

Introduction

Landscape of Sanitation in India: Reflections on *Swachhta*

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The sociocultural factors of caste, religion, and the notion of purity and pollution of the Indian society have determined the sanitation access, behaviour, practices, and interventions (Bean 1981; Coffey et al., 2016; Dube 1958; Khare 1962; Luthi 2014; Mohanty & Dwivedi 2019; Srinivas 1952). Religious beliefs and the concept and the traditional norms of pollution and purity being the soul of caste system which originate in Hinduism (Bean 1981; Coffey et al., 2016; Coffey & Spears 2017; Douglas 1966; Dumont 1970; Guru 2000; Khare 1962; O'Reilly & Louis 2014; Shah 2007; Srinivas 1952) governs sanitation rules, interventions, adoption, access and practices of Indian society at large (Gatade 2015; Ramaswamy 2005; Teltumbde 2014). The sanitation scholarship has echoed the unequal power social relationship between caste, wherein the higher caste symbolizes greater purity than castes which are low in ladder; the dirtiest work of cleaning waste from the streets, sewerage and emptying latrines pits is done by lowest of the low in the caste hierarchy, thus justifying the social exclusion of the lower caste (Batra 2012; Coffey et al., 2016; O'Reilly, Dhanju, & Louis 2017; Mohanty & Dwivedi 2019; Prashad 2000; Vyas & Spears 2018). Thereby, setting the much-needed scene to examine sanitation from a holistic perspective for the scholars engaged in sanitation scholarship from diverse angles.

Academic research in anthropology, history, sociology and development studies have come to be built around and structured heavily around the politics-of-access to water and sanitation. For the day-to-day survival of humans, access to water and sanitation is an eminent prerequisite, and its availability and accessibility around the globe in terms of quality and quantity has been of major concern. Around 2.2 billion people in the world do not have access to safely managed drinking water services and 4.2 billion people lack safely-managed sanitation services (UN 2020).

The United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals 2030, in its sixth goal, identifies the significance of safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene in the progress of nations. Access to water is a human right, and it is a designated to be a public good by the UN. The State is institutionally responsible for providing, ensuring, and maintaining access of water to everyone. However,

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