

Research Article

## Occupation and Dignity of Unseen Population: Yes They Are Manual Scavenger

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper explores one of the socially unseen population, and they are engaged in most crude occupation in the digital and skilled India. The life never changed to them associated with traditional and caste-based occupation for generations. They have barely been studied and never been recognised in most discussion on 'polluted' occupation in India. The question of dignity and inclusion is still a dreamlike Make in India project similar to Swacch Bharat campaign that has merely put in any effort on those groups who have been cleaning the Bharat for centuries. Paper discusses the identity of their occupation, identity of their community and putting crudely identity of their caste while studying the manual scavengers. This paper explores the various dimensions of manual scavengers and relies on an ethnographic study conducted on Hadi Caste in Bokaro who are one of the Scheduled Castes listed in the Census of India documents. Hadis are settled across the states but with varied jobs. Further, this paper also informs the presence of such groups with different nomenclature across the country, namely in large numbers, in Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and others. The paper does take help and refer another study conducted on manual scavengers in the city of Hyderabad, Telangana.

**Keywords:** Exclusion, Inclusion, Discrimination, Dignity, Pollution, Manual Scavenger, Caste

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### INTRODUCTION

Occupation and dignity are two important concepts embedded in a society that refers to an apt society. The social histories of manual scavengers in India have

been the cruellest forms of indignity and inhuman social arrangements that exists even in contemporary India. The problem of manual scavenging has been existent for centuries India but the government of India barely took its' seriousness. The works of Dalits have been assigned lowly and menial in caste society. The degradation of traditional occupation is based on the hierarchical system of society that never recognized the exclusion of Dalits due to work they are engaged into (Ziyauddin and Acharya, 2005). The persistent pressure of civil society organization enforced Government of India to take cognizance of the inhuman practice of a traditional occupation. It is observed and noticed after the major survey conducted by Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) that was assigned to conduct all India study and submitted its' report in in the year 2007 to the Government of India.

No matter scavenging appears a dot on the shining India in the twenty-first century and a crude face to the independent nation. Several states initiated half-hearted steps to eliminate the practice of manual scavenging but mostly failed to do so. The elimination of centuries old practice would have been easier if the government of India had taken bold steps to enforce stringent rule much earlier than enacting of 'Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993' in the Parliament. Nothing has changed even in modern Information Technology cities like Hyderabad in Telangana. Few years earlier in 2010 erstwhile state Andhra Pradesh a dozen dry latrines to be located just 20 km from Hi-tech city in Hyderabad, the showpiece of the State's rapid strides in information technology. Five years after the State belatedly adopted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, and announced a high-flying plan to declare the state of Andhra Pradesh as dry toilet-free by December 2002 – the date was subsequently extended to December 2005 – awful practice continues. Government of India has proposed to construct huge numbers of toilets by 2019 for each household across the states when there is dearth of substantial data.

It is quite difficult to understand the methodology being followed in toilet construction programme without having some macro sociological studies. A joint survey conducted in 2001 by the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Caste Cooperative Finance Corporation (APSCCFC), a state government agency and the SKA estimated the number of community dry latrines (CDLs) maintained by Municipalities and Gram Panchayat, which was 25,762. Kurnool heads the list with 4,782, followed by Anantapur (4,173), West Godavari (3,503), Kadapa (2,324), Visakhapatnam (2,251) and East Godavari (2,248). The number of scavengers, including dependants, was put at 30,921. Since then, no attempt has been made to update the figures. Apart from CDLs, the Andhra Pradesh Mission for Eradication of Manual Scavenging (created within the APSCCFC) estimated

the existence of two to three lakh dry latrines. This is perhaps the largest number of such latrines in any State in South India. 'The deadline has come and gone. There has been no perceptible change in the situation at the ground level barring the demolition of a few latrines here and there. After the initial enthusiasm that followed the survey and the formation of the mission, there is no interest left' (Ramaswamy, 2003). The government and more, specifically the APSCCFC, claims that the majority of the manual scavengers have been rehabilitated as part of the National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (NSLRS). It claims that all the 28,099 scavengers and their dependants have been 'rehabilitated in dignified alternative occupations' between 2000–2001 and 2003–2004 at a cost of Rs. 61.43 crores. Civil society groups dismiss these programmes as a farce. 'Rehabilitation has become a charade. The beneficiaries and the middleman share the margin money provided by the State. Banks are reluctant to grant loans but ready to "sanction and recover loans" on paper and "close the account". The bank is happy having "extended the loan" to the needy. Elated, the government could claim the rehabilitation of yet another scavenger on paper. Content with his share of the margin money, the beneficiary goes back to scavenging. That is how you see so many of them being rehabilitated, but the pernicious practice is still persisting,' says Gita Ramaswamy. Last year, she brought to light the existence of manual scavenging in Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's Assembly constituency, Pulivendula, in Kadapa district (Venkateshwarlu, 2006).

Historically, the practice is steep in the caste hierarchy, just as it is elsewhere in the country, and is confined to the bottom most sub-caste of the Dalit community. They are called Methar (migrant Balmikis from North India largely from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi) in Hyderabad and Telangana and Paki in coastal Andhra Pradesh. Gita Ramaswamy writes how manual scavengers were brought from Haryana by one of the Nizams, Nizam-ul Mulk, between 1855 and 1860. No local castes were willing to take up the demeaning job of manual scavenging. Traditionally, scavenging communities, too, preferred to work in areas far away from their native villages to avoid the stigma as it is one of the worst forms of exclusion (Goffman, 1961). 'So there are Madigas, one of the major groups within Dalits, from Nellore doing the job in Rayalaseema. Rellis taking up the same work in East and West Godavari and Krishna districts. Yanadis did the similar menial works in Ongole, Guntur and Prakasam districts. Halakhors, a Muslim sect, performed this job in Anantapur in bordering Karnataka areas.' (Ramaswamy, 2003). The Muslim scavengers were found practicing in Kurnool town, Karimnagar and some of the Muslim-dominated towns in Andhra Pradesh for instance Hyderabad. It is complex to understand their origin with the establishment of Nizams in Hyderabad. Despite this fact, their genesis is also linked with the scavengers in Rajasthan and who were again brought by the Nizams

in Hyderabad. Gradually, lower occupational groups among Muslims had to be dependent on their own occupations, but with the change in the socio-political situations in Hyderabad, most of them tried to change their identifications.

It is not of the concern that the Muslims in India have been historically marginalised in various spheres of their life. The loss of political dominance not only forced them merely to survive in socio-political arena, but the continuous decline in political participation excluded them from other benefits in the process of social inclusion.

The existence of marginalised Muslims can't be ignored and anthropologically, it is of greater significance looking the socio-cultural history of these communities and groups among Muslims in India. Even Kaka Kalelkar list for Hyderabad state had only six occupational communities, namely, *laddaf/dudekula/pinjara/pinjari* (cotton carders), *qasa/qassab/quarishi* (butchers), *faqeer* (semi-nomad beggars), *sangtarash* (stone-carvers), *mehtar* (Muslim, Muslim scavengers) and *hajjam* (barbers).

The inclusion of Muslim community has not been addressed in independent India and relatively quite less studies are available. Going further, there is also popular perception that religious conservatism among Muslims is a major factor for not accessing the state-supported developmental benefits driven by the state. But the reality is contrary to this assumption. In the study on Muslim scavengers, it was found that Muslim have high expectation in all the successive governments and every time their aspirations have found apathy and exclusion. For instance, in the case of education, the main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children are forced to drop out after few classes. The case of worker population ratio for Muslims is lower, but they are not much lower in urban settlement. Large numbers of the Muslim population is concentrated in self-employment-related activities and lower in salaried jobs. The present condition of Muslims as minority group is quite vulnerable in their various life worlds. The classic case witnesses the practice of scavenging at large level among Muslims in Andhra Pradesh and particularly in the vicinity of old city of Hyderabad.

Of the various social groups of Muslims in existence in Andhra Pradesh, only Dudekula or Pinjari or Nurbash has been known, identified and referred to since a long time. Two recent accounts of social groups of Muslims of Andhra Pradesh are that of Shaik Abdul Azeez Saheb and that contained in 'People of India' series, Volume of Anthropological Survey of India on Andhra Pradesh. Saheb mentions, 'the Indian Muslims also have caste-like groups', but he distinguishes them from Hindu caste, in that Muslim caste lack an ideological frame comparable with the traditional Hindu varna model and does not have the tendency towards rigid elaborateness characterised by institutionalised inequality or hierarchical relations

found in the Hindu caste system. According to him, ‘the Muslim castes are occupationally and culturally different’.

Mehtar as a community has been mentioned and studied in several studies except Hadis have not found special mention. The people who have studied the caste based occupational groups are namely, People of India by S.S. Sastry that gives a brief description about manual scavenging castes Thurston’s (1909) volume ‘Caste and tribes in Southern India’ and Syed Siraj Ul Hassan’s ‘The Castes and tribes of H.E.H. the Nizam’s Dominions in 1920<sup>1</sup> are a few that provide the presence of castes engaged in to menial jobs in the past apart from the mentions in the Report of Census of India in 1901, Census of India 1961 and Census of India 1981. But there have not been detailed accounts of Muslim Mehtar in any study except in a study conducted on Muslim Mehtar in Hyderabad city (Ziyauddin, 2012).

The name Mehtar means a prince or a leader or a great man. It is a name given ironically or in compensatory consolation to the community engaged in sweeping and ‘scavenging’. Syed Siraj Ul Hassan (1920), writes, those Mehtars are called Lalbegi, who are the followers of the patron-saint Lalbeg. Sain Lalbeg who is believed to be Ghazi Miyan and a saint, worshipped in Punjab among the Lalbegis wherever they are. By faith, Mehtars may be either Muslim or Hindu. This report is concerned with Muslim Mehtars. According to the Census Ethnographic Notes on Mehtar, Mahar, Mang, Mang Garodi, Dhor and Dakkal (Dakkalwar), out of the 533 sweepers and scavengers in the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in 1966–1967, 93 were Muslim by faith. This gives an idea of the proportion of Muslim Mehtar/Lalbegi in this traditional occupational community. In assessing the population of the community, it must be remembered that among Muslims, as among Hindus, all members of an ‘occupational community’ are not engaged in the traditional occupation, and among Hindu as well as Muslim members of communities of ‘sweepers and scavengers’, actually engaged in the occupation, not all, often not even a majority, are on the rolls of Municipal bodies. Their population was 4,553 in 1981 census. It is well known that this community is treated as ‘untouchable’, and they are the worst victims of this practice.

But, it is really difficult to find out the number of Muslim scavengers in Hyderabad because they never registered themselves in the rolls of municipal corporations and those practicing or practiced don’t identify. The repeated trial of accessing the registered scavengers in the rolls of municipal corporations failed because of unavailability and other undefined reasons. The people interviewed for the purpose of getting ethnographic details of the scavenging community has a greater relevance

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<sup>1</sup>This volume provides a great detail about the existing castes in Nizam’s dominion. One can also refer to find accounts of Muslim castes who were engaged into menial occupation or unclean jobs. To examine the contemporary society of various castes and their occupation,, Sirajul Hasan’s writings are

here, as many of the fellow Muslims, who have left the scavenging as an occupation, have diversified their occupation. This has been realised with the help of replacing their surnames with new surnames or using name without surnames. A famous Telugu writer who works with the community who they call Dalit Muslims suggests that they are not able to link with the mainstream Muslim society due to various socio-cultural reasons. It is believed that the deep-rooted cultural features of their community cannot be replaced with the higher elite class Muslims. Hence, it becomes essential to discuss about the Dalit Muslims. As Massey (1996) writes that the Dalits are those who are downtrodden, broken down and exploited section of our society. Muslims have also begun to identify as Dalits with the idea of consolidating the scattered sections/castes and create a pressure group within the civil society. For classical example, Dudekula Muslim in Andhra Pradesh have started to forego the old age traditions with Islamic rituals, traditions, customs and manners in the hope of securing a higher social status (Saheb, 2003).

#### **SITUATING HADIS AS AN OCCUPATIONAL GROUP**

The Hadi community is one of the most backward caste groups among the 22 Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the state of Jharkhand. They are mostly concentrated in the district of Bokaro. There are around 500 households of Hadis in Bokaro and Dhanbad alone. They are also referred to as Bhangi and Mehtar in Chas by the people who utilise their services, Hadis can be categorised as manual scavengers. They have been engaged in this occupation on the basis of family tradition and caste. Hadis have been enumerated in the consecutive Census of India reports as Hair, Mehtar and Bhangi. The population of the three groups of people is put together as 58,242 as per the Census of India 2011. In the same year, the population of the three groups of people in the urban context was 36,044 whereas in the rural context was 22,198. These statistics show the existence of such occupational groups across the districts. The urban densities of manual scavengers are generally high in most states including Jharkhand due to the high demand in both urban household's toilets as well as public toilets. But, these three groups of people are equally populated in both urban and rural areas. In the same census year 2011, the district-wise SC population provides information on persons living in urban settlements as 5,286 and rural settlements as persons 5,295 which is almost equal to the urban population. Of the total population, 5,385 are males and 5,196 are females.

The largest clusters of Hadis belong to Bengali linguistic families which make them 581,000 Bengali speakers. Secondary languages spoken among Hadi community are as follows; Oriya 212,000; Hindi 126,000; Rangpuri 44,000; Bhojpuri 38,000; Maithili 4,600; Santali 4,400; Kui 2,400; Kharia 1,700; Kurux 1,500; Magahi 1,400.

However, this population is witnessed to be scattered in the whole of Indian Territory. As per the available records about Hadis, they are populated in the following 10 states of India; West Bengal (589,000), Orissa (224,000), Bihar (106,000), Jharkhand (84,000), Uttar Pradesh (8,300), Himachal Pradesh (2,100), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1,600), Chhattisgarh (1,500), Tripura (1,000) and Meghalaya (1,000). Hadis are populated in small numbers both across and outside India; Bangladesh has a population of 59,000 Hadis, whose primary language is Rangpuri and belong to Hinduism as per a report published by one non-government organisation (NGO).

The Hadi community is one of the most backward caste groups among the 22 SCs in the state of Jharkhand. Vidyarthi and Rai (1985) have given detailed description about Scheduled Tribes in the Chotanagpur region including regions under Bokaro but it has no mention about Hadis. They are mostly concentrated in the district of Bokaro. There are around 500 households of Hadis in Bokaro and Dhanbad alone (Sudhir Hadi, President, Jharkhand Hadi Yuva Samaj Manch). They are also referred to as Bhangi and Mehtar in Chas. Hadis can be categorised as manual scavengers. They have been engaged in this occupation on the basis of family tradition and caste. The Census of India document has kept three castes, Hadi, Mehtar and Bhangi, in one group due to their similar occupational engagements in manual scavenging and sweeping. The present study chose to study only Hadis and not the entire Dalit community in the town, and inferences are drawn from a few other manual scavenging groups studied in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Hadis have been enumerated in the consecutive Census of India reports as Hair, Mehtar and Bhangi, until 2011 census that has corrected typographical mistake. Now, Hadis are referred as Hari in the census document but not as Hair. However, Hadis have retained their identity as Hadi.

### **STUDY'S PROBLEM**

The notions and understanding of Hadi caste as an occupational group is significant to explore but the present paper is limited to exclusion and concerns to dignity of Hadis. However the data on perceptions of illness and health was also collected among Hadi community that shows various processes of illness experiences (Mishra, 2010) of excluded social groups. Their occupational categorisation of manual scavenging confined Hadis to the lowest strata in Chas town. However, the practice of manual scavenging has changed over a period of time and particularly during the past two decades. Manual scavengers are not carrying night soil on their heads, which was the case earlier, to dispose off in the outskirts. First, the change has arrived because of reasons namely the conversion of septic and dry toilets into water flush toilets in the town. Septic and sandas (open latrines

dugged in an area) are no more in existence or use. Second, the employment opportunity in the Chas Municipality also paved way for better working conditions. Pathak (1991, pp. 37–43) in his book on *Road to Freedom* describes the existence of manual scavenging in Muslim countries too. His description focuses on manual scavenging among Hindus but not limited to any one group like Hadis. He believes that religious sanctions related to Baitul-Khula (latrine) in Muslim society suggest that the latrine system existed, and disposal of human excreta took place in Arabia. He rationalises that considering Hijab as an important practice of Muslim women, they would have stopped going out for defecation. However, this is true to many other rulers and countries in different periods. As a result, the practice of nightsoil disposal has prevailed even during Muslim-ruled Estates.

### SELECTING THE STUDY POPULATION

After an initial survey of Dalit localities in Chas, I wished to study more than one SC. In due course, I realised Hadis are the worst off in the ladder of socio-economic and political participation among Dalits in Chas. The fieldwork among Hadis was conducted over a long period of time 2010 to 2013 A.D. as the field was familiar to me but never easier to enter into the field. Knowing fieldwork area a convenience but it also poses challenges to the researcher (Srinivas, Shah and Ramaswamy, 2002). In fact one of the first study on weaker sections India was written by Sinha (1993) that gives broader idea but it has largely focussed on Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and a few SCs. This volume does not examine Hadis who are spread in several states though in small numbers. Their engagement in menial jobs such as sweeping makes them more vulnerable to illnesses than the other SC groups. The paper does not bring illness view point (Armstrong, 1960) that is discussed in another paper by Ziyauddin (2012) but problems of exclusion are correlated to dignity of the caste groups. The nature of work is hazardous and filthy not only in terms of physical touch, but also the notion of pollution towards Hadis work is the highest in comparison with all other jobs carried out by any other SCs. Thus, I decided to take up Hadi Cooli and study their life ethnographically.

I selected one Cooli among all the Coolis (here Mohalla) of Chas to study the perceptions of health and illness among Hadi community. I chose Hadis because except a few mentions they have not been studied like the Bauri Caste, which is another SC group in the neighbouring Mohalla (Bauris were studied by Sengupta, 1980; Freeman, 1977). There are research studies on other manual scavenging communities in other parts of the country but not the Hadis. Even small and scanty references are not found as it has been mentioned earlier. Before exploring the problem in question, locating it in its socio-political and historic context will help us to have a better understanding of why certain things are a certain way.

### **SUB-CATEGORIES WITHIN HADI CASTE**

Hadis can be further divided into four sub-groups. Although all of them fall into the same category as SC, but the differences do exist. The data on social history of different sub-categories within Hadi caste are not available in the field except Maghaya Hadis who are the predominant households in Hadi Cooli and in the surrounding region. The other sub-groups are settled in other states, and there is no social interaction between them. The four different types of Hadi Caste narrated and recorded in the field are described in the following sections.

#### **Four Sub-Categories of Hadi Caste**

1. Sahir Hadi; 2. Digar Hadi; 3. Bengali Hadi; 4. Maghaya Hadi

It is believed that only families belonging to Maghaya Hadi are found in the entire region of Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Purulia, Giridih and Ramgarh. The history of others except Meghaya Hadi is not studied because of the non-availability of data and research literature. Gandhi Hadi finds it difficult to explain the miniscule details of the community due to lack of documentation on the community. The newer generations are not able to connect with the history of Hadis except the last elder generations who may take away all the social history with them if not shared with the present generation.

Maghaya is one of the subgroup within Hadis. Maghaya means an equal caste groups to Bhumihars in this region as asserted and described by Gandhi Hadi. They belong to Ghoda Gotra. This Gotra can be found in a few neighbouring districts of Bokaro district mainly Dhanbad, Ramgarh, Hazaribagh, Giridih in Jharkhand and Purulia in the state of West Bengal. The details of the kinship and its history are described in the following sections of this paper. As per the memory of Gandhi Hadi, a 69-year-old person in the community, initially, settled only three households settled in Hadi Cooli, Chas. In fact, the available lands where Hadis are settled belong to only three members, and the land belongs to only these three, and they all were paternal brothers. Hadi caste is distinct as they do exist in large number of population in West Bengal and partially in Orissa including the present Jharkhand. But only a few districts have higher percentage of population such as, Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Giridih and Ramgarh. The field data reports that there are around 500 households in this region. Their exact figure is unknown due to the census classification of SCs in which Hadis are clubbed with Bhangis and Mehtars in the state. There is gradual but unconscious change in using the caste surnames as Hari. There are a few using Hari, while a large number continue to use Hadi. The Census of India has missed their original caste surname 'Hadi', and the document has mentioned Hadis as 'Hair' in the Census Report 2001, a term unrecognised by Hadis in written or other reference.

### **Hadi Cooli Population Census**

As per the household composition census data collected in 2010, there are 51 in Hadi Cooli. The total population of the 51 Hadi households is 306, of them 139 are male and 167 are females. It is considerably important to note that in such a small population, there are 19 widows and 1 divorcee woman living with her two daughters. None are found to be widower at the time of data collection. This data also illustrates the fact that the average life of men is lower than women in Hadi Cooli. The working conditions in filthy and unhygienic environment as well as exposure to manholes expose them to ill health.

### **Mapping Hadis as Manual Scavengers:**

The notion of scavenging which I found through the websites was entirely different from what I found out while exploring about manual scavenging. As written, 'the process of removing burnt exhaust gases from the combustion chamber of the engine cylinder is known as scavenging'. But this research focuses upon manual scavengers who are engaged in certain occupation in Indian subcontinent since ages. Sinha (2001) rightly observes that manual scavenging has not received proper attention, neither about its inception nor existence, desirability or epistemology. Similarly, Hadis were also missed in earlier researches.

In the volume prepared by Vasant Moon in 'Writings and Speeches of Bhim Rao Ambedkar' published in 1989, Ambedkar writes, 'Once a touchable always a touchable, Once an untouchable always an untouchable, Once a Brahmin always a Brahmin, Once a sweeper always a sweeper'. This context still finds relevance in the data on Hadi Cooli. There is constant feeling in Hadis that their occupation is always available as secured employment as no other caste would enter into sweeping and manual scavenging in the town of Chas in Bokaro. But in the last 10 years or so, after a few private hospitals emerged in Chas, tribal youth have posed a minor threat to the monopoly of Hadis in scavenging or sweeping occupation. A few hospitals are ready to pick up the tribals youth as they demand less that is accept low wages and are more loyal to work.

### **Continuity of Manual Scavenging and Institutionalisation of the Occupation**

The *Dalits*, too, had traditional occupations but with a distinct difference. By and large, their occupations were least desirable and defiling (Srivastava, 1997). The regional variations in occupation among *Dalits* are important, but mainly two categories of occupations were popular, namely, cleaning and leather processing. Cleaning and sweeping involved sweeping of streets, drains and sewers. Removals of human and animal excreta, raising pigs and others are a few other one. As latrines in most cities were not provided with flush, the sweepers had to carry buckets of human faces on his or her head. The most popularly known name for

all those who do the so-called unclean occupation is '*Mehtar*' for which Mohammedan counterpart is '*Halalkhor*', '*Lalbeg*' and '*Khakhrob*'.

Those who are considered to be lowest in the caste hierarchy did their work including handling of dead animals, removing their skin, and currying them and making of leather goods, such as shoes, *chappal* and others. All of these tasks were considered defiling by the so-called clean castes and by assigning these tasks to people. Those who were already polluted, the society spared the normal people. The reason was then easily reversed, and the *Dalit*'s pollution was attributed to the unclean nature of their work. Not only the *Dalits*' jobs are undesirable, polluting and tedious, but they are also low paid and had to eat the leftover from another persons' plate which is considered highly degrading.

In independent India, the process of institutionalisation of manual scavenging started taking place. The Indian Railways is perhaps the largest rail network in the world, employing the largest number of manual scavengers. Unofficial surveys conducted by various NGOs and research groups project that almost 120,000 persons are Dalits, of which 95 per cent are female. This trend of female dominance in scavenging is not prevalent among Hadis in Chas town which is unlike the general trend. But definitely, the modern and urban state machinery too considered them as caste-based category which can be observed in the way that they employ Hadis as manual scavengers. Now Hadis are referred as sweeper in Chas.

The Government of India as a first step to make the work of scavenging more consistent with human dignity suggested supplying of wheelbarrows or handcarts to sweepers employed by municipalities for scavenging work so that the practice of carrying night soil as headload could be eliminated altogether. The Government of India provided 50 per cent of the costs towards the purchase of wheelbarrow and handcarts through the state governments. The wheelbarrows provided to the scavengers were mostly improper and so heavy that they were bound to be discarded by the scavengers, and this situation is reported in most towns including Bokaro and Chas.

With the beginning of urbanisation rather practicing scientific sewage system, Hindu society found it convenient to force a few castes to do menial jobs like manual scavenging across the country, for example Madigas in Andhra Pradesh (Ramaswamy, 2011) and Hadis in several region of the countryside including Bokaro. The employment of manual scavengers began systematically during British Empire and consequently local kings and royal families started following the suit. The British rule both legitimised and systemised manual scavengers by creating official posts. In fact, the British institutions namely, the Army, Railways, Courts, Industries and major Towns were equipped with dry latrines instead of waterborne

sewerage. They continued to institutionalise this system of disposal as human headloads, and it remained much visible till very recent in different corners of the country in independent India.

The pan Indian visibility of manual scavengers is because of the strong presence of British rule and their residency set-up wherever they ruled. The representatives of British rule lived permanently or for short durations in most parts of the country. Hence, this factor gave a push to the population settlement of manual scavengers in most parts of India. In view of this illustration, it is important to take note of the demographic pictures of these occupational groups in this section. However, in general details of their population are limited and not representative due to lack of country-wide survey by any institutions or a government body itself. Further, there is complete lack of any kind of a sociological study on the Hadi caste in comparison with other social groups. One does not get proper reference about the Hadis not even in the edited volume of People of India series for Bihar that includes Jharkhand in part I and part II. The scanty references are found in the Census of India documents. Otherwise, we do not have intensive field studies about the Hadi caste. There are good numbers of references on other castes engaged into manual scavenging but not Hadis. I did not mention those studies as they are not required at this point. Another survey by the Committee on 'Improvement of Living and Working Condition of Sweepers and Scavengers' headed by I.P.D Salapa on the sweeper *Pourakarmiks* in Karnataka working in various Municipalities in the state shows that beside the SCs there are Muslims, Christians, Lingayats, Kurubas and Mudaliars engaged in this profession. This only proves that members of different castes and communities have also taken up to this vocation mainly due to economic compulsions in the past.

An inhuman bondage of 1.3 million manual scavengers exists in India despite ban. Then, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, Mr. Mukul Wasnik admitted in the Rajya Sabha that manual scavenging should have been eradicated 2 years ago, but now the target has been fixed for March 2010 (2009). As on date, there are at least 115,000 manual scavengers, who are also considered untouchables or Dalits, identified for benefits under a 2007 self-employment rehabilitation scheme for them being implemented by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, Government of India. But, these are only government figures. 'This figure is fictitious,' says Bezwada Wilson, convener of the Planning Commission's sub-group on 'Safai Karmacharis' (sweepers), adding that there has been no proper national survey so far of their number. 'From our four-year-old survey in nine states, our conclusion is that there are at least 1.3 million manual scavengers in the country,' Wilson, head of National SKA after conducting a survey of 252 districts in 12 states in India. In this background, a

petition was filed by SKA in the Supreme Court in 2003 which forced the state governments to initiate some action in 2007.

It is helpful to contextualise the problems of manual scavenging historically and discuss the practices of carrying human excreta as human headloads. Hadis were involved in doing this job for years until the introduction of flush toilets. In this background, the elaboration by Pathak (1991) in his initial writing on manual scavengers elaborates the socio-cultural history of all the social groups engaged in the occupation of handling the most menial job in the human society and how they practiced it as their traditional occupation. It would also be interesting to understand as to why cleaning human excreta is popularly called as *night soil*? The term 'night soil' was coined for human excreta. In American and European countries, human excreta was collected by scavengers from privy vaults at night and carried to farming areas to be used as manure. The focus of compost did not get mechanised, but this practice gave rise to occupational groups in India. The practice of cleaning human excreta at night, therefore, gave it the name 'night soil'. The same got strong impetus due to already existing caste-based occupational structures in India. In fact, there have been more than a dozen types of latrines in existence; however, none of them resulted in the liberation of scavengers, and they only increased the intensity of the practice (Pathak, 1991, pp. 45–52).

### **Types of Latrines**

It is interesting to give the list of such latrines namely, sandas, closed and open sandas, septic tanks, dry toilets, portable toilets, chamber pots, urine diversion toilets, pit toilets or pit latrines, urine-diverting dry toilets (UDDTs), dry earth closet alternative and others. However, some designs were and are inherently discriminating. Even now, though there are flush toilets, still all the shit goes into the septic tank. Once the septic tank is full, who cleans it? At least until these vacuum-based mechanised machines were introduced, it was again the manual scavengers who used to collect manually the shit from the septic tanks and there are still such practices. So what used to be a daily affair earlier, the introduction of septic tanks turned it into once in a while 'one night stand' as Zizek termed (Atluri, 2011).

An important consequence of this occupational association is untouchability, while discussion on untouchability is beyond the scope of this research; it is pertinent to note that the discrimination faced by Hadis is in the name of untouchability. A few Hadis do recall how the severe forms of discrimination and practice of untouchability existed but then gradually it declined to minimum. The changes in toilet construction from dry to septic and later into flush-based reduced the physical filth at work. Consequently, the work of Hadis continued but only the nature of

the workplace changed. Certain changes took place due to change in the form of toilets. The crude form of doing job gradually shifted into little upgraded forms. For instance, now Hadis call themselves sweepers after the large number of Hadis getting employment in Nagarpalika as sweepers. A law passed in 1993 forced the state institution to call them as sweepers not as manual scavengers. This helped to bring changes in the mindset and perception of non-Hadis towards Hadis. The data informs the invariable change brought because of both change in nomenclature and invention of flush toilets. Hence, there is a noted positive change due to the above-mentioned reasons including the constitutional and legal factors. The data on untouchability does record the past experiences of Hadis. Today manual scavenging is changed and reduced to different levels and is in various forms that is not noticeable through the lenses of law on untouchability but can be noticed in everyday lives of Hadis.

To be untouchable in Indian caste hierarchy is to be very low in and partially excluded from an elaborate hierarchical social order, and this order functions quite efficiently. Michael (2007) gives a detailed account of untouchables in India in his new volume on *Dalits in Modern India*. He says untouchables are persons of a discrete set of low caste, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity from particular relations with higher beings both human and divine. They make up about 16.2 per cent of the Indian population in census 2001, and in the census 2011, enumeration SC population has increased at 16.6 per cent.

They have been called by various names such as ‘untouchables’, ‘Harijans’ (a glorified term, coined by Narsimha Mehta later adopted and popularised by ‘Mahatma Gandhi’), ‘Exterior Caste’ (a term used by J. H. Hutton), and ‘Depressed Classes’ (a term used by British officials. For the present discussion, Hadis have known for their association with untouchability in the past.

The cycle of traditional and family occupation does not enforce Hadis to break the chain. The trap of caste occupation continues even today at large. Only one person among the 105 workers is found to be doing non-caste and modern day work. Nirmal Hadi became an exception to the entire Hadi Cooli. He is 33-year-old young and works in a private firm, Tata Indicom, as office clerk. He spends entire day in an office unlike all his friends who get back to home in the afternoon, but he finds comfort due to nature of the work. During an interview, he questions ‘why does the birth in a certain family and caste restricts us from the freedom of choice in all aspects of life and work?’ Most are over dependent and consequently spiralled in their traditional occupation. It gives both a sense of security and over-dependency. The result is never helpful to bring change into their life. But Nirmal overcame this barrier alone. He further asserts, ‘I am the only Hadi who has completed graduation (BA), and I am not doing my caste-based occupation unlike

my friends and peers in Hadi Cooli'. This context is true to the caste-based communities that are still found to be engaged in the same or similar occupation, and this is much more prevalent among the low castes or SCs in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Until or unless the mainstream (defining this is difficult) society do not abandon the process of imposition of values of life which do not correlate with the Dalits in India. There is rare probability of marginalised and excluded occupational category of Dalits; Hadis, here in this study, reap the benefit of equality and equity in all the spheres of man's life. Unlike Dr. B R Ambedkar did indeed give birth to a movement that encompassed all the needs of human society – economic, social, cultural, political and spiritual. Debating about changing occupations would have no or least meaning unless we understand the socio-cultural and political background of the community. Similarly, social exclusion (Ziyuddin and Eswarappa, 2009) of Hadis seeks clarification in the phenomenon of exclusion which is a 'process' (Patel, 1994, 2006). Is not the reason sufficient to argue that scavengers in Chas town are living in alienation and suffering from exclusion and far away to dignity? Except a few, most of the individuals in Hadi Cooli were ignorant to their names, hereditary and occupational history as they have no meaning in their everyday life.

In recent years, the marginalised groups have begun to struggle for empowerment and self-recognition in the daily lives and interactions (Mondal, 2003). Muslims and Dalit Muslims are two distinguished social groups of Indian society that needs attention in research, especially those into traditional occupation. The first portrays to be identified as homogenous social groups and the second is homogenous but socially deprived group. Given the fact that, a section of 'Hindu' Dalits have received special status for decades and benefits from the state, it is obvious that their conditions are better than a few of others but not to all Dalits, as the study reflects the vulnerable conditions of Hadis in Bokaro town. Hence, studying the dynamics and dimensions of social exclusion experienced in the community and the changing occupations is an essential but difficult question.

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