WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

SECONDARY SOURCES


---. “In the Name of Culture.” The Hindu 8 Feb. 2009, Print.


ANNEXURE 1

Scavenging dignity

Even, in Bihar, Gujarat and Kolar Goldmines there are so many Sohinis and Laxmis suffering as manual scavengers. Their psychological trauma is revealed by Harsh Mander in the Hindu paper on Sunday, 29th June 2008.

Employing manual scavengers to clear human excreta is punishable under the law. Yet many institutions, private and public continue to do so with impunity. The majesty of the law and might of the state appears powerless to snuff out the tragic, shameful legacy of millennia, a practice which we call “manual scavenging.” In most places manual scavengers themselves do not
speak out because of shame and fear of losing even their frequently insecure source of livelihood.

Instead they remain trapped in vicious circle of intense stigma, segregation, poor health and education, destructive coping strategies like alcohol and drugs all of which in any case or barred by their birth in the most disadvantaged of all castes.

Ramrakhi, who has worked since she was ten says, “The gas emitted by the shit has spoilt my eyes, and my hands and feet also swell. It sticks to my hands and makes me nauseous. Chinta Devi like many others says she hates this work but has to pursue it to raise her children. Kokilaben, a sanitation worker in Kadi municipality, Mehsana, Gujarat testifies in an affidavit to the court.” The human excreta discharged by people on the road is collected by me in a large bowl with the help of broom and tin plate and stored in a trolley. When the trolley is full, I drag this with the help of my daughter and my husband. I carry human excreta stored in plastic bucket on my head and while doing so the dirt falls on my body. I fall sick frequently. If I refuse to remove the waste, I get suspended from duty by the Nagarpallika.

Despise an uncaring state and disused law, activists of the Andholan are determined to realize their dream one day – of securing the promise of the constitution, of equal human dignity, regardless of their birth, for all the citizens to be denied to remove than a million dalits.

ANNEXURE 2

Witness to a Kidnapping

The district court building happens to be barely five minutes walk from my parental home in Chandigarh. Outside this house of this justice, I witnessed the kidnapping of a young woman who had come there seeking justice.

The violence of the act – and how it was accepted by so many as natural, just and “for her own good” – revealed the ugliness of the City Beautiful. (...) It was early February when I came to Chandigarh for a short visit. A woman was walking in my direction. Suddenly, I heard her scream. Before I could figure out what the matter was, she began to run in the opposite direction. Just then I saw a huge white van stop by the curb. Burly young men -- four or five of them -- stepped out and began to run after the woman. Within a matter of seconds, they had grabbed the hold of the woman who was screaming and struggling. I saw them drag her by her hair into the van. Before I could unfreeze myself and try to make down the license number, they were gone.

Soon a crowd gathered. One of us discovered the woman’s handbag that had fallen of in the scuffle. We decided that we should take the bag to the police station nearby.

Then a middle-aged Sikh man who was in the crowd spoke up. He told us that it was all right, it was all a ghar ki baat and nothing bad was going to happen to the woman. He claimed that he was her father and it was her brothers and cousins who had “taken her home”.
“How can you allow your own daughter to be treated like this? What kind of a father are you? Have you no shame. I asked.

This is what he offered by way of an explanation: His daughter was having an affair with a Muslim man and that was not acceptable to him. She was a bright girl, he said, an engineering student, but this Muslim man was ruining her life. He said something garbled about a lawsuit the couple had filed against the family. It appears that she had come to the court in connection with the lawsuit and the family had been waiting for her.

It seemed to me that many in the crowd cooled down after they heard this “explanation”. But there were four or five young men who agreed with me that we have to take this man to the police station and report the kidnapping.

We narrated what we had seen to the policeman on duty. Then the old man started talking about the affair with the Muslim man, as if it were a crime. To show that he was not narrow minded, he said that he would have had no objection to a churna chamar (derogatory reference to the “untouchable” communities) but he could not accept the idea of his daughter marrying a Muslim.

His story had an immediate and a dramatic effect. The policemen were far more interested in the old man’s travails over this supposedly wayward daughter than the violence she had been subjected to. My pleas that the victim was past the age of consent and had the full right to choose her partner were met with total incomprehension. Madam, you don’t understand these matters, the cops told me. How can this poor man let his daughter marry a Muslim?

It was self-evident that to these guardians of law and order that respectable women from Sikh and Hindu families should not marry Muslim
men. In their eyes, the old man did the right thing by having his own daughter kidnapped.

It was also self-evident that these cops were not going to do anything to help. I insisted that they take me to their chief. I pleaded with the inspector that for all we know, this kidnapping could be the first step toward an honour killing. I threatened to get the media involved if the police did not make all efforts to find the woman and to ensure that no harm came to her. After receiving assurances of action, I took down the inspector’s phone number and left.

Later that day, the police inspector called to tell me that the woman wanted to stay with her family out of her own free will. He put her on the phone to me: she dutifully told me that the misunderstanding had cleared, her family was treating her well and that she wanted to stay with her family.

After all, far deadlier crimes against women are taking place everyday. It has been well-established – and well reported in the media – that honour killings are on the rise throughout Northern India. Nearly one tenth of all murders that take place in Punjab and Haryana involve family members who kill their own kin who dare to break the bounds of caste and creed. A majority of the victims are women.