
On the occasion of screening of the documentary film
LESSER HUMANS
by Stalin K. of "DRISHTI" at the Amnesty International Film Festival

**LESSER HUMANS :
SCAVENGERS OF THE INDIAN REPUBLIC**

A STORY OF THREE MILLENNIA
**SCAVENGERS (BHANGIS) IN INDIA TODAY
MODERN VICTIMS OF ANCIENT APARTHEID**

(A survey of the living conditions of scavenger (Bhag) caste in Gujarat, India-1998
by Martin Macwan, Director, NAVSARJAN, Ahmedabad, India)

METAMORPHOSIS OF HUMAN BEINGS
INTO
DEHUMANISED ROBOTS AND
FILTHY SCAVENGING CREATURES

ENSURED BY

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & RELIGIOUS TYRANNY AND EXPLOITATION

**WILL INDIA ENTER THE 21ST CENTURY
WITHOUT
A SECOND METAMORPHOSIS ?**

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' Martin Macwan-1998

INTRODUCTION

Three Years of working with the scavengers

So much has been written on and around the issue, including reports by the various commissions set up by various governments. Hundreds of recommendations have been made and schemes drawn up, without ever being serious about it. If fifty years of national independence have to be summarized by the scavengers (bhangis), it is very simple. "They trust no one."

Therefore, I do not wish to add any more material to the subject, which is theoretical and impotent. The national has patted its back several times for evolving various plans and felt content. In spite of knowing that their inaction have only strengthened the privileged. So, if we can not wipe someone's tears, why to device them with promises that have been violated several times.

Personally, it has been a shock to me. In spite of working with Dalit for many years, this issue never hit me hard until about two years ago. I only wish to narrate here the facts that I and my colleagues have come across. These facts throw light on the life of scavengers. I feel, these facts tell a story of scavengers, but more than that it tells the story of the State, which has maintained a status quo.

These are the facts that describe the scavengers as they are today. Any attempt to theorize these facts only helps to wash away the guilt of those who are in public life.

If they are only an embarrassment to the nation and its leaders, I wish to increase it. These are hard realities that exist today in 1998. They affect around 8,00,000 families in India.

PART-I : Forced Labour of The filthy Kind

1.1 Dry latrines have to be cleaned.

Vado Varvano Chh.

There are various kinds of dry latrines in both the urban as well as rural areas. These units are either private or managed by local self governments.

1.2 I Still have to clean up the vaste

Vassida Varvana Baki Chh.

Vassida means dung of animals, along with other filth that is scattered all over. They need to be collected and dumped at a designated place. That village has sizeable number of cattle. The dung mixed with hay is dumped at a site to make manure. The excreta of very young babies is also mixed in the collection. Vassida is collected manually into shallow plates made of tin and dumped. The dumping grounds are often near the Bhangi houses. After the dumping is over, the tin plates are cleaned with hands by mixing dry soil to wipe off the sticking content. This is to save the plates from corrosion. Some

food is given to them daily. At the end of the thrashing season, they are given 10-15 kilos of grain.

- 1.3 Vadoliyu :** There are communities like feudals and Muslims, who are considered high caste but are poor. Their women live in enclosures. Curtailing women's freedom has forced them to a small dry latrine known as Vadoliyu.

There is a hand dug small pit in the ground, not deeper than one feet in which human excreta is discarded. It has two bricks, one on either side to serve as foot rest. The privacy is created by four wooden pillars posted around the pit, covered with pieces of jute bag as walls.

- 1.4 Dabba jajroo :** The rich in the village build a proper toilet, which is at the end corner of their castle like house. The toilet has everything but a tub replaced below with a tin box, removable from an outlet built in the wall only from the backside. The removal of this box can not be seen from the inner part of the house.

- 1.5 Gutter Latrine :** The open gutters for disposal of fifth are connected to every house with bathrooms. The children and even adults in the darkness defecate directly in these gutters, where excreta mixes with plentiful of dirty water and other fifth.

- 1.6 Vada Jajroo :** In every big village the local government demarks a plot of land, each separate for men and women to be used as open toilet. The plot ate covered from all the sides with a three to four feet high wall, with an open entrance at some point. In a larger village there may be several such wada latrines.

- 1.7 Khada Jajroo :** A properly built litrine is connected to a soak pit at the back side. The bathroom is also connected to the pit. The mixture of water and excreta never leaves the pit dry. When the pit is full, which is neck deep, the person who cleans, gets in the pit. For a period of three to four hours he remains in the pit covered with filth up to the neck.

- 1.8 Village Community Latrines :** There are of various kinds. There is one set of properly built latrines, without tub, leading disposal through a hole to the common open drain at the back side.

The other kind comprises of a place like a big hall, with two rows of toilet place, one opposite the other. The distance between the rows, which are raised above the ground by one and half feet is approximately three feet. Only two foot rests divide one person, sitting next. People who utilize this, come only with one small tin of water, to wash thernselves. The remains right there which is collected with two tin plates and emptied in a bamboo basket, for disposal. Basket is either carried on head or shoulder. At times, basket can be full with worms, who breed very fast, in the waste leaving indisposed for a day or two.

The only person, who disposes human waste are Bhangis or the Scavengers. Most of them are women. Their day starts very early in the morning with foul

smell of shit and the day ands with the same foul smell as their houses are close to all forms of latrines.

The owners of private dry latrines pay them Rs. 5/- per month (12 Us. Cents) and a piece of bread everyday. The piece of bread can be seen hanging in front of their belly tied in the sari, while they keep themselves busy working, hands soiled with film.

The local Self-Government, who employs them, through state Government grants, do follow uniform standards of payment. Some bodies pay Rs. 50/- per monthly (Us.\$ 1.25), while others pay Rs. 600 /- a month. In some cases, the salaries are not revised for past 20 years or more. In semi-urban areas, Payments are higher, although there is unequal payment for men and women. The grants used these payments through the self Governments are part of the World Bank loan given to the Nation under various developments programs.

The work load decreases, because it is linked with population increase. So when mothers are sick, unable to work and at the same time cannot afford to take leave, the Children join them as a helping hand. The Children then face seclusion, where other children and sometimes teacher smell stink from them.

1.9 You, drag away that (dead) dog

Alya Kutru dhaheidi Kadh

There are some animals, which are useless after death. They are also considered inauspicious. Dogs and Cats are part of this category. Many Hindus shall return home halfway, if the cat crosses their way when Cats and Dogs die, they have to be discarded. Members of Dalit community, other than Bhangis are summoned to discard such animals, only where there are no bhangis. There have been incidents of physical attacks on Dalits for their refusal to do so.

The dead animal is tied with a string and then pulled away, out of the village. While all others who are passing by shall go off the road with their hands covering their nose and month, to save themselves from the foul smell, that may bring impurity, leading to a bath.

1.10 Railway Tracks and Excreta : Even when the trains stop at the stations, there are some passengers who continue to defecate. Excreta in this case is trapped between rubble stones. The only way to remove it is by scrapping with wire brooms.

1.11 Man holes : The metropolitan and big cities have flush latrines connected to sewage lines, very big in size. When they are blocked, the scavenger through the man hole gets in it and dives in the filthy water with a bucket to remove all kinds of substance, such as plastic, cloth, glass pieces, etc. In the Industrial pockets, the chemical waste is channelled to these gutters or they seep into the same as they do with ground water.

1.12 Pathological Laboratories

The stool and urine for tests are collected from the patients by a Bhangi only.

1.13 Postmortem Rooms

The dead bodies are handled by Bhangis. The opening up of the dead body is done by a Bhangi, so is the job of sewing the dead body after the autopsy. In a murder case of a Dalit, where the body was exhumed after seventeen days, I witnessed that the Doctors were at a distance taking notes. The cutting of the body, breaking the skull, removing bones for examination was done by a Bhangi.

1.14 Hospitals And Maternity Homes

Removing blood, urine, shit stained bed sheets is done by Bhangis. Cleaning scavenge from the bodies of the patients undergoing ailments or removal of waste and urine pans and cleaning them is done by Bhangis. Tables in labour room, of maternity homes are cleaned by Bhangis. The hospital jobs are carried out by women. They are referred as 'Mahetrani'.

Part-II : Traditional Duties in Villages---- Not by choice but enforced by custom, Tradition and imperatives of survival

2.1 Go, Make the announcements.

Haad Padi Aav (Town Crier)

In villages this medieval mode of communication is still popular. The bhangi is asked to go from street to street and announce a meeting or warning cattle for trampling of crops etc. In return he is paid a rupee or two.

2.2 Toran , Dhol And Dakla

Tying buntings - festoons (Toran) of tree leaves over the doorway, and cloth shade (Mandap) in front of the house having a wedding, or on festival days like the new - year day. Playing drum (Dhol) during wedding celebrations lasting for a couple of days among all the castes of the village. Playing the small drum (Dakla) along with wailing - like singing during the worship of the exclusive deity of the other sub-castes of Dalits.

All jobs are done by a Bhangi. The payments are in cash and kind. Such jobs done at wedding ceremonies can earn better money. Denial to perform any of the jobs can lead to serious consequences.

2.3 (Go, give the Bad News about the Death)

Ja Melo Aali Aay

News are of two kinds, good and bad. News about Marriage, Engagement, Child birth, especially of male child, newly wed girl getting pregnant for the first time are considered good news.

News about death, specially of young is considered bad news. The person who gives good news is auspicious. The person who gives bad news is the

contrary. People in the rural area communicates largely through personal messages.

Good news therefore is sent through only by Brahmins. (Brahmin are priests Even Dalits amongst themselves have a sub - caste of Brahmins). The bad news is only given by Bhangi. In return of his service, he is given some butter, jaggery and bread. He will normally carry a bathing towel which he will spread on the ground and sit after the news is delivered. The relatives of the dead shall empty a cup of coarse grain in the towel. So far as the eatables are concerned he shall borrow a utensil from his local caste man and get food in it.

He might sit there in a corner off the road and eat his given his food or carry the same back home for his family.

Part-III : Some Traditional Practices ---- Internalization of Degradation

3.1 Eating evil or cursed food

Varelu, Mantrelu Khavanoo.

Belief in many black - rituals persists among the rural and urban (non Bhangi) poor of the so called lower and middle castes, some times including so called upper castes. For example, black - magic - treated food is left at the nearest cross roads to free a person from evil spirits. No one touches that food -offering. Except, of curse the Bhangi who eats it as part of his - long struggle to fight the hunger.

3.2 Masters, Please Give us Dinner

Vadu Aljo Maa Baap.

Vadu, means dinner. Aljo, means please be kind to give'. Maa Baap, means mother and father literally but in this context it means ' kind Masters'. Wether it be a city or a village, in the evening time approximately when one is about to finish the dinner, a person mostly a women, sometimes accompanied by a child, enters the street. Both are carrying aluminium utensils. She would then shout with maximum humility, " Vadu aljo Maa Baap". At some distance the same appeal is repeated and then meekly they go to a central place and wait. Both are barefoot has a bigger utensil and the child has a smaller one, for solid and liquid food respectively.

One after another some member from the family, mostly women and kids come out with food, and from a little distance shall empty the food in the utensils held by the women and the kid. Every time that someone comes, the women plays two functions. Firstly, to accept the food with expression of thanks in the eyes saying, "lao Maa Baap" (Give us kind masters) and secondly be vigil that her child does not even by an accident touch the one who gives the food. The most important is also to see that the child does not spill the food.

There is someone else, also waiting in the street, the dogs. The family members shall walk out with two separate plates, one to be emptied in the utensil and on a big stone plate, fixed at a place for the dogs. Sometimes the dog will smell the food and without touching it, walk away.

After waiting for some time on realization that no more food shall be coming they will walk away to their house for dinner. Three kinds of food is given to them. Fresh but not consumed, fresh which is consumed but in form of leftovers in the plate, especially from the children who can not finish everything on their plate, and the third kind of food being the leftover from the afternoon.

Children on either side learn simultaneously. How to give and what to give and how to receive. The only people who come to ask for food are from the community called bhangis or scavengers. Sometime even beggar come and beg for food but they will name the food that they would like to have i.e. They will say " Please give me some vegetable."

3.3 Baa, would you please pour water for me ?

Baa Paani Redi Aljo.

A woman of high caste is addressed as 'Baa' dalits are not allowed in many villages to draw water from the well. The worst is that scavengers are not allowed to well, meant for Dalits. They have to wait at the side, until a high caste lady has some mercy and pour some water in their pots.

Specially in the agriculture season, when the sowing operation are on, one has to wait for hours to get a pot of water.

3.4 A Kind of wild grass

Dabhdo

Dabhdo, the grass has multi utilities in villages, specially to save the family from the wrath of super natural elements. A little Dabhdo is always put along with the dead body in the grave, it is also required when there is sun eclipse which is believed to bring disaster to the family. The sun during the eclipse is believed to be possessed by 'Rahu' a demon. Therefore to save the family from likely disaster, during the sun eclipse Dabhdo is thrown on the roof of the house.

Dabhdo is always handled on such occasions by Bhangi. If at all the worth comes it shall come to him.

3.5 Zampdo And Zampdi

Gods and Goddesses can be divided into two parts; of the upper castes and of the rural, lower caste poor, who mostly have their own local village goddess (called Gram-devi or Gram-devta). These local gods-goddesses are not a part of the classical Brahminical Hindu religion, and can be appeased only by "black" magic rituals.

There are some who bring love, compassion and wealth. There are others who bring wrath and disaster and have to be feared. It is interesting to note that all good (who promote welfare) i.e. Saraswati (Goddess of education), Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), Brahma (the creator) are worshipped by the high castes. They are painted as artistic and beautiful personalities, fair and attractive with compassion and beautiful personalities, fair and attractive with compassion in their eyes.

Bad Gods (who bring destruction) i.e. Meldi (who ask for child sacrifice), Kalka (Black with long tongue) are worshipped by the poor. Hadaksha (the Goddess of rabbies) is worshipped by Bhangis. The Gods for the poor promote only destruction and fear.

Similarly it is believed that close contact with Bhangi, whether dead or alive is equally harmful. The ghost of a Bhangi male is known as Zampdo and the Female one as Zampdi. All other ghosts can be appeased but not Zampdo and Zampdi.

Therefore one does not find a Bhangi roaming around after dark during the pre- diwali festivals. They are scared that they shall be subjected as the victims of supernatural elements. This is a good trick to keep Bhangis away during the fun and frolic, which is the major attraction of these festivals.

3.6 Burial Cloth covering the dead body.

Kafan And Loogdu

End of life journey is death. The dead body of a male is covered with white cloth and the female body with red cloth, known as kafan and loogdu. Just before the body is laid to the final rest in grave the cloth is removed and hanged to a bushy shrub.

After the burial, the Bhangi takes home the Kafan for a new dress.

Part- IV : Prohibitions

4.1 Marriage Procession can not enter the village.

Jaan Gaam Mathi Na Kathay

The marriage procession of a Bhangi can not enter the village from the main gate. Similarly they can not decorate themselves with jewellery or good shining cloths. There have been serious incidents of attacks on the scavengers for not having obeyed the above rules. They can not hire music parties on the occasions as done by other. A young boy was beaten up because he had put his shirt in.

4.2 Can we celebrate pre-marriage ceremony ?

Phuleku Pheravvu ke Nahin ?

Phuleku is a wedding ceremony where the boy, with flower garland around his neck. Painted with termarine powder (believed to be skin purifier as well as skin shiner) and with a knife and coconut in hand (knife to protect against the evils) is invited around to all the families of his community. He is fed with sweets and given young girls who shall be chanting marriage songs.

In Higher caste communities the same ceremony has added elements. The boy is on a horse back, going around on public roads with musical instruments and firecrackers.

Dalits are not allowed to do anything by which their ceremony matches with the one of higher caste. There have been incidents of mass attack where dalits had tried to sit on the horseback for the ceremony.

4.3 Which way shall we carry the dead ?

Maaiyaat Kyan Thi Kadhsu ?

There is always a cause for worry when someone dies in the community. The dead body of Dalits can not be carried out to the cemetery by the main village gate, for it would defile the village. Often, therefore it's a long detour by the time the body reaches the final destination.

4.4 (And, we dropped ourselves from the School)

Ane Ame Bhanta Bhanta Utri Gaya

Sangeeta, now 14 yrs., describes how she was pushed to the last bench in the class by teacher. Earlier she scored very good marks. But she and other children felt psychologically so harassed by the teacher that they dropped out of the school.

"I had dreams that one day i shall be the nurse or the Doctor... but i have become the scavenger. All my dreams have shattered" unable to continue she breaks down in tears.

4.5 Can't you see ? Have you eyes blasted off ?

Bhadto Nathi ? Ankho Phuti Gayee Chhe ?

One hears this common phrase, whenever a scavenger community person approaches a higher caste person and thereby comes at a close distance. The connotation is for untouchability. The former has to stand or walk at such a distance that his shadow does not fall over the latter.

4.6 Who will make grain flour for us.

Darav Vanu Dukh

In many villages the flour mills owned by high castes do not grind flour for scavengers. They have to go on cycle to other villages for the purpose. This is a major problem we have seen in the villages of patdi taluka, in surendranagar district.

4.7 You, get up from here

Ey Utho Ahintha

In a village called Zanand, 70 Km. away from the state capital, the scavengers are in really difficult position. The village has no waste land, as the village being close to the river and the land being fertile, all waste lands have been encroached. The problem for Bhangis : Where to go for toilet ? Wherever they go, While they are in the middle of defecation process, someone or the other of the high caste will force them to get up and go away. This applies to even women.

4.8 Sit on the floor.

Niche Bes

The Bhangi or other Dalits, though elected as the members in the local self government, shall not be allowed to sit on the chair. They have to sit on the floor. There are times, when they are not summoned for meetings. Later their signature or thumb prints are acquired as proof they have attended the meeting.

4.9 Is Mohan home ?

Mohan Gher Chhe ?

Mohanbhai is my colleague in his early forties. He belongs to the community it was dark all over and we were waiting for the dinner to get ready. Someone shouted at the end of the street. On his return i inquired as to who was the caller and i learned that it was the village postman. The post is not delivered at home. Mohanbhai however being a worker in delivered the post at the end of the street.

4.10 Get the Ram's-god's cup.

Ram patar Utaril Laav

'Ram patar' is a name for a cup made from soil, kept separately for Dalits in almost all upper caste houses. It is placed over the outer pillar, under the roof. So when any Dalit member goes to that particular house, they are offered in that. After the tea. Which is poured in the cup above, he has to wash (again the water for the purpose shall be poured from above) it and place it at its original place.

'Ram' is the name of the lord, after whose name the cup is named. For Dalits, including scavenger, the very fact that they were offered tea, by a high caste person is an occasion of pride. In a village, there are times when the exploitation shall not be direct. The community leaders shall be used over a cup of tea to be mediators. The leaders hold quite a clout over the community. In cases of borrowing money from the landlords, one has to go via these community leaders.

Part-V : Desperate search for subsidiary sources of income

5.1 Collecting bones from garbade.

Hadka Vinvana

Adults and children collect bones, are collected separately along with paper and glass pieces, to be sold for a petty sum in the market.

5.2 Supda and Indhoni

Supda means a strew made plate type article, used to clean the grain before cooking, whereby it will be separated from the small particles of hay and other waste material. Indhoni, is a grass made small round article which women place on thier heads to support water pots.

For Bhangis the only 'clean' means of earning some petty income is to make two articles of household use dried grass. There are known as '**Supda** and **Indhoni**' used by all the primitive barter economy of the village the Bhangis are paid in king (grain) and not cash. Buyers are few and far between. The only significance is that these articles are not considered polluted by their touch, and that in a small way they are allowed to become artisans for a while.

Part-VI Self-perception and as perceived by others

6.1 Destiny Inscribed by goddess Fate on the sixth day after the birth

Chhathhi Na Lekh

After the child is born, on the sixth day a ceremony is conducted. A piece of paper and pencil is kept under the pillow, over which the new born baby is sleeping. It is believed that Goddess Fate or Vidhata inscribes the fate of the new born, which can never be undone. No wonder, most Bhangis believe thier present fate to be divinely ordained.

6.2 Sir, we are like animals

Saheb Ame Rahya Dhor

Whenever you enter a scavenger colony and start a dialogue about getting organized or fight, someone or the other shall say, " How can we understand all these. We are like animals."

6.3 Boyes have names like waste, unclean, dusty, idiot etc.

Kachro, Melo, Dhudiyo, And bogho.

These are common names found if persons in the community. One can add more to the list. In Gujarat, all male names carry 'Bhai (brother) and female ben (sister) behind their names. But not for Bhangi and Dalits. Even the government records would describe their names as most insulting. The rest of the communities shall address Dalits in the same insulting tone. On the other hand an elderly Dalit person dare not address a feudal kid without respect. In cities now the generation is names better.

6.4 He is completely rotten, very sick

Akho Ne Akho Hadi Gayo chh

This is how a very sick person is described in the community. The phrase i.e. 'sadi javu' (rotten up) is used in the context of vegetables or fruits. A study conducted by a special team set up by the planning commission of India to study the health problems of scavengers say that scavenger are more vulnerable to anemia, Diarrhoea with Respiratory infection, Skin diseases, Jaundice and other ailments compared to others.

6.5 From where shall!! I start counting my sorrow ?

Dukh Chyanthi Ganvoo ?

Especially the old within Bhangis are seen in a pathetic condition. Crippled by age and negligence they are a helpless lot. One only hears from their mouth the repeated wish of an early death.

6.6 Will You have tea ?

Cha Piso ?

Even when the scavenger knows that you do not consider them low as others do, every time they shall make it sure by asking whether you will have tea or water at their house. Those who believe in untouchability as far as food is concerned, like many social workers we have seen (although they will sit in their house), Shall deny politely, "no thanks, we just had." Scavenger are shrewd enough, and they will ask such people, "If you want we can get tea made in the market for you."

In cases major atrocities on Dalits, the police protection is provided. The police from high caste will not receive even water from Dalits. In such cases Dalits shall go to the high castes, with whom they had a dispute, and request to provide food and water to the police.

6.7 How about a Bhangi having sex with you ?

Tane Bhangiya Rakhe ?

This is worst abuse one direct to a non Bhangi woman. It is provocative enough to murder the abuser.

6.8 Oh, i see ! You are going around with a newspaper !

Chhapu Laine Fare Chhe ?

Few days before the high court struck down the system of manual scavenging in village Ranpur, Kishorbhai, a leader of the community was with

a broom in his hands. Now, he bought a news paper. This was the comment passed by the high caste merchants as he passed through the market area.

6.9 Brother of the Bhangi..... Bhangi behaviour.

Bhangiya Ni Bhaee..... Bhangiya Weda

Whenever some one from any other community except the Bhangi behaves in unpleasant manner, he and his behaviour shall be described in the above manner. This is the worst kind of humiliation to a non Bhangi person.

6.10 Bhangis have crossed their limit

Mara Haara Bhangda Phati Gaya Chhe

This is the remark full of contempt and full of intolerance made by high caste, Which also carries a bad word. Whenever a scavenger is finely dressed, going to college, has purchased a vehicle or done anything which suggest that his financial or social position has improved, the remark follows. "Mara Haara" means my brother- in - low, and 'Phati gaya' means, they have crossed boundary. In crude sense it means 'they gone above their status'.

6.11 Scholarship for the "children of persons engaged in Filthy And Unhygienic Occupations".

This is how the government has framed has a scheme to financially assist the school going children, specially of Bhangis. The teacher is in charge of applying, securing and finally disbursing the scholarships from the government. The Duties and powers of the teacher are discretionary.

There have been several cases where we had to intervene and force the teacher to pay up the scholarship money to the parents, which was not done for four years.

6.12 Loans For Dhols And Nagaras (Drums)

The Government of Gujarat has a special scheme for Bhangis. Financial aid is given if they want to purchase, Dhols and Nagaras. 'Dhol' is a drum tied around the neck and played. 'Nagara' is the drum which is places on the soil and beaten.

This is in pursuance of the 'self-employment program; with a taste of Entrepreneur Development'.

6.13 You do not have any experience of business.

Tamne Dhandha No Anubhav Nathi

The Central Government in early 1990s declared open 'National Scavengers Scheme'. The aim was rehabilitation. Package consisted of part grant and part bank loan, to scavengers for anything else, but scavenging.

One Bhangi youth applied for the scheme. The Government authorities approved part grant and forwarded the application to the local bank for loan. The bankers told Bhangis, "since you have no experience in Business, we cannot give loan." The loan was desired for capital money to buy and sell dress material. The loan amount was Rs. 5000/- (US \$ 120)

"How can I have experience, unless I do it ?" Was the argument of the pleading applicant.

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"We !! that is your business". Said the banker. However, Bank expressed willingness to offer a loan, for purchase of Drum.

Part-VII : Some Stories of Experiences

7.1 The Story Of Chhaniya Ghaun.

"Chhaniya" means something which is immersed in the dung of an animal, specifically in this case of a bullock, and "Ghaun" in Gujarati language, means wheat. In a village called Vataman, in Ahmedabad District, my friend and colleague showed me that in the thrashing season, the thrashing season, the wheat crop is thrashed by the bullocks manually, through a process of crushing wheat crop with their feet by walking over it round and round until, the corns are separated from the hay.

In the process the bullocks eat lots of raw wheat and discard the same, indigestible because of overeating, in the state of diarrhoea, with the dung in form of dribbling slurry. There are live human beings waiting for the bullocks to discard the dung. Then fill it in the bamboo baskets, bring home the stuff, mix it with lots of water, separate the wheat, which shall settle at the bottom of the vessel. The wheat is then dried in the open sun to be then taken to the flour mill, and consumed. The wheat collected like this can take care of the family for two or three months.

7.2 The Story Of Laxman.

Laxman is eight years old. He is staying with his grand parents. His parents are away in search of labour. The Village is Vejalka in Ahmedabad District. There is a small pan - cigarette shop in the village. The owner is a Patel the high caste.

The shop is a popular place for poor children. From here they can entertain themselves by watching television, in a house. It was a bad day in Laxman's life. He was so much engrossed watching a film in the television that he put his hand on the pan shop. The owner asked him to remove his hand. Laxman was too engrossed to hear. The owner threw a handful of wet lime paste, used in the pan at Laxman, but it fell on his clothes. It is the second throw that went straight into the eyes of the boy.

The eye specialist are not hopeful to save his one eye. I remember that day two months back, when Laxman came to my office with his grand father. He forgot his pain, as he concentrated on the refrigerator, closing and opening the same, wondering at the coolness. He asked me many questions about the refrigerator.

It was time I took him to an English newspaper's office. He, on climbing the vehicle, told the grandfather, " Papa, how nice this car is. Aren't we sitting for

the first time." All along the road in the city, the evening life flooded with lights kept him amazed with open mouth.

I asked him whether he would go to school now. He said, " If i go now, the student and teacher would tease me by calling me blind so i will go only after i am well."

7.3 I did not get the better part.

Haaro Maal Mara Bhag Na Ayo.

The place is a village in the Vadhwan taluka of Surendranagar District in Gujarat. The reference is regarding the injustice meted out to a person, the complainant being a person from Bhangi community over distribution of meat from a dead animal. When an animal is dead in the village, a team of at least four people are required to be able the corpse of the animal to an assigned place or where the assigned is at a far distance, it is dragged to a secluded corner of the road.

The first stage is skinning which required skill, as the well discarded skin would fetch a better price in the market then the one which shall be with punctures. The second stage is to separate meat according to the quality as certain parts are considered better than the other parts. The third stage is distribution of meat, where survival of the fittest applies.

The quarrel was that the scavenger did not get a better part as the same part was cornered by another member who belonged to a higher caste, although a dalit himself. And as the matter could not be resolved amicably, it resulted into a police complaint. The police was more than puzzled not quite sure as to how to handle the matter and sought the help from our organization i.e. Navsarjan.

Two of our colleagues reached the village to find that the aggrieved party had gathered outside the house of a retired police officer from the same village, who belonged to a non-Dalit high caste. It is a usual practice to beg for counselling from the higher castes in resolving inter community matters. Definitely that were all standing outside the house making representation.

When the retired police officer came to know that two workers of the organization has arrived the invited them in the house. One dare not observe untouchability with the workers. One of the two workers was from the same community, a Bhangi. Suddenly there was hue and cry as the host offered drinking water to the workers, from the people standing outside saying, " Sir, He is our Bhangi, a lower caste, he can not drink water from your house." There was so much heat in the environment that as the workers observed, the aggrieved party and forgotten completely about their original; grievance.

The issue to save the master from any defilement that might come to him from the action to their community member by drinking water from the former's house had taken the precedence.

The story itself is nauseating. But in the area where 60 % population have to migrate for more than six months a year in search of labour, the poorest have no option but to eat what is available.

The incident of 1920s flashes through the mind, when Gandhiji gave a call to Dalits to give up eating the dead animals, a factor he thought distanced them from others. He received two letters in response. The first letter was from a teacher of rural Calcutta. He wrote that when he gave up eating the dead animal, the same was throttled in his mouth by caste Hindus, saying that it was his religion to eat it.

The second letter was from a businessman from Bombay. He apprehended that if Dalits gave up eating dead animals, go for education and thereby enter the business, what will the caste Hindus do ?

7.4 The Story Of Young Girls.

It was wedding time in the Bhangi colony, when few youth from the Darbar community, fully drunk entered and started making gestures at young girls. The host went to the Darbar elders to request their youth not to harass them, specially when there were many guests.

Everyone thought the matter had resolved until the same youth returned at midnight. On request from a very elderly and his wife to have mercy they both were beaten up. These kind of incidents were not new to the community in the village. A year back one of the girl was taken away along with the cot on which she fast asleep by feudals. She was returned almost after two days. Saying she had lost her way and that they had found her.

7.5 Unemployed Bhangi Primary Teachers.

The hope for a prompt job has pushed many Bhangi parents to invest everything they have to enable children to study at the teacher's training college in 1992, Navsarjan organized a protest program in the former state capital. The day was 15th August, the independence day. The demand was for a change in the exiting reservation policy, the main factor responsible for rendering over 1000 Bhangi trained teachers unemployed.

The policy reserved 2 % seats for the admission at the teachers college. This was done with acceptance that due to all kinds of hardships the Bhangi student can not secure more percentage in the matriculation exams.

But when it come to jobs, it was on the basis of merit. Merit was drawn from the combined marks of both, matriculation and college. In the process most Bhangi students never stood a chance as they had lower percentage in matriculation compared to others.

Our demand to reserve 2 % of jobs to balanced the position was accepted but never implemented. The entire reservation policy has changed now.

The changed policy has made it compulsory for schools to advertise for all vacant posts. The schools are liberty however, to turn the 'reserved post' as the 'unreserved post', if they do not find a suitable candidate after three

rounds of advertisements and personal interviews. The Bhangis or Dalits never prove to be 'suitable' in schools managed by caste Hindus and their organizations.

One job however is reserved 100 % for Bhangis, the scavenging.

To conclude, it is not enough to develop beautiful plans for the rehabilitation of scavengers. The moot question is whether the state in power recognizes them as human beings.