Chapter- 3
Caste and Scavenging In Telangana - Origin and Practice

Introduction

The introduction has discussed the reconfigured presence of caste in modernity, while the first chapter has dealt with the feudal Brahmanical caste practices in Telangana, and the second chapter has engaged with how those caste practices have remained intact in the present Telangana society. This chapter explores the connection between those caste practices and how they have resulted in forcing Telangana Dalits in to modern forms of slavery (scavenging) in Telangana. It is because of feudal Brahmanical caste practices that the Dalits, Madigas and Malas, and other marginalized communities are forced to work as scavengers in Telangana. Telangana Dalits are some of the worst victims of feudal caste practices. Historically, the Madiga, Mala and other marginalized communities were treated as untouchables and assigned filthy and degraded forms of employment in villages.

3.1. Scavenging Is the Slavery Forced On Dalits

Sudharak Olwe, a photojournalist has published a photo essay titled “In Search of Dignity”¹ about conservancy workers, also known as sweepers, of the Greater Bombay Municipal Corporation employees. These workers collect the city’s garbage, sweep the streets, clean the gutters, load and unload garbage trucks and work in the dumping grounds.

He describes the situation as,

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¹Sudharak Olwe, In Search of Dignity, Published at http://www.galli.in/2013/10/search-dignity-justice-sudharak-olwe.html#comment-2217360638, (seen on 26th August 2015)
“All 30,000 of them are Dalits, belonging to the lowest rung of the Indian caste system. They have little or no education. Without exception, all of them despise their work. They are either completely ignored or looked down upon with disgust by the rest of society. They have to work in the midst of filth, with no protective gear, not even access to water for washing off the slime. Most of them are alcoholics and live in poverty, in dismal housing. They are perpetually in debt despite earning what, by Indian standards, is a decent wage of US $152 (10079/- Ten Thousand and seventy nine Indian Rupees only) per month. The workers abuse their wives and children. And when the husbands die (usually at a young age), the despised job passes to the widows. The despair continues. Few years ago, quite by accident, I descended into the „living hell” – a phrase that quite accurately describes the life of these workers. What I saw shook me to the core of my being. That thousands of men and women were living and working in such dehumanizing conditions filled me with rage and shame”.

These pathetic and inhuman conditions of scavengers exist not only in Mumbai; it is the state of affairs everywhere in India. More than 24000 scavengers in Hyderabad live in similar conditions. Such dismal conditions remain not because of the profession of scavenging but because all the scavengers are Dalits.

Scavenging in other countries is a profession, work, job or occupation but scavenging in India is a form of slavery that is forced on untouchable communities. In response to the above description, a resident of New York City Kathryn Foster writes,

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2Ibid
“I was really affected by these photos. I am from America; I have never seen these kinds of things here. This is sad. Is it not there anything that can be done for these people? It may be ignorant on my part, but could not the city take over this function and make these kinds of jobs more desirable? For instance, here in NYC, which is also a megacity, we have the sanitation department who does all these kinds of jobs. Most people do not like to work in sanitation but those who do choose to do it of their own will and are well provided for. They have unions and rights; why can't such a great city as Mumbai do it too”.

Another foreign scholar, Martin Medina has described the scavenging situation in America. The economically poor in America involve in sanitation work due lacking of state safety net for the endurance, but it is not an occupation, based on birth for any individual. As pointed out by Martin Medina,

“In America from the 17th century to the present, scavenging has been an important survival strategy to mostly poor and immigrant individuals. Scavenging continued to exist even in the booming economy of the 1990s due to industrial demand for inexpensive raw materials and the persistence of poverty. In the event of a downturn in the US economy and if the safety net for the poor were severely curtailed, scavenging could increase significantly”.

However, some of the migrants and economically poor in America adopt sanitation work as a survival strategy. Nevertheless, in India it is a forced occupation for Dalits, particularly for Dalit women. It is therefore, not a birth based occupation in any country other than India. Elsewhere, people choose the work by choice and will, and it is a decently paid job in

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3 Ibid
other countries. But in India, it is precisely because of the caste system one who is forced to become a scavenger will be paid low. And this is just because they belong to the so-called lower caste in the caste hierarchy.

Every occupation in India is attached to a caste (community) according to the Chaturvarnya system of Hindu hierarchy. Scavenging is a slavery that is assigned to Dalits and has continued in independent India in all its secular state institutions. All scavengers/ sweepers are from oppressed castes, known as Scheduled castes or Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized communities. Scavenging is a slavery that is sanctioned by the caste system to the untouchable communities. It is an occupation forced on Dalits. Sometimes, it is literally forced, but most often the local caste society and its dynamics creates a situation that forces them to enter into scavenging in institutions of the modern era.

We have to then ask, how, in India, a man or woman becomes a manual scavenger, sweeper, cleaner of filth, bearing in mind that it is not a choice, that it has social stigma attached to it and pays very little. One needs to understand that scavenging is hereditary and is not taken up by choice. None of the scavenging families want to continue the occupation of their ancestors; it has then been made hereditary by force. No scavenger does their job voluntarily; it is a caste system with its socio-economic and religious sanctions. It has created a situation where there is no other option available for Dalits, except for doing this filthy job. The only exception to this phenomenon is Saint Gadge Baba Maharaj, a saint and environmentalist from Maharashtra.
Vivek Kumar writes,

“Saint Gadge Baba (1876 –1956) a saint from Amravati district of Maharashtra, who used to promote public hygiene and cleanliness, the revered Baba started a revolution in the state by going from village to village, cleaning and preaching hygiene way before these issues became a part of the government and the United Nations programme. People, including Babasaheb Ambedkar, were very impressed with his social service. He always carried his trademark broom in hand and an upturned pot for food on his head. Whenever he entered a village, he would instantly start cleaning its gutters and roads. If the residents of the village lauded his efforts, he told them that their appreciation would have to wait until his work was done”.^5

However, unlike Sant Gadge Baba, scavenging and cleaning the filth of others is not a choice for lakhs of scavengers, sweepers and manhole cleaners who clean the country everyday and die in gutters, without any compensation to their families. These people belong to the untouchable communities.

“They were known by different names in different states across India, like Bhangi, Valmiki, Chuhra, Mehtars, Mazhabi, LalBegi, Halalkhor etc. In northern India; Har, Hadi, Hela, Dom and Sanei etc. In eastern India; Mukhiyar, Thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli etc. In Southern India; and Mehtars,

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Bhangias, Halalkhor, Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Barvashia, Metariya, Jamphoda and Melaetc”.

In Telangana, Mehtar, Valmiki, Halalkhor are engaged in the cleaning of human excreta and Madiga, Mala, Lambadi and other OBC marginalized communities engaged in scavenging works in Telangana.

3.2. Attacks on Dalit to Force Them into Scavenging

The reason for the continuity of such slavery today is the reconfigured form of casteist practices in the modern administration that forces the untouchable communities, controls their socio-economic conditions, and regulates their economic development. The untouchable communities are not allowed to access the facilities and benefits they are entitled to from the government according to the constitution and different laws. For example, the non-implementation of reservations in public employment and education institutions, which has been explained in the introductory chapter. When the children of scavengers try to change their occupation to live with dignity and respect, they are attacked by casteist elements. There are thousands of such attacks on Dalits to prevent them from choosing the profession of their choice. Here is such an incident reported in the newspaper Hindu,

“In 2012, Vinubhai Kabira, Mehul”s father, rented an auto with the hope that his son would earn a living as an auto driver. In a matter of a few days, Mehul was attacked by a group of youths from the Darbar community, who beat him up so badly that he had to be hospitalized and the family had to flee the village. “They objected to my riding the auto. They forbade people from sitting in it. Their harassment continued for five days after which they vandalized my auto and beat

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6Lok Sabha secretariat parliament library and reference, research, documentation and information service (larrdis), Manual Scavengers: Welfare and Rehabilitation, 2013
me up. Out of fear, we fled the village,” said Mehul, whose family mustered the courage to return four months ago. “They said „Bhangdas” should not ride an auto. They did not even allow us to park it at the auto stand. They said we were fit only to clean gobar [cattle faeces] and work in their fields,” his father Vinubhai said”.

Attacking Dalits for denial of scavenging work is a very common phenomenon everywhere in India, but due to the severe lack of representation of Dalits, particularly people from the scavenging communities in the media, such incidents never see the day of light. It is also important to pay attention to the fact that Rahi Gaikwad, a Dalit journalist, reported this news.

Dalits are attacked to uphold inhuman caste practices, and state administration and police always ally with the upper castes, collude with the perpetrators, and implicate the victims in fabricated cases. As a result, the traditional caste practices, the treatment of Dalits as untouchables and forcing them into the slavery of scavenging is justified by the modern state administrations because of their impunity. It is illegal but gets the legitimacy of the state through police and administration. Further, in the above news it says, “They (the perpetrators of atrocities on Dalits) behave that way with the police too,” remarked J.D. Zala, sub-inspector, in charge of the Bavla police station. These words of a police officer reveal that caste Hindu communities have little respect for the government administration and threaten them on occasion.

In November 2012, Guddidevi along with 10 to 12 other Valmiki women in Parigama village in Uttar Pradesh’s Mainpuri district refused to clean dry toilets. Members of the dominant Thakur caste threatened them. Guddidevi told Human Rights Watch:

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8Ibid.
“We left this work with help from the Garima Abhiyan. We always wanted to leave and we were looking for some support. … When we left, they came to our houses and threatened us: “If you do not clean our toilets, we will not allow you to use our fields for defecation. We will hit you with sticks and stones.” Then after a week, six of us women were called to the meeting and told that if we did not do this work they would beat us up. They said, “We will not let you live in peace.”

The report further says,

“Some of the other women said they were threatened inside their homes. They were warned that they would be denied grazing rights. They were also threatened with eviction. Despite these threats, they refused to return to manual scavenging. Soon after, some 20 to 30 upper caste men from Parigama confronted the Valmiki community. Gangashri said: “They called our men and said, „If you do not start sending your women to clean our toilets, we will beat them up. We will beat you up.‟” We were afraid.” The next morning, Guddidevi and three other women went to file a complaint at the police station, five kilometers away. They did not get the protection they sought. The police officer on duty at the Alau Tahsil police station told them it was not in his capacity to handle their complaint.

The above two incidents are not the only ones; there might be thousands of such incidents still taking place in which Dalits are forced to do the filthy jobs. When one begins to inquire into the actual people who are engaged in sanitation work, one can immediately notice that it is only Dalits who are involved. However, the scholars and policy makers in this country have failed to recognize and document this truth while formulating policies

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10 ibid, pp-57
and while producing the literature on the issues of sanitation. The silence of academicians, administrators and policy makers normalizes and justifies the existing caste inequalities as common culture of this Indian society, which has thrown Dalits into slavery.

3.3. Caste System Was the Origin of Scavenging

The origin of the present form of scavenging is the Brahmanical feudal caste system. The present form for scavenging is not a work, job, occupation or profession but it is the slavery of untouchable castes. There was reference for the origin of scavenging castes in the Brahmanical Hindu religious texts. Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak writes in his Road to Freedom, that,

“According to the contents of the scriptures and other literatures, scavenging especially the disposal of night soil by a particular caste or castes in Indian society, has been in existence since the beginning of civilization with the emergence of towns. One of the fifteen duties for slaves enumerated in the Naradiya Samhitha was to dispose human excreta. In Vajasaneyi Samhitha the Chandals and Paulkosa have been referred to as slaves for the disposal of the night soil”.11

Those Chandals are the present untouchable communities.

Sachchidananda mentions that,

“When Aryans came here as conquerors, they retained with themselves the religious and military functions of the social order. Therefore, as time rolled by, they held the functions of princes and nobles and became large holders of land. The conquered people were kept in subjugation. They performed the lowest task, which was scavenging only. Later on some variations in the features of the

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11Sachchidananda, People at the bottom, A Portrait of the scavengers, concept publication company, New Delhi, 2001, p.12
members of the groups emerged partly by the fact that their entry as servants in to high class families facilitates illicit connection with the superior class and partly that tribe habitually recruits itself by admission of out caste from superior tribes (Crook,1896).\textsuperscript{12}

We can keep the Aryan invasion theory to its controversy for some time, but one cannot deny the fact that there were the landholders whose Brahanical feudal caste practices forced native, untouchable communities into the slavery of scavenging.

Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan, (National Campaign for Dignity and Eradication of Manual Scavenging) clearly understood the problem of scavenging. They say, “The Garima Abhiyan holds that manual carrying of human faeces is not a form of employment, but a custom integrally related to the caste system based on inequality and injustice”.\textsuperscript{13}

Gita Ramaswamy describes how the Hindu Brahmanical notion of purity and pollution has resulted in producing manual scavengers. She says,

“The traditional Hindu concepts of "impurity" and "pollution", the bedrock of the inhuman practice of "untouchability", discouraged them (Brahmins and their allied dominant castes) from having indoor toilets and goaded them to insist on manual scavenging by Dalits. The people who were brought from villages to lay roads and railway tracks were later used for menial jobs, including manual scavenging. Those engaged in this operation, over 80 per cent of them women, have been the worst victims of untouchability in many parts of the country. They are branded "polluted", for that very reason pushed into manual scavenging, and again, because they do this job they are treated as

\textsuperscript{12} ibid, p.13
\textsuperscript{13} Resource Kit on manual scavenging, Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan, Dewas , Madyapradesh
"polluted" and hence "untouchable". They are thus caught in a vortex”.

Gita Ramaswamy further writes that,
“Manual scavenging became a widespread practice with increasing urbanization in the late nineteenth century. The destruction of artisan trade and imposition of property relations and commercialization of land by the British caused social upheavals. Urbanized groups, led by the privileged castes, did not think of setting up a proper underground drainage system like the one the Nizam of Hyderabad did, back in the 1930s. This period witnessed the importation of people to do a job that even local Dalits refused to do. It was during this period that Dalits who worked as agricultural laborers were gradually brought into scavenging”.

It is an open secret that only untouchable communities are forced into scavenging slavery everywhere, but no government official acknowledges it. No government has put it in writing, because it will raise questions about the modernity and secular spirit of the society and state. Hiding this truth may give comfort because forcing Dalits into scavenging is a religious sanctioned modern slavery. The individuals who are sympathetic towards Dalits and associated with state institutions see this scavenging issue as the fate of Dalits and nothing more than that. They never question why only a particular community is condemned to do this filthy job. Instead the officials look for the solution in the technology by making it as an issue of environment and waste management.

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15 Ibid
3.4. Modernity of Caste Based Scavenging

To understand the connection between caste and scavenging, one needs to look at the people engaged in the scavenging work. They will find that it is only Dalits who are doing this work. They are assigned this work because they are untouchables and they are treated as untouchables because they do such filthy jobs. It is only because of the Hindu religious notions in India, the Dalits have becomes scavengers, and are treated as untouchables, and humiliated every day. The Dalit woman, due to her caste and gender, becomes a scavenger for her children and the scavenger of other’s children and adults too. Therefore, it is to be understood that in India, because of the caste system and its modernized caste practices, the ideology of Gandhi and the nationalist discourses that some people are considered „intellectuals” by birth and some people are „scavengers” by birth. This is the modernity of scavenging.

It does not mean that there was no mobility of caste occupations. There are a few instances where Brahmins have beena dopting other professions by leaving their priestly occupation. However, this is only because other positions offer more economic well-being than that of a priest. No Brahmin joins the job of scavenging. That is why Sridhar V Ketkar rightly observed,

“Today a man can take to any occupation without changing his caste. The only exceptions are that no body of good (dominant, mine) castes would like to take to the occupation of shoemaker or scavenger, and no man who is not born as a Brahmin would be accepted as a priest in the community”.16

16Ketkar V Sridhar, History of Caste in India, Tailor and Carpenter, Newyork, 1909, p.19
The above observation by Ketkar was in 1909. However, the situation has changed afterwards due to the intervention of Gandhi, who argued and advocated for the retention of caste based occupations from the 1930s. The same Gandhian ideology has become the national discourse of India. Gandhi saw manual scavenging as a god given family profession to the untouchable communities. He says, “I do not advise untouchables to give up their trades and professions. One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your president, that according to me is Hinduism”. (Harijan 6th March, 1937)\textsuperscript{17}

He also says that, "I may not be born again, but if it happens, I will like to be born into a family of scavengers, so that I may relieve them of the inhuman, unhealthy and hateful practice of carrying night soil."\textsuperscript{18}

This Gandhian thought is the heart and soul of Indian media, academia, judiciary and administration and the same Gandhian ideology is propagated and practiced by the entire state apparatus every day. Hence, despite Dalits constituting 90% of the scavenging population, the state apparatus does not question this tendency.

Gandhi therefore advocated the status quo of the existing caste system, that of inequality, but without untouchability, which includes the scavenging professions assigned to the Dalits. Along these lines he says,

“My opinion against sweepers” strike dates back to about 1897 when I was in Durban. A general strike was mooted there and the question arose as to whether scavengers should join it. My vote was registered against the strike proposal. In spite of my close attachment to

\textsuperscript{17}Vidya Bhushan Rawat, India’s Shame: Some Unanswered Questions From The Frontline Reports, available at -http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-rawat280906.htm (seen on 15\textsuperscript{th} January 2015)

\textsuperscript{18}Bindeshwar Pathak, Life and Mission, Sulabh International, New Delhi, 1991
sweepers, better because of it, I must denounce the coercive method they are said to have employed. They will thereby be losers in the long run. City folks will not always be cowed down. A Bhangi may not give up his work even for a day. (Harijan 21st April 1946)"  

These Gandhian ideas have become policies, laws, circulars, orders and judgments. Following is a news report in Loksatta, which carries one such example, where Maharashtra government declared that only Dalits should fill all scavenging posts.

“Henceforth, the post from scavenging services, whether government or semi government, will be filled in from the scheduled castes people only. The posts will be given to the heirs and relatives of the workers who are in services. These vacant posts will be reserved only for the scheduled castes people. The state government on Wednesday took this decision, in order to protect the heir rights of Valmiki, Mehtar and to give them economical protection. The Lad commission proposed this policy. State cabinet ministry decided that these proposed suggestions would be carried forward and scheduled castes people must get benefits of these decisions. After the retirement of scavenging worker or after the sudden death of scavenging worker, the vacant post will be given to the heir or relative of that worker”.

The news report further says,

“However, to reserve the particular post for only one caste will create different problems. The appropriateness of the decision will be questioned. In 2014, one petition was filed against the recommendations of Lad commissions regarding the appointments of Scavenging workers. It was dismissed by the high court at that time.

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19Vidya Bhushan Rawat, India’s Shame: Some Unanswered Questions From The Frontline Reports, viewed on 24th October 2014 at http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-rawat280906.htm
However, court had ordered to the state government that keeping in the mind, the competition among the unemployed people for scavenging work services the government should rethink and reconsider the recommendations that were made 40 years ago. However, government decided that the 40 years old recommendations need to be applied in the present situation also. According to the decision, the vacant post from the same scavenging services will be filled strictly from the relatives and heirs of the working person in that service.”

News report in Loksatta news paper Mumbai carrying the news about the reserving scavenging jobs to only Scheduled Castes

The social justice minister confirmed and supported the decision. “How fair is it just to recruit the people from the scheduled castes?” This question was asked to the social justice minister Raj Kumar Badaule. He replied,

“Other people from the scheduled castes should get the benefits of this decision”. By saying this, he confirmed the decision. Lad commission recommended Valmiki–Mehtar castes and their relatives and heirs should get the benefit. However, in society other people from scheduled caste also do the same work so they should also get the benefits. It means Lad commission also
thought about all workers and people from the scheduled castes and their heirs. After saying this, he supported the decision of the State Government.\textsuperscript{21}

It is nauseating to see that the Maharashtra government wanted all untouchable communities to be engaged in scavenging in the pretext of their economic interests. The sensible thing that a secular and modern government institution should do is to reserve employment and educational opportunities to the untouchable communities in some non-scavenging spaces in dignified positions, and to give opportunity to those untouchable communities in jobs other than scavenging. This situation is the result of Gandhi”s justification of the caste system and caste based occupations and complete disregard of Ambedkar and his thoughts.

Ambedkar had a view contrary to Gandhi and he looked at it as a problem arising from the caste system. He said,

“For in India a man is not scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. If Gandhism preached that scavenging is a noble profession, with the objective of inducing those who refuse to engage in it, one could understand it. But why appeal to the scavenger’s pride and vanity in order to induce him and him only to keep on to scavenging by telling him that scavenging is a noble profession and that he need not to be ashamed of it”.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{21} Special reporter, Loksatta, Daily newspaper, Mumbai, Thursday, 17\textsuperscript{th} September 2015, p.10, (Translation from Marathi to English by Kudale Kaniphath Malhari)
\bibitem{22} B R Ambedkar, \textit{what congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables}, chapter xi, Gandhism The Doom of the Untouchables, available at - http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/41L.What%20Congress%20and%20Gandhi%20CHAPTER%20XI.htm
\end{thebibliography}
Ambedkar further said,

“To preach that poverty is good for Shudra and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the untouchables and for none else and to make them accept these onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life. By appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes which none but Mr. Gandhi can perpetuate with equanimity and impunity.”

Ambedkar here questioned and advocated for the delinking of scavenging from caste. However, the rulers and policy makers never gave a thought to what Ambedkar said.

Indira Gandhi recognized the problem as a misery and humiliation but she did not recognize that the problem involved caste. She opined that “Sanitation in India is not only cleanliness; it is also an end of the humiliation and miseries of scavengers who carry human excreta on the head”

While the entire state apparatus is engaged in realizing Gandhian ideology that advocates caste-based occupation, the founder of Sulabh International, Bindeshwar Pathak brings another argument that scavengers are not a caste, but a class of people. He observes, “Scavengers were a special class and, not a caste, united in their miseries and social degradation.” This is a dubious argument and is criticized by many activists and scholars

Vidya Bhushan Rawat says,

“...those scavengers are a particular caste imposed upon them by the Varnashrama dharma and denying it would be the biggest lie of our time. It is very unfortunate if someone working on the issue deny the

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23Ibid
24Ibid
existence of manual scavengers as caste. It is a fact that most of the municipalities have Valmiki, Arundathiyar as the main people doing sanitary work but now a day with relatively better remunerations other caste people are also coming for sanitation work in the municipalities but they never clean and always keep themselves away from cleaning work. Most of them are absentee employees who employ another beggar labour from the community on a wage basis and take his handsome salary on the month end. The fact of the matter is that, it is very difficult for the people from these communities to get promotion in the municipality while a Bhadralok Bengali who joins as a sweeper on paper soon becomes a Babu (Supervisor).”

The above observation by Rawat raises two important issues here:

(1) the entry of non-Dalit individuals into scavenging jobs creates the caste hierarchy within scavengers;

(2)

(3), while the Dalit scavengers remain as scavengers, the non-Dalit dominant caste individuals joins as a sweeper, never sweep the roads but employ people from the scavenging castes to sweep on behalf of them, and are promoted as supervisor within a short time. Scholars such as Tulika Tripathi have missed this important aspect emerging from the phenomenon of non-Dalit entry into the scavenging „profession”.

Tulika Tripathi has inconsiderately argued that,

“The old link between caste and occupation has been weakened. Now Brahmins do not necessarily carry out religious duties, and Vaishyas are not necessarily into trade. We also observe many

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26Vidya Bhushan Rawat, India’s Shame: Some Unanswered Questions From The Frontline Reports, viewed on 24th October 2014 at http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-rawat280906.htm
Scheduled Castes (SCs) going into territories, which were earlier reserved for upper caste groups. But this mobility is seen largely in castes other than SCs, and whatever little mobility is observed within the SC community is confined to the better off SCs. It also needs to be pointed out that Other Backward Classes (OBCs), a relatively newer category, has acquired economic and political significance in the last few decades”.27

Tripathi blissfully missed the reality of caste when she said, “Now Brahmins do not necessarily carry out religious duties, and Vaishyas are not necessarily into trade”.28 Because those Brahmins and Vyshyas do not engage in scavenging work, but they take up positions which gives them more social power than their caste positions.

Many scholars have stressed upon the truth of this caste based scavenging; Vimal Thorat says that the number of those Dalit scavengers is 13 lakhs across the country. She says,

“In spite of manual scavenging being made illegal in the country, 13 lakh Dalits continue to engage in it to earn their daily bread and butter. Moreover, Delhi, the national capital, has 10,000 dry latrines even today. Even though the chief minister of Delhi denies it, you will find them in various places in the capital”.29

The connection between caste and scavenging is unavoidable because it is unarguably the caste system that has forced Dalits in to modern slavery

27 Tulika, Tripathi, Safai Karmis of Uttar Pradesh, Caste, Power and Politics, Economic and Political weekly, Vol - L No. 6, February 07, 2015
28 Ibid
i.e. scavenging and it is not only in Telangana but it is a pan Indian phenomenon.

The Safai Karmachari Andolan describes manual scavenging as a dictate of the caste system,

“Manual scavenging, an occupation which involves cleaning the dry latrines and carrying human excreta is considered as one of the lowest, polluted and most degrading occupation. The caste system dictates that those born into a particular Dalit sub-caste should engage in manual scavenging and should remain doing so throughout their lives, prohibiting them to lead a dignified life in the community”.\(^{30}\)

The definition that was given in the both Acts of parliament in 1993 and 2013 did not mention the caste while defining “manual scavenger”. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, defined manual scavenging as “Manual scavenger” means a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta and the expression “manual scavenging” shall be construed accordingly”.\(^{31}\) The legal definition of „manual scavenger” did not carry the weight of manual scavenger because it did not recognize this work as caste based slavery.

In the developed counties, where there is no birth based caste system, the scavenging job is a well-paid job and the scavengers in India are paid less because they are Dalits. The writers, scholars and activists who argue that there is no link between caste and scavenging in India are missing the truth and in effect advocating the status quo of caste hierarchies in the modern era.

\(^{30}\)Safai Karmachari Andolan, available at - http://safaikarmachariandolan.org/aboutus.html, seen on 23\(^{rd}\) November 2015

\(^{31}\)The employment of manual scavengers and construction of dry latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993
Some of the foreign scholars have looked at scavenging through perspective of labour. However, Martin Medina in his essay “Scavenger Cooperatives in Asia and Latin America” appropriately says that,

“Even though scavengers are not always the poorest of the poor, their occupation is generally ascribed the lowest status in society. Historically, outcasts and marginal groups, such as slaves, gypsies and migrants have performed waste collection and recycling activities in developing countries. In India, the harijans, formerly untouchables play an important role in garbage collection and recovery of recyclables from waste. And in Muslim countries, non-Muslims usually perform refuse collection and recycling activities since contact with waste materials is considered impure” 32

This pure and impure classification in India is not limited to only materials but also to the professions and people.

The practice of manually cleaning excrement from private and public dry toilets and open drains is consistent with a feudal caste society. Even though manual scavenging is banned by the law of the land, the Dalit communities like Valmiki, Bhangi, Arundathiyar, Methari, Paki and others are still not allowed to choose their choice of work and are forced to do the this filthy job. Particularly, the women who belong to these communities are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and forced to remain in this work.

3.5. Supreme Court of India Recognized the Fact

It is a strategy of the dominant caste scholars and policy makers who say that there is no caste in the scavenging profession. Some activists, who are engaged in the movement against manual scavenging calls it a conspiracy to

W. Robinson, the Solid Waste Handbook. New York: John Wiley & Sons, p.10
hide the reality of caste, Bezawada Wilson says, “There has been a conspiracy to ignore the bitterest truth of their (Manual Scavengers) existence at every level – religion, caste, bureaucracy, plans, and politics that is why the system looks with contempt”. By looking at the workers who are engaged in the scavenging work, anyone can easily understand that they are Dalits, the untouchables.

Bezawada Wilson, on behalf of the Safai Karmachari Andolan filed public interest litigation (PIL) in the supreme court of India. Seeking issuance of writ of mandamus to the Union of India, State Governments and Union Territories to enforce implementation of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 inter alia, seeking for enforcement of fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 17, 21 and 47 of the Constitution of India. In the judgment of the above PIL the supreme court of India mentioned two important observations about the connection between caste and scavenging. It says,

(i) “The inhuman practice of manually removing night soil which involves removal of human excrements from dry toilets with bare hands, brooms or metal scrappers; carrying excrements and baskets to dumping sites for disposal is a practice that is still prevalent in many parts of the country. While the surveys conducted by some of the petitioner-organizations estimate that there are over 12 lakh manual scavengers undertaking the degrading human practice in the country, the official statistics issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the year 2002-2003 puts the figure of identified manual scavengers at 6,76,009. Of these, over 95% are Dalits

33 Bezawada Wilson, foreword to “Unseen: the truth about Indias manual scavengers”, penguin books, New Delhi 2012, p.15
34 Mandamus - (man-dame-us) n. Latin for "we order," a writ (more modernly called a "writ of mandate") which orders a public agency or governmental body to perform an act required by law when it has neglected or refused to do so
35 Judgement of Supreme Court of India, Safai Karmachari Andolan and Ors vs. Union of India and others 27 March 2014, Author: P.Sathasivam, Bench: P Sathasivam, Ranjan Gogoi, And N.V. Ramana, in Writ Petition (civil) No. 583 OF 2003, p.1
(persons belonging to the scheduled castes), who are compelled to undertake this denigrating task under the garb of “traditional occupation”. The manual scavengers are considered untouchables by other mainstream castes and are thrown into a vortex of severe social and economic exploitation.

(ii) The sub-Committee of the Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission in 1989 estimated that there were 72.05 lakhs dry latrines in the country. These dry latrines have not only continued to exist till date in several States but have increased to 96 lakhs and are still being cleaned manually by scavengers belonging to the Scheduled Castes”.  

In spite of this recognition and direction by the Supreme Court, it is not easy to eradicate scavenging because the state apparatus is involved in practicing caste as an ideology for eradication of manual scavenging, the civic bodies need to adopt the modern machinery one side, and scavenging communities should be represented in all realms of the entire state apparatus to give moral strength to them, and political will is a must to tackle this problem. Ravichandran argues,

“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.”

Without political will court judgments will remain merely 'on paper' and no further.

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36 Ibid, p.2
3.6. Scavengers in Telangana

Dalit communities are not scavengers by choice; it is the caste system that has assigned these filthy jobs to them. Dalits are literally forced by the caste Hindu communities to do the scavenging; because they cannot clean their own filth as their religious sanctions prevent them to do so. The jobs are decided by birth according to the Chaturvarnya system, as Ambedkar pointed out “The old Varna system prevalent in ancient India had society divided into four orders: (1) Brahmins, whose occupation was learning; (2) Kshatriyas whose occupation was warfare, (3) Vaishyas, whose occupation was trade and (4) Shudras, whose occupation was service of the other classes”. The ex untouchable communities did not fall under the Chaturvarnya system. They have been historically identified as out-castes, and therefore assigned the most denigrated of jobs.

Scavenging originated as a caste based slavery in Telangana. Following are some examples of how this came to be.

Kotesh Devulapally, a social activist hailing from Warangal district in Telangana state, he says the practice of manual scavenging is one of the most cruel and inhuman. He described an incident that took place in his village (Shankarajpally of Eturnagaram Mandal) during his childhood days. According to him,

“In 1980s, I witnessed an incident. One Mr. Lachchaiah, known as Bakka lachchadu (a humiliating way of calling a lean and Madiga caste man, belonging to untouchable community as commonly used by every other community people above them in the caste hierarchy) was walking on the village main road and passing by the house of the landlord, Vanaparthi Papaiah, who belonged to the feudal caste. The

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38 B R Ambedkar, *What congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, chapter xi, Gandhism, The Doom of the Untouchables*”
landholder called Lachchaiah in an angry and derogatory tone, “are bakka lachchiga iturara” (come here,) and asked him to wait for a moment.

Then the landlord defecated in the very place in which he sat and asked Lachchaiah to remove the fresh faeces from the place, and when Lachchaiah asked for a shovel to remove the faeces, the landlord angrily yelled at him, “Neeku Para Endukura Madiga lanjaakoduka, Thiyyira chethulathoni” (why do you need a shovel you son of a bitch, clean the faeces with your hands) to clean the human faeces. Then Lachchaiah was unable to question the cruel landlord, and he removed the faeces with his bare hands”.

This incident tells us a lot about the plight of Dalits in Telangana, particularly Madigas. Lachchaiah was not a manual scavenger earlier; he belonged to the Madiga community, who are involved in removing dead cows in the village and leatherwork. However, Lachchaiah being Madiga and his lower socioeconomic status as a Dalit and feudal power of landlord made him as manual scavenger.

Koteshwar spoke about another incident involving a Brahmin woman, the mother of his Brahman friend, “Once, the Brahmin women teacher was coming out of a bank after drawing her monthly salary. 3 thieves attacked her with human faeces in their hands, they spread the faeces on her and looted her, then that Brahmin woman went back to her home and took bath several times to come out of the feeling of being polluted by the touch of the faeces. She threw away her clothes. When her husband came home, she complained saying, “Donga Vedavalu Malamu challi, Dabbulu Ethukellaru” (Rascal thieves spread the human faeces on me and took away money”). The Brahmin, her husband, not worried about the money that they lost, but he felt that the word malam (faeces) polluted his house. By using the word faeces in the sacred house, he angrily said, “Murkhurala pavithramaina ee entilo
malamankunda Ashudhdhamani chavochchuga?” (Ignorant women, why you are using faeces (night soil) word in this sacred home, why don't you use ashuddham, (means impure) instead.

So here, we have two incidents. In the first incident, a landlord compelled a Madiga man Lachchaiah to clean the human faeces with bare hands. In another incident, the husband of the Brahmin woman asked her not to use the word human faeces in his house. This is the relation between caste and scavenging.

In the first incident, the feudal landholder showed his feudal caste power to denigrate Madiga Lachaiah. He actually did not want his shit to be removed but he wanted to humiliate Madiga Lachaiah. That is why the landlord did not allowed Madiga Lachaiah to use shovel to remove human faeces. To understand it properly, the question here is not about the removal of human faeces but it is the issue of disrespecting another human being. That is why, the present form of scavenging is not about work, occupation, job or profession, and it is pure slavery that is sanctioned by the Brahmanical feudal caste system.

In the first incident, the dominant caste landlord forced a Madiga person (Bakka Lachaiah) to remove human excreta with bare hands. Some may argue that it is the poverty or illiteracy of Bakka Lachaiah, and if that is the understanding, there might be other people in other communities in the village who are as poor and as illiterate as Madiga Bakka Lachaiah is. However, only Madigas were asked to do such filthy jobs. As a social commonsense, it is unimaginable for any other community. It is the social system of the village in Telangana where Dalits, the untouchables were treated as lower human beings.

In the second incident, a Brahmin husband abused his wife for using the word „night soil“ in his home; and this reveals the caste practices of a Brahmin family. We can see how both incidents are deeply attached with caste, and with the Hindu Brahmanical notions of the pure and the impure.
Therefore, in India caste has produced scavenging as a form of slavery to
denigrate certain communities. Now this caste exists as an ideology of Hindu
Brahmin Dharma and it exists in day-to-day practices:

Telangana Dalits are forced to perform filthy and menial works as a
caste based occupation in the villages. Some of these include:

1. Disposing animal carcasses,
2. Skinning the dead animals and
3. Leather-work such as stitching shoes other agricultural equipments
4. Castrating animals
5. Sweeping and
6. Beating Drums at the times of marriage, death and festivals.
7. Knitting beds for dominant castes
8. Informing about deaths and post death rituals to the relatives of the dead
9. Taking the cloths of the dead
10. Assisting deliveries,
11. Cutting umbilical cord
12. Cleaning after delivery
13. Assisting the official who visits the villages in all matters,
14. Announcing by shouting in the village streets

The above list is in addition to the practices of Vetti, Bonded labour,
Jogini, and Banamathi killings of Dalits that are discussed in the first chapter.
The above are the practices that have existed over centuries in the villages of
Telangana. Even in the present times of modernity and development, the same
practices are in existence with little changes. The feudal Dora (landlord) has
now become a Surpanch (village president) of the Grampanchayath, wherein
Dalits in Telangana villages have remained as landless, agricultural laborers.
It is in this kind of situation that it has become easy for dominant castes to
compel Dalits into sanitation work. Moreover, forcing Dalits into scavenging
work has become „normal” and „commonsensical”, and this is due to the social
acceptance of caste hierarchy by the state apparatus. The secular, modern and
civil discourses have never questioned this but justified scavenging as „work”,
Communists, Naxalite and other civil society organizations in Telangana see scavenging from the point of view of labour and have asked for increase of wages but they have never addressed this issue as something that has emerged from the caste system.

There are few villages in Telangana where Mala Madiga hamlets do not exist. When such is the situation, the Dalits from other villages are called and hired for scavenging work and other works that are assigned to Dalits as mentioned above. However, there are few instances where Mala Madigas of the new generation refuse to take up any of the degrading occupations, such as scavenging and beating drums. As a result, scavenging is being forced on the most marginalized communities such as Chakali and Mangali in absence of Dalits. It effectively means that if at all one has to do scavenging, he has to be a Dalit in the first place, and if not, and he should be a man from a marginalized caste within the caste hierarchy. No dominant castes, such as Reddy, Velama, Komati and Brahmins take up the work of scavenging at any cost even when they are economically poor. Because their caste notion, ideology and practice compel them not accept it, further the village social design is such that no one thinks in this direction, and no one dares to ask those upper caste men to do scavenging work. This situation clears the misconceptions around class notions that surround scavenging and reaffirms the truth that scavenging is a caste-based slavery forced on the untouchable communities.

Moreover, such modern slavery has been continuing in the present era of secularism and democracy and it is seen everywhere in all private and public institutions. It is seen everywhere in Telangana in all the private and public institutions. It’s more apparently visible in the public institutions that include civic bodies such as Grampanchayaths, Nagara Panchayaths, municipalities, municipal corporations and railways because these institutions are engaged in the cleaning of public roads, drainages and parks other public places.
Everywhere else in the world, one becomes a scavenger by choice, but in India the untouchable communities, so-called lower caste persons has to accept the profession of scavenging whether they like it or not. It is a forced occupation for Dalits. That is why Ambedkar said, “For in India a man is not scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not”. Moreover, it is a meagerly paid job. And it is not meagerly paid because there is less work to do but because the scavengers belong to so-called lower castes. The gap between the salary of a regularized government employee pay and that of contractual and outsourced employees such as sanitation workers” pay by the government reminds one of the imposition of Manusmriti through modern means. Sweepers in Telangana Grampanchayaths and schools get 500 to 1600 Rupees per month, while the regularized sweepers get 22000 Rupees. At the same time teachers gets around 42000 Rupees.

Scavenging is the worst form of untouchability that is clearly visible. Everybody in the town or in the village knows the caste background of scavengers. Hence, it would be difficult for him or her to even do a different job other than the one assigned to him through the caste system. Even among Dalits, they face this discrimination. The Dalit movement in Telangana has not yet recognized this issue as a problem. As Kadaram Yadagiri, retired employee of GHMC, and leader of the scheduled caste welfare association says that the “Scheduled Castes are the sweepers and cleaners, irrespective of modernity or tradition, whether in private or government institutions. Those who are engaged in the scavenging occupation for generations should be given other opportunities; a movement is required in this direction”.

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40 B R Ambedkar, what congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, chapter xi, Gandhism The Doom of the Untouchables, available at - http://www.ambedkar.org/ambed/41L.What%20Congress%20and%20Gandhi%20CHAPTER%20XI.htm
41 KadaramYadagiri interviewed by Karthik Navayan on 22"nd October 2014, in Chinthal Basthi, Hyderabad
Scavenging is invisible in other public and private institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, offices of government and private organizations. All these institutions and offices engage scavengers for cleaning their toilets and sweeping their premises. When public institutions, which are supposed to be secular and modern, are engaging scavengers by following the traditional notion of caste hierarchy and employing only Dalits, the private institutions and offices will without any doubt follow the caste system and employ only Dalits in scavenging because they are answerable to none.

3.7. Caste Composition of Public Institutions

The public institutions in Telangana are disproportionately occupied by the feudal dominant castes, the reservation system is ignored in all appointments and opportunities are denied to Dalits. This is resulting in twoway marginalization of Dalits; (1) there is no sufficient representation of Dalits in the Public sector and no economic progress; (2) Dalits are losing the opportunity of social status of an „employee”.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the judiciary is still untouched by Dalits. Brahmins, Reddys, Velamas Kayastha, Kapus and Kammas have captured the high courts of the Telugu states. In the High Court, there were 141 judges from their inception from 1954. There have been only six judges from the Scheduled castes category and only one tribal judge. The rest were from the Brahmanical dominant castes, and therefore over represented (34 Brahmins, 31 Reddys, 16 Kammas, 7 Kshatriyas, 9 Kapus, 4 Vyshyas, 3 Velamas, 2 Kayasthas, 2 Patnaiks and 16 BCs). Dalit Adivasis are underrepresented while Brahmins and their allied dominant castes are over represented.

Not only the high court but also all other state departments in Telangana are disproportionately occupied and operated by dominant caste
individuals. A RTI reply from the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation reveals that the dominant castes, Brahmins, Reddys, Velamas and Komatis, who together constitute only 15% of the population, occupy 50% of the total jobs in the department. It is not only the case with the high court or agricultural department but it is the truth of every state institution in Telangana, including the autonomous institutions, whether they are research institutions or educational institutions such as universities. All are occupied and governed by dominant castes with Brahmanical cultural capital and those dominant caste individuals deny the entry of Dalits into institutions by misquoting and misinterpreting the reservations policy.

Reply to RTI application from Government of Telangana on Caste diversity in the department of agriculture and cooperation

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation has 4135 SC, ST employees in total who are on the pay roll of the government (Regularized).
Out of 4135, more than 90 percent Dalits are scavengers. When asked about the presence of the Reddy, Brahmin, Kamma, Velama, Kayasths, Komati, Kapus, and Kshatriyas in the scavenging employment, a GHMC officer laughed and said, those dominant caste community people never joined as scavengers in the entire history of GHMC.

3.7.1. All Sanitation Workers Are Outsourced

Since the 1990s, the regularization of sanitation workers has stopped. The sanitation workers remember it as „after Chandra Babu Naidu became chief minister, there are no regularizations of sanitation workers in the GHMC“. Chandra Babu Naidu became chief minister for the first time in 1995. In 2011, the Government of Andhra Pradesh officially admitted that the sanitation workers would be outsourced. It says,

“At present 23,209 employees including Public Health and Non-Public Health workers are working in all categories in all Urban Local Bodies. The present proposal covers the posts from category of Commissioner to Bill Collector in 55 categories of posts only. At present 5,115 employees are working in these categories. The present proposal does not cover the posts of Public Health and Non-Public Health Workers, Attendars, Drivers, Record Assistants, other Class-IV employees in the Urban Local Bodies for the reason that the requirements of these posts vary from Urban Local Body to Urban Local Body and these posts are outsourced to a major extent”.

3.8. Categories and Practice of Manual Scavenging

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43 G.O. MS. No.218 Dated 15th June 2011, Municipal Administration & urban development (G1) department, government of Andhra Pradesh
All the 'unclean' workers such as sweepers, sewage workers, pit workers and cleaners of human excreta are the people who are branded as impure and "unclean" by the Hindu Brahmanical religion. They are the untouchables, referred to with different names at different historical times such as Panchama, Asprushya, Anthyaja, Avarnas Chandala etc. Gandhi called them by the name „harijan‟, at the time he was working for eradication of untouchability and temple entry to the untouchables. In colonial period, these untouchables had organized themselves as Adi Dravida in Tamil Nadu, Adi Andhra in coastal Andhra region, Adi Hindus in Hyderabad Deccan (Present Telangana state) and Adi Karnataka in Karnataka state for their movement for self-respect. These untouchables are now popularly referred to as Dalits and the constitutional term for them is Scheduled Castes.

Untouchable communities are found in all types of scavenging works such as sweepers, sewage workers, pit workers and cleaners of human excreta from dry latrines and on the railway tracks in Telangana today. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 defined a person who cleans human excreta as manual scavenger. It says,

“Manual scavenger means a person engaged or employed, at the commencement of this Act or at any time thereafter, by an individual or a local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed of, or on a railway track or in such other spaces or premises, as the Central

44 There are contradictions and debates on coining and using the word „Dalit‟, the word „Dalit‟ was popularized in the 1972 by the Dalit panthers movement in Maharashtra. Some says the Dalit panther‟s movement itself coined the word Dalit but Late Dr Jamunadass says that it was Jagajivan Ram used it earlier in 1950s, Late Jamunadass is a historian from Chandrapur, Maharashtra. The usage of the word Dalit rejected by some scheduled castes, in Maharashtra, mahars who converted to Buddhism wants to identify themselves as Buddhists not Dalits. Kanshiram also rejected the word Dalit, and used the word Bahujan
Government or a State Government may notify, before the excreta fully decomposes in such manner as may be prescribed, and the expression “manual scavenging” shall be construed accordingly.\textsuperscript{45}

It is to note that the Act above recognized a manual scavenger as a person who is not provided or requires equipment to remove human excreta. However, the other scavengers such as the sweepers, sewage workers and pit cleaners and cleaners of human excreta from dry latrines and railways tracks are also not provided the required equipment such as shoes, masks, jackets and other requirement to protect them from infections. Therefore, we can call all categories of scavengers as manual scavengers.

Screen shot of list of GHMC scavengers

Dalits do all types of scavenging work in Telangana. To put it in the right language, “Not all Dalits are scavengers but all scavengers are Dalits”. Those who argue that Dalits take up sanitation work due to lack of education, money and land etc. should understand that it is the feudal Brahmanical caste system that has prevented Dalits to have land and education. Therefore, Dalits have been forced into this slavery of scavenging because of the caste system, and its system of hierarchy. Moreover, this inhuman caste practice has

\textsuperscript{45} Section 2 (i) (g) of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013
continued in the same form until today across all the districts of Telangana and in all the modern secular institutions without anyone questioning it.

As estimated, about 75000 – 80000 scavengers in Telangana state are involved in all kinds of scavenging work, sweeping, and drainage clearing, and removing human excreta. They are Dalits, 80 percent of whom are Madigas, and 10 percent of them are Malas. In addition, another 10 percent includes the other marginalized communities such as Lambadas, Mangalis, Chakalis and Muslims. Cutting across all communities, 90 percent of those scavengers are women. There are 8778 Grampanchayaths in Telangana and every major

Grampanchayaths, which has a population of more than 3000, has not less than 2 scavengers, and in some places the scavengers are up to 5, so the total scavengers engaged in sweeping and cleaning in all the 8778 Grampanchayaths amounts to around 25000. The number of manual scavengers in each Nagara Panchayat would be 70 to 100, and the total will be around 2000 in 25 Nagara Panchayats. There are 32 municipalities in which the scavenging workers will be around 200 to 300 (Mancherial Municipal Corporation has around 272 manual scavengers\(^46\) in each and a total of around 10000, and there are 6 municipal corporations, Hyderabad, Khammam, Ramagundam Warangal, Nizamabad Karimnagar, where the scavengers are high in numbers. There were 1,850 sanitation workers in Greater Warangal,\(^47\) while the total number of scavengers in municipal corporations, except GHMC will be around 10000. In 2013, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporations had around 19,000 sweepers through 2600 Self Help Groups\(^48\).

\(^{46}\)Pudari Prabhakar, Municipal Councilor, Sunnambatteela Wada, interviewed by Karthik Navayan at Mancherial, on 20\(^{th}\) August 2015

\(^{47}\) Special Correspondent, Sanitation workers lay siege to Warangal municipal office, the Hindu newspaper, Warangal, March 27, 2015

\(^{48}\) GHMC Tender Notice 06/A1/IT/GHMC/2012-13 Dt: 10-07-2013, for Establishment of procedures, formats, practices and automation of processing of wages for sweeping workers in 18 circles
In 2015, according to the statement of the chief minister of Telangana, the GHMC had 24,000\textsuperscript{49} scavengers working in different sections.

There are 4135\textsuperscript{50} SC-ST employees working in GHMC in different positions, out of which 3619 are scavenging workers. It means 90 percent of Dalit employees of GHMC are manual scavengers, of which 3619 are regularized scavengers and only their salaries are paid by the state treasury. The rest of the 20000 scavengers in GHMC are outsourced employees; those 20000 contractual workers are divided into women SHG groups and assigned localities for sweeping and cleaning. Every group will have 7 to 10 members; of them, one or two members will be men to drag the garbage cart.

3.8.1. Sweepers

Sweepers are the one category of scavengers, majorly women, employed by civic bodies, Grampanchayaths, municipalities and municipal corporations. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation has been using the term „Public Health Workers” to address its scavengers. There are 24000 scavenging workers, out of which 19000 are sweepers and 90 percent of them are Madiga and Mala women. On estimation there are 50000 sweepers in the state of Telangana and about 5000 of them are men.

3.8.2. Sewage Workers

\textsuperscript{49} Salaries of GHMC sanitary staff hiked by 47 per cent, Deccan Chronicle July 17, 2015, available at - http://www.deccanchronicle.com/150717/nation-current-affairs/article/salaries-ghmc-sanitary-staff-hiked-47-cent, seen on 22\textsuperscript{nd} November 2015
A sewerage line was established in the year 1931 for Hyderabad. This covers an area of 54 Sq.m. for a population of 4, 68,000.\textsuperscript{51} However, the sewerage system has not developed according to the growth and extension of the city and increase of population. The waste matter from domestic and industrial establishments has increased enormously, leading to constant blockage of sewage lines. Hyderabad Metropolitan Water supply and Sewerage\textsuperscript{52} Board maintains this sewerage system. There are 1 lakh 72 thousand manholes in the entire GHMC\textsuperscript{53} area. Dalit scavengers clean them. They enter into the overflowing manholes by applying oil to their bodies. The sewage workers are therefore forced to enter drains without safety equipment, like oxygen mask, goggles, gumboots, helmet, etc. 2-3 deaths by asphyxiation are regularly reported, caused by fermentation of sewage, which produces noxious gases including hydrogen sulphide (commonly known as sewer gas).

The network of sewers, underground drains and manholes which is the workplace of these workers, are extremely dangerous. These are confined, oxygen-deficient spaces where the decomposition and fermentation of sewage produces noxious gases including hydrogen sulphide (known as sewer gas), methane, carbon monoxide, all of which cause death by asphyxiation. The long-term neurological effects of exposure to these noxious gases are also very severe and debilitating. Provided with no gas detecting devices, most manhole
workers have ingenuous methods of checking the concentration of these toxic gases. After opening the manhole cover, they let it vent a while, then light a match and throw it in. If there’s methane, it burns out. Once the fire abates, the worker prepares to enter. Another strategy, after opening the manhole cover is to check if the cockroaches are alive. If they are dead, the sewer is left open for some time and then the workers enter. The assumption is that cockroaches are not known to die easily.

Entering the narrow, dark drain, the worker pushes his only weapon, a spliced bamboo stick to dislodge the block. This exercise could take hours. The workers generally hold their breath, close their eyes and plunge headlong. They feel their way by poking with the bamboo stick. As they go poking, a sudden blast of putrid sludge, besides methane, hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide assaults the worker. Even if the worker manages to not to swallow the toxic muck, it surely enters their bodies. If the worker survives the initial ordeal, he crouches inside and loads the sludge into leaky metal buckets for his team to haul out. The workers perform the task of wading through these drains by wearing a loin cloth or just underwear. No protective gear is ever given to these workers. At the most the contractor provides alcohol to the worker to perform these tasks.

S Jeevan Kumar, the president of Human Rights Forum says,

“GHMC and HMWSSB allowing contract and casual workers fitted with no protective equipment and safety devices to enter clogged drains to clean them unmindful of the aspect that such workers may end up dying is a blatant violation of Article 14, 17 & 21 of the Constitution of India and a violation of the guidelines set out in the Order dated 12-07-2011 passed by the Supreme Court in Delhi Jal Board vs. National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers and others”54.

54 S. Jeevan Kumar, affidavit in the Public Interest Litigation No 366 of 2013, filed by Human Rights Forum in the high court of AP and Telangana
Jeevan further mentions that,

"The Hindu newspaper carried a news item on 22nd June, 2013 reporting that three workers entered a clogged drain on the LB Nagar Owaisi road. One of the workers, Madhu aged 30 years, first entered the drain and started clearing the garbage in the drain. Even as he was clearing the garbage, the accumulated water as well as the poisonous gases behind the garbage came out in a rush. The worker Madhu then slipped into the water, inhaled the gases and became unconscious. Sensing that their co-worker was drowning, the two other workers Yadaiah and Shekhar entered into the drain one after the other and both of them became unconscious due to the poisonous gases that was trapped in the drain. While Madhu died on the spot, Yadaiah and Shekhar who were unconscious were admitted into a nearby hospital. On 24-06-2013 the Hindu newspaper reported that D Shekhar had succumbed to his injuries in Osmania General Hospital. On 18-07-2013 the third worker Yadaiah also died in the same hospital. Satyam a 43yr worker, died while cleaning one of the manholes in Serilingampally (Circle 11), GHMC on 11th May 2013. This manhole was about 30 ft deep, and it seems that there are very few manholes of this depth in this Circle. The normal manholes are 3-5 ft in depth. Satyam”s daughter was there when he entered to clean the manhole. He went all the way down using the steps and was just a few feet away from the bottom when, weakened by the lack of oxygen, he could not grasp the stairs with his hand and fell. The daughter called for help and a passerby, Anjaneyulu, just 18yrs of age went in to help Satyam. Both died. There was no oxygen after a depth of 5 feet and the poisonous gases emitted by the sewage lead to their death".

It is common and became normal to hear about the deaths of workers employed to clean the sewerage drains in the city. As mentioned above

\[55\] Ibid
chapters, there are hundreds of people mostly from the Scheduled Castes, untouchable communities, who clean the drains. It is a fact that very few of them have the status of being permanent workers of GHMC and HMWSSB. These workers who do the most humiliating and dangerous work are the lowest paid workers with no medical facilities, security of employment or backup for their families. Yet without these workers, we the citizens will be unable to live in our homes and go about our daily lives. The workers enter into the neck deep into the drain water in the manhole and clear the garbage.

It is again the civic sense that needed for the segregation of waste for people while dumping garbage into the ground. Indiscriminate and Unmindful usage of materials and no segregation of waste results in blockage of sewage pipelines, the dirty water from kitchens, bathrooms and toilets of homes passes through four-inch house drains and empty into the main sewer. These drains carry domestic, commercial and industrial wastewater and often get clogged because of people who negligently dumps a wide range of objects such as no degradable thermocol, variety of plastics, industrial sludge, kitchen waste, toilet cleaning acids, medical waste (syringes, blades, even placenta), sanitary pads, glass shards, household gadgets and construction debris. It is to clear this debris that the manhole workers enter its bowels.

Jeevan further observe that,

"In the year 2005 the Center for Education and Communication, an organization based in Delhi carried out a study among sewerage workers in Delhi. One of its key findings are that most workers die before they reach 50, that they suffer from acute illnesses such as eye irritation, upper respiratory tract irritation, difficulty in breathing, skin rash, cuts and injury and chronic Illnesses such as fatigue, burning of eyes, cough, skin irritation and lower backache. This study also notes that most of these workers are contract workers, are paid less than minimum wages and are not supplied any protective equipment to enter and clean the drains. Further, a common feature of the lives of
these workers is severe alcoholism as the workers consume alcohol to cope with the debilitating consequences of their work.\textsuperscript{56}

Though the practice of manual scavenging is banned in India, this contemporary practice of manually wading through rotting sewage in clogged underground drains and manholes can be seen in every single town and city across the State of Andhra Pradesh. The work despite being of high risk category is low paid, invisible and humiliating in nature. Despite being fully aware of the fatal consequences of this work, the GHMC and HMWSSB continue this practice of manual cleaning of drains. Further this work is often done by the contract workers. The GHMC and HMWSSB intentionally employed only contract and casual workers to perform these hazardous tasks so that the State cannot be held responsible for their illness or death. Often the families of these workers state that they are not recognized as workers employed by GHMC and HMWSSB and this limits the compensation and other benefits that are due to them. These workers are so disadvantaged that they are not even paid compensation by the government.

The manhole workers are drawn from the Scheduled Castes communities and are seen as untouchables by all sections of society. Such workers often narrate that unbearable poverty and lack of alternative employment makes them to continue in these jobs. Further once a worker or a community gets into this kind of work, it is a trap, and he won’t readily get other kinds of job. So it becomes difficult for the worker to break free and move to other kinds of work.

According to the news report of Tehelka,

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid
“At the very least, 22,327 Dalits die every year cleaning sewage. Their deaths rarely attract attention of either the State or society. Unnoticed by the world, India has beensubjecting a particular sub-caste within Dalits to this genocide for decades. Article 2 of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, of which India is a signatory, Supreme Court advocate Colin Gonsalves, observes that the Indian State definitely stands guilty of genocide.”57

3.8.3. Cleaners of human excreta

Removing human excreta with bare hands are the caste practice forced on Dalits where a man has to remove the excreta (human faeces) of another with basic tools such as broom, bucket and basket. Dalits are forced to remove human excreta from private and community dry latrines using mostly a tin plate and carry it in buckets to be dumped elsewhere. The existing sanitary system is discriminatory because it is forced on the Dalits even though there are machines available to clean the pits, and railways tracks, those institutions are using Dalits to perpetuate caste system. Gita Ramaswamy says, "When urbanization set in - which should have rationally led to scientific sewage practices - Hindu society found it convenient to force Madigas and Bhangis into manual scavenging".58

In 1993, the Government of India banned the employment of people as manual scavengers. In 2013, a second legislation was passed in the parliament, which seeks to strengthen this ban by barring manual scavenging in all forms and all the scavengers should be rehabilitated following a detailed

58 Ibid
survey. Despite two legislations and a National Commission for the Safai Karmacharis, the practice is still prevalent in the country. According to a survey conducted by the Safai Karmachari Andolan, the practice of manual scavenging is prevalent and it was practiced by the government offices, courts in Telangana until 2010, the Safai Karmachari Andolan has dismantled dry latrines in the Nizamabad district court. South central Railway is the biggest employer of the category of manual scavengers to clean the railway tracks and latrines in the train coaches. As estimated, there will be around 5000 manual scavengers in Telangana who are employed by different institutions including the south central railways. Only this category of manual scavengers is recognized as "manual scavengers" by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

Bezwada Wilson, the National Convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), has been fighting against manual scavenging for a decade now, he says, “Manual scavenging exists and is often promoted by offices and institutions of the government itself. Once, the SKA found a dry latrine even inside the Nizamabad court complex in Telangana. When we started demolishing the dry latrines, they were prevented us 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”.

As of 2009, SKA was instrumental in eradicating manual scavenging in as many as 139 districts.

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59 Bezwada Wilson, Interviewed by Karthik Navayan on 4th October 2015 in Hyderabad
Conclusion

Every human society needs scavengers to keep the cleanliness and save humans from the gutter. With industrial development, urbanization and establishment of megacities the need of scavengers is increased. However, it should be a choice of individuals to enter into such jobs. It is not the case in India; this urban requirement is fulfilled by forcing Dalits into scavenging and to continue the already existing caste based slavery of scavenging in independent secular India in modern era. All this slavery has been taking place in the public institutions, which are supposed to be secular and modern. As pointed out above by Colin Gonsalves, this practice of scavenging, that of killing Dalits in the gutters is a genocide\textsuperscript{60} that attracts the definition of genocide according to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide– 1948.

\textsuperscript{60} Definition of Genocide 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide – 1948, article 2, “Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”