WASTE ECONOMIES: LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL INEQUALITIES

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ABSTRACT

In this seminar I look at some key cultural and social concerns fuelling the crisis of waste in the world, with specific focus in India. I propose a series of consideration regarding the potential nexus of environmental pollution, social and cultural prejudice and global power relations. Such consideration illustrate how each problem waste, inequality and environmental pollution – will fundamentally shape one – another over the purse of the coming decades, with differential impacts across socio – economics divides.

Keywords: waste economies, local perspective, global inequalities

INTRODUCTION

Waste might become the challenge of worldwide civilization, and India is a visible example of that environmental problem. India is one of the largest populated nation in the world, makes environmental problem even worse. In India, dirt and rubbish is closely related and identified to the low caste of society. Therefore, being low caste and dirty is a common thing. This article approaches waste as a national question closely related to that of economic growth (how to balance middle-class spending power with environmental needs), public health (how to survive from polluted water), and natural resources (how to keep the waters clean when 60 per cent of India's sewage ends up in water channels and on open ground untreated), all of those issues are dicussed by considering local people perspectives.

In India attitudes about ritual purity and pollution often collide with scientific understanding of waste and dirt and of sanitation and hygiene. Some local people and many pilgrims in Varanasi bathe in the polluted Ganga and rinse their mouthes beside outlets for untrated sewages. Devotees are unpertubed. They may be aware of the physical pollution of the Ganga, but pollution does not compromise for them the river's sacred and purifying properties. Their understandin of waste generaly ditiguishes between waste as dirt or filt (gandagi, aswatchhta) and the pollution associated with religious impurity (ashuddha, apavitra). The first pair of words commonly refers to the external forms of waste produced by a society undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization. The second pair of words comonly refers to the ritual impurities incurred in the course of daily life, which must be ritually removed to regain purity. Thus the well washed hand of a human being may be spurned. Even the cup that such a hand touched may be thrown away as assudha, something touched and therefore tainted but brown Ganga water may be used to ritually cleanse the mouth. Local wisdom, believe and thus becomes its culture is a shaping agent for its people lifestyle. It is the biggest challenge in maintaining the efforts on making India cleaner and healthier.

Several programs had been held to solve the problems, such as Clean India proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He casts himself as the passionate defender of public order. His campaign 'Sachh Bharat' to clean streets and eliminate public defecation under slogans such as 'Toilets first, temples second' aims to ensure that by the time of Gandhi's 150th birthday anniversary in 2019, there will 90 million toilets around the country. All this takes place against the backdrop of India's caste system that associates waste with people who handle it, adding the worry of ritual notions of pollution to the list of waste's risks. Yet it is only a political movement and is not as effective as it felt. This vision of Clean India highlights a neat, sanitized public space appealing to middle classes and the better – off. But it often excludes the poor. Public shaming of unfortunate transgressors of the Swachh Bharat vision suggest that there may be little tolerance of people unable to fit the description of dutiful citizens committed to the regimen of cleanliness and hygiene. The poor are marginalized not simply for ritual and economic reasons but as deficient citizens. How environmental issues even happen in India? What are the implication to people's health and economy? Those questions would be answer on the discussion.

DISCUSSION

1. India: Culture, Sanitation and Economy

India's density of population, intricate cultural practices,and pulsating politics make it essential for sucessful programs to respond to local needs when (and if) they adopt technical and managerial practices from elsewhere. Simple solutions may appeal to non liberal ideas and enterpreneural spirits, but ground – level experience tells a more complicated story of how people think about the experience waste. Existing system of waste recovery feature and array of actors; scavengers, waste pickers, garbage buyers, and a host of processors and receivers. They are all linked to each other by an internal logic dictated by economic, social and cultural relationship.

Questions of social class have teased administrators, social scientist, Marxist and marketers for more than a hundred of years. From the 1920s, India's communist struggled to build class – based movements to advance the revolution, adhering the ideas of Marx and Llenin and following isntruction from the Soviet Union. They rarely suceeded. From the 1990s, capitalists and their marketing directors identified "India's growing middle class" as an aspirational group with varied levels of disposable income, defined by their desire for consumer goods and the resulting garbage they produced. But what defines the Indian middle class, and how many people constitute it? Estimates and definition vary widely.

India faces a second extraordinary challenge in adressing the cultural relationship between waste and caste. We touch on aspects of caste throughout the book, but they receive extended treatment. Ideas of "pure" and "impure", which have little to do with scientific principles of hygiene, continue to inform everyday practice among large sections of Hindu society. Althought untouchability has been illegal for more than three generations, 190 million people born into this group are still

stigamtized by other people's belief that they are polluting. The most polluting of all are those who deal with human waste and refuse.

In a number of Indian traditions, austerity and self – denial are valued as examples of virtuous conduct, and Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation preached simplicity and self sufficency as essential elements of free and fulfilled India. Mahatma Gandhi's Independence struggle promoted frugality and village life centred around agriculture and crafts. Although these ideologies haven't prevented the sprawling urbanisation of today and its pressures on waste management, statistics affirm that Indians remain prudent consumers: an average American creates 150 times more waste than an average Indian But effective capture, reuse or disposal of discarded things requires more than reliance on old – and attenuating-ways. It requires systematic thoroughness, technical innovation, realization of an urgent need to change and respect and fair reward for workers at all links of the waste chain.

Civic conciousness and public spiritedness are difficult to imagine or practice for those who live precariously. People who lack of secure shelter and workplace regard public areas as spaces in which they have little investment. At its most threatening, public space is where they encounter police persecution, harassment and humiliation as scavengers and random defecators. For them, the morally binding contract of the Clean India pledge, let alone its practical application, is meaningless, and they appear left outside the purview of waste-free nation. Memories of previous slum clearance campaign bring with them anxiety that mariginalized population will be swept out of sight along with beggars and stray dogs. The Swachh Bharat campaign suggests a muscular brand of Hindu nationalism. Calls to protect "our mothers, sisters and daughters" from the indignities of open defacation insinuated a patriarchal guardianship. What might seem inocuous action by civil society groups, such as the movement generated by the Ugly Indian can lead to aggressive enforcement. New rules imposed on cleaned up urban spaces may exclude everyday activities of hawkers, peddlers and street vendors, let alone waste pickers. The goal of Swachh Bharat mean that governmentsand their servants are under pressure to produce results and declare yet another area open – defacation – free. Photographing villagers who defecate in the open, blowing whistles like football refrees to point out and shame such people, and eve physically assaulting them became part of Swachh Bharat story in 2017.

People in other place and times have confronted the bloating mountains of detritus that consumer's capitalism and urbanization produce, and in the nineteenth century India's sanitary practices were not markedly less hygienic than elsewhere in the world. The "sanitary knowledge" that Florence Nightingale referred to in the 1860s was little more than a generation of old Britain and existed more in the theory than in practice. The question of 'why is India so filthy?' is related to the British sanitation history. The Landmark research that documented the foulness of Britain's growing industrial cities was Edwin Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, a "masterpiece of protest literature", published in 1842, which led to parliementary inquiries and legislation. The evidence gathered in Britain described conditions that were similar to India. Furthermore, the Great Stink of London in 1858 when the River Thames was an open sewer bulging

with diseases (even Queen Victoria was not spared from contracting typhoid at sixteen), in order to state that Britain was already helpless in governing its own waste, let alone that of its imperial subjects. When Britain finally woke up to its responsibilities in the late nineteenth century, around the time of India's bubonic plague, its response was excessive quarantines and occasional home demolitions that met with little support and gave public health a troubled legacy.

Garbage and crime often go together, including big time crime. Garbage – related crime in India appears to be common but not at the scale or for the high stakes of North America and Europe. That's not surprising, because Indian capitalists have not yet found ways to turn waste into lare – scale, high value activity. However when fire burned out of control on the Deonar dump in Mumbai in 2016, journalists encountered "powerful" garbage mafia gangs who divided the site to share recycleables said to be worth Rs 6 million ($100.000) a day. The gangs had their own teams of up to a hundred waste-pickers protected and supervised by the gang's own thoughs. Gang-employed waste-pickers could earn a reasonable income in return for docility, long hours and productivity. Turf wars and murders were part of Deonar scene. In Bengaluru, people compalain of "garbage mafias" who control routes and deman ransom from local government and community groups. In Kerala, truck drivers are paid to dump waste in neighboring state. In other cities, waste-related crime may extend to the corrupt award of local contracts, theft of equipment and struggles to dominate branches of the recycling market.

2. Indian Sanitation Crisis

India has two problems that have some characteristics of a binding crisis. Each offers the potentials to heighten conciousness of the environment anc provoke change in the action of individuals and government. Neither crisis, however, threatens the imminent peril, panic or publicity of a plague epidemic.

The first is air pollution. Mumbai's notorious Deonar dump bubbles with methane gas has the flames into small fires regularly. In January 2016, it grew into major fire that made the city cough for days. It did again ten month later. This grotesque marriage of atmospheric pollution and waste crisis emphasized the immense presures on the wider environment. Ten Indian cities were in the world's top twenty worst cities for air pollution, according to a World Health Organization report in 2016. Delhi, whose air pollution traumas gain notoriety because of its air size and prominence ranked number eleven after the provincial cities of Gwalior, Allahabad, Patna and Raipur.

A concerted campaign against air pollution would do a little to help with the taming of garbage and sewage. Indeed, it could prove a distraction. Less than 5 percent of air pollution is estimated to come from the burning of garbage, even including the methane that Deonar and every dump emit everyday. Construction sites in expanding cities produce some of the dust that circulates in polluted air, along with coal fired power plants and vastly increasing number of motor vehicles. The flat dry plains of north India have always produced clouds of dust at particular seasons, and these are now augumented by the effectsof farmers burning crop stubble, which mechanized harversting leaves in the

fields. Air pollution is an urban crisis that affects everyone. “Rich or poor” Sunita Narain wrote in 2017, “We live in our airshed”. But atmospheric pollution is not something that the poor can do much about. It’s a binding crisis with the potential to awaken awareness of environment and the uncritical use of fossil fuels, but it connects only indirectly with the pollution of lands and water.

The other crisis that has potential to change behavior is the alarming level of childhood stunting and infant mortality, strongly related to open defacation. In the north Indian countryside, the children of better off rural families appear to be as vulnerable to illness and stunting as those as the poor. Flies don’t read bank statement, and unwashed fingers that feed children and that toddlers put into their own mouths can belong to rich and poor. Under the clean Indian campign, Financial Grants make it possible for large numbers of poor, rural people to build toilets, but motivation to use them – for health – convenience and status is lacking. If the wealthy were persuaded that building toilets and using them would make their children stronger and healthier, their example of toilet building and usage would increase the desirability of a toilet.

These are long term changes that can spread only slowly into wide wide spread pattern. Random defacation does not destoy people’s dwellings or strike them down with boils and fevers. To make the connection between listles, undersized children and fecesin fields and lanes requires the skills of imaginative advertisers using all the techniques of the mobile phone world. And even in rural India had a toilet for every family, who will remove the compost from a pit latrine, and where would the contents of an overflowing septic tank go, and who would deal with it?

India has one further asset in attempts to tame waste – its proliferation of nongovernmental organizations, right – based organizations, self – help groups, residents’ association, action groups and the like. Unlike China and other parts of the world, In India such organizations are still alowed to exist and grow, independent of the state. Indeed, it is often the state’s deficiencies that generate them. Among the forty thousand such groups that are registered, no doubt some are shady, created to benefit their organizers, as critics sometimes claim. But a great many embody characteristics that made India the vibrant, adaptable place that it is. They often form out of local frustations, but their reach and influence can be wide. Thanal, the NGO in Kkerala, began as movement to control pesticides and grew to become a vehicle for challenging government menthods of managing waste and treating waste handlers. It is now credited with inspiring cleanup strategies in one of India’s cleanest states, tinny Sikkim, high in the Himalayas, three thousand kilometres away from the steamy southwest coast, Yishey Yongda, a bureaucrat in the Sikkim government an a public face for the state’s sanitation achievements, tells interviewers that she was “inteoduced to the concept of zero waste by pioneering non profit in Kerala, Thanal”.

CONCLUSION

This article stressed the important characteristics of waste in India in the twenty – first century are unprecedented but also that some features warrant comparison to other times and places. One of

these relates to people. In summing up both the ugliness and the advances of public sanitation in Victorian times in Britain, Anthony Wohl writes, “Fortunately, men and women of compassion and sensitivity do not accept an undesirable status quo merely because prior conditions or conditions in other countries are worse. India todays shares this much with industrial Britain of long ago: people of “compassion and sensitivity” are to be found at all levels of society. They work in a political framework that still allows groups to organize, governments to be lobbied, and orthodoxy to be questioned. Conditions improve where coalitions – waste handlers, middle – class activists, professionals, officials, and politicians – devise approaches to tackle the rising tide of waste.

Such virtuous circles from here and there around the country. It would be unduly optimistic to suggest that they are destinies to expand and prosper. Economic liberalization since 1991 has encouraged capitalist activity that seeks to appropriate resources that once seemed available to anyone - such as vacant land and waste. A purely market driven approach to waste absolves the state of responsibility and leaves many at the bottom of the waste chain to fend for themselves. Socially excluded groups, whether based on caste, ethnicity or religion and discrimination. The pollution and disease accompanying the uncontrolled waste of an industrializing society ultimately belong to everyone.

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