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FORGOTTEN AT THE MARGIN : MUSLIM MANUAL SCAVENGERS

Manual scavenging has been thrust upon a community who is then persuaded to be happy with its own marginality. In the Indian context, where division of labour of an individual is decided by his caste, this lack of economic alternative should be construed as a major principle of casteism. It is not just a 'division of labour', but also the "division of labourer". It justifies manual scavenging in the name of 'job'. Despite all the laws against caste practices, it's most inhuman manifestation i.e. manual scavenging is still practiced in India.

To deal with such a "dehumanizing practice" and "social stigma" the Union government passed a law known as Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013. This Bill will override the previous one as it had "not proved adequate in eliminating the twin evils of insanitary latrines and manual scavenging from the country." It is in this context, that this paper would like to deal with Muslim manual scavengers, a little known entity in social science.

The first question this paper would like to discuss is about the caste among Indian Muslims despite no sanction from the religion. Secondly, this paper shall deal with Muslim manual scavengers, an *Arzal biradari*, including their social history. This section will try to bring forth the socio-economic context of Muslim manual scavengers who live an 'undignified' life. Third section will deal with the subject of inaccessibility of scheme benefit meant for all manual scavengers? What has been the role of State in providing a dignified life to its citizens? A critical analysis of the movement against manual scavenging shall also be covered.

Manual scavenging goes against traditional saying that '*kaam koi bhi ho, bura nahi hota*' (no job is bad). It shows lack of alternative to individuals and preaches them to be happy with the limitlessness. As *Manusmriti* propagates casteism as a natural evolution of human existence. Hence, despite all the law against caste practices, its most inhuman attribute i.e. manual scavenging is still practiced in India.

The most of the 'recognized' scavengers, probably 97 per cent, belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) category. Author's emphasis on the word 'recognized' is due to the refusal by the state to incorporate manual scavengers belonging to Muslims and Christians socio-religious communities into the list of SCs. This is happening despite social, economic, educational and cultural similarities among the manual scavengers belonging to these religious communities. Hence, this paper would like to bring forth the wretched condition of Muslim manual scavengers who live an 'undignified' life. Why are they not able to avail the facilities meant for manual scavengers? What has been the role of the state in providing a dignified life to its citizens? In addition, the paper will also undertake a critical analysis of the movement against manual scavenging. The aim of this paper is not to create division among the scavengers but to bring forth the similarities and mainstream the discussion on Muslim manual scavengers.

Muslim Manual Scavenger: Who are they?

Researchers and scholars, both national and international, have been delving upon the issue of manual scavenging since a long time. They have brought forth the humiliation and agony of manual scavengers and contextualized the debate within the framework of democracy and dignity. But, rarely have the issues and challenges before Muslim manual scavengers been debated or put in to a similar framework. The history of this group is very thin and scattered, which further stops scholars who want to research on this topic, to approach the issue. Satyamev Jayate (2012), a popular TV show by Amir Khan, rightly discussed about the prevalence of manual scavenging in India but failed to go deeper into the issue.

In history, some scholars have pointed out the presence of Muslim scavengers known at that time by different names. Muslim scavengers have many sub-castes, known as *Halalkhor*, *Hela*, *Lalbegi* etc. W. Crooke in his book *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western India* (1896) has enlisted no less than forty-seven Muslim scavenging castes. Almost all the *Chuhra*s west of Lahore were Muslims, and they were very commonly called *Musalli* or *Kutana*, the two terms being apparently almost synonymous, but *Kutana* being used in the south west and *Musalli* in the north-west. One list from Benares divided the caste into nine sub-castes, *Shaikh*, *Hela*, *Lal Begi*, *Ghazipuri Rawat*, who trace their origin from Ghazipur, *Hariri* or *Hah*, *Dhanuk*, *Bansphor* and *Dhe*. *Halalkhor* has been a prominent caste of Muslim scavengers and the origin and meaning of caste name has remained in discussion, especially of colonial travelers and anthropologists.

Fryer refers to *Halalkhor* as base people "because they defile themselves by eating anything and do all servile offices" (B.G.Gokhale 1979:65). Ovington also refers to the *Halalkhor* as "eat-alls or eaters at large" (1979:80), people who drink anything potable and eat whatever comes along including

carrion. They perform the sanitary services in the houses of all the residents in a ward and are untouchable as their contact was considered as polluting and despised. The meaning of their name has been subjected to wide misinterpretation. The above caricature defined them as ‘eater of anything’ or ‘eat-allers’ which are wrong in its approach. However, the definition is oblivious to the fact that *Halalkhor* community is adherent to Muslim religion who cannot eat anything or everything. There are specific injunctions in Quran about what is lawful and prohibited for eating. Hence, Lang’s definition would be more appropriate where he argues that a *Halalkhor* is “The lowest (in status) of all servants were the sweepers (*khak-rub, ja-rub-kash, kannas*), who belonged to the so-called ‘menial’ castes. Characteristically, Akbar renamed them *halal-khor*, i.e. the people who worked hard to earn their pay (as against *haram-khor*, the idle). Their remuneration, despite this ‘improved’ nomenclature, was still at the lowest rate, two dams per days (i.e. Rs. 1.50 per month)” (Peter Lang 2004:559).

Apart from their caste based occupation, *Halalkhor* community was used by Mughal rulers to spy in the neighbourhood and report to the local authority. Gokhale (1979) pointed out that these men were under obligation to go twice a day to clean out every house, and inform the *kotwal* about all that went on. “Crooke (1896), writing about this community, states that the name *Mehtar* was commonly applied to the servants of the Emperor Humayun. Another title for them is ‘*Halalkhor*’, one who eats what is lawful, one whose earnings are legitimate. *Halalkhor* is also known as ‘*Khakrob*’, or ‘sweeper of dust’ and *Baharwala*, one who is not admitted into the house. Another euphemistic name for them in Punjab is ‘*Musalli*’, ‘one who prays’. From their religion and patron saint they are sometimes known, collectively, as *Lalbegi*, which is the name for one of their sub-castes” (B.N.Srivastava 1997: 21).

There has been a campaign by right-wing political parties that scavenging was the outcome of Mughal rule in India. But, this is far from the truth. Gita Ramaswamy wrote “This argument fits neatly into the Hindutva theory that all social evils emanate from Muslim rule and reconstructs a glorious Rajput heritage for communities like *bhangis*” (Gita Ramaswamy 2005:6). The practice was in operation even prior to the Mughal period and even after conversion to Islam many of these scavenger castes continued with their practices. There had been no change in occupation of Muslim scavengers even during the British rule. According to the Census of India (1901), “in some places a third class, called *Arzal* or ‘lowest of all’ is added. It consists of the very lowest castes, such as the *Halalkhor, Lalbegi, Abdal, and Bediya*, with whom no other Mohammedan would associate, and who are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground” (Kenneth David 1977: 343). The humiliating ‘job’ continues in post-colonial India and so does the involvement of Muslim *scavengers* in scavenging.

Today, there is no clear estimate of population of this community as government does not conduct caste census among Muslims and Christians. Bindeshwar Pathak (2010) argued that “the complete information in respect of all the scavenging communities is still not available. Even in the case of those included in the list of Scheduled Castes full information about their social customs, social status, their economic position, culture etc. is not available anywhere on an all-India basis” (B.Pathak 2010:5). Thus, enumeration of castes and their number among Minorities is a very important task for well-crafted policy intervention for their welfare and any opposition to caste census from various quarters will scuttle the process.

Nevertheless, according to 1961 Census, of the total workforce i.e. 8,02,400 persons engaged in the profession of scavenging, Scheduled Castes constituted 48.2 per cent and the remaining 51.8 per cent were non-Scheduled Castes, such as Sikhs, Muslims, Christians. The Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission (1989) had estimated the number of scavengers belonging to groups, like Muslims, Christians and Tribal at around three lakhs. Sachar Committee Report also throws some light on the number of this community, according to which 0.2 per cent of Muslim urban workers work as building caretakers, sweepers, cleaners and in other related occupations. In rural areas this proportion is 0.1 per cent. Gender analysis of manual workers among Muslim reveals that 0.1 per cent are male workers whereas women are a larger chunk with 0.2 per cent. The number is small in comparison with Scheduled Castes.

Law to deal with Manual scavengers

After Independence, pioneers of national movement dreamt of a dignified life for every citizen of the country, in spite of a difference of approach to deal with the situation. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “I may not be born again, but if it happens, I will like to be born in a family of scavengers so that I may relieve them of the inhuman, unhealthy and hateful practice of carrying night soil” (B. Pathak 2010:7). M.K. Gandhi eulogized the ‘undignified life’ of scavengers. Ambedkar presented different ideas to deal with scavenging. According to him caste system is at the root of this practice. He pointed out that among scavengers, if a person belongs to upper caste, he does not face ‘untouchability’ whereas a child born in scavenging caste does, even if he is engaged in other occupation.

Ambedkar quoted Gandhi to critique his stance on scavenging. Gandhi said, “I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen year old Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger’s work in order to teach the Ashram cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper and that if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example” (B. Ravichandran 2011:2). B.R Ambedkar then

proceeds to critique Gandhi's position thus: "What is the use of telling the scavenger that even a Brahmin is prepared to do scavenging when it is clear that according to Hindu Shastras and Hindu notions even if a Brahmin did scavenging he would never be subject to the disabilities of one who is a born scavenger? For in India a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not" (B. Ravichandran 2011:2).

Nevertheless, the debate over the scavengers and their democratic rights as citizens of India helped to frame policy in Independent India. In 1949, the then Government of Bombay appointed the Scavengers Living Conditions Inquiry Committee, under the Chairmanship of Shri V N Barve. The report of the Committee was published in 1952. It touched upon the problem of abolition of Gharaki or customary rights to scavenging in Gujarat. Subsequently, a more detailed study of the problem was undertaken by the Scavenging Conditions Enquiry Committee set up by the Central Advisory Board for Harijan Welfare on 12th October 1957 under the Chairmanship of Professor N R Malkani. The report was submitted in 1960. One of the major recommendations related to the Government of India was giving grants for the purchase of equipment which would help eradicating the practice of carrying night soil on head. Later on, two more Committees were formed in 1965 and 1968 to look into the status of scavengers.

Apart from various committees and commissions that have been established to assess the situation, Government of India took various legislative measures to deal with manual scavenging, like The Law on Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993; Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013, Schemes for Low Cost Sanitation and Liberation of Scavengers taken by other Agencies; The National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents (1992); New Self Employment scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS).

But, one 'biased' Official Order (OO) pushed Dalit Muslim in general and Muslim scavengers in particular at the margin and excluded them from the benefits accruing to the SC population. Article 341 of Indian Constitution provisioned with regards to that Scheduled Castes that 1) The President may with respect to any State or Union territory, and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be. 2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

With the Presidential Order, 1950, Dalit among Muslim and Christian communities were excluded from availing the reservation facilities under Scheduled Castes category. The logic put forward by the then Indian government was that Islam as a religion does not propagate a caste system or any type of inequality among human beings. There has been a conscious denial of the caste practices among the Muslims, which was recorded by colonial ethnographers. But, this rule has been amended twice till now to include Dalits of Sikhs and Buddhist communities. Following an agitation by Master *Tara Singh*, the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Act, providing for inclusion of Dalit Sikhs in the list of the Scheduled Castes, was passed in 1956. It said; notwithstanding anything contained in para 2, no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu or Sikh religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste. In May 1990, to commemorate the birth centenary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Prime Minister V.P.Singh brought Dalits who converted to Buddhism into the list of Scheduled Castes. Hence, Presidential Order, 1950 is against the spirit of Indian Constitution which mandates 'Right to Equality' of all citizens without discrimination based on caste, creed, religion, colour, language etc.

Law into Action

State has been trying to improve the basic living standard of manual scavengers and preparing them to be incorporated into the mainstream. Since inception of the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), a total number of 11.4 crore toilet units (IHHL-BPL + IHHL-APL) were approved. The progress against the target as on 15th May, 2007 was 3.2 crore i.e. 28 per cent. Besides the construction of Individual Households Latrines (IHHL), toilets were also constructed in schools and *balwadies*. Prior to launching of TSC, under Central Rural Sanitation Programme, 94.80 lakh IHHLs had been constructed in the rural areas.

Initial observations about the government efforts to eradicate scavenging are very impressive. But, group discussion and testimonials of beneficiaries have another story to tell. A report on public hearing on 'Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers and their children in India' revealed that "Corruption was done on large scale in the rehabilitation scheme, which is Rs. 735.6 crores rehabilitation scheme implemented by Government of India. About 76 per cent people got benefits; those are not in eligible criteria" (Rashtriya Gramin Abhiyan 2012: 2). Report also shows that the middlemen are playing a big role in corruption. 24 per cent people do not get any benefits of Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), according to data, and department released amount on their names.

On an enquiry in to the status of implementation of scheme in various States, it was found that Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh were the top States where maximum number of people got benefited whereas Jammu

and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh are the States where 77.6, 71.8 and 69 percent of the identified people were kept out of the benefit. Thus, 50 per cent of identified people from 8 States out of 18 (16 States + 2 UTs) where this scheme is implemented were not benefited.

Report also reveals that the benefits are going to fake entities. "Middle men or commission agents would visit Dalit *bastis* telling households to sign on so and so papers as the government had chosen them as beneficiaries of a new scheme. The beneficiaries would never get to know the loan amount, sanctioning officer or other details of the transactions. After a while, the middle men would revisit them and hand over Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,500. Many of these people did not even know why they were being given the money or how much money had been borrowed in their names" (Divya Trivedi 2012:1) For instance, Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of beneficiaries who receive benefit. So, in Madhya Pradesh most cases of SRMS beneficiaries are registered, but 30 per cent of them are deprived of any such benefits. Thus, 3982 cases out of 13272 never got the money which was sanctioned against their name. In Uttar Pradesh too, 160 beneficiaries out of 3176 were deprived of the loan sanctioned against their name.

Critical look at Policies, Programmes and movement to end Manual Scavenging

A critical focus on the policies, programmes and movement against manual scavenging is required, as classification of scavengers on religious basis brings forth the issue of discrimination. Muslim manual scavengers have been discriminated against by authorities responsible for implementation of schemes and movement meant to eradicate this practice. A report 'Eradication of inhuman practice of Manual Scavenging and Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers in India' by Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan, 2011, recorded that government programmes have completely ignored the Muslim communities, such as *Hela* and *Halalkhor*, who inhabit several States of India and have been as much a slave of this exploitative tradition as the Dalit Hindu communities. It is also notable that the actual victims in this case too are primarily women. Jan Sahas survey argued that "...They are deprived of other welfare measures despite being manual scavengers and experience similar discrimination and exploitation as Hindu manual scavenging communities" (Jan Sahas SDS 2014:16-17).

Looking at the condition of manual scavengers in Jammu and Kashmir, V.B.Rawat argued that "...Jammu & Kashmir is one of the biggest violators in this regard where 1,78,330 households need manual scavenging" (Rawat 2012:2). In this Muslim populated State almost all the scavengers belong to the Muslim community and follow Islam. They have remained unaffected by the programmatic intervention. It led Rawat to question the benefit of the new laws against manual scavenging. He argued "...how are the Muslim

manual scavengers going to be benefitted from that. Secondly, there is the issue of whether the act would be implemented in Kashmir as it is always a problem that all central acts have to be separately developed for this region. What will the J&K government propose to eliminate this crime against humanity? Will it rehabilitate the people and provide them alternative employment?...If the Centre is making a law against elimination of manual scavenging practices or even if a law is enacted for reservation in Promotion, the Muslim and Christian Dalits would not be able to get any benefit of the reservation” (Rawat 2012: 3).

The Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) has been advocating for eradication of manual scavenging and for the same purpose it has completed a State based survey to identify the scavengers. However, the list prepared after the survey is faulty and exclusionary. For instance, in the case of Mau district, Uttar Pradesh, the list fails to identify Muslim manual scavengers although the State has 4,831 total identified scavengers (Table 1). In Mau, there are many Muslim families involved in scavenging. Shakeel Ahmed, an activist with Poorvanchal Gramin Vikas Sanstha (PGVS), whose grandmother was a manual scavenger, speaks of the taboos that prevailed in her days and how the stigma exists even today. “We are Muslims so technically there is no untouchability, he says. But it exists, maybe with a *meethapan* (sugar coating). The word *halal* (good) is used with reference to our work, but when my grandmother went to Mecca there were sniggers where we live that a *mehtarani* was going on Haj. People would not visit us or eat with us. Even today people are surprised that I send my son to school” (Freny Manecksha 2007: 1).

Sayina has repeatedly asked the civic authorities for a job as a sweeper. Her anger is palpable when she says: “I am throwing their dirt because that is the only way I can earn something” She spends lavishly on *paan* – it is the only way she can get rid of the foul odour that stays even after the work has been completed. Among the Dom it is the women who are more prone to alcoholism; they often drink heavily to numb their sensibilities. Sayina also speaks of the sexual harassment faced by women scavengers: “Middlemen approach us promising us work but demand sexual favours in lonely gullies or take us to their shops” (2007: 1).

When Fatima Kaneez’s mother died it was a foregone conclusion in Nadwasarai village of Mau district of Uttar Pradesh that she would have to start doing what her mother and grandmother had done for many years, that is, lift human excreta from dry latrines, using only a small broom and tin plate. Fatima, who is from a community of scavengers called *Halalkhor*, recalls: “The thought of such work was repulsive, but when I hesitated the villagers put pressure on me. They said my husband was unemployed, I had small children to support, and this was after all my family’s hereditary occupation.” In a perverse twist of logic, the villagers even argued that

Fatima's daughters' chances of marriage would be enhanced if she worked as a scavenger because this would imply that there was a steady flow of income into the household.

Though the caste *Halalkhor* and *Lalbegi* prominently work as scavengers, the survey did not record their presence in Bihar. While writing about the scavengers of Bihar, Sachchidanand argued that "In Bihar according to an estimate of the Planning Commission (1989), the number of scavengers is 22,400, out of which 10 per cent reside in rural areas...There is general misconception that all scavengers are Scheduled Castes and are, therefore, entitled to the benefits provided for the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution" (Sachidanand 2001:16). But, *Halalkhors*, as they are Muslim by religion, do not enjoy such rights. In his field study Sachchidanand found the existence of *Halalkhors* or *lalbegis* in both rural and urban areas. S. Musi Raza in his study (1992) argued that "After liberation, the situation has changed. The curse of untouchability is being gradually removed. Some social interactions have started with poor Muslim families of lower strata. In certain cases, they are invited by lowly placed Muslims on certain occasion and they also invite them. But such interactions are not free and on a large scale. The *Ashrafs* and well placed *Ajlaf* do not regard them untouchables, but avoid social intercourse." (2001: 44)

More than a decade later Ali Anwar accounted for the plight of Muslim scavengers of Patna and their socio-economic position in his book *Masawat ki Jung* (Fight for Equality). "Close to the *Imarat-e-Shariah* office there is a huge settlement of *Halalkhors* (Dalit Muslims). Cholera broke out in the *halakhors* locality a few years ago killing six poor people. Not to speak of providing any material assistance, the *Imarat-e-Shariah's* office bearers did not even prefer to meet the affected families and inquire about their welfare" (Ali Anwar 2004: 40). Sachchidanand (2001) presented the number of household of Muslim scavengers in Bihar Sharif. He found that more than 1,100 Muslim scavengers live in this area (Table 2).

The new Act 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act', 2013, or any bill prior to this, has never discriminated between the scavengers belonging to different religions. The new Act defines a manual scavenger as "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 in a railway track or in such other spaces or premises, as the Central or State Government may notify, before the excreta fully decomposes, and the expression 'manual scavenging' shall be construed accordingly" (New Act 2013:2). However, experience shows that the application of this Act or implementation of any welfare programme

has always been discriminatory against the scavengers belonging to the *Arzal* Muslims.

Why State did not recognize Dalit (Manual Scavengers) Muslim

There are many factors that cumulatively act against the case of Dalit Muslims: a) Elite Muslim leadership, b) Homogenized politics, c) Piecemeal approach of democratization and d) Assertion of Hindutva politics.

Elite Muslim Leadership: From class/caste perspective, there has been little change in the socio-economic profile of the Muslim leadership in post-Independence India. Muslim politics has been continuously dominated by upper class and caste. According to an analysis by Theodore P. Wright, Jr., out of 58 (Rajya Sabha members) twenty-five were upper class; Nawabs and Zamindars with titles from the British or from Muslim princely states like Hyderabad, Bhopal, or Rampur; twenty claim relationship by blood or marriage to famous Muslim figures of the past or to princely houses; twenty-four others report parental middle class callings business, professional, or civil service (Wright, 1997: 854). These leaders filled with reactionary heritage of past and mixing religion with politics, resisted any attempt of democratization and never raised such issues as caste practices among the Muslim. In the changed circumstances, these leaders were more conscious about, how to maintain their political power without annoying other communities and mobilize masses for their respective political parties. They appealed to maintain the unity, without which neither individuals nor society could progress.³ They never came out of belief of the homogeneity of Indian Muslims.

Meanwhile, so called secular government by a secular party did not confront communalism. Arend Lijphart's 'The Politics of Accommodation' brings forth the argument that shows how leaders from the emerging groups accommodated themselves in the mainstream and used them to garner votes in election. The Congress party, for long, did the same with Dalit and Muslim community. This clientele politics has failed from 1980s onward.

The co-option of congress Muslims in governmental structures restricted their ability to keep up their links with large segments of the Muslim people. They eschewed involvement in all issues which were seen to be specifically Muslim and were likely to leave them vulnerable to charges of promoting sectarian causes. In particular, in first three general elections, 'the nomination and election processes work[ed] to put into the legislatures Muslims who [were] incline to be docile and not raise embarrassing issues too persistently, lest they either not "[got] the ticket" next election or [were] shifted to less safe constituencies' (Wright 1966:110). The lacuna shown by the secular parties and Muslim leaders in raising the caste issues has sheer political motives. Once Nehru was out of scene, the communal polarization became more and more sharp and Indian politics once again saw the mixing of religion with politics. Once conservative forces took over the community politics, the

Congress in spite of countering positively with them, made underhand dealing with these forces. For electoral gain, Congress invariably relied upon these conservative elements amongst Muslims. In addition, Muslims were appeased by elevating a few from the community to exalted positions in government. These forces consistently propagated the idea of homogenized Muslim community putting forth the argument that, in Islam there is no such concept of caste; in its fold all are equal. Moreover, the communally charged atmosphere allowed them to ask for unity among the Muslims. Resultantly, the issues like women rights, caste practice, democratization of various Muslims institutions, and agitation for modern education have been neglected throughout the decades.

Homogenized Politics: British rulers established Muslims as a homogenised category in Indian sub-continent. The process began immediately after the 1857 revolt and shaped up with 1909 communal award of separate electorate. Formation of Pakistan cemented this process. After Independence, rise of homogenised politics strengthened this proposition. During this period, politics of Urdu, AMU, Haj subsidies, Personal Law were a few issues Muslims were racked with.

Assertion of Hindutva Politics: Creation of Pakistan satisfied the Muslim communalism; however, India did not transform into a *Hindurashtra*, the dream of Savarkar, which was a disappointment for the Hindu communalists in India, who had vigorously tried to achieve it. The nationalist leadership certainly did not give room to these divisive elements, but, it failed to negate them completely. The Hindu fundamentalist forces continued their propaganda against the Muslims, which in turn fed into the efforts of the Muslim elite leadership to strengthen their grip over the community. Holistic

Government lackluster approach toward Muslims: Government, run by a single party for such a long period set certain trends which became the characteristics of the state. Government considers each social group as a vote bank which facilitates them to ride the power. The government associated various projects of upliftment with different social groups to make a balance. Thus, reservation associated with SCs/STs, development fund to north-east region, militancy with Jammu and Kashmir, language problem (anti-Hindi) with South India and security issue for minorities (Sikhs, Muslims and Christian). As Sikhs and Christians communities have high development indicators hence security is their main concern. However, Muslims have the problems of identity, security and development. But state is not objective in its treatment to the Muslims. This led Zoya Hasan to raise the question that “does state policy reflect objective realities or does it reinforce and privilege certain categories over others?” (Zoya Hasan 2011:197). Whenever Muslims have started weaning away from Congress it came up with some populist measure to show their concern for minorities. For instances, Indira Gandhi 15 points programmes, UPA government’s new 15 points programme, Sachar

Committee. The policies generated from these programmes lacked the will of implementation in a holistic ways but has always ended up pacifying the anger against the government.

Way-out

There have been some efforts by the Government to root out the malaise of manual scavenging. Government has taken occupation as criteria to draw a list which gives chances of inclusion to all those who are involved into this menial works. Policy has broader outline. However, it goes contrary to Ambedkar's approach, who argued that upper caste involved in sweeping did not necessarily face the wrath of untouchability but the lower caste does. So, the lower status is the resultant of lower caste ranking in social hierarchy which sweepers belong to, rather to their occupation. Today, due to lack of job opportunities in the public sector many lower class upper caste Hindus have been working as sweepers. And, it has been a trend that these upper caste sweepers delegate their jobs to men/women belonging to lower castes. Hence, caste rather than occupation should be given priority in designing programmes. Further, Muslim scavengers, who belong to the *Arzal* category, should be included into the programme equally. Secondly, the policies of the government have been such that it forces people to remain in the jobs that they traditionally do as family occupation. In most of the cases educational help or scholarship has been stopped by the government as it was found that families were out of the profession. An example of a particularly self-defeating government programme is the scholarship for the children of families involved in scavenging. To avail the scholarship, children or families have to prove their engagement in manual scavenging for at least 100 days in a year. This scholarship scheme provides a negative incentive to the Dalit households to continue in this occupation. Recently, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment changed the criteria, but due to lack of awareness lakhs of children are not able to get this scholarship. This forces them to remain in the profession to avail the scholarship. Third, Muslim (*Arzal*) scavengers are not included into the Scheduled Caste category. They remain out of benefits government provides to the other scavenging communities in India. Hence, they should be included in the SCs list.

Manual Scavenging is a blot on the face of civilized society and democratic political structure. The presence of a 'pre-medieval' practice certainly does not go with India's claim of the largest democracy in the world. State's commitment to remove the practice of manual scavenging is proving to be a false promise. Unless and until a determined effort takes place against the annihilation of casteism, the manual scavengers, who might not doing the menial job, would not find themselves living a 'dignified life'. Their lower caste identity would continue to deceive them a 'respectful' life.

NOTES

1. Dr. Ambedkar argued that in caste system each group has specific occupation to perform and they cannot move to other job. Birth in a particular caste decides individual occupation and person has no choice of their own.
2. Sonia Gandhi used the term while emphasizing in favour of this bill.
3. This is a line used by Syed Mahmud during All India Muslim Consultative Convention on 8th August 1964. Reported in *The times of India*, 9 August 1964.

Table 1
Survey Conducted by Safai Karamchhari Andolan to record Manual Scavengers

Sr. No.	State	Total No. of District		No. of Manual Scavengers Profiles documented	No. of Dry Latrines
		Survey Conducted	Manual Scavenging Documented		
1.	Uttar Pradesh	50	13	4831	28050
2.	Bihar	38	27	944	1394
3.	Uttrakhand	12	4	451	2484
4.	Madhya Pradesh	16	5	171	398
5.	Jammu & Kashmir	9	9	161	361
6.	Maharashtra	24	13	70	75
7.	West Bengal	12	5	29	56
8.	Assam	7	1	22	22
9.	Punjab	8	1	13	13
10.	Jharkhand	3	1	12	16
11.	Gujarat	1	1	4	4
12.	Chhatishgarh	11	1	1	1
	Total	191	81	6709	32874

Source: *safaikarmachariandolan.org*

Table 2
Number of Muslim Scavengers in Bihar Sharif

Sr. No.	Mohallas	No. of Household
1.	Bagnabad	40
2.	Soh	12
3.	Pahariper	06
4.	Nanuatoli	06
5.	Choti Saluganj & Saluganj Kharihani	50
6.	Domkhana (Gulshan Bag Katra)	48
7.	Kagaji Mohalla	02

Source: Sachidanand (2001)

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