

The Lowliest of The Low (Sweepers) In Transition in India

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Abstract - This article examines how do the national policies and international programmes reach the beneficiaries through mediators, who use local idioms to convey the message in the process. And how does this happen in case of policy initiatives in India in regard to programme related to the lowest section of society viz. the sweepers in a medical institution in an urban setting. Modern agencies such as the state, political parties, social workers, urbanization and medical institution expected to remove the poverty are having little impact on the aspirations and life styles of the sweepers, whereas family and kinship are found to be more effective in this regard. The traditional occupation is now a salaried occupation with a sense of security. They live in the campus of a medical college, and interact with doctor's families providing domestic assistance with a few running small shops along with. These changes have, to an extent, reduced untouchability, and their compact living under the helping scheme in medical college campus helps in developing caste and neighbourhood ties among different groups. Parents and caste leaders take decisions regarding socialization of their children who are discouraged to continue schooling in spite of scholarships available, and utilize all their links to get the children traditional job in a salaried position. This is how the traditional institutions mediate between the beneficiary and the state, thereby using the state policy framework selectively for their own transition in a modern institutional framework. For the analysis, data from 64 families have been collected.

Keywords: Untouchability, Harijans, Scheduled Castes, Depressed classes, religious practices of the Harijans

INTRODUCTION

Valmiki is the historical setting in writing on religions in the report of the 1881 census in Punjab, Denzilbetson noticed that Lal Beghi and Balashah were the figures worshipped in the sweepers' shrines and oddest. How these two required Mahomedan names, and who they were is a matter which needs enquiry. To this he appended a footnote:

It seems at any rate probable that Balashah is Balmik, the traditional author of the Ramayana. In the sweepers worship him under that name (Census, 1881: 154n). Even though the term Valmiki provides

a somewhat ambiguous identity (Satish Saberwal, 1976: 51-67).

Many terms have been used for this category in the earlier literature, such as antyaja, panchama and chandala, but it is difficult to say whether all of them have exactly the same referent. The English word most commonly used in untouchable, although many find it unacceptable because of the odium attached to it (Beteille, 1969).

The expression "Depressed classes" and exterior castes were commonly used prior to 1930 but since the passage of the Government of India Act of 1935 they have been consistently referred to as

"Scheduled castes". The definition of the Scheduled Castes is an important area which is the base of categorizing a community or communities as Scheduled Castes. The term Scheduled Castes have been defined in the Article 366(24), 341 and 366 (25) and 342 which are reproduced as under.

Article 366(24) "Scheduled Castes" means such castes, races or tribe or pairs or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Article to be "Scheduled Castes" for the purpose of the Constitution of India (Somawat, 2002).

Since the Harijans themselves accept the idea of untouchability so often, it is said, it is idle to expect them to force the pace much and in my case they would advance most when the high castes do not find this threatening (Saberwal, 1976: 228). The many untouchable castes in different parts of India were listed in a separate schedule in this act and this practice was continued in the constitution of India promulgated in 1950. The Harijans comprise an aggregate of many castes, which differ widely from each other. A few of these, such as the Chamars, number more than hundred thousand individuals and are spread over different states of the Indian union. Others are much smaller in size and more localized.

The Harijans are not concentrated in any particular geographical region, but are found in every state, and practically every district. However, each region has its characteristic component of Harijan castes, which are generally different from those of another. The better-known Harijan castes include, Palla, Paraiya (Tamil Nadu), Mala, Madiga (Andhra Pradesh), Mahar (Maharashtra), Chamar, Bhangi, (Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), Cheruman, Pulagan (Kerala), Holeyia (Mysore), and Bagdi (West Bengal). The Harijans are concentrated more in the rural areas, only 10.7 per cent of their population being classified as urban, as against a

corresponding figure of 18.0 per cent for the country as a whole.

The Harijans are becoming integrated into the lower social strata. Their occupations, incomes and other indicators of social standing continue to be low; correspondingly, their self-esteem carries, for most. The mark of importance and of inability to influence the forces which shape their lives (ibid). The Harijans do not represent any single physical type, and some of the physical types found among them are also frequently encountered among the upper castes. Further* there are enormous regional variations.

Generally, they speak one of the fourteen Indian languages of the regions depending upon the state in which they live in India, linguistic differences are usually associated with other cultural differences, and this is as true of the Harijans as of the upper castes.

The overwhelming majority of Harijans are engaged in manual work and particularly in occupations which are held to be onerous. In the rural areas, they work mainly as agricultural labourers. But many sections of them are associated with a variety of specialized traditional occupations such as scavenging, leatherwork (including flaying and tanning) and basketry, etc.

The religious practices of the Harijans are markedly different from those of the upper castes. Sanskrit elements occupy a minor position in their religious system.

The Bhangis are a caste of scavengers and have a low ritual status. A number of terms are generally used for them. They are variously known as Halal Khor, Chuhra, Hari, Mehtra, Lal begi, Hella, Hadi and Valmiki. In south India, the term thoti or madiga is generally used for Bhangis (Shyam Lal, 1997: 18-25).]

Shyam Lal (1997: 18-25) suggests that the name Bhangi has been interpreted in a number of ways.

Some earlier writers like Crook (1896) believes that the name 'Bhangi' is derived from Sanskrit root Bhang (hemp) and Bhangi means addict. A slightly different version is given by Chauhan (1967: 48). The Bhangis, according to him, are those who have been broken away from society and the term is, therefore, derogatory in meaning.

Other like Gadgil (1952: 94), Issacs (1965: 53) and Sahay (1975: 4) have tried to trace the origin of the Bhangi from their traditional business of removing night soil. Sahay says that Bhangi means "those who are associated with filthy work like carrying of night soil. Cleaning of drains and like". According to Issacs "night soil has traditionally been the task of untouchables at the bottom of even the untouchables scale,

The Bhangis do not have any written history, Their legends and traditions too do not take us very far. History throws very little light on their origin or on the development of their community. Bhangis are a caste of scavengers and have a low ritual status. The Bhangis, are those who have been broken away from society and the term is, therefore, derogatory in meaning. In other words, the Bhangis are those who are associated with filthy work like carrying of night soil, cleaning of drains and like.

The Balmikis are divided into various sub castes and exogamous lineages. Exogamy is the marriage rules. They observe Hindu rituals on occasions like birth, mundan, marriage and death. Birth pollution is also observed. The Valmikis have been associated with scavenging in the past. Now a good number of them serve as sweepers in public and private sector.

Traditionally in the process of social stratification, the Valmikis occupy the low status and were isolated from education. The low degree of education among the weaker sections including Valmikis has attracted the attention of Government in the Independent India. A number of programmes were launched but were not up to the mark

therefore many national and international voluntary agencies have jumped to initiate particularly primary education for the welfare of weaker sections.

Meerut is a metropolitan city in western U.P. and situated only about 70 kilometers away from the National Capital, Delhi. It is situated on the main Delhi-Haridwar National highway in subtropical climatic conditions. The history of Meerut is linked with the struggle of independence of India which has started at first in 1957 by Mangal Pandey at Meerut. The population of Meerut city (including cantonment area) is about one million. It has the status of commissioner headquarters, which included 4 districts. The main crop of its surrounding areas is sugarcane and potato. The population of Meerut consists of Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. In the total population of Meerut. the following communities are known to be living and their approximate proportion is about 35% of total population are Muslim, 20% Scheduled castes including 6 to 7% Valmikies) and the remaining about 45% population consists of the other Hindu castes Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, etc.

Meerut city located in western part of Uttar Pradesh, spanning across 335 sq/kms, has an urban population of 1,068,772 of which 471,581 (44.1%) people reside in 102 listed urban slums recognized by the District Urban Development Authority (DUDA).The population density of the area falling within the Meerut Municipal Corporation is 7,532 people per sq/km (Census, 2001). A rapid survey of the area conducted by UHRC in June 2006 revealed 87 additional slums indicating that the slum population can be as high as 50% of the urban population (UHRC, 2006).

There are about 110 colonies or mohalla as in the city. Out of those 110 colonies Valmikies are living in about 80 colonies. The Mohallas which are said to be Muslim dominated in those 30 Muslim

dominant colonies the Valmikies do not live. The largest colonies of Valmikies in the Meerut is Bhagwat Pura. Population of Valmikies in this is about 2009.

The smallest colony is said to be the Rang Saaj Valmikies Bustee where 75 persons belong to 15 families of Valmikies. Population of Valmikies some important mohallas of Meerut is given in the following table.

Table 1 : Population of Valmikies in Bustees of Meerut City 2009

#	Name of Bustee	Population of Valmikies	Average Families
1	Bhagwat Pura	205	500
2	Ashok Puri	295	73
3	Nand Puri	310	45
4	Ambedkar Nagar	207	41
5	Fais Mohalla	203	33
6	Mehandi Mohalla	248	42
7	Chowk Mohalla	243	40
8	Kasim Pur	505	72
9	Cant Railway Station	498	83
10	Grass Mandi	1010	168
11	Badam Mandi	195	32
12	Sobha Pur	406	67
13	Guru Nanak Puri Rajban	1015	167
14	Govind Puri	786	114
15	Harsh Puri Rajban	221	44
16	Ravindra Puri Sadar	825	165
17	Sotiganj	275	55
18	Sadar Thana	145	29
19	Rang Saaj Sadar	75	15
20	Pulhedagram	490	81
21	Krishna Nagar	510	85
22	Sophipur	197	33
23	Mainda Mohalla	309	51
24	Bakari Mohalla	194	38

25	Handia Mohalla	1006	143
26	Topkbana Kheda	805	134
27	Katchari Kheda	1020	170
28	Sharma Nagar	186	37

The Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel Medical College, which is situated on Garh Road hi Meerut city is a well known Medical institute. A higher milestone from Begum Bridge, the hub of Meerut city.

The area of Medical College campus is 3600 Sq. mtrs. having college, hospital, hostels and staff quarters green parks. About students are studying in the Medical College. 50 senior doctors are here. There are 150 nurses, 750 fourth class employees 144 are out of these 750 which 150 this figure is verified through a leading employee of scheduled caste in the Medical College who had this list of Valmikis caste, working as the sweepers, 5 Valmikis are ward boys whereas one is working as a clerk.

The residential quarters are categorised into three types. The third type quarters are allotted to doctors only. The second type quarters (98) are allotted to the staff concerned to the classical job, which first type quarters. Which are 350 in number are for peons and sweepers. Out of 350, only 64 quarters are allotted to sweepers i.e. Valmikis. In these 64 quarters, around 507 people are residing. There is some open place near these quarters. Due to the population pressure, this land is also occupied by the Valmikis. They have put up their huts or Kachcha structures to accommodate some of the household members.

Indian society is traditionally characterized by over 3000 castes established U1 hierarchical order identified along traditional occupation and purity and pollution in culture. (Ghurye 1998, Dumont 1970). In this scenario the highest and lowest (bottom) positions in the hierarchy are undisputed. The priests are on top and sweepers are at the bottom. The caste pecking order has been disputed

for long in the middle; every middle caste claims or tries to establish its super ordination over the other. These groups are divided into two categories - castes above the line of pollution and those below that line, both having their own hierarchies.

Robert Deliege opines the untouchables do not form a homogenous category. As is well known fact that they are themselves divided into a multitude of caste, strongly differentiated (1997:65). In the traditional setting of India Ghurye mentions restriction on feeding and social intercourse within the lower groups and their various branches (1988:8). The main features of caste in traditional India have been described under six heads.

- (1) Segmental division of society;
- (2) Hierarchy;
- (3) Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse;
- (4) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges among the different sections;
- (5) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation;
- (6) Restriction on marriage.

These have been drawn out from the readings of the Hindu Classics and the writing of Superintendent and commissioners of census of India. These characteristics provide, in a nutshell, the traditional picture of castes and their placement in the hierarchical order in India before the British rule (1977-1947). The introduction of the railways (1883), during British rule and exports of raw materials like cotton and jute and imports of finish products, textile drew attention of several scholars (1853). Srinivas discusses social change in modern India under the main heads.

Social movements within the traditional structure received attention of M.S. A. Rao. Social movements and Social transformation (1979:2). Such movements led to the formation of caste associations and the rise of 'Caste Patriotism' (Ghurye, 1988:406-

407). Movement for rise in social status through giving up jobs and practices connected with impurity led Srinivas to conceptualize sanskritization as a process (1952). Modernity as a change in the value system of a traditional society draws special attention of Yogendra Singh (1996) Milton Singer (1972). These values form a part of the constitution of independent India with its preamble emphasizing in the value of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and justice. The search for new value in a traditional society marks the nature of the traditional society in India.

A sociological concern is how the lower or lowliest among the low affected till the process. Special qualifying provision was made for protective discrimination in favour of the weaker sections of society. Article 46 specifically states: "The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, and shall protect them for social injustice and all harijans of exploitation". The caste and tribes have been considered for special allotment and hence their names are listed in the schedules to the constitution. It is apparent by now that a small number of persons belonging to the different scheduled castes have benefited from several provisions of the reservation in education, employment in government departments, and representation in the parliament and state legislatures. These persons have certainly availed themselves of opportunities to occupy different and in some cases probably better socioeconomic positions (Nandu Ram, 1999: 440). In pursuance of this directive, the state has made it necessary for schools and colleges to reserve seats according to the proportion of the population and to give concessions in fees. State also provided scholarship, reduction in minimum qualifications and increased the age limit in comparison to other non-reserved sections so that

admission can be given for recruitment to jobs in the state service. The sweepers provide their services to priest and middle castes in their homes; so the chances of interactions are fairly high, hence the opportunity to contact with others are available but seems to be ineffective in developing then- status socially and economically both.

The sweepers are found all over the country with different names due to regional variations majority of them are engaged in traditional occupation i.e. sweeping and pig rearing. The priest and sweepers on the line of Jajmani system form patron-client relationship in both rural and urban India.

Modern transportation facilitates faster travel and trade and establishment of new institutions adds new dimensions to the sources of interaction between service giving and receiving castes.

New job opportunity was provided several modern institutions, railways and other government departments to sweepers. Earlier they were involved in household cleaning i.e. cleaning of individuals' toilets and carrying night soil on their head load or hand driven cart. With the opening of new job opportunity, the nature of their job shifted from individual household to office structure provided new avenues increasing the area of social interaction.

Railways have the largest infrastructure and network throughout the country. A significant number of people travel by train, on an average hundred people sit in one compartment of the train, many a times not knowing each other. During the journey, the need of drinking water and refreshment provides an opportunity to interact with the fellow passengers. Water and refreshment is available in all stations through vendors selling in compartment. A person satisfies their journey needs without asking the caste group of fellow passengers and persons selling the refreshments. It has been observed that the tobacco chewing persons share betels and

cigarettes, bidi (local cigarette) with each other demand match box by fellow passengers in a common sense. Thus while traveling on the chances of social interactions are greater cutting across the caste boundaries.

The present study was conducted in medical college campus. Sixty-four households of sweepers, living in the same campus and their interaction with other community were observed. The males of these families were working in medical college. The females of these families provided domestic services in the officers' colony. These domestic services including household cleaning, washing cloths and even cleaning kitchen utensils. Working in these families, provided ample.

During the course of study, 64 families have been observed. Most of the members of these families were employed in government offices as sweepers. Majority of them were employed in S.V.B. Patel Medical Hospital, Meerut and their females were engaged in various kinds of domestic services. It has been observed that these females were providing services to the houses of officers who were either doctors or administrative officers. Nature of these services were clean and unclean both. The clean services include from kitchen work to cloth washing. Kitchen services consist of cleaning of utensils and working as assistant in operating the kitchen gadgets such as mixer machine and oven. Washing cloths involves operating of washing machine. Unclean jobs like washing the floor and toilets are done by other female of the same family. It is interesting fact to note here that those who were working in unclean jobs were not allowed to enter in the kitchen. Those females who work in the kitchen, work relating to toilet cleaning is not done in any case. Time to time directions are given to those females who work in the kitchen for maintaining cleanliness and also they are supposed to enter in kitchen for rendering services only after

taking the bath. However, though they along to the same caste and same family but there is segregation between the females who work in kitchen and who work for cleaning diet because social stigma is attached with this cleaning work.

Interestingly this kind of segregation is observed to the houses where they work. Out of these houses this is not practised. While working in household jobs these females handle many kitchen and household modern gadgets. Many of gadgets are operated during cooking and washing clothes. In turn, these modern gadgets influence the working of these females. Due to modernization and competitive market have given such kind of condition where all these items are available in many ranges for every class of consumers. So, lower ranges items can be bought easily. Market situation and opportunity of consumption provided a favourable condition in reaching these items to the houses of these household job workers.

It has been observed during the course- of study that every member. The children of these families not like to go school for attaining the education though there are many schools including government, non- government managed. It seems that nature of job and reservation policy are significant for not attaining education by the children belonging this category. The reservation policy gives a situation where there is no competition. And the nature of cleaning job (toilet cleaning and sweeping) is such where they have got their monopoly. As these jobs are not done by other sections of the society in any circumstance because social stigma is attached with this. These two situations strengthen job security among them. As rejections it is very common among them that jobs are secured without any effort and competition. Though, the income is more and expense is less even then this section always lives in debit. The case study of the family indicates that the members of

the studied families were rendering service as servants to the girl's hostel and as domestic servants. Unconsumed food stuff of the hostel was given to him daily. After completing the services while returning to home this food used consumed by every member of the family and whatever was left here unconsumed, used to utilize for feeding their domestic animals viz. pigs. This sort of feeding results in healthy pigs. In turn they get handsome amount after selling the pigs. Because of good income source, the younger generation of these families was not eager to work at all as their necessity was fulfilled easily. So, there is an emergence of leisure class among the youngster. Substantial economic situation and ample leisure time contributed towards watching cinema, gambling and drinking liquor as a time passing activity. The reflection of cinema culture can be observed in day to day life as they dress their styles and dresses like the style of actors and actresses. Chewing tobacco and smoking cigarettes have become part of their life. Drinking liquor and eating pork on every evening are observable practices of this section.

However, much sources of income and less expenditure have not contributed solid economic base as these, as mentioned above, practices gradually given a situation where money cannot be saved and hence, they are reaching in debt situation is going towards more costly when they have adopted cinema culture in hosting marriage ceremonies and also they could not give up their generations old traditional practices. Hence, the expenditure has gone to the three/four fold greater than the actual. Invitation was given to all kin and kith groups as per the traditional practices but along with these higher castes persons were also invited. And the drinking arrangement for the invitees belonging to higher castes was made separately.

Services of experts non-vegetarian cooks at higher payments was taken. Dowry system, which is very common in the region even cutting across the caste and religious boundaries has been adopted strongly by community under study. As a matter of fact, the new changing social condition of marriage practices has increased the expenses, which has bearing on the poor economic condition of this community on the one hand and the adaptation of watching cinema, television and life style of higher castes and its maintenance which is an outcome of continuous social inter course with higher caste people through rendering domestic services by the women folk of this community has given a situation in which the expenses are increasing day by day and leading debt situation economically. For maintenance the adopted life style they started borrowing money from the money lenders, Debt is gradually became high because of its nature that whatever they earn is given to the money lenders in the form of interests. In this connection during the course of study it was observed that the course of study it was observed that the money lenders stood up at the gates of University for recovering the interests. So, on the salary, day they become money less. This is never ending process that leads in debt increasingly. The desire for fulfill, debt and high style living attitude have compelled them for exploring new economics avenues. Hence, while rendering domestic services, the females of this community has started sharing beds as additional source of income. When this fact became open, the youths of higher class people has started to exploit. In this regard. The business of black mailing also came into existence and sexual exploitation is institutionally in the society. Arrangement was made for these invites and delicious vegetation food was served to them. And for their own community members dinning arrangement was made near the house where liker and pork were served.

Interestingly, both dinning arrangements were hosted hi the same premise. Marriage function involves community feast and dowry increasing the expenditure in a greater degree. In spite of many economic opportunities they always live in deficit. The above case suggests that poverty cannot be eradicated merely with raising the income.

CONCLUSION

We get conclusion:

- Acquisition of modernized goods including the electronic and cosmetic items.
- Supplementing of income through additional resources like domestic assistance to better of households namely doctors and office workers; strengthen of traditional occupation of pig rearing and diversification by a few towards petty shop keeping.
- In interactions with higher castes and classes near abolition of untouchability with domestic assistance reaching the kitchens.
- Abolition of untouchability in the institutional selling of patient - serving groups.
- An attempt has recently made inviting upper castes and classes to a dinner in a wedding ceremony by organizing a separate vegetarian dinner prepared by castes but funded by the lowliest group to which guests has no objection.
- Little change has been noticed hi the strength of structural unit like the kinship, community living and observers of expensive dinners.
- Patterns of consumption hi daily life remain connected with the meat liquor considered impure in the Brahminical tradition.
- There has been no change in the aspirations for the younger generations; educations for vertical mobility have not appeared either as a practice

or value, even within the campus of higher professional learning.

The parents aspirations for their children is not of getting higher education, but of getting a salaried job in the medical institutions through expansion of opportunities and let the children remain at the level of parents hence a case of an elite institutions not as an agency of change towards future, but as a job considerations providing institutions at the lowest level with security perhaps at the highest level and little change in traditional consumption of meat and liquor or even marriage customs.

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