
“Manual Scavenging” Caste and Ignorance of Authority**P. ALAN PAUL**

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ABSTRACT

Dalit community people are considered as outcasts according to the Hindu Varna system, and they are treated violently everywhere. Manual scavenging is a degraded work that is assigned only for Dalit community people, especially women. Many Indian villages expect Dalit women to do manual scavenging, and 'upper caste' people prevent them from getting other jobs. Equal status for them in society is demanded, and the government of India is responsible for protecting the oppressed class from the atrocities that happen against them. They are suppressed in all ways and are dehumanized. This paper will look into the misguidance done by the authority itself, which leads to the failure in implementing the laws that protect the oppressed class.

Keywords: *Caste, Dalit, Dalit women, Manual scavenging.***Introduction:**

Manual scavenging is the worst surviving symbol of untouchability - National Advisory Council resolution, October 23, 2010. Manual scavenging is the process in which humans are involved in cleaning human excreta manually, and it is mostly practiced in India. This process is considered to be one of the evil practices which are still followed in the country. Many laws are put forward by the government of India to end this practice from society, but the failure to implement the policies stands as a barrier in bringing hope to the people who do that work. Manual scavenging is considered to be a work that is reserved for "lower caste" people. Manual scavengers are forced to do the work in most places without their wish; they do not have an option to quit as they have a family to feed. The job is filled with risks as there are no safety measures initiated by the government. Many lives have been lost, but it is continuing in this country. Caste politics is the root that gives life to evil practices which are still not abolished in the country. The study explores the problems faced by manual scavengers and also the negligence of the Indian government in providing proper measures to stop this practice due to the dominance of the "upper caste". I have chosen the stage play '*Manjal*'[1] as my primary text. It is a Tamil play directed by Srijith Sundaram, and it addresses the pain of manual scavengers; how they are treated in society. It acts as a tool to articulate the subaltern's voices; the cruelties they face in their everyday life. This play also shows the difference in priorities between the 'low caste' and "upper caste." The "lower caste" people are denied justice in every aspect; the courts, responsible for providing justice, also ignore their presence. The reason behind all these atrocities is 'Caste.' Caste is the root problem in dividing the entire independent country. An individual or group is identified with their caste, and it has a significant effect in judging the group. According to the Hindu Varna system, Dalit people are considered to be outcasts, untouchables, and it is still followed in many places. They are not allowed to live in the areas where 'upper caste' people live. They should not attend festivals; visit temples; share community sources for water. Manual scavengers are mostly from the Dalit community as they are not offered any other works in society.

Literature review:

Violence against the Dalit community is not something rarely found in this country; it has become a routine in the contemporary time. Kumar's 'Nature of Violence against Dalit women'[2] talks about the cruelties faced by Dalit women in society. Violence against the Dalit community has an association with their occupation; their nature of work, such as manual scavengers. Kumar has given the data of women workers of the Dalit community in many states collected by Singh in his paper. More than 95% of manual scavengers are women from those communities, and they are not given any other job to work. More employment systems should be open to the Dalit community women. Kumar's article would be helpful for my research as it focuses on the suppression of Dalit women. Adding on, the Devadasi system and Jogini system, which are still followed in some villages in India, suppress Dalit women. This article provides data on physical abuses such as sexual harassment and also the battle for justice. Joslin, in her article titled 'Oppression of Dalit women,' has analyzed the events of Bama's *Sangati*[3]. Chapter 2 of her paper focuses on the caste and class inequality followed in the society, which affects the Dalit women to a greater extent than others. The women from the community are harassed by the 'upper-caste' women and men for their social status; this paper lists the reasons behind their suffering. Poverty is one of the important elements which make them dependent. Secondly, chapter 3 is about Male chauvinism, which is also a major reason for women being invisible to the outside world. The patriarchal system has made women submissive to men. The religious ideas have never supported women but have made them slaves to the men of their caste and others as well. Women are portrayed as men's pleasure. Chapter 4 talks about the importance of education, which can free them from the chains of patriarchal society and also religious myths. Bama has ended her work with a positive message to women. The article 'THE DALITS WOMEN MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU' by Santhi[3] talks about the discrimination happening against Dalit women in many aspects of society. She says the community themselves did not have an understanding among them. The education to the Dalit community was refused by Brahmins, who are the 'upper caste' of the strata. The 'upper caste' felt that it is not okay to provide education to a Dalit. The formation of the TNWF movement helps in uplifting the lives of Dalit women and get justice for the discrimination that happens against them. The article tries to show that Dalit women are treated lower than men, even in their community. In the article 'The Politics of being a Dalit Woman,' Ghosh[4] has talked about the book *Dalit Women: Vanguard of an Alternative Politics in India* by Kapadia [5]. The discrimination Dalit men faces will have

its effects on the women of the community. Men use women to express their pain, and it leaves women hurt. This article also shows the struggle Dalit women face to enter politics in Tamil Nadu. This article concludes by showing the religious conversion of Dalit women to Christianity (Pentecostal). This is due to the violence they face in their own community. In the article 'Making differences visible: An Intersectional Feminist analysis of Dalit,' Azam[6] talks about the lives of "lower caste" women, which are suppressed by 'upper caste' people for decades. Women are capable of doing everything but are suffering in this patriarchal society. 'Upper caste' men fulfill their sexual desires with 'lower caste' women and treat them badly. The abuses which upper-caste men do to Dalit women are considered to be a custom by them, but upper-caste women are respected on the other hand. 'Upper caste' women face violence but not like the ones Dalit women face in everyday life. 'Dr. Ambedkar & Upliftment of Dalit Women' article talks about the vision Ambedkar had in the lives of Dalit women. Ambedkar wanted women to be educated, and he relentlessly worked for that. He believed in challenging the religious conventions to break it. He was not ready to blame the Dalit women for anything as he understood the root problems behind their unawareness. 'Societal Status of Dalit Women in India' talks about the cruelties faced by the Dalit women in the patriarchal society even in this contemporary era. Daily life for Dalit women is a battle. They have no freedom to enjoy anything in their life; even freedom is denied to them in their families. Only the son can inherit the land and everything they own; daughters are not given importance as they will be married to some other. Their lives revolve around men from their birth without any independence. Dalit Woman Writing: The Unheard Voice by Patchala Rajesh talks about the unheard and unnoticed works of Dalit women. The article shows the women freedom fighters belonged to a 'lower caste' who went unnoticed after independence. This article also articulates the poems by women who tried to show their pain through poetry. 'Dalit women life-narratives and literature as experience' article also talks about Bama's work *Sangati*[3]. A way to bring out their voices is through literary works, which can really create an impact on society. The narratives can give life to the unheard voices. The violence against Dalit people is always seen as an attack from the 'upper caste' people, but hardly a few researchers question the role of the government. The delay in implementing the laws which protect the oppressed community has a connection with the people who are in power.

Research Methodology:

I have used Textual analysis method in this paper as it helps in interpreting the text. The text can be analyzed in many ways; there are hidden messages in the text to society.

Discussion:

The play starts by explaining the title '*Manjal*'[1] with the idea behind it. Manjal means the color yellow in Tamil, and the reason they titled it that way is that it symbolizes human excreta. Manual scavengers do not like the color yellow as they are made to clean and carry the feces with their hands. In one scene of the play, a pregnant woman could be seen cleaning the toilets of the 'upper caste,' and the way she will be treated would be inhumane. The woman will be sharing these incidents with the audience. A place where she falls down would be cleaned with water by the 'upper caste' house woman. These things show how inhumane are the cruelties that happen against the women who do manual scavenging. 'Untouchability' may be considered as a sin and crime, but it is forced upon the oppressed. The woman mentions the health issues they face due to the work atmosphere. We all witnessed how hard a sanitary worker's job is during Covid-19 time. It needs safety measures as it involves risk to their lives. Manual scavengers get sick very easily; it may even end in death, but still, proper safety measures are not provided. Women were forced to come to work in many places even if they are pregnant, and it leads to the abortion of the fetus. Women who do this work have no other way because they need to feed their families. These things show that the dirt is not in the hands of 'untouchables' but in the minds of the 'upper caste.' Dalit community people are involved in more abusive works and are exploited. Another scene from the play shows how the death of a worker happens and what effect it leaves on the family. The worker loses his dignity and also peace at home for doing this work. His wife and children are criticized for his occupation, and it made him come to a decision not to do this work anymore. But he was convinced by a contractor who works for an 'upper caste' landlord. He will be offered more money to do the job, and it leads to losing his life. The worker was given alcohol by the contractor before getting into the septic tank to forget the smell. But once he is dead, the report will be against the worker by stating that he has consumed alcohol and working. The injustice that happened to him will have its effects on the family; his son and wife will be forced to work. The manual scavengers who are asked to clean the sewers are not given any precautionary dress to save their life. Even now, there are lots of deaths happening due to this, but only a few are reported. According to the laws passed to prevent the people from manual scavenging, there is no such work present in this country, but we hear death news in many places. This shows the influence of the 'upper caste' being present in the government. The government is responsible for finding a proper remedy, but there is no hope for a remedy in the near future. There is a report stating that the year 2019 had the highest number of deaths due to manual scavenging in the last five years. Manual scavenging has affected the people who clean toilets and carry the waste above their heads in terms of aesthetics. For most people, rain can evoke a good feel and make them relax or write poetry. But for the people who do this work, rain is an enemy. The waste they carry reaches their faces and bodies, which will make them dirty as well as unhealthy. They do it in vain; they do not have any other option. They are not allowed to shelter under any shops or any building. The idea of aesthetics will be different for an ordinary person and a Dalit person. The atrocities happening against the Dalit community has been steadily increasing in the country, but justice is getting delayed and denied at last. The only source which can provide justice is the government. The government has introduced many laws years back to prevent the Dalit people from facing atrocities by the 'upper caste' people. Still, those laws are not being followed by the officials. The people in charge are not able to act because the power is in the hands of the 'upper caste' people. To add on, the Indian railways have reported that toilets in the trains that run in India will directly discharge the waste on the tracks. The tracks are cleaned by humans, and still, the government says that there are no manual scavengers. It is the whole responsibility of the government to abolish these practices which suppress a particular community of people. The delay in implementing the laws shows that the government is one of the critical violators of the Indian constitution.

Conclusion:

The caste barrier is the root cause of all the problems. When a Dalit worker stops doing the work he is assigned to do by the 'upper caste' people, he is beaten to death. A Dalit cannot expect independence until a strong law will be enacted and implemented with strict actions. More employment opportunities should be provided to the Dalit community. Some machinery inventions do not require human support to clean the sewers. The government should initiate measures to use such types of equipment. The government has to ensure that no 'low caste' people should be forced to do such works.

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