

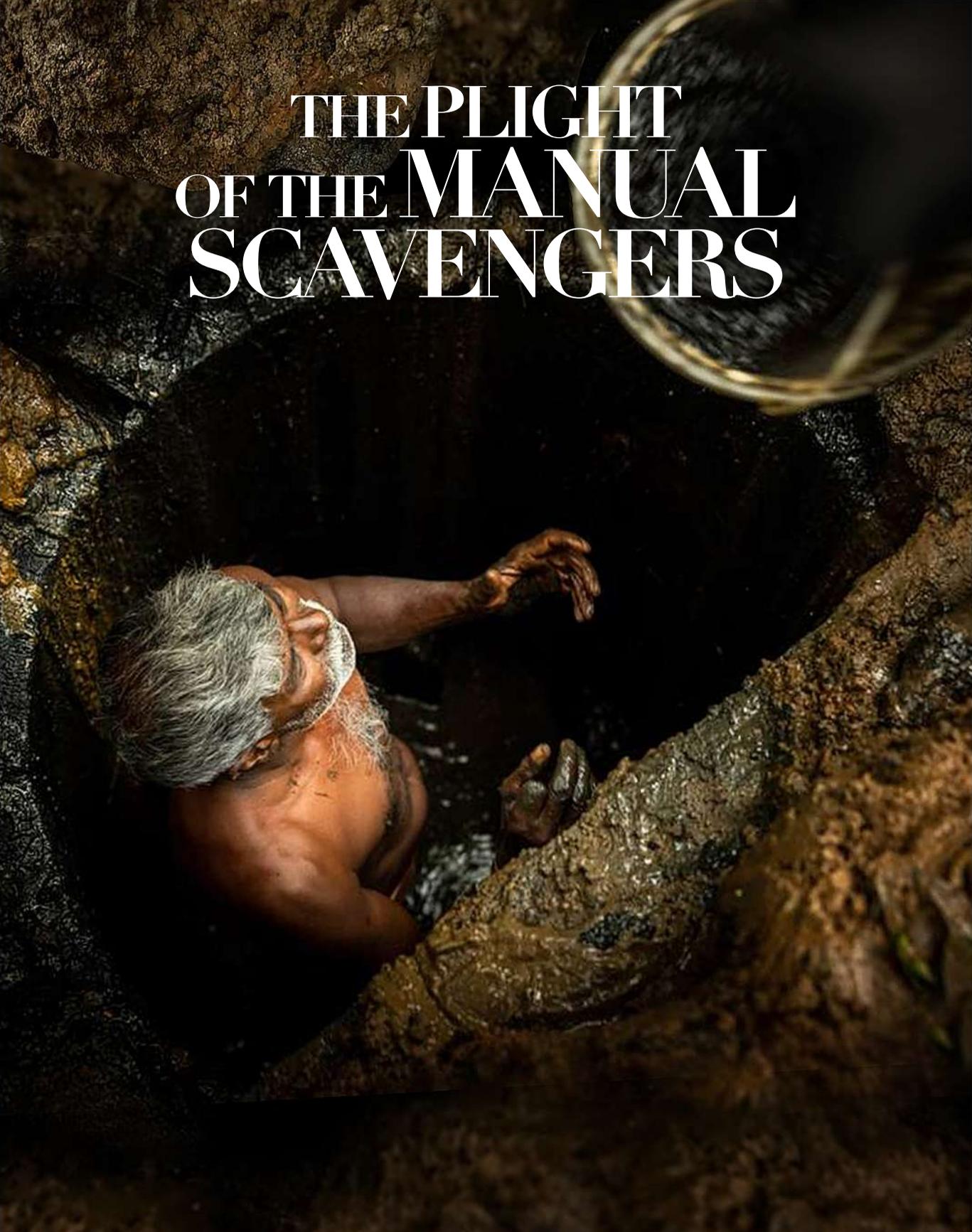
Bimonthly

Pax Lumina



Vol. 1 | No. 4 | November 2020

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



THE PLIGHT OF THE MANUAL SCAVENGERS

*As individuals we can influence our own families.
Our families can influence our communities and our
communities can influence our nations.*

-Dalai Lama

Pax  **Lumina**
A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

For E- Reading (Free Access)

www.paxlumina.com



Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Advisory Board

- Dr. Stanislaus D'Souza
(President, Jesuit Conference of South Asia)
- Dr. E.P. Mathew
(Kerala Jesuit Provincial)
- Dr. Ted Peters
(CTNS, Berkeley, USA)
- Dr. Carlos E. Vasco
(Former Professor, National University of Colombia)
- Dr. Thomas Cattoi (JST-SCU, California)
- Dr. Kifle Wansamo
(Hekima Institute of Peace Studies, Nairobi)
- Justice Kurian Joseph
(Former Judge, Supreme Court of India)
- Dr. George Pattery
(Former Professor,
Visva-Bharati University, West Bengal)
- Dr. K. Babu Joseph
(Former Vice Chancellor, CUSAT, Kochi)
- Dr. Ms. Sonajharia Minz
(Vice Chancellor, Sido Kanhu Murmu
University, Jharkhand)
- Dr. Jancy James (Former Vice Chancellor,
Central University of Kerala)
- Dr. C. Radhakrishnan (Litterateur, Kochi)
- Dr. Denzil Fernandes
(Director, Indian Social Institute, Delhi)
- Dr. K.K. Jose
(Former Principal, St. Thomas College, Pala)
- Dr. M. Arif (Adjunct Professor,
Premraj Sarda College, Ahamednagar)
- Dr. M.P. Mathai
(Adjunct Professor, Gujarat Vidyapith)
- Dr. Paramjyot Singh (Centre for
Peace and Justice, XLRI Jamshedpur)
- Dr. Siji Chacko (Director, Conference
Development Office, JCSA)
- Dr. S. Mohammed Irshad
(TATA Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai)
- Joye James (Former Professor,
Loyola College of Social Sciences, Trivandrum)
- Dr. Neil Tannen (Asst. Professor,
St. Joseph's College Autonomous, Bangalore)
- Dr. Walter Fernandes
(Professor, NESRC, Guwahati)



Editor

- Dr. Jacob Thomas IAS (Retd.)

Managing Editor

- Dr. Binoy Pichalakkattu

Associate Editor

- Dr. K.M. Mathew

Contributing Editors

- Dr. Augustine Pamplany
- Dr. Francis Gonsalves
- Dr. Kuruvilla Pandikattu
- Roy Thottam
- Dr. Neena Joseph
- Devassy Paul
- Sheise Thomas
- Sunny Jacob

Design

- Preshish Sama

Pax Lumina

An Initiative of Peace and Reconciliation Network

Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA)

Vision

Promotion of Peace and Reconciliation

LIPI, the Nodal Platform for Peace and Reconciliation Network of JCSA, aims at fostering peace with a multi-pronged approach.



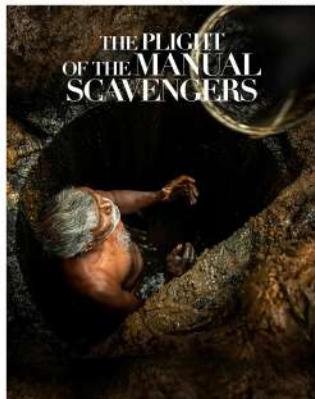
LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

LIPI, Ponoth Road, Kaloor,
Kochi- 682 017, Kerala, India

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION
NETWORK

Jesuit Conference of South Asia
225, Jor Bagh, New Delhi-110 003, India





Contents

Vol. 1 | No. 4 | November 2020

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



EDITORIAL

05 | **Nullified Lives**
Jacob Thomas

The Crude Reality

09 | **The Outcaste of India -
The Sanitary Workers**
James Regina C. Dabhi

18 | **A Crude Reality in India**
A. Sahaya Philomin Raj

28 | **WHO CARES WHEN WE DIE?
...DALIT LIVES MATTER!**
Paul D'Souza

INTERVIEWS

14 | **How to End Manual Scavenging**
Beswada Wilson

23 | **No Turning Back**
Divya Bharathi

International Affairs

33 | **The United States
and its Dramatic
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**
Francisco Javier

The Human Rights Perspective

38 | **Manual Scavenging
and Human Rights**
Elsa Muttathu, PBVM



**42 | Shutting Down
of Amnesty India**
Aakar Patel

44 | STAND WITH SAN

A Hero from the Excluded Space

**47 | Abject People, Abject Space,
and a Hero Who Fought it**
J Devika

51 | Didi of the Musahars

BOOK REVIEW

52 | THE UNSEEN by Bhasha Singh
Dominic Palakeel

**55 | CASTE MATTERS
by Suraj Yengde**
Nishant A Irudayadason

REPORT

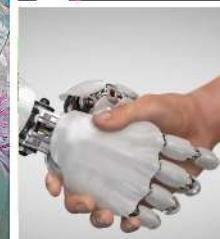
**58 | XLRI-LIPI CERTIFICATE
PROGRAMME
in Peace Studies 2020**

59 | LIPI SCIENCE TALKS

ART AND PEACE

**62 | Music of Silence
and Colours**
P. Surendran

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Nullified Lives



Editorial

Dear readers, this issue of Pax Lumina may offend your gustatory sensibilities. Though this is not a deliberate attempt at invading your finer sensorial boundaries, we apologise.. You are the client and as they say in management lingo client is the queen. And our job is to give you what you want. Yet as you know seeing is not always an activity with intent, though looking is. We didn't want to look at these people. Nobody wants to. But we saw them , right here in our midst and it is our duty to report what we saw. After all without truth there is no justice and without justice there is no peace. Pax in our name stands for peace.

The focus of this issue is manual scavengers and their nullified lives. We know they are alive because of the indispensable work they do in collecting, removing, carrying and dumping the most dispensible commodity human beings produce-- excreta. The primary work of collection from the lakhs of dry latrines that still exist in many parts of India is done by women of certain communities which form the lowest of the low of the outcastes. They do this work in the early morning before the sun rises in the dark of the dawn so as to be unseen and thereby not to hurt the sensibilities of the rest of the society! The rest of the work in this valueless chain is for men to accomplish. Many suffocate and die as Divya Bharathi the film maker tells our managing editor, Binoy Jacob who interviewed her.

Baswada Wilson, 54, was born in this community in Karnataka and has worked all his life for the emancipation of manual scavengers, travelling all over India.

He is now the National Convenor of the Safai Karmachari Andolan which works for the eradication of manual scavenging. I interviewed him with great trepidation at confronting this horrid reality he is working to eliminate. But I was amazed by his sanity, practical wisdom, hope and unadulterated commitment. He has been deservedly honoured with the Ramon Magsasay Award. He is now working with the *Niti Aayog*, Govt. of India to identify the actual number of people employed in this sector, convert the dry latrines to water closets and rehabilitate the workers. He is patient but optimistic. Please read what he says in the following pages.



One important thing Wilson and others who work with manual scavengers point out is the structural violence implicit in the caste system which stifles the lives and dreams of those at the bottom of this pernicious hierarchy and still worse, outside it.

There are more individuals and organisations who are working to eradicate this scourge from our country. We have featured some of them and their work in this issue.

Howsoever painful the reality surrounding us may be, this magazine has a duty to look beyond the immediate surroundings; at the world beyond. We have our correspondent from California writing about the just concluded US elections and their implications for the US and the rest of the world. As of now Trump has not conceded defeat. Big egos take a little time to deflate. But we wish both the victor and the vanquished peace and reconciliation, in their own interests as well as the well-being of the US and the rest of the world.

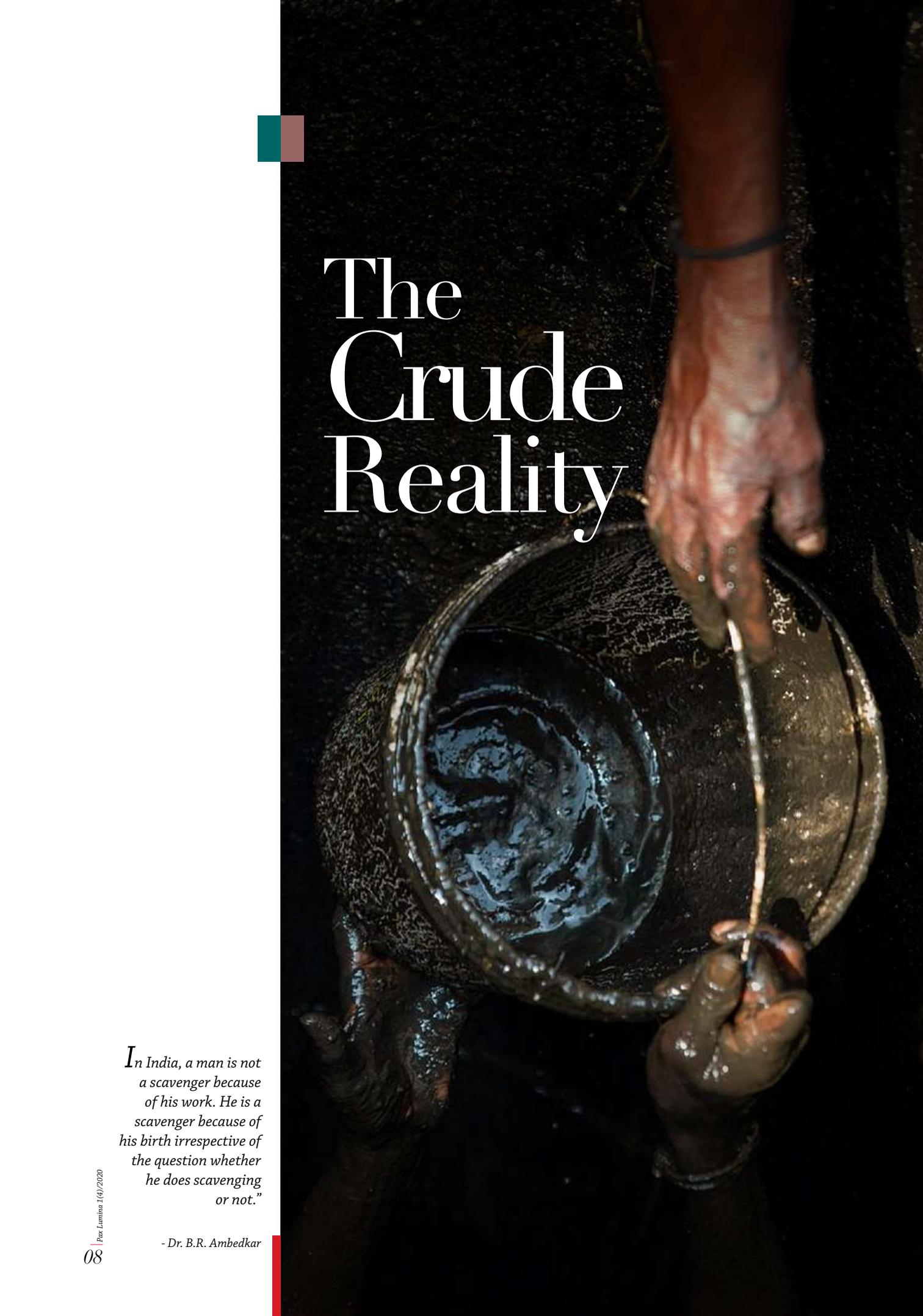
Certain developments in the recent past in India have cast a shadow on the human rights record of the nation. Two such instances, one about the closing down of the offices of the Amnesty International and the other on the incarceration of human rights activists like Fr. Stan Swamy are highlighted in the section on Civil Society and Human Rights.

In our Art and Peace column, we have introduced an abstract painter from Iraq. Our columnist writes about the music of her art.

Machine learning and Biotechnology are the two major frontiers of modern science discussed by our science columnist, an eminent scientist.

There are other features and articles in the magazine which go beyond the focus of this issue and which too, hopefully, will arouse your interest, stimulate your thinking and nudge you to action. Wish you all a very Happy Diwali! Stay safe, stay peaceful.

Jacob Thomas
Editor



The Crude Reality

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."

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar



James Regina C. Dabhi
jimmydabhi@gmail.com

The Outcaste of India- The Sanitary Workers

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 09-13

Hypocrisy and contradictions are part of the social life of many of us Indians.
Our clean India campaign might clean the streets of India but our mind-sets are littered with the filth of the varna-caste beliefs and practices

Introduction

The recent gruesome gang rape and killing of a 19 year-old young woman in Hathras by the so called upper caste men, in Uttar Pradesh, India has shaken the country. A large number of Indians are on the streets asking for justice while those affiliated to Hindutva ideology and politics protect the accused. This young woman belonged to a community called VALMIKI or BALMIKI, the manual scavenger community.

The manual scavenging is almost exclusively done by the Valmiki, a

subsection of the Dalit community. Dalits before the independence of India were untouchables or the *Avarna*. Dalits are not *shudra*, the fourth caste within the realm of Hinduism. Dalits are outcastes, identified as the Scheduled Castes after 1951 as India became a Republic. The Constitution did away with social discrimination. But has the practice, of treating the Dalits as untouchables, ceased? The answer is NO. The so called upper castes who call themselves *savarna* even today discriminate Valmiki and Dalits in a number of ways and in varied degrees [in fact the *savarna* should call

The pedagogy of the oppressed by Paulo Freire has the critical analysis that can help us to **understand the life of Valmiki and the inhuman conditions under which they live and work in India.**

themselves *kavarna* where *sa* means good and *varna* signifies colour and *k* signifies bad as their treatment of other human beings is bad, inhuman]. The underlying assumption is Valmiki are not human beings and thus can be treated inhumanly. They are inferior, and therefore, can be humiliated, insulted, sexually exploited and the women of the community can be raped or 'used'. Varna or caste is what race and white supremacy are in the west.

The *varna-caste* hypocrisy is obvious in the practice of untouchability. If the so called upper caste members touch the outcaste/Dalit, s/he will be polluted. However, these so called upper caste have no problem in molesting and raping the women of the outcaste. Hypocrisy and contradictions are part of the social life of many of us Indians. Our clean India campaign might clean the streets of India but our mind-sets are littered with the filth of the varna-caste beliefs and practices.

Who are the manual scavengers of India?

Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and



sewers. It often involves using the most basic of tools such as buckets, brooms and baskets. The practice of manual scavenging is linked to India's caste system where the so-called lower castes/avarna were expected to perform this job. Manual scavengers are amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged communities in India. Till date, it is this community that is engaged in this profession not so much out of choice but out of social, economic and political compulsion, helplessness.

Let me cite two examples from an article 'India lower caste still removing human waste' (<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/08/25/india-lower-caste-still-removing-human-waste/>).

"I studied commerce and banking, but I couldn't find work. Even though I am educated, the village council hired me to clean toilets because I am from this



COVID-19 and the lockdown and demand on their service has exasperated their situation in many ways. **They are the ones who often manually have to collect and dispose the Covid19 infected waste of the hospitals without necessary protection. Social discrimination is seen in the way they are treated by authority and civil society.**



community" Kailash Pokerji Kundare (Jalgaon, Maharashtra, India).

"I had to work with my head veiled. During the rains, my clothes would become drenched with excrement. They would not dry. The house would smell. I started to get skin diseases and even to lose my hair" Badambai (Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh).

The reality of the Valmiki (manual scavengers)

According to the 2011 census, there are still 26 lakh dry toilets in the country. Forty per cent of these are in the rural areas while 60% are in urban India. Every State government and the Centre keeps appearing before the Supreme Court to claim total eradication of manual scavenging. But the truth is there are

still two to three lakh families in the country who continue to work as manual scavengers.

The Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) an organisation of manual scavengers has been working for the eradication of manual scavenging in the country, estimates the number of reported instances of manual scavenging since 2013 at well over 1,70,000.

Most of the dirty work has to be done by women. The going into gutters, sewage, toilet pits which are choked is done by the men of this community. Removal and carrying dead animals from private property and public places is done by the members of this community. In time of disaster, natural and man-made, members of this community are called to clean up, compelled if they are employed by Municipal Corporations with minimum or no facility for hygiene and protection.

Many occupational diseases, therefore, are seen common among members of this community. They do not have much access to public health service. With privatisation many of the towns and cities have outsourced the work to private players who, in turn, employ members of this community with minimum wages and protection.

Education among them is the least, higher education very rare. They suffer the economic brunt of limited income sources and employment opportunities.

The life of Valmiki can be better experienced and understood in the light of Ambedkar and his efforts in annihilation, his critique on religion and his legal mind in framing the Constitution of India. The pedagogy of the oppressed by Paulo Freire has the critical analysis that can help us to understand the life of Valmiki and the



The cow vigilantes have killed so many people especially Muslim under the pretext of cow protection. **But the very same people who worship the cow leave their dead animals to rot or call the Valmiki to dispose of the dead.**



inhuman conditions under which they live and work in India.

Subhojit Goswami, in an article 'Manual scavenging: A stinking legacy of suffocation and stigma' in Down-to-earth of September 2018 describes the situation of the manual scavenger as a stinking legacy of suffocation and stigma. Every year, hundreds of manual scavengers die, asphyxiated by poisonous gases. The Valmiki take up this lowly job, not knowing that human faeces and urine which harbour a variety of diseases, may carry Hepatitis A, E. coli, Rotovirus, Norovirus, and pinworms. The community risks infection by coming in contact with these wastes. That also explains why sewer workers die as young as 40, falling prey to multiple health issues: cholera, hepatitis, meningitis, typhoid and cardio-vascular problems. In fact, repeated handling of human excreta without protection leads to respiratory and skin diseases, anemia, jaundice, trachoma and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Manual scavenging is not only a caste-based but also a gender-based occupation with 90 per cent of them being women. Households with dry latrines prefer women to clean the excreta instead of men as they are located inside the house. COVID-19 and the lockdown and demand on their service has exasperated their situation in many ways. They are the ones who often manually have to collect and dispose the COVID-19 infected waste of the hospitals without necessary protection. Social discrimination is seen in the way they are treated by authority and civil society.

The inhuman, irresponsible and uncivilized behaviour of Indian society at large.

The untouchability is just one manifestation of this deep-rooted exclusion and discrimination. Gandhiji wanted to do away with untouchability, the physical manifestation of Varna-caste discrimination while Ambedkar wanted *varna*-caste to be uprooted.

The life of Valmiki is what it is, largely due to what the Indian society is and the way it treats the Valmiki. In spite of the abolishing of untouchability by the Constitution, the *varna*-caste-ridden Indian mindset has not changed as much as one would have liked it to.

COVID-19 vaccine might be discovered and prevented in future. Numerous strategies such as legal and social reforms have not eradicated *varna*-caste based discrimination in rural and urban areas. The mind-set of a sizable Indians (not only Hindus but Muslims, Christian, Jains, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists and even some who claim to be atheist) are infected by the *varna*-caste ideology.

Manual scavenging, banned through a legislation in 2013, still prevails in India due to "weak legal protection and lack of



enforcement" of the rules, according to a new global study by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and others.

The cow vigilantes have killed so many people especially Muslim under the pretext of cow protection. But the very same people who worship the cow leave their dead animals to rot, or call the Valmiki to dispose of the dead. Often the decomposed bodies found at some places have to be cleared or brought for postmortem by members of this community. No one else will be ready to do this work.

Is there a way forward?

In the caste ridden society, backed by religion and politics in India, it is not easy to change the mindset of many communities and individuals. Yet all is not lost. Over the years there has been struggle against *varna*-caste discrimination and some change has taken place.

First of all, the civil society in India has to shed its *varna*-caste mentality, and do away with *varna*-caste ideology and practice of discrimination from all spheres of life, private and public.

The Governments at the State and the Centre have to have the political will to do away with social discrimination. These governments should ensure political will and economic commitment to improve the status of Valmiki and deal strictly

with those who discriminate within government, administration and civil society at large.

The manual scavenging for many may have ended as a form of employment but the stigma and discrimination associated with it lingers on, making it difficult for former or liberated manual scavengers to secure alternative livelihoods and raising the fear that people could once again return to manual scavenging in the absence of other opportunities to support their families.

Education from primary to higher education is a must. There is a change but it has to continue more rigorously. On account of social discrimination and treatment of the larger society the hygiene and health aspects have suffered. They need to be improved by accessing and mobilising themselves, it is their right and the government is not doing any favour to them.

Adhering to the Constitutional values and the principles enshrined in it, is a help to the Valmiki community as well as other communities. As Paulo Freire says we have to resist the evil inside and outside of us. The communal and *varna*-caste infected mindset of all has to be transformed. The exploited and exploiters have to become really human and undergo a change.

(I am grateful to Parshotam Vaghela for providing some data for this article - James Regina C. Dabhi)

Beswada Wilson

How to End Manual Scavenging

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 14-17



The problems of those working in the septic tanks and sewage drains are more severe. It is a pan India problem. Mechanisation is yet to find its way into these areas.

Many die in the process, inhaling toxic gases and by the very nature of job. And most of them are Dalits.



Pax Lumina: Thank you Mr. Wilson for agreeing to this conversation. We are quite impressed by your work amongst the manual scavengers for their emancipation and rehabilitation. What is the state of these hapless people now?

Bezawada Wilson: I am glad that you are interviewing. We work in 49 districts, mostly spread in Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, J&K. Approximately 56,000 people are engaged in manual scavenging and the majority are women. They are mostly involved in dry toilet cleaning. This is done before daylight to avoid the sight of people. The work includes collection, carrying and disposing of night soil. Septic tanks and sewage are cleaned by men.

Government of India plans to declare India as a Manual Scavenging Free State. We have conveyed to the authorities of NitiAayog the difficulty in achieving this target immediately and asked for more time. They want proof for the continued presence of manual scavenging. We need to furnish very clear data. After that, within a few months the task of conversion of the dry latrines to water closets can be completed.

Dry latrine is inside the home, with no commode or water drainage, and it has to be cleaned by human beings. Everyone defecates in to a basket or a bucket and the nightsoil has to be transferred to the basket to be carried to the dumping site.

Water closet has to be made on a war footing and the safai-karmachari must be provided with proper livelihood option, i.e., rehabilitation.

Niti Aayog has agreed to work with us and support us financially in achieving the task of conversion of the dry toilets. They want us to do a survey of the people involved. It must be done in a systematic manner – construct new toilets and rehabilitate all the women in the process. This is all that we know

about it as of now. We are still searching. Hopefully this is the last and final leg of our journey.

The problems of those working in the septic tanks and sewage drains are more severe. It is a pan India problem. Mechanisation is yet to find its way into these areas. Many die in the process, inhaling toxic gases and by the very nature of the job. And most of them are Dalits. We doubt if the Government is taking it as a serious matter.

Pax Lumina: What about the benefits of the policy of reservation? Are these people benefitting from this?

Bezwada Wilson: As sub castes -Valmikis/Bhangis - in some places the Government is willing to give up to Rs 40,000/- as a onetime cash assistance. And though up to an amount of Rs, Twenty-five lakhs is needed for the rehabilitation, they are not willing to provide the same.

Educational levels are low amongst these people compared to that of other Dalit communities. Yet one cannot say that there has been no benefit at all. Here and there are a few Government servants



What is required is political will. If the administration works with a political will, things will fall in place. There must also be interventions at policy level.



Manual scavenging is prevalent in other South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. **These are the nations that I have visited and seen the situation myself.**



from these communities... a few officers, two/three Sub Inspectors of Police etc.

Pax Lumina: What is the key to success of such a programme as this?

Bezwada Wilson: What is required is political will. If the administration works with a political will, things will fall in place. There must also be interventions at policy level. It is our dream to work upwards from rehabilitation to reservation to Government employment to a mighty designation in a politically strong situation. It is true to some extent that these communities suffer from untouchability and discrimination.

Pax Lumina: Where do you get the energy/motivation for this struggle from?

Bezwada Wilson: After seeing and experiencing so much oppression, it is very difficult to sit idle even for a minute.

Pax Lumina: What about education of their children?

Bezwada Wilson: We are still poor in educational standards. It is very

difficult to find educated members in our communities. Most of our children join work after their marriage. But in a situation of poor health in the case of any one of their near and dear, the children do extend their helping hands.

Pax Lumina: what about similar situation in the other South Asian countries?

Bezwada Wilson: Manual scavenging is prevalent in other South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. These are the nations that I have visited and seen the situation myself. I do not know about the other countries.

As and when technological advances are achieved, these unhealthy practices will give way to better ones. This is what has happened in the western nations and even in other parts of the world. There, the construction of a toilet is a basic necessity.

It must also be noted that progress in India has been hampered by the prevalent caste system. Annihilation of Caste, as Dr Ambedkar would have it, is a dire necessity for technical progress.



We organise girls in the Ambedkar Gender Equality Clubs. They work in 176 districts and around 2,000 women are members. There are NGOs like National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) which also works for the upliftment of the marginalised.

Pax Lumina: What is the message you would like to convey through Pax Lumina?

Bezwada Wilson: I must thank the Jesuits and all other similar communities for their dedicated and tremendous work.

When we think about the social change as an outcome of our work, we want what is legitimately assured by the Constitution of India. Social change is an important outcome, as Dr Babasaheb would say. The people for whom we are fighting as of date, are not in power, they are not rich, and our fight is long – to put a full stop to a 5,000-year-old practice is not easy. So, it is struggle, fight, struggle and fight... It is for the restoration of the dignity of our fellow human beings.

In promoting peace and reconciliation

It must also be noted that progress in India has been hampered by the prevalent caste system. Annihilation of Caste, as Dr Ambedkar would have it, is a dire necessity for technical progress.

- one must realise that reconciliation can take place when only violence stops. In the Indian scenario, violence and atrocities continue in the name of caste and religion. And so, we have to seek justice. So, justice is most important. Once the oppressor realises that what he/she is doing is wrong, it is time to seek reconciliation. Ok, I can forgive him/her now. But I cannot forgive when you are still harassing me and my children, raping my womenfolk, etc.

But India hasn't reached the stage of reconciliation yet. The dominant powers are re-emerging and are joining the state oppressors. They who lost their base are returning in full power. The State is joining the oppressor.

We must understand that India is a great Republic, a sovereign State, a great country. Every individual has his/her power to exercise. We must exercise this power and put it on the table to restore justice, peace and reconciliation.

This interview was conducted for Pax Lumina by its Editor Dr. Jacob Thomas.



A. Sahaya Philomin Raj
philominrajsj@gmail.com

A Crude Reality in India

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 18-22

Introduction:

India is basically a caste-ridden society. From top to bottom, the caste attitudes and tendencies prevail in all spheres of life, whether public or private, in India. The most inhuman act of 'honour killings' of the inter-caste married couples in most part of the country reflects the intensity of the 'caste mindedness' of the people. Though the Constitution of India at its inception, spelt it out vividly that 'Untouchability' is abolished and no more permitted, we find its practice vibrant all over the country. Apart from this, the parliament has enacted various special legislations to curtail this greatest social evil. 'Untouchability' perpetuates 'Manual Scavenging' in the country. 'Manual Scavenging' is not a job or occupation one voluntarily chooses for his/her livelihood but it is an imposed occupation upon the people who belonged to the lower strata of the Scheduled Caste Communities in India.

Manual Scavenging:

'Manual Scavenging' is a very unique phenomenon in the South Asian countries, where 'Caste system' is actively practised. 'Manual Scavenging' means the picking up of human excreta by another human with his or her hands. It is carried out in private latrines and in community latrines built by Governmental and non-Governmental organizations.¹ It also refers to the removal of raw (fresh and untreated) human excreta from buckets or other containers that are used as toilets or from the pits or pit latrines or on the streets wherever open defecation exists. It also denotes, the labour involved in the removal of raw human excreta using brooms, tin plates, and buckets. This work is usually done without any protective gear by the workers.² The employment of manual scavengers to empty "dry latrines" was officially prohibited in India first in 1993 and latest in 2013 by yet another enactment, known



Though
the Constitution of
India at its inception,
spelt it out vividly that
'Untouchability' is
abolished and no more
permitted, **we find its
practice vibrant all
over the country.**



as “the Prohibition of the Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013”. This Act has defined the term “manual scavenger” as “a person engaged or employed . . . 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.”³

Manual Scavengers among ordinary Scavengers in Tamil Nadu and in India:

In my works among the scavengers with the team of 'Para Legals' and advocates for the past 6 years in Madurai and Virudhunagar districts of Tamil Nadu, I find it a difficult task, to distinctly identify the manual scavengers among other scavengers. The scavengers' total population in these two districts is around 25000, numbering both in private and public sectors including Railways and Health centres. However, our work is mainly among the sanitary workers who have been recruited either directly or through contractors in the local bodies, whose population is around 13000 in both the districts. Majority of them are womenfolk, who are doubly exploited and subjected to unimaginable ordeals.

Government of Tamil Nadu has come out with an unscientific data stating that there are only 462 manual scavengers in 2015.⁴ Earlier, the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 had figured the number to 334 only. These figures are not even a tenth of the actual number of the manual scavengers in the State. According to the census 2001, the population of the scheduled castes doing the work of cleaning and manual scavenging is



nearly 1, 97, 25, 376 in 29 States of India.⁵ The 2011 Census of India found 794,000 cases of manual scavenging across India.⁶ It is very important to note, that there is no authentic survey undertaken to ascertain the manual scavengers' population. In March 2014, the Supreme Court of India declared that there were 9.6 million dry latrines being manually emptied but the exact number of manual scavengers is disputed - official figures put it at less than 700,000 but campaigners say it is closer to 1.2 million.⁷

When the state unit of Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA), surveyed some 8 districts in Tamil Nadu in 2016, it identified 3,032 manual scavengers and submitted the data to the Government for suitable action as

per the law. In addition to that, in 2016, our team undertook a sample survey in some parts of the two districts, where we are operating, and in a short span of time, we identified 254 manual scavengers in both the districts. This points out that the number of manual scavengers in the State would definitely go very high if appropriate survey is undertaken, according to the law. After that survey, we approached the Government officials with the plea to verify and declare the 254 identified workers as manual scavengers and to arrange for their rehabilitation as per the Act.

However, they refused to take any steps to implement the provisions of the Act in this regard. So I preferred a Public Interest Litigation invoking the jurisdiction of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court for declaring the identified workers as manual scavengers and to establish an appropriate survey committee to undertake proper survey as per the Act. Though the case was filed in 2017, the matter is pending before the same court till date as the Government is deliberately dragging its feet on the case without filing its reply. Even the Judiciary is not keen on giving pressure to the Government and in taking

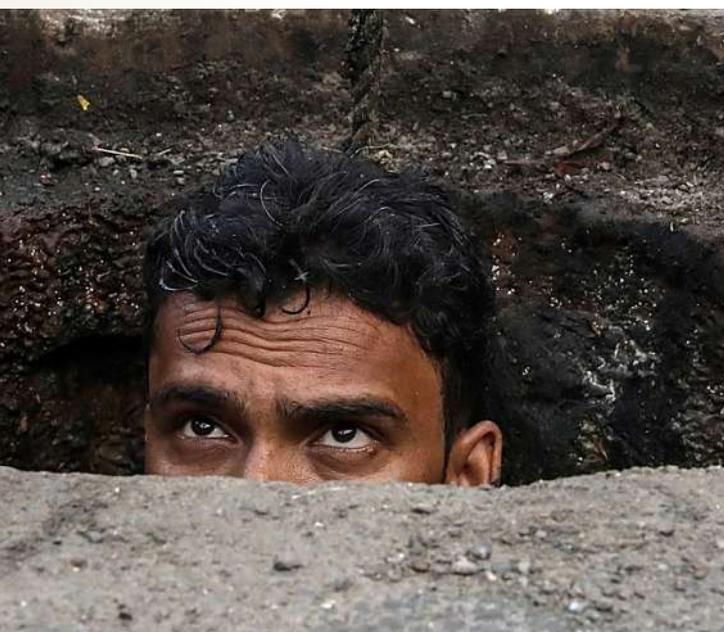
Even the Judiciary is not keen in giving pressure to the Government and in taking steps to implement the Act. Hence to my knowledge, nobody has been identified and **declared as manual scavengers by the Government, and thus, no one has availed of the rehabilitation measures prescribed by law, so far in the country.**



steps to implement the Act. Hence to my knowledge, nobody has been identified and declared as manual scavengers by the Government, and thus, no one has availed of the rehabilitation measures prescribed by law, so far in the country.

Sewage deaths and hazardous nature of the work:

As far as the two districts are concerned no proper sanitary facilities for the public is available. Open defecation is a crude reality not only in Madurai but all over India. Similarly, the workers have to deal with the open drainage all over the country without any proper protective gear. It is also alarming to witness the workers involved in cleaning the sewers by entering the manholes and getting into the septic tanks without even the basic protective apparatus. The absence of the protective gear has claimed the lives of hundreds of workers due to asphyxiation. According to the State Government data, around 206 manual scavengers died, while cleaning sewers and septic tanks between 1993 and July 2019 in Tamil Nadu. The deaths in Tamil Nadu were the highest among all the States. ⁸ In fact, the unregistered deaths are more.



The legal provisions and rehabilitative measures provided in the 2013 Act are inadequate, very narrow and they do not address the core issues of these workers. Hence, **there is a need for a more powerful, concrete law which would genuinely address their core issues at the ground level.**



Complex Reality

We have been observing the manual scavengers' pains, sufferings and the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the Caste Hindus, Government officials who are functioning as their supervisors. These higher-ups come mostly from the intermediary castes. During my work, I have come to know some of the manual scavengers' key issues and try to grasp and understand the complexities of those issues. These workers want to get rid of this filthy and despising profession, but still they are unable to make it, because of the stagnant system strongly operating in this society. Indians, in general, feel, that the manual-scavenging community is responsible for their 'shit'! The irony is that the manual scavengers themselves feel that only they are responsible for others' shit! In one of the interactions held with manual scavengers in Sattur, Virudhunagar District, Tamilnadu on 28 January 2017,



one young man very innocently got up and asked me “If not I who will do this job sir?” It is very difficult to understand and digest this state of mind of those who are involved in manual scavenging. It is a very complex reality.

‘Manual Scavenging’ was prohibited by law long back. Still we find it being openly practised even in the Government sectors all over India. The practice of manual scavenging deliberately violates various international human rights law, including protections found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and International Convention on Economic, Civil and Political Rights. India is also party to other international conventions and covenants that reinforce obligations to end manual scavenging.

Suggestions

To put an end to this caste-based discrimination, there is a need for proactive and affirmative strong action taken by the Government and by the civil society organizations. The legal provisions and rehabilitative measures provided in the 2013 Act are inadequate, very narrow and they do not address the core issues of these workers. Hence, there is a need for a more powerful, concrete law

which would genuinely address their core issues at the ground level.

Conclusion

The former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, after taking cognizance of this inhuman practice, called it a blot on the Indian society.⁹ The issue of manual scavenging has not been tackled effectively so far. The past efforts have failed to get the maximum results. So there is a need for developing new strategies to accelerate the process of change and transformation. The new approach regarding the manual scavengers’ issues should get the full support of the civil society, Judiciary, Media and the Government.

- 1 Singh, Bhasha (2014): Unseen, The Truth about India’s Manual Scavengers (New Delhi: Penguin Books). P 261
- 2 "Human rights and manual scavenging" (PDF). Know Your Rights Series. National Human Rights Commission. Retrieved September 16, 2013.
- 3 The Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, No. 25 of 2013, chapter I (2)(1)(g).
- 4 The Wire, “The missing Manual Scavengers of Tamil Nadu”, 16.08.2018
- 5 Singh, Bhasha. p 270
- 6 UmeshIsalkarUmeshIsalkar, TNN (30 April 2013). "Census raises stink over manual scavenging". The Times of India. Retrieved 6 September 2015
- 7 "SafaiKaramchariAndolanAndOrsvs Union Of India And Ors". Supreme Court of India. 2014. Retrieved23 June 2015.
- 8 The Hindu, “Manual Scavenging fatalities highest in Tamil Nadu, says survey”, Chennai Edition, 13.11.2019, p. 7
- 9 Conference of the State Welfare and Social Justice Ministers, Delhi, 17 June, 2012

No Turning Back

Despite completing the legal studies (2014), I could not enrol myself as an advocate, because there was **FIR filed against me due to my involvement in the struggles and protests for human rights.**

QR Code: *Kakkoos*



I**ntroduction:** Divya Bharathi, the Social Activist based at Madurai, Tamil Nadu and the Director of the documentary 'Kakkoos' (Toilet) on manual scavengers speaks to PAX LUMINA.

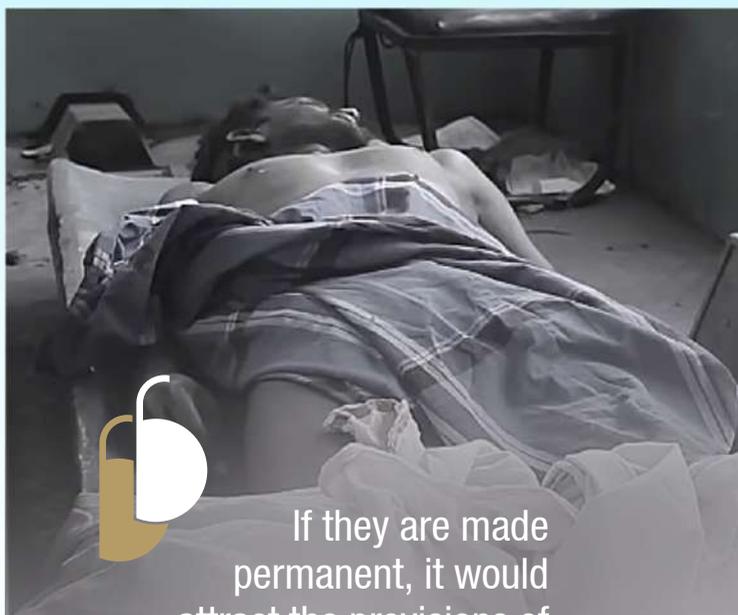
1. How did you get attracted to the community of manual scavengers in Tamil Nadu?

□ I was born as the only child in a poor family at Viruthunagar, in Tamil Nadu. My parents were mill workers. Even from my school days I was attracted to the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party. I was also influenced by the ideology of Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasamy Naickar by reading their books. I used to watch films shown in the party forum highlighting the problems of labourers. Since I was very much interested in films I thought of working in the film industry, and accordingly in 2008, I joined Madurai American College, for Visual Communication course. I paid Rs 65,000/- towards fees which was unaffordable for a person from a poor background. Within six months of joining the college, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. This naturally to additional financial burden. Consequently, I was compelled to discontinue my studies there. Then I joined the Government Law College (place?) with only a thousand Rupees towards fees. Despite completing the legal studies (2014), I could not enrol myself as an advocate, because there was FIR filed against me due to my involvement in the struggles and protests for human rights. So I started working as an event photographer/ videographer to earn a living. Though I was aware of manual scavengers and their problems from my school days, it attracted my serious attention during this period.

2. How many people are engaged in manual scavenging or cleaning of sewerage in Tamilnadu?

Are there only men ?

□ As I have highlighted in my documentary, There is no record or register regarding the actual number of manual scavengers. The report given by both the government and non-governmental agencies are totally different from reality. The data given even in the Parliament are fake. Manual scavenging is carried on only by contract labourers everywhere including the railways. This is the scenario throughout India. In case we



If they are made permanent, it would attract the provisions of labour legislations followed by **penal action according to the Acts (1993 and 2013) prohibiting manual scavenging.**





ask the railway authorities about the number of people involved in track cleaning, 'Nil' is the answer. If they are made permanent, it would attract the provisions of labour legislations followed by penal action according to the Acts, (1993 and 2013) prohibiting manual scavenging.

In Madurai district alone, there are 30,000 people involved in manual scavenging especially for septic tank cleaning. Both men and women turn up for this but women are more in number these days because their wage is less compared to that of men. Women can also be easily exploited physically and financially.

3. How about their social status?

□ Total reservation in Tamil Nadu is 69%. Of those, the scheduled caste represents 18%. Out of this 18%, 3% belongs to Arundhathiyar community which is exclusively engaged in manual scavenging. They are not treated as human beings and are socially excluded.

With regard to rehabilitation, there is no provision for their housing or healthcare or their empowerment. Even the so called highly publicised "Swachh Bharat " scheme of the ruling party has not made any impact in this area. The provisions of the Prohibitory Act on manual scavenging is not implemented at all.



They are not given entry in public places like hotels. Untouchability is practised against them. These people suffer from inferiority complex because of the social stigma attached to them. The same is transmitted to their children also in schools and elsewhere. Even among the scheduled caste, they are in the lowest rung of the social ladder. It is quite unfortunate to hear one's own child asking its own mother not to serve food by the hand soiled by manual scavenging.

4. How many people have died during their work in the past 5-10 years?

□ As part of making a documentary on Manual Scavengers, I had spent about 14 months among the scavengers. In all, 21 persons died within this period. Annually, it is reported, around 30 persons die due to asphyxiation while cleaning septic tank alone.

5. Any compensation/ medical facilities or rehabilitation measures available for them from the government?

□ According to 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court of India, if a death occurs to a manual scavenger an amount of Rs.10 lakhs should be given to the family of the deceased. This is precisely the reason why

no records are maintained. Often, the litigation process is very lengthy and justice is denied to them. I myself have filed around 9 petitions claiming compensations, but it is well over three years now, no judgment has been obtained. In fact, the government should have given this compensation without going for time-consuming litigation.

There is great lacunae in providing medical facilities to these scavengers. As they are handling all the waste and garbage including human excreta manually, their hands and legs are full of wounds. Since they are exposed to bleaching powder even their skin is peeled off. In fact, the government is supposed to provide 44 safety tools for manual scavengers such as gloves, masks and boots. Practically, nothing of this sort is given. With regard to rehabilitation, there is no provision for their housing or healthcare or their empowerment. Even the so called highly publicised "Swachh Bharat" scheme of the ruling party has not made any impact in this area. The provisions of the Prohibitory Act on manual scavenging is not implemented at all.

6. What is the level of education among them especially of the youngsters and children?

□ Most of them drop out before they reach the high school. The major reasons





are poverty and social discrimination. They are branded us 'untouchables.' They are not provided employment in any other occupation because of this taboo.

7. How can we end this practice?

□ The major reason and the only reason behind this predicament is caste. Unless the great problem of caste discrimination is eradicated, it will continue. In addition to it, modernisation and mechanization must be implemented.

8. What inspired you to make the documentary depicting the story of manual scavengers? How was it received? Any award?

□ I was deeply moved by the plight of the manual scavengers since my school days. I wanted to highlight their problems and sufferings before the world. There was nobody to support financially. For this I had to pledge all my jewellery. Somehow, the documentary was brought out. The only award I got for this is the case registered against me and my stay in underground for three months. I had to face a lot of criticism in the media especially in the social media. I was projected as an aberrated woman. There was also political opposition from the ruling party. Hence, I had to run away to Kerala, the neighbouring State. There I got tremendous support from the media and the NGOs.

9. What are your future plans?

□ This is my life. My focus is always on the exploited, the downtrodden and the marginalised. Fighting for their rights is my life-long commitment. Currently, I am working on a documentary on trans-women. I am single-minded in my struggle for the cause of the exploited, and in safeguarding their dignity as human beings. As an advocate, I help these people by providing free legal service. I use my documentaries as a political weapon.

10. How about your collaborative ventures?

□ While I was making the documentary, there was no literature available in Tamil language. I gratefully remember the support and guidance I received from Fr.Dr.Philomin Raj of IDEAS Madurai who helped me by providing the Tamil version of the Manual Scavenging Act, 2013 and he oriented me in the fieldwork. Besides, Fr.Philomin Raj extended to me a lot of legal support.

11. Any message to PAX LUMINA?

□ Currently, the political situation is very negative. All, including the religious, should come out to the realities of the people and play an active role in the empowerment of the vulnerable section of the society.

This interview was conducted for Pax Lumina by Binoy Jacob



Paul D'Souza
dsouzasj@gmail.com

WHO CARES WHEN WE DIE? ...DALIT LIVES MATTER!



The existence of manual scavenging which is a 'national shame' calls us to clean up from within... **Can we have India clean (Swachh Bharat) with 'unclean' Indians? It is an existential contradiction that a progressive nation cannot afford to live with...**



Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 28-31

Two persons died and a third was injured while cleaning a septic tank in Badarpur in the national capital recently. According to police, as Devendra, a sanitation worker stepped into the tank, he fainted due to toxic fumes. The other two jumped in to save him and fell unconscious as well. While one of them managed to make it out alive, two died of asphyxiation.

The news "like this" published in 'Indian Express' on October 11, 2020, is a regular feature in national and regional newspapers almost across India. The deaths of sewage workers are neither restricted to one locality nor a recent phenomenon. Manual scavenging continues to be the most insidious form of caste discrimination in India and elsewhere. The number of people killed while cleaning sewers and septic tanks have increased over the last few years. The most striking figure despite the government's claims





The Acts with its amendments were portrayed as a ray of hope, however, that too failed to criminalise manual scavenging and ended only with a strict suggestion to use safety gears while entering septic tanks. **The ground reality has hardly seen any substantial change.**



and advocacy and interventions by civil society has been the number of deaths due to manual scavenging during the last year. According to a February 16, 2020, article in 'The Hindu', 110 workers were killed while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

Though manual scavenging has been prohibited under 'The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013', a National Survey in 18 States identified 62,904 manual scavengers between 2013 and January 31, 2020. The de-humanising practice continues to draw temporary attention from the policymakers, judiciary, executive and civil society organisations, and the media which often ends up becoming a piece of news or debate in electronic media. The Acts with its amendments were portrayed as a ray of hope, however, that too failed to criminalise manual scavenging and ended only with a strict suggestion to use safety gears while entering septic tanks. The ground reality has hardly seen any substantial change.

One of the manhole workers of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation who regularly went inside the sewer lines for cleaning operations at night says,

“Who would work in these dangerous drains? I too do not like to work but I convince myself before I get into the sewerage that I have to do. I make a compromise with myself. But when I come out, I feel like a prisoner who has just come out of jail. If there are people around, I feel ashamed to walk and even my co-workers stand far. Often when I sit for my dinner, I remember the scene and the smell. At times, I begin to doubt myself, have I come to this world by committing some crimes in the previous birth?”

The pitiable condition of the sanitation workers in general, and manual scavengers, in particular, raises questions as to why it continues and why they have to die to keep the country clean. When large scale deaths of manual scavengers continue, it does seek answers from those concerned. The Dalit community engaged in the occupation concerning their faith and being considered Hindus questions the wider 'Hindu community' about the difference in their treatment. To 'Gandhians', from whom they derived the title Harijan, the question asked is: Can we get dignity if we continue to follow caste norms of prescribed occupation as suggested by Gandhiji? The community also raises questions to the 'Ambedkarites' on the reason behind not being considered a part of their movement, and if they too are responsible for the continued exclusion faced by the manual scavenging community. The question put to the 'liberals' is about their failure in paving a path for the community which has been institutionally denied access to occupational mobility when other communities were able to transcend to find dignified viable alternatives? Moreover, the internal reformation does demand an introspection from the community herself: Why is the community stuck to this dehumanising traditional occupation when some of them are treated as “lesser humans” without receiving dignity which is the fundamental right of every person?

Looking towards the future, the pressing question of a way-out for the communities engaged in 'unclean' occupations, and the discrimination faced by them because of their occupational engagement remains unanswered. Formal education is intricately linked to upward social mobility and in this aspect; schools play an important role in sorting out individuals into their prospective levels. However, education has not opened possibilities for the future generation of the community as expected. A field-based study undertaken by the Indian Social Institute showed a steep high dropout rate after secondary school among children of households engaged in 'unclean' occupations. Moreover, children from the community continue to be the victims of visible and invisible discriminatory practices, in the classrooms and outside the classrooms. The exclusionary practices in schools and society in general also affect their educational aspirations and become a matter of grave concern amongst them.

A survey, as part of the above-mentioned study, covering a total of 12,348 children showed that only 0.6% of them have completed higher-level education. Without higher education, any entry of youths from the community, to dignified occupations promised by modern India's ambitious campaigns like 'Skill India', 'Digital India', 'Start-up India', etc. remains unimaginable. Moreover, the lack of political will to pull out these communities from the grips of the caste-based occupation ascertains entrapment of the coming generation of the community in the mission of 'Cleaning India'.

Every parent desires to raise happy and successful children, however, the parents involved in 'unclean' occupations invariably have to go through humiliations for what is their right ascertained by the Constitution. A member of the Dalit community shared the pain and humiliation he had felt when he went to the government office to get a caste certificate for his child.



“Sadly, they want me to clean their toilets, but they don't want to see my sight when I go to the government office. Recently, I visited an office to get a caste certificate for my child's educational purpose. The government official told me, 'why do you want the certificate for your child? What will he do with education? He is your child and will continue to take over your work once you leave'”.

The constitutional values and social thinking must correspond and corroborate to find a way-out to end the dehumanising practice of manual scavenging and to bring change at the ground level. Our constitution guarantees equality; however, we live with the social thinking that predominantly treats people unequally based on caste and creed. Initiatives to mechanise cleaning the cities have brought some hope among people, including the manual scavengers who have been given the machines. But the extent to which the programme is implemented is yet to be seen. The contradiction and the paradoxes in which we live does not allow the age-old practices to change. It is now



The pitiable condition of the sanitation workers, in general, and manual scavengers, in particular, **raises questions as to why it continues and why they have to die to keep the country clean.**



a well-accepted observation that frequent deaths of India's sewer workers aren't a governance failure – they are rooted in caste. Therefore, a campaign to change the mind-sets of people is as vital as the programmatic intervention for social mobility and human treatment of communities historically involved in 'unclean' occupations.

Several studies have shown that although the caste system is eroding in urban centres, atrocities against Dalits continue, and the brutality of the physical and sexual assaults has increased in recent years. Caste does matter, and it matters much to a caste which is considered "lowest in the hierarchy" - the Valmikis among Dalits. It must be noted that the manual scavengers and those engaged in 'unclean' occupations are predominantly from the Valmiki community.

Atrocities on Valmikis and Dalits are not new and unheard of. In the year 2005, at Gohana, in Haryana, a whole locality of Valmikis was burnt down by the dominant caste Hindus which led to a migration of 2000 Valmikis from the village. Recently, on 14 September 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit woman was gang-raped in Hathras in Uttar Pradesh. After fighting for her life for two weeks, she died in a Delhi hospital. The body of the victim was conspiratorially cremated

by the police without the consent of her family. The girl belonged to the Valmiki community. The crime and what followed in Hathras once again repeats the old narrative – caste does matter. There have been protests across the nation but none of this is comparable with the protest against the infamous Nirbhaya gang rape. Similar narratives are repeated for the deaths of manual scavengers in cities' dangerous drainages: Who cares when they die!

One of the women from the Valmiki community, working as Safai Karamchari on a contractual basis narrated her hope and aspiration from the nation as follow:

"I have been doing this work for many years. Our men go down the septic tank, and we are not sure whether they will come alive or not. Day by day the number of deaths is increasing and every other day we hear in the news of septic tank death. I have three children and I don't want them to do this work, I want a life of dignity for me and my children".

Movement like 'Dalit Lives Matter' must come to the center-stage of socio-political consciousness. Manual scavenging is an issue of social and institutional discrimination that demands social justice as the only way out. There is a clarion call to all the citizens - beyond Dalit mobilization - to join the movement to respect human life and dignity. Every death inside a sewer is a painful reminder of their tragedy to the family members which keeps them wondering: will this ever end? However, for every Indian who dreams of a clean India must begin to believe that human life and dignity does matter. The nation that envisages global leadership for itself cannot allow its citizens to suffocate and die in the sewers and pits of our mother earth anymore.

*Author is Researcher
at Indian Social Institute, Delhi.*



International Affairs

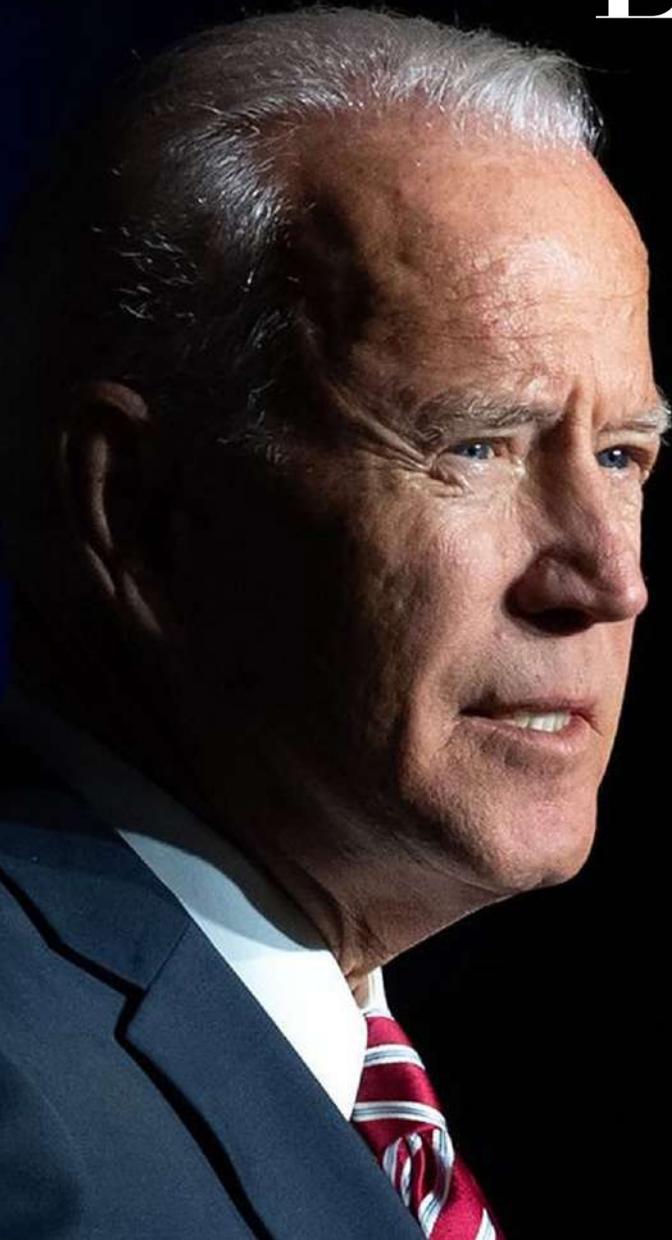
*“For it isn’t enough
to talk about peace.
One must believe in it.
And it isn’t enough to
believe in it. One must
work at it.”*

- Eleanor Roosevelt



The United States and its Dramatic PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

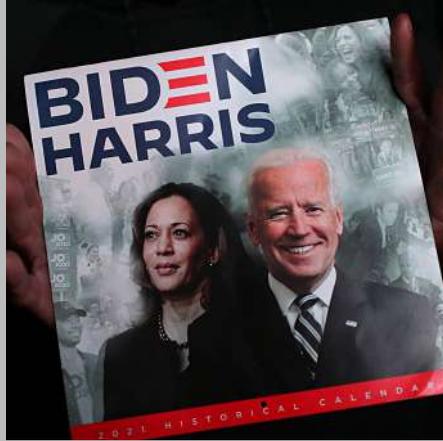
AS ON 09 NOVEMBER 2020



Joe Biden has won the US Election and will unseat President Donald Trump after just one term in office. President Trump is only the 9th president in U.S. history not to be elected to a second term.

Biden won the popular vote by 50.6% to Trump's 47.6% (a margin of over 4 million votes). Although two states – North Carolina and Georgia – remain too closely divided to call them for one candidate or the other, so far in the electoral votes (each state is designated electoral votes based mostly on population size) Biden has received 274 to Trump's 214. A candidate requires 270 minimum to win.

Most Americans are breathing a sigh of relief that the election is finally over, regardless of which candidate one supported. No election in living memory has been as contentious



For in Joe Biden, we will have a white president who formerly served as vice president to America's first African American president. In vice president **Kamala Harris, we will have the first woman to be vice president and she is the daughter of an Indian mother and Jamaican father.**



or expensive. For both the right and the left of the political spectrum, this election was considered extremely critical - some arguing that the fate of the nation hung in the balance - which resulted in record-breaking voter participation.

The fear of election violence was a common concern. Those on the left worried that right wing militia groups with high powered automatic weapons would intimidate voters or worse - unleash violence in the case of a Biden win - in Democrat-leaning urban, suburban and coastal districts. On the right, people worried about looting or mob violence on the left in the event of a Trump win. Their fears were not unfounded.

Violent outbursts had disrupted the mostly peaceful anti-racist protests against police violence during the May to July time frame, by heavily armed militias and white supremacist groups opposing them from the extreme right, and mob style destruction of property

and looting from some protesters on the far left. This came after the earlier rejection by many on the right of Covid-19 prevention measures imposed by health authorities such as wearing masks in public and restrictions of movement. At that time heavily-armed figures showed up in state capitals, even attempting to occupy the State House in Michigan. Recently, the FBI revealed that it had foiled an extremist right-wing plot to kidnap the Democratic Governor of Michigan.

Despite the fear of violence, the election went off peacefully on November 3. Although it took until November 7 to determine the outcome, the days of waiting were peaceful. Yet, a number of dangers and challenges lie ahead.

President Trump has yet to concede the election to his opponent. This is unusual, but very little has been usual about Donald Trump. Although Joe Biden has not only won the popular vote but crucially also the Electoral Votes required, Trump has spent the last week making baseless claims of vote rigging by the Democratic party, by election officials in the states, voter fraud and imaginary stories of fake ballots 'found' and fraudulently counted. If this continues it will only deepen divisions. The Trump campaign has also filed various lawsuits in the 'battleground states' where the vote count was relatively close between Biden and Trump, though these are not expected to succeed and at least one suit was summarily thrown out by a judge for lack of evidence.

Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in the realm of social media, in which large portions of the public inhabit alternative versions of reality - often based on lies, conspiracy theories or slander - which convince them of untruths manufactured by extreme political forces including foreign governments' cyber warfare efforts. Even if these extreme forces and their social media projections do not result in violence and domestic terror (and they have; just examine the criminology of school shootings, for instance), it still leaves

the United States vulnerable to persistent division and mistrust across the political spectrum.

On the evening of Saturday Nov. 7th, when Joe Biden's win was confirmed, he gave a rousing victory speech. He struck an upbeat tone, of an America where people of all background belong, of justice regardless of race or gender, of commitment to an economy where the middle class once again thrives, and of political reconciliation. He promised to be a president for all Americans, not just those of his party. He outlined a commitment

to compromise and find common ground between the two parties. He even expressed empathy for Trump supporters who are disappointed by the outcome of the election.

Whether this message of peace, reconciliation and healing of political fissures will be possible in reality, is going to depend to a great extent whether people in power – in the Congress, in the media, and on social media – want it.

When Joe Biden is inaugurated President on January 20, 2021 he will preside over a divided government. The Senate will likely still be controlled by Republicans. The House of Representatives will have an even slimmer Democratic majority than it has had since the midterm elections of 2018. This scenario could easily lead to Republican legislative obstructionism of Biden's vision. Any legislation requires passage in both houses before it reaches the President's desk for a pass or a veto. We have seen such obstruction repeatedly, for example, in the refusal of the Republican Majority Leader Senator McConnell from bringing to a vote in the Senate any of the pandemic financial relief legislation the Democratic House majority has passed in the last six months.

It also remains to be seen how politicians and media figures react to Trump in the ten weeks before Biden's inauguration, and then after he has left office. Will they continue to reward Donald Trump's incendiary and often false Tweets with affirmations, interviews, and the public stage on which his enduring power over people's opinions rely?

The coronavirus, which has reached almost uncontrolled spread for the past two months in the majority of the United States, is the other prime challenge facing these last days of the Trump administration and the early days of Biden's presidency. In the last two to three weeks, the national caseload has jumped from





Trump and his Republican allies in Congress holds the cards on the pandemic. And major action seems unlikely. **The administration has made clear that their only real plan is a vaccine, but by the time one is ready and can be widely distributed to the entire nation it may be the middle or end of 2021.**



around 8 million to 10 million. The country is hitting record daily new cases, nearing one and a half lakhs per day. Deaths have also risen above one thousand per day and are climbing. At this rate, before inauguration day (Jan 20) we could exceed the horror of the height of the pandemic in April, with hospitals overflowing, refrigerator trucks in cities to store the corpses of the dead, mass graves, and an economy locked down and people out of money and work once again.

In the short term, Trump and his Republican allies in Congress holds the cards on the pandemic. And major action seems unlikely. The administration has made clear that their only real plan is a vaccine, but by the time one is ready and can be widely distributed to the entire nation it may be the middle or end of 2021. That leaves time for this virus to cut a path of destruction much deeper and wider than it already has.

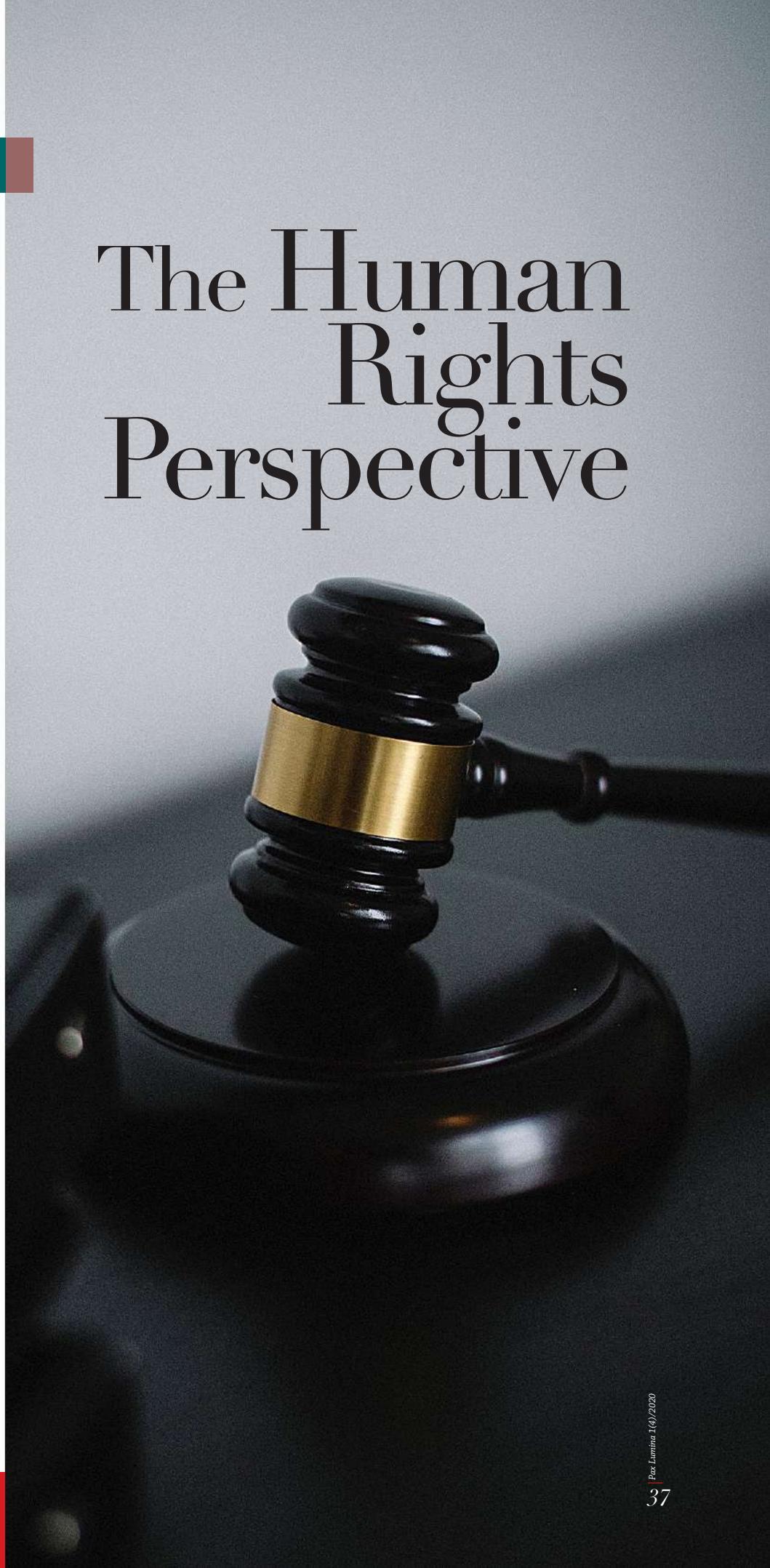
The Biden administration in January will likely inherit a public health crisis much worse than it is today. They are aware of this and thus have announced a task force on Covid-19 being convened imminently to make plans. Whether having new presidential leadership



will effect bipartisan legislative cooperation on the pandemic, from a Republican-dominated Senate, is yet to be seen.

Despite the many challenges the United States faces, there are three particular reasons for hope. First, despite how contentious the election was, the greatest fears of violence in the streets did not materialize. Second, the reactions of world leaders - such as PM Modi of India and PM Macron of France - to Biden's win have, in just these first two days, already been overwhelmingly positive. Trump's unpredictability and disdain for multilateral international cooperation may be a thing of the past. A Biden administration promises to resume cooperation on trade, security and the environment. Third, despite the racial injustice in the U.S. which has been so publicly aired this year, the winners of this election show that a multicultural and multiracial America is the future. For in Joe Biden, we will have a white president who formerly served as vice president to America's first African American president. In vice president Kamala Harris, we will have the first woman to be vice president and she is the daughter of an Indian mother and Jamaican father. Both Biden and Harris have given their lives to public service. The younger generation will have in them leaders who exemplify what is possible.





The Human Rights Perspective

*"The rights of every
man are diminished
when the rights of one
man are threatened."*

- John F. Kennedy



Elsa Muttathu, PBVM
elsamuttathu@hotmail.com

MANUAL SCAVENGING AND HUMAN RIGHTS



India is a land of many contradictions and one of the most outstanding of them is **the ability to live in peace with extreme inhumanity in the midst of sublime 'spirituality'**.

“**W**hile one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violate. What does this tell us about the equality of rights grounded in innate human dignity?” Pope Francis (Fratelli Tutti, Para.22)

India is a land of many contradictions and one of the most outstanding of them is the ability to live in peace with extreme inhumanity in the midst of sublime 'spirituality'. We boast about 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,' while practising untouchability and caste-based discrimination. Our politicians, immaculately clad, steal the limelight for the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' while our unsung heroes disappear in sewers and septic tanks inhaling toxic gases.

Imagine a day in the life of a manual scavenger, who gets up early in the morning to clean and carry human excreta with bare hands or using buckets and brooms or having to descend the sewers and septic tanks emanating toxic gases for a livelihood.



According to Antonio Gutierrez, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ‘must embody the principles of inclusiveness, integration and ‘leaving no one behind’.’”



What sense of purpose or self-worth will a person gain from such a degrading work? Human Dignity and inclusion are central values of the Gospel, Catholic Social Teaching, Constitution of India and the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations “reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person.” The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognises “the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Article 1 of UDHR “affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Article 2 talks of the universality of these rights without distinction of caste, class, race gender or nationality and insists upon the role and responsibility of the governments to ensure these rights to all its peoples. According to Antonio Gutierrez, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ‘must embody the principles of inclusiveness, integration and ‘leaving no one behind’.’”

The Preamble to the Indian Constitution begins with ‘We the people’ resolved to secure for all its citizens EQUALITY of status, as well, opportunity and dignity of the individual. Even after 70 years of independence and after having brought in the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, manual scavenging is being practised unabated in many parts of the country. What is worse is that this particular occupation is associated with caste denigrating some sections of Dalits to a lifelong bondage from which they cannot escape. A typical example of this is the story of Sunil Yadav a BMC employee in Mumbai, who inherited his father’s job. Despite the fact that he holds a couple of graduate and post-graduate degrees including a Masters in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai and is currently a Ph.D scholar on Manual Scavenging at Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI), for a living Sunil does manual scavenging and was denied promotion from a 4th class worker to a 3rd class worker! Of his first day at work in 2001, Sunil says “The first day, I was sent to clean a house gully. It had dead rats and stinking sewage. I thought I was sent to hell.”

“Manual scavenging is not a career chosen voluntarily by workers, but is instead a deeply unhealthy, unsavoury and undignified job forced upon these people because of the stigma attached to their caste. The nature of the work itself then reinforces that stigma” said Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2013. One of the objectives of the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan introduced by PM Narendra Modi

was to eradicate Manual Scavenging. But still an estimated 1.3million people are employed in manual scavenging and 90% of them women. In 2019, 110 people died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.

In 2018, the special Rapporteur to Water and Sanitation to the United Nations Léo Heller remarked, ‘the emphasis on building toilets should not ‘contribute to violating fundamental rights of others, such as those engaged in manual scavenging.’ In his report to the 45th session of the Human Rights Council in 2020, he made the following recommendation “Establish a monitoring system to follow the process of emptying pit latrines under the national programmes, in order to control possible trends of increases in manual scavenging practices, ensuring that this practice is not carried out in a caste-discriminatory manner.” (A/HRC/39/55/Add.1, para. 71(n))

Human Dignity and Human Rights are inalienable and universal. While there are many mechanisms and Human Rights instruments available, an ignorant and immune citizenry that is blind to the universality of Rights may be instrumental in perpetuating discriminatory and degenerative practices like manual scavenging and caste-based discrimination, which is a slur on the dignity of the nation.

A tool to organise community to reclaim their dignity

Civil society organizations advocating for the rights and dignity of the manual scavenging community have recourse to a tool: Rights-Based Litmus Test developed by the NGO Mining Working Group at the UN. It is based on four principles:1) Do no harm, 2) Eradicate the root causes of poverty 3) People as right-holders and 4) sustainability. This litmus test can help civil society as well as policymakers to assess and monitor the implementation of the Prohibition Act of 1993 and Prohibition and Rehabilitation Act of 2013 and amplify



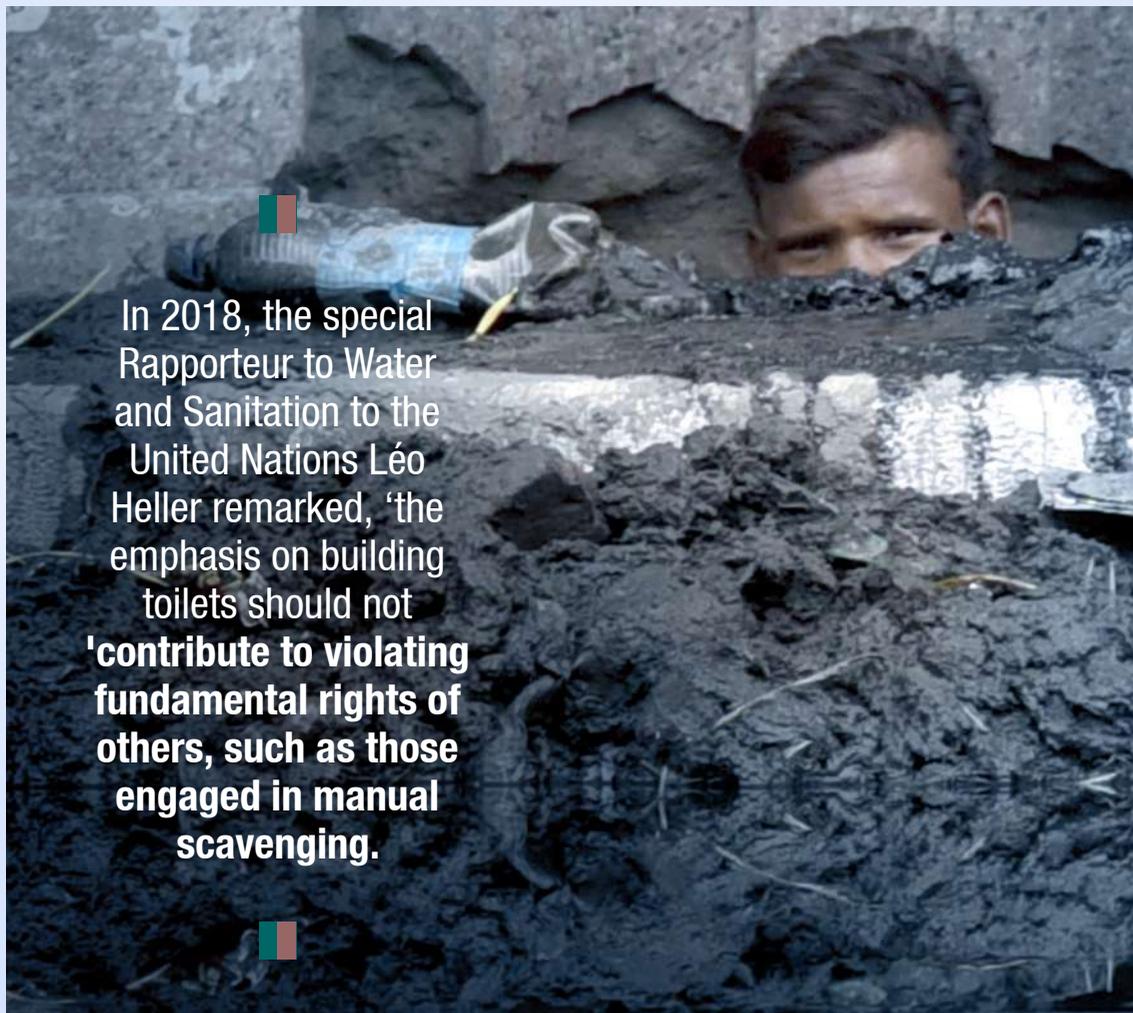
Even after 70 years of independence and after having brought in the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, manual scavenging is being practised unabated in many parts of the country.



the voices of ‘Safai Karmachari Andolan’ a movement to eradicate Manual scavenging led by Bezwada Wilson.

Do no harm

Is Manual scavenging practised in your area? Who are engaged in this profession? Are they provided with protective gear? How socially included are they? Are there policies to protect and rehabilitate those employed in manual scavenging? If so, what is the level of implementation? What are the monitoring mechanisms in place? If the governments fail in the implementation of effective policies, is the Civil society empowered to use the National or International mechanisms like the High-Level Political Forum or the Universal Periodic Reviews to raise the issues during the national reporting.



In 2018, the special Rapporteur to Water and Sanitation to the United Nations Léo Heller remarked, 'the emphasis on building toilets should not **'contribute to violating fundamental rights of others, such as those engaged in manual scavenging.**

1) Eradicate the root causes of Poverty.

Is poverty and caste-based discrimination at the root of manual scavenging? What does it do to the sense of dignity of the affected community? How does it address gender-based discrimination? Are there skill training programmes that will facilitate a transition to more decent jobs? What opportunities do their children have of education to escape the stigma?

2) People as right-holders

Do those engaged in manual scavenging have a choice regarding their job? Their children's future? What rights are denied them by reason of their birth? What is the level of participation of the community in socio-cultural and economic lives of the

society? How do we hold the Governments as duty-bearers accountable for the non implementation of policies?

3) Sustainability.

What is a sustainable future for their children when they are shunned in society by reason of their parent's occupation? What percentage of budget allocation for the rehabilitation of Manual scavengers are effectively used?

The unspent budget allocation for the rehabilitation of Manual scavengers and non implementation of the Acts are not only testaments of indifference and lack of political will but gross violation of the rights and dignity of the Dalit Community.

(Author was the Former NGO Representative, UN)



Aakar Patel

aakar.patel@gmail.com

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 42-43

Shutting Down of Amnesty India

The citation for the Nobel Peace Prize for 1977 opens with this paragraph:

"Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights organization run by its members. It is independent of all governments and all financial players. It is also independent of political convictions and religious faiths." The independence bit refers to Amnesty's policy of accepting no funding from governments or corporates. The bit about political convictions refers to Amnesty's desire to engage on human rights with all governments even if they are despotic. The thing that is less understood about Amnesty is the first line. That it is a movement run by members. The ownership of Amnesty International is not with any fixed set of individuals or even with a parent organisation. It is floating ownership that resides in millions of individuals around the world. The members elect boards at the national and global level that are empowered to recruit the executive and the bureaucracy (comprised expert professionals such as researchers, advocates and so on) who do the evidence-gathering that is at the core of Amnesty International's work. The members are investors in the human rights space. Because of this unique structure,

Amnesty's presence in countries can often itself be fluid. In India, the organisation has been represented over the decades by several disconnected groups. It began five decades ago, about a decade after Amnesty International was founded, when George Fernandes was a member. When that first set of members either passed away or dispersed, another set came. Sometimes there was a gap of years when this happened. Over the decades, several different groups have come together in India to set up an Amnesty International structure. At times, they would also have the resource to establish the executive and bureaucracy. The writer Mukul Sharma was the Director of Amnesty India under one such structure a decade and a half or so ago. Others have come and gone before him.

News of Amnesty International halting its operations in India because of Government action must be seen from this perspective which, as mentioned, is not well understood. Amnesty International India said that it was unable to establish organisational continuity given that its accounts had been frozen without a trial or conviction. It had no access to resource to defend itself in court or to pay salaries and statutory liabilities.



This would mean two things. First, that about 160 employees would be out of work immediately. Second, that there would be a halt to the lines of human rights work that Amnesty India had been interested in. These include some pieces where the State engaged with the human rights body, such as on gender based violence. Amnesty India had programmes where it associated with the police forces in Karnataka and Maharashtra to try and improve the reporting of sexual violence. It had also for several years been working with Western Railways on the same issue.

It had a programme of human rights education, in which it was working with schools and governments around India, and part of that dealt with sexual violence against children. This has now ended.

On other issues, the State did not engage with Amnesty India. On Kashmir the organisation produced research reports (usually long pieces of on-ground evidence gathering with lots of data) on human rights violations concerning the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the use of pump action shotguns as a method of crowd control and the preventive detention law, and the Public Safety Act.

In Chhattisgarh, it researched freedom of expression and the misuse of laws curbing the freedom of journalists by often jailing them. In the recent past, it had reports brought out on the National Register of Citizens in Assam and on the riots in Delhi after the Citizenship Amendment Act protests violently broke out.

Amnesty's research reports are often used as the basis for international action. For example, the

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations for the first time brought out two reports on Kashmir in 2018 and 2019. A very large part of the findings on these reports, which was put out under two different high commissioners including the current office holder Michelle Bachelet, the former president of Chile, is based on Amnesty India's findings. There are about four dozen references to Amnesty India in the first report alone.

The US State Department's 2020 report on human rights in India, the recent United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's report which marks India as a 'country of particular concern', the European Union's members of parliament's motion on India and United Nations Special Rapporteurs' frequent interventions on India all make reference to material gathered by Amnesty. This may be seen as a reflection of the organisation's credibility and may also be seen as a reason why a government might want it to be shut down.

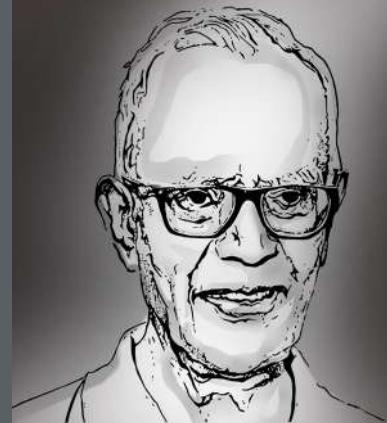
Amnesty International is best understood as being something akin to the United Nations. There is a Secretary General and a head office with an organised bureaucracy which has continuity. But the individual members that make up the UN (nations) are independent and their own governments elected by voters (members in the case of Amnesty) keep changing.

So long as there are individuals in India who believe in the sort of things that Amnesty stands for globally - individual freedoms and liberties based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which India is a signatory - there will be an Amnesty presence. It has been shut down for now as it has been often in the past. But it will return again and soon.

Author was the Former Director of Amnesty International India

STAND WITH STAN

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 44-45



Stan Swamy, an 83-year-old Jesuit of Jamshedpur Province, was arrested by India's high-profile National Investigation Agency on charges of colluding with Naxalites and Maoists especially with those accused in Bhima-Koregaon case. In fact, Stan had no association with the accused and he has never visited the far-off place. The arrest of Stan who championed the cause of the rights of Adivasis over their lands, forests, water and resources for the last four decades is in total violation of human dignity and Constitutional rights. The Jesuits, as they are called the world over, have been at the cutting edge of the struggles of the poor and the marginalised for almost five centuries. Stan's mission is in resonance with the Universal Apostolic Priority of the Jesuits to 'walk with the excluded.'

What is the 'crime' that Stan Swamy allegedly committed? He demanded the implementation of PESA (The Panchayats -Extension to the Scheduled Areas - Act) of 1996 which was introduced in the late 1990s as a legislative means of promoting self-governance in rural areas through the creation of local village bodies. But it is perpetually sought to be diluted, bypassed and sabotaged.

The economic and social problems of Adivasis are rooted in the gradual displacement from their customary lands. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 was enacted to secure the rights of Adivasis to their lands and forests. It is still on papers and they have been consistently denied of land ownership rights. Stan has been supportive of the Pathalgadi Movement, a traditional practice of honouring ancestors by placing stone slabs

in burial or cremation places. In the 1990s, the retired bureaucrat-turned-activist BD Sharma and his colleague Bandi Oraon, used stone slabs inscribed with constitutional provisions under the Panchayati Raj Act and the Fifth Schedule. This came to be known as Pathalgadi.

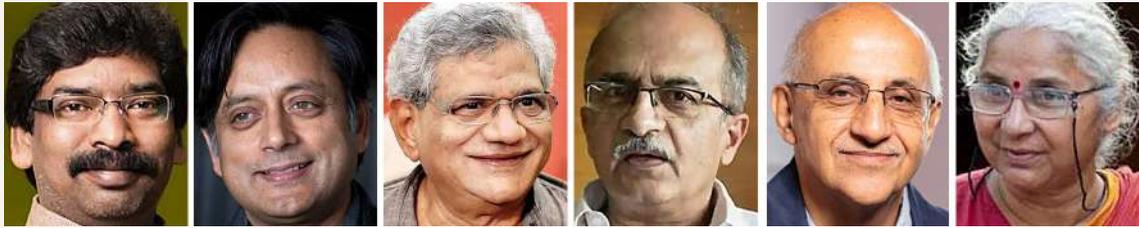
Through the Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Forum (PPSF), Swamy stood for the innocent Adivasis languishing in jails on fabricated allegations. After a study, he found that of the 102 youth imprisoned, as many as 97% said allegations against them were unfounded. The government had imposed the harshest law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act on them without evidence. Stan exposed the deplorable conditions in jail, and the repressive measures by the authorities without court sanction. The large number of acquittals eventually vindicated his stand.

Stan's arrest has invited widespread criticism and protests both nationally and internationally. Civil society members, intellectuals, social activists, religious groups and journalists have reacted vehemently against the unlawful arrest and judicial custody of Stan and demanded his immediate release by staging peaceful protests and fasting in many places.

The bail petition filed earlier on health ground was rejected and Fr Stan continues to be in the Jail. The next step is to move the High Court with a bail petition on the basis of the ten thousand page long charge sheet. Let us hope that justice will be done and truth will triumph at the end.

(Source: www.standwithstan.jcsaweb.org
Jesuit Conference of South Asia)

#STANDWITHSTAN



The arrest of Swamy, who had been working in Jharkhand for years in faraway places to reach Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalised communities, has “crossed all limits”. It is forcing us to ponder about where the country is headed. Today it was Stan Swamy, tomorrow it will be us.

- Hemant Soren
Chief Minister, Jharkhand

No Jesuit will indulge in any violence or entice anyone towards violence. This must stop. I appeal to the government to be fair and at least grant him bail.

- Shashi Tharoor
Congress Leader

Many draconian laws are being used by the government to silence the people. This cannot be accepted. We must break this silence. For evil to succeed, the good only requires to be silent. People need to restore the secular democracy.

- Sitaram Yechury
General Secretary,
Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The NIA has forcibly taken Octogenarian Father Stan Swamy from his ashram at Ranchi. It would be difficult to imagine a gentler and kinder person. It is the sign of the venality of the NIA that they are trying to implicate him under UAPA!

- Prashant Bhushan
Lawyer, Supreme Court of India

It is adversaries as powerful as these that Swamy and the young Adivasis, who he stands in unflinching solidarity with, are fighting. Is it a surprise then that he is seen as a dangerous enemy of this government?

- Harsh Mander
Human Right Activist

My heart beats for Father Stan, who “worked for Atmanirbhar Adivasi” (self-reliant Tribal).

- Medha Patkar
Social Activist

Stan Swamy has spent a lifetime fighting for the rights of adivasis. That is why the government seeks to suppress and silence them; because for this regime, the profits of mining companies take precedence over the lives and livelihoods of adivasis.

- Ramachandra Guha
Author and Historian

I know Fr Stan for the past forty years. He is a living saint. The arrest of Fr Stan is a strategically executed plan.

- Dayabai
Social Activist

Stan Swamy at 83 represented a hope that the tribal world and its imagination may survive. When the government arrested him for conspiracy, one realized that what they were arresting is hope and justice for the tribe as a way of life.

- Shiv Viswanathan
Scholar and Activist

Jesuits involvement among the Adivasis and Dalits is an option. This is an option to walk with the excluded for justice and truth

- Fr Stanislaus D'Souza SJ
Provincial of South Asia

We, as Jesuits involved in works of education, caring and defending the rights of the poor and the vulnerable all over the world, stand in solidarity with Stan and other human rights defenders in India and strongly condemn the arrest of Fr. Stan Swamy, demand immediate release and refrain from arbitrary arrests of innocent law abiding citizens.

- Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)
Society of Jesus, Rome





A Hero *from the* Excluded Space

*Until justice rolls
down like water and
righteousness like a
mighty stream.*

- Martin Luther King Jr.



J Devika
devika@cds.edu

Abject People, Abject Space, and a Hero Who Fought it:

Recollections of Fieldwork in an Ex-Manual Scavenger Settlement



From 2013 to nearly 2017, I was a frequent visitor to a prominent city-slum in Thiruvananthapuram. I went there as a researcher on urban governance through women in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, but was actually more curious to learn of the nature of urban socio-economic disadvantage in post-1990 Kerala. I will call the place Kulamnagar. Despite many improvements, especially through the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNURRM) housing, there was only one word to describe the place: abject. And not long after I began going there, I learned the history of how an ‘abjected’

And not long after I began going there, I learned the history of how an ‘abjected’ space, a marshy, inhospitable, swamp, was joined to a people who were abjected by the harsh norms of caste that prevailed in the erstwhile kingdom of Travancore in the 1940s. **And how, despite much struggle and some gains, the place continued to be abjected – even after the ex-scavengers were moved to Kerala’s first government-sponsored housing for the socially-excluded people, a place now known as MSK Nagar.**

space, a marshy, inhospitable, swamp, was joined to a people who were abjected by the harsh norms of caste that prevailed in the erstwhile kingdom of Travancore in the 1940s. And how, despite much struggle and some gains, the place continued to be abjected – even after the ex-scavengers were moved to Kerala’s first government-sponsored housing for the socially-excluded people, a place now known as MSK Nagar.

A muddy swamp adjacent to an old abandoned serpent-grove and a pond where death rituals of the members of a nearby Brahmin settlement were conducted, the land which later became Kulamnagar from the late 1930s onwards was not just considered unfit for human habitation, it was considered haunted. However, this (and the edges of other swampy areas in the city) was the place where the Dalit people who were brought to the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as scavengers could set up their habitations without being challenged and evicted by the caste elites. They were part of the new arrangements for city sanitation: a modern, scientific arrangement, so it was claimed. Yet, it was an edifice built on the clay feet of the evil of casteism. People who were expected to clean the city and thereby protect the health of its residents were banished to the city’s peripheries, to the most unhealthy and insanitary spaces.

How these people took over these areas and made them places of their own are stories that must be told some day. They were clearly not just inhabited by the lower caste manual scavengers who were brought in from the neighboring Tamil areas. Indeed, the oral sources that I collected from Kulamnagar revealed a much wider spectrum of people who settled down there in the mid-20th century. They included Muslim merchant-families who enjoyed considerable prosperity before they were plunged into losses and destitution because of the Great Depression, working class, lower caste women who ran away from oppressive husbands or were

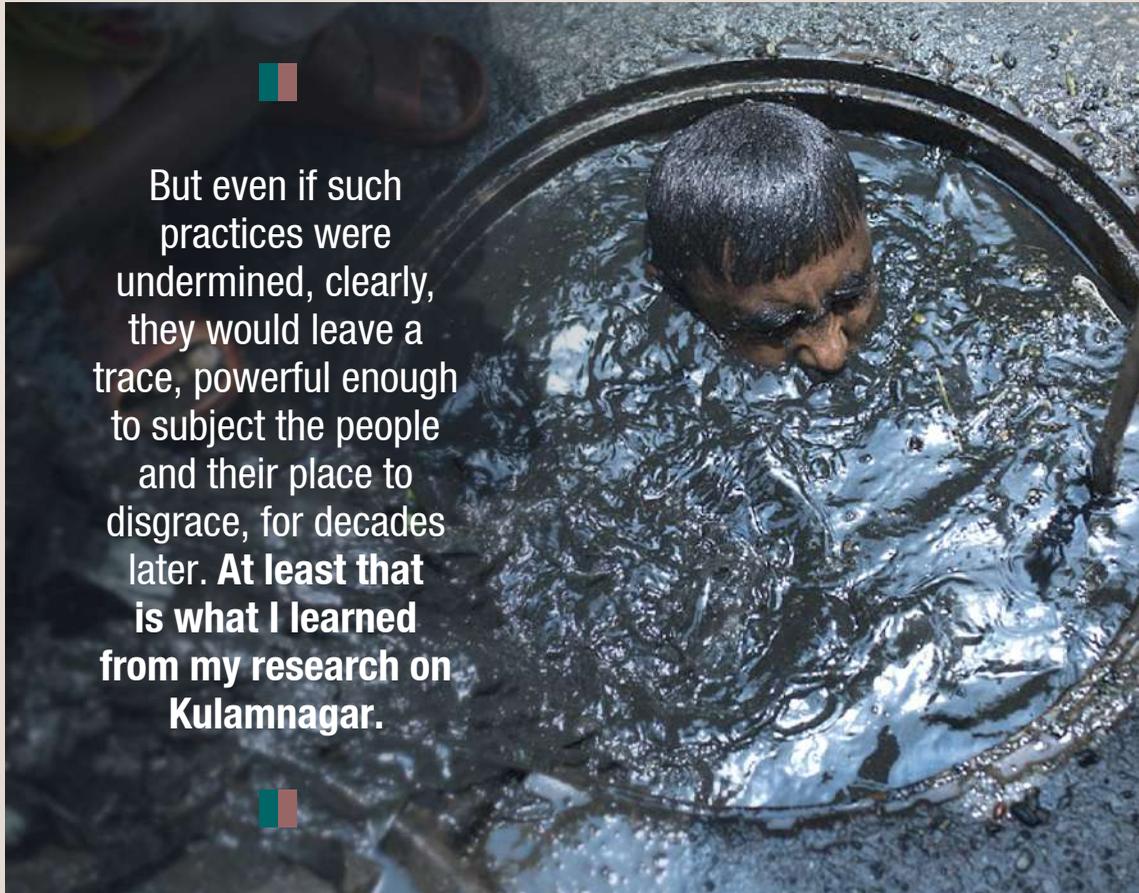


All equally bore the stigma of being the rejects of the traditional *janma-bhedam* order of caste and the effects of colonial capitalism, and this commingled seamlessly with that of the manual scavengers and the land that accepted them.



cheated by upper caste lovers, inter-caste couples, young and orphaned heirs of Nair families who escaped attempts to murder by greedy uncles and relatives, besides a large number of Dalit Tamil families who engaged in the Municipal sanitation work. Many of these refugees of caste, gender, and capitalism became head-loaders in the nearby bustling market; the women did odd jobs and low-skill labour. All equally bore the stigma of being the rejects of the traditional *janma-bhedam* order of caste and the effects of colonial capitalism, and this commingled seamlessly with that of the manual scavengers and the land that accepted them.

One of the heroes of this settlement who appeared in the memories of the senior residents there is worth remembering: I shall call him Isaac. He was a Dalit man from the neighbouring Aryanad, who shifted to Thiruvananthapuram and became sanitation worker in the 1940s with the



But even if such practices were undermined, clearly, they would leave a trace, powerful enough to subject the people and their place to disgrace, for decades later. **At least that is what I learned from my research on Kulamnagar.**

Thiruvananthapuram Municipality, one of the earliest labour leaders there. As a child, he had mastered exorcism from his grandfather – he hailed from a long line of traditional Pulaya exorcists. But later, he was converted to Christianity while still a teenager by the missionaries of the London Missionary Society and received a basic education from them. He had to flee his village, however, after falling in love and eloping with a young Nair woman. Reaching Thiruvananthapuram, he signed up as a manual scavenger. The land on which Kulamnagar now stands was the only refuge for the penniless young couple. His daughter told us of a story that she had heard being told and retold at home when she was a child, in the 1960s: “People used to be very scared of the spirits of the dead and the serpents in the sacred grove that were supposed to haunt this place. Papa was not scared – he strode boldly towards the wild area where the serpent-grove stood, a little away from the tank – and built a fence

around the land between these two places. He was not superstitious at all – he would regularly urinate inside the sacred grove and wasn’t ever afraid! Gradually, people stopped being scared of the place, and the grove shrank to just a few trees and then almost disappeared.”

Yet, this man’s biography also reveals how the stigma persisted – and how scavenging, even when it came to be recognized as labour – continued to add new layers of stigma. Kulamnagar’s later notoriety was as a key site of illicit liquor manufacture and drugs peddling in the city. Many of our interviewees in the 40-50 age-group remembered the Kulamnagar of their youth and late childhood as tense and fraught with danger, with drunkards, illicit liquor-sellers, and drug-pushers making things very difficult. This was in contrast with the memories of older women – one of them, for example, remembered two thieves among the earliest residents of Kulamnagar



– one was a “traditional” thief, who plied his trade in far-off places, and the other dug up the copper pots from the mud in the tank-bed and sold them. They did not seem viciously criminal, unlike the figures that emerge in the accounts of the younger women, who remembered outright criminals striding around the place. Isaac’s daughters remembered that the men at Kulamnagar had always been heavy drinkers – because of the kind of work they did. “Remember, our father used to get down into the sewers to clean them – not a job anyone can do unless dead-drunk. And the others too needed a strong drink – those who stripped the hides off dead carcasses and the butchers too.” Initially, they would get in from outside; and soon, a female migrant desperate for income began to brew and sell it for the residents. The troubles began when the market extended outside Kulamnagar with outsiders becoming customers. Soon, it became uncontrollable as the illicit liquor-makers and traders acquired connections with local policemen and officials. “Our father used to consume quite a bit,” said one of them, about Isaac in the 1960s. “But he knew that things were moving in a bad way. He began to secretly inform the police of these elements.”

Isaac’s story, then, strikes one as unbearably tragic. As someone who fought – to a considerable extent, successfully – to bring dignity and rights for sanitation workers, Isaac was a hero. Yet, the very nature of the work that he did – that of scavenging – which could not be done without dulling the senses somehow, with strong liquor mostly, ultimately consumed him. He was addicted to it. His children recollected how cruel he could become at times – how the job simply gnawed away at his humanity – and how they and their mother could only watch, helpless. The Nair-born wife stood by his side till the very end, knowing well that the deterioration was beyond their control. It was the work that destroyed a man of immense ability, conviction, and courage – work imposed on him by a merciless tradition that was simply reinforced by an equally ruthless ‘modernity’ that denied sanitary lives to sanitation workers and condemned those who protected the city’s health to the most unhealthy conditions.

Kulamnagar continues to bear the stigma even though the unionised sanitation workers moved away to their own housing colony provided by the government. The new colony, the MSK Nagar, also bears the same stigma.

Kerala’s record on manual scavenging is not entirely clean. Yet, we live in the illusion that the working class’ democratic upsurges of the mid-20th century swept the rotten legacies of caste-ridden work away. But even if such practices were undermined, clearly, they would leave a trace, powerful enough to subject the people and their place to disgrace, for decades later. At least that is what I learned from my research on Kulamnagar.

The author is a feminist researcher and teacher at Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

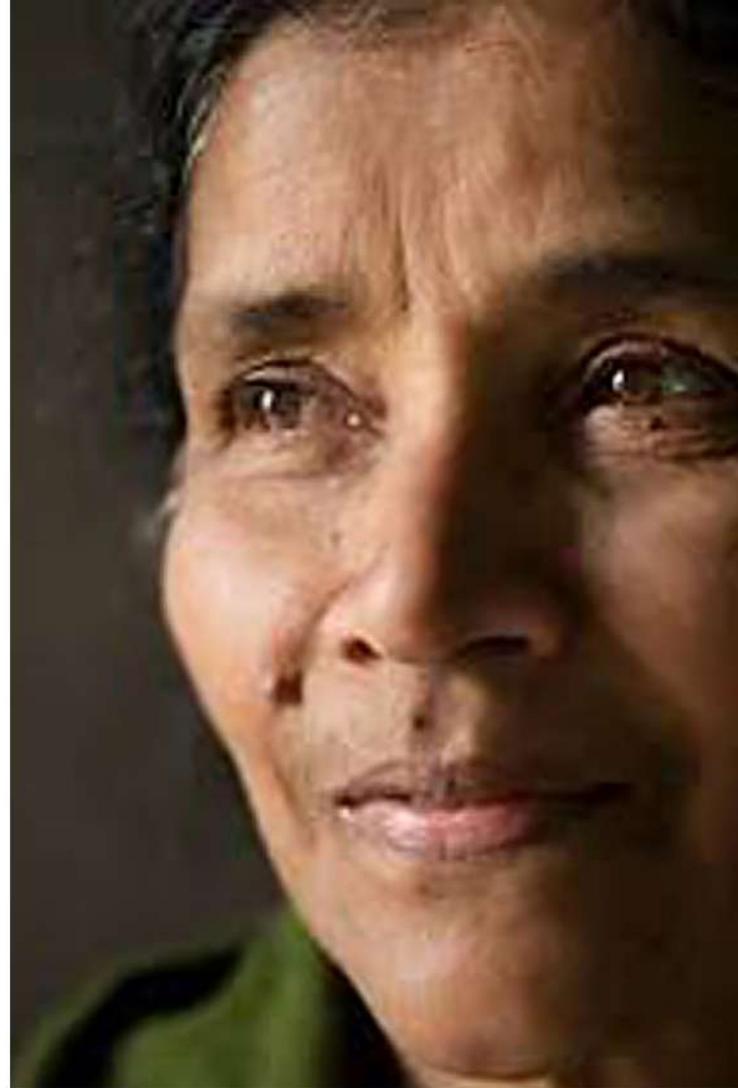


Didi of the Musahars

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 51

Sr. Sudha Varghese is a social worker hailing from the Kerala State of India and a Catholic nun who has devoted herself to the Musahar, the Dalit community in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, who are considered the "untouchables". She is affectionately called 'didi' which means elder sister. In 1965 she joined the Sisters of Notre Dame to work for the poor. She resigned her job as a teacher and went on to study law to fight cases for women who have faced abuse, particularly cases of rape, sexual harassment, and violence against them. Her major thrust was to empowering women by providing education and employment. For this she founded *Nari Gunjan* (woman's voice), a not-for-profit organisation for literacy, vocational training, healthcare, advocacy and life skills for Dalit girls and women in Bihar. In 2005 she established a residential school in Patna named *Prerna*, meaning inspiration. She imparted to them legal education and made them aware of their Fundamental Rights envisaged in the India Constitution.

Sister Sudha is greatly inspired by Dr B.R Ambedkar who fought against the evil of untouchability. According to Sudha, Dalits in Bihar are completely unaware of their rights and privileges. They are bribed with liquor, food and money during elections for vote but no one turns out for them once their motive is fulfilled. They are exploited from all corners, and the administration, politicians and other officials keep mum on this.



Sudha spent more than five decades among the poor in North India. "I was unaware about the evils of caste system, and the miserable state of the poor in Bihar. There were days and nights when I feared that I could be killed any moment. I had to leave my home in Danapur due to death threats and was forced to live in a rented flat at Bailey Road. But then the realisation dawned upon me that I can't fear to lose my life to some goons who don't own my life. God has given me this life. It was after that I moved back to my home in Danapur," she recalls.

Sudha has secured many awards such as Corporate Philips Good Samaritan Award, Bihar Saman Award and Bihar Asmita Award. In 2006, she was awarded with the prestigious Civilian Award Padma Shri. She continues her prophetic mission for the untouchables. "I have lived a thousand lives and died a hundred deaths in 50 years that I chose to spend in Bihar," says Sr.Sudha.



Dominic Palakeel
dominicpj@gmail.com

**BOOK
REVIEW**

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 52-54

THE UNSEEN

by Basha Singh

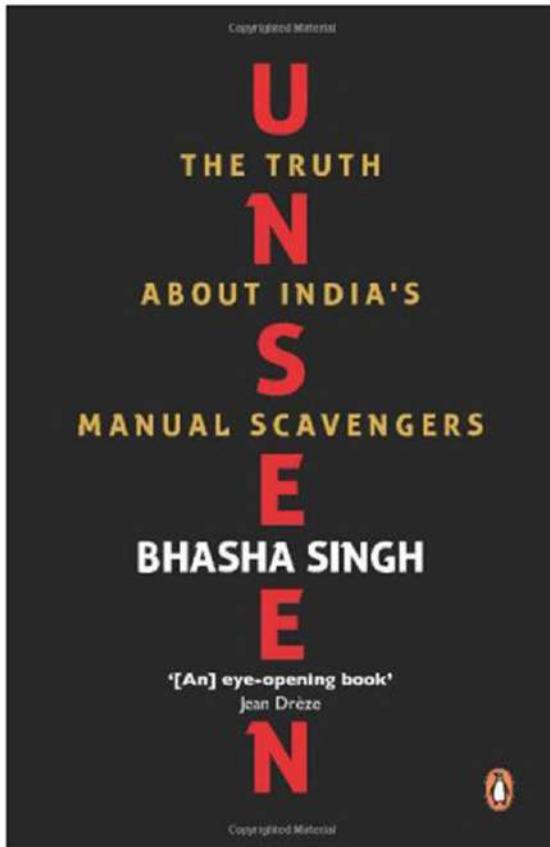
However hard they struggle to break off the chain, they eventually fall into the same loop. **It is this social predicament that is the topic of Basha Singh's scintillating work THE UNSEEN.**

“**E**veryone must be his own scavenger” said Mahatma Gandhi. When he said it, what he had in his mind was not the taboo associated with the work but the fact of stigmatizing certain sections of people with this kind of work. It is many years since Gandhi said it, but the social reality is surprisingly the same, where the unpleasant burden of clearing the dirt of the society still rests with a few unfortunate ones. However hard they struggle to break off the chain, they eventually fall in to the same loop. It is this social predicament that is the topic of Basha Singh's scintillating work the Unseen.

Bhasha Singh is an independent journalist, activist and writer. As a journalist her focus has been on agrarian distress in north India, the politics and ground realities of nuclear plants and issues of Dalit, gender, and minority rights. She published her first book on manual scavenging, Adrishya Bharat,

(Hindi) in 2012. The English version of the same book was published in 2014 translated by Reenu Talwar with the title UNSEEN by Penguin. The relevance of the content and the lucid style of narration turned the book an instant hit with wide public acclaim. “This eye-opening book is an unsettling mirror that brings us face to face with a side of India that most of us have learnt not to hear, see, or feel”, said noted economist. Jean Dreze.

'Unseen' exposes the plight of manual scavengers across eleven Indian States. The removal of human excreta from toilets without flush-systems is described as manual scavenging. The author shows that the septic tank or pits are usually cleaned at night. Though both men and women are employed, the dry latrines are usually serviced only by women. Singh argues that the people who are forced to carry out this degrading work remain invisible, and are pushed to the margins of society. The book tells more about the



people who do such a work rather than dwelling on the theoretical and ethical aspects of an abhorring task as this. This book attempts to cover two facets of this social evil: primarily, how this caste-based practice dictates and influences the way people live and think. Secondly, the fierce desire and constant struggle to liberate themselves from the clutches of such inhuman practice is presented. Focussing more on women, this book highlights how women from such communities are trying to get liberated from this stigmatised and demeaning social existence.

A compilation of several articles written by Bhasha Singh 2006 to 2012, this book is divided into two parts. Part one: 'the invisible India' deals with the cases and accounts of the practice as well as people involved in it across the different States. Part two: 'knocking on the doors of Power' targets the government and law machinery responsible for the

eradication of this practice. The second part also has revealing articles on the invisible manual scavengers working for the Indian Railways.

Laxmi, one of the manual scavengers whom the author interviews as part of her research points out blankly: "If our people die, it makes no difference to anybody in this world. This is because our caste is written on our forehead. As long as manual scavenging and our caste are interlinked, we will not be released from this hell." This is exactly the point that the author attempts to drive home through this work: the plight of the manual scavengers. In fact, in 2012, the Union Government passed the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill but unfortunately it has done very little to ameliorate the situation. All that this law has achieved is to make manual scavenging illegal, says Ms. Singh. As a result, today, when a man

crawls into a septic tank to carry out excrement in buckets upon his head, he is actually breaking the law! Since the government has failed to provide alternative employment opportunities to these communities, the essence of the Bill remains to be an utopian dream.

The book details the plight of manual scavengers particularly their social status, deplorable working conditions, pathetic safety measures, and the agonizing self pity with which each one lives. Going beyond a mere depiction of the existing situation in a pan India scale, the book also raises pertinent questions about the caste bindings in the modern Indian society. It depicts manual scavengers battling deep-rooted social stigmas as they try to take up other means of livelihoods. Owing to their so called lower status in the caste hierarchy, finding any sort of employment other than manual scavenging is not easy as it is stiffly resisted, even belittled by the rest of the groups. The untold stories of double oppression of women are brought to the fore through the stirring testimonies of women scavengers. Ms Singh has unearthed a poignant fact: that they are hugely bitter about the fact that over the centuries, they have been unseen and unheard because an ostrich-like society has buried its head in the sand, unwilling to deal with the issue. The book also peeps into the policies and laws made in their name and analyses to what extent they have been successful. So in that way, it acts as a sign board for policy-makers and social activists.

The author passionately narrates the heart wrenching stories of the manual scavengers with a great empathy for them. But at times the style of narration gives the impression that her own self imposed tag of “manual scavenging journalist” does away with the objectivity that is necessary for a research oriented work like the present one. There are



This book offers a thought-provoking reading of one of the marginalised communities in India. **Presenting people of life and blood in real life situation, the book provides a captivating reading that is capable of stirring the conscience of the reader.**



several instances in the book where she emotionally gets involved in the topic which invariably weakens her own claims of dispassionate portrayal. The outrage that she demonstrates on behalf of this admittedly ill-treated community seems to overshadow the massive research effort that she must have undertaken for a book of this scale. Similarly, there are instances of the author losing focus of her central topic and lavishly devoting pages on other issues outside the purview of her focus. For instance, while talking about the situation of the manual scavengers in Kashmir, she gets carried away by stories about the violence of the armed forces against the civilians considering the scope of her work it was irrelevant to the narrative.

This book offers a thought-provoking reading of one of the marginalised communities in India. Presenting people of life and blood in real life situation, the book provides a captivating reading that is capable of stirring the conscience of the reader.





Nishant A. Irudayadason
nishant.irudayadason@jdv.edu.in

BOOK
REVIEW

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 55-57

CASTE MATTERS

by Suraj Yengde

This book is a wonderful piece of autoethnographic literature, drawing inspiration from different disciplines to analyse the complex realities of India from a Dalit perspective. It challenges our moral and political consciousness not only to become aware of the human rights violations suffered by **the Dalits, but also to subscribe to a philosophy that would enable us to join hands with Dalits in their struggle to end such violations.**

The author of the book *Caste Matters*, Suraj Yengde, has stirred controversy about the reality of being a Dalit. The author has chosen to critically analyse the deplorable Indian reality aggravated by caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability from an experiential perspective, thus presenting it as a memoir. A Dalit or a Tribal reading this narrative can resonate with his life experiences. Caste discrimination as a lived reality of the author adds credibility to his analysis of inhuman practices against the Dalits, ranging from verbal abuse to instances of sexual violence against Dalit women.

This book has six chapters. In his introduction, the author shares his personal memory of his loving grandmother, besides all the struggles that he had to undergo at a very young age that include, poverty, lack of access to sanitation, doing odd jobs, having been treated unjustly and witnessing violence to back up his claim how “the strict apartheid based on caste and religion retains absolute sanctity, giving little or no occasion to understand the humanity of the ‘lowly’, ‘polluted’ or ‘unmeritocratic’ Dalit”. He chose to adopt the Socratic method of dialogue by placing in the forefront the dialogues of two great Indian heroes who fought caste discrimination - Mahatma Phule and Dr Ambedkar.

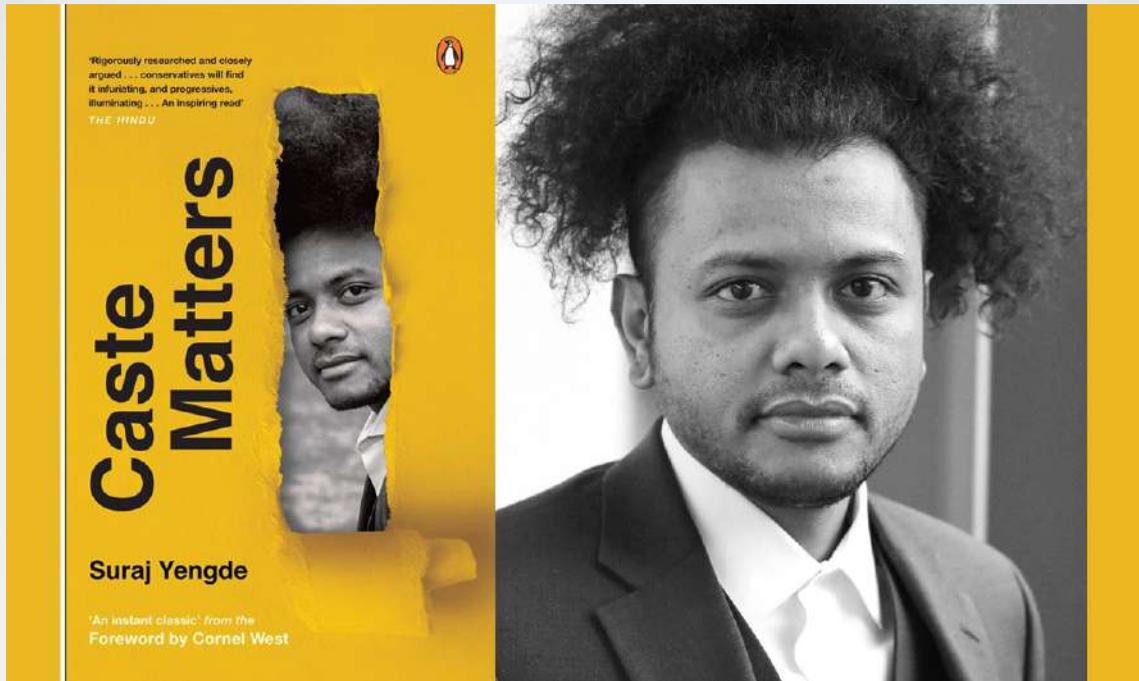
In the first chapter titled “Being a Dalit”, Yengde shows that, despite the equality of rights guaranteed to all by the Constitution, the Dalits are subjected to systemic discrimination annotated with personal examples of being ridiculed and taunted. Referring to Heidegger’s existential ontology of Time, the author claims being a Dalit is to have a limited ownership of existence and “Time in the Dalit experience could be understood as a deprivation of privilege where the body politic is facilitating the civic death.” The second chapter titled “Neo-Dalit Rising” surprisingly discusses many recent events to assert the humiliation and degradation that Dalit officials face from among their peers, thus showing “the inadequacies of legal provisions in the absence of society’s willingness to acknowledge its prejudices”.

The third chapter titled “Many Shades of Dalits” highlights the recent awareness among the Dalits to assert their culture in music and the fine arts coupled with humanistic values and scientific temper. However, there are always obstacles to this aspiration due to various factors including the subcastes among the Dalits. Yengde notes that there are 1200 Dalit subcastes and 4000 sub-subcastes - all of them want to maintain their unique historical and cultural identity but “forced into Hindu untouchability”. Sadly, there is stratification among these subcastes, which has resulted in the neglect of some groups who are “co-opted by Hindutva forces into their projects of violence”. Further, the Dalit leaders, who are supposed to represent the Dalit cause, “work under the tutelage of their Brahmin bosses who thrive in the Brahminical ecosystem”. More importantly, he classifies the Middle-class Dalits as Token Dalits, Elite Dalits, Self-obsessed Dalits and Radical Dalits not only to highlight the differences among them that make it impossible for them to join hands but also to criticise

them in strong words.

Yengde notes in the fourth chapter titled “The Dalit Middle Class”, that with the rise of the Dalit middle class, emerged Dalit consciousness that could destroy “collective amnesia of vicious Brahmin supremacy”. He observes that the Dalit Middle class is inspired by the vision of Ambedkar and sees organized revolt against injustice along with Education as the path to success. He speaks of the need for “frontal Dalit attack on all forms of human bigotry.” In the fifth chapter titled “Dalit Capitalism”, he criticises the view of some Dalits that economic success will lead to Dalit empowerment. Whatever economic success Dalits may achieve, “without a dynamic vision for the future, they would remain merely a gaggle of geese”. The final chapter titled “Brahmins against Brahminism” traces the historic anti-caste movements in which some Brahmins played a significant part.

The book is meritorious, at least for two important reasons. Firstly, Yengde’s analysis of the question of Dalits within the social, economic and political narratives of India is comprehensive. He touches upon many vital issues of the contemporary India including the violence done to Dalit girls and boys who marry other caste people. He puts forward Dalit love charged with political vision as “an effective antidote to the malady of caste,” “an intense force of fraternity”, and “the only force in India that can accommodate the ignorant and uphold the virtues of compassion”. He has presented a detailed discussion on capitalist economy and cautions how Baniaization (Baniya referring to caste involved in business - whom Ambedkar calls “worst parasitic class known to history”) of Dalit groups will create “a toxic condition of oppression by the oppressed”. He vehemently criticises capitalist ideology in uncompromising



terms: While discussing the political landscape of India at length in reference to the Dalit question, he makes a pertinent remark about the political left. In his words, “the Dalit remains agentless in the left discourse” because “the debate of the left movements in India squarely points to the Western imperial order as the central problem while remaining blind to the local, everyday caste oppressions carried out within the new capitalist caste market.

Secondly, the author makes an interesting comparative analysis between the struggle for Dalit to have equal rights and the struggle of the Blacks in the US to have racial equality. While discussing the approaches of two eminent black leaders of the twentieth century Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois in their struggle against white supremacy, he favours the approach of the latter who laid the foundation of black liberation on human dignity, civil rights, political freedom, equality of power and higher education. While the author subscribes to a similar approach in the struggle of Dalits to have a dignified life, he laments that unlike the US where the

White people could offer critical voices in support of the Black civil rights, India lacks such contribution from the so-called high caste people. The author is particularly careful not to malign any caste group and gives evidence from history to show how many young Brahmins who backed up Phule and Ambedkar in their fight for eradication of caste have been ostracised by the society. However, this is not the case in the post-independent India.

This book is a wonderful piece of autoethnographic literature, drawing inspiration from different disciplines to analyse the complex realities of India from a Dalit perspective. It challenges our moral and political consciousness not only to become aware of the human rights violations suffered by the Dalits, but also to subscribe to a philosophy that would enable us to join hands with Dalits in their struggle to end such violations.

*Nishant A. Irudayadason
Professor of Philosophy and Ethics,
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.*

XLRI-LIPI CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME Peace Studies 2020

The third batch of the certificate programme in peace studies jointly organized by XLRI, Jamshedpur and LIPI, Kochi is in the final stage and the convocation is scheduled to be held on 21 November 2020. The students, 50 in number, represent a cross-section of India from almost all the regions of India. Among them are professionals, teachers, social workers, religious, lawyers, college students and researchers. The course aims at strengthening of right attitudes and values along with enhancing professional skills.

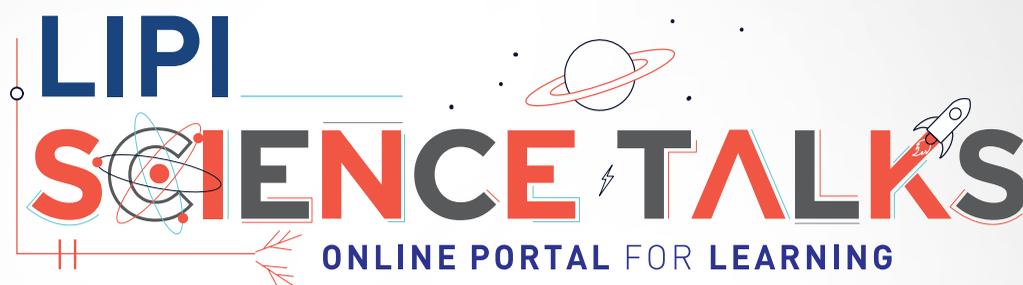
Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations (LIPI) is the Nodal Platform for Peace and Reconciliation of the South Asian Jesuit Assistency which aims at creating an atmosphere of peace with a multi-pronged approach. LIPI is academic in nature, spiritual in vision and interdisciplinary in approach. Collaboration and networking with similar institutes sharing a common vision is a major dimension of LIPI. Accordingly, it has a tie up with XLRI-Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur. XLRI is one of the premier business schools in India. The Centre for Justice and Peace (CJP) is a new initiative of XLRI launched in 2019.

The course content includes: Understanding peace and justice; Structural inequalities and human rights; Conflict transformation; Identity, violence and peace; Communal harmony; Inner peace in times of covid-19; Holistic approaches o health care; Science and peace; Art and peace. Assessment is based on assignments and project work. The project work is supervised by competent faculty of XLRI-LIPI.

The members of the faculty are known for their profound professional competence, educational leadership and research experience. Dr. K. Babu Joseph (Former Vice Chancellor of Cochin University of Science and Technology) is the Principal Advisor. Prof. Dr. M.P. Mathai (Adjunct Professor, Gujarat Vidyapeeth) is the Dean of the Faculty. Dr. Jacob Thomas (IAS, Retd.) is the Academic Coordinator. Other members of the faculty include Dr. Paramjyot Singh (Director, Centre for Peace and Justice, XLRI), Dr. Denzil Fernandes (Director, ISI-Delhi), Dayabai (Social Activist), Dr. Augustine Pamplany (Director, ISR-Aluva), Dr. S. Painadath (Director, Sameeksha, Kalady), Prof. Dr. K.M. Mathew (KUFOS, Kochi), Roy M. Thottam (Coordinator, Art & Peace, LIPI), Prof. Dr. Neena Joseph (Former Professor, Institute of Management in Government), Dr. Sr. Beena Jose (Principal, Vimala College, Trissur), Toby Joseph (Atmamitra, Kalady), Dr. Babu Joseph (Former Director, National Institute of Naturopathy, Pune) and Dr. Binoy Pichalakkattu (Director, LIPI).

To the participants the course provides a thorough understanding of peace and justice. It familiarizes them with leading practices of conflict management and conflict transformation. Besides, the students are equipped with practical skills in teamwork and interpersonal relations. Ultimately, they experience peace and act as Ambassadors of Peace. For the Management promoting peace is a vision and a mandate.

*Director, XLRI-LIPI Peace Studies Programme
Lumen/Jyothis, Ponoth Road, Kaloor
Kochi - 682 017. directorlipi15@gmail.com
www.lipijesuits.org / Mob: (+91) 94974 45381*



(An Initiative of LIPI SCIENCE FORUM
Loyola Institute of Peace & International Relations, Kochi)

LIPI SCIENCE TALKS

is an online portal to discuss the basic and advanced concepts in contemporary Science and Technology. It facilitates online talks and conversations on topics in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Technology, and History and Philosophy of Science.



Unity of Science and Humanities:

A Mathematical Perspective

Dr K Babu Joseph

(Former Vice Chancellor, CUSAT)

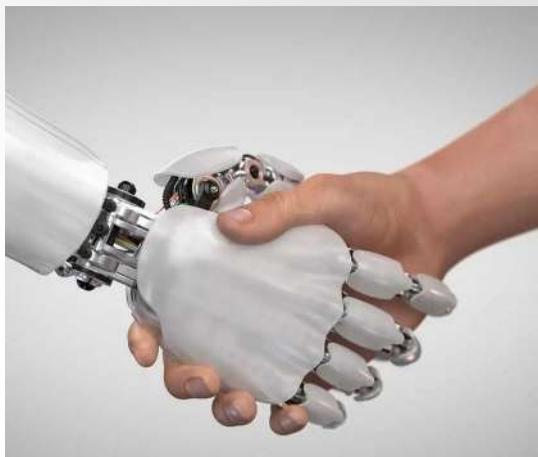
Science and humanities have traditionally been regarded as separate compartments of intellectual activity. Science of any description, either employs mathematics in its presentation, or is at least, mathematizable. Humanities are maintained, to a large extent, free from the 'math pest'. Science and humanities, however, make ample use of logic in their

formulation, but with a difference in the degree of its application. Mathematics is built on the foundation of set theory, logic finding universal application as the science of reasoning, without which no discipline can thrive. Logic is a strong thread that runs through both humanities and sciences, the latter being related to set theory via mathematics. It is, therefore, natural to seek a connection between logic and set theory, enabling one to appreciate the unity of all knowledge.

In this talk, it is pointed out that logic and set theory are different representations of the same abstract algebra. This may be construed as indicative of the existence of a deep symmetry. That there are parallels between logic and set theory was noted by several mathematicians and logicians, including George Boole, in the 19th century itself. In his book, *The Principles of Mathematics*, the famous mathematician

and philosopher, Bertrand Russell, refers to this symmetry as duality, but downplays its importance. It may be noted that the basic material dealt with in logic is propositions, while that set theory is sets.

After demonstrating the duality between logic and set theory, we argue that the symmetry between them may be broken by the peculiarities and ambiguities of particular languages. Further investigations are called for.



Probability, Statistics and Data Science

Dr K K Jose Kanichukattu

(Hon. Director, School of Mathematics & Statistics, M.G. University, Kottayam)

Randomness and uncertainty exist in our life and probability deals with its quantification. This measurability of uncertainty is one of the greatest discoveries in science which led to the development of Statistics. It is the science of taking wise decisions in the face of uncertainty based on systematically collected data. Statistics has become the new technology for advancement in all disciplines including biological and physical sciences, managerial and social sciences, health sciences and engineering. The contemporary era is driven by Big Data.

Thanks to advancements in Computer Science and Information Technology, Data Science and Data Analytics have emerged as powerful tools.

The speaker discusses a range of topics such as axiomatic formulation, subjective and fuzzy approaches, probability and Data Science. He argues that science does not deal with reality but with models of reality. He introduces statistical model building through random variables, probability distributions and stochastic processes. The steps involved in model building are explained and illustrated with respect to epidemic modelling in the context of COVID 19. The importance of data and the challenges posed by Big Data are explained in detail. Data Science is an interdisciplinary field that uses scientific methods, processes, algorithms and systems to extract knowledge and insights from both structured and unstructured data. All decisions in management and health sciences, business and planning, research and development are data driven today. Data science is regarded as a fourth paradigm of science (empirical, theoretical, computational and now data-driven).





Gene Editing Technique: Prospects and Challenges

Dr Sr. Beena Jose

(Principal, Vimala College, Trissur & TORCH International Fellow, University of Oxford, UK)

Technologies for making site-specific modifications in the genomes of cells and organisms have made it possible to change the DNA sequences of living organisms with exceptional ease and precision. For many years, molecular biologists have been looking for using cellular repair processes to intervene and modify DNA of organisms by guided genome editing. However, this new technical ability has raised profound questions about how people may choose to modify not only their own DNA but the genomes of future generations. CRISPR is a gene editing technique which is faster, cheaper and more reliable than previous gene editing methods. With enormous applications in medical sciences and other areas, technology has created a storm of controversy. The speaker will discuss this controversial situation critically in the light of recent developments in Genetic Sciences and with special reference to CRISPR/CAS9 technique.

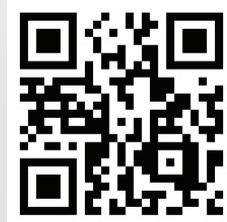


Milestones in the Perception of the Universe

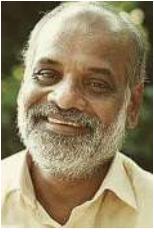
Dr Joe Jacob

(Head of the Dept. of Physics, Newman College, Thodupuzha & Visiting Associate, IUCAA, Pune)

Astronomy is one of the oldest sciences, yet it is vibrant in contributing new insights about the Universe. The major part of the body of knowledge now we know as Astronomy came into existence only during the last four centuries, of which the greater chunk of knowledge was acquired during the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The talk is about the milestones in the perception of the Universe as of now, and the circumstances/inventions/new ideas which led to it. The speaker will focus on the tremendous progress in this area brought about by the advancements in science, especially, the use of instruments like telescopes, launching of space telescopes etc. The opening of a window into a broader landscape of the Universe facilitated through the recent detection of the Gravitational waves will also be discussed.



Scan QR Code to watch Video | Subscribe to **LIPI Science Talks**  **Channel.**



P. Surendran

psurendran61@gmail.com

ART
AND
PEACE

Music of Silence and Colours

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 62-65



Great masters say that music is the noblest among the arts. This glorious placement is given to music may be because it is an art that breaks all national and cultural boundaries. Hence all genuine artists try to break the boundaries. According to Walter Pater, the English art critic, “All art aspires to the condition of music.” This is true of the abstract paintings of Madam P, the Turkish painter. She had no formal training from any school of art. She inherited the skill from her parents.

Madam P was born in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, in 1975. As a child she used to wander about in the gardens of Copenhagen and to carve certain drawings on the snow flakes. Looking through her window she felt elated upon seeing the passersby on the street

Madam P

enjoy her drawings on snow. Since that early time itself, she took painting to her heart as a mode of thinking and style of living.

When she was 14 years old she started drawing pictures using oil paint on larger canvas .In every series, she employed different languages; a colorful sail to the blissful experiences. The WhatsApp messages Madam P sent even during this pandemic season are full of hope.

Like many other artists, Madam P's life also passed through different stages of creativity. She also had a figurative stage. Thereafter, she turned to abstract expressionism. As the the name indicates, 'Phoenix' is a painting on resurrection. Colours take life as flames. The image of flame in the myth of Phoenix merges with the sky in this beautiful work. The five- elements-based beauty is well embedded in this picture. The furious whirls and pools are also apparent in this painting. Certain paintings look like colourful rivers put in vertical direction. 'A journey to my soul' is a significant one that belongs to this group. The images of the journey are portrayed in abstract style. The landscape of the painting is quite mysterious. 'The Real Love' is a self-searching enquiry into platonic love. 'The Princess' dances between concrete and abstract expressionisms. In the treatment of colours, romanticism is quite resounding. The picture exists not in melancholy but in bliss. The use of blue colour is amazing.



© Madam P. 10/2020



‘Happiness in my soul’ also displays high positive energy. It is a search that surpasses the melancholy. The unending search can be considered as a general feature of Madam P’s paintings. Men are always haunted by primordial melancholy. So life becomes an unstoppable search to overcome this melancholy. This is a work where green is the hero. Blue and magenta turns into the colors of healing.

‘Language of Silence’ is another significant series. It is a sequel to the ‘Lost a map’ series. The language of silence is filled with the primeval memories. In this painting, she uses the alphabet of Gokha Turks, the nomads with Mangolian origin. They were also known as Blue Turks. Their letters are not used in specific meaning but as mere shapes only. It resembles the work of KCS Panicker who utilized alphabets in his series called ‘Words and Symbols.’ Even though there are a variety of languages in the world, all of them are found to be insufficient. Moreover, human beings still depend on silence. This is the philosophy put forward by these works.

‘The language of silence’ contains works which overflow with music. There is one painting which appears to be like a number of Bamsuris

arranged horizontally. Dark brown is the main colour in it. The light streaks of red are also used. The letters in this painting look like musical notations. Ney (Reed f flute) makes us feel the gentle touch of the soothing melody. This musical instrument in the Sufi tradition is a renovated form of the flute of the Ottoman period. Turkey has a rich heritage of sufism as well.

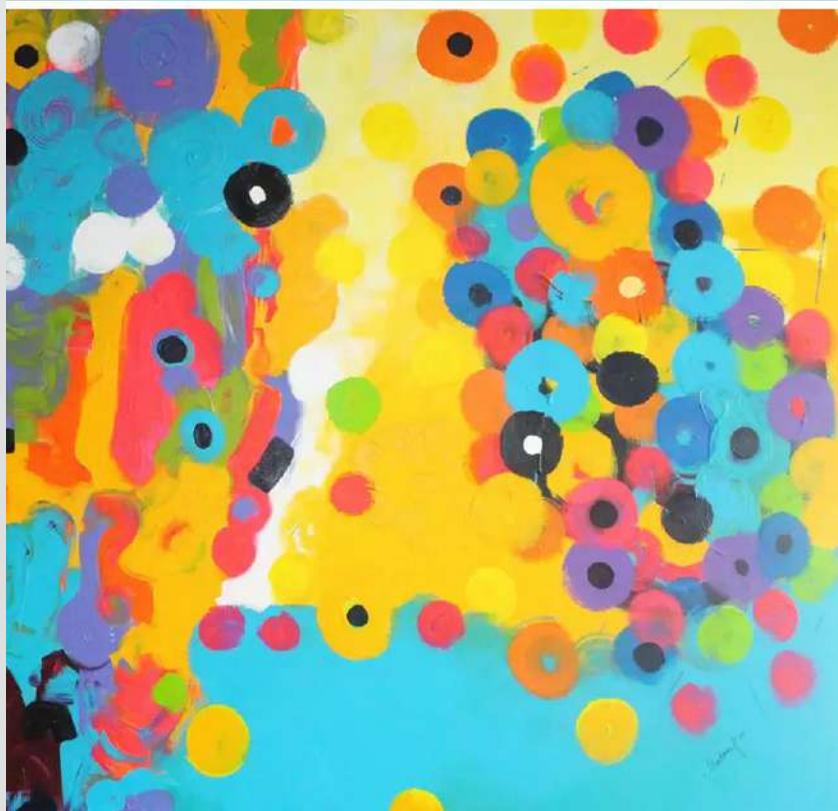
Turkey has a rich heritage in paintings. Madam P never denied it. The geometric shapes in the carpet and the abundance of colors have always inspired the painters. It is a continuity of ancient Persian art works. The doyen of modern art Henri Matisse was inspired by Persian Carpets. Furthermore, Ebru art is still popular in Turkey. It is a form of traditional painting in water colour. They take water in square shaped vessels and pour oil into it. The paint with water colour on the oily surface. After that, they put the paper on it to sketch the painting. Marbling in Ebru art is marvellous. Madam P also drew much inspiration from these rich cultural heritage.

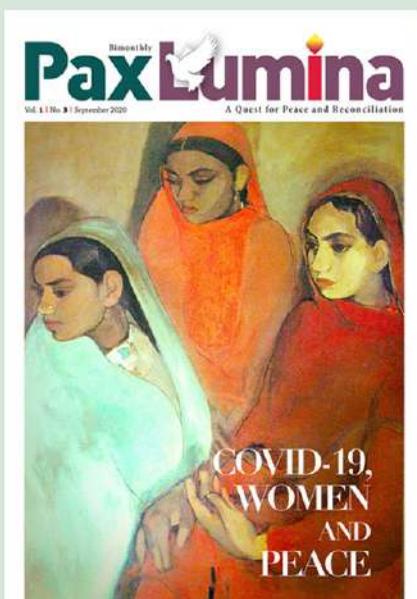
‘The Lost Map’ is another series. ‘The lost a map of Piri’ is the famous one in this series. Ahmed Mohiyudhin Piri was an admiral,

sailor and mapmaker in the Ottoman period. The maps he prepared in bird's eye view is still a surprise as he did it at a time when the technology was not much advanced. In the eleventh century an unknown map maker had prepared world maps named the lost map of the Caliphs. These traditions also had a huge impact on Madam P's abstract works.

Another important series is the 'Mechanical Work.' It depicts the evolution from ancient times to the digital age. This series is totally geometric in nature. Geometry has influenced the paintings from ancient time itself. The American painter Alfred H Bar coined the word Geometric Art. The movements Verticalism, Supermatism and Minimalism are all rich with geometric art. Piet Mondrian is the greatest doyen of geometric art of all times. Madam P's Mechanical Age series is an extraordinary continuation of European geometric art. It is the expression of human conditions imprisoned in squares everywhere.

In the map of contemporary Turkish paintings, Madam P stands out with her unique creativity and charisma. She has already conducted her painting exhibitions in different parts of the world. Her paintings have already grabbed envious placements in various museums and universities. Her paintings occupy a place in Danish Parliament too. In fact, she is preparing to arrange an exhibition in India very soon after the lock down.





LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 66



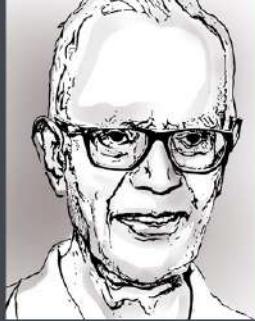
Dear Editor,

Thanks again for PAX LUMINA dated Sep 15,2020, which I just finished reading. I can very well make out the steady growth in "readability" of the rather new bimonthly in terms of language, relevance of topics, commitment & focus of authors etc..

However, I feel the journal could still be better focussed in terms of general headings under which articles are presented. While reading a weekly newspaper like THE ECONOMIST, for instance, I give varying levels of attention to various sections (such as The World This Week, Editorials, Regions/Nations, Business & Finance, Books, Obituary and so on) so that I can optimise the time of reading & get the best on topics of my interest.

I am sure that with the extremely relevant theme of peace & reconciliation, PAXLUMINA would be in a position to present its highly topical articles into appropriate sections & heighten the interest of the readers.

K.A. Joseph Kochi



**STAND
WITH
STAN**

JOIN THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT THE HUMAN RIGHT DEFENDERS

**Would you like to join
the campaign to protect
the liberty of human
rights defenders?**



**Would you like to
demand the immediate
release of
Fr Stan Swamy
who worked for the
tribals in Jarkhand for
decades?**

Please Sign the Petition in
www.standwithstan.jcsaweb.org





LIPI

Suggestions and feedback
may be sent to
paxlumina2020@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor should
contain full postal address,
telephone number and email id.

**Nodal Platform for Peace and
Reconciliation Network, JCSA**

Ponoth Road, Kaloor, Kochi-17, Kerala, India.
www.lipijesuits.org