in the space of the school. When I asked Anjali, who works as construction labourer and lives with her husband and their three children in the Rain Basera, why she thinks that she cannot complain about things that she is not satisfied with in school, she asked me back what she should say and said: “Mere ko bolna nahĩ āta.” (interview with Anjali; translation: “I cannot talk.”). In fact, most of the parents I engaged with are either completely illiterate or have a very low level of formal education and seem not to be confident to raise their voice in school. The main concern for which some approach the school nevertheless if they feel necessary, is the education of their children – exactly because they hope that their children get enough education to be more confident to talk to people. Anjali, for instance, said that she sends her son to school because he should become intelligent and well-behaved (“bāt karne kī tamīz”) so that he can sit between ten people and nobody will mock him as illiterate.

Correspondingly, a certain educational level and the confidence to talk to people in different positions figure as essential assets of those parents who are more actively involved in school matters. The two parent members of the School Management Committee (SMC) of RP Kulam School to whom the principal referred me when I asked her for the parent members, live in the two slums with their families, but stand out each in their way. First of all, regarding gender roles it is interesting to note that these two parent representatives are men, while the majority of parents who drop and pick up children at school are women and the MDMS guidelines on participation only talk about mothers. One of them, Shayan, proudly told me that he has his own small taxi driving business, which brings enough money that his wife does not have to work unlike most other mothers of their neighbourhood. Because he has a lot of work and four children in four different schools, Shayan wants to quit his membership in the SMC of this school, but the school staff allegedly tries to convince him to stay in the SMC because he is a very outspoken person. He said: "[…] kyonki hum thoṛa sā bolne vale hai, bol dete the, koi bhī āta tha. To mike pe bhī hum bol lete the vahā̃ pe." (Interview with Shayan; translation: "[…] because I am a bit outspoken, I was talking, was able to do everything. So I was also talking into the microphone there."). According to him, only parents who are able to write at least a bit can become SMC members. He himself is a high school graduate and is convinced that his very good contact to the school staff has to do with his educational level and especially his relatively good English as well as his confidence to speak out. Regarding his involvement in MDMS processes, beyond occasional discussions in SMC meetings on possible improvements of the scheme, he said that he goes regularly and tastes the food and over the last years it has been satisfying.

The second parents' representative in the SMC, Raj, is a social worker who is employed by the NGO in the Rain Basera. His responsibilities include facilitating the enrolment of children in RP Kulam School, so that he is in the position of a mediator between parents and the school. Raj has passed tenth grade in school and has, allegedly, always been engaged with serving the society. He sees it as part of his task to improve the awareness on the importance of education among the residents of the Rain Basera. Regarding the MDMS, he sees it as his responsibility to go and check the food by

tasting or looking at it if there are any issues. He also said that they are occasionally talking about the food in the SMC meetings, but since it all runs as per rule and the quality is okay, there is not much to talk about and no further participation of parents is needed.

At Sir Balai School, where no functioning SMC is in place and the overall atmosphere is a more tense one, as described in chapter two, parents have even less confidence to raise their concerns in this school and are not actively engaged in supervising the MDMS processes. However, in both schools this does not mean that the parents are not keeping an eye on the quality of the food. As reaction to the incidence of 23 death from food poisoning in a school in Bihar 2013, for instance, everybody was concerned about food safety and hygiene and parents told their children not to eat in school for some time. Generally, parents are informed about the food quality by their children and they sometimes see or taste the food if their children take home what they left-over in their boxes. In cases the children report of insects in their plates or the like, some parents tell the teachers about it, but more usually, they resort to quietly pack home-cooked food for some time at least.

To sum up, parents do give some kind of feedback on the MDMS. However, to talk of a "mobilisation" of mothers as active and "empowered" supervisors of the processes at the schools – as the MDMS guidelines envisage – would be exaggerated. Formally, parents' participation is given in the required form – the distributors are parents, daily parents' signatures for having tested the food are submitted and the required percentage of parents is represented in the SMC (even if in Sir Balai School this institution exists only on paper). However, it became clear that in the way the schools handle the processes none of these positions provides the respective parents with means to actively shape the processes. In the actual practices and daily routines in school, parents do not have such an active position. Hence, rather than supervising the processes in an organised manner, they stay alert and react in their own way that is shaped by the role that they have acquired in the space of the school. In fact, the predominant welfare character of the scheme, as well as the socio-economic inequalities between school staff and parents put the latter in a rather passive role of the receiver of governmental services (education and food for their children). Hence, there is a certain tension between the

envisaged and the actual role and position of parents with regard to the school and the MDMS. In the language of Dean, I identified a tension between the envisaged and the actual identity formation here. How does this go together?

The myth of participation and empowerment

The examples above showed that the two government schools are not a space where mothers are being "empowered" and their "ownership" of the MDMS increased. Considering the fact that most of the mothers have to handle high workloads, low wages and difficult living conditions where securing basic living facilities requires much effort, the question arises whether one can realistically expect a more active participation in MDMS processes. As discussed in chapter one, many families still struggle with enabling their children to go to school. Thus, for the parents who have taken all efforts required for enabling their children to go to school, their major concern is whether the children actually learn something in school that helps them for their future. That the children also receive a meal at school is appreciated by most of them. Considering further that the scheme runs relatively smoothly in the two schools, one could also assume that more involvement of mothers, in form of supervising the feeding process, is just not necessary.

In rural school-level kitchens the idea of a "mothers' watch" (as it is called on the website) may have a different relevance as the preparation processes happen on the spot and the supervision of mothers could put some pressure on the school staff to manage these processes in a proper way. In the example of a district in Chhattisgarh, which is mentioned on the website, the involvement of mothers has allegedly had a positive impact on cooking and hygiene as well as on teachers' absenteeism (see MDMS website, section "community participation"). In Delhi, however, a monitoring report of the scheme in 2013/2014 conducted by the CSDS found that "community participation" and involvement of parents was very low in all sampled schools. In fact, the parent members of the School Monitoring Committees were not aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding the MDMS, nor were they informed about the eligibility and entitlements of the children

regarding the food norms. The paragraph on this aspect ends with the suggestion that "this vital component" needs to be strengthened (Vijaisri 2014:48,49).

There are also several studies that look at the aspect of involvement or participation of parents (or "local community") within the processes of the scheme with the assumption that active participation/engagement of parents is a crucial factor for the success of the scheme and that such mechanisms need to be improved (e.g. Dasgupta et al. 2010:4; NFI 2003:10; De et al. 2005:16). De et al. (2005), for instance, found the participation level to be low and argue for more involvement of parents, but without clarifying what exactly they expect from it (De et al. 2005:16).

The formal instruments for the involvement of parents and communities in school and educational matters (including MDM) are SMCs, Village Education Committees and parents-teacher meetings. Some studies point to the general importance of such mechanisms for the involvement of parents, such as the Exclusion Report of the Centre for Equity Studies (2014) that argues:

> "Involvement of parents and community members of children belonging to excluded groups in school activities is bound to reduce the social distance between school and community. This may be achieved by giving representation to the parents in the School Management Committees (SMCs), to ensure their concerns and aspirations are brought into the School Development Plans (SDPs)." (Centre for Equity Studies 2014:29).

Other studies also find the new instruments for parents' involvement in schools helpful, but emphasise the need for proper implementation. Priyanka Pandey et al. (2010), for example, conducted a quantitative study on 600 schools in UP, MP and Karnataka in 2006 in which they compared test results of students with the role of teachers and community participation through education committees and the knowledge about such. The results indicate very low learning levels, low teacher attendance and effort as well as very low awareness and participation levels among the education committee members and the community at large with some differences between the selected states. The main conclusion of the authors is that teachers are largely not accountable and that parents and the local community due to very bad functioning and low awareness of education committees do not hold them accountable. The results of this study suggest that the education committees in this situation

– with no training or information given to the members and the community – can hardly function as a means of actual community participation. Finally, they argue that the fact that better learning results of students correlate with a higher level of awareness and involvement of parents/community members, could be a proof that more local participation might have a positive influence.

The problem that these institutions – similar to other institutions that are introduced in a "top-down" manner and meant for local participation – are in reality often not functioning properly or have very limited powers, is prominent in literature (e.g. Banerjee 2007:1365; Rose and Dyer 2008:71). The fundamental dilemma of local participation and empowerment mechanisms, that is related to the problem of limited powers, is the fact that such institutions and mechanisms are themselves part of the power relations and inequalities of their social environment. It is at least doubtful within the given power relations at school that parents of low caste status and low educational status will be able to get into responsible positions where they can actually influence matters at school even if well-functioning and powerful SMCs were established in the schools of my research. In case of the MDMS, if a system of "mothers' watch" was organised, this too would be within the existing power relations that govern the school and the MDMS processes of the school. Hence, in settings where caste domination prevails, for instance, it is rather unlikely that the widespread phenomenon of caste discriminating practices – against the cooks or against students – can be effectively challenged with this method. Indeed, the relation between local empowerment, participation and social inequalities deserves closer attention.

The concepts of empowerment and participation have become an essential part of development projects in the 1990s. Matching with the neoliberal idea of less state intervention in social matters, it became a global trend to focus on local empowerment as a development strategy. According to John Harriss (2002), this trend builds on false assumptions regarding the role of 'social capital' based on Putnam's misled study on how important participation of people in local civil society organisations allegedly is for development. In a nutshell, Putnam argued that the performance of regional governments in Italy in comparison to the civic engagement of the citizens shows that north Italy

performs much better than the south of the country (in governmental and economic terms) because of its local associations. Hence, he concluded that institutional performance is strongly related to civic engagement (especially in voluntary organisations) and development policies, therefore, should better support local self-help groups and NGOs instead of redistributing resources in society (Harriss 2002:23-29). Based on this argumentation, social capital was given crucial importance for development and strengthening local membership in organisations was assumed to have large positive effects for people.

According to Harriss (2002:5), this idea suited international development institutions – and their ambitions to implement large-scale cuts of public expenditure – so much that they did not see its adverse implications for the poor, nor took any criticism seriously. However, local associations and NGOs, which became the focus of development projects, are not necessarily democratic in their representation, nor democratically accountable (Harriss 2002:10). This is because civil organisations do not exist untouched by power relations, but instead participation is subject to local power relations (Harriss 2002:50, also referring to Skopol and Tarrow). In Putnam's influential study he ignored the importance of the context, which could be that local associations are dominated by powerful people and their interests – for example, Dalits might have high levels of social capital but because of the setting in which they live they cannot make use of it (Harriss 2002:10). Harriss (2002:14) even claims that the projects that set out with the idea to strengthen social capital in fact depoliticize and "disarm" people in their struggles for more just distribution of resources and opportunities. Putnam's concept of social capital and the way it has been used to justify that the focus of development policies shifted to supporting civil society and NGOs systematically depoliticizes development: "It successfully supports the systematic depoliticization of development (which is, of course, in itself a deeply political act) by occluding the recognition of power and of class relations." (Harriss 2002:114).

Dean, too, makes the general point that even those who claim to empower the powerless always also act within the existing power relations and do themselves again create programmes that make those people whom it means to empower subjects (Dean 2010:4, 5). In his argument he refers to

Barbara Cruikshank, who is convinced that participation is always part of political power relations, or in her words: “The citizen is an effect and an instrument of political power rather than simply a participant in politics.” (Cruikshank 1999:5). On the example of Sharma’s (2008) ethnography on the Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme for women’s education, I have already discussed (in chapter three) how a programme for women’s empowerment entails that women who are working for the programme are put into typical positions of patriarchal structures. By showing how efforts to empower certain people can entail making them subject of particular conservative structures, I argued that this demonstrates how efforts towards reducing inequalities can even go closely together with processes that reproduce the same. Hence, contributing to Harriss’ argument that the focus on participation and empowerment of development projects tends to ignore local power relations and politics, there is the risk that such projects reproduce inequalities rather than – or along with – reducing them.

Overall, a fundamental dilemma is that the government or other actors may have all kinds of ideas, programmes and schemes by which the poor should be supported or empowered, while most of such provisions and schemes firmly keep the poor in their places. To explain what I mean by this, I turn to an example of my empirical research: the Rain Basera. Mr Ram, the head of the child welfare centre at the Rain Basera, told me that he and others among the staff members, are surprised that the inhabitants of the night shelter do not respond to the programmes and provisions they offer to them in the way they had expected them to. For instance, Mr Ram is very disappointed about several unsuccessful attempts to set up vocational training for adolescents and adults. The staff had – allegedly based on what kind of training the people whom they wanted to support chose themselves – invited people to organise electrical workshops for them. The deal was supposed to be that they get training (of about a week) free of cost and then would be supported with shop spaces and equipment so that they could start their business from which they were expected to earn about 200 INR per day. After a few days, those who had joined the training initially stopped coming to the workshop after they had asked for money right from the beginning of the training. Mr Ram reasoned that they were

not interested in this offer. That it would be a problem to invest the time for the training and handle the money loss that this would involve for most of them, was not part of the considerations that he shared with me. On the contrary, in this context he explained the relation of the poor to governmental provisions in a prejudiced way – not very different from the opinions of many teachers that I discussed in relation to the concept of "gande bacce" (see chapter two). For example, he thinks that the stories of people saving money for their families and home places in the villages are only a rhetoric, while they spend all money they earn on eating and drinking here. He also sees it as morally wrong that many of them allegedly got used to getting everything for free so that they also take the food provided by the Society for the Development of Children and Youth (SDCY) for granted and at times even get angry if they do not get a share. In his view they fail to understand that this is not a governmental service but only born of the extra effort by the NGO and primarily meant for the children.

Further, Mr Ram got the impression that some of them perceive the NGO staff as government employees of whom they do not expect much since employees in the government sector have the image to be in the job only for getting the money. As example how he comes to this assumption, he recalled an incidence with a mother who asked for support in admitting her child to school. When they told her to come back in March at the time of admission, she countered that she will handle it on her own then. He interprets this reaction as sign of frustration with or distrust towards government employees of whom she assumes no actual support can be expected. Mr Ram also observed that in the case of donations, such as clothes that are given to the families via the NGO staff, instead of using the clothes they sell them and buy other things, such as pots, from the money.

Mr Ram apparently grapples with making sense of the behaviour that he observes, which he underlined when he told me that for him as a psychologist all theories that he learned seem to fail in this context. On the one hand, he described the selling of donations and the demand for a share of the food provisions as part of a misunderstanding from their site regarding the support that they are being offered. On the other hand, he admitted that they have enough clothes and no safe space to store things. He is aware of the fact that their insecurity level is very high and understands that living

together with so many families in the Rain Basera without space for privacy and storage is very hard for them. Considering that, he even said that he thinks they do adjust a lot to the situation with all its insecurities. By saying this, he at least partly acknowledges the mismatch between what is offered to the poor and what they actually need. Yet, he clings on to the underlying assumption that people should be thankful for what they get instead of demanding free services or financial support, as in case of the vocational training, for instance. Further, what I assume to be a crucial point here, is that – as Mr Ram's view exemplifies – the experiences people made with the government and governmental as well as NGO services are often not being considered in the attempt to understand their response to such services and programmes.

Generally, I argue, the government and NGOs offer a huge range of services and provisions to the poor, many of them free of cost, but these often do not fully match with their needs and daily life realities as they ignore the existing inequalities. In fact, they are often difficult to access (as in case of ration cards and the minority money in school), of low quality while demanding high stakes from the families (as in case of government school education) or not exactly matching their needs (such as the vocational training and cloth donations). Hence, the families made the experience that the provisions and schemes offered to them are usually not suited to actually change their overall situation and enable them to escape poverty and overcome their exclusion and marginalisation. Further, examples, such as the way how the government handles the current crisis induced by the covid-19 pandemic (as discussed in the introduction of the thesis) reaffirm how this part of the population is ignored by the government or at least their needs and concerns are only considered in a very insufficient way. Against this backdrop, disappointment, frustration and also distrust in the government by the poor seems to be well justified. How this can be part of a vicious circle, is pointedly formulated by Samaddar:

> "Bereft of attention and help, many migrant workers eye the state government with suspicion and distrust. These negative feelings may keep the workers away from seeking out government services even when these are being offered, frustrating the purpose of the state-run schemes." (Samaddar 2020:137).

Based on my observations, I agree that there is the possibility of such a vicious circle. However, there is also the possibility that the assumption that people do not seek out government services because of negative feelings is taken as an easy explanation for why state-run schemes may not be able to fulfil their purpose, instead of seeking for the problem within the scheme and the governing of it. Doing so would mean to ask what exactly a scheme offers to whom, in which context, by what means and with what kind of underlying presumptions on and expectations from the poor.

Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the governing of the poor in general and the way the MDMS is governed and how people are governed through the scheme, in particular. With this analysis, I tried to find answers to the question to what extent the governing of the MDMS contributes to reducing inequalities.

To better understand the relation between government and those who are governed, I used the Foucauldian idea that governing does not only happen by what we commonly call government, but everybody governs himself (and others) by various means based on certain objectives, beliefs and rationalities. Further, using the method of examining regimes of government suggested by Dean (2010), I analysed the MDMS by looking at four dimensions that Dean identifies as relevant for understanding how regimes of government work.

It is part of the first dimension, *visibility*, that high absenteeism of children from school and poor nutritional status (both visualised in form of figures, reports, etc.) are being identified and viewed as problems that ought to be tackled. The way in which these issues are being approached find concrete shape in the second dimension, the *technical means of governing*, which are, for instance, the guidelines and juridical orders that seek to prescribe and regulate the implementation of the MDMS. Thirdly, I looked at the *knowledge and rationalities*, that guide the governing of the scheme. Different approaches towards poverty and hunger (historical and recent) and scientific developments as well as interests and beliefs of people in responsible positions shape the scheme. This explains, for instance,

a certain social stigma that is still attached to public feeding. Further, I discussed, how the NGO, Akshaya Patra, that follows strict high caste Hindu food norms gains increasing influence on food politics via their prominent engagement in the MDMS. *Identity formation*, as the fourth dimension, points to the fact that every kind of governing assumes and shapes certain capacities, statuses and attributes of those who govern as well as of those who are governed. I focussed here on the parents and in what position they are regarding the space of the government school in general and the MDMS in particular. Clearly, participation and empowerment of mothers – as envisaged in the guidelines of the scheme – do not describe the actual position of the mothers in the schools of my research. These concepts are part of a very prominent approach to development programmes and poverty reduction, though it is, at closer look, highly doubtful whether they are suitable concepts to actually reducing poverty and inequalities. Generally, schemes and provisions for the poor by the government or NGOs tend to ignore the local power relations, the daily life realities of the poor as well as the experiences they made with such programmes. Hence, many initiatives for supporting the poor contribute to keeping them in their places rather than actually enabling them to escape poverty, inequality and marginalisation.

To sum up, the MDMS is governed by welfare, humanitarian, neoliberal and rights based regimes, which are constantly negotiated by various actors involved. Although the scheme has been introduced in the 1990ies, when the neoliberal thought dominated in the development sector on global scale, entailing the idea that the poor need to empower themselves, the basic nature of the MDMS is that of a redistributive welfare programme. However, parallel to constructing the envisaged beneficiaries of the scheme as rather passive "receivers", the guidelines also build to some extent on the principal of local participation and empowerment, which is prominent in neoliberal programmes. The participation in form of supervision of the feeding processes at school by mothers, does not happen in the schools of my research. This kind of engagement does not match the situation and position of mothers (i.e. their identity formation) in the space of the government school. Regarding the reduction of inequalities through the scheme, even parents' participation in the envisaged way does not seem

to be a tool that can effectively challenge inequalities, since participation is usually subject to the prevailing power relations.

Further, a neoliberal influence can also be seen in the extensive engagement of NGOs in governing the scheme (at least in urban areas with centralised kitchens). This allows them to gain much power in governing the scheme and also pursue their own interests, which – in the cases that I looked at – rather recreate inequalities instead of reducing them. The two most obvious points are, that the structural arrangement of Bhojan Foundation's mechanised large-scale kitchen (as discussed in the previous chapter) reproduces gender inequalities and that Akshaya Patra with its ideology propagates high caste Hindu food norms that pronounce caste and religious inequalities rather than reducing them.

A different approach is that of seeing everybody as holder of a right to food, which is most prominently promoted by the Right to Food Campaign. This shaped the way the MDMS functions to some extent through juridical means. As the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009, the National Food Security (NFS) Act of 2013 is an example of how the government has incorporated the introduction of rights to the poor and a rights based language in its biopolitics to some extent. In both cases, however, the hope that this would be a step towards more equality, as it would reduce inequalities in the educational and food sectors, seems to be in vain. In fact, there has not been a fundamental shift from viewing the poor as beneficiaries of welfare – the way they have been historically constructed – to holders of rights that they can effectively claim. Rather, the rights and entitlements seem very weak given that the government has not provided for equitable schools for the poor and actual food security that is accessible to those who need it.

Conclusion

The Indian Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is commonly assessed as an educational and nutritional scheme since its primary aims are to increase enrolment and retention in school and enhance the nutritional situation of the students. In this dissertation, I took inequality as the lens through which I assessed the MDMS. Tracing the extent to which this scheme contributes to reducing inequalities, I looked at different spheres – the space of the school, the NGO-run kitchen, the governing of the scheme and the situation of the poor and marginalised more generally.

I identified a range of possible ways in which the MDMS might contribute to reducing inequalities in these different spheres. Firstly, on the most general level, by attracting children from disadvantaged backgrounds to school and supporting their nutritional situation, the scheme could contribute to better educational and health levels of children from marginalised communities and especially girls, hence reducing inequalities in these spheres. A more direct way in which the scheme is supposed to contribute to reducing inequalities according to the official goals of the MDMS, is by the eating of the meal itself. The idea is that the common lunch in school for children from different socio-economic backgrounds can foster a feeling of equality and by that reduce inequalities among them. This refers especially to caste inequalities as they are particularly tied to restrictions on eating and drinking. Further, the guidelines specify that women from disadvantaged backgrounds should be hired preferentially in the jobs that the MDMS generates. By improving their economic situation, this could also reduce inequalities. For NGOs that cook food under the scheme, there is a provision in the guidelines saying that they should not discriminate on the basis of religion and caste. The same provision also says that the NGOs are not supposed to use the scheme for propagating religious practices. This final point can be read as an attempt to prevent the scheme from being used for recreating religious differences and inequalities.

In the examination of these possible ways by which the MDMS can contribute to reducing inequalities, I found tendencies that possibly challenge inequalities as well as those that reproduce

the same. Firstly, in chapter one I concentrated on whether, by attracting children from disadvantaged backgrounds to school and improving their nutritional situation, the scheme might contribute to better educational and health levels of children from marginalised communities. To understand the situation of the children of my research area and the role that education as well as educational and nutritional policies play in this context, I looked at the daily-life of the urban poor of my research area, the harsh conditions they have to handle and their relation to education. Most of the families, whose children are in the government primary schools of my research, are migrants from rural areas. They live at the margins of the city and their children's childhood is fundamentally shaped by their migration background, the difficult living conditions and economic pressure. Together with their parents, they are negotiating their daily-life between family responsibilities, household chores, work, leisure activities, school education and informal education and other support offered by NGOs.

In this context, the MDMS is a programme that is well appreciated and of much use for many. It is, at the same time, one of several options to get 'free meals' for many children, and for most parents it is not an issue to which they attribute more attention than necessary. As long as it runs in an organised way and the food is alright, it is a substitute for – or in many cases an addition to – home-made food that they pack for school, no more, no less. Other schemes, which entitle students to receive material support for schooling expenses, are much more complicated to access. In fact, the processes for accessing financial support meant for families belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) or Scheduled Tribes (ST) are such (involving bureaucracy and corruption), that the majority of families from the eligible groups do not have access to it. Comparatively, the MDMS reaches its beneficiaries much more reliably than other school based programmes for the support of children from disadvantaged families.

To what extent the scheme functions as an incentive for children to go to school is difficult to assess as there are other programmes as well with the same aim, and a generally increasing importance is attributed to education across society. However, irrespective of the role that the MDMS plays in this process, the trend that increasing numbers of children from poor backgrounds are going to school

is paralleled by a deepening divide between government and private education. Everybody who has the means, sends his child to a private school while many government schools are primarily visited by 'first-generation learners' of very poor families and are not adequately equipped in many cases. Sir Balai School exemplifies this vicious circle more straightforwardly than RP Kulam School and for many students the school fails to help them attain an educational level that could be crucial for shaping a better future. Largely, these developments in the educational sector deepen inequalities in the society – with the current pandemic further dramatically contributing to this trend – with or without MDMS.

I turned to actual lunchtime in school in chapter two, following the idea that the common meal for children from different backgrounds can foster a feeling of equality and by that reduce inequalities among them. Firstly, it is important to note that the idea of the "common meal" that is mentioned in the guidelines is not specified further so that it is left to the schools to interpret it, while the monitoring of the scheme does not include an examination of this aspect.

My analysis focused on how lunchtime is organised, what social dynamics unfold during the time of distributing and eating and how the attitude and behaviour of the school staff challenges as well as reproduces social inequalities. I found that distribution is handled in a relatively routinised way and that during the time of eating the children are left more or less free by the teachers. In both schools the school staff does not guide the sitting arrangement, nor the start and end of the meal. Only in case one class all children are strictly directed to commonly wash their hands before eating in an organised way, a ritual that bears potential to foster a feeling of equality, especially considering the role of dirtiness that I describe below.

On first sight, caste or religious differences do not seem to play an important role in the processes around lunchtime as the children take the food regardless of who distributes it and sit or stand together with their friends who are sometimes from different castes or religious backgrounds. My observations revealed, however, that among students as well as in the attitude of staff towards students, dirtiness is a factor for social exclusion. Children refuse to sit next to allegedly dirty children – while eating or

during class. I argue that this "dirtiness" refers not only to physical aspects, but is also inherently interlinked with class and caste prejudices. Many teachers and especially Mrs Verma, the principal of Sir Balai School, set negative examples for the children with their prejudiced view on the children – categorically called "gande bacce" ("dirty children") by Mrs Verma – and their backgrounds.

In the examination of lunchtime, the aspect of religious inequalities came also up, as I found that they, too, are bridged as well as reinforced in connection with the school meal. Children partly ignore religious differences in their friendships and also while eating, but the menu of the scheme clearly emphasises high caste Hindu food norms, which together with a strong bias against Muslims of Mrs Verma and some teachers of her school reaffirm religious prejudices in Sir Balai School. Generally, with the exception of one contract teacher and an intern in her teachers training who together used the MDMS for concrete hygiene and socialisation training of grade one in Sir Balai School (the common hand washing ritual that I mentioned above), the staff at RP Kulam School takes more care to guide the distribution and eating processes. Among other aspects, I argue that the figure of the principal and her attitude seem to make a significant difference here. In RP Kulam School, with Mrs Sakshi as principal who rejects caste and religious prejudices, the processes run in a more organised way and a friendlier atmosphere. In Sir Balai School, in contrast, the strongly biased perception of Mrs Verma shapes the overall social climate and supports the reproduction of inequalities in school.

Shifting the focus to the production of the MDMS food (in chapter three), I examined the extent to which the employment practices and labour regimes in the food production processes of the MDMS contribute to reducing inequalities. According to Supreme Court orders and official guidelines, women, Dalits, SCs and STs shall be preferentially engaged in the jobs that the MDMS creates. Literature reveals that in case of school level kitchens, generally women are engaged as cooks and helpers, but only in some of the states, which have set their own clear rules on this aspect, preference is given to Dalits in a consistent way, low castes and other disadvantaged groups. Generally, there is a widespread reluctance to engage Dalits under this scheme and numerous cases where cooks who are Dalits are confronted with discrimination and opposition. Moreover, the aim that preferentially

women from disadvantaged backgrounds should be engaged as cooks and helpers seems very weak considering the fact that, according to the guidelines, they are not supposed to be formally employed, but only get an extremely low payment as "honorarium" that grants no social securities.

My observations revealed that Bhojan Foundation, the NGO that prepares the food for the schools of my research in a centralised kitchen, is left relatively free to follow its own employment policies. The NGO and the system of the centralised kitchen in general as well as the social atmosphere at the schools allow for the recruitment of Dalits in the food preparation and distribution processes. Workers from all religions allegedly work together and at least among the 18 women in the kitchen Dalits and non-Dalits also do so. This bears the potential to reduce caste inequalities. On the other hand, at this NGO, employment and staff management are tailored according to the internal priorities of the organisation. The caste identity of the male employees as well as of the drivers (all male) is allegedly not recorded. The women at the NGO, of whom about half are Dalits, work almost exclusively as distributors in the schools, while of the employees who work in the kitchen itself, 95,8 per cent are men. The very strict gender segregation at Bhojan Foundation puts women only in the positions that are regarded as "un-skilled", with very low scope of working hours (in case of the majority of them – the distributors), low payment, high insecurity and no chances for promotion, regardless of their personal abilities.

In these segregated labour regimes, I argue, we see patterns that Charles Tilly identified as mechanisms recreating 'durable inequalities' in most organisations. Historically grown and widely accepted inequalities in society, such as 'Dalit/non-Dalit' and 'female/male' in my case, are reproduced in a system that is geared towards smooth and efficient processes. The scale of production and the semi-automated working processes demand night shifts and flexible working times to some extent. With the labour system that includes shared dormitories for the male staff, the NGO arranged the daily routine in a way that the relevant work in the kitchen is exclusively done by men. This recreates gender stereotypes regarding "male" and "female" work and also reproduces gender inequalities in the larger societal context.

The labour regimes at Bhojan Foundation are one aspect of the governing of the MDMS. In the fourth and final chapter, I focussed on the larger question of how the MDMS is governed and how it governs people within the context of how the poor are governed more generally. To approach this question, I used the Foucauldian concept that governing is not only what the government (and state apparatus) does, but everybody governs himself (and others) by various means based on certain objectives, beliefs and rationalities. Governing poverty and hunger – including schemes such as the MDMS – is part of governing the population, which is conceptualised as biopolitics. Further, I followed Mitchell Dean's (2010) method of examining how regimes of practices work, which builds on Foucault's concept of government. In the case of the MDMS, this entails an analysis of how the different approaches towards poverty and hunger (historical and recent) and scientific developments as well as interests and beliefs of people in responsible positions shape the scheme. In the history of food provision for the poor, for instance, we find explanations for a certain social stigma that is still attached to public feeding.

Generally, the MDMS is governed by welfare, humanitarian, neoliberal and rights based regimes, which are in constant negotiation. The basic nature of the MDMS is that of a redistributive welfare programme, which constructs the beneficiaries to large extent as passive 'receivers'. At the same time, the guidelines also build to some extent on the principal of empowerment, reflecting the neoliberal idea that the poor need to empower themselves by participation, which dominated in the development sector on a global scale in the 1990s. However, I argue that parents' participation in the envisaged way does not seem to be a tool that can effectively challenge inequalities, since participation is also subject to the prevailing power relations. In the schools of my research, the required participation of parents is formally given, as the forms of each day show the signatures of two parents who have allegedly tasted the food. However, in the actual practices, power relations and daily routines in school, parents do not have a position as active as envisaged by the guidelines.

Moreover, the NGOs engaged in governing the scheme (at least in urban areas with centralised kitchens) also pursue their own interests, which – in the cases that I looked at – rather recreate

inequalities instead of reducing them. Two examples for these processes are that the structural arrangement of Bhojan Foundation's mechanised large-scale kitchen reproduces gender inequalities and that the ideology of Akshaya Patra propagates high caste Hindu food norms that reinforce caste and religious inequalities rather than reducing them.

Overall, in the way the MDMS is governed on the more general level as well as in the concrete processes and arrangements of food preparation and eating that I examined, it creates opportunities for the reduction of inequalities to some extent. However, according to my analysis, the MDMS in not a driving force for the reduction of inequalities. Rather, the role of the scheme in contributing to reducing inequalities seems quite small. I found reasons for this on various levels of the governing of the scheme. Since it is a governmental scheme, the role of the government is a crucial one, though it is inseparably entangled with that of other institutions and actors. Generally, the MDMS is one of uncountable schemes and provisions for the poor by the government or NGOs, which tend to ignore the local power relations, the daily life realities of the poor as well as the experiences they made with such programmes. Hence, be it intended or not, many initiatives for supporting the poor contribute to keeping them in their places rather than actually enabling them to escape poverty, inequality and marginalisation. Even the rights based approach that may appear to be a promising way towards achieving greater equality or equity, seems to be incorporated in the biopolitics of the government in a way that makes it not much different from the welfare approach. In fact, assuring rights to people without considering the inequalities that shape their daily-life realities – and with that their actual means to claim entitlements – does not make a huge difference for the people concerned, but rather reproduces the existing inequalities. I, therefore, conclude that the contribution of the MDMS to the reduction of inequalities is quite limited. As the scheme is embedded in the existing social structures and power relations of the society, which largely replicate inequalities, the scheme does so, too.

Further ethnographic research on social aspects of the MDMS in general and on the role of the scheme in reducing and reproducing inequalities in other regional settings in particular, would be highly valuable. Moreover, in view of the difficulties I faced in accessing written information on the

socio-economic situation of many of the communities of my area of focus, further studies on migrant communities in Delhi would be of much help for future research. Empirical evidence on the situation of these migrant groups in their home places, the hardship they face in securing their livelihoods, but also their strategies to cope with the situation, for instance, would fruitfully contribute to studies such as this dissertation. Muslim Dalits, for example, and individual communities thereof, such as Pamarias, face inequalities in many regards – based on religion, caste, region of origin and (in case of women) gender – while they are not officially recognised as Dalits and hence cannot benefit from reservation policies. More empirical evidence documenting their situation would be of much value. Regarding the educational situation of the poor, further in-depth research on the multi-layered causes for low teaching time, low quality of education and low learning levels in government schools could provide relevant insights into the various factors that play a role in whether a child has access to adequate education. In research that examines the role of class, caste and religious prejudices in this context, particular attention could be paid to whether biases based on these factors are hidden in categories of dirtiness and hygiene in the schools and beyond. Overall, my observations and results can be seen as an invitation to further empirical investigation on what education and social policies for the poor actually mean to their daily lives and in what way they contribute to reducing or reproducing inequalities.

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Annex: List of recorded interviews/conversations

School staff

Sir Balai School

Pravesh, teacher of class 5, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, September 2 and September 7, 2015.

Mrs Sharma, teacher of class 4, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, September 8, 2015.

Shika, teacher training intern in class 4, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, September 8 and September 15, 2015.

Romila Jannat, teacher of class 3, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, September 30, 2015.

Shreya, teacher training intern in class 3, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, September 30, 2015.

Vidya, teacher training intern in class 2, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, November 3, 2015.

Menakshi, teacher training intern in class 1, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, December 8, 2015.

Reena Verma, principal, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, November 23 and December 9, 2015.

Amita Das, contract teacher of class 2, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, December 18, 2015.

RP Kulam School

Rijula, teacher of class 2b, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, August 27, 2015.

Shemita, teacher of class 4a, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, September 9, 2015.

Manju, teacher of class 2a, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, October 2, 2015.

Idika, teacher of class 5a, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, October 15, 2015.

Mrs Dalal, teacher of class 3b, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, October 29, 2015.

Rita, teacher of class 1, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, November 2, 2015.

Jyoti, teacher of class 3a, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, November 8, 2015.

Seema Sakshi, principal, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, December 13, 2015.

Soni Varma, teacher of class 5b, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, December 13, 2015.

Mr Anand, special educator, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, December 18, 2015.

MDMS distributors

Sushmita and Rani, MDM distributors, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, October 9, 2015.

Ranchi, MDM distributor, Sir Balai School, New Delhi, October 18, 2015.

Sushmita, MDM distributor, RP Kulam School, New Delhi, November 6, 2015.

School inspector

Krishna Kumar, school inspector, MCD office, New Delhi, May 18, 2016.

NGOs

Amira, mother at RP Kulam School and cook at Khush, Khush, New Delhi, November 3, 2015.

Amira, mother at RP Kulam School and cook at Khush, Khush, New Delhi, February 6, 2016.

Mr Ram, head of SDCY centre, Rain Basera, New Delhi, February 15, 2016.

Mr Thomas, manager at Bhojan Foundation, New Delhi, April 27, 2016

Asha Dash/Das, staff at Bhojan Foundation, New Delhi, April 27, 2016.

Raju Mishra, staff of SDCY and SMC member at RP Kulam School, Rain Basera, New Delhi, May 12, 2016.

Mr Sharma, staff at MCKS Food for the Hungry Foundation, New Delhi, May 13, 2016.

Parents/relatives of schoolchildren

Under the flyover

Nuria and Imran, parents, flyover, New Delhi, February 15, 2016.

Nuria and Imran, parents, flyover, New Delhi, February 16, 2016.

Roshni, mother of children at Khush, flyover, New Delhi, February 17, 2016.

Chandini, mother at Sir Balai School, flyover, New Delhi, February 17, 2016.

Sajini, mother at Sir Balai School, New Delhi, February 18, 2016.

Priyanka, mother at Sir Balai School, flyover, New Delhi, February 19, 2016.

Chandini, mother at Sir Balai School and relatives, flyover, New Delhi, March 17, 2016.

Nuria and Imran, parents, flyover, New Delhi, March 17, 2016.

Soni, relative of children at Sir Balai School, flyover, New Delhi, March 26, 2016.

Rani, relative of children at Sir Balai School, flyover, New Delhi, March 26, 2016.

Nasima, mother, flyover, New Delhi, April 6, 2016.

Several persons, relatives of children at Khush and in different schools, flyover, New Delhi, April 6, 2016.

On footpath

Salina and Yogesh, parents, on footpath, New Delhi, March 24, 2016.

Sonia and Rakesh, parents at RP Kulam School, on footpath, New Delhi, April 11, 2016.

Sir Balai (slum-like settlement)

Nisha. Mother at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai slum-like settlement, New Delhi, February 11, 2016.

Nisha and other parents at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai slum-like settlement, New Delhi, February 11, 2016.

Several parents and relatives at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai slum-like settlement, New Delhi, February 19, 2016.

Sir Balai residential area

Mohit, father at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, December 4, 2015.

Nuresha, mother at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, December 8, 2015.

Rani, mother at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, December 8, 2015.

Geeta, mother at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, December 9, 2015.

Diksha, mother at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, February 5, 2016.

Rijula and Viksham, sister and father at Sir Balai School, Sir Balai residential area, New Delhi, Februrary 11, 2016.

Savitri Camp

Preeti, mother at RP Kulam School, Savitri Camp, New Delhi, December 5, 2015.

Anita, mother at RP Kulam School, Savitri Camp, New Delhi, February 3, 2016.

Gandhi Camp

Alim, father at RP Kulam School, Gandhi Camp, New Delhi, November 2, 2015.

Anuja, mother at RP Kulam School, Gandhi Camp, New Delhi, February 12, 2016.

Several persons, relatives of children at Khush and in different schools, Gandhi Camp, New Delhi, March 29, 2016.

Several relatives of children at Khush, Gandhi Camp, New Delhi, April 5, 2016.

Several persons, relatives of children at Khush, Gandhi Camp, New Delhi, April 13, 2016.

Shayan, SMC member at RP Kulam School, New Delhi, May 7, 2016.

Halima, mother at Sir Balai School, New Delhi, May 19, 2016.

Rain Basera

Anjali, mother at RP Kulam School, Rain Basera, New Delhi, March 23, 2016.

Several relatives of children at RP Kulam School, Rain Basera, New Delhi, March 29, 2016.

Several persons, Rain Basera, New Delhi, March 29, 2016.

Nasima and Jamal, relatives of children at Khush, Rain Basera, New Delhi, April 13, 2016.

Affidavit

(according to regulation 12 of the 2013 examination regulations)

1. My opportunity to take part in this doctoral procedure was not commercially brokered. In particular, I have not sought out the services of any organisation that provides advisors for the completion of dissertations or would fulfil the duties incumbent upon me with respect to examination-related achievements in whole or in part.
2. I hereby declare that I have prepared the dissertation submitted "Just Lunch: An Ethnography of School Meals and Poverty in Delhi" independently and without any unauthorised assistance. I have not accepted any external aid with or without remuneration, nor will I do so in the future. I did not use any aids other than those listed by me. All passages taken either verbatim or in adapted form from other authors are indicated as such.
3. The dissertation I hereby submit has not yet been submitted in the context of any other examination procedure.
4. Furthermore, I am aware that any falsehood regarding the present declaration shall exclude me from admission to the doctoral examination and/or shall later lead to termination of the doctoral procedure or to revocation of the title I may receive.