

# **“The Synchronicity of Purifying City and Social Closure”**

Prashant Bansode\*

© by the author

(\*Associate Professor

Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy,

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune

INDIA.

Fax: (020) 25652579

Tel: (020) 25650287, 25654288/89

Email: prashantsoc@gamil.com

Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The Ideal City: between myth and reality. Representations, policies, contradictions and challenges for tomorrow’s urban life” Urbino (Italy) 27-29 August 2015.

<http://www.rc21.org/en/conferences/urbino2015/>

## **Introduction**

The cleaning—purifying—of cities involves two important activities related to disposal of waste i.e. solid and human waste. These tasks are important from the view point of sanitation and public health in the cities. If these tasks are not performed well then it would lead to chaos in terms of serious implication on health of the citizens. Often in the past there were epidemics due to unhygienic conditions. In cities it is quite common that water and some air borne diseases are due to poor hygiene. The local bodies that are involved in providing proper sanitation in cities often fail due to lack of proper urban planning, inadequacy of services and lack of funds. Especially in Indian cities the ratio of population to persons involved in sanitation is very disproportionate. The lack of civic sense amongst citizens and their own perceptions of waste and management of waste complicate matters to the worst. Therefore, the heavy onus of cleaning—purifying—cities so as to have proper hygiene conditions is on those who are involved in disposal of solid and human waste. The present paper is focused on the scavenging castes those involved in disposal and management of human waste, the implication on their work and living status, the continuing of scavenging as hereditary occupation and exclusion in many ways. The paper majorly draws empirical reflections from Pune city (Maharashtra, India).

## **The Hegemonic Discourse and Praxis of “Purifying” City**

It becomes imperative to understand ‘waste’ as a social construct especially in the context of the hierarchical caste system in India. As waste is conceived ‘impure’ therefore the onus of disposal of waste was imposed on the allegedly ‘impure’ in the society. The social construction of waste and waste management therefore bears the principle of “purity and pollution”. At the bottom of the structure of Indian society there appears a hierarchical arrangement of caste and its—strong—linkages with occupation. Even amongst the allegedly impure there is hierarchy based on the notion of “purity and pollution”. Those associated with the disposal and management of human waste are ranked lowest amongst the allegedly impure. In cities today, *Matangs*, *Mahars*, *Charmakars*, Nomadic Tribes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes are involved in solid waste management and *Valmikis* (Bhangis) and *Mehtars* are largely

involved in disposal and management of human waste.<sup>1</sup> The *Valmikis* and *Mehtars* are ranked lowest amongst the low due to their association with filthy occupation. The social construction of waste and waste management has to be understood as the hegemonic discourse based on the principle of “purity and pollution” in Indian society.

The Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India has by now received comments and suggestions on *Swachha Bharat Mission* on the government internet portal [www.mygov.nic.in](http://www.mygov.nic.in). It has put up the fortnightly progress report of the mission (developments till 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2014). The report has classified the suggestions and comments of the citizens under three broad categories i.e. garbage management in India, cleanliness in public markets and other suggestions. In the category—garbage management in India—there are 29 comments and suggestions that focuses on civic sense of waste management i.e. awareness campaigns, education about garbage management, segregation of dry and wet waste, forming associations for garbage management, improving governments role, introducing modern technology, involvement of private agencies for garbage management, teaching garbage management in schools and rewarding good works. The suggestions on—cleanliness in Public Markets—focuses on the role of government, lack of civic sense of cleanliness amongst rag-pickers, hawkers and in general the lack of awareness about cleanliness in public places. The—other suggestions—focuses on the role of political leaders, citizens at large and students particularly for clean India. Also it focuses on involvement of media for cleanliness drive and involving celebrity like Mr. Amitabh Bachchan.

One often finds on television channels the present Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi, some ministers, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) officials, bureaucrats and citizens taking to cleaning cities. The Bollywood (Indian Film Industry) stars are made ambassador for spreading this initiative. As stated above the famous Bollywood star Mr. Amitabh Bacchan is one of them. Even there are some actresses involved in this cleanliness mission. On Sundays and other public holidays—middle class—citizens

---

<sup>1</sup> The caste and occupation distinction is evident in each city of India as the ex-untouchable castes are also divided hierarchically on the principle of “purity and pollution”. The castes doing these occupations mentioned here belong to Pune city. See, Socio-Economic Survey of Pune City: 2008-09, A Report prepared by B.D. Karve Research and Consultancy Cell, Karve Institute of Social Sciences, Pune, p. 212. Please note that this will be quoted as KISS Report, 2008-09.

come to joints in cities and start the cleaning mission—the dry garbage—who had taken the *Swachata Pledge*. Almost all of these volunteers are supporters of the BJP. Also the associations and organizations who conduct cleanliness drives are connected to BJP—which is in power—the right wing.

As is well known that coalition of middle class and ruling bloc is necessary to build hegemony the discourse on the hygienic and purified urban spaces is therefore ‘hegemonic’. Further, legitimizing the hegemonic discourse comes with the production of ancillary practices necessary to take hold as everyday practices. The *Swachha Bharat Mission* of cleaning cities is a hegemonic discourse and praxis also.

The second phase<sup>2</sup> of Hindutva politics has resurfaced with new strategies and emulation of the so called ‘Gujarat’ model of development at national level led by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi. The policy for economic development is exemplified by the mission of ‘Make in India’, ‘digital India’, ‘smart city’, ‘skill India’ and ‘clean India’. This era is marked by overwhelming emphasis on the foreign investment for the development of “abstract” global market. Since the present prime minister had taken charge he has started mission—especially the economic agreements with foreign countries—for consolidation of globalization of the economy by providing infrastructure and services of international standards. This not only gives the upper middle class in cities to consume the same quality products which their western counterparts consume but also adds to their pride by creating the same ambience for consumption of infrastructure and services. The urban middle class which is the supporter of the Bharatiya Janata Party is also the beneficiary of pro-globalization policies and liberalization. The stronger coalition of middle class and ruling bloc is developed after the resurgence of the BJP in Indian politics.

In the context of above development it is important to address the following few questions. Is the ideal of clean city ‘exclusive’ or ‘inclusive’ of all? What happens to

---

<sup>2</sup> The first phase of Hindutva politics was witnessed post 1990 when it had resurfaced under the leadership of Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, especially post 1995. Satish Deshpande (2003) has pointed out that India has experienced two main developments post 1990 a) the resurgence of Hindutva strategies and b) the pro-globalization economic policies that have followed uniformly since 1990, see, Deshpande Satish (2003) *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, p.72.

those who are involved with purifying cities? Are their issues of existence raised? Does the Hindutva ideological discourse and praxis legitimize the age old notions of caste and “purity and pollution” in cities?

The idea of clean cities of the middle class is their aspirations in comparison with the cities of ‘West’. The anger and frustration of unclean cities is in response to these aspirations that the western countries have [relatively] more clean and hygienic spaces. Indeed this is justified but it is more related to class concerns than real hygiene in cities. The ‘middle class’ dream of clean Indian cities is an ‘exclusive’ idea of city of themselves rather than “inclusive”.<sup>3</sup> The un-hygienic urban spaces are often attributed to the existence of slum dwellers, migrants and the poor living in cities. Further, their ‘exclusion’ and ‘expulsion’ from the ‘core’ of cities is expected.<sup>4</sup>

The discourse on waste and waste management exclusively focuses on the solid waste management in cities and ignores the issues of disposal and human waste management. It does not link the issue of waste to the larger issue of haphazard development of urban centers that lead to the issue of sanitation and un-hygiene in cities. Neither has it raised the issue of providing latrines in slums of cities. The sample survey of slums in cities of Maharashtra has pointed out that about 11 per cent households from notified slums and 30 per cent households from non-notified slums are without any latrine facility i.e. even without common toilets.<sup>5</sup> It also does not focus on the issues of inadequacy of public toilets especially in slums, issues with their management and cleanliness and the overall plight of scavengers involved in the disposal and management of waste. Neither has it raised the issues of rehabilitation of manual scavengers. There is no acknowledgement

---

<sup>3</sup> The suggestions and comments of the citizens i.e. of the middle class about *Swachha Bharat Mission* do not even dwell on the issue of public toilets and sanitation in slum areas. There is no mention of disposal and management of human waste in cities. There is no acknowledgement neither mention that there exists in some or other form ‘manual scavenging’ which is banned by law. The suggestions and comments ignore the issues of disposal and management of human waste and those involved with it and the important aspect of their liberation from dehumanizing occupation (of manual scavengers). See, Suggestions on *Swachha Bharat Mission* up to 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2014, Fortnightly Progress Report, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India

<sup>4</sup> The idea of relocation of the slums so that cities are free of it, is the “exclusive” idea of middle class displacing the slums from the “core” part of the city to the “periphery”; moreover this also involves benefits to the real estate investors and other business purposes by taking over of the area. There is a Slum Rehabilitation Programme by law as the Slum Rehabilitation Act is passed by Government of Maharashtra (India). Though the act was drafted to ensure proper housing, sanitation and other facilities to poor but the contemporary middle class expects the expulsion of the slum dwellers.

<sup>5</sup> See, A Report on “Particulars of Slums”, 65<sup>th</sup> Round of National Sample Survey, 2008-09, Vol. 1, Government of Maharashtra, p.7.

of their exclusion—social closures—with reference to their liberation from the drudgery of scavenging and its dehumanizing effect.

Moreover this dominant discourse conceives that scavenging castes conforms to cleaning the filth of others without any resistance. Ironically the dominant discourse conceives scavenging as a spiritual experience. It is important to refer here the statement of present Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi from his book *Karmayog*:

“I do not believe that they have been doing this job just to sustain their livelihood. Had this been so, they would not have continued with this type of job generation after generation....At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their (Valmiki's) duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and the Gods; that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by Gods; and that this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries. This should have continued generation after generation. It is impossible to believe that their ancestors did not have the choice of adopting any other work or business” (Modi Narendra, pp: 48-49).

Modi justifies the continuation of the scavenging occupation by Valmiki's as it was spiritual for them to clean the excreta of other as their traditional occupation. Since the upper middle class who has taken *Swachata Pledge* are apparently from upper castes and are involved in cleaning—restricted to dry waste i.e. garbage—it is expected then that scavenging castes conform to their traditional occupation. The dominant ideological discourse and the praxis re-invokes the age old caste notions of “purity and pollution” when it comes to “purifying cities” especially in India.

### **The Structural Irony: Purifier as Impure**

The fact that only some caste groups perform scavenging (and still continues to do so) itself explains that this would have been possible through the process of subordinating. The process of subordination has its root in ancient history of India. The Chinese travelers had made observations during the Mauryan dynasty that there existed a class of people named Chandalas i.e. untouchable caste—who were staying outside the villages and were found to be engaged in scavenging activities. In the Mughal era the Muslim rulers bought these caste people for scavenging work as Muslim women were not allowed to defecate in open due to the *Purdha* system. For them the basket privies were designed which were commonly used in India till the colonial rule. These captives when released were not accepted in Hindu religion therefore they converted to Islam. That is why we find that some groups amongst the caste follow Muslim religion and

some Hindu. But both Hindus and Muslims (and largely Indian society) forced on these castes the scavenging occupation.

The imposition of this occupation on these castes was done through the quasi-religious sanctions and coercion. In the colonial records especially in the Bombay Presidency the scavenging castes were referred to as Halalkhors. It was alleged that Halalkhors are the offspring of a Shudra father by a Brahmin widow.<sup>6</sup> As per one Hindu myth the Suparekha (the spiritual leader of *Halalkhors*) was cursed by Sita for want of manners in a feast in which Sita had cooked and invited persons from eighty-four castes. Suparekha was cursed that their followers would lead a lowly life and live on refused food of others thrown on streets. The lowly position in ritual hierarchy was accorded as per this myth on them.<sup>7</sup> Another caste group amongst scavengers is *Mehtars*. As per another Hindu myth one *Mehtar* in the meeting of gods in heaven spat in air and it fell on one god. The punishment given to him was that he would clean the spit for his life. Today, the Mehtars justify the continuation of scavenging as their fate in the light of this myth. The justification of continuation of the occupation came from the religious sphere for the scavenging castes. The embodying of this occupation has to be seen by these castes in this frame of subordination or imposition of occupation.

There is enough support to this as Mehtars challenge their subordination and accept that the filthy occupation was imposed on them. The old-aged persons amongst the Valmikis and Mehtar caste stated that they were Rajputs and were defeated in war. They were asked to clean the excreta in the forts of Rajasthan (the land of Rajputs). Even today they claim their lineage to Rajput clan.<sup>8</sup>

There are more than 15 caste groups involved in scavenging occupation and they trace their origin to Rajasthan, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Various nomenclatures have evolved for them. As stated earlier, the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Poona compiled by James Campbell in 1885 clubbed them under the name Halalkhor. It states that Halalkhor literally means all-eaters; amongst these scavenging castes Bhangis are

---

<sup>6</sup> See, Campbell James, 1885, Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Poona, Government Central Press, Volume XVIII, Part I, p.435

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 436.

<sup>8</sup> The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Poona, 1885, states that these caste groups (especially Halalkhors) claim their lineage to Rajput clan. Though they had migrated to other places they were asked to continue the same occupation as they were regarded as untouchables.

bamboo splitters, Dheds are Gujarati tanners and Mehtras as princes. They are also called as Lal Begis as they are follower of Lal Beg a religious and spiritual leader. In Maharashtra the scavenging castes includes Balmiki (Valmiki), Mehtar, Meghwal, Vankar, Rukhi, Madiga, Mala, Lal-Begi, Halalkhor and Bhangi. There are also other castes like Mang-garodi, Nav- Boudha (very miniscule) that perform scavenging but are not hereditary scavengers. The scavenging castes are not natives of Maharashtra and have migrated from Gujarat to Poona during Peshwa supremacy.<sup>9</sup>

These castes groups continue scavenging as they have no choice to change the occupation. The occupation imposed on them by religious sanctions and coercion has become a hereditary occupation as the stigma of untouchability was attached to it. The paradox of “purifier as impure” was religiously sanctioned and socially justified as a practice. As stated earlier, the embodying of this occupation has to be seen in the frame of subordination as they have internalized this occupation and they continue to do so. This is evident as basket and broom has become venerable objects as a part of the cultural tradition of scavenging caste. The Bombay Presidency Gazetteer, Poona pointed out that...

The scavengers are the men associated with night soil cleaning from morning to eleven. Before starting on their day’s work they have to bow to a basket and broom and on the *Dasara Day* in October they burn frankincense before them and offer flowers, blades of rice and *apta* leaves (p. 436).

This tradition still exists amongst the Valmiki community in Pune.<sup>10</sup> In post colonial India some of the ex-untouchable castes were leaving their hereditary occupation especially the Mahars while the Bhangis-the major scavenging castes continued their hereditary occupation.<sup>11</sup> It was found in Pune (Pune and Poona are interchangeable

---

<sup>9</sup> See, Iravati Karve (1961) has listed Bhangi in the Castes of Gujarat in Maharashtra Land and its People. Also see, Campbell James, 1885, Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Poona, Government Central Press, Volume XVIII, Part I state that the Halalkhors have migrated from Gujarat to Poona during Peshwa supremacy, p. 436.

<sup>10</sup> This was observed while conducting survey for Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Pune. I was in-charge for leading the research team for the Survey for Identifying Existing Dry Latrines in Maharashtra & Socio-economic Status of Scavengers Engaged in Practice of Manual Scavenging funded by the Mahatma Phule Backward Class Development Corporation Ltd., in 2004. The principal investigator for this survey was Dr. H. Beck and Mr. Shaileshkumar Darokar. Hereinafter this will be refereed as TISS survey, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> See, Iravati Karve (1961) states that besides Mahars, Mang and Charmakar the Bhangis were employed in their own hereditary occupation (pp. 105-06).

words) in 1945-52 that Mehtar were doing exclusively their hereditary work i.e. 100 per cent of them as opposed to other castes (even the other ex-untouchable castes). The same situation persists in other *thesils* (blocks) in Pune district. It was found that 100 per cent Bhangis were in municipality as night soil cleaners and no Bhangi was found in villages'.<sup>12</sup> The occupation has become hereditary in such a way that caste becomes synonymous with occupation. For instance, the municipality department of conservancy in fact it had used caste to indicate the service i.e. Bhangi service in Pune<sup>13</sup>. Despite opportunities for mobility in urban areas and employment in other occupations it is observed that break down of caste based occupation of Bhangi community has not changed (Shyam Lal, 1981).

The process of modernization and urbanization has not de-personalized the social relations based on caste rather status inconsistencies often are determined on the basis of caste. Especially the workforce in urban India is compartmentalized on the basis of the caste status. Barbara Harris-White (2004) has argued that caste still shapes the ideologies of work and status in urban India and as a consequence there is not only compartmentalized labour markets but it also enforces class, caste and gender discrimination ( Barbara Harris-White, 2004: 31).

Though the practice of untouchability is abolished by Article 17 of the Constitution of India but caste based discrimination has not been eliminated from the cultural sphere in urban India. The scavenging castes are still looked down upon and are discriminated. Though they are recruited by the local bodied and are protected by law against maltreatment but they face harassment and torture (Barbara Harris-White, 2004; Shyam Lal, 1981; Chandra Ramesh, 1999). When the sanitary workers comes in building for transferring of the human waste in the trucks of municipality they are not given soaps for cleaning hands and also water is not given to them.

The Dalit<sup>14</sup> movement has politically mobilized for dignity, self-respect and status in society. While the Dalit sanitary workers have organized themselves for improving working conditions and wages it has also taken to self-esteem (internal change) by challenging the legitimacy of ritual subordination. The scavenging castes especially the

---

<sup>12</sup> See, Iravati Karve (1961), p, 111.

<sup>13</sup> See, Gadgil 1952.

<sup>14</sup> Dalit mean the 'oppressed class'. This term is self-evolved by the ex-untouchable castes.

Valmikis, Mehtars, etc have developed caste association and raise issues of improving work conditions and demand recognition and dignity. Thus Barbara Harris-White rightly argues that the compartmentalization and struggle over the trades in market have denied and excluded their entry into other trades.

While conducting field work for TISS survey, 2004 I met Mr. Lakhan Solanki the leader of Valmikis in one settlement of Kolhapur city. He told that he had opened a *burgee*<sup>15</sup> stall outside the Kolhapur bus station. Being a good cook his delicious *burgee* was consumed by many travelers. He earned significant profit in the first month. The other street vendors being jealous of his earnings and popularity of the food stall decided to bring down his sale and earnings. They started telling to his customers that he belong to Bhangi caste. As soon as this propaganda was set in there was decline of the customers on his food stall. This brought down his sale and had to unfortunately close down and sell of his belongings bought for setting up the food stall (Field Notes: 2004).

Moreover the structure of caste was seen to be internalized by the scavengers. When our research team [for TISS survey, 2004] visited the house of scavengers for filling up the interview schedule though some of them asked to come in their house but as a part of hospitality they were not offering anything that is made by them. Rather at all houses they offered us cold drinks, opened in front of us with an opener. This they did as they felt that we will not take anything that is prepared at their house. But I had asked to prepare tea at many houses instead of cold drinks though one of the senior researcher and other team members declined to take tea by giving some reasons. Even while conducting field work we experienced the structure of caste based on “purity and pollution” still prevalent today (Field Notes: 2004).

The scavenging castes forges alliance with the Dalit movement for improving work conditions and gaining self-respect and honour for internal reform as well as leaving this degrading and inhuman occupation. Dr. Ambedkar for his life worked for the emancipation of the ex-untouchable castes and also ensured that they get protection and preferential treatment as he was the chairman of the Draft Committee of Constitution of

---

<sup>15</sup> This is a popular street food stall that dishes out hot egg scramble with bread at bus stands, railway stations and other public places.

India. One leader from Pune of the Valmiki community shared that ‘leader like Dr. Ambedkar is needed for the emancipation of scavenging castes’.

### **The Onus & Consequences of Purifying City**

The very first sewage system for Pune was designed in 1928. The sewage system consists of collection networks, conveyance lines, pumping stations and sewage treatment plants (STPs). It was upto the year 1999 the total main sewer length in all zones was approximately 146.83 km in old Pune city limit. In the year 2007-08 the total sewage generated in Pune municipal limit was 451 MLD out of which 305 MLD was treated (68 per cent) by 5 sewage treatment plants and was discharged into Mula and Mutha rivers. Following is the sanitary statistics of Pune city:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Unit</b>
Total Sewage collection of Pune City	567 MLD
a) Residential sector	510.30 MLD
b) Commercial sector	56.70 MLD
Total area covered by sewage collection system	199.33 km
Number of sewage treatment plants and total capacity	7/ 382 MLD
Number of pumping stations and total capacity	8/325 MLD
Total sewage chambers	78361
Total sewage collection system serves	27.36 lakh (million) population
Total population of Pune as per Census, 2011	31 lakh (million)
Approximately 12 per cent of population is not covered under the sewage system	

Source: Socio-Economic Survey of Pune City: 2008-09, A Report prepared by B.D. Karve Research and Consultancy Cell, Karve Institute of Social Sciences, Pune, p. 96. Please note that this will be quoted as KISS Report, 2008-09.

As per the KISS Report, 2008-09 though it was found that approximately 58 per cent of the surveyed households had attached toilets but 40 per cent households were depended upon common toilets and the rest two per cent had no toilet facilities. But importantly this report also found that 78 per cent households did not have sufficient toilet facility while just 20 per cent had sufficient toilet facility. The study stated that in Pune city these common toilets are insufficient and the ratio of toilet seats and numbers of people using it is in inverse proportion. The insufficiency of toilets and using of common toilets have negative implications. It pushes people to go for open defecation. As a matter of fact it is observed that approximately 65 per cent of India’s population defecates in open (both in urban and rural areas). But this proportion is less in urban

areas. For instance, in Maharashtra, as per Census of India 2011, 12 per cent of urban households defecate in open and eight per cent use public or shared toilets. The figure of open defecation rise as the Census of India 2011 reported that open defecation in towns and cities (population of less than 1 lakh) is around 22 per cent.

The common toilet though found in large numbers in slums, *chawls* and *wadas* of Pune are unclean and unhygienic. There is no one to take the onus of cleaning it. It is also important to know here that the TISS Report, 2005<sup>16</sup> found that majority i.e. 47 per cent of scavengers' households were not having toilet facilities (both bathroom and latrine).

As far as the human waste removal and disposal is concerned it depicts extremely poor standards. Children defecate on road sides, open areas or along railway lines. Women prefer to go on nearby hills early in morning or late in the night to avoid embarrassment (KISS report p. 103). The report of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai on manual scavengers in Maharashtra has identified and highlighted the scavenging activities and places of their work—besides the water borne latrines—as a) *Topli Sandas/Khuddi Sandas*—this means a place for defecation having tin/wooden box for collection of human excreta, such is cleaned in public and private latrines with the help of a broom and a tin plate. This is then piled into buckets and carried on head/shoulder for disposal at a distant place and b) Dry latrine—means a latrine other than a water seal latrine....the study reported that 30 per cent (of their sample) were involved in cleaning of night soil at open defecation places and 25 per cent at open gutters/drains while 43 per cent were working at water borne latrines. See the following Table 2.

The proportion of people depending on one toilet is observed to be large and therefore people defecate in open. The large proportion of open defecation, open gutters/drains and insanitary latrines not only depicts poor standards of human waste removal but it becomes inhuman and undignified service. Therefore, this situation creates more room for prevalence of manual scavenging.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Beck H and S Darokar, 2005, Report of the Survey of Conducted for Identifying Existing Dry Latrines in Maharashtra & Socio-economic Status of Scavengers Engaged in the Practice of Manual Scavenging, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, submitted to Mahatma Phule Backward Class Development Corporation Ltd.

<sup>17</sup> Manual scavenging is banned as per the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. The act defines manual scavenger as “a person engaged or employed by an individual or a local community or public or private agency for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing

**Table 2: Zone Wise distribution of the place of work of scavengers (in per cent)**

Place of work	Zone						Total
	Konkan	Nasik	Pune	Aurangabad	Amravati	Nagpur	
Dry	0	1	0	49	5	0	55
Latrines/ <i>Topli Sandas</i>	0	1.8	0	89.09	9.09	0	100
	0	0.2	0	4.5	0.5	0	0.9
Open defecation	293	205	279	271	78	113	1239
	23.6	16.5	22.5	21.9	6.3	9.1	100
	25.9	45.7	38	34.7	14.1	22.6	29.8
Open Gutters/drains	254	37	107	143	238	246	1025
	24.8	3.6	10.4	14	23.2	24	100
	22.4	8.2	14.6	18.3	42.9	49.1	24.7
Water borne latrines	542	199	346	336	237	140	1800
	30.1	11.1	19.2	18.7	13.2	7.8	100
	47.9	44.3	47.1	43	42.7	27.9	43.4
Manholes	43	7	2	9	0	2	63
	68.3	11.1	3.2	14.3	0	3.2	100
	3.8	1.6	0.3	1.2	0	0.4	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1132</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>4182</b>
	<b>27.1</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>100</b>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: TISS Report, 2005, p.37.

Manual scavenging therefore persists in new forms though it is banned by law. The presence of manual scavenging is also acknowledged by the Census of India, 2011 and this has evoked the controversy of definition of manual scavenging between census officials and local authorities. The following table gives the insanitary statistics as manual scavenging still persists.

<b>Table 3: Insanitary statistics</b>	
Total Insanitary latrines in 256 cities of Maharashtra	171688
The Total number of latrines where manual scavenging takes place in Maharashtra	4996
Number of latrines cleaned manually in Pune Municipal Corporation limit	94
Number of latrines cleaned manually in Pune Cantonment limit	16
Number of latrines cleaned manually in Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation limit	223
The number of manual scavengers in Mumbai was 1137 which was highest in Maharashtra followed by Akot with 530 manual scavengers.	

Source: State Government Resolution and Census 2011

---

or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta, in an insanitary latrine or in open drain or pit". Though this definition broadly encompasses the prevailing forms of manual scavenging but there are many other instances where there is frequent contact of hand or human body that were excluded from the definition of this act.

After the Census of India 2011 figures were available the authorities of the local bodies denied the existing of manual scavenging. The authorities said that the definition of Census officials was ambiguous and therefore not correct. The civic bodies started conducting studies for identifying the practice of manual scavenging in cities. But the problem of persisting manual scavenging is much more than these figures suggest. It is a form of social exclusion.<sup>18</sup> Wherever there are dry latrines manual scavenging persists. The lack of water in public toilets leads to manual scavenging. Defecation along the railway lines leads to manual scavenging as it has to be lifted. The practice of collection of *tikaris*— i.e. collection of excreta from footpath and open spaces—adds to manual scavenging. As in public toilets old people cannot sit in latrines and therefore they stand while defecating, therefore, there is night soil to be cleaned in the morning from the walls. Entering into manhole for clearing blockages of the lines that carry human waste often meant a dip in it (though it causes death due to suffocation by poisonous gases) did not come under the purview of this act. After a lot of assertions and protest by Dalit groups and leaders the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavenger and Their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013 was passed as law to cover cleaning of excreta from railway tracks and sanitary workers are forced to enter the sewer lines and wade in human excreta as manual scavenging practices.<sup>19</sup>

Though there are lots of situations that still come under the category of “manual scavenging” but do the scavengers have a choice to change their occupation willingly or otherwise is a big question. As per the TISS Report, 2005 it was found that 96.2 per cent considered themselves as non-liberated and just 3.8 per cent felt they were

---

<sup>18</sup> See, Rajeev Kumar Singh and Ziyauddin, 2009, Manual Scavenging as Social Exclusion: A Case Study, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV NOs 26 & 27, pp. 521-23.

<sup>19</sup> As per the guidelines of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India for Survey on Manual Scavengers in statutory towns issued in February 2013 manual scavenger means “a person engaged or employed by an individual or a local community or public or private agency, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta, in an insanitary latrine or in open drain or pit into which human excreta from insanitary latrines is disposed of, or on a railway track, before the excreta is fully decomposed, and the expression “manual scavenging” shall be interpreted accordingly”. See further the explanation given and also the definition of ‘insanitary latrine’.

liberated.<sup>20</sup> The TISS Report, 2005 stated that it was rare to find the liberated scavengers in real sense.

### **The [unfair] inclusion and exclusion**

The dismantling of the direct touch with the human waste by introducing modern technologies for collection and disposal would not only make human conditions of work but would enhance the self-esteem of scavengers. The colonial rule made the public latrines in Pune city after 1925 of flushing type and hence they were not served by the Bhangis.<sup>21</sup> Though, in limited way the dismantling of direct touch with human waste was attempted in colonial era. In post independent India also there were attempts by State and local bodies to provide better working conditions of work and securities but as discussed in the earlier section limited modernization has taken place with less impact.

Nevertheless, there have been successive committees and efforts by the State to eliminate manual scavenging and rehabilitating them and enhance the status of scavenging communities. The V.N. Barve Committee in 1949 suggested that there should be abolition of removal of night soil by hand and the hours of work would vary from two to five. It recommended for two half day leaves besides weekly off and two sets of cloths to be given to workers. The N.R. Malkani Committee in 1957 reiterated the recommendations of Barve Committee. The National Commission on Labour in 1966 strongly recommended that an inspectorate be established for implementation of legislation and extension of Provident Fund and Employees' State Insurance Act to scavengers and sweepers. Again the recommendation of the N.R Malkani Committee in 1966 are important as it stated that the *Bhangi Kashta Mukti* and *Bhangi Mukti* programmes should be started to replace the basket privies to sanitary latrines. As per this programme the safety measures were to be provided to scavengers i.e. gloves, gum boots, scrapers, bucket with trolleys and receptacles. The B.V. Lad Committee in 1973 recommended improving the working conditions of the scavengers. The Mehtar Committee appointed in 1983 reiterated the recommendations of Lad committee. The task force of the Planning Commission in 1989 suggested to abolish scavenging and

---

<sup>20</sup> The TISS study has defined the liberated scavenger as one who comprehends manual scavenging as most menial and dehumanizing occupation and abandons it being conscious of it or consider other occupation as substitute for it.

<sup>21</sup> See, Gadgil, 1952, p.259.

rehabilitation of scavengers. On the basis of this the “National Scheme of Liberation of Scavengers and their Dependents” was framed by Government of India in 1992. The targets were set for rehabilitating the scavengers.

Ramesh Chandra (1999) points out that this scheme envisages two integral components; a) restructure the mechanism of disposing night soil by introducing water borne latrines and b) rehabilitation of scavengers by giving them training into other trades. For the former he categorized as “hardcore” and for the later “softcore”. The “hardcore” of the scheme was to convert the dry latrines into water borne latrines; this was the duty of ministry of urban development. The “softcore” comprised of three important things as Chandra (1999) suggests a) the identification of scavengers and their dependents, b) survey of aptitude of scavengers for training into alternative trades and jobs and c) providing financial assistance to pursue these trades or jobs. Chandra (1999) further points out that the work of rehabilitation has been either slow or negligent especially in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan as just 3.15 per cent of scavengers were given training and just 11 per cent were rehabilitated in Maharashtra. Chandra (1999) states it is disheartening to note the dismal performance in “hardcore” and “softcore” of the scheme.

The scavengers are found to be doing work in filthy conditions with lack of security to employment and lack of social security. They are the excluded sections in city as they live in low income households, continue hereditary occupation, have low educational status—very few are graduates—as there are problem with availing the benefits of reservation, they have very poor health status—as they are susceptible to viral and other infections especially tuberculosis and women are more affected by working conditions as they get back ache and tuberculosis.<sup>22</sup> Vivek (2000) argues with experience from Mumbai city that the scavengers are neglected from security of employment, get poor wages and face health hazards.

It is known that the process of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) in India started since 1991 was coupled with the withdrawal of the state for security of employment. The secured employment in local bodies was curtailed and the process of

---

<sup>22</sup> See for further details the section on socio-economic conditions of scavengers in Maharashtra of the TISS report 2005.

contracting and hiring services in this sector was continued since 1991. The scheme of Voluntary Retirement Scheme was encouraged to scavengers and their son and daughter were recruited on the same post but without any security. But the civic bodies continued the residential quarters to the son or daughter recruited as they knew that nobody will take up this work. In general the social security to workers was in question.<sup>23</sup>

The civic bodies have adopted to encourage construction and maintenance of public toilets on PPP model. It was the initiatives of sociologist Bindeshwar Pathak that created Sulabh International in 1970 that provided low cost, safe sanitation technology. This was taken so as to liberate the scavengers. It is claimed that by 2006 this movement has liberated 60, 000 scavengers and installed 1.4 million households and maintained 6500 public pay-per-use toilets. The movement by NGOs and the market to liberate the scavengers though important but this has led to insecure employment.

The KISS Report, 2008-09 stated that under the PPP model sanitation units, notably urinals, western commodes, and bath units are constructed with the adequate supply of water and electricity facility by the local body or any other agency. It entails that the slum dwellers will be entrusted the job of maintaining the toilet block in a clean condition against a monthly salary of Rs. 1500-2000. In some cases the residential quarters for the person is built in the first floor of the toilet block. The major concern raised by them was that they are not clean. The hiring of services of scavengers for this job and make them stay on the top of these toilets are making the conditions of work and living worse. They just get maximum Rs. 2000/- per month for this service. There is no security of employment. The market and NGO initiatives have rather resulted in exclusion of scavengers with reference to secure employment and living conditions.

It is a profitable enterprise for those who run these toilets. Apparently the owners/contactors of these public pay-per-use toilets are upper caste. For instance, in Kolhapur the tenders in municipality for construction and running of the *sulabh sauchalayas* were from the dominant caste—Maratha. Moreover, in slums (of Pune) the contradiction is quite clear—*sulabh sauchalayas* as “bungalows” in the heart of slums. The slum dwellers said that they go to answer the nature’s call in morning in the

---

<sup>23</sup> See, P.S. Vivek, 2000, Scavengers: Mumbai’s Neglected Workers, *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 3722-3724.

“bungalows”. Those employed on these “bungalows” are the scavenging community youths without any bargaining power for demanding fair wage.

The women of scavenging community are bad sufferers in such scenario. Almost 60 per cent of women are in private sector employment are recruited on daily wage basis and amongst the *Safai Karmacharis* 90 per cent are women belonging to scavenging communities. Most of the work of cleaning cities is now on daily basis with lack of security of employment.

Though there are attempts taken by members of these communities but they are not absorbed in other than scavenging occupation. Especially women do not get job as domestic workers due to caste prejudice. This is because the scavengers are expected to work as per the caste status. The empirical study of Rajeev Kumar Singh and Ziyauddin (2009) found that some scavengers have tried to change their occupation but they have to return to the same occupation as they faced social boycott and there was hardly any government support (Rajeev Kumar Singh and Ziyauddin, 2009, p. 523). Scavengers have to face discrimination and ignominies of various types in urban settings.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of “clean India” with the contemporary initiatives under the *Swacha Bharat Mission* is a hegemonic discourse and praxis. It not only re-invokes but justifies the caste notions of “purity and pollution” so that scavengers conform to cleaning toilets and remain contained with wages and the lifestyles by continuing their hereditary occupation. The ideal of clean city is “exclusive” of the urban middle class and “excludes” the scavengers in variety of ways. There is no right to live in city with dignity and dignified work. One of the major problem with purifying city is that those involved in it are not only accorded low status but the old notions of “impurity” (if not of untouchability) are still attached to it as no one take this occupation and this becomes the hereditary occupation of few caste groups. Since colonial time initiatives were taken to dismantle the touch of hand to human waste when it comes to disposal of it but hardly it has created any significant positive impact even in contemporary time (though there is limited change). Though there is introduction of modern and sophisticated technology in sanitation but they are restricted to few cities. The place of work of scavengers still today depicts very poor standards as majority of India defecates into

open. The public/common toilets in cities are insufficient and therefore people are pushed for open defecation. Not only the public toilets are insufficient but they are unhygienic. As a consequence not only scavengers have to continue their hereditary occupation but eventually get into the trap of becoming as “manual scavenger”. This has taken place in the historical backdrop of initiatives taken by the state to abolish manual scavenging and rehabilitating the scavengers. It is imperative for the liberation of scavengers that dry latrines to be converted to water borne latrines but nothing is achieved substantially as the insanitary statistics suggests. Still there is prevalence of open defecation (in large proportion), open drains and gutters and taking dip in the manhole. Another important aspect is rehabilitation of scavengers that has shown no satisfactory results, especially in Maharashtra. Scavengers in cities therefore have to face various forms of social closures. Post privatization and liberalization they are excluded from security of employment as hiring on daily basis with low payment is prevalent. Women are more suffers in this scenario. There is serious hazard with reference to health of scavengers (especially on women). This raises the larger question of *social justice in the city*.

As far as the recent developments in politics and urban economy is concerned the “synchronicity of purifying city and social closure” would persist. The renewed Hindutva strategy re-invokes the subordinate positions of scavengers by glorifying scavenging as spiritual experience. However, caste associations of Valmikis, Mehtras, Lal Begis and others have to align themselves with Dalit movement for evolving strategies for their emancipation. The real strategy would be to create sources for alternative employment opportunities and mobilizing for a spiritual movement for internal change or reform to gain self-esteem so that they abandon scavenging.

#### **References:**

Bandyppadhyay, S, 2004, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony*, Sage Publications, New Delhi

Barbara Harris-White, 2004, *India Working, Essays on Economy and Society*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi

Chatterjee Mary, 1974, Mobilisation of Urban Sweepers, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 30, 1974

D.R. Gadgil, 1952, *Poona: A Socio-Economic Survey*, Part II, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics Publications, Pune

J. H. Hutton, 1947, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Functions and Origins*, The Macmillan Co. Cambridge

Mari Marcel Thekaekara, 2003, *Endless Filth: The Saga of the Bhangis*, Zed books, London and New York.

Omvedt Gail, 1994, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, Sage Publications, New Delhi

Patil Sharad, 1979, Dialectics of Caste and Class Conflict, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XIV Nos. 7 & 8

Prabharar Kothandaram & Vidya Vishwanathan, 2007, *Sulabh International: A Movement to Liberate Scavengers by Implementing Low-Cost, Safe Sanitation System*, Growing Inclusive Markets, UNDP.

Suvira Jaiswal, 1998, *Caste: Origin, Functions and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar Publications, Delhi