



India WASH Forum

WASH News and Policy Update

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India WASH Forum News

India WASH Forum stands for an independent credible voice in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector.

WASH News and Policy Update is a bi-monthly e newsletter of the India WASH Forum. It is an open platform for engagement on contemporary issues.

We are conscious of the need to engage with and understand other larger debates in the social and economic development scenario, of which drinking water and sanitation is a part. Hence we include in our news analysis and policy updates, events and developments from other related development fields, besides the WASH sector.

The Times Magazine has named The Protestor” as the Year 2011 Person of the Year, in recognition of the pro democracy protests against governments the world over. We have seen the “Yes we Can” slogan of 2008 got defined in the USA as “We are the 99%”. Social media that was seen as the medium for protests in the third world, was also used extensively in the restricted media settings of USA and some European countries. The mass peaceful protests primarily by youth, are a respectable form of solidarity with each other challenging the status quo. Unlike the suicide deaths of farmers in India, or the youth suicides in Japan, that are generated with mass despondency, the youth protests offer new hope. It is reminiscent of the 1968 student protests in France where in the face of all odds the students came together and coined their slogan for changing the world – Be Practical, Do the Impossible”. We have much to learn from mass movements and uprisings in history and the creative methods used in the current mass protests (including the use of human microphones where using loudspeakers was banned) both as a measure of solidarity, as well as getting your ideas conveyed when faced with mounting censorship and control by the state.

Social exclusion in sanitation sector in India, has almost always bypassed the issue of manual scavenging. We bring together a collection of Reports and Papers on this subject compiled by the Network Jivika jivika@yahogroups.com. The compilation provides a lead article in the form of a Book Review of sanitation success in India in the flagship Nirmal Gram Puraskar. The book review is done from the viewpoint of analysis of the discourse of mainstream understanding of sanitation, its social construct and public policy making.

“The title of the book Squatting with Dignity, contradicts itself. It implies that people can squat with dignity. All through the book, the author himself says that before the NGP award was introduced by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the sanitation campaign could not move forward. It is true people were not comfortable with open defecation but certainly it was not a question of their dignity, as the author presents. Then whose “dignity” is it?

It appears, from a reading of the book, that the dignity at stake is that of the “nation”, which remains the silent presence throughout the book.”

Government of India launched the National School Sanitation Initiative recently. The initiative is a joint effort of the Ministries of Urban Development and Human resource Development, Central Board of Secondary Education and GIZ. Under the National School Sanitation Initiative it would be made compulsory for the schools to focus on the practical aspects of sanitation in its right perspective, laying emphasis on Personal Hygiene, Proper Sanitation, Clean Toilet Habits, Safe Drinking Water, Separate Toilets for Girl Child, Disposal of Waste Water, Human Excreta Disposal/Toilets, Waste Water Recycling,



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Waterless Urinals, Waste Segregation, and Compositing, Food Hygiene and Creation, and Conservation of Green Spaces. It aims to set in place a self regulatory benchmarking process where schools will assess the status of sanitation and water facilities in their schools and the assessment will generate a scoring for each school. The schools will have to display this score and will have the opportunity to improve it. A website www.schoolsanitation.com has been set up where schools are being asked to register.

In December 2011, End Water Poverty (EWP) joined forces with Freshwater Action Network (FAN Global) for the first time, to facilitate an international advocacy planning meeting for water and sanitation activists. Campaigners from Africa, Europe, the US, South Asia, Central and South America and Mexico came together to consider how planning around shared objectives could enable us all to understand each other's plans and strengthen those opportunities where we come together to influence water and sanitation policy towards 2015. The meeting was a huge success - productive, hard work and also a great deal of fun! There were over 40 participants from 18 countries giving us a truly global perspective to the planning process. Added to the EWP and FAN members were international partner WSSCC and INGO supporters including WaterAid, Tearfund, World Vision and Oxfam. The meeting begun with some great 'speed presentations' about water and sanitation advocacy in nine countries from across the globe which were filmed and can be seen [here](#).

Four Advocacy Themes. Most of the planning during the meeting was done in four parallel groups, based on the strategic advocacy aims of EWP and FAN Global. These were: the human right to water and sanitation, climate change and IWRM, finance and accountability, and health and other sectors. Each team worked through their collective aims, campaign targets, potential activities and allies, and considered the tactics and resources needed for a global advocacy action plan, linking local and global processes and campaigning opportunities. Once presented back to the whole group, the teams conducted their first task team meetings and, as from now, are working on coordinating the delivery of these plans during the next year, supported by the Global Secretariats of Freshwater Action Network and End Water Poverty.

The Mumbai Global Sanitation Forum organised by the WSSCC in October 2011, was a great success in bringing together a range of organisations and individuals together from around the globe to discuss sanitation and hygiene issues. The Forum provided a platform for Deliberations and Networking on diverse issues ranging from – Leadership in Scaling Up Sanitation, Social Marketing and Behaviour Change, Equity and Inclusion, among others.

The India Urban Conference organized by Janagraha, IIHS, Arghyam and Yale University in Nov 2011 in Mysore, provided a setting for a large national conference on diverse Urban Issues. The conference was organized along thematic as well as cross cutting sessions. The thematic sessions included, Health, Education, Water and Sanitation and Social Security. Cross cutting themes included Governance, Unorganised Sector, Culture and Art, City Planning, etc.

The Global Sanitation Fund in India has now reached the implementation stage. We bring out a brief note by the implementing agency, Natural resources Management Consultants(NRMC), on the focus of GSF in India and an analysis of the current sanitation situation in the states of Jharkhand and Assam.

India's income inequality has doubled in 20 years

NEW DELHI: Inequality in earnings has doubled in India over the last two decades, making it the worst performer on this count of all emerging economies. The top 10% of wage earners now make 12 times more than the bottom 10%, up from a ratio of six in the 1990s.

Moreover, wages are not smoothly spread out even through the middle of the distribution. The top 10% of earners make almost five times more than the median 10%, but this median 10% makes just 0.4 times more than the bottom 10%.

"The main driver has been an increase in wage inequality between regular wage earners-contractual employees hired over a period of time," says the Organisation for [Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (OECD) in a new report on inequality in the developed world and emerging economies. "By contrast, inequality in the casual wage sector-workers employed on a day-to-day basis-has remained more stable," the report said.

South Africa is the only emerging economy with worse earnings inequality, but it has halved this number since the last decade. "The combination of marked spatial divides, persistently high shares of informal sector jobs and disparities in access to education accounts for much of the widespread variation in earnings from work in the EEs," the report said.

Wage inequality has driven more general income inequality in the country. India has got more unequal over the last two decades-India's Gini coefficient, the official measure of income inequality, has gone from 0.32 to 0.38, with 0 being the ideal score. In the early 1990s, income inequality in India was close to that of developed countries; however, its performance on inequality has diverged greatly since then, bringing it closer to China on inequality than the developed world.

There is evidence of growing concentration of wealth among the elite. The consumption of the top 20% of households grew at almost 3% per year in the 2000s as compared to 2% in the 1990s, while the growth in consumption of the bottom 20% of households remained unchanged at 1% per year.

In comparison, the income of the bottom 20% of households in China grew at double the rate in the 2000s as compared to the 1990s, while the increase for the top 20% of households was much slower. In Brazil, household incomes have been growing faster among the poorest households than among the richest for the last two decades.

Of all the emerging economies, India has by far the highest



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proportion of informal employment, by any national or international measure. "In India...informal employment includes a disproportionate number of women, home-based workers, street sellers and workers sub-contracted by firms in the formal sector," the [OECD](#) report said. India spends less than 5% of its GDP on social protection schemes as compared to Brazil's more than 15%. Its tax revenue as a proportion of GDP is under 20%-the lowest of all emerging economies, and just half that of developed countries.

The Planning Commission Approach Paper for the 12th Five Year Plan is now released and is titled as "Faster Sustainable and More Equitable Growth".

The section on water resources makes a case for water pollution that is often missed in the over emphasized discourse on sanitation these days. "Even if we succeed in bringing about a major rationalisation of water prices, by itself, it will not lead to optimal use. For this, a rational pricing must be accompanied by regulatory measures to ration water to different agricultural users, and stronger measures to discourage pollution. Contamination of drinking water is the principal cause of health disorders, particularly amongst children. It is estimated that up to 13% of drinking water in rural areas contains chemical contaminants including fertilizer run-offs (particularly urea and its decomposition products)."

On sanitation, the Approach Paper admits failure of the NGP driven success story of sanitation of the early 2000s. It also admits failure of the awareness generation IEC programme. Unfortunately, the Approach Paper offers no way forward on awareness generation for behaviour change. In the IWF News and Policy Update # 20, we had included the recommendations made to the Planning Commission by the Working Group – on what needs to be done to improve sanitation behaviour change as a systemic intervention.

"The Nirmal Gram Puraskars (NGPs) spurred competition among PRIs to hasten toilet construction, but it does not appear to have ensured sustained use. A 2008 study covering 162 NGP Gram Panchayats in six States shows that only 4% of GPs were genuinely open defecation free. In 32% of the GPs, more than 40% of the people are not using the toilets built for them under TSC. The problem arises because TSC is becoming increasingly state-led and target-driven and often implemented without any conscious effort to create required awareness at the community level. The programme is often driven by a desire to achieve fund utilisation and not as an exercise organically linked to awareness creation and demand generation processes. Top-down IEC strategies of posters and brochures with no individual contact have proven to be ineffective. Great effort is required to sustain the gains of the adoption phase to ensure that slip-backs do not occur."

Global Sanitation Fund in India and Sanitation in Jharkhand and Assam: NRMC(the Executive Agency for the Global Sanitation Fund India)

The Global Sanitation Fund has selected India as part of the Country Programmes portfolio to implement a US\$ 5 million fund aimed towards Promoting Sustainable Sanitation in Rural India, with special focus in the states of Assam and Jharkhand. The programme seeks to respond to fundamental challenges in the Indian Rural Sanitation Sector. In this respect it is consistent with the core principles espoused by the Government of India (GoI), the GSF and the institutional and funding arrangements prevalent in the Sector and, aims at influencing long-term, sustainable change.

The Global Sanitation Fund in India will support community-level interventions aimed to enabling access and effective use of improved sanitation facilities and hygiene promotion at scale in select locations in Assam and Jharkhand. The Country Programme Proposal identifies three objectives:

1. To contribute to sustainable sanitation use and hygiene behaviour at scale
2. To develop capacity for sustainable promotion of improved sanitation and hygiene
3. To promote a culture of continuous learning among all stakeholders.

The GSF's objectives are mutually reinforcing, and will be achieved through demand-driven approaches that emphasize high quality awareness creation, demand generation and capacity building efforts and integrate elements of sanitation marketing and effective use of media. In parallel the Programme will also:

(a) support institutional strengthening and capacity building at the State, District and Sub-district levels in Assam and Jharkhand to enable them to better respond to communication and capacity development needs, and scale-up successful approaches, State-wide;

(b) Realize the potential of partnerships with Civil Society, various Government departments and the Private sector;

(c) Promote multi-stakeholder coalition engagement and learning on a national canvas, with a special focus on Assam and Jharkhand, through support for research, advocacy and networking efforts and learning events.

The proposed Programme, given the support it envisages for demand-driven community-level approaches aimed at improved sanitation coverage and hygiene practices and the emphasis placed on institutional strengthening, capacity building, multi-stakeholder engagement and learning, is consistent with the strategic underpinnings of the TSC. GSF, along with TSC, will be implemented in eight districts in each state of which four will be taken up for complete saturation and in another four districts one identified block will be taken for implementation. GSF along with Governments of Assam and Jharkhand have selected the following districts and blocks for intervention and support:

Jharkhand and Assam with a combined population of more than 64 million people accounts for a major portion of population of India. By most health, education and other key indicators, large parts of Assam and Jharkhand are not only among the most backward regions in India but also in the world.

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Table 1 Demographic details of Assam and Jharkhand

State	Census Year	Persons	Male	Female
Jharkhand	2011	32,966,238	16,931,688	16,034,550
Assam	2011	31,169,272	15,954,927	15,214,345

By current trends these states are projected to fall well behind on most of the MDG targets undermining national performance. Lack of education, poor health and insufficient access to drinking water and sanitation are closely associated with and perpetuated by high levels of poverty. Differences amongst social groups are acute and have been acute and continue to be so. Access to sanitation and public health indicators are far below the national average and reveal large differences in health outcomes across gender, social and economic groupings. While access has increased, service quality has declined, and continued population growth makes it difficult to sustain current access rates. Institutional reform and strengthening is needed, in addition to the change in current focus on technical issues.

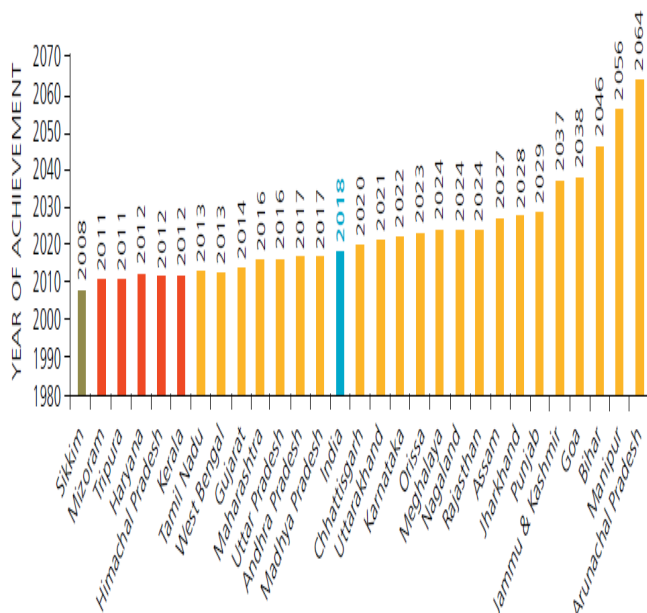


Figure 1 States achieving universal coverage (IHL) year wise

The water and sanitation sector in the states are characterised by largely non-responsive government service delivery agencies, weak local government and widespread corruption. A large proportion of the population remain excluded from their water and sanitation rights and entitlements. The poor and marginalised suffer most and it is these groups that the EA and Sub Grantees seek to target.

The Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) of the Government of India has been in operation for over a decade (1999 to date), and the Nirmal Gram Puraskar, a fiscal incentive programme that rewards local governments (Green Panchayats) that achieve total sanitation, has completed five years (2005 to date). The country has made significant progress in terms of coverage and outcomes. The coverage has increased significantly from 21 per cent in 2001 (Census, 2001) to more than 65 per cent, according to the TSC online monitoring system. The number of Gram Panchayats which have won the Nirmal Gram Puraskar for achieving total sanitation has also increased to more than 22,000 but states of Assam and Jharkhand failed to keep pace with the national progress.

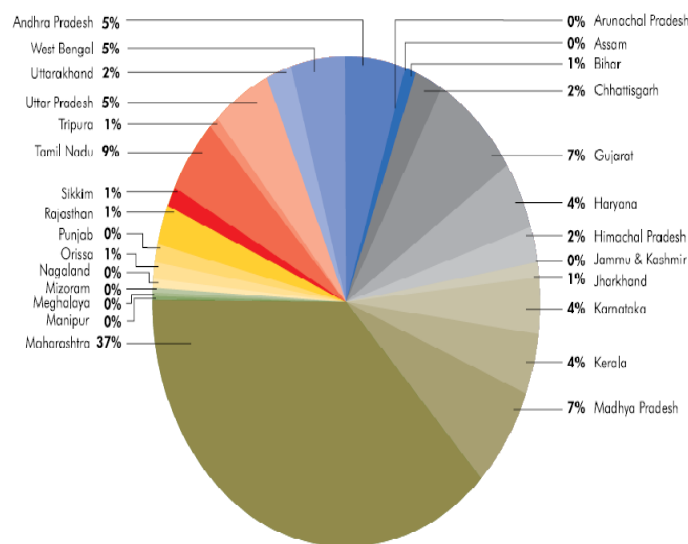


Figure 2: NGP State wise (%)

While state of Assam has spent only 20% of the TSC budgets allocated to it in a decade state of Jharkhand have registered a similar low of 28% utilisation. With such low utilisation state of Assam has achieved only 23% Individual Household latrines against the TSC target and the state of Jharkhand has achieved only 32% coverage against the TSC target. Both the states have registered a very poor financial efficiency reflected in terms of money spent to make Panchayat Open defecation free when compared to other states. While Maharashtra has spent a meagre Rs 6 lakhs to make a Panchayat ODF, Assam has spent a whopping 675 lakhs and Jharkhand Rs 97 lakhs to make Panchayat ODF. Similarly against a nation average of 753 Panchayats achieving ODF status in India, Assam reports a meagre 24 Panchayats and Jharkhand 223 Panchayats so far becoming Nirmal Gram Panchayts. Both Assam and Jharkhand need to change gears to catch up with the national declaration to make states ODF by 2012 and need to construct 3551 and 3479 toilets respectively per day against the current pace of 789 and 888 toilets per day.



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success of TSC in terms of the number of panchayats which became free from open defecation was meagre.

Nevertheless, Alok is optimistic about achieving total sanitation in India within five years, through certain policy measures. He proposes including sanitation as a subject in the civil engineering curriculum, which the author feels would create a new breed of engineers who would compensate for the lack of expertise. He also advocates the inclusion of urban areas within the purview of the TSC, uniform policy guidelines for all states, promoting friendly toilets for the differently-abled, consolidating the implementation of sanitation technology in railways, a national campaign focusing on cleanliness, international learning exchange on sanitation, eco-sanitation, solid and liquid waste management, etc.

Hinduism, Caste, Cleanliness

Alok's analysis of TSC brings forth significant issues for further discussion. His understanding of the issue of sanitation is firmly rooted in a problematic combination of Vedic tradition and state policies. The author draws on Vedic literature to build his arguments. He claims (p 18) that the Vedic period represents "the most noteworthy phase in Indian history, which trace their [Caste-Hindus'] cultural life to the Vedas, which they hold to be divine truths revealed from time to time to the Rishis (seers) in their super normal consciousness." He further writes (p 19), "Manu Samhita contains a set of verses which talk about the places where defecation and urination were permitted and places prohibiting passage of stool or urine. The code was very clear and rigid regarding maintaining environmental sanitation..." Alok gives long quotations from the Hindu sacred texts which emphasise the importance of maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in daily life. However, he conveniently eschews any discussion on how some castes were assigned mandatory and rigid traditional occupations, which are labelled unclean and impure by the very same Manu Samhita.

This legal treatise says, "Their (out-caste) dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place [v.10.52]. "There are stringent punishments for those who try to be equal. One of those punishments I quote (Manusmrti 8: 281). "If a man of inferior caste (polluted) tries to sit down on the same seat as a man of superior caste, he should be branded on the hip and banished, or have his buttocks cut off." Such a theory of inequality preached in the Manusmrti exists as a general practice in present-day Indian society, especially in the Indian villages. Manu says that the untouchables should live outside the village and continue serving the village in menial and unclean occupations (v.10.51).

In this context the role model village of Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra, for which Anna Hazare was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Indian state is a good example. There are three houses of Matangs in the village. They are still tied to their traditional occupation of making brooms and ropes. There have been no elections of the gram panchayat in the village for the last 24 years. In the gram sabha, representatives to the panchayat as well as the societies are nominated. Elections are not allowed here too (Sharma 2006). Instead of upholding the

rule of law, the state functionaries uphold inequality. It is also not surprising to see that the TSC focuses on promoting the PRIs, which is part of the state apparatus in the villages for its implementation. The Nehruvian belief that all the social issues could be addressed through state policy is supplemented with the Gandhian insight that varnasramadharma (the caste divided organisation of society) is a better way of organising people's lives.

A book like the Manu Samhita, with inequality at its heart, surely cannot be the basis of arguments that seek to resolve the question of sanitation democratically. Unfortunately, such biased texts are not only referred to positively, but also upheld and followed even for present-day policies, as the book under review illustrates.

Purity and Modern India

The form of unequal treatment meted out to the untouchable has changed in the modern era. Hence, it is important to pay close attention to the difference between the caste system in the pre-modern and modern eras. In pre-modern India, the caste system involved material practices with two things embedded in it. First, the untouchables lived outside the village and, second, they were in unclean/menial occupations. Those two are the outward registers, while at the same time there was an inward feeling of defilement, odium, aversion and contempt (Ambedkar 1982: 492). Hence the untouchable "causing pollution by touch" was at two different levels, one is literal and the other notional. What makes it difficult to break the system of untouchability is the Hindu religious sanction of the practice of untouchability in the notional sense. The ordinary Hindu looks upon it as part of his religion. There is little doubt that in adopting what is deemed to be inhuman behaviour, the Hindu does so more from the sense of observing his religion than from any motive of deliberate cruelty (Ambedkar 1982: 493). Therefore, in India a person is a scavenger by birth and not due to his occupation.

Ambedkar argues, "Untouchability will vanish only when Hindus will change their mentality. The problem is how to make the Hindus unlearn their way of life. It is no small matter to make a whole nation give up its accustomed way of life. Besides the way of life the Hindus are accustomed to, is a way which is sanctified by their religion, at any rate they believe it to be so" (1989: 144). Instead of removing the cruel notion of the caste system inside the thinking of the caste Hindus, the state and the civil society focus on the occupation or the living condition, which is only an outward expression of the inner notions which structure the thinking of caste Hindus. Thus, the state and civil society manage to show their shrewd sincerity on this issue without actually addressing the matter at hand. As a result, they argue for and often provide better equipment in relation to the occupation or they talk about the cleanliness of their households. However, none of these actions will remove the caste system. The present sanitation campaign, discussed in this book, is another example of such a programme constructing toilets for households in the rural areas.

Explaining Away Scavengers

At one level Alok holds Vedic literature, which preaches inequality, as sacrosanct and then claims that the system of



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scavenging and its stigma came into force during the Mughal period with the introduction of the purdah system where Muslim women used to wear the burka (veil) and were not allowed to go out to defecate (p 33). Such a strange narration of India's medieval history seems intended only to make the Muslim responsible for introducing the scavenging system. It is unquestionable that the caste system has always been integral to Hindu society, and it is illogical, and intensely political, to say that the scavenging system came into force due to Muslim rule. The Hindu nationalist has always sustained the caste system in practice, while glorifying and heaping lavish praise on the scavenging communities. Here we see in operation a favoured narration which makes the Muslim responsible for the caste system and scavenging, at the same time bringing the untouchables into the fold of Hindus.

Most of the so-called nationalists were comfortable with Gandhi's notion of untouchability, which was to improve the condition of sweeping, but were not prepared to abolish the basis of untouchability. In other words they were not for emancipation of scavenging castes but only for reforming the excesses within the caste occupation (Prasad 2000: 117). The nationalist appropriation of the scavenging system into its narration also extends to the appropriation of people. Alok, at one point, says (p 35), "Inspired by him [Gandhi], a large number of disciples worked relentlessly for this purpose and notable among them were... Shri B R Ambedkar..." This act of naming Ambedkar as a disciple of Gandhi only proves that the author is completely unaware of the tempestuous relationship between these two. Ambedkar was one of the few intellectuals and political figures to outright reject Gandhi's ideology. I agree with Prasad's argument that the Gandhian solution to untouchability and the caste system, for the most part, entailed a valorisation of the dalits as sweepers, not now to be seen as the "lowest occupation", but indeed as the "highest".

The State and Sanitation

Sanitation is defined as "prevention of human contact with the hazards of waste". A large number of people working in contact with "waste" have been whitewashed by both the government agencies and the author, by not including scavengers or municipality workers in the definition of sanitation. When it comes to common removal of human excreta (second or third person shit), in municipality, or common toilets, these voices, however, become muted. The state does not provide logistics to the scavenging communities, rather it forces them to do the cleaning of "waste" in an unhygienic manner. If the state promotes hygiene among the scavenging occupation, it implies that the state has to spend a large amount of money on mechanisation. However, even if it invested in mechanisation and other modernisation of the sanitation sector which reduces or eliminates immediate human contact with "waste", it will still not remove the caste stigma embedded with the occupation. Therefore, no other community/caste will be willing to take up the occupation of sanitation (Ramaswamy 2005: 23). If the state genuinely wants to eradicate the scavenging caste system then it would have to undermine all the discriminative practices of the caste system and the biased preachings emanating from the Hindu texts, which many people hold sacrosanct. It is due to the lack of clarity in the issue of sanitation in India that the TSC or the author cannot provide clear guidelines as to who should

clean the common toilets in schools, community complexes, etc. Since the state cannot ask the scavenging community to do the job, therefore a Gandhian understanding would be to construct an independent toilet for each person where he cleans his own shit.

However, the state cannot escape the government schools. Therefore in schools the TSC encourages the children to clean the toilets on a rotation basis. But the reality, as seen in many villages, is that the dalit students are forced to clean the toilet. This has resulted in protest and opposition from the dalit movement. In the school's context the author says, in a somewhat disjointed sentence, that there is a need to recognise the dignity of labour. The question which remains unanswered is why does this dignity need to be recognised only by the dalits, why cannot everyone recognise this dignity and clean others' shit?

Other long-term issues are also neglected in the TSC because of the perceived ideas on sanitation, based on the notions of caste, remain unquestioned. Take one illustration. Open defecation may not require people to clean it; however when toilets are constructed, at some or the other point of time scavengers will be required to clean the pit. This is evident even in modern cities and institutional spaces where we find them getting into drainages and manholes to remove the blockade and many time they come out dead due to the toxic gases.

Conclusions

The title of the book *Squatting with Dignity*, contradicts itself. It implies that people can squat with dignity. All through the book, the author himself says that before the NGP award was introduced by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the sanitation campaign could not move forward. It is true people were not comfortable with open defecation but certainly it was not a question of their dignity, as the author presents. Then whose "dignity" is it?

It appears, from a reading of the book, that the dignity at stake is that of the "nation", which remains the silent presence throughout the book. Only in his acknowledgements does the author declaim "open defecation has been the biggest national shame". Therefore the saddest part is even if some people are concerned with the question of sanitation, they fail to understand the hidden caste/religious construction of scavenging and the scavenger's identity. Certainly it is the state education apparatus which keeps us away from this very important topic, and there is growing antagonism towards anyone who questions caste-based discrimination and occupation. This book is a blueprint of the Indian state functionaries' experience and attempts to provide "constructive" suggestions from that perspective. This book provides a view of this perspective and shows us that the scavenging population has been bypassed by the Indian state's modernity drive.

A politically informed and socially relevant way of looking at the issue of sanitation ought to, first, involve a study of the ways in which historically the notion of caste-based occupation was constructed and the processes through which it developed, and then to educate the masses while rejecting those heinous Hindu texts which strengthen and justify inequality. This cannot be



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done through a valorisation of the caste system and its occupation. The state's failure has been that it has viewed caste and the question of sanitation/scavengers only at the level of the individual and not as a problem of the structure. Therefore the state has looked for scavengers to rehabilitate. If one views the issue from the perspective of structure, then it is easy to see that it is the non-scavengers who need rehabilitation. The social disabilities that come with scavenging/sanitation can only be eradicated by a large-scale reformation of the caste hindu society.

“As long as there will be a metal trash can in Rameshwari’s hands”, noted one Balmiki poet, “the democracy of my nation will be an insult” (Valmiki 1991: 16-17). The TSC may offer “pride” while squatting with dignity but scavengers will still experience and endure ignominy.

Thanks to NAC, scavenging abolition gets priority anew: Smita Gupta

January 26, 2011 00:00 IST |

A plan of action should be finalised within a month or so with the target of ending the pernicious practice of manual scavenging within the 11th Plan period that ends in March 2012, sources in the Social Justice Ministry said. This was the key outcome of a two-day consultation meeting which concluded here on Tuesday.

Jointly organised by the Ministries of Social Justice, Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, and Urban Development, and attended by officials of 11 State governments, experts and a host of civil society groups, the consultation was triggered by the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC) directing the government to tackle the issue on a war-footing.

Four groups were set up during the consultations — the first discussed the scope and methodology of a fresh survey of manual scavengers; the second, amendments to the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993; the third discussed revisiting the self-employment scheme for rehabilitation of manual scavengers, and designing an education and skill development programme for their children; and the fourth discussed drawing up a Plan of Action for the States to provide total sanitation, including conversion of all unhygienic latrines and mechanisation of cleaning of drainage and sewerage systems.

Follow-up by Ministries

The sources in the Social Justice Ministry said: “The ideas that have emerged during the group discussions will now be pursued by the Ministries concerned with the object of producing a plan of action very soon. The ideas thrown up by groups one and three will be followed up by the Social Justice Ministry, the second by the Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation Ministry, and the fourth by the Urban Development Ministry.”

In the past too, the government has set and missed deadlines to eradicate the curse but this time, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Mukul Wasnik told *TheHindu*, “Rehabilitating manual scavengers is our Ministry’s topmost priority. We have requested the State governments to make public announcements so that anyone still engaged in manual scavenging can come forward and report [his or her situation] at the district headquarters, so that no one is left out.”

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Uttarakhand have requested Central funding for conversion of 2.4 lakh dry latrines. This, Mr. Wasnik said, made it clear that the scourge has yet to be wiped out. Citing figures provided by the Safai Karamchari Andolan, which says there are still 4,833 manual scavengers in 14 States, Mr. Wasnik said the governments concerned had been told to immediately find them alternative occupations. Though discussions have been on for a while, the push came after the NAC shot off a letter on November 9 last, urging the Centre to coordinate with all State and local governments and Central government departments, including the Railways, to abolish manual scavenging by the end of the 11th Plan period.

The NAC suggested a new survey in every State and Union Territory of dry latrines and manual scavengers; the demolition of all dry latrines; the rehabilitation in modern marketable skills of all manual scavengers; and a special programme for education of their children. The NAC also said it would monitor the progress of abolition of manual scavenging on a quarterly basis.

On Monday, Mr. Wasnik told the meeting that the government — through the National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents during 1992-2005 — succeeded in rehabilitating 4.28 lakh of the 7.70 lakh manual scavengers and their dependents who had been identified in 1992. In 2007, a new ‘Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers’ was launched to rehabilitate the rest of them. But that task remains unfinished.

Imprisoned for life : HARSH MANDER

<http://www.hindu.com/maq/2011/01/09/stories/2011010950100300.htm>

Dalits are often trapped in ‘unclean’, socially despised occupations because of the persistence of tradition and because there are no viable alternatives...

Winds of change: Demanding the abolition of manual scavenging in law and in practice.

Millions of women, men and children continue to be trapped in humiliating and socially devalued vocations only because of their birth. The Indian caste system survives in large tracts of rural India despite the sweeping winds of modernity. It mandates the division of labour, or the allocation of occupations, based on one’s birth into a particular caste. Caste through millennia permitted little opportunity to people to move from one caste-



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based occupation to one that is socially regarded to be superior. Many of these barriers persist in modern times.

The most disadvantaged castes even among dalits are socially assigned occupations that are considered ritually 'unclean' and socially degrading. Most of these 'unclean' occupations are associated in one way or another with death, human waste or menstruation. These three universal physiological processes have been culturally shrouded by beliefs of intense ritual pollution. The collective tragedy and angst of these most socially oppressed communities is that they find themselves socially trapped into 'unclean' occupations even as the country surges into 21st century, market-led economic growth. Tradition, feudal coercion and economic compulsions combine to persist in ensnaring millions of these dalit families across the length and breadth of the country into socially despised occupations.

Dealing with impurity

The unclean occupations culturally forced upon dalit people that are related to human death include the digging of graves, collection of firewood for the cremation of dead bodies and setting up the funeral pyres. Death is considered so impure and unclean that, in many regions of rural India, it is dalits alone who are required by tradition even to communicate the news of any death to the relatives of the deceased person, whatever maybe the distance.

There are a large number of unclean occupations that derive from the death of animals. In most states, villagers still expect dalits to dispose of carcasses of animals that die in their homes or in the village, whether cattle or dogs or cats. They skin the bodies of dead animals, flay and tan these and develop them into cured leather, and sometimes even craft them into footwear and drums. The pollution associated with leather is so pervasive that in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, even the beating of drums at weddings, funerals and religious festivals is considered polluting and imposed as a social obligation or caste vocation only on dalits. The logic is carried further in rural locations where public announcements are still made in villages by the beat of drum. Even this occupation is considered polluting and is the monopoly of dalits, because of the polluting touch of dried and treated animal skin that is stretched on the drums.

A third category of 'unclean' occupations derives from the culturally polluting character of human waste. In most parts of India, the manual removal of human excreta, often with bare hands, survives as a deeply humiliating vocation despite it having been outlawed. This pollution extends in many cases to cleaning of sewage tanks, drainage canals and the sweeping of streets. The beliefs related to the pollution by menstrual blood results in midwifery and the washing of clothes deemed as unclean occupations in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar and Maharashtra.

Deep wounds

Lifelong engagement in these intensely socially despised — and frequently grossly unhygienic — occupations leaves profound

physical and psychological scars on people who are forced into this work. Despite technologies available to make the work safe and hygienic, these are rarely deployed.

The sturdy cultural beliefs in the polluting nature of certain occupations adapt regressively to a range of potentially liberating contemporary developments. For instance, the establishment of leather factories and tanneries has freed dalits significantly from traditional hereditary occupations, but dalits still lift and skin carcasses to sell at a price to leather footwear companies. It is also interesting that leather and tanning factories have a very high proportion of dalit workers. In cases where the modern economy or municipal management requires the transport of solid waste or carcasses, even the drivers of these vehicles are drawn from the dalit community. Municipal authorities routinely employ only dalit workers for scavenging and sweeping. Veterinary and medical doctors, unwilling to pollute themselves by touching corpses, even use dalits to perform post-mortems, whereas they only look at the dissected corpses without handling them and write their reports.

Some unclean occupations are involuntary and unpaid, or paid a pittance. The bearing of death messages and temple cleaning in Tamil Nadu, cleaning up after marriage feasts in Kerala and Karnataka, making leather footwear for people of higher castes as a sign of respect in Andhra Pradesh, and drum-beating and the removal of carcasses in many states are unpaid tasks. Ghasis, Panos and Doms involved in leather work and scavenging are landless and most non-dalits and even some of the dalit farmers refuse to employ them for agricultural wage work. In Orissa we find payments of leftover food, old clothes, fistfuls of food grains or petty cash. In most Rajasthan villages, cash is rarely paid for traditional unclean work expected from the dalits, instead they are given food (not more than two rotis). In Karnataka, we found payment of arrack, a meal and some cash for drum-beating, and fixed cash payments for other tasks like mid-wifery and lifting of carcasses. Scavengers may be employed on monthly salary by local bodies, otherwise families pay them cash or stale food.

Not all unclean work is paid, and a lot of it is forced. Refusal to perform 'unclean occupations' often results in retribution: in the form of abuse, assault or social boycott. Even in the absence of such overt coercion, economic compulsions prevent most dalits from escaping humiliating hereditary occupations. They may earn Rs. 200 from skinning a dead buffalo, which brings food into their cooking pot. Scavenging may secure them regular employment in urban local bodies.

Those engaged in unclean occupations are usually assured very low but secure earnings because of their monopoly of these occupations. If they persist in occupations such as scavenging or disposal of carcasses and human bodies, which are indispensable for any society, but which no other group is willing to perform, it gives them greater economic security than many other disadvantaged groups. But this is at the price of the most savage and extreme social degradation. Yet, if they seek to escape this social degradation to achieve dignity, they have to abandon the economic security of their despised occupations to join the vast ranks of the proletariat. This, then, is the core of their quandary: if they seek economic security, they must accept



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the lowest depths of social degradation; but if they wish for social dignity, they must accept the price of economic insecurity and deprivation.

Signs of hope

Whereas hereditary unclean occupations for dalits remain entrenched in the rural social system, cracks are developing. There are many reports of successful resistance from many parts of the country. In Tamil Nadu, until recently refusal to perform unclean activities was met with fines, violence or excommunication. However, collective resistance has grown over the past decades, forcing non-dalits to accept the mobility of these dalits into the more respected caste-neutral category of agricultural worker. Some inspiring case studies have come to light even from the feudal outposts of Rajasthan. In Palri village of Sirohi, the dalits collectively resolved to refuse to remove the carcasses. The caste Hindus retaliated with a social and economic boycott and violence, but the dalits held their ground. Today they have freed themselves from this legacy of shame. Likewise, the Regar community in Sujapur village of Sikar refused to lift carcasses. Non-dalits negotiated and a breakthrough was achieved when in a major rupture from tradition, it was agreed that two persons from each caste would take turns to carry the carcass outside the village. However, it is still left to the Regars to skin the animals.

A unique national movement of self-respect and non-violent direct action of manual scavengers themselves — the Safai Karmchari Andolan — has succeeded in freeing tens of thousands of mainly women from this practice, although its stubborn last vestiges persist, including in the Indian Railways.

It is these brave and proud struggles of dalit people themselves to free themselves from the shackles of humiliating social tradition, that illuminate our world with hope of a more humane social order for all our children.

Why is it so difficult to free India of manual scavenging?

BEZWADA WILSON

<http://kafila.org/2010/12/22/why-is-it-so-difficult-to-free-india-of-manual-scavenging/#more-6016>

Safai karmcharis from across India declared their liberation at a function in Delhi on 20 December, 2010

Over the years, there have been many changes in the Safai Karmchari Andolan movement. The biggest change we have seen has been in the safai karmchari community's outlook. There was a time when safai karmcharis were ashamed to admit they did manual scavenging. It was not uncommon for even family members to be unaware that someone was involved in the practice of manual scavenging.

But the community started discussing the issue threadbare and the silence over manual scavenging was broken. They came together and organised themselves on a national platform with the single focus of eradicating manual scavenging. As the state and the judiciary began hearing our voices, we began to break the chains of caste and patriarchy.

We gathered the courage to burn the baskets we once used to collect human excreta in. We began knocking the doors of the district magistrates to implement the 1993 Act of Parliament that outlawed manual scavenging. Ideally the DM should have been approaching the safai karmcharis and helping them leave the practice. It's an irony that we have had to go to the DMs to make them aware of the Act they should have been making us aware of! In doing so, however, we have been strengthening the functioning of the Indian democracy. In the twenty first century, safai karmcharis are making stronger the pillars of Indian democracy!

Over the past few months, 1,260 enumerators, who are from within the safai karmchari community, have conducted a massive survey documenting the prevalence of manual scavenging. The community, in many places, has decided to leave the practice on its own. People are still coming out and acknowledging that they are into the work and resolving, trying and managing to leave it.

The changes that have taken place in the community have been reflected at the legislative and judicial levels. Thanks to the work of many intellectuals and activists, the centenary year celebrations of Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1991 resulted in a slew of measures for Dalits.

The Eradication of Manual Scavenging & Dry Latrine (Abolition) Act came into force in 1993. But the aim of the Act has not been fulfilled even today. On 20 December 2003, exactly seven years ago, the Safai Karmchari Andolan and 13 others filed a petition in the Supreme Court to make the state and central government and their bodies implement the Act.

To begin with, the state governments wouldn't submit the affidavits the Supreme Court asked them to. Even after the Supreme Courts reprimands, seven principal secretaries had to be summoned to the court for them to take cognisance of the case! In the affidavits submitted, all of them denied that manual scavenging was prevalent under their jurisdiction.

So the onus of proving that it existed fell upon us, the victims, victimizing us further. We started collecting data along with photographic and video evidence in several states. As a result of such evidence we would submit in Supreme Court, the states would simply go and demolish those dry latrines, and reported back to the court that these didn't exist! This became a strategy for us: we started collecting more material and submitting it.

In seven years the case has seen eight judges, including two chief justices, preside over the hearings. The process has been slow and cumbersome. The last hearing was in November when the court mulled over the issue of whether it can direct state

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governments who had not notified the Act to do so. The next hearing is on January 11.

We have used two orders passed by the SC in 2008 to expedite the process. We took the orders around to district magistrates and ask them to implement those orders and demolish dry latrines in their districts.

In 2005, we went around states demolishing dry latrines. We would be prevented from doing so, in response to which we said that when the government denies the existence of these dry latrines how could we be demolishing them? This way we forced governments to act. The most notable case was that of a dry latrine inside the Nizamabad court complex in Hyderabad!

Just to demolish a dry latrine and liberate a safai karamchari, why should it need an order from the highest court of the land? Can't the government simply implement an Act it has itself passed? Why should social change need the intervention of the Supreme Court?

There have been many schemes and programmes for the rehabilitation of safai karamcharis and many high officials, often prime ministers, have spoken out promising to make India free of manual scavenging. Why hasn't that happened?

The changes may be slow, but they are taking place. These are not just at the level of the community and the state, but also the civil society and the media. Responses to manual scavenging from civil society and the media, until some years ago, used to express sympathy but not support or work towards eradication of manual scavenging. Earlier they would say, 'They don't have the skills for alternative work', 'They should be given better equipment', and so on. Now, many have joined the SKA movement, endorsing our stand that human beings should not be lifting the excreta of other human beings. That they should come out of this practice into a world of dignity and equality.

Over the years, there have been efforts by many people at many levels, but the biggest effort has to be from us. It is difficult, but most important that we take the initiative in our own hands, leave the work and free India of the scourge of manual scavenging.

Enslaved by tradition: the manual scavengers of Vidisha

Mahim Pratap Singh

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article954578.ece>
December 15, 2010

Mahim Pratap Singh



THE HINDU FAILED BY MODERNITY: Basanti Bai, a manual scavenger, with her "tools" - a metal scraper and wicker basket. Photo: Mahim Pratap Singh

Over 200 families in this district of Madhya Pradesh continue to bear the brunt of caste discrimination.

Vidisha, a thriving trade centre of ancient India, finds glorious mention variously for Emperor Ashoka's governorship, for featuring in Pali scriptures and Kalidasa's romantic epic *Meghdoot*, as a premier tourist destination in glossy brochures of Madhya Pradesh Tourism and as the parliamentary constituency of Sushma Swaraj, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

That the banned practice of manual scavenging is still a forced occupation for several Dalit families here is seldom written about.

According to unofficial estimates, over 200 families in the district continue to bear the brunt of caste discrimination primarily through the practice of manual scavenging. "Every morning, I go to eight to ten households, collect the garbage in a straw basket and dump it a mile away from the village. When it rains, the waste oozes through the basket over to my hair," says Guddi Bai (38) of Nateran *tehsil*.



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The waste she is talking about is human excreta, euphemistically called “night soil”. Guddi belongs to the Valmiki community, relegated by the caste system to practise manual scavenging as their traditional occupation.

Ironically, Guddi, who goes from house to house collecting human faeces every morning, has a water-seal latrine at her house.

Nateran, the *tehsil* visited by this correspondent, has eight families that practise manual scavenging in its headquarters alone, and in all cases it is the women who do the job while the men work as agricultural or construction labour.

While the practice was banned by law in 1993 with the passage of The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, it still continues in several parts of India. The deadline for the eradication of manual scavenging from the country, after having been revised thrice (December 2007, March 2009 and March 2010), was recently set for 2012-end by the National Advisory Council, headed by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi. Following its last meeting on the issue in October, the NAC noted that it was, “deeply distressed to observe that the shameful practice of manual scavenging persists in India, despite being outlawed”.

Official denial

An important reason for the failure of the Centre and the State government in eradicating this dehumanising practice seems to be consistent official denial.

In 2006, the Madhya Pradesh government, along with some other State governments, filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court claiming the practice had ceased to exist in the State. However, a counter-affidavit was filed by 17 organisations from all over India along with photographs and video clippings of manual scavenging, proving the official affidavits wrong.

While Vidisha District Collector Yogendra Sharma accepts that the practice still continues, he does not find economic deprivation to be a reason.

“All these families have alternative livelihood options; most of them have BPL and Antyodaya ration cards, cattle etc. The only reason, I understand, they are still doing it is because they have been doing it for generations and because it is easy money for them compared to jobs that require hard work like agriculture,” says Mr. Sharma.

“We are now making efforts to motivate them to abandon this practice willingly,” he adds.

The dilemmas of rehabilitation

During the five-year period of the 10th Plan, Madhya Pradesh received Rs.2.9 crore under the Centrally-sponsored Pre-Matric

Scholarship scheme for the children of those engaged in “unclean occupations”.

However, people in the occupation note the scholarship requires getting a 100-day “unclean work certificate” from the authorities, which is almost impossible since issuing the certificate would mean the legally abolished practice is still going on — a fact the authorities do not want to admit.

According to the Ministry of Social Justice figures, out of a total scavenger population of 81,307 in the State, 77,512 have been rehabilitated under the Centrally-funded Self-Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) and only 3,795 remain.

Unofficial sources put this figure at around 8,000 to 10,000.

The SRMS, formulated in 2007, envisaged the rehabilitation of manual scavengers — in a phased manner, by the end of 2009 — by assisting them in finding alternative employment through term loans (up to Rs.5 lakh) and micro financing (up to Rs.25,000).

However, the rehabilitation schemes concentrated only on the financial aspect and ignored the social aspect, causing several “rehabilitated” people to eventually fall back to the practice. The financial rehabilitation programmes were male-centric, while it is the women who make up the largest chunk of those engaged in this occupation.

“Firstly, the programme does not have any specific provisions targeting women and secondly, most of the projects for which loans are provided are not women-friendly,” says Asif Sheikh of Garima Abiyaan, a Dewas-based NGO.

Patron-client relations

Another important reason for the practice continuing even after 63 years of independence and 17 years after a law was passed by Parliament banning it, is that it derives a “traditional legitimacy” from the patron-client system, which is firmly entrenched in the psyche of those who perform this degrading job.

The families in Nateran note that scavenging is not a means of sustenance and they make ends meet by doing other jobs like agricultural labour.

“All I get for working everyday is around 20 to 50 kilos of grain annually and a few old clothes on occasion,” says Basanti Bai (40) who has been scavenging ever since she was handed the job by her sister-in-law after her marriage.

Why doesn't she quit then?

“If we quit, the upper caste women ridicule us. ‘*Tum to panditaain ho gayi ho*’ [You seem to act like a Brahmin woman],



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they say. Moreover, that is the way it has always been going on," she says.

"The patron-client system, in a strange way, provides security of employment and, given the nature of this job, it basically is secure as there is no one to compete with and hence it will require determined social, political and economic rehabilitation measures on the part of the government if this dehumanising practice is to end," says Professor Nandu Ram, director of the Ambedkar Chair at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The Valmikis, and other scavenging communities, also face discrimination from other Dalit communities such as the Jatavs and the Ahirwars and are relegated to the lowest levels of the caste hierarchy among Dalits.

Badaun makes progress to end manual scavenging : Jiby Kattakayam

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/11/22/stories/2010112253870500.htm>

BADAUN: For years Badaun district in north-central Uttar Pradesh has grappled with the twin problems of polio and diarrhoeal outbreaks while turning a blind eye to poor sanitation and manual scavenging.

But a recent initiative of the district administration with the support of agencies like the UNICEF has aimed for a convergence solution hinging around the Total Sanitation Campaign seeking to rehabilitate manual scavengers, conversion of dry latrines to pour-flush toilets and polio vaccination rounds.

People in Badaun villages, where the conversion of dry latrines has begun, say that health workers who visited them in the past never bothered to explain the connection between polio and open defecation.

Begun four months ago, the initiative has succeeded in converting 21,000 of the estimated 60,000 dry latrines in the district to pour-flush toilets and rehabilitating over 1,500 of the estimated 4,000 manual scavengers in Badaun, of whom 99 per cent are women. Every household that converts its dry latrine gets Rs.1,500.

District Magistrate Amit Gupta who is spearheading the campaign says the multi-pronged effort has involved mobilising funds, coordinating government departments, convincing people to convert dry latrines, motivating the manual scavengers to abandon their traditional occupation and finding them an alternate means of livelihood.

"When I visited the villages I was shocked. Food was being cooked right next to the dry latrines. Faeces would collect until the women scavengers cleared it every morning. There were flies everywhere. I was convinced that without hygiene there was

no hope of progressing on any other developmental goal," Mr. Gupta says.

The rehabilitated women manual scavengers emphatically say they will never return to their erstwhile profession. At Sheikhpur village in Ujhani block where considerable progress in the campaign objectives has been achieved, all 30 women manual scavengers have quit their profession and over 600 of the 700 dry latrines in the village have given way to pour-flush ones.

District Panchayati Raj Officer R.S. Chaudhary is mobbed by the rehabilitated women manual scavengers at Sakari Jangal village on why the promise of alternate employment has not been kept. "Haven't we distributed Antyodaya cards? Aren't you all getting 35 kg of food grains every month under the scheme? Please wait a little more time. Your NREGA job cards are getting ready," he tells them.

Mr. Chaudhary, who is monitoring the campaign's progress in 260 villages, confesses that the women are under considerable pressure not to quit the profession. A majority of men in the Valmiki Dalit community to which the women belong are jobless. The Rs.20 that each household in the village pays the women every month was also a source of income for the men's pastime – drinking.

The other castes in the village also exert indirect pressure on the women by not offering them alternate employment. To overcome this hurdle, the district administration is trying to win over the gram pradhans. Many from the community have also migrated to urban areas to escape from the clutches of this degrading profession.

Valmiki community leaders though happy with the initiative are worried that the women will return to scavenging in the face of these pressures. Kalicharan Valmiki of the Badaun Valmiki Jan Vikas Manch believes that NREGA in the short-term and education and job reservation in the long-run is the only hope for the community. "My daughter studied up to intermediate. But the only government jobs we will get are as safai karamcharis," he says.

With only one polio case being reported in Badaun this year compared to 52 in 2009, UNICEF officers who are assisting the campaign note a discernible change in people's attitudes towards sanitation, which they hope will ultimately contribute to eradicating the practice of manual scavenging.

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Former manual scavengers demand apology from government

Vidya Subrahmaniam

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article863436.ece>



The Hindu Women scavengers gather during the 'Samajik Parivartan Rally' in New Delhi on Monday. Photo: S. Subramaniam

The capital's Constitution Club resounded on Monday to cries of "Jai Bhim" as a huge gathering of former manual scavengers rose as one to demand an apology from the government for the wrongs done to the community. "Apologise now for the violation of our dignity," they said.

The choice of venue, with portraits of Babasaheb Ambedkar forming the backdrop, was perhaps intendedly ironic. It was to remind the country of its failure to redeem its pledge towards the most wretched of its citizens — the Scheduled Castes, and among them, those condemned to the obnoxious practice of manual scavenging. Sixty years after the Constitution abolished untouchability and decreed all citizens to be equal and free, one section continued to be subjected to the most abhorrent of all human rights violations.

Expectedly the audience roared in approval, each time a liberated "safai karamchari" narrated her personal story of sufferings and vowed never again to go back to "that life of shame and indignity." The speeches were punctuated by shouts of *sukhi roti khayenge, maila nahi uthayenge* (it does not matter if we have nothing to eat, we will not do manual scavenging) and "apologise, apologise." Each speaker spoke in her native tongue but the accounts of pain and humiliation were similar.

Anita, a former manual scavenger from Uttar Pradesh, said she and her mother worked long hours, often without water, because they were outcasts who could not touch any utensils. Anita wanted to know if India had really gained Independence. "I will celebrate Independence Day when we are treated as equals." Saroj from Haryana spoke of people covering their noses and waving her away in disgust. Anita from Punjab said she once slipped and fell while in an advanced stage of pregnancy. As no one gave her a hand, she lay covered in excreta.

The star of the day was the spit-fire Umayal from Tamil Nadu. Recalling her school days, she said she used to be made to stand in a corner and was ordered to bring her own plate because her mother cleaned human excreta. "This is happening even today. I want to ask the government: You spend so much money on advertising on TV. Why can't you use some of it to spread awareness about us? Why can't my children study? Why can't they become Collectors? Why not? Why not?" The tearful Umayal was led away to screams of "apologise, apologise" from the audience.

Social activist Aruna Roy asked for reservation for the community, not in sweeper categories, but in higher education and in the higher bureaucracy.

Communist Party of India general secretary D. Raja said the clean-up should begin from the Railways which was the largest employer of manual scavengers. "If this is not a national shame, what is," he asked, wondering at the paradox of a government willing to spend Rs.70,000 crore on the Commonwealth Games but not mustering the will to uplift the manual scavenging community.

The Safai Karmachari Andolan has demanded a comprehensive rehabilitation package, including stringent punishment to those found to be employing manual scavengers in violation of the Manual Scavengers and Dry Latrine Construction (Prohibition) Act, 1993.

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Throwing off the yoke of manual scavenging

Vidya Subrahmaniam

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article850934.ece>



In this July 7, 2010 photo, a sewerage worker clears a choked drain at Anandnagar, Hyderabad. Photo: Mohammed Yousuf

The obnoxious practice will continue in one form or the other, as long as the government and society treat certain so-called menial jobs as the preserve of one community.

On November 1, a unique journey will come to a ceremonious end in Delhi. Earlier this month, five bus loads of men and women headed out from different corners of the country with one slogan on their lips: honour and liberation for those still trapped in the horror of manual scavenging.

When the protesters (most of them former manual scavengers) set out on their mission, they knew that the Samajik Parivartan Yatra (national rally for social transformation) would have to be more than a petition to the government. A comprehensive rehabilitation package was undoubtedly at the core of the yatra's demands. But there was equally another objective: To motivate the remaining members of the scavenging community to throw off the yoke — on their own, without waiting for a package. Bezwada Wilson, Convener of the Safai Karamacharis Andolan (SKA) and the brain behind the rally, explains the concept of self-liberation: "Manual scavenging is a blot on humanity, and if you engage in it, it is a crime you commit on yourself. So, don't wait for the government, break free."

Given the depth of emotion in this message, it will be a double crime if the government does not do everything in its power to hasten the process of liberation. Perhaps that is why, on October 25, the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council proposed a far-reaching package of reforms to end the practice. Nonetheless, the irony is inescapable. Sixty-three years after Independence, India is still debating the best way to lift manual scavengers out of their collective misery.

Mr. Wilson was a young boy when his family in Karnataka sent him away to study in a school across the border in Andhra Pradesh. He came home for holidays but felt out of place in a community whose defining feature was the uncontrolled violence of its menfolk. It was the early 1970s and they lived in a large, grimy neighbourhood around the edges of the Kolar Gold township. The evenings were always the same. The men would get into a drunken rage and assault the women senseless. The pattern of male aggression and female submission was common to most feudal, patriarchal societies, but even by this yardstick, the violence was excessive.

The teenager knew he had been born to a family of sweepers. The local school he went to as a child was segregated and was known by a swear word. But that still did not explain the anger that erupted around him. His father, a retired government employee, and his brother, mysteriously employed in an unnamed place, stonewalled his questions. Determined, the boy followed his brother to his workplace, where the horror of manual scavenging hit him like a million lashes.

Mr. Wilson learnt that he and his family were part of a huge community of manual scavengers that serviced the Kolar Gold township. They physically lifted and carried human excreta from the township's network of dry latrines. He could now see where the violence came from. But he could also see the unfairness of it all on the women who formed 85 per cent of the manual scavenging workforce. The women of his community were victims thrice over: they were outcasts even among Dalits; they were despised and shunned for the work they did, and they were physically abused by the men who saw the beatings as an outlet for their frustrations.

The employment of humans to clean human faeces was unarguably the worst violation of human rights anywhere in the world. The degrading act stripped the individual of her dignity while the constant handling of excreta brought in its wake crippling illnesses and infections that went untreated because the community bore the cross of untouchability. Over the next decade-and-a-half, Mr. Wilson worked at educating the elders and spreading awareness about the dehumanising aspect of their occupation. But it was difficult to organise a community that was simply unprepared to give up its job.

This was a baffling paradox. On the one hand, there was the daily ritual of the men drinking and getting violent to forget the pain and humiliation of manual scavenging. At the same time, there was a sense of ownership about the job. "It is our job," they told Mr. Wilson, vastly complicating his effort simultaneously to organise them, fight the company management that employed



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them, and push the government towards banning the occupation and rehabilitating the workers.

Mr. Wilson told *The Hindu*, "Our people had internalised their oppression. They saw themselves as a condemned lot, it was their fate, they had to do this work." If the manual scavenging community, now included among the safai karamcharis (sweepers) to diminish the ugliness of the act, owned up its work due to an acute lack of self-worth, those higher in the caste hierarchy compounded the injury by perpetuating the myth that toilet cleaning and allied activities, like sweeping and picking up garbage, could only be done by the valmiki Dalits, also known as dom, hela, hadi, arundatiyar, madiga, relli, pakhis, chekilliyars, etc.

Incredibly, the ridiculous notion prevailed even at the level of governments — and it continues to prevail — with job reservation for the Scheduled Castes translating as the Dalit castes forming the majority of workforce in Class IV and lower categories. Whatever the official explanation for this, this was nothing if not the Varna system by diktat.

The insensitivity of officialdom to manual scavenging can be seen from the length of time it took India to formally ban the practice. The Constitution abolished untouchability once and for all in 1950. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, which prescribed punishments for untouchability, followed in 1955, and The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act came in 1989. But manual scavenging, which is untouchability at its most violent, was prohibited by legislation only in 1993. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act came into force 46 years after Independence.

Far worse, manual scavenging continues to this day, with many Central and State government departments themselves employing manual scavengers in violation of the 1993 Act. The worst offender in this respect has been the Union Ministry of Railways: the open discharge system of toilets in train carriages results in excreta having to be manually lifted off the tracks. Many municipalities too continue to use dry latrines.

In 2003, the Supreme Court directed all the State governments to file affidavits on manual scavenging, taking a serious view of a PIL petition filed by the SKA and 18 other social action groups. The Uttar Pradesh government admitted to the practice as did the Railway Ministry. But most other State governments brazenly lied that their States were "free from manual scavenging." The SKA, which has an entire library devoted to the documentation of the practice, has clinching photographs and data that establish the lie. The Andolan estimates that there are currently over 3 lakh manual scavengers, down from 13 lakh a decade ago. However, it attributes the declining numbers as much to voluntary liberation as to official intervention.

So far, manual scavenging has been tackled at two levels: The conversion of dry latrines into pour-flush toilets and the rehabilitation of those engaged in the practice. The rehabilitation itself has been terribly half-hearted; a shocking report in *The Hindu* shows that the district administration in Ambala fired

manual scavengers it had re-employed as sweepers. The crucial issue, therefore, is a vital third element: the de-stigmatisation of the so-called menial jobs via changes in recruitment patterns and policies. Without this overhaul, manual scavenging will continue in one form or another.

It is also necessary to expand the definition of manual scavenging to include other kinds of unhygienic toilet cleaning. The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation has been overseeing the elimination of dry latrines since 2004. According to the Ministry, the numbers of dry latrines have declined from a total of 6 lakh in six States to about 2.4 lakh in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Uttarakhand.

But significantly the Ministry makes the point that while dry latrines may be on their way out, this does not necessarily mean the end of manual cleaning of excreta. A recent paper prepared by HUPA says that in the poorer areas in many towns and cities, the dry latrines have given way to "bahao" latrines. These are not connected to septic tanks or underground pits but flow out directly into open drainage, resulting in the "sludge and excreta" having to be manually removed. Says the paper: "These unsanitary latrines require continuous cleaning, which is done by municipal staff and almost always manually, with the most rudimentary appliances."

And no prizes for guessing which castes form the municipal staff. As Union Minister for HUPA Kumari Selja says: "It is ultimately about attitudes. As long as society treats toilet cleaning and sweeping as menial jobs to be done only by certain members of the caste system, it will be difficult to end the obnoxious practice. The scavenging and sweeping community will be truly liberated when cleaning jobs become respectable with the workforce drawn from all communities."



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About India WASH Forum

India WASH Forum is a registered Indian Trust since 2008 with Trustees from all over India. It is affiliated to the WSSCC Geneva and is a coalition of Indian organizations and individuals working on water, sanitation and hygiene.

A unique feature of IWF is its non-hierarchical set up. The Trustees of India WASH Forum are represented in their individual capacity and do not represent the organisations they are associated with.

The agenda and activities that India WASH Forum are determined at the initiative of the Trustees and support from organisations and individuals.

We receive a very small operations grant from WSSCC and undertake learning events, engagement and support with other organisations and initiatives and bring out this bi monthly News & Policy Update.

Since 2010, India WASH Forum is actively engaged in the Global Sanitation Fund and current is **the host of the Global Sanitation Fund in India**, providing the Chair and Convener for the Programme Coordination Mechanism of the Fund in India.

Our Charter includes the following commitments;

- ❑ **Promoting knowledge generation** through research and documentation which is linked to and supported grassroots action in the water-sanitation-hygiene sectors. Special emphasis is given to **sector-specific and cross-cutting thematic learnings**.
- ❑ **Supporting field-based NGOs and networks in their technical and programmatic work**. The IWF would also consistently highlight gender and pro-poor considerations, and provide a national platform for interest groups working in the sector to come together.
- ❑ **Undertaking policy advocacy and influence** work through
 - Monitoring and evaluations
 - Media advocacy and campaigns, and
 - Fact finding missions
- ❑ **Undertaking lobbying and networking to promote common objectives** in the sector.

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