

COPING WITH DEGRADING WORK

A study of Mehtars in Hyderabad City

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology**

Submitted by

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For
My parents

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that, I, **Srinivas Suvvada** have carried out research embodied in the present thesis titled '**COPING WITH DEGRADING WORK: A STUDY OF MEHTARS IN HYDERABAD CITY**' and I decalare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for any award of any research degree or diploma elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

Towards an Anthropology of work:

Though the debate on the concept of work is not a new phenomenon, it received great impetus during industrial revolution, with the analysis of labour, market and related aspects. Generally, the notion of work is analyzed in terms of 'paid employment' or 'economically convertible, social or technical labour'. And some times, the broader level analyses are made using time, space, value, production, and similar units. But of late, particularly with the study of non-western societies by the western scholars, emerged certain models in analysing the traditional cultures, which lead to the understanding the occupation in relation to its social construct, while economic rationale remained as an important aspect. Particularly from these models, a greater understanding of work, and its embeddedness in a variety of structures from which it takes its organization and meaning was made possible. Though these aspects surface in western society also, religion, kinship, politics and family play important role in traditional societies. In western societies work is always seen as 'a discrete activity in a distinct economic realm' "We may look to the late eighteenth century for this separation out of the 'economic': yet, working in complex ways. ...Cultural connectedness of work in the west too, there has been the transformation of words investing work from connotations of pain and degradation to words denoting dignity and transformation of nature and man's being. These major transformations point to the need for an historical Anthropology or an Anthropological history of work."(Joyce Patrick 1987: 2)

Further, Anthropological, or empirical analysis made in traditional societies, contributed in a major way towards, understanding the 'work problem' in a holistic fashion. As Godelier points out that the division of labor is the result of the social hierarchy and not its cause, alerts us to the rich possibilities of anthropological approaches. (Godelier in Joyce Patrick 1987:2) However, the anthropological studies aimed at western industrialized societies not only presented an understanding of work culture, but also benefited from the ethnographies of the oriental. The anthropological and ethnographic accounts of work have much to offer,

bold facts of material survival The conception of work varies, in societies, and individuals, with the inherent necessities and contexts, like for example, hunter-gatherers make no distinction between work and non-work activities (Sahlins 1974), as the case is same with the people pursuing artistic activities. Some identify, 'work' as not work, but means to earn money. This variation has to consider for its cross-cultural relevance. Though it involves incentives involving 'economic' motifs or returns but there are social and cultural meanings to it. Godelier (1972:266 in S.WallMan 1979:4) points out in this direction saying 'work is not only "Economic" activity; it has more reasons than that'. "Work is at one time an economic, political and religions act, and (it) is experienced as such". Removed from its monetary implications, the 'work' one has to think, what relevance it have, to livelihood and alternative incentives, (apart from economic ones) it provides, necessary to life. When work is seen as an activity in itself and activity emanates from within, the monetary value is undermined to its social value. The work of maintaining status and personal esteem considered significant within and outside the community. Again work is seen as a means in controlling the unexpected situations. Some times an extra value or incentive given to a particular work or specialized task gives satisfaction for the person, who is proud to be identified with a 'work' or a 'thing' executed or produced by him. This paradigm is understood in terms of notion of hierarchy, which is bestowed upon a community, where occupation is hereditary, rather than acquired. The significant element in this regard is not the 'work done' but who are the evaluators of such work (considered polluted), who controls it? (Agency, community). who works? (Men or women), and further its physical, psychological, and social-symbolic relevance of that doing (work). So this performance of necessary tasks, resulting values, obligations, identity, status, and structure are as fundamental to livelihood, as any other immediate need, like food and shelter. Franken Burg (quoted in Barth 1966) defines the work in this manner ' as the production, management or conversion of the resources necessary for livelihood -'the sum total of capital, skills and social claims'. The value of particular forms of work, though changes with historical and social context, also depends on the individual contexts. However it is mostly the structural or status position governs the resources of the person or

individual. The work of a normal activity is some times regarded as a means of achievement, while works with no economic value are rated as high in some societies, or works of despised tasks or socially inferior, may become a source of dignity and pride. Wadel (1979) points that 'even the most essential tasks remains unacknowledged, hidden. those tasks will not be dignified by the status or existential, of the worker'. And these cores with their peripheral activities i.e., the domain of activity, exchange or meaning and 'conversions' between resource systems are ultimately what work is about from the perspectives of social anthropology (Wallman; 1979). The general out look of work in western tradition is the amount of energy or effort directed towards the achievement of some goal, whether or not that goal is realized. Hence a Bushman spends all day hunting and comes back empty handed by our definition he has engaged in work. In our society, (Western) when we use the term work we usually mean some activity for which we are remunerated, usually monetarily that is. work refers to employment or what one does on the job. Leisure on the other hand, is what we do when we are not working. As social investigators who have concerned themselves with such definitional matters have learned... there is no sharp dividing line between work and leisure (David Kaplan; 2000). A common way of trying to distinguish between the two is to say that leisure refers to voluntary activity, or free time, no matter what one does with it- "free" in the sense that it is not devoted to subsistence or maintenance. Work, refers to conversion of time to money. As the Anthropological understanding of leisure, points that the leisure is a prerequisite for culture building do convey some rationality in conceptualizing the notion of work. As David Kaplan points out the "The leisure that figures in discussions of culture building is not simply enforced idleness, on the other hand the abundant leisure of hunter gatherer is seen as a mark of their "affluent" existence (David Kaplan .2000)

Caste and occupation:

In the Indian context it is useful to reflect on the concept of work as many of the occupations people pursue are rather ascribed than achieved. The notion of *jati* and the occupation it practices have different connotations when compared to

Anglo-Saxon conceptions of work. " Work is doing (*Karna*) and the deeds of "work" one does both cause and constitute one's fate, *karma* (Searle Chatterjee 1979:269.) . The meaning of work in Indian context is again subjected to the notions of inevitability, and without attachment. For many, work is a purposeful activity. The general meaning of work in India is all purposeful. But it also implies as inevitable in the speakers mind. As some scholars suggested *Kaam* (work) means involvement, instrumentality and self-interestedness. And the work can be performed without any attachment. Many scholars provided to local variations of notions of work.

Studies of work places both in Europe and in the USA as well as in areas traditionally studied by anthropologists have revealed the interplay between informal, personal and, in Weber's sense non-rational, patterns and bureaucratic ones (S.Chattrejee: 1979). The concept of work varies in Indian context unlike the western concepts. In India there is no real work ethic as in the west. The work of a blacksmith, or a peasant is not glorified as it is in our school textbooks, and popular imagery portrays the rich man, the man who has succeeded, as not working, whereas the poor are precisely those who have to work hard and 'carry stone on their head' as the villagers say (Deliege: 1993:133). Many of the occupations in India are hereditary and hence carry a number of traditional elements in its transmission to next generation and the functioning. Hence, there is a necessity to look into the work cultures of the various Jatis in emic perspective. The occupations particularly practiced by the ex-untouchable communities are further complicated for understanding from the popular notions of work, due to its association with the notion of "pollution". On the other hand stratification system itself vitally affects occupations. The social origin of an individual plays a major role in the determination of his eventual occupational placement. The social system and occupational placement as a part of the broader system are thus in a two directional interaction process. An important consideration in this relationship is the linkage between the two systems. (Hall.R.H; 1969:319). In India traditional occupations are hereditary and passed on to son by his father and grand father. Here people relate their work to their own notion and conceptions of the world. For example, *Viswakarmas* relate their work to their mythical ancestor and follow a complex of ceremonial practices in their work. The

western notions of work cannot be completely applied to understand the work culture of the goldsmith in India. He relates and conceives his own world while working. Work for him is a devotional act for the Supreme Being. Then emerges the question that how can an occupation be perceived? The term perception as applied to occupations does not refer solely to perceptual process that occurs when an individual is confronted with occupationally relevant stimuli. Rather it refers to the complex of beliefs and assumptions, which exist in the individual's memory. The term incorporates the process by which this complex came to be organized as it is, and how it is likely to incorporate new information. Thus, studies of the perception of occupations might be more accurately described as studies of how people form concepts about occupational world, how they interrelate these concepts, and how they manipulate and evaluate them when making vocationally relevant decisions (Anthony.P.M&Charles.Jones. 1978.2). In this context there emerges a methodological question in understanding the work with regard to Indian *Jatis* and their occupations

Though all occupation and works are meant to eek out a livelihood, hierarchy based on *Jatis* and its value attachments and ritual impurity attached to them makes some occupations inferior. The very secular occupation of tilling the land (cultivation) is considered not a noble occupation in some contexts. Coming to the occupations carried out by lower rung of the society, those untouchable communities and their occupations are treated almost degraded, since they are associated with such polluted material like dead carrion and human excreta. Collecting night soil, or sweeping occupation is one such and the most degrading work among all. Though it is indispensable work, which is beneficial to the society, yet its practioners are downgraded "Working as night soil removers, sweepers and renders, untouchables fulfill other similar vital functions . the work obviously contributes to their segregation from other fringe groups who carry out secondary tasks of no great social necessity (Deliege: 1999. 121) Further, the gradations exist between manual labour and that of other works are to be seen in the light of the religious ideologies. In many cases working with the soil is considered impure. And many untouchable communities

do perform these works involving all the materials of nature. Robert Deliege succinctly puts the problem as follows:

"The distinction between intellectual work and manual (it would be tempting to say 'physical') labour is clearly marked in India: Brahmins are a sort of 'scholarly' class, the only ones able to study the sacred texts, in contrast the heads of the lowly are only good for carrying heavy loads. The dirty clothing that used to be worn by Untouchables, as we have seen, reflected their disgrace, and even today the upper castes do not appreciate their 'putting on airs', in other words, dressing decently. Likewise, a Harijan who goes to school is seen as one less worker. Indians think of the different castes (jati) as different species, each of which is good at a particular job. Brahmins are regarded mediocre farmers, for example In the same vein, the function of untouchables is to serve society by removing its impurities " Why did god create carpenters, grain parchers, potters, barbers, cattlemen, and the like? ", one of Wiser's (high-caste) informants asked him.. 'Did god not intend that each should perform his own work? And certainly it was not necessary for a Bhangi to read when his work was to clean cesspools "(Deliege, 1999,pp: 122-123)

Some traditional occupations like removing dead animals and other such defile elements, also gives them special privilege and monopoly on such occupation where others cannot dream of competing. Therefore, one cannot see the work culture with that of the western ethic. It needs a framework, which may be a mixture of local and the western model.

Culture of practice:

Originating from the core and spreading towards the periphery, these actions, or practices, or the domain of doing may be studied under the general rubric of practice, and that of saying under the term discourse. It implies that the practice and discourse are what is done and talked about the work and environment. While the practice involves non-verbal gestures, techniques, is implemented by man with his tools, as discourse is a dialogue or interpretation about the work. While performing activities on periphery, the boundary of social structure becomes porous for individual. It means persons comes out of the structure and enact through roles. To

start the argument on practice, the method offered by Bourdieu (1977:1) is both empirical and applicable to the notion of doing. He seeks to bridge the ritual or choice between objectivism and subjectivism, by proposing lasting disposition to action, on the one hand and the place of temporality and improvisation on the other. Instead of rule bound character of social life, he thinks it more appropriate to understand the generative schemes that lead to the strategies by which practices arise, or in his words, how the 'orchestrated improvisation of common dispositions (1977:17) reproduce the divisions of the social structure on an everyday basis. Bourdieu terms this as "Habitus", which is realized in objective structures. These Habitus are transposable dispositions; function as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions (1977:82-83). As he describes Algerian Muslim peasants, he further analyses how the Habitus generates homologous formations across different social activities, such as funerals, ploughing, harvesting, circumcision, marriage etc. Through them different conceptual fields emerged (farming calendar). These are variants of a single type of structures. And this Habitus is both product and resource for it is logically prior to actual events of practice and is subject to strategic manipulation. Thus Habitus, as 'core' generates practices, yields strategies, knowledge of practice lies in practice themselves, which are dominated by material wealth, symbolic capital and development of body both individual and collective. Here proliferation of strategies is related to this politics, which seeks to reproduce through wealth and body, land, and heirs. They fulfill the function of integration by instituting divisions and by giving to practice the 'appearance of realized myth' (1977:163). As Bourdieu propounds that knowledge of practices that its actors do not reflect, they witness it without appropriating it. Practices as Bourdieu, mentions are always unfinished and emergent, helps in understanding productive reproduction character of non-discursive practices. Unlike Bourdieu's, 'theory of doing', based on 'Algerian Muslim peasants', where, they do things, because they are Muslims, these can be best understood, in the framework of Bhaktin's theory of utterances (1990) where they unfold through an examination of its internal coherence and its location with wider society, while these utterances, are in a form symbolizes, both resistance, and ideology. They are best understood in the light of theoretical propositions of James Scott (1990) theory of resistance and hidden

transcripts. Though based upon the notion (Scott 1990) that weak in certain conditions resort to such practices, which are both challenging to existing hierarchy and power, normally, make no headlines. But they do have an impact and create reefs of their own. Though Scott uses the 'weapons of the weak' in a context where peasant life is surrounded by farm restrictions. In this study, the concept is used to show, how the 'menial', 'polluted', 'obnoxious' 'mundane' occupation gives rise to certain practices, where the group, person and outsiders respond and recreate events, hierarchies resulting in 'layers of behaviour' and 'super structures'. Those who are dominated live by the practice of a 'contra culture' that negates and dilutes the oppressiveness of the ideological domination. The dominated keep them as their 'secret weapon' at it was and even they may not be fully aware of them at a conscious level. (S.Channa: 2001). The practical knowledge of the social actors also plays a role in understanding the individual and the group. Bourdieu understands peoples strategies in everyday life not by individual rational decision-making or as being determined by supra individual structures but by *Habitus* 'once acquired ...underlines and conditions all subsequent learning and social experience. (Bourdieu 1977:72-95; 1990:52-65). The *Habitus* only disposes actors to do certain things. It provides basis for the generation of practices but does not determine them

Everyday life, person and work:

The endeavor, towards constructing social reality from the 'thick description' or 'intimate' understanding of the people by the participant or anthropologist is in vogue in anthropology since its beginnings. Many, depended on this tradition, to elicit the worldview of community, and subjected them to a micro-level analysis to build models or test models. From the imaginist point of view, building or understanding social phenomenon in the field, participating in everyday life, though poses, methodological challenges, provides a rich harvest of data, sufficient for social construction. The 'words', 'symbols', 'gestures', and 'events', though not a new source for data collection, they inevitably reveal the 'structures' within 'practical taxonomies'. The person who express his social world, is replica of people and society at large, and an examination of these individuals reveal,

the unknown complexity of nature and function of the group. society The fluctuating requirements of a variable every day existence demand the cultivation of more and more qualities (Hellen: 1984). These demands may emanate from the particular cultural life, with which one identifies, or dictates of occupational needs The person responds to fulfill the challenges thus posed by his surroundings So 'growing up into the everyday world is not a process where by one is born selfish (jealous, cowardly, etc.) and only gradually thereafter adapts oneself to the world's demands (Hellen 1984. 9). A person who responds, and creates an atmosphere around him after, or always may not reflect the total culture he may be part, but here arise 'anthropologicalness' or 'anthropocentrism' (Hellen 1984). There will be no exact logical conclusions, like 'thus it is', 'therefore', etc, for this is not fault of everyday thinking: this dependence on human perception is indispensable in everyday practice. Here the question is how a person or individual takes symbols or technology, available to him without a logical understanding of it, or not concerned about its logic's. This everyday life, Hellen points the direct reproduction of the 'person'; hence, its teleology is relative to, correlated with the 'person'. And this person who lives in everyday life is characterized by particularity or by individuality. Hellen further opines that everyday thinking is heterogeneous and de-anthropomorphized, and anthropomorphic worldviews and mental motifs mingle forcibly in undifferentiated fashion within its framework. And everyday thinking is fetishist: it accepts things and institutions as they are, in ready-made form, and brackets of their origins. Hence a clear note has to be made how the 'person' though act upon various roles, they do not bother about their origin or how they came to them E.g. Imitation of dress, festivals, functions, leadership, dress: they consider them as role models. As mentioned earlier, one cannot identity the structure or organization of a particular society, by understanding everyday life of a person, but we have to take an aggregate of objectivations, and the relationships between them. And here comes conversation as an adjunct to the business of everyday living, a dialogue is best understood in identifying human relationships though in a limited sense. As Hebdige argues that refusal is worth making, that these gestures have a meaning, that the smiles and the sneers have some subversive value (Hebdige Dick: 1979).

Every day life offers rich data to interpret the community. Dialogues with individuals do contribute to such an evaluation. But the persons, who adapt to various forms of living and their everyday interaction with others, are at times particular to individuals. Since individuals who imitate and create a social setting around them may not be completely representative of their community. The confusion always remains how this person adapts to things without any rationality attributing to it. And in these contexts conversation remains the available objective tool in interpreting the situation.

Person, conversation and dialogue:

Taking Goffman (1974) as starting point, it can be argued that everyday life does offer the empirical facts to construct the social reality. An individual or person, when made to talk, converse, unfolds an array relations, which are both reflexive and historical; make us to understand better the social structure of the being, and its transformation. These narratives not only offer a mechanism to relate his self but also, relate his past to the present. Here, the person or the individual, negotiates with meanings, opportunities available at his doorstep and selects the relevant choice for him. These meanings and opportunities are best analyzed in their discourse or narrative/utterance, 'story', autobiography, and conversations. Hence I would like to adhere in my analysis of person through discourse, to show how he explicitly resists and merges with the outside world. As Bhaktin (1985) points, every dialogue, occurs against the backdrop of a present but invisible third party. Bhaktin acknowledges the limitations posed by the discourse or dialogue, which cannot be fixed in a unitary structure. Fredrik Barth's generative approach to cultural variation is another way of understanding the role individuals play in moulding and sustaining cultural knowledge. 'Among the mountain Ok...the differences are apparent not just to external observers, but, some of them, indeed shock the actors themselves, who view them as not merely "ungrammatical", but as actually objectionable. The cultural context of "Ok", cosmology is distributed between "many sub -traditions located in numerous villages and temples which are further subject to a constant oscillation public performance and personal safe keeping in the

care of a small number of ritual experts (Fredrik Barth 1987). Barth's arguments are concerned with the circumstances of the storage in the individual mind without literary aids, of complex cultural materials over a long time, followed by a demand for their manifestation in complex and vital performance of mystery cults'. A process which must be highly evocative of personal involvement by the ritual expert in the cultural symbols in his keeping, and could be expected to result in his marginally reshaping them in form and content in harmony with his own visions, at every new performance' (Barth: 1987:30).

Every day life offers rich insights to construct the social reality. Individuals do offer a variety of experiences from both self-reflexive and historical point of view. His past becomes present as he narrates himself. Individual narratives understood in his autobiography and conversations, have meaningful insights for the social structure of the community. His narration is though singular. have always reflect the third subjective element. Individuals are also important manipulators in the social structure. as they inherit certain traditional advantages with them, it may be leadership or skill in particular knowledge etc They form, shape and reshape the social settings.

Understanding Ex-untouchables:

There is no dearth of literature on ex-untouchable communities in India, and particularly by ethnographers, social and cultural Anthropologists. These studies offered rich insights in understanding these communities. Every scholarly effort enriched the existing literature on these once excluded communities. With multiple models of analysis, these contributions tried to look at the problem. often came out with contradictory analyses. Some times they had similar arguments, tried to look at the dynamics, involved in these cultures, in their adaptation and transformation. The present work deals with one of the most depressed communities, who are engaged in an occupation considered polluted, and who were treated as "untouchables by untouchables". And hence arises the need to explain, why, and what kind of models available to us to understand the people who live, with a worldview of their own, and with in a world created and recreated by them The present work deals with a 'sweeper caste'

known as 'Mehtar' in local terminology. Before embarking on the literature available and the contribution to the understanding of sweeper community, it is necessary to look into the knowledge generated by the academia on these ex-untouchable communities in India. Indian caste structures has provoked and generated multiple models of understanding it. In the earlier literature 'untouchables are explained as "self-contained groups" or people who accepted their low social status (Dubois: 1959). A kind of "consensus" approach is seen here 'Imitation' agreement with higher caste culture by possessing thinner culture or possessing culture in less convincing form is yet another perspective available. Some of the prominent 'images' or models developed by the subsequent anthropological literature mainly revolved around images of alignment or integration. One model projected and 'outcaste' image of the untouchable. (Mencher 1974; 476, Gerald Berreman 1971: 16-23). In another set of models, which basically talked about the diversity of untouchable communities, are disjunctive (Moffat 1979:13). But still they projected 'untouchable culture as alternate culture' rather than 'culture less' or 'lack of culture' approach of outcaste model. Unlike the great tradition of the higher castes and of the Brahmins in particular the little tradition of the Camars contains a *parayan* and non-Brahmanic religion, which emphasize the propitiation of goddesses of disease, and the use of medicines and exorcists (Cohen 1955:8). But in the process of Sanskritization of Camars, new dichotomies emerged with great tradition at one end while westernization is on the other. We find in Pauline Kolenda's analysis of north Indian sweepers, impact of theories of karma, dharma among the untouchable sweepers. But the myths created by sweepers relating themselves to higher *jatis* gives a relaxation for the religious anxiety of the sweepers, opines Kolenda (1983). This shows us the internal acceptance of the or perhaps justification of the rank order of castes. Katheline Gough analyses the case of *pallans* with political and economic variables and radical anti-caste political action. Miller (1966:26-28) on the other hand, analyses the political action adapted against the dominant greater tradition, and he further elaborated it by asserting that Bhakti devotionalism, and Mahar militancy, and neo-Buddhism attested to the alternate new values. But organizational, behavioural patterns are missed here and how they come out of it is (the system) is not dealt with.

Outcaste images imply that culture is only manipulative rationalization, and that culture free perception and action are to some degree possible. In the out -caste image, some cultures can be more realistic than others, some can be thinner than others. Models of diversity make no such assumption. For this set of approaches, all the varying cultures of caste are equally thick and equally relativistic. Berreman (1972:400) on the other hand viewed caste, as operated and dictated by the “power” of the objective facts... who has the power... and how it is likely to be exercised.

The other set of models, “Models of fusion” or “Integration”, as these models of analysis, stress on consistence set of underlying principles of mechanisms, which governed the social structure and function of culture in a general way. Here they are not concerned with disjunctive approaches, as they are concerned with opposing elements with dominant ideology in the earlier models. Louis Dumont, McKim Marriott come here, who argue, the “encompassment” of the phenomena. As Dumont puts it: “Man does not only think, he acts.... To adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy, and a certain consensus of values, a certain hierarchy of ideas, things, and people, is indispensable to social life.... in relation to these more or less necessary requirements of social life, the idea of equality, even if it is thought superior, is artificial” (Dumont 1970:54-55). Dumont further argues, that, some castes aspiration for higher caste titles, or identities, is an acceptance of ranked system of caste, as they do not concede with the legitimacy of the ranked system. The purity and pollution concepts of Dumont are again relevant in the analyses of an occupational community, which is treated as low. As Moffat (1979) puts it “The untouchable makes personal purity possible, by removing the strongest source of organic impurity, and the untouchable mediates between man and the malevolent demons. The “outcaste model” and “models of diversity” emphasize on disjunction, as “models of unity” emphasizes on conjunction. The difference between the defenders of the ‘outcaste’ models and those of the models of diversity is slight in Moffat’s estimation: the first stress untouchables lack of a separate culture and their exclusion from the dominant culture, while the second, on the contrary, regard untouchables as bearers of an ‘alternate culture’ (Deliege Robert: 1999:29).

On the other hand, there is abundant literature on these communities, outlining their social position, changing social status, adaptations, mobility, identity social movements and development problems. Though these studies, (Joseph Mathew 1986. Wankhede.G.G, Nirupama Prakash 1989; C.Parvatamma 1989; P.K.Mishra 1992. R.K Kshrisagar 1991; Nandu Ram 1989; K.Saradamani, 1980, K K.Pundir, 1997: J.Sarkar, 1984; Benjamain Joseph 1991; Ravindre Kumar; 1997, C.L.Sharma, 1995,1996) highlighted their problems, policy alternatives, and insights into planning the developmental programmes, threw little light on their 'cultural life' and Processes of social dynamics, unlike the earlier theoretical works. A number of studies conducted by both sociologists and Social Anthropologists have focused on development policy, as well as theoretical issues. .

Some of the ethnographic studies focused on understanding these communities from the proper theoretical perspective. These studies in turn offered most crucial insights and models of paramount significance. (Owen Lynch 1969. Pauline Kolenda 1983; Khare R.S 1984; Shyam Lal 1981.1991.1992.1994.1996,1997,199; Searle Chatterjee, 1979, Parshad Vijay2000; Andre Beiteille. 1998. Michael Mahar 1998; Morris Opler 1998; Joan P.Mencher 1998; Delhege Robert 1993,1997,1999). These studies interpreted the untouchable culture from various points of view. Though the ethnographic richness has given understanding and deep insights into the social dynamics of the community, many of them lack an approach where individual self and identity are represented. Khare's (1984) work in this regard focused on this aspect. The belief, among Indologists and ethnographers is that untouchability, in theory and practice, has been an important feature of Indian society. The argument is that inequality in India is a question, not merely of unequal distribution of resources, but of basic ideas and values' (Beteille, 1998). Some interpreted saying "the concern with pollution also served to keep the untouchables in an inferior economic and political position through enforcement of sumptuary laws and physical separation (Morris Opler, 1998). Group identity and self-image and emotional ambivalence are focus for some. (Herald Issacs, Miller: 1998). Some studies also focused on how the defiling status is not an accepted one but resisted. The defiling nature of their work, including the sweepers handling of human

excrement and the shoe makers removal of dead animals, provided them with bargaining power not available to the weaver or chamar whose goods and services could be provided by others. (Mahar, J.Michael, 1998 19) In another revelation Joan P.Mencher (1998:38-49) finds that "While it is true that the Paraiyans have always had a secure place within the traditional structure, such security does not mean that they liked their role, or even that they accepted it. one suspects there has always been considerable hostility and resentment toward those higher in the social structure. Paraiyans openly express resentment about the way they were treated The Paraiyans did exercise a minimal type of control over the excess of landlords and higher caste people through the latter's fear of the Paraiyans knowledge of black magic" (Mencher P.Joan 1998: 38-49). Michael Moffat's (1979) contribution in understanding untouchable communities is important, as he raised basic question, that whether untouchables possess a separate culture of their own His concerns are that these communities are in 'consensus' with the outside *jati* hierarchy, and they continuously 'replicate' or 'reproduce' those in their own society Moffat then concludes, " They do not possess a separate sub culture. They are not detached or alienated from the 'rationalizations' of the system, untouchables possess and act upon a thickly textured culture whose fundamental definitions and values are identical to those of more global Indian village culture. The 'view from the bottom' is based on the same principles and evaluations as 'the view from the middle' or ' the view from the top'. The cultural system of Indian untouchables does not distinctly question or revalue the dominant social order. Rather, it continuously recreates among untouchables a micro-cosm of the larger system"(1979:3). Though his notions are structurally based on the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' have limited relevance in the analysis of untouchable culture, as Dumont, himself limited these notions to certain domain saying that, these notions need to be applied carefully.' I do not claim that the opposition between pure and impure is the "foundation" of society except in the intellectual sense of the term; it is by implicit reference to this opposition that the society of castes appears consistent and rational to those living in it. In my opinion this fact is central. in and of itself (1988). Lynch Owen (1969) uses 'reference group theory' in interpreting the s Chamaras of Lucknow and their social mobility and identity He mentions that '.. a caste is an

“adaptive structure” through which its members can relate and re-relate themselves to members of other castes in terms of the potentialities provided to them by the socio-political environment in which they interact (1969:3). He also concludes that the political participation is a functional alternative to sanskritization in the context of the Jatav community. Lynch uses three modes in his interpretation of reference group theory that is ‘Imitation’, ‘Identification’, and ‘Negative reference group’. He makes a structural definition of sanskritization not in terms of cultural attributes and symbols but rather in terms of social structural positions and relations. (See Lynch Owen 1969: 212). Deliege Robert (1989,1992,1993,1998,1999) contributed a great deal in evaluating and understanding various models propounded by most ethnographers. Though he denies certain conceptions he does merit them for their relevance in specific contexts. The main theories of the caste system have given differing degrees of attention to the untouchables, but few have dealt with the problem of untouchability in depth. A great number of ethnographers have insisted on the integration of the untouchables in the caste system and have thus put the accent on the state of balance, or even, the harmony of the system. However it must not be forgotten that the untouchables are also outside the system and are rejected on all sides. (Deliege 1997:103-4). In his study of Paraiyans he presents a holistic view of the community. On the whole the structuralist (Moffat: 1979) and conflict, counter cultural models or alternative cultural practices (Mencher: 1974, khare: 1984, Freeman: 1986, Vincentnathan Lynn: 1993) did indeed manifested in looking at the untouchable conceptions and their construction of society and person. Further the models like ‘out caste model’ and ‘diversity model’ stress on the notion that the untouchables lack a separate culture of their own, while models of unity, in contrast considers, that the untouchables do possess an alternate culture of their own. Studies focused on the sweeper communities also used some of the above concepts in their models of interpretation. Reversible sex roles and egalitarian set up of the community, (Chatterjee Searle: 1979), relevance of traditional notions of *Dharama* and *karma*, and alternative cultural out look (Kolenda Pauline 1983), models of sanskritization and de-sanskritization, religious transformation, mobility (Shyamalal 1971,1973,1975,1992), social history (Vijay Parshad 2000) are some important frame works that are emerged

during the last four decades . These models helped in understanding these communities in multiple ways, but most of the studies tend to look at the community as whole, by neglecting the 'individual and self' within the community. They have always seen them as the expressions of the community rather than the 'Individual self' except in few studies (Vincentnathan Lynn 1993, Khare. R.S. 1984).

As much of the debate is on whether untouchables possesses their own culture or they do simply rely upon the dominant tradition, should be looked at through multiple ways of analysis. Since ideology is guiding force for the creation of knowledge of any sort, including culture, it needs to be addressed here. As Althusser (1969, in Hebdige 1979:12) puts it Ideology is nothing to do with the consciousness it is profoundly *unconscious*. . Ideology is indeed a system of representation, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with the 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. While talking about replication it is necessary to look into its general application in human societies. As Hebdige Dick rightly puts it, "All human societies *reproduce* themselves in this way through a process of 'naturalization' It is through this process- a kind of inevitable reflex of all social life- that particular sets of social relations, particular ways of organizing the world appear to us as if they were universal and time less (1979:14). At times this unreal may be used as a means for resistance and escape from the dominance. In the case of outcastes this is very much prevalent. And it is demonstrated in many studies that they replicate not merely for the appropriation but to hide in that general acceptance of cultural codes. As Berreman points out that 'every opportunity is taken to utilize any crack in the wall of oppression to mitigate or escape it. The most ingenious and persistent mechanism imaginable are utilized to manipulate the system and to avoid the worst of its consequences (1975.167)

But again when looked into the resulting consequences of this domination 'resistance' emerges as a means for the subaltern expression. Many of the above mentioned studies showed how these ex-untouchable communities do express their cultural constructions in alternative ways. Here Scott's classification of 'thick' and 'thin' versions of hegemony is important. In his differentiation, 'thick' hegemony is one in which subalterns accept the legitimacy of the system in which they enmeshed, believing it to be right and just. On the other hand 'thin' hegemony is one in which the subaltern recognizes the injustice of the system. "... To define for subordinates what is realistic and what is not realistic, and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, have idle dreams" (James C Scott 1990:73) A structuralist like Dumont (1970), and Moffat (1979) viewed the untouchable culture has a structure of its own which shared elements with the larger structure. Most of the studies though enriched the ethnography of these communities; they tend to see the community in isolation to 'self' and 'individual'. The work of Searle Chatterjee (1979), which is focused in understanding the work culture of the communities and their role in the communities' adaptation. Many Anthropological approaches did see these communities as self-contained entities or communities trying to climb the social ladder using various means available to them. The role-played by 'self' and individual in day-to-day life is seldom discussed. Gerrald Berraman's (1975) study on a Himalayan community does talk about these elements, where he discusses how these community members sought to escape the worst consequences of deprivation, denigration and humiliation.

Anthropological and ethnographic writing on ex-untouchable communities tend to look at the phenomena as a group and community activity. Except few studies (Khare R S. 1984), most of them highlighted the community's culture as some thing of unified phenomena. Nevertheless rich insights produced by ethnographies, provided an empirical base in understanding these societies. Some of the important contributions both from structural and functional ethnographers analyzed them with models akin to their framework. They either applied these models for the writing or fitted the data in the framework. These models are either unified certain notions of the

community, with that of the dominant perceptions or popular cultural structure of the society at large. In the process of integration or alienation they ignored the self/individual and to some extent the element of protest in the community. One hardly finds these notions within these writings. The contribution of the individual is totally omitted in these interpretations. The individual's contribution in the process of community's adaptation is relegated to the common activity in-group. In the classic ethnographic tradition they either romanticized the community or simply looked at them as an 'isolated whole'. Studies conducted in the urban centers adopted the models of mobility, stratification and social change. Again in these studies one can hardly find any reference to the self and individual and their contributions within the community. Though many studies on these communities are conducted in the traditional village settings, the empirical observations are quite useful in interpreting at the macro level. The most significant feature in these studies is emphasis on 'local constructions' of reality. The 'conflict' and contestation is used but rarely. They are aimed at looking at the community's response to the dominant ideology. Individual and self is discredited in those models and their potential as harbingers of change is ignored in many ethnographies.

The following specific objectives are framed in the light of the above discussion for the study of Mehtars, a sweeper caste in the inner city of Hyderabad.

1. To delineate an ethnographic account of the Mehtar community in Hyderabad.
2. To understand the work and patterns of work organization among the community.
3. To explore the various coping methods and alternative cultural practices adopted by Mehtars in response to a degraded work and caste identity.
4. To analyse through Mehtars narratives their concept of self and society.

Selection of the area and population:

Present study was conducted in the inner city of Hyderabad. This part of the city is also known as old city of Hyderabad. The locality is made up of a neighbourhood with old-fashioned streets and houses. The city was built 400 years ago, with well-planned streets and drainage facilities. From the early period various castes and communities from different parts of the country, especially from the north Indian region came to the city. The Nizam rulers brought most of them, to work in the city and other parts of the Nizam state. In course of time

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small neighbour hoods emerged and became part and parcel of the old city. People from all castes, religions and languages are seen in this area, making it a multi cultural residential area of the city. Artisans from different towns and villages of Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh settled in this region. Mehtars whose traditional occupation is scavenging were brought by the Nizam to work in the royal houses and armory. The early settlers of the Mehtar community from Haryana choose this area as their residential area. The Nizam has permitted them and granted the area. Later they spread around the city and other parts of the state. There are more than forty residential areas in the city for the Mehtar community. These areas also known as bastis vary in size according to the number of households. Some bastis have three houses to two hundred houses. The present study is conducted in the largest and main basti of Mehtars located in the inner city of Hyderabad. This neighborhood also known as Valmiki Nagar is constituted with 231 households. The basti represents the core Mehtar identity in many ways. The basti is constituted with many old families who are hereditary representatives of the known names of the leaders of the community. In fact the community got spread to other regions from this place. People from other bastis also consider this basti as important as its residents are first settlers from Haryana. Many elderly community leaders also reside in this basti. It has numerical significance with a population of 1600 odd people. The basti is also well connected to other neighbourhoods with roads and small lanes.

Methodology and Data collection:

The study is conducted in a small basti (An Urban slum) in the inner city of Hyderabad. It is located in a sensitive area of the city, where communal clashes between two religious groups are a common phenomenon. The area is hence under public attention. The local administration is always on high alert about this locality. This locality is also prominent in many respects, as multi-ethnic communities from north India inhabit it. Fieldwork is conducted in three phases, by adopting traditional anthropological and ethnographic techniques. In the initial stages several visits are made to understand and comprehend the local situation and to acquire familiarity with the local population.

In the first stage several attempts have been made to identify and contact the traditional heads of the community. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the people and their leaders. But in spite of the sincere efforts, many suspected the researcher as an investigator of the police or belong to secret service of the government. Many questioned the credibility of the researcher in conducting the study. Some individuals also questioned what the outcome will be and how it is used. A few even expressed their opinion about the futility of the study, as it will no way benefit them. In spite of these hurdles the researcher is able to convince the community and its elders about the purpose and academic nature of the present work. It has taken long time for establishing rapport with the people and to make them convinced about the project and as well a to prove the credibility of the researcher. During this period, researcher established rapport with the community and identified key informants. Every effort was made to be familiar with all the households and persons. The researcher was invited by many to participate in household ceremonies and community festivals. Good rapport was established with the traditional leadership and the youth in the community.

In the second stage, a Household survey was conducted in the basti consisting 231 households. A detailed schedule and questionnaire is prepared to collect socio-economic and demographic data of the households. During this period some more key informants were also identified in various categories based on occupation and other activities. Statistical data are codified and analyzed in the SPSS package. This helped in tabulating the socio-economic profile of the community. Open-ended questions were used along with the checklist, during this stage of fieldwork. While taking household survey, every attention has been paid towards the accuracy of the information. Interviews were conducted mostly with the head of the household but often with other adult family members, whoever present during that time.

In the third phase of the fieldwork long hours were spent with the individuals and groups of people in conversations. Much time was spent with many individuals in taking their biographical information and related data. Participant observation of various activities in the basti was given importance. This time is used to

have access with individuals and people who are otherwise less interested in conversation in the early period of the fieldwork. Researcher has participated not only in the ceremonies and rituals of the community, but assisted in their activities. For example he has helped in painting a temple wall for the Valmiki festival. He has been obliged to write some letters and accompany some on their personal works. Quite often discussions are also made with members of the local communities in the neighbourhood.

From the initial stages of fieldwork, the researcher tried to establish close relationship with the people in the basti. Every precaution is taken to observe the reality in possible objective manner. Anthropological research, which derives its strength from participant observation, is used as an important tool in the fieldwork. In an effort to overcome certain limitations of participant observation, researcher took the help of all possible tools in the data collection. Apart from household survey interviews with the key informants, friendly contacts were established resource persons, and specialists. More time was spent in interacting with the people in the basti. Secondary data are collected from sources like census, monographs and reports etc

Observation of everyday day life in the basti became an important feature in the fieldwork. An important aspect in collecting data from the individuals is making them to talk about themselves and on various issues. These narratives of the individuals are elicited by asking them to reflect on their personal lives in family within and outside the community. These individuals by narrating their selves also interpreted the dynamics of relationships within the family and community.

Demographic data is collected through household survey with questionnaire on age, sex, education, and other socio economic variables. Ethnographic accounts on various traditional institutions like family, marriage, political organization, religious beliefs and other aspects of the community and its surroundings are recorded with an emphasis on their changing aspects.

In each household data on patterns of work, organization of work in traditional setting, and its transformation secondary and subsidiary activities are collected. Intensive discussions are made with people from all age groups and categories including those who are engaged in the scavenging work, as well as others who are not depended on it directly. Allocation of time, influence of family on the organization of work and hardships faced by these families are also noted here. Discussions are made with people who are engaged in scavenging work, to elicit their experiences and treatment meted out to them by others both at work place and outside. While collecting the data effort is made to note the time spent by people in attending the scavenging work.

Mehtars religious beliefs rituals are recorded with the aid of specialists in the community. Various rituals and their organization and processes are also recorded. Specific rituals performed by people are attended and they were asked to narrate their experiences. Persons who are engaged in magical practices are met individually to record their experiences with various cases and how they entered into these magical practices. In this process some clients were also asked to narrate their experiences.

Intensive discussions are made with people who were into various criminal activities. In depth data are collected from all categories of individuals in this field, and their interactions with various people in the society, their interrelations, and discrimination faced by them in these interactions.

It is noted carefully about the traditional festivals the community celebrates and how they have taken popular festivals into their lifestyle. Discussions with elderly and aged along with the people who are into modern occupations helped to elicit this data. Organization of various festivals in the basti like *Valmiki Jayanat*, *Ganesh chaturthi* and *Dasherra* are collected. People who are behind the successful organization of these festivals are approached separately to discuss their experiences and interpretations. Priority is also given to understand how they managed the resources for these activities.

Individuals from various occupations are met individually to elicit their constructions about themselves and the society. Care is taken in choosing these people who are not only engaged in scavenging work but people who achieved considerable progress in business, education, government employment and politics. Narratives from these individuals in the form of 'auto-ethnographies' are collected to understand their experiences and notions on the community and wider society

Analytical framework and organization of the Thesis:

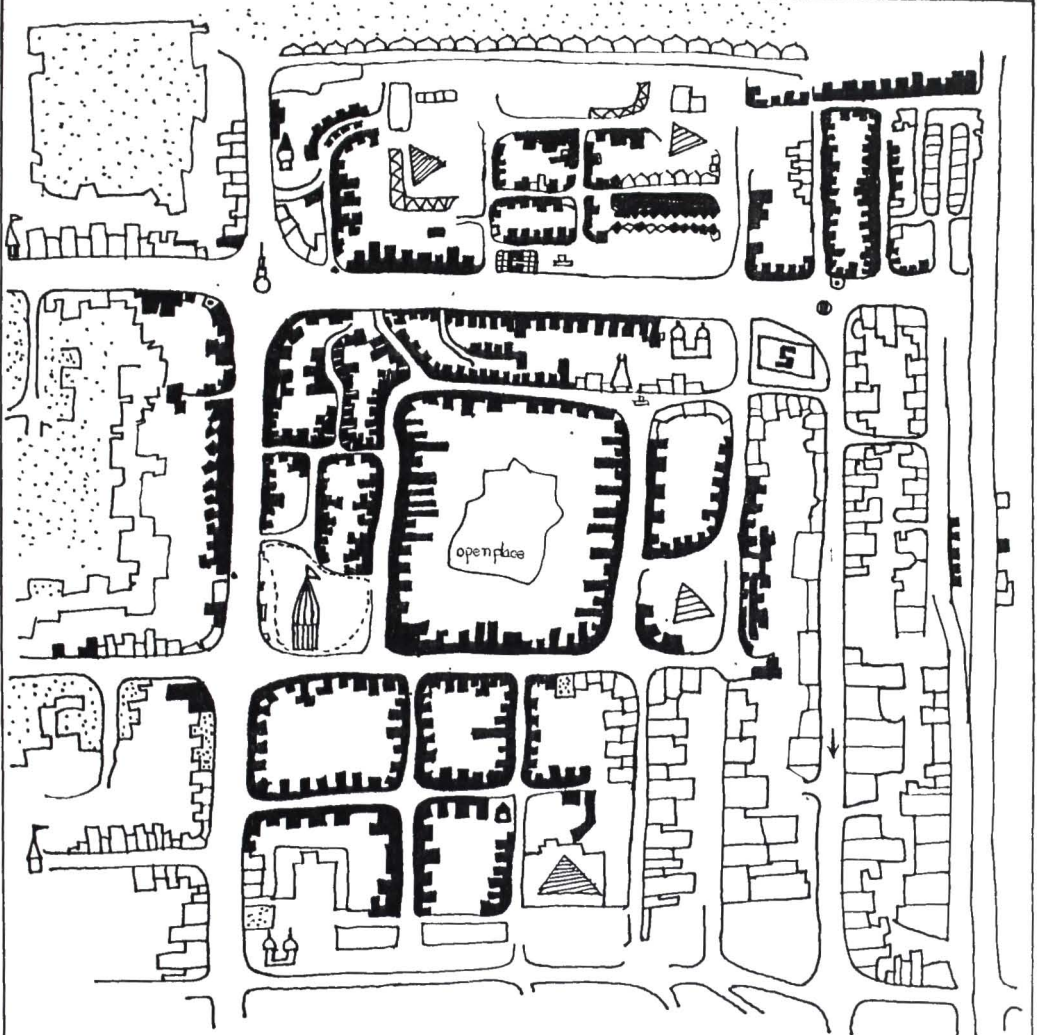
In understanding the theory of social change or cultural dynamics, rich resources of data and models are available. In the literature on the scheduled castes many emphasized a holistic approach in understanding their social organization. But the role of work, particularly in the urban context is neglected. Michael Moffat (1979) points that to large-scale exclusion of untouchables from village life, made them to replicate every institution role, ranked relations from which they have been excluded. In looking at the present data, every day life and person formed the focus. Taking Agnes Hellen's (1970) conception of person and its creation in everyday life, an attempt is made to understand the lifestyle of the Mehtar community. The every day life demands more and more qualities from the individuals. These demands may emanate from the cultural life one lives in and also from dictates of occupational needs. Although James Scott's (1990) frame work remains the major tool in interpreting the data emphasis is laid on recording the dynamics of the local situation on how the people with polluted identity respond and present themselves. An attempt is also made to focus on individual as part of community and occupation. The generative approach propounded by Fredrik Barth (1987), in analyzing the 'OK' cultural variation in inner New Guinea, found to be useful for focusing on the role of individuals in cultural reproduction and change. But the difference is that the Mehtars use the knowledge for healing and solving the problems of others. In the present case the focus is on the functional use of the knowledge by the individuals in various social contexts. As in the Barth's 'OK' study, it is attempted to look at individual's creativity and modifications in using these rituals for enhancing individual charisma and dignity.

With the frame works provided by Goffman (1959), Hellen (1984) an attempt is made to understand the particular occupational group and its life style from emic perspective. The 'self' or 'person' is always a phenomenal 'object' of analysis in everyday behaviour. " If we individuals are to reproduce society... must reproduce themselves as individuals. We may define 'every day life' as the aggregate of that individual reproduction possible (Hellen A: 1984; 3). The every day thinking, is based on historical memory and operates on past and present taxonomies offered to 'the subject' (person). The present work adheres to analysis of person through discourse, to show how he explicitly resists and merges with the outside world. A Mehtar lives in the community, as a person sharing common values. He is also continuously in touch with outside world as an individual. In his everyday life he encounters a variety of situations, and tries to mediate between his past and the present. He carries with him memories of myth and history. He tries to relate and at times uses these memories to gratify his emotional needs. In mediating his own values and outside values, he pretends to be a follower, and yet resists those dominant outside values.

The present thesis is organized into seven chapters. Ethnographic profile of the community is presented in the second chapter, followed by the literature review. The ethnographic chapter delineates the community's cultural life, its traditional institutions like marriage family, and political organization social change along with the socio-economic profile of the households. The basti and its ethno-history, is described along with the socio economic profile population. Emphasis is laid on the description of various traditional institutions and social change. The data on household survey are also included in this chapter, to make it as a comprehensive text on the community with reference to its traditional base and present situation. In the third chapter, working culture and life of the Mehtars is presented. Their work in both public and private spheres is discussed here. Their perception of work and others work is also delineated. Further quantitative data from various households is used to describe the working structure of the community. Fourth chapter is devoted to the acts of the individuals and community and how they have responded to various stigmatized identities. In this chapter emphasis was laid on how individuals in the community are responding to degrading identity of their caste. The ritual specialists and their clients and organization of their magical practices are

discussed with case studies. An effort is made in understanding the manipulation of traditional institution of the community towards achieving a new status. Case studies of people engaged in criminal activities are presented here. The emphasis is on how the community members have responded to various pressures of the locality. It also showed how their occupational identity became a problem in the every day interactions. Community's working life and their consequential activities out side the basti, particularly the misdemeanor activities are discussed here. . Fifth chapter describes the community's adoption of various popular festivals from the Hindu pantheon. Emphasis is laid on how various individuals, manipulate the popular festivals in enriching their self-image. But it is noted that individuals though are part of the community, yet try to take advantage of their position within and outside community. The discussion particularly focused on individuals and Mehtars successful adoption of various symbols of the popular culture around. In the sixth chapter individual narratives of self are discussed. This is focused to see how individuals from various occupations and with different images, interpret and look at the society. Here the emphasis is on self-narrative of the particular persons, to understand their everyday interactions with others. In this the case studies are presented to look into the narrative as a reflective phenomena of the mind of the individual and community. In the last chapter summary and conclusions drawn from the study are presented. An appendix on myths of the community follows summary and conclusion.

RESIDENTIAL PATTERN OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.



RESIDENTIAL PATTERN OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

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|---|--|--|----|--|--------------------------|----|--|---|
| 1 | | MEHTAR HOUSE HOLDS | 8 | | MUSLIM HOUSE HOLDS | 13 | | Hanumant temple |
| 2 | | TELUGU speaking HINDU CASTE HOUSE HOLDS. | 9 | | PORK SHOP. | 14 | | BOREWELL |
| 3 | | VALMIKI TEMPLE. | 10 | | MARKANDEYA TEMPLE | 15 | | CATTLE SHED. |
| 4 | | MOSQUE | 11 | | Goddess, pahivali temple | 16 | | Goddess GURGANVALI (Small Cement structure) |
| 5 | | PIG REARING AREA. | 12 | | MYSAMMA TEMPLE. | | | |
| 6 | | School | | | | | | |
| 7 | | COMMUNITY HALL. | | | | | | |



THE MEHTARS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Mehtars: A Scheduled Caste and their Occupation:

Known by a multitude of names, in various regions, Mehtars are composed of diverse groups of people who are engaged in scavenging, leather tanning and other menial jobs. People who are engaged in such degrading occupation are named, and called differently which varies from region to region¹. Further the people engaged in these unclean occupations, have been sub-divided which vary in different places.² These divisions are based on distinctive cultural practices, ranging from food habits, to types of unclean occupations. Though the Mehtars, or Bhangis, are associated with other occupations like basket making, agricultural labour, they gradually entered scavenging and sweeping occupations, with the intervention of colonial governance and the growth of the urban dwellings. Primarily engaged as agricultural labour, these communities spread and their cultural practices are often contradictory and sometimes resemble with that of the majority population in that particular region or locale. Other communities following similar occupational activities are *Chuhra*, *Dhanak*, and *Khatik*. These people are spread over the Punjab region and parts of Haryana. People converted to Sikh religion are known as *Mazbi*, and *Rangreta*, who perform all hereditary duties, except, touching night soil³. Among the converts to Islam, Bhangis are known as *Musalman Chuhra-Musalli*, *Kutana* who are spread around the west of Lahore in Pakistan. These people are known to have given up scavenging occupation, by taking up occupations like rope making, and cultivation⁴. These multiple names identifying the people engaged in the scavenging and other menial jobs are so varied that they struggled to be identified by some names like *Adi Dharmi*, *Adi Dravida*, *Adi Karnataka*, *Adi Andhra* etc., during

¹ Sir H. Elliot gives the following list of the subdivisions of the Mehtars: Baniwal, Bilarwar, tak, Gahlot, Kholi, Gagra, Sardhi, Chandalia, Sirswal, and *Sriyay* (Hindu Manners and customs p 397)

² *Ibid*: 396

³ See *Punjab Castes*: Denzil Ibetson 1974 p 290

⁴ *Ibid*.294.

colonial times, particularly during the period of the census operations. W.Crooke (1986) writing about this community states that the name Mehtar was commonly applied to the servants of the emperor *Humayan*. They are also known as *Khakrob*, or 'sweeper of dust' and '*Baharwala*' one who is not admitted into the house⁵. In the Northern Indian region, these communities are known by such names like Hela, Lalbegi and Patharpor. etc. while in Central Indian provinces and Bengal, known as Bangi, Dom. etc. In the Western part they are known as *Halalkhors*, *Olgana Barvashia*, *Metariya*, *Jamphoda* and Mela etc. "In the Deccan, the Bhangis are divided into *Bhasods*, *Chajgadis*, *Helas*, *Lal Begis*, *Makhiyars*, and *Sheikhs*⁶. Munshi Hardayal Singh in his 'The castes of Marwar' (1984) writes that the Bhangis or sweepers are the lowest caste and are regarded as very unclean by the Hindus. They are employed in sweeping and removing night soil. They also make *Chhaj* or winnowing fans. They are very rarely found in the country, and found chiefly in large towns. The Bhangis are also called *Lalbegis*, *Khakrobs*, *Halalkhors* and Mehtars. As Sir Elloit opined that the 'Bhangi's are probably known from their drunken habits, eating Bhang: LalBegi from their object of worship; *Khakrob* from profession *Khak*; earth sweeping. *Halalkhor*. from persian halal, meaning, lawful, and *khor*, meaning, eating. This is to address people who eat food earned by lawful means. The word Mehtar is said to be derived from the Persian meaning prince, said to have been applied to them in derision The sweeper or scavenger caste of Punjab is called the *chuhra*, a corruption of Sudra They have got a number of divisions viz. *Deswali*, *Bagi*, *Sotarwala*, *Janyaka* *Balmiki* and *Lal-Begi*. Most of these refer to Balmiki as their progenitor or patron saint⁷. Thus it is evident that the community who engaged in the unclean occupation is not a single homogeneous entity. At that time they were not a caste, but a community 'Mehtar' composed by different lower caste members"⁸. In the Eastern India, there are numerous sub-castes of Bhangis. Colonial ethnographers like H.H.Risley (1891) opined that these people are Hinduised aboriginal tribe, which was driven into Bengal by the Aryans or the persecuting Mohammedians. There are

⁵ *ibid* 295

⁶ See Srivastava, B N (1987)pp 21

⁷ See K.P.Bahadur 1978. Caste, Tribe and Culture of India

⁸ See Lynch Owen pp.264, as quoted from Prashad and Dube (2001).

many sub-castes like *Barabhagira*, or *Kaora-paik*, *Madhya-bhagiya*, or *Madhukul*, *Khore* or *Khoriya*, *Siuli*, *Mehtar*, *Bangali*, *Maghya*, *Karaiya*, *Parandual* etc., of these, the Mehtars sub-caste alone are employed in removing night soil; as others are engaged in other occupations like cultivation, playing musical instruments, taping date trees, making bamboo combs, carrying palanquins, serving as *syees* etc. But ritually and socially they are at the bottom, as these members are not allowed to use public places or temples⁹. In Southern India, as Sirajul Hassan (1920) says 'the *Lal Begis* of the Nizam's dominions have seven groups, who neither eat together nor intermarry. These are the *Hele*, *Malkane*, *Chhichhade*, *Dumar*, *Chhajgode*, *Bhadeye dassan* and *Makhyar*. Number of exogamous groups such as *phatrod*, *Sanakat*, *Kanderas*, *Surawals*, *Gaikwad*, *Sarwan* and *Kanderia* does exist, who are employed as sweepers and scavengers and most of them are employed in the municipalities'¹⁰.

However these communities who occupied a lowest level of social strata, are not a homogenous community but made up of a variety of *Jatis* or communities engaged in various occupations in the course of time spanning the thousand years. Max Weber identified pariah groups more or less with guest residents and defined them 'as underprivileged social groups who, though their occupations were economically indispensable for their host societies. For this reason they were obliged to live as unsteady wanderers, or as people forcibly restricted to settling only on the fringe of cities, town and villages. Often they were aliens who were refused admittance into a closely knitted society'¹¹.

Yet among those poor untouchables is a distinct and separate category of despised, even hated people. They are culturally ranked lowest in a cultural hierarchy of purity, in part, because of the hereditary pollution associated with some of their occupations, such as leather tanning or sanitation work¹². The transformation of communities into particular occupational group is so complex a phenomenon, which needs to be looked in-depth, regarding their origin and spread. Though many theoretical propositions are in vogue, there seems to be slight variation with one another, yet they

⁹ Ibid pp.33

¹⁰ The castes and tribes of H.E.H, the Nizam's dominions by Syed Siraj-Ul-Hassan

¹¹ See Stephen Fuchs 1981, pp 1

¹² See Lynch Owen M 2001, pp.259-268

converge at some point or run parallel in eliciting the phenomena of origin of these particular caste groups. There are many theories which are extensively reviewed namely 'mythological tenet', 'historical tenet', 'anthropological tenet', 'ethnological tenet', 'conversion and ex-communication', 'invasion', etc¹³. Out of all these tenets, it can be assumed that these groups are earlier not subjugated and forced by the various forces to engage in the so-called polluted or unclean occupations. Many a times their origin is being linked to a Rishi known as 'Valmiki' who has written the Ramayana in Sanskrit. However, there are numerous myths and legends, which are orally transmitted from generation to generation, offer quite contradictory or similar notions, expressed in scholarly theoretical propositions.

Though differently named and called in various regions and states of India¹⁴, etymologically speaking, according to Crook (as quoted in Shymlal 1991). The word 'Bhangi' means 'hem drinkers'. According to Gadgil (1952) "Mehtar Bhangis are castes traditionally confined to the business of removing night soil". They are on this account considered among the most degraded in Hindu society, moving out of the caste occupation is therefore extremely difficult for them¹⁵.

One of the 15 duties for slaves enumerated in the Naradiya Samhita, was to dispose of human excreta (Nagar; 1980:9). In Vajasaneyi Samhita, the Chandalas and Paulkasa have been referred to as slaves for the disposal of night soil* (Nagar, 1980:8). Other scholars like Malkani sought to emphasize that 'Bhangis' are those people who were warriors made captives after they fell to the enemy. According to Chaturvedi (1980:22-23) Kshatriyas and Bhangis have descended from the same source, for, he says, one notices a marked similarity between them in *gotras* and surnames¹⁶.

¹³ See Shymlal 1991, pp.11-28.

¹⁴ In Punjab they are known as Chuhras, Mazbi, Balmik in the city of Meerut, Bhangis in Rajasthan Bhangis in Gujarat, Bhumalis, Haddis, Hari, Kaora, Lalbegi, Mehtar and in Bengal and North-Eastern India, Orissa, as 'Haddis'.

¹⁵ See Shymlal, 1991, pp.23

* See Bindeshwar Pathak: Road to freedom A sociological study of scavenging

¹⁶ *ibid.* He presents examples of similarities in their surnames like Vas, Vasvar, Bundelia, Chandal, Chauhan, Yaduvarshi, Panna, Bundela, and Bargajar etc

Untouchability and Scavenging Occupation:

The essential feature of 'untouchables' are that they are excluded from the Hindu society, and hence could not get any benefit or living standards, that are available to others. In the context of people who are engaged in the 'unclean occupations' like scavenging, the rules and rituals are much stigmatized and rigid, by not allowing them to even minimum avenues offered by the larger society. In general the untouchable has no right, only the duty to perform, and to submit to any kind of treatment by the people, though his services are essential for the proper function of daily life and work. They are ruthlessly exploited, socially degraded and humiliated lot forced to live secluded in unhygienic surroundings often deprived of the essential necessities of human life. Nevertheless, with the ongoing assertive policies and the modernization of traditional society, there is a significant mobility among the 'ex-untouchable communities' in urban areas. Though this achieved positive changes, there still prevails a situation, where persons engaged in particular 'unclean occupation are treated separately, and they are secluded and live apart in urban dwellings. People engaged in the scavenging occupation', are most significant, and prominent as they represent untouchability, the worst curse. The fellow scheduled caste people treat them in the same manner, as the other communities in Hindu society treat them. Further, in tracing the relationship of untouchability to the menial work, Stephen (1981) opines that in the early stages of Indian civilization, animal breeders, have developed a hierarchical structure, and developed fierce warrior spirit while on the other hand they despised the manual work, as degrading. All the manual work that had to be done was assigned either to slaves or to craftsmen of other race and culture. But in spite of their usefulness the craftsmen were not only despised for their manual service, they were also socially segregated¹⁷. The 'unclean' occupations of certain menial classes would obviously have excluded them from participation in many ritual activities. They and their work would have seemed not only repugnant, but also fraught with the danger of pollution, and they themselves may gradually have been treated as 'untouchable'¹⁸. Probably the question of untouchability is a trait in the pastoral society, and got strengthened, modified, and institutionalized by the interpenetration of Aryan, Dravidian, and Aboriginal cultures

¹⁷ See Stephen Fuchs, 1981, pp 16-17 at the bottom of Indian society, the Harijan and other low castes

¹⁸ Ibid pp 11

As Stephen Fuchs (1981) puts it 'It is possible that the Aryans and also the Dravidians brought it along to India when they invaded this sub-continent and settled permanently in the midst of an agrarian village population, with highly skilled artisans. The latter, depending for their livelihood on the sale of their products to the cultivators, could be more easily subjugated and enslaved by the new conquerors from Asia than the farmers on whose supply of grain and other field products even the new lords depended. Thus the artisans became outcastes and untouchables while the cultivation retained a higher social status and greater economic independence'¹⁹. However the emergence of a sweepers caste or community is a culmination of groups and people from all *jatis* who got their distinctive names according to the region they inhabit. As this study is focused on urban setting, the popularly used name for a sweeper is 'Mehtars' although other Telugu castes like Madiga, Mala. and a few Muslim families are engaged in this occupation. Mehtars constitute a majority in this occupation. In the city of Hyderabad, Mehtars presence goes back to the times of Nizam rule, which became integrated with the city of Hyderabad after independence

Mehtars:

The caste of sweepers and scavengers known, as 'Mehtar' is a term meaning a prince or a leader is an ironic title given to those who are traditionally engaged as sweepers and scavengers. This constitutes diverse elements. In certain areas like central provinces sections of the *Ghasia*, *Kahar*, and *Dom* castes do sweeping work, and are therefore amalgamated with the Mehtars. The caste is thus of mixed constitution, and also forms a refuge for persons expelled from their own societies for social offences. But though called by different names, the sweeper community in most provinces appears to have the stock of traditions and legends. The name of Mehtar is now generally employed, and has therefore been taken as the designation of the caste²⁰.

In Andhra Pradesh, Mehtars constitute 4,553. (1981 census) and they are mainly come from nine districts of Telangana including Warangal, Khammam, and Nalgonda, and now are concentrated in Hyderabad²¹. Among them there is a classification based on occupation

¹⁹ Ibid pp 21

²⁰ See Russel R.V. 1916, pp.215-233.

²¹ Ibid pp.217. see K S Singh 1998, people of India, vol no V

as 'Gaukhana'. Around this place a large number of Arabian Muslims stayed in residential quarters, who were part of Nizams Army. On the southern side, both Muslim and Telugu communities inhabited, while at the western side a large Muslim graveyard was located, known as 'Daire mir Mohmin'.

A large number of people belonging to various occupations are brought from the Northern India, to work in the estates of Nizam, as many of them are familiar in Urdu, and professional at activity. Nizam Ulmulk Asafza brought Mehtars for serving the king. Apart from Mehtars, Kayasthas, Khatri (for sarkari accounts/correspondence) Rajputs (craft, and related works) are also brought to Hyderabad. As oral accounts go, unlike others, Muslim nobility and particularly women are not allowed to relieve outside, due to *pardah* system. Hence, arrangements were made within the houses for the purpose. And hence the particular requirement arose for people to carry night soil, and Mehtars, who were agricultural labourers work (*khetri, bawdi*) in Haryana, and Delhi, were brought here, and a small chunk of land is given for their residential arrangements. Before the Mehtars, the local Telugu speaking lower castes, who are converted to Islam during Quli Qutubshahi period, carried out scavenging and related occupations. Around 1860-65 two persons were brought by 'Mahabbat Hyder Ali' who is Tukaram and Bakshiram, to undertake, and supervise various works at horse sheds, cantonment, and other regions of the Deccan Sultanate. BakshiRam was appointed as Subedar in 1860, while Chotelal was appointed as the chowdhari for Mehtars, under the kingship of Osman Ali of Nizam government. BakshiRam and Chotelal brought number of people from Haryana, and Delhi to work as scavengers in various dominions of Nizam's state like Nizambad, Nanded, Jalna, Parbani, Aurangabad, Marwad, Bidar, Vadi, Gulbarga etc. (See the Geneology chart No.1&1.1)

In Hyderabad they were provided some land, and burial ground on the outskirts of the city to bury their dead. The local Muslims who were engaged in scavenging occupation were known as 'Mosalli Mehtar' and the Mehtars also came to be known as 'Mashur', meaning people who work with filth and mud. After independence of India, and unification of Nizam province with the Indian union, Mehtars became independent

* Based on key informants in the area, who are 80 years and older Intensive discussions are made in the field with number of individuals to ascertain the facts

* based on field work, and key informant interviews of persons, who belong to the some lineage of Bakshichand

employees under nobility and worked for other households. Diverse people like Telugus, Muslims, and people from northern India gradually inhabit this region. In the early 20th century and till 1970's, the residences of Mehtars are simple thatched houses with mud walls, with lots of pig sheds. As municipal administration started its functioning, many of these people joined the government employment as scavengers in 1974. Later small residential complexes are provided to the inhabitants, which later gradually developed as a colony by 1990 with electricity and drinking water facility.

The early migrants from villages like *Nari, Pohtak, Haterna, Bhowapur, Karala, Dhupalpur in Sonapath, Kablana, Ghadikesari, Nizapar* etc., are settled in this part of the old city constituting a major settlement of Mehtars in Hyderabad. Later they spread to different parts of the city for convenience of travel to work places, and formed about 40 small residential areas. But majority of them are of 10-15 households composition and are relatively small. The Mehtar community in the city of Hyderabad has undergone tremendous changes during the last three decades. The basti gradually transformed into a colony with the amenities provided by the local government. Further, the locality surrounded by the basti, is multi ethnic in composition, where Muslim, *Rajput, Kayasth, Marwari*, and Telugu caste population live, though in one residential area, but segregated by housing colonies, and newly developed residential, structures. The locality retained many primordial elements in its cultural and social life, such as 'rituals of goddesses', festivals, ceremonies, folk festivals, etc., which are celebrated by many of these communities. The basti has seen and undergone very tumultuous situations, and most violent communal tensions. During 1984 and 1988 this area has witnessed worst ever communal violence, between Hindus and Muslims and the worst sufferers are none but Mehtars, due to their specific geographical location, between Muslims and Hindus. In the 1988 violence, one person belonging to the Mehtar community was shot dead by the police, and many people injured. Mostly youth fought and defended themselves from the troublemakers at that time

The population:

The basti selected for the study is known as Valmikinagar or Sultansahi. is constituted of 231 households, with a male population of 852, and while female population is 826. totaling 1678 persons altogether.

Age and Sex Composition of the population, in the basti.

	Age							Total
	0-5	6-15	16-25	26-35	36-50	51-60	60 & Above	
Male	88	228	241	115	126	25	29	852
Female	84	231	233	136	92	21	29	826
Total	172	459	474	251	218	46	58	1678

The people who migrated from various villages, in Haryana belong to 27 *gotras*, and they proudly liked to be called with their *gotram* names, which are used as their surnames. People belonging to *Bidlan* constitute a majority group with 274 persons, *parcha*, *chundaha* *kagda* *dhillhod*. and others follows with the population of 237, 152, 255, 149, respectively

Family:

Among Mehtars family occupies a central role in their social and economic organization. Family plays significant role in maintaining 'personal', or 'individual' relations within the community and outside. The family structure among Mehtars, influences many factors in their everyday life, from occupation, to social prestige, and to economic growth. These families are patrilocal in residence, and patrilineal descent, having a strong patriarchal authority. Joint family is yet another significant feature of the family structure, though it started declining in recent years due to various factors. But families are large in size, which helps in maintaining economic security of the members. Though joint family system is on decline, the economic organization of the family still remained unshaken, as the family members.

particularly the brothers, maintain closely knit economic relationships with support of their father. There are four significant family types present among Mehtars.

The basic family type is nuclear family, which consists of parents and their unwed children. There are 80 nuclear families, in the present study area whose households are engaged in scavenging occupation. Among those, there are 26 nuclear families, whose occupation is either in government department or technical service, while 33 nuclear families belong to households, whose primary occupation is business or private job. As people who engage in practicing magical rituals come from five nuclear families in the Basti. Though these five respondents admitted themselves regarding magical practices, more than sixty percent households has at least one ritual specialists with regular practice or on part time basis.

The second category is sub-nuclear family. Among them eleven families belong to households engaged in scavenging, as eight families belong to non-scavenging households. Third category is lineal collateral joint family, where eighteen, belong to scavenging families, as five families are in government service, while twenty five families belong to households whose occupation is either independent business or work at private shops. The next category is supplemental lineal collateral joint family. One is engaged in scavenging occupation as two are found in other households. There are seventeen families of single person houses, where six of them are in scavenging occupation. Others are engaged in independent works.

Family types among scavenger and non scavenger house holds

S N o.	Family Type	1	2	3	4
1	Nuclear	80	26	36	1
2	Sub nuclear	11	2	6	
3	Lineal collateral joint family	18	5	25	2
4	Supplemental lineal collateral	1		2	
5	Single person	6		9	2
	Total	116	33	77	5

1. Scavenger households
2. Govt. employee /Technical staff etc households
3. Other independent business / Working in private shops etc households
4. Ritual specialists Households

Family sizes among the Mehtar households

S No	Family Size	No Of households
1	(1-5) Small	77
2	(6-8) Medium	94
3	(9-12) Large	37
4	(>13) Very large	22
5	Other	1
Total		231

Though there are no rigid rules in terms of married brothers, living together. The arrangement is either accepted or followed, keeping in view the family interests, and to facilitate the working structure of the family members. In the Basti, small and medium size families are common phenomena. A household comprises one to five members are found in seventy seven families, and six to eight members in ninety four families respectively. Households with nine to twelve persons are classified as large families, who constitute twenty-two families in the total. There is one single parent family. Joint family is still preferred by many than to live separately in nuclear families.

The Head of the family is generally the male member of the household who is the eldest, who is also known as "*Gharka Bada Admi*" (Head of the household). He represents the family in many of the events in the basti. The patriarchal authority is visible in every aspect of the Mehtar' family. One cannot take decisions, without consulting the head of the household. Sometimes, the responsibilities of the household are transferred to the eldest son, who tackles many issues in place of the head of the household. But the head, in terms of his age is still respected in the family. Besides doing his job (scavenging) the head of the households organizes work and other jajman activities of the family. He also distribute the work, and one has to respect him, and follow the rules and regulation laid down by the community. In property sharing elder brother is slightly favoured than others, but

with the consent of the younger ones. Preference is also given to those, who take care of aged parents and their traditional work. The elder brother is responsible for searching employment for younger ones, if the father fails to meet the requirements. He also represents the family in caste *panchayats*, enacting the role of a parent. The brothers help in the marriage of the younger sisters and contribute money and material. The disputes among brothers in terms of sharing property quite often go to the caste *panchayats* for settlement. Daughters usually do not have any right in the properties. After their marriage, they join their husband's families. But She gets the ownership over scavenging work in and outside the household after marriage. Married daughters are sent to her in laws house, whereas sons generally stay in the parent's house. But sons can also live separately, if one is able to manage his family. As one informant says, "Though some are interested to have the nuclear family, majority prefer joint family as it is safe and secure. Earlier there were strict rules, but now they are becoming more flexible and changing". Some times younger brothers prevail upon the elder brothers to follow the advice of the parents. as it is evident on many occasions, particularly marriages in the Basti

The elder brother or head of the households treats the unmarried girls with respect and they are provided with gifts during the festivals. Women, have little say, in property and political leadership and need to adhere to all community rules and traditions. Generally, wife of the head of the household commands respect from the members of the family and outsiders. All married women should wear '*ghoonghat*' (veil) when they go out to market and work. Women should wear it, whenever she talks to the men in the house particularly with father-in-law. This is known as '*Nazar Churana*' (hiding the face). This tradition is strictly followed by the Mehtars. A few young leaders among Mehtars challenged this tradition, rather openly in caste *panchayat*. SundarTank once raised this issue with the 'paunch Committee meeting'. He opined " the woman, in times of emergency, cannot convey anything, to her father in-law, due to this traditional problems. Hence, I suggested that women should be allowed to cover her face up to nose but not completely". Women have relatively little freedom in the family matters. If any problem related to family is discussed, the woman is allowed only to tell her opinion, but not to give any suggestion, about what to do. The women undertake many of the household activities.

including rearing of children. Among them, more than fifty per cent go for 'sweeping work' along with men. As one informant puts it " *poora jimmedari Gharki awrat ke ooper rehta*". (All responsibilities of the house rest with the women). The younger generation, though interested in many changes preferred a slow and steady pace in accepting modern and democratic values. My key informant, commenting on the veil and dress code of the women says that, the very style of wearing dress is symbolic of protection to women and her body. It keeps away the 'flirting' attitude of the men and women. He also points out that the women in Mehtar community maintain their dignity and respect, like *sita*, who maintained family values and protected herself from the lusty *Ravana*. Many Mehtars feel that the wearing a veil protects one's family's respect. The practice of veil starts when the girl attains the age of puberty, by wearing a *Doti* (A thin cloth kept around the neck). Women's participation in the work is relatively higher than the men's as they are also engaged in the household work apart from the scavenging work outside. Participation in social life of the basti is merely restricted to the ritual and ceremonial activities. Women are treated, with respect, and any immoral activity within or outside are treated seriously as an offense by the community. In the past women are not allowed to attend school and college education. Now majority of family members prefer sending their children to school. In many of the household activities like, purchasing clothes, food, entertainment, etc., women take decisions and make the men in the household to listen.

Rarely a woman participates in panchayat or any such kind of activities. Men dominate in many of the affairs in everyday life.

There are several quarrels among family members, whose girls move freely with boys. During my fieldwork, one girl and boy eloped, and later the elders brought them back, and 'caste panchayat' left them after giving punishment.

Relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the house are similar to father-in-law relationship. Daughter-in-law in the house generally maintains cordial relationship with the, mother-in-law. There is no direct one to one talk at least, till the birth of the first child. Children are reared and looked after by the mother-in-law in majority of the families. In the early period of the settlement of the Basti, children would accompany their parents to their work places. The children share the *chapatis* or any eatables, given to the workingmen or women. Usually father has little time (working

overtime) necessitating the housewife to pay more attention towards children. The family disputes and quarrels among members are solved within, except in extreme circumstances, where they approach caste *panchayat*. Each family takes pride in its lineage and surname, and tries to maintain the gotras (surname) purity and related rules in maintaining the dignity of the family.

Marriage:

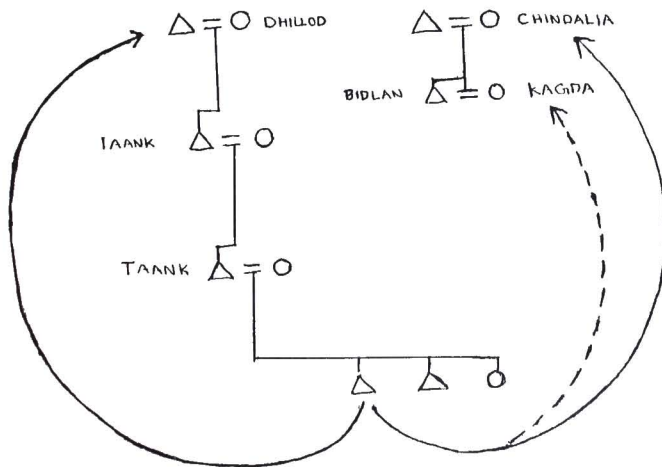
Marriage among Mehtar community in the Basti resembles the general Hindu marriage rituals, with every minute detail followed, in every aspect of wedding ceremony. Broadly the marriage process starts with a search for the bridegroom, followed by wedding preparations by conducting ceremonies like *Samal*, *Haldi Phorna*, *Gheepilana*, etc. Marriage rituals are long and sometimes it takes 3-10 months to complete a marriage towards consummation. Mehtars strictly adhere to 'endogamy'. Though they are some cases, where the boys from the basti married girls from other castes. Such intercaste marriages are strictly opposed and persons engaged in inter caste marriage are ex-communicated. In one such incident a boy married a girl from neighbourhood, belonging to *Marwari* community. The caste *panchayat* objected to the marriage and ex-communicated the family. The family members of the boy fought back, which led to violent clashes with weapons in the community people. Later everything settled amicably, and the boy did not pay any amount to the *panchayat*, as one needs to pay the punishment fee after the problem is resolved. The family is still treated differently by the Mehtar community. That particular family lives separately in the basti, though it is part of the same residential area. When enquired, many felt that people, who violate community rules, should be excommunicated, and they should not be treated properly. In another case, a Mehtar boy married to local girl belonging to '*Mala*' a scheduled community. The community leaders again objected for the marriage. The *panchayat* imposed fine on the family and the family obeyed the judgment of the caste panchayat. Though the couple stays in the Basti, the fellow Mehtar families look down his family.

Gotra exogamy:

Mehtars strictly adhere to gotra exogamy and whoever violates is punished severely, which may lead to excommunication from the community. *Gotra* as a unit regulates family and marriage relations among the Mehtars. One is not allowed to marry within one's *gotra*, father's mother's *gotra*, and mother's mother *gotra*. But rarely some rules are relaxed. Generally one has to avoid two generations from both father and mother side, to have an alliance. Further, people who address themselves as brother and sister, generally avoid their families in marriage alliances. A person whose *gotra* is tank^{family} can marry into his grand father's-mother's *gotra*. He can also marry into mother's grandmother's *gotra*. Some times marriages also take place into one's mother's mother *gotra*. This *gotra* lineage is crucial in many ways as property transactions are involved among families.

The Following shows depicting marriage alliance between two families.

D.no.1: Marriage alliances between families belonging to various gotrams.



_____ Marriage alliance is acceptable.

----- Marriage alliance is acceptable, but rarely such alliances are accepted.

Marriage alliances are generally facilitated and mediated by 'Baluchis' (mediators) among Mehtars. Once the bride is selected, the boy's family keeps some money for example 16, 101, 506, or 1001 Rupees with the bride's family to confirm their selection, which implies that no other families should make any alliance with the bride. After this regular visits take place between the two family members with exchange of gift items like clothes, eatables and small feasts, which involve drinks and pork. This may continue for 1-2 years. During this period both sides may break away from the agreement if one is not satisfied with any aspect of others behaviour towards them. In the second stage, if both sides are still determined for the marriage, groom's family visits the bride's family and gifts her with ornaments and clothes etc. followed by a feast in the evening at brides home symbolizing second betrothal. This means bride is formally admitted into the groom's family.

Bride's family brings sweets, fruits etc. to give to the groom's family. This ceremony is known as 'Shaadika latta'. Along with it 'pindat' is also given to the groom's family, which is a sort of written agreement for the marriage. This is a reminder to the boy's family, regarding the marriage. Part of the ceremony is known as 'somal'. This ceremony meant for a commitment towards the marriage of the girl. The boy's family generally visits the bride's family and exchange sweets, clothes, and sometimes ornaments with the bride's family. A lot of partying takes place among the members and this signifies the acceptance of both the parties with regard to confirmation of marriage. A ceremony called 'lagan', takes place, well in advance of the marriage. It is actually a reminder to the pending marriage. The girls family members usually accompanied by the father come to the groom's residence, with sweets, fruits, garlands, red threads, clothes and turmeric. The groom's family is honoured on the occasion, while the head of the family, usually the father, is key

person in all ceremonies. Bride's father also breaks a few turmeric roots with stone, and applies the powder on the forehead of the groom. This event is known as ' *Haldiporna*' signifying the bond between the two families. From that day, bride and groom, take turmeric water baths for five and seven days respectively. These are known as ' *Banwade lag gaye*', and ' *Matana maslte*'. They also take oil bath, known as ' *Baantael*'. It signifies that the bride has become a member of her husband's family.

Gajbangha (Erection of wedding pole):

The groom is given some ritual objects, like *Konga (Haat Kaya)*, *Gaj*; and a pair of *Kangua*, which are made with iron. *Gaj* is an object made with iron; this is kept on the ground for eight days. Groom, does this to ward off evil spirits entering the home. A wedding pole is also erected near to it in front of the groom's house, near the front door of the home. Two twigs of wood are kept in criss-cross manner beneath which a pot with water is placed. During that time young girls are invited to home and served sweets. Mehtar's believe that this ritual brings auspiciousness and prosperity.

Beela haat karomama:

The maternal uncle of both groom and bride, participate in the marriage rituals with gifts. They bring *haldi*, gifts and new clothes to these families during *Haathleva* ceremony. During this ceremony, bride's hands are kept in the hands of groom, and his new father-in-law gives some gifts.

Maaka dood peera: (Sucking of mothers breast):

Before heading in ceremonial *Buraat* (procession) to bride's home, the sucking of the mother's breast takes place. The groom is decorated with turban, and wedding clothes and he is accompanied and helped by mother's brother. He sucks the mothers breast or in her absence or if she is a widow, brothers wife or *chachi* (mother's sisters) who occupies the mothers place. After this,

mother's brothers give him some gifts or money. Then the procession begins, accompanied by women and men folk of the community to bride's home.

Milna:

The elderly person who officiates marriage rituals recites some mantras, while bride's family welcomes the marriage procession. Clothes and gifts are exchanged between bride and groom's parents. Then the groom stands on a *pandal* erected in front of the house. He exchanges garlands with bride. The groom's family gives the bride seven saris, ornaments, and small gifts. Bride is again decorated with the ornaments and brought to *mandap* (*chowri*). Bride and groom are allowed to talk to each other, as elders watch them. They take marriage oaths and walk around the sacred fire lit in the *Mandap*. The elders keep their hands in each other's hands. The ceremony is complete and bride goes to her house, and paints her handprints on the wall.

Maataka dhokan:

Various Goddesses are worshipped at bride's house during this time, for the well being of the newly wed couples. Later 'Dohidhaan' or unknitting the threads tied in the marriage takes place. Bride and groom together worship the family deities. The sister of the groom also receives gifts from the bride's family. Afterwards, the ceremony of *Mudlkai* is celebrated, as relatives of the groom give money ranging from 10 to 100 rupees as gift. Everyone looks at the face of the bride, by lifting her veil and bless her. She has to bow down and touch the feet of the elders in the family to receive their blessings. The near and dear in the family also gift new clothes to the newly wed couple. After this, the marriage ceremony comes to an end.

Attitudes towards intercaste marriage are quite rigid among many people in the basti. In spite of their educational level and occupational mobility, very few expressed their willingness to have matrimonial alliances with other castes. Responses are collected from heads of the household in many cases. Some responses are also collected from persons of the particular houses who had better education and climbed the ladder of mobility, than others in the community.

Attitude to inter caste marriage according to occupational status of the households.

S.no	Occupation of the house holder	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	Working as sweeper in houses	2	28				30
2	Sweeper in Pvt Organization	3	8				11
3	Working in MCH as sweeper	8	43	1	1	2	55
4	Other scavenging works	4	73	1	4		82
5	Others, who are not directly engaged in scavenging work	17	31	1	2	2	51
	Total	34	183	3	7	4	231

- 1 Inter caste marriage is acceptable.
- 2 Inter caste marriage is not acceptable.
3. Boys from the Mehtar community can marry outsiders.
- 4 Our community rejects intercaste marriages
- 5 I cannot express any opinion

Many felt the need to marry within the community. Irrespective of their occupational mobility, they feel that the marrying into other community means losing many social and cultural values. Some opined that these marriages do not last long, as there is a *jati* differences. Thirty-four out of two hundred and thirty one households expressed the feeling that the intercaste marriage is acceptable as long as both sides have proper understanding. But a few households responded saying that boys from Mehtar community can marry girls from other communities. But boys of other communities are not acceptable to marry to the Mehtar girls.

Attitude to inter caste marriage according to Educational levels

Education	Opinion					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Nil						
Primary	10	37		1	1	50
Secondary	5	47				53
Intermediate	12	61	1	3	3	
Degree	3	23			2	28
P.G.	2	11			1	13
Total	34	183	1	4	2	231

* Opinion index is the same as above table.

Some of the rules of the marriage are very crucial and are strictly adhered by one and all among the Mehtars. Widow remarriage among Mehtars, is acceptable but a widow is not allowed to marry old people. A person can have a widow of his elder brother, if both the widow and younger brother agree for such marriage. One can also marry second wife, if the first wife is unable to bear a child. Some times restrictions are stringent in widow marriage, as the community may reject it if the groom is a bachelor, or too young. Though intercaste marriages are not allowed, there are 7 inter caste marriages among the Mehtar, which got approved finally, after some punishments. Dowry practice is also slowly entering into Mehtar marriages. As one informant puts it “*Joor julum Hona Nahī*”. One should not be forced to give dowry’. Among Mehtars, there is strong notion about the endogamy, and irrespective of their educational level and occupational mobility, majority stressed for the need for the marriages in the same caste. The notion against inter caste marriage is significant, since Mehtars live in multi ethnic urban setting. Out of 231 household respondents, 183 said ‘no’ to inter-caste marriage. There are 34 responses positive, but fifty per cent of the respondents are not directly engaged in the scavenging work. 3 responses are positive for boys marrying with other castes, as four household respondents said that the community denies such alliances. Among the literate, there is a positive attitude to intercaste marriage but for majority, endogamy is preferred. As one key informant puts it ‘even though we marry outside the caste, one or the other day we are looked down by others, then why to give a chance for divorce’.

Gotras in the basti:

The following are the *gotras* or surnames of the families; they are *Bidlan, Parcha, Chindalia, Kagda, Dhillod, Dulgaj, Gingotted, Mangwana, Saraswal, Taank, Tushamad, Boath, Prwar, Sarwar, Hatwal, Karala, Khandera, Bangni, Shud, Ridlan, Baagdi, Sandai, Ghowri, Lahotti, Keer, and Deol*. Among Mehtars there is no distinction between got and surname. *Gotra* name is simultaneously used as surnames or suffixes. But largely the dominant groups in terms of numerical strength, as well as

leadership belong to *Bidlan, Parcha, Chindalia and Kagda, Dhillod*. Many of the differences and hierarchy among them are due to owning of rights over scavenging work, and among the early settlers in the basti. The early settlers became *zamendars*, and they controlled the rest of the population with regard to work and *Badli* system*. Families belonging to *Dhillod* generally used to lend money to others in their community, and became an influential section among Mehtars. *Bidlan* group, from the beginning controlled the community and supervised their work in and outside of Hyderabad, had their numerical and economic dominance reigned for a long-time and continuing even today. The next group is *Kagdas*, and *Chindalia's* whose ancestors are also to some extent acted as traditional leaders, but not to the extent of the *Bidlans*, and *Parcha* group. But *Chindalias*, *Kagdas*, slowly started their entrepreneurial activity and became economically well off than other community members. In the matters of political and social issues, these families, fought with each other continuously for a long time, over many issues, like marriages, and leadership. In one incident narrated by a member of *Parcha* family, some years back, there was a problem with regard to marriage of a boy and girl who belonged to different gotras, which led to violent fight. Later though the matter was settled, the differences between *Parcha* and *Bidlan* families remained and their interaction has been limited in many respects

* As many of the Mehtars are migrants from Haryana, some after working for certain period, wished to go back to their villages to look after their fields and other works. As they cannot leave an income generating work here they used to give their rights of work on particular households (where they work as sweepers) to the fellow Mehtars. With an agreement of 50% of the income should be returned to the original owner of the work.

Distribution of households, family types and population according to Gotras

Gotra	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Bidlan	23	5	8	1	1	38	138	136	274
Parcha	20	4	5		5	32	127	110	237
Chudaha	13	1	4		1	19	80	72	152
Kagda	18	1	6		6	30	133	122	255
Dhillod	17	1	5	1	1	25	73	76	149
Dulgaj	5	1	2	1	1	10	31	41	72
Gingotted	4		1			5	13	18	31
Mangwana	7					7	20	25	45
Saraswal	4		4			8	31	35	66
Taank	4	1	1			6	24	22	46
Tushamad	4		4			8	29	34	63
Boath	8	2	4		1	15	55	53	108
Piwar	-		1			1	4	3	7
Sarvar	1	2	1			3	6	11	17
Hatwal	5	1				6	16	16	32
Karala	-					1	4	4	8
Khandera	-		1			1	4	4	8
Bagri	1		1			2	6	6	12
Shud	1		1			2	10	5	15
Ridlan	2		1			5	20	14	34
Baagdi	1					1	4	2	6
Sandai	1					1	3	3	6
Ghawri	-					1	5	3	8
Lahoti	1				1	2	9	6	15
Keer	1					1	3	2	5
Deol	1					1	4	3	7
Total	142	19	50	3	17	231	852	826	1678

- 1 Nuclear
- 2 Sub nuclear family
- 3 Lineal collateral Joint family
- 4 Supplemental collateral family
- 5 Single person household
- 6 Number of House holds
- 7 Male population
- 8 Female Population
- 9 Total population

Economic organization:

In the *Basti* out of 231 households, Ninety-five households derive their income from the sweeping occupation, while one hundred and thirty four derive their income from other sources. Out of them, eighty-two households get their income from more than one source. The sources includes, both scavenging and other occupations. In majority of the cases, the income derived is from the rights on sweeping occupation, which they sold to others. They do not go or engage in that work, instead some one else who bought the right from them will do the work and pay the amount as per the deal. Thirty households depended on sweeping work in individual Households, 10 households are engaged in shops and theaters. Fifty-five households depend on sweeper jobs in Municipal corporation and Government offices.

Occupational structure of households depending on scavenging work as primary source of income according various gotrams.

S N o	Gothram	Household	Pvt/Theatre	MCH/ G.O	Other Kinds of works	Others
1	Bidlan	2	1	13	9	13
2	Parcha	5		8	13	6
3	Chindaha	1	1	6	9	2
4	Kagda	3	2	9	10	6
5	Dhilode	6	1	3	9	6
6	Dulguj	1	1	4	2	2
7	Gingotted	1		1	2	1
8	Mangwana	2		1	2	2
9	Sarasval	1	1	1	3	2
10	Taank		1		2	2
11	Tushamad	1			6	1
12	Boath	4		4	4	2
13	Ptwar				1	
14	Sarvar			1	1	1
15	Hatwal			2	2	1
16	Karala	1	1			
17	Khandera				1	
18	Bagni			1		1
19	Shud					1
20	Ridhan	1	1		1	
21	Bagdi					
22	Sandai			1		
23	Ghowri				1	
24	Sudha	1				
25	Lahotti					1
26	Ridlan				2	
27	Keer				1	2
28	Deoli				1	

Among Mehtar families in the *Basti* 39 families depend on sweeping occupation in individual houses, and among them majority belong to nuclear families. Fifteen nuclear families depend on sweeping work in private theaters and other complexes, while fifty-six families are into municipal corporation work. There are nine families whose members search for work everyday by going to the nearby market areas. Some families, particularly belonging to nuclear families, go to work of sweeping but some of them sold their ownership rights to others.

Occupational Categories among Mehtars according to family type

S N o	Type of Occupation	Family type					
		Nuc lear	Nuc lear (*)	Joint	Exte nded	H Extended	Poly gam ous
1	Sweeping House holds	30	3	3	1	2	
2	Sweeping work in Pvt Complex, Theatre etc	15		1			
3	Municipal Corporation / Govt offices	35	8	11	1	1	
4	Searching for seeping work etc Badli ka kaam	2	3	1			
5	Who attend sweeping work, occasionally or work sold to others	30		23	1	4	1
6	Others who do not scavenging work but derives subsidiary income of it	35	3	1	0	4	0
	Total	145	19	50	3	11	1

Secondary & Subsidiary activities in different households

S N o	Activity	Family Type				
		Nucle ar	Su b- Nu cle ar	Lineal collateral Joint	Supplemental lineal collateral joint	sin gle
1	Auto driving	5		7		1
2	Finance, Petty business	3		1	1	
3	Playing cards, Auto driving	12		8		3
4	Bacon & other animal rearing	9				3
5	Shamanism	1			1	
6	Sweeping work & other related works	18	2	7		1
7	Household work	50	10	12		2
8	Other activities	44	7	15	3	7
	Total	142	19	50	3	11

Income levels:

In the basti, fifty percent of house holds come under the income group earning between 1000-3000Rs. Nearly thirty percent come under the income groups earning 3000-6000 Rs. Fifteen percent come under the income level between 6000-10000Rs. Five percent households cross 10000Rs income per month. People who cross these income levels are generally engaged in business or pig rearing occupations

Material possessions:

In its gradual linking up to the outside world, the Mehtar basti acquired a number of gadgets, ranging from that of TVs, cars, two wheelers and other such gadgets like cell phones. In the basti, one enterprising family has setup a

cable network in association with some partners in from neighborhood. This made accessible all the satellite channels to the *Basti*. Nearly all households possess radio and TV sets. This facilitated them to watch the popular programmers on the TV. It is observed that in some households' members also watch education channels. This though has not brought a great change but significantly brought an attitudinal change among many in the *Basti*. Watching popular games like cricket is a common fascination for many youth in the *Basti*. The youth flock together whenever cricket is played. Two wheelers became a common means of transportation for many, especially office going elders and youth. There are 63 households who possess the two wheelers, while two households have four wheelers. Since driving auto is a subsidiary activity, many possess them and some hire them quite often. Altogether the *Basti* is well equipped in terms of these tools for better accessibility and to maintain required contacts with the city and its surroundings. The following table gives the list of material possessions of the households.

Material possessions among households of Mehtars in the neighbourhood

S N o	Material possessions of households	No of House holds
1	Radio & T V	52
2	Radio & T V Cycle	82
3	Radio & T V & Auto	5
4	Radio, T V Two wheeler & Four wheelers phone	2
5	Radio, T V two wheeler, auto	13
6	Radio, T V Two wheeler	63
7	Radio, T V Two wheeler, Telephone	2
8	Nil	4
9	Radio, T V Cycle, Auto	8
	Total	231

Women and work:

Women play key role doing work in and out side the family in the Mehtar community. The work force of the women is more when compared to men and they involve a multitude of works. They go to work along with men to both at private and municipality work places. Except a few women who otherwise belong to economically well off families, all of them go along with their husbands to work. Some belonging to the former category sold their ownership right over work, or somebody will do their work under *badli ka kaam*. Women who accompany their husbands to work places generally return early by afternoon, while their husbands stay back doing other kinds of work and return in the evening. Women in the *Basti* are contributors to work in a major way. All the cooking and household needs are taken care off by them, which includes rearing the children. Some of the women work for more than eight hours They come and prepare food for the supper. For women there is a strict code of dress One needs to keep her veil around the face while she is out of the house. Hence their identification is easy for others. Though men have the liberty in wearing the pants or any kind of western dress, women folk are strictly prohibited from wearing any dress other than their traditional one.

Religion:

Mehtars in the basti follow a host of cults and beliefs, and their religious behaviour is a mixture of multiple belief systems like worshipping various malevolent spirits and gods. Worshipping, *Durga*, *Ganesh*, *Valmiki* and other Hindu gods and goddesses are common among them. Their offerings involve worship in Hindu style like offerings of ghee in a *havan*, incense and fruit, and also sacrifices animals like pigs, goats, fowls etc. The religious beliefs of the Mehtars in this urban area are gradually transforming since the last two decades. They have been adopting many popular Hindu festivals and ceremonies in their daily life. Some are showing interest in following certain sects like Brahmosamaj, Arya samaj etc. Many individuals emerged, as Magical practioners since the last one decade. In the early days of Mehtar's settlement in the area, they worshipped a variety of goddesses, apart from

worshipping their ancestral gods and Valmiki at small shrines located in the Basti. Mehtars or Bhangis elsewhere, have undergone various reform movements and adapted to various religious cults both from Hindu and Muslim religions paving way to a unique religious life style, which offers them 'an ideological solace' and integration with the larger section of the society²². While their transformation as followers of 'Valmiki' is a clear manifestation of integration of Mehtar or Bhangis into mainstream religious life, they still retained their own religious practices and rituals, which simultaneously co-exist with changing religious practices²³. Mehtars worship a number of goddesses apart from Kali, who are both malevolent, and benevolent in nature. Known as *gammurtal* (village Goddess) following goddesses are propitiated in household. Some homes having a Bhagat among them give more emphasis on the rituals related to the goddess. *Sikhpatri* (*mapatrivali*) also known as *scherwali*, is the goddess believed to be fond of red sarees, and Mehtars believe that the very presence of the goddess brings riches. But she is ferocious. Huge pigs are sacrificed in the rituals. Wednesday is auspicious to the goddess. It is believed that she is born on that day. Along with the pork, sweet bread and 7 fried breads are also offered.

Goddess Sitalamata:

Also known as *Gurganvali*, wears yellow dress (*peda*). She is very benevolent in nature, and does all peaceful things. Once in two or three years this goddess is worshipped with special rituals by sacrificing lot of pigs. Mehtars believe that this goddess also heals diseases like smallpox chicken pox etc.

²² Writing about Chuhars, Owen Lynch (2001: 259-268), quotes, 'Convergent with chuharas violent history of domination and exposition is history of their transformation into Balmikis within Hindutva's embrace. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries chuhars followed the Bal Sahi religion. It was composed of elements existing in the culture around them, but 'in creative ways' making it an emancipate, separate, and superior religion

Enjoying a maximalist notion of equality among its adherents who could commence directly

²³ Ibid. British investigators, while uncovering the major elements of chuhar's previously secret beliefs, found in the genealogy of Bal Sha four figures with names sounding like Valmiki. Using that as evidence, colonial officials attributed Valmiki, as the author of the Ramayana, the Chuharas 'true' ancestor. Thereby, they erased 'entire causations of' (untouchable) religious innovation. P.71.

Basantimata:

Also known as *Kalimata* She is black in colour and considered very dangerous (*Khatarnak*). Whatever the devotees ask, she blesses them. She is offered pork and sweets, and if the devotee is satisfied and blessed for his prayers, she is offered the liver of the goat.

Phulandemata:

Also known as *Madn ki Musani*, she always resides on the cross roads of the residential area, at graveyards, and on the outskirts. She likes white and red colour saree, and she is always worshipped outside the house. In the rituals along with a mud lamp is lit, ghee is offered by pouring it on the firewood. A small pig is sacrificed in the ritual and it should be left there. She is believed to be the protector of the children from smallpox, and looks after the well being of the head of the household. She is kind and compassionate goddess. Apart from these goddesses, *Lalitamata*, *Kantramata*, *Madhuban* are also worshipped by the Mehtars in the basti. Excepting a few variations in the ritual process almost all households worship these deities, by sacrificing pigs. *Manchadevi* is a goddess worshipped during chaitra month. *Seetlamata*, *Patrivale*, *Gurgamvalee*, *Basanima*, *Kantimat*, *Phubundemata*, *Mahakali*, *Bawri*, *Durga Bhavani*, *Gammurtol (satbowris)*, *Madhuban sikpatri* are worshipped by the Mehtars. From this *Basti* many people go on pilgrimage during the month of April, to worship *Mapatrivali* in *Pattarggad* village in Haryana. These are two myths narrated by the residents of the Basti as follows

Bowri Devta:

Mehtars worship *Bawris*, at household level, with variant features. The ritual processes vary from house to house, depending on its ancestral tradition. For example *Jeetmal Bawri* is offered a pig while *Kesarmal Bawri* is offered goat sacrifice. Each household consists of one ritual specialist, who performs all religious activities of the house, and if required in other household also. One of the Bhagats in the Basti narrated about the *Bowrie Devata* saying that '*Bowri* signifies a caste name. *Bowrie devata* is a daughter of Yamraj and his wife *Kapuri*. According to him that

there are five Bowries, who are actually brothers, who have also a sister. The eldest of *Bowri* is '*kesarmal Bowri*, or *Zeetmal Bowrie*'. Their sister's name is '*Shedoban Shamko*'. These *bowries* always appear in the police dress, and quite often they indulge in stealing in Jhat's fields (land lords) and distribute the grain to the other poorer jatis in the village, like *dhanak*, *chamer guinar*, etc. Among these five *bowris*, '*saalrsingh Bawri* is brave and gentle. He is Balshali (strong) and knows '*Raajneeti* (politics), *kootneeti* (civility) and *chalneeti* (black magic). That is why he is head of the Gang. (Gruech *ka sardar*). During the period of Moughal sultanate he fought with the soldiers of Moghal army at '*shahere saffadam*' and died at Murthal. Temples have been constructed on that place. Their sister '*Sheddo*' used her magical powers and brought her dead brother's spirits under her control. Since then these bawries are helping Valmiki community, and they have been worshipped. Apart from these *Bowries*, *Garugaram Bowri*, *Harlal Bowri*, *Haatimal Bowri*, *Todarmal Bowri*, also died in the fight with landlords, who subsequently are being worshipped by the community. '*Sabar Singh Bowri*', died at saffedom while fighting Moghal army, and rest of them died at murtal²⁴. Apart from ancestor worship, *Thoi Manama* (Valmiki), *sevadars* are also worshipped by the Mehtars. *Sevadars* are those people, who practiced many occult rituals and achieved a higher spiritual status, after their death. Almost every household worships one *sewadar* and in some houses their number exceeds more than two.

Myths of origin:²⁵:

In this world there are only two *Dals*. One is *Shivdal* and the other is *Vishnu Dal*. All the people in the world are born into these *Dals*. Whoever born on *paurnami* day (full Moon), have Brahman like mind. They have *Gupt Gyan* (*Goregumte*) (Secret Knowledge), whoever born on *Amavashya* day look black. They believe and have faith in *shivdal*. This world is made of black and white. *Amavashya* represents *kala* (black) and *pournami* represents *Gore* (white). One person says he is

²⁴ Based on conversation with a Bhat Mangwana shaman at his house in the basti

²⁵ As narrated by Haridos Maharaj, a key informant and acetic himself, during my field work. He maintains a temple of his own, and performs regular Bhajans every day

great and another says he is also great. But *Shiv Dal* has more rights. In *kumbmela*, *shivdal* takes first Bath. There is always interaction between *shivadal*, and *Ramdal*. There is no fighting. Sometimes one is strong and another becomes weak. They fight with each other. We have faith in *Shivguru* and use lots of meat and other such materials in *puja*. People, who use lot of milk, have faith in *Ramdal* (Vishnu). *Duniyake jati* are 36. (The *Jatis* in the world are 36) Today there are 41. Nowadays they have increased. This *Valmiki* is not made. He is old among *Dheds*. Among *Dheds*, eldest is Valmiki followed by *Ravidas*, *Saansi*, *Kumjan*, *Dlya Kasib*, who have two wives, *Diti*, *Aditi*, the first son of *Diti* is *Brahmon*, as second son is Bhangi. In the world *sevak*s (servants) are more. One went to till the land, became farmer, another went to see the marketing of goods became Baniya, another went to *pujapat* became brahmin. one went to safai *Karneko* (scavenging), *sabko seva karneko* (to serve all) and became Mehtar. People who worked with filthy things became scavengers. Our people used to eat meat of hunted animals. But some ate dead animals' meat. People who ate dead ones are, *chirikuri* also eat big animals and *Bandkuri* eat donkey horse.

Dead animals like horse, and donkey are taken away or lifted by the Valmiki's only. And rest of the animals are taken by chamars. Valmiki's sweep in villagers and Mochis take out skins and make chappals. Valmiki's are village servants, chowkidars, Jaggis (midwifery activities) Dais, and cultivators To serve the public we are doing scavenging work. "Bandkuri" are titled. due to their association with big animals like horse, donkeys, whose foot prints looks like closed semi circle. Whereas *chiris* are associated with removal of goats, whose foot look like projected mainly because their fingers are open ended and are separate. Donkeys are rarely present in the village and thence there is no necessity arises for their removal. Valmiki's rear pigs and animals also²⁶.

²⁶ While sharing this information Haridas Maharaj, said that he came to know about these differentiations, due to one incident in his village. " There was a dispute in the village for the removal of the dead horse, which was in the midst of the village for two days Nobody came forward to remove it The paanch (village panchayat) called Bhat (genealogists for the Valmiki) to tell whose responsibility it is to remove the dead horse That is how I have come to know about it ", said Maharaj

Following are the festivals associated with various gods and goddesses, celebrated by the Mehtars in the basti.

Januaray (**pho**)

February (**Phagun**): *Gurugoraknath*

March (**Chaitra**):

Patrivali, Mapatrivali puja. The rituals for the goddess involve sacrifice of pigs, both male and female. Slaughtering of the pigs takes place in the evening after 7-p.m. The blood of the pigs is kept in a small bowl, along with sweets, ghee, hukka, halwa etc. Nine rows of charcoal are kept, which are burnt with ghee while performing puja. The ghee is sprinkled, on the burning charcoal. A light in the small mud vessel is kept in front of it. If the direction of the light moves towards the burning charcoal, it is believed that the goddess has consented the householders invitation. In the basti except people belonging to *Dhillod* and bidlan *gotras*, all others celebrate and perform these rituals. As the ancestors of these two *gotras* are believed to be violators of a code restricting the drinking of a particular drink auspicious in the worship of the goddess.

April (**Vaisakhi**) People, who miss to offer *pujas* to *patrivali* goddess, offer the same in this month

May (**Jhet**)

June (**Asaad**): Ma *patrivali, urgamvali* are worshipped in this month.

July (Saamman):

Savan ka thees (*Theesonka tyohar*) From this month whoever believes in *Gurugoraknath*, avoid eating meat for two months. This festival is celebrated, during June or end of July being an exclusive festival for the women folk. The newly wed women and young women among the Mehtars particularly celebrate this. Women swing on the ropes tied to tree branches, and wear new clothes on the day. Several varieties of sweets are made like Ghulgee, saag, etc. Near and dear are invited to attend the event. This festival celebrated enthusiastically during the early period of the settlement of the basti. But now slowly this festival is disappearing from the lifestyle of the Mehtars.

August (Badwa)

Gugapeer is worshipped in this month. Goats are sacrificed and kheer, puri, and halwa are offered. Majority of the people in the basti celebrate this festival.

September (Aasoj)

Pitramavas is celebrated. Where ancestors are remembered and pujas are performed in their name. Angar (Burning charcoal) is kept in front of the photos of dead ancestors, if the photos are available. The number of bowls kept depending on the number of dead ancestors. Leaves of the peepal tree are made into little hollow cups, in which *kheer* (sweet) made specially for the ritual is kept. Later, particularly, the children in the household are served with the food and sweets. Till the end of the ritual, everyone fasts in the house.

October (Kartik)

Hoika festival is celebrated in this month. Women specifically observe this and their participation is significant in many ways. Women observe fasting on this day. Newly married women participate in this festival more actively. Their mothers-in-laws are invited if they live separately and are given new clothes, along with some fruits. In the eastern corner of the house a pot full of water is

kept. A silver anklet is draped around the pot. This is significant because, this anklet contains round silver balls, which signify the number of years, this festival celebrated in the household. A metal bowl is kept on the pot. On this another bowl containing five varieties of fruits and sweets are arranged colourfully. A saree is covered on the top of the pot in a triangular fashion. This part is known as *Odri*, while the bowl full of fruits containing bowl is known as *multika dakkan*. In front of this pot is arranged a lamp. The women who are fasting, performs first puja, followed by others in the family. During the ritual process one should not cut vegetables with knife, and avoid eating pork or any meat. Digging the soil is also prohibited. After this festival, follows *Devutana* a unique ceremony, involving young girls in the community. On the seventh day young girls and women make arrangements for the hoika festival. A brightly lit mud lamp is kept in front of the house, which is decorated with fruits and flowers around it. The footprints of the members of the household are printed on the soil in front of the house, where the deities to be worshipped are invoked. Some times even the footprints of goats are also worshipped in the ritual. The lamp is covered with a plate. The young and unmarried girls are invited by the members of the household to participate in the festival. They are served with sweets and flowers. Girls also dance around the decorated lamp. After this, the elderly women in the community tell the girls about the significance of the festival. Girls, who participated in the festival, later go out and burn their *naadis* (A knot of the under garment tied around the waist of the girl). The burning of this knot signifies, the death of evil spirits present in an unmarried girl. In the early days of the settlement of the basti, almost all households practiced this, but now only few families are following this tradition. Because the basti and its neighbourhood spread to such an extent, without leaving any open space, said one elder. Another informant felt that all new kinds of festivals are entering into Basti, keeping away the old traditions of the Mehtar community. *Dubki punnamai* is also observed in this month by the Mehtars who take a sacred bath in memory of dead ancestors.

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November (Mangsar):

Devutni gyas is celebrated in this month, depending on the calender year.

December (Pho):

Apart from the above festivals there are intensive rituals performed, for propitiating goddesses and bowries, which are limited to various events in day-to-day life. The worship of these deities happens at household level and the members of the household perform the rituals themselves. There are extensive rituals during the birth of the first child in the house. And the propitiation of the goddesses goes as and when, depending on the position of the householder. There is a ceremony known as *Gonakarna* or *buklva*, which is linked to sending married daughters to her in laws house, when she attains the age of puberty. The father in law is invited and served a feast by his counter part. He is provided with new clothes, whereas the girl is provided with 2 pairs of clothes. Whatever is celebrated according to Hindu *dharma* are followed here, says one informant. Like the Hindus who visit shrines to perform ceremonies connected with birth rituals we also do the same, mentions the informant.

Apart from propitiating gods and goddesses, Mehtars in the basti, celebrate all festivals, which the neighbouring Hindu castes celebrate. *Vinayak chaturthi* is celebrated with lot of fun and frolic attached to it. Though not celebrated at household level, this festival to a large extent is a group activity among the Mehtars. In the basti two *Ganseh pandals* are erected, by collecting money from individual donations and from households in the basti and elsewhere. The youth and community leaders in the basti manage these events. The colourful platforms are raised with electric illumination and papier-mâché decorations. There are also entertaining events during nights, which are attended by the youth and children of the community. Further, community elders are also called and they are felicitated during these events. *Dashera* or *Durga puja* is another popular festival among the Mehtars, which is celebrated both at household and at community level. In majority of the

cases, the festival is very much intertwined with the Mehtars household goddesses. *Kali* is appropriated by many as the “great goddess or supreme goddess” among all the goddesses worshipped by the Mehtars. The religious specialists among the Mehtars, who generally officiate, show devotion to worship goddess *kali*. Popular calendar art of the goddess adorn the rooms of these ritual specialists who involve in magical practices. Some of them, who practice shamanism, celebrate *Dashera* by installing life-size figurines of the goddess. The important event that gradually developed and integrated into the basti life is annual celebration of *Dashera* festival by installing a *Durgamata* idol in the basti. This is celebrated for nine days. A Brahmin is brought to perform the initial rituals on the first day. In the evenings the hired artists from the city, who sing songs and bhajans throughout the night, stage cultural performances. Known as *maataji ka vishal jagaran*, one of these days during this festival is marked for this. All the leaders and community members, attend this bhajan kirtans throughout the night. A VIP or some political leader is invited on this occasion as a guest of honor. Wide publicity is given in the neighborhood by printing leaflets and posters, which are circulated and pasted on the walls.

Diwali the festival of lights is also celebrated by the Mehtars, some performing the *Lakshmi puja* in the households. *Valmiki Jayanti* is another significant event celebrated by the community. *Valmiki* being the saint god of the Mehtars occupies an important place in the annual ceremonies of the Mehtar community. A committee appointed by the caste panchayat of the basti manages all the events related in organizing the *Valmiki Jayanti* festival. The *Valmiki* temple in the basti is built with the donations from the various households. Now it has a shrine replicating the north Indian temple style with sanctum sanctorum. Some individuals took special care in making the temple complex into a place of hygiene and serenity. On the *Gopuram* of the temple a saffron flag is hoisted with rising sun symbol painted on it. Every year this temple is painted white during the *Jayanti* day. There is no strict ritual rules laid down as any one can come and worship on their will and wish. On the *Valmiki Jayanti* day almost all Mehtars come to worship *Valmiki*. Women come with plates containing coconut, banana and sweets. A person who sits near the idol of the *Valmiki* receives them and returns half of the offerings brought by the devotees. In the

evening *Bhajans* are arranged. Whoever is interested come voluntarily and participates in the event. Some of them recite verses from Ramayan. A procession is taken out in the evening, which goes through various lanes and by lanes of the neighbourhood. Once in a while a large-scale processions are also taken out in the city, depending on the resources available. One such procession was taken out in 1998 with lot of fan fare and celebration. Colourfully decorated horses, children enacting the characters in the Ramayana are taken out in this procession. Many small Mehtar bastis participated in this event though large participants coming from the Valmiki nagar in the old city.

Mehtars also worship the local deities of the Telugu speaking *Jatis*, though selectively. During the festival of *Bonalu*, they worship *pochamma* and other goddesses, and they follow rituals of local traditions. There is a small shrine for *pochamma* in one of the by lanes of the basti. The history of this shrine is traced back to nearly 50 years back by its caretaker. Once the Mehtars also invited a local leader of the neighborhood to participate the *Bonalu* festival. The residents in that area proudly points to the shrine, which is built and developed by them. Further nearby residents take pride in its elevation to a small temple, as it attracted the local leader. This enhanced their prestige and status among basti members. The basti rapidly adopted and practicing these ceremonies, which were once not their tradition.

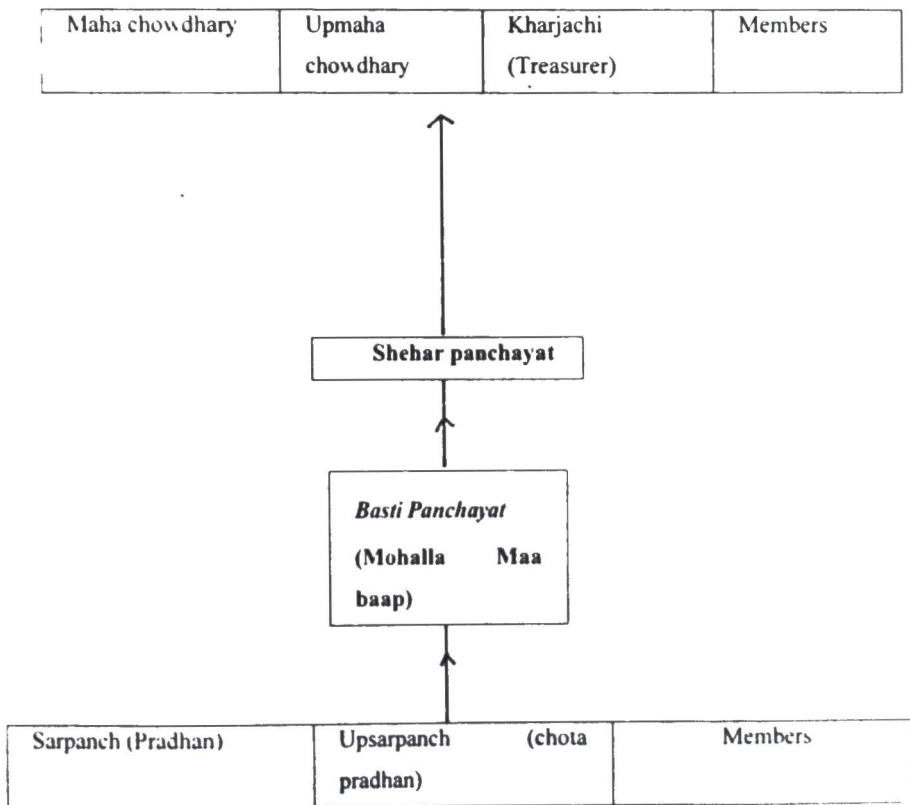
Political organization; Caste Panchayat:

Traditional leadership and caste *panchayat* is well structured and organized in Mehtar basti. The traditional caste elders, who are elected by the members of the caste, are generally known as persons who have good knowledge about the customs and rules of the community, apart from being politically superior in many respects. Some of the early-migrated families of Mehtars occupied these higher positions as they controlled large areas of Nizams's provinces as heads of municipal, and household scavenging activities. These traditional heads of Mehtars, quite often also controlled the local castes like Mala-Madiga sweepers and Muslim Mehtars, who opposed their leadership, as Mehtar heads came from Haryana. One such Mehtar leader 'Sheik Chotelal' belonged to parch family. Nizam Asman Alikhan, who provided

him facilities like horse, brought him fame among the community. This Mehtar head controlled all sweepers in the area of Hyderabad, Raichur, Bheed, Mahboobnagar, and Jahbla etc. Around 1920 Nizam Osman Ali Pasha awarded him the title 'Sheik Chotelal' (see genealogy 1.1). These traditional leaders are somewhat well versed in communication and maintained good contacts with people outside the basti, particularly with police and politicians. Generally a caste *panchayat* in the basti consists of 5-11 members. The heads of the panchayat elected by these members are known as Pradhan and *Chota Pradhan*, under whose leadership the *panchayat* sits for regular meeting to look after the affairs of the basti. This *panchayat* particularly imposes fines and punishes those individuals who violate the norms of the caste. Many of the conflicts and disputes are resolved amicably, by not necessitating the people to approach court or police. Generally known as Mohalla Maa-Baap (basti panchayat) these 11 members of the *paanch* are elected by the people once in two years. These *Mohalla panchayats* come together to elect *Shehar Panchayat*. The members of *sheharpanchayat* members elect *Sheharpanchayat's* head known as Mehtar sha. and treasurer known as *Khajanchi*. Earlier traditional caste head used to be the leader or head of *SheharPanchayat*, known as '*Mehtarsha*', is now elected by the people. Many powers are vested with him, which the community abides. He has the power to excommunicate persons found guilty. Many of the disputes, which are not resolved in Mohalla panchayat, can approach shehar paanch. In the city, Shehar panchayat is formed with 17 *Molala maa baap*, and this generally constitutes a district. The head sometimes, known as *Mahachowdhary* is accompanied by others like upmahachowdary, treasurer and other members. But the other numerically strong households often challenge the judgements given by these leaders. Who in spite of their strength had little power and access to mobility. Some of them entered into the criminal world. For example the *paarchu* households are equally strong in terms of their number. As the traditional leadership is always with the *Bidlan* families, they dominated the decision making process in judgments. There is relatively less mobility in terms of education and occupation in the *paarchu* households (See Genealogy chart No.1.1). With the democratic institutions like court, police, government offices are accessible, and with the growth of the literacy, the traditional authority has been challenged by many. Participation in politics outside the basti is prominent among some household, particularly belonging to *kagda* and *chundalias*

(See Genealogy Chart No. 1.3, 1.4). They have access to more political parties than any other group in the basti. These families also achieved significant mobility in terms of occupational diversity and economic development. Though Bidlas have achieved mobility in terms of education and occupational mobility, their participation in politics outside the sphere of the community is less.

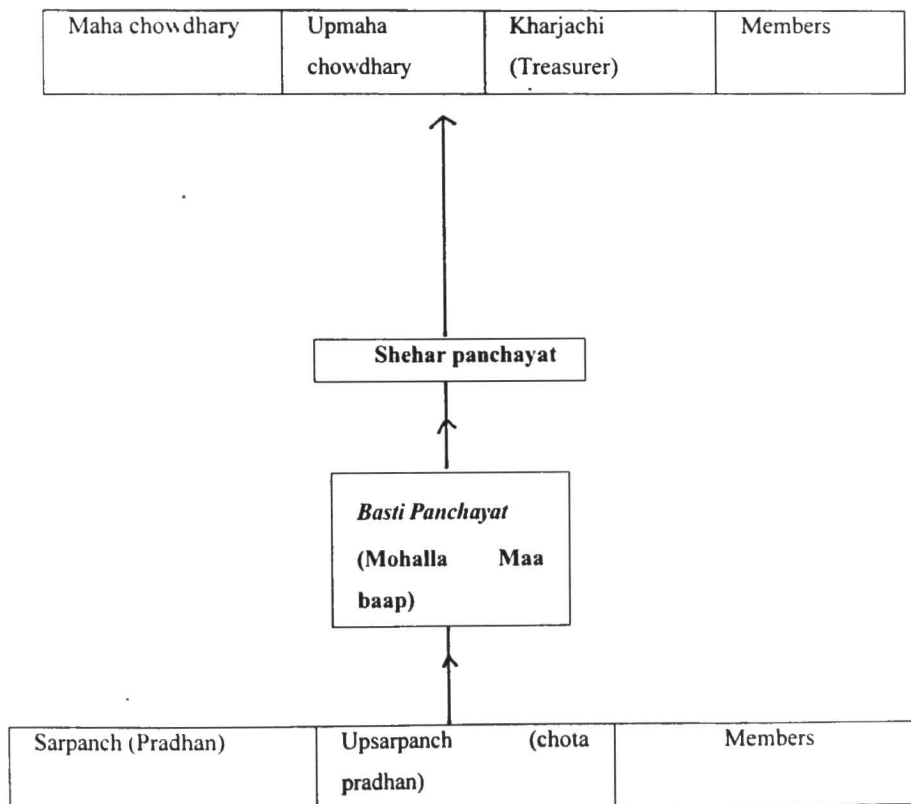
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D.no.2:

Panchayat organization of Mehtars.



Since 1970 onwards, there is a drastic decline of number of meetings of the caste *panchayat*. Many, especially the youth, who are educated and belonging to underrepresented *gotras* or persons whose population is relatively small within the caste, started challenging the caste *panchayat*. There are instances where a person who married a girl from a Telugu caste, was excommunicated from the caste, rebelled against the *paanch*, and went to police for settlement. In another case, marriage in the same *gotra* is regarded as a crime, families belonging to *parcha*, got into confrontation with the *paanch*, who rejected the marriage. This resulted in violent clashes among the Mehtars, and even today these incidents created a dividing line among Mehtars in the basti and families belonging to *parch* (second largest in population). Some households whose numerical strength is small, quite often challenge the 'punishments' and 'judgments' given by the *paanch* committee. Among the Mehtars, there is a strict rule regarding begging. One should not beg and it is prohibited. If one found practicing it he will be punished severely. The punishments given to prostitution are also very severe and sometimes excommunication from the caste is carried out. Though in recent times *paanch* is mainly dealing with disputes in the basti, some people are approaching the police station. Often it is done deliberately to create awareness among the basti people. Sundar one of the key informant while narrating one such incident opined, that 'our people should also know the 'constitutional safeguards' and about law enforcing agencies, so that the community won't feel that the: *paanch* is acting ruthlessly'. Many a times, he says, punishments given by the *paanch* are relatively less intensive when compared to punishments given by police. He narrated an incident where a young boy happened to steal sports items from the community gym in the *Valmiki* temple. This is witnessed by a group of youth and the culprit is brought before '*paanch*' with all the evidence. His parents were summoned, and the boy confessed stealing the sport items. *Paanch* committee gave a judgment that the boy should touch the ground of the *Valmiki* temple with his nose, by folding his hands back. Afterwards he was handed over to local police station kept there for 5-6 hours and he was brought back to the basti on bail. Sunil opines that there must be severe punishment so that, they may not commit same mistakes, perceiving the intricacies in law. There are many instances where the people, who in turn approached the court, by not accepting the *paanch* judgments. The basti *paanch* settled 7 inter caste marriage disputes so far, and one rape case. In the latter

case the culprit refused to marry the victim, and the *paanch*, forced his brother to marry, by threatening excommunication from the caste. Ran Singh, my key informant says, our girls never commit such crimes of intercaste marriage, as we watch them. Any thing pertaining to the girls is considered prestigious, among Mehtars. But in spite of many conflicts between the modern democratic institutions and traditional caste *panchayat* of Mehtars, people in the basti still value any judgments by the *paanch*.

Education:

Education among Mehtars is rather a recent and a new dimension in their lives. Particularly the establishment of Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad and subsequent absorption of the 'Mehtars' into government jobs, led to the transformation. Many primary and secondary schools were setup in and around the neighbourhood of the basti since the 80's. This helped many Mehtar households to send their children to schools. Due to 'untouchability' and polluted 'identity' attached to them because of their 'work' of sweeping many did not pursue education in the early periods of their settlement in the basti. Except one or two households, majority of the children remained either at home or accompanied parents in their daily work. As narrated by Arun, 'earlier these children accompanied their parents to their work place to get money and other eatables came back to play in the basti of mud walls'. Now every family is sending their children to school. Even girls are also encouraged to go to schools. Households, whose primary or substantial part of living depended on scavenging occupation, showed relatively poor results; when compared to households, having government and other employees or people who are into enterprising activities. There are more primary and secondary school students among non-scavenging households.

Educational levels among, scavenging and non-scavenging households.

Occupation of the households	Literacy Levels						Total
	Nil	Primary	Secondary	Intermediate	Degree	P.G	
House holds where scavenging work is not primary	26	29	37	12	6	6	116
Govt Employee, clerical, police, class IV jobs, petty business, pig rearing etc.	19	15	31	14	6	1	56
Scavengers, /working in private firms	5	8	12	2	1		28
Total	50	62	80	28	13	7	231

Educational level among (persons) whose households engaged in different forms of scavenging occupation.

	Education					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nil	7	2	11		3	27
Primary	8	4	16			18
Secondary	12	2	15	1		47
Intermediate	1	1	9			11
Degree	1	1	3			5
P.G	1	1	1			3
Total	30	11	55	1	3	110

* Literacy rate is collected from the households where children are admitted into 1st class

All population totaling 1678 people's literacy is collected

** Percentage does not always add up to 100 due to 'rounding' error

1. Household work
2. Non house hold work / Private offices' Theatres
3. Municipal corporation / Govt offices
4. Searches work every day
5. Work system (Budlika ka kam)
6. Others (who work on a daily basis and other kinds of jobs)

Educational levels increase from joint families to Nuclear families High incidence of illiterates, are found among joint and other families, whereas the progress is quite ahead in Nuclear families

Educational Levels among households of different family types

Family type	Education						Total
	Nil	Primary	Secondary	Intermediate	Degree	P.G	
Nuclear	30	36	50	12	8	6	145
SubNuclear	2	5	7	4	1		19
Lineal collateral Joint	12	11	15	8	3	1	50
Supplemental lineal collateral			2	1			3
Single person	6	1	6	3	1		17
Total	50	53	80	28	13	7	231

Dropout levels are high among nuclear families, as compared to joint families. The interesting thing about joint families is that there is better control and supervision among the joint family members. In the basti, families who are into business and other entrepreneurial activity are giving more attention to their children's education. Some even drop their children at school and colleges. Dropout levels at secondary schools are high in all families and there are few dropouts at intermediate level among joint families.

Dropout levels among different family types.

Family type	Educational levels					Total
	Nil	Primary	Secondary	Intermediate	Degree	
Nuclear	104	15	15	7	1	142
SubNuclear	16		1	2		19
Lineal collateral joint	34	2	13	3	1	50
Supplemental lineal collateral joint			2		1	3
Single person	13		2	1	1	17
Total	167	17	31	13	3	231

Many respondents from nuclear families felt that the dropping out from school is a result of economic hardships as many helped their parents in their work. A few also felt that frequent involvement in quarrels at school made them to leave. There are also incidents among them where students quarreled on their caste status in school or abused children in the name of caste. There are others, due to lack of interest left the school, whose number is high in the nuclear families.

Reasons for dropouts from school among different family types

Family type	Reasons						Total
	*	To Assist Parents	Quarrels	Not interested	Failed	Married	
Nuclear	104	19	8	7	4	0	142
Sub nuclear	18					1	19
Lineal collateral Joint	34	5	4	2	5		50
Supplemental lineal collateral		1			1	1	3
Single person	13			1	2	1	17
Total	169	25	12	10	12	3	231

There are altogether, 13 graduates, and 7 postgraduates found among these households. One engineering and one medical graduate found in one family.

In the basti, many elders, and youth opined that education, is a valuable thing and their children should go to schools, so that they will be able to take up other occupations. But, many expressed inability to send or persuade their children to school. One informant said that 'these kids, are habituated to this basti environment, and they make friendships, which are not good'. As others say, many are not pursuing education as they have occupational security and nobody can take away their jobs, as their occupation is considered polluted. Very few families in the basti, who are early migrants, or holders of *Jajman* rights, among Mehtars are well ahead in imparting education for their children. Families belonging certain *Gotrams* like *Bidlan*, *Chindalia*, *Mangwan*, and

Kagda, contain more number of literates than others. But with the opening up of government and private educational institutions in and around basti parents are sending their children to school. In the early period, due to 'Urdu medium' schools, nobody sent their children. Now some households are also sending their children to English medium schools. These households are those, whose members are either in government servants or not dependent on income from scavenging occupation.

Daily life:

Daily life in the *Basti* starts as early as 4:30A.M. In the morning people who have to attend the sweeping work at private houses get up early. They go for the work around 5:30 A.M. and finish their work by 8:30 A.M. If some one is engaged in some private works or previously arranged work, they look after them, and return home by 11A.M. But some, who search for work daily, return home at 6:P.M After a meal and an after noon nap some get ready for the evening assembly of friends and sit for playing cards, and visit local market place for the purchase of the goods. Generally if some friends are available they sit for a drink or two. For many, leisure activity means playing cards and having a drink with the friends. A few do prefer movies, but with the cable TV network many watch them at home during evening time. Women after returning from their work in the morning, attend to all household activities. Many participate in all the community festivals.

The Basti and its Surroundings:

The basti with its very location in the inner part of the old city offer a unique, composition with a complexity of human relationships. In its early stages, this Mehtar basti is relatively isolated and was at the end of the inner city outskirts. But in course of time, with the growth of local population the residential areas have spread towards all corners of the Mehtar basti. Now it is surrounded by Muslim residential area at one end and on the other side by Hindu communities belonging to various *Jatis*. This basti has witnessed severe communal clashes in the years 1992, 1997 and 1998. The communal clashes have taken place due to some prejudiced propaganda by the mischievous elements whose intention is to settle some political scores. The very location of the basti is so significant that the Mehtars especially youth are automatically

dragged to the violence, in which one of the youth belonging to my key informant family also died. In yet another incident one of the Mehtars who went for the scavenging work in a particular household got killed and the body was dumped into the sewerage tunnel, according to one of the informant. This case is registered with the police. And this also became an issue for the communal violence later on. Though these riots have created some distance between the Mehtars and the Muslims, later they were pacified with the intervention of the police, who formed friendship committees. The youth and other do normally go for the shopping and for other petty things like tea etc, to the Muslim residential area. Some of the Muslims are even invited for the marriage ceremonies held in the basti also. Muslims also invite them for the marriage functions.

The local Telugu communities also maintain friendly relations with the Mehtar community. And quite often they are invited for the marriages, festivals and other such popular festivals like *Ganesh chaturthi* and *Dasherra*. But the participation of Telugu communities in the festivals and marriages of Mehtars is relatively absent. Mehtar youth's participation in others festivals is also less. But on individual level they are related to many people in course of their work. The frequent meeting points for many are the local liquor shops in the neighbour hood, where Mehtars interact with the local population. Some times there were clashes with others where the youth of the basti are involved. People who started enterprises like, tailoring, cable TV, are able to mingle with many outsiders than the people who are engaged in the sweeping work. But in many instances, "we" "they" demarcations exist within and outside the Mehtar community, as it is evident in everyday interactions, and in the daily life style. In the discourses regarding politics and other such topics, it is always mentioned by the Mehtars that it is they (Hindu *Jatis*) who did that way or this way. Apart from this everyday interactions, are limited to such things like, wishing each other or some petty business interaction. In general there is a clear mental demarcation between the Mehtar's (who engage in the scavenging occupation), and rest of the Telugu communities residing in the area.



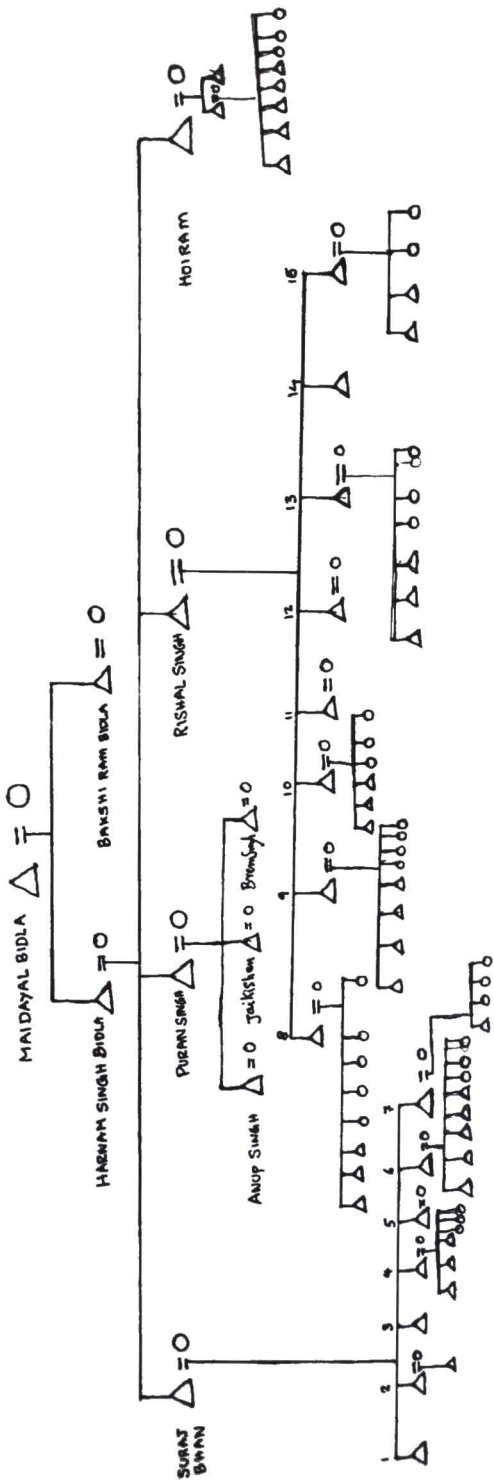
Public Amenities:

The basti with its well-laid tar and cement roads is quite transformed during the past three decades. As one community elder puts it, “earlier, our children played in dust and mud, pig sheds co-existed with us, even we faced difficulty in getting drinking water. We used to take our morning meal after the work, at work place. Children also accompanied their parents to assist and often to eat the food given by the householders”. The Basti has undergone many changes in this respect, as it got many facilities. Its gradual transformation, from an isolated ‘basti’ to ‘Nagar’ (planned colony) improved many of the parameters of the living standards*.

The basti is well connected to other parts of the inner city of Hyderabad. Small by lanes from the main road leads towards the basti. Both tar and cement roads are laid down during the early nineties. Though the basti appears to be on the periphery of the neighbourhood, a wide road towards its southern end connects it. Facilities like water and electricity are available to all the households in the basti. In recent times all most all households are connected with the cable TV network. The police station is located a half kilometer away from the basti. A high school run by the Government of Andhra Pradesh is established in the early nineties. But the medium of instruction is Telugu and hence many of the children in the basti prefer to go to the other schools in the area. Though there is no hospital in the basti, many private clinics are located in the area at a walkable distance. In fact the *Valmiki* Basti is located on the fringe of the larger neighbourhood facing east side, known as Gowlipura. *Valmiki* basti is very close to a Muslim neighbourhood in the region. The Muslim neighbourhood is connected with a tar road. Muslim community uses the connecting road to the basti. There are regular commuters from that part. Though there is no vehicular traffic in the basti, auto rickshaws, two wheelers and bicycles move in the area. There is one Public distribution shop in the basti, managed by one of the leaders in the community. Essentials like kerosene, sugar, wheat, soaps, etc are sold

* Generally ‘basti’ signifies a residential area, almost akin to slum with low standard of living. While, ‘Nagar’ is associated with a more structured residential area with all amenities.

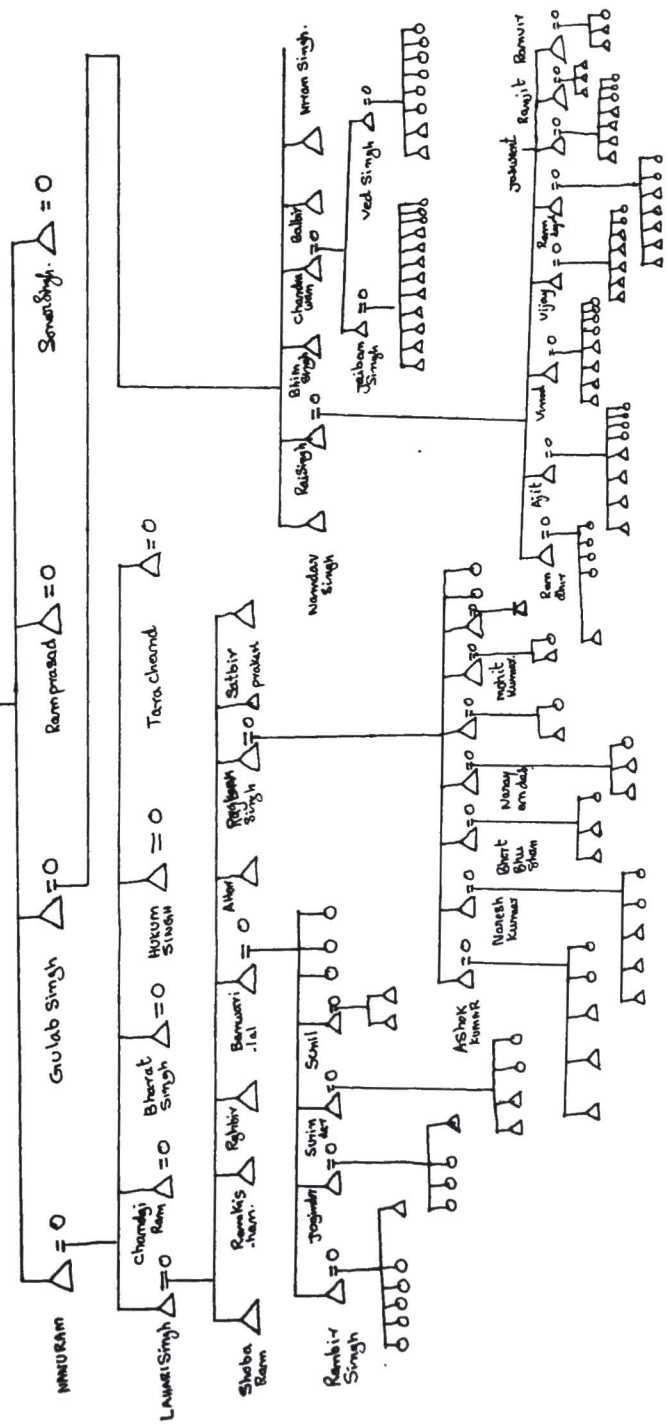
here. Many of the homes use this facility. A few go outside the basti for buying essentials. Often they visit the nearby markets to buy the essentials.



- 1 KANTA SINGH
- 2 RAM DHEER SINGH
- 3 NARAYAN SINGH
- 4 DAYA SINGH
- 5 JAGDISH SINGH (who obtained first Ph.D. in the community).
- 6 Jile Singh
- 7 Suya Prakash.
- 8 Ahar Singh
- 9 Omprakash Bidla
- 10 Satbir Singh
- 11 Ahar Singh
- 12 Dheramvir Singh.
- 13 Sukhinder Singh.
- 14 Karamvir Singh.
- 15 Rajvir Singh
- 16 Mahavir Singh

SHEV RAM
PARCHA.

Manu Ram
Gulab Singh
Rampasad
Somen Singh



Manu Ram

Gulab Singh

Rampasad

Somen Singh

Chandji Ram

Bharat Singh

Nisum Singh

Tara Chand

Shaba Ram

Ramkishan Singh

Rajbir Singh

Banwari Singh

Alwar Singh

Rajkesh Singh

Satbir Singh

Prabhat Singh

Joginder Singh

Sewil Singh

Nanday Singh

Rishi Singh

Chanda Ram

Balbir Singh

Irian Singh

Ved Singh

Ramesh Singh

Ashok Kumar

Nandesh Kumar

Ghant Ghus Singh

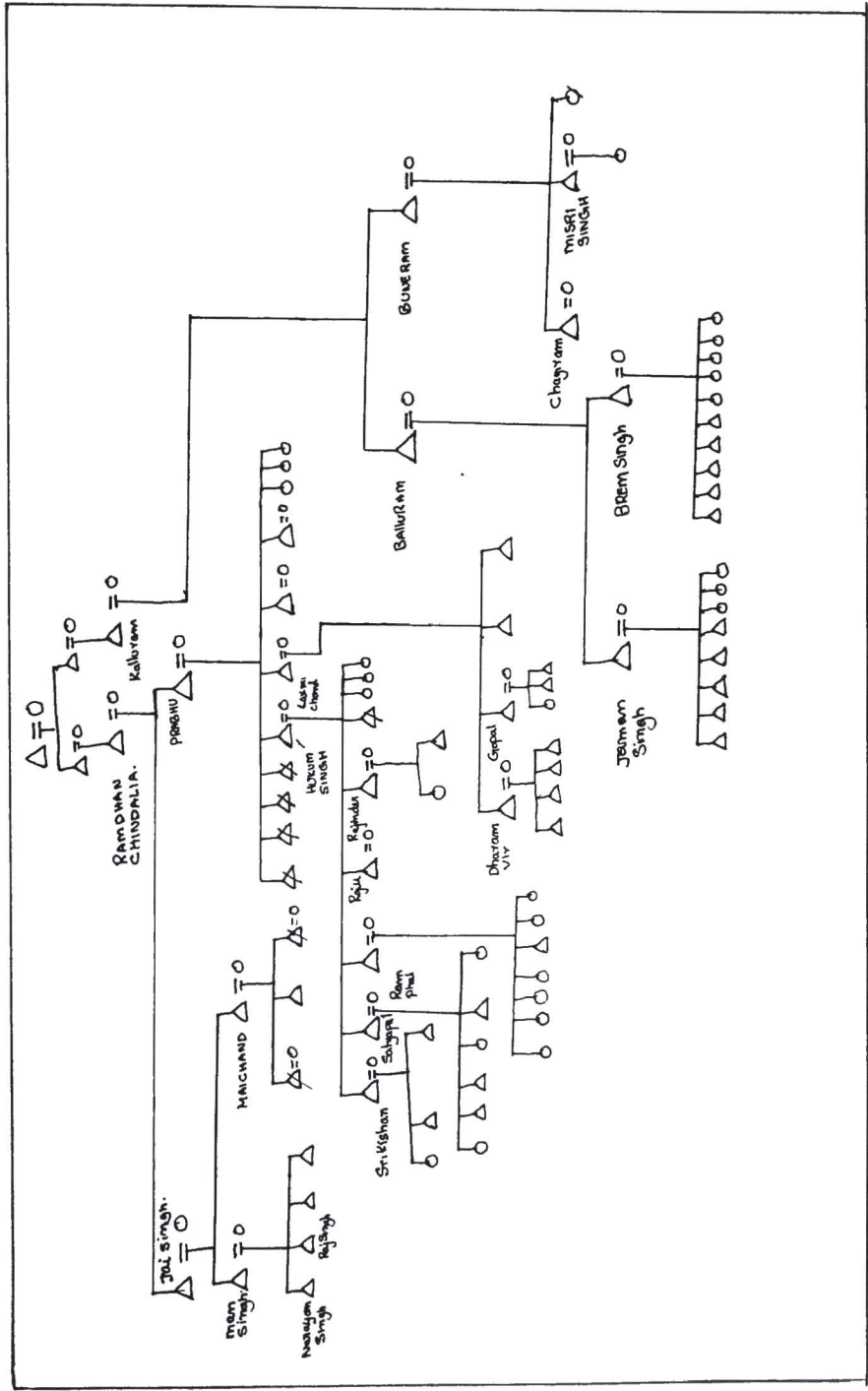
Nand Singh

Vimal Singh

Vijay Singh

Ram Singh

Jaganat Singh



WORKING AS SWEEPERS: WORK, IDENTITY AND CASTE.

In the *Valmiki* basti persons engaged in the scavenging occupation belong to the second and third generation of people who migrated from various villages of Haryana in North India. In the last part of nineteenth century, and towards early twentieth century the Mehtars in the basti are engaged in the sweeping occupation in the houses of the then ruling Nizam and their officers. The early settlers were brought by the Nizam along with an army battalion to look after the horse sheds of the palaces. They were given a place to live, which is almost at the dead end of the then old city. Majority of the early migrants settled in this basti. This basti became a central habitation area for many Mehtars. Apart from this place Mehtars also spread over to serve the nobles in the various parts of the city. The work pattern and topography of their work changed with the entry of the municipal administration in the area of urban sanitation. The Mehtars were slowly got absorbed into the municipal administration as sweepers. In the city and in the neighbourhood, they are identified with their work that is sweeping. The name of the community that is 'Mehtar' gradually come to be associated with the work they do. For many Mehtar means sweepers. In the public they are popular as '*metarollu*', '*metarodu*', who are scavengers. The community and its work became synonymous in the city. An ascribed status based on their work is given to them, which is a common phenomenon in Indian society, where birth- rights are ascribed rather than achieved.

Working as sweepers:

The work sphere of the Mehtars in the basti can be looked in terms of two spheres. One is working in the public sphere, which includes working as sweepers in the municipalities. This is managed by the state administration and the persons work there are salaried employees, employed by the local administration. In the second category work is analyzed keeping in view its private domain. Here Mehtars are engaged in the sweeping work, which is managed by themselves and the community. The payments and other benefits they get out of the work are based on the agreements made between their masters and themselves. Out of total two hundred and thirty one households in the basti, one hundred and sixteen are directly getting their

income out of the scavenging occupation. Among them either one or all the family members are engaged in sweeping work. They are engaged in a variety of sweeping works. One hundred and fifteen households derive their income not primarily from sweeping work, but from other occupations. These householders have either sold their rights on work or leased the work to somebody.

There are thirty households who totally work as sweepers in the independent households in the city. Out of them twelve households belong to the small families; thirteen belong to the medium size families, while five families belong to very large families respectively. Eleven families are engaged in the sweeping work in private companies, shops and theaters. Fifty-five families are working as sweepers in the municipal corporation and other government offices. In this category twenty-one belong to small families, as twenty-three, eight and three medium and large and very large families respectively. Fourteen families, mostly belonging to small and medium families, search for their work every day. They also do regular sweeping work in some households and then go to various market places in the city, in search of small works, where payments are made immediately. Such works includes, either cleaning some floors of a shop or theaters or commercial complexes. Six households belonging to small and medium families are engaged in the *Badli ka kaam*. They are working on some body's behalf. Here they pay fifty percent of the amount they earn, to the owner of the work.

See the following table

Time period and time spent on average in m...

5	work > 10 hours	1
4	< 5 hrs	2
3	> 5 hrs	7
2	work in a book	1
1	work in a book	21
3	Time spent on	1
4	Morning hours	13
7	Less than 10 hours	24
7	More than 10 hours	7
9	Others	34
10	Total	147

Time spent on the work...
 The work...
 members regularly attend the work...
 of the day while others...
 jobs from morning to evening...
 length from nuclear families...
 region belongs to the nuclear families...
 has than the hours in attending and...
 which varies according to family size and type...
 the work they do it also determines the...
 work and time

work and time...
 and selling the work...
 arrangements are also known as...
 changes (generally such deals happen...
 work in special hours Persons employed...
 Members in individual houses The...
 responses say one informant In another...
 another category

Occupational Categories among Mehtars according to Family Size

S N o.	Type of Occupation	Family Size				Total
		Small (1-5)	Medium (6-8)	Large (9-12)	Very Large (>13)	
1	Sweeping in Households	12	13	1	4	30
2	Sweeping in Pvt Companies, shops, theatres etc	4	6	1		11
3	Working as Sweeper in MCH, Govt offices	21	23	8	3	55
4	Daily search, apart from household work	7	6	1		14
5	Badli ka kaam, also some house hold work	2	4	0		6
6	People who sold or leased their work	29	46	25	15	115
	Total	75	97	37	22	231

Structure of the work:

Persons working in the Municipal Corporation and government organizations attend their work early in the morning and return home by evening. Persons working in such jobs rarely attend other works, as many of them attend to the household chores after returning from work. Mehtars engaged in the work of private firms and other market areas rather spend more time from the morning to the late evening. They do multiple job works in different parts of the city. Persons who are engaged in the sweeping of independent houses start their daily routine rather earlier than those who work in the shops and government offices. Mehtars who have to search for their work on a daily basis spend more time in the city and they travel more time in search of the work. They also work as daily wageworkers. They get their payments immediately after they complete the work. These persons sometimes also take up the work of others in the basti. And on their behalf they go and attend work. Persons engaged in municipal work, quite often depute these people to work on their behalf. Both the parties mutually negotiate the payments made to such works. Since nobody objects to such replacements there is more flexibility here, than in other

occupations says one informant. In another category people do the work of other Mehtars, in individual houses. The owner of the work generally holds the right to work in specific house. Persons employed by him will pay him fifty percent of the earnings. Generally such deals happen in closely connected families. These arrangements are also known as *kaam karidna and kaam bechana* (buying the work and selling the work).

Work and time:

Time spent on the sweeping work varies according to the nature of the work they do. It also determines the earning capacity of the members of the household, which varies according to family size and types. There are thirty-eight members who spend less than five hours in attending and completing their formal sweeping work. Among them majority belongs to the nuclear families. Members spending more than five hours are also largely from nuclear families. Nearly members of forty-nine families work in both the shifts from morning to evening. Twenty-three members work mainly in the morning hours of the day, while thirty-six members work till late morning hours to afternoon. Ten members regularly attend the work from 10^o clock to 5^o clock in the evening. Very few, works till late in the evenings. The following table gives the details.

Time period, and time spent on scavenging work, according to family types

S no	Working hours	Type of Family					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	< 5 hrs.	28	4	3		3	38
2	> 5 hrs.	7	1	4		1	13
3	Noon	1	1				2
4	Working in both Shifts	27	5	13	2	2	49
5	Till late evening	1			1		2
6	Morning hours (5.30 - 10)	13	1	7		2	23
7	Late Morning hours (8am -2pm)	24	3	9			36
8	10am - 5pm	7		3			10
9	Others	34	4	11		9	58
	Total	142	19	50	3	17	231

- 1 Nuclear family
- 2 Sub Nuclear family
- 3 Lincal collateral joint family
- 4 Supplemental lincal collateral
- 5 Single person house holds

* Data are collected from households and persons who are engaged in scavenging occupation, and attend to work daily, either individually

** Work in both shifts, includes, both Municipal, and privately employed sweepers

For persons engaged in sweeping work at individual houses, the day starts at 5'o clock in the morning. If wife and husband are also working, they together go to work by 6A.M in the morning. They complete their work by 9 A.M, and go round the bastis to collect their payments. Since payments, are made (by) independently by the householders, the time varies. Monthly payments made by householders vary according to the agreement between the Mehtar and his employer. Mehtar collects their payments through ought the month on rotating basis. In all most all the days in the month there will be some sort of payments received by the Mehtars. They then go to the market place after wards to buy some vegetables or home needs and return home between 12-1 P.M in the noon. Some return early in the afternoon. After having an hour and half sleep women generally attend to homework in their houses. Men generally play cards, or some go around the market or look after any other subsidiary activity they can pursue A few families rear pigs and run the petty business shops. The afternoon free time is thus utilized in taking care of their subsidiary activities. In some joint families, sweeping work is shared and exchanged by the members of the family. This facilitates them to save time and look after other activities at home and outside. Due to this flexibility, members from joint families are able to manage time, efficiently to undertake subsidiary occupations. Among the joint family members, pig rearing is a common activity. Pig rearing is an activity, which needs more time in maintaining and managing the sheds.

Subsidiary activities:

Thirty five percent of the households are engaged in the various subsidiary activities. Auto driving, rearing pigs, and going for additional work in sweeping are common subsidiary activities for many. Sixteen members agreed that they play cards in the free time. Some are engaged in the magical rituals. Known as removers of the evil spirits, some persons in the basti adopted this as important secondary occupation. Many in the basti favour playing cards and smoking hukka. People play cards in the basti, in groups. Generally, many decisions are made during this time regarding the work, and evening activities. Many youngsters also play cards without any objection from the parents or the elders. Playing cards is a daily routine for many. Few are into local politics and social service activities. They are either members of some political parties or they work under some leader. Free time is available at one's will and wish, as any body can opt out of the wok. Their work will be completed or attended by some one from the family. One informant puts it this way, 'what else one wants, this work gives plenty of free time and leisure'.

The following table presents various subsidiary occupations carried out by the Mehtar community.

Subsidiary Activities in Different Occupational Categories

S N o	Subsidiary activities	Occupation						Tot al
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	Auto driving	2	1	3	7			13
2	Petty business & Finance		1		3			4
3	Playing cards & House hold work	3		5	8			16
4	Social work & Politics			2	1			3
5	Bacon & Rearing Animals	7			10			17
6	Additional sweeping Work	4	1	2	17			24
7	Physical exercises Sports							
8	Shamanism			1	1			2
9	House hold work	11	5	33	25			74
10	House work & other petty things					78		78
								231

- 1 Working as sweeper at households
- 2 Working as sweeper in private offices /cinema theatres
- 3 Working in Municipal Corporation / Govt office as sweeper
- 4 People who work on *Badli ka kam*, part time sweepers & who search for work every day, by going to market
- 5 Others, who do not directly work as scavengers and do not go to sweeping work. They are engaged in other occupations

Work and Savings:

The saving patterns among many households are similar with few having individual bank accounts. Mehtars engaged in the sweeping work in individual houses, and whose income comes from the scavenging work, mostly save in the local chits. Those who are engaged in the petty business, and are working in private organizations save their money in both chits and saving bank accounts. There are few government employees who save in the local chits, followed by persons engaged in magical practices. There are only four who have taken LIC policy. Seventy households belonging to all categories of income sources have savings in local chits, banks and life insurance policies. Families whose income comes from petty business and other areas are more. Those who are engaged in scavenging are relatively in small numbers who have these accounts. Thirty four house holds do not save in any manner as their incomes is not sufficient for their needs. Again in this category majority belong to the households whose income is from scavenging occupation The informal saving pattern is preferred more among Mehtars whose primary source of income is scavenging. This helps many to take money at convenient intervals with more flexibility. Whereas institutionalized savings are more among house holds who diversified their income generating activities.

The following table furnishes the details

Types of savings in different occupational categories (Non Scavenging households)

S N o	Saving pattern	Occupation of the household			
		1	2	3	4
1	Chits	76	8	30	4
2	Bank	1	1	1	1
3	LIC		3	1	
4	Chits, Bank, LIC	17	20	32	1
5	Depositing with individuals		1		
6	No savings	22	2	9	1
		116	35	73	7

1 Households primary income comes from sweeping work

2 Govt employee / working in offices etc

3 Petty business independent enterprise working in private firms as watchman sales boy etc

4 Magical practices

5 * Data are collected as revealed by informer about their main savings but it may be considered that households have more than one form of saving

Work and education:

Education levels among the Mehtars are very low. Persons engaged in the scavenging work possess very low level of education. Twenty-seven households, never send their children to schools. Eighteen households are able to manage their children's education till primary level. Forty-seven continued till the secondary level, as five and three households respectively are able to manage till graduate and postgraduate degrees. There is a better awareness among the families and households who are into government employment than persons working in private sphere.

Educational levels of persons and household occupation.

Education	Type of Work					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nil	7	2	11		3	27
Primary	8	4	16			18
Secondary	12	2	15	1		47
Intermediate	1	1	9			11
Degree	1	1	3			5
P.G	1	1	1			3
Total	30	11	55	1	3	110

* Literacy rate is collected from all population totaling 1678 persons

- 1 Household work
- 2 Non house hold work / Private offices/ Theatres
- 3 Municipal corporation / Govt offices
- 4 Searches work every day
5. Mutual exchange of work (*Badlika kaam*)
6. Others (who works for household/ non household etc)

Drop out levels, are more among the Mehtars who are engaged in the household scavenging work. When the data are collected it is revealed that the majority of the dropouts assisted their parents in their work. A significant number of them have failed in primary and secondary level in schools. Some dropouts are due to quarrels at school with the fellow students. Among them many reported that one or the other time these quarrels are due to abuses using the caste name. Following table shows the details.

Dropout Levels According to Occupation type of Households.

S N o	Reasons for leaving school	Occupation Scavenging	Occupation Non-Scavenging	Total	Other s
1	Assisted parents in their work	116	103	219	
2	Quarrels at school, for reasons of abuse and others	13	16	29	
3	Not interested in studies	18	39	57	
4	Failed in the Exams	38	43	81	
5	Married	4	14	18	
6	Commit riots	1		1	
	Total			405	1265

*Data are collected about individuals in the household

Mutual exchange of work:

In many instances, Mehtars mutually support themselves irrespective of their working either in Municipal Corporation, or private organizations. If two persons belonging to same family, working in different areas, they support each other. If the other person is sick or cannot attend for certain reasons, one of his family members and attend his work. Usually they do not face any problems at the workplace, as no body

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comes forward to do the sweeping work. These kinds of exchanges are quite common in the basti. These arrangements are made across families, barring few individual differences. Some times work arrangements are made from both short periods to longer durations. The actual employee or the person who is supposed to do the work is replaced by the one who is actually is not an employee or owner of the work. Kinship and family ties are also useful in many ways in making agreements. The older people who cannot continue in their work as sweepers give their work to one of the family members. There are no stringent rules with regard to exchange of work. If any dispute arises due to personal reasons, they are solved by the caste *panchayat* of the community.

People and work place:

Mehtars encounter people at various work places, involving government officers to petty businessmen. In the public sector offices, usually they maintain good relations with the staff. As sweeping work is nothing to do with the other domains of the work sphere in the office spaces, there is little interaction with the officials. The lower rung officials who are supposed to be supervisors of sanitation are quite familiar with the Mehtars. They attend the work in offices much earlier to the office hours, and later they keep roaming around the office and its surroundings. During the festival times like *Dashera* and *Divali*, they collect money and gifts from the office staff. Though other category employees do collect the money, sweepers demand their own share and special contributions from the staff and officials in the offices. These kinds of privileges are not available to Mehtars who work in the public areas like cleaning toilets, removing garbage or in sewage tunnels. They maintain relatively little contact with people, as there is no need for going to offices, except on salary day. Mehtars working in the offices rarely went on strikes, as described earlier, officials help them, in all kinds of crisis or needs. If a Mehtar is unable to go to work for some reason, one of his family members or some body will be sent to do the work. Persons engaged in the sweeping work of the private houses, maintain relatively good relations. There is not much one to one interaction, except during the time of payments. Few Mehtars who are directly engaged in the scavenging work are quite often invited to the public ceremonies and events, like marriage. But these people are relatively less in number. Persons working for individual houses as sweepers, have very less interaction with them except during festival occasions. They enter

the house from the back yard and yell at them informing that the Mehtar came to clean the toilets. The broom and water bucket is readily kept in the toilet, or water is provided upon his arrival in a bucket kept exclusively kept for the purpose. In some Muslim houses, Mehtars enter the house from the front door itself. In these houses Mehtar is allowed to take water without any inhibition, unlike the Hindu houses where water is provided upon the request of the Mehtar. In these private houses Mehtars get all kinds of alms during festival seasons, including money, food and clothes. A few of them, also receives food items every day. Generally the treatment at work place is normal. But thirty-one respondents feel that people maintain distance from them and treat them differently. The interaction with those people is also very less in many occasions. Eight respondents feel that the payments they receive are small and are delayed many times. A few of the respondents said that, while they come out after cleaning the toilets, many sprinkle water of their footsteps, so that the pollution caused by them can be removed. They also felt that their behaviour is suspected since they belong to Mehtar *Jati*.

The following table gives the opinions expressed by the various respondents.

Treatment at work place, by the employers, towards persons working as sweepers, or belonging to the sweepers family

S.No.	Opinion	Persons
1	No Problem, we are treated normally	178
2	Keep distance from us / some treat us very inhumanly	31
3	Low wages are paid at irregular time periods	8
4	They sprinkle water, on our footprints But give us gifts	2
5	Some suspect our behavior, because we are Mehtars	6
6	No response	6
	Total	231

* Data is collected from individuals, who are working as sweepers presently, and also in the past, from all 231-house holds

After their work hours, Mehtars go to the market and interact with number of people. But many of them are petty businessmen or shop venders. Their interaction with them is normal. In their everyday interaction in the local market, teashops and hotels, they usually maintain good relations with men. But they are known with their occupation.

Work place-coping with polluted identity:

As described earlier, Mehtar's work in a variety of public and private spheres as sweepers. Unlike the constraints involved in the private sphere, sphere of work at public places are better organized. Persons working in the private institutions or houses, have to cope up with many uncertainties and risk factors. These involve from the low the wages to behaviour like looking upon the sweepers with caste identity. Many Mehtars felt, though the treatment meted out to them is relatively normal in many respects, still they some how are unable to mix freely with their employers, particularly in private organizations and houses. All, in the basti, have emphasized this. The work that is scavenging practiced by them is considered as their unique feature.

A person who works as a sweeper and also into auto driving as subsidiary occupation, revealed the following strategies employed by him while cleaning toilets. He says *' I employ a variety of tricks to get more money as well as to tease the persons who pay me meager amounts as salary. Some times I keep more stone in the toilet, so that they ask me to remove them in my next visit to the house. They pay me whatever I demand. Other wise in normal occasions they do not pay in time. It also happens that I visit their houses a bit late, so that they feel my need. But you know, this all because of our helplessness (majburi) that I do such things. You know to maintain a family is very difficult, you see I also took to auto driving'*. Raj further says that he never kept his identity as a secret among the friends and other college mates. *'I never felt bad that I am born into Mehtar caste.'* Says Raj. Another informant says that he has been sweeping the school toilets of the local Muslim community for almost two decades. He says he is unable to remove the stones piled up in the toilets of the schools. As it is known practice among Muslims that one has to clean the genitals completely and many use the small pieces of bricks for the purpose, which are piled up in large numbers. He further says *" I was never paid extra money for this hard job, rather they scold me if I go late to the work. What to do, I scold them in the low voice and start doing my work'*. But many of the Mehtars are of the opinion that they go to work to do it completely and return with the payments. But due to the inferior treatment, meted to them they avoid the work half way or do it superficially. *'Who knows what we are doing and how much powder or acid we use'* says one informant.

Most of them opined that they are identified with the work they do rather than, valuing their honesty. As Saroj puts it “ The Hindus any way do not treat us properly. However trustworthy we are, nobody believes us. You know we clean the dirt of the people and still we are not respected. Even though I give services by cleaning their dirt, toilets, and their feet and drink that water, they don’t believe me. Instead they believe their own caste men. The doctor, who every day touches human excreta for testing is respected. He cuts the body and puts his hand in the womb, and cleans it again, and people respects him and salute him. Don’t they think that we are equal to them”. Then the informant pointing to the demeaning attitude of the people towards Mehtars pointed that he respected the researcher for his age, but not by caste. He further comments by saying that the world respects rich, irrespective of his identity.

Women, Household and Work:

Women’s contribution to work at home and out side is very significant among the Mehtar households. Majority of the households needs are taken care by the women. In the early hours, women accompany their husbands to work in various bastis. Women return rather early by 12 P.M to home. On their return they buy vegetables and other required ration for that day. They prepare lunch and wait for the children to return from the school or work. Apart from this regular household work is totally taken care by them. It is regular feature for many housewives that they have to attend the needs of their husbands during their drinking time in the evening. Generally preparation of some vegetable or pork curry is very common Housewives, have to serve whatever is required during this time. Though a few men participate in house keeping activities, it is the women who do the maximum household work. For many there is no entertainment except going to the local theaters for the noon shows. Watching movies is once a great past time, but with the invasion of the television, many stick to their homes to watch the popular cinema and other programmes. Women apart from their household chores do accompany their husband in some cases where the work burden is more. If the husband is sick and unable to go to work, she goes and completes his duties It happens at both private houses as well as government offices. Generally no body objects if wife of a

sweeper coming and doing job on his behalf. Buying essential goods is also a women's job among the Mehtars. Men rarely go to the markets for shopping. Women go to the nearby market area to buy vegetables and other essential commodities for the home. Though there is no clear sexual division of the labour, women traditionally engaged in the scavenging work. But in recent times the educated and socially mobile families, are not sending the girls to the scavenging work. In the recent past, there is an incident where some residents of a nearby neighbourhood assault a Mehtar girl. Women observe strict veil system while she walks in the basti. The same also applies in the house also, if some elderly people are around. Though women perform many services and other ritual functions, they are not allowed to visit the burial ground and to participate in the death processions in the community. The earnings of the women are spent on the household needs. Generally the tips and other alms they get are spent without any hesitation on children. During the household functions and ceremonies men sit separately as all women assemble at one place. The work sphere of the women and men though is same; the community life is quite segregated and limits the women only to certain social activities. Children are more dependent on their mother for many things. The women mostly manage the savings. It is interesting to note that many women have their savings with their employers. Generally the ceremonial practices carried out in the basti, have good contribution from the women in terms of participation and activity. Apart from these activities many play a key role in organizing and maintaining the family relations. They look after the mutual exchange of pleasantries, and other activities. In many cases it is found that it is women who contribute to family sustenance in times of economic hardships and unknown set backs.

Economic hardship and Family:

In most of the families who work under the *badli ka kaam* (where income is shared between the owner of the work and the worker), face hardship due to low level of income and insecurity. Most of them try to cope up with the system by working for others in the basti as well as working out side, by taking up part-time jobs etc. Some work in the neighborhoods as part time sweepers as others go on searching for work in the outskirts of the city. In this category many work as sweepers and

manual labourers at marriage function halls in the city. Though the work they are engaged in is temporary, it gives them instant income. Some children belonging to these families also assist parents in doing private works related to sweeping etc in the market areas. Another way is taking petty loans from individuals in the basti itself. This helps them to get money at low interest, as well as timely. But the other obligation is the moneylender even if he belongs to the same community demands them to work in his house without payment. Many work on such occasions but without any payments. They receive some eatables from such assignments. The lender also requests them to work on his behalf in some government offices as scavengers. A few families who are slightly better off in the basti started small *kirana* shops for selling petty things. Generally such businesses are either, looked after by some siblings in the family. One of the nuclear families even started a *biryani* shop. In this family both wife and husband are working as sweepers. After the wife returns from the work around the noon she prepares the *biryani* with pork. The small shop at their house is a place where they sell it, till the late evening. This is in demand as many sit for the drinks in the evening. Apart from this kind of activities, some individuals do engage in the local dispute resolution and other such activities. They get commissions depending upon the deal. Many youth in the basti are attracted towards such practices as it gives them regular income, not only during the dispute time but whenever they require the money. Many individuals whose income is mainly from scavenging are into this part time venture. Some are even part of the larger groups else where in the city and work on their behalf. This caused a lot of havoc within the community as some youth are arrested by the police, and are kept in the police station for long time. Some youth in the basti do maintain connections with local petty businessmen, and other traders to help and solve certain disputes pertaining to business and personal matters. The persons belonging to lower income families among Mehtars also resort, though rarely to stealing the pigs from others farms and such activities. Though this practice has relatively come down in recent times, it was a common practice for many in the past.

Work and leisure:

For Mehtars the notion of leisure is not separate from their work. It is quite integrated into their work and every day life. As Robert A. Slebbins (2000) points out " The singular values, attitudes and expectations that constitute an important part of the sub-culture of some professions are so attractive that an unknown, but nonetheless significant proportion of professionals, are further moved to seek them outside the work place, hoping to continue experiencing the rewards of challenge, personal appeal and psychological absorption they have come to expect at work'. In the popular notion leisure time is considered as some rejuvenating period, where after a hard days work one expects or will be longing to enjoy that time. But among Mehtars, work is some thing, which happens mechanically, without much expectation. And they do the work not because they enjoy but it is their basic means for the survival. The motivation required for work does not come from the gains they make from it. It is a compulsion for he or she to work for survival. Mehtars leisure or free time is not a planned schedule, it happens in a daily routine. The daily leisure of Mehtar community is also intertwined with the nature of work they do that is scavenging. Work offers them multiple choices and freedom to make decisions. about how to spend the time.

As described earlier many return to the home by noon or early evening. Few of them spend their time in relaxing either by sleeping or chatting for a while with the neighbours. Majority takes this time, to play cards with the friends in the basti. Generally playing cards is almost an every day activity for many. There are some individuals who regularly meet on a specified place and time. Youth have their friendships and net-works in this regard. In the basti there are two major divisions among them based on their affiliation to *gotra*. Though every one moves cordially, still there is some uneasiness among them. Due to earlier fights among them and other feuds related to land and marriage disputes, there exists a clear demarcation between some families. In playing cards, no particular time is fixed. As and when two or three people assemble they start playing the game. Younger persons never go the places where elder people are playing cards. Unless some one asks for any help like getting a cigar or water etc, younger people do not approach them. It is a common tradition among the Mehtar that, one should respect the elderly and should not play any sort of games with them. The younger people play in their own age groups. There

are no fights among them during this play. It is observed that they never had any quarrels in these matters. Playing cards continues till in the evening some times after evenings also. Some leave the game by early evening, about 4'o clock, and go the market or go for the auto driving if one has. If it is youth, many prefer to go to the local gym maintained by the community. Some also go to the local ground for playing. A few among them go to the market areas around and go for some personal works. Between six and seven in the evening many return from their daily chores. And this time is important for many, as many prefer to have a drink.

Work, drink and community:

Drinking in the evening is a daily activity for many in the basti. This is part and parcel of their life style. Around 6'o clock many return from their daily work. Some prefer to drink in their homes. But many form groups and they assemble at particular time, where they participate in the drinking activity. Money required is some times pooled from the participants, or some individuals share the cost. Few of the Mehtars go to the local toddy shop for the drink. There they drink along with others in the neighbourhood. It is observed that during the drinking time Mehtars do not quarrel. It may happen outside the basti. There is no restriction for any regarding the drinking in the basti. One informant said that 'drinking is essential for the work they do. One has to tolerate the bad smell in the lavatory during their work in the day, and hence having a drink in the evening will make them sleep better'. It is also claimed that sexually they will have better stamina than many. It is noted that many take drink even in the early hours in the morning. Before going to work they take a few pegs of alcohol, again to escape the dirty smell in their work place. Though there are no restrictions for the youth on taking alcohol, all activity of the youth regarding alcohol happens in private. However elders do not object for such activities. Some youth who are progressive in nature tried to stop the drinking activity by formulating strict rules and punishment for such activities. But they are all in vain due to callous attitude of leaders, says one youth. Though drinking at work place does not occur, a few persons who work in sewerage tunnels of the municipality do take alcohol. These persons go deep into the tunnels to remove the dirt, filth and poisonous gases like methane

causes trouble to their breathing. Drinking activity is household activity in small families, since the persons in the small family and small income groups cannot afford large amounts of money. Youth and individuals from large income families quite often get together to have a drink. Some of the individuals who are engaged in the magical practices do sponsor to friends quite often. But many a times they sponsor such activity to please their clients, who visit for solutions for their problems. Very few who are in their old age and people engaged in the magical ritual performances take *ganja* (intoxicant derived from the leaves of *cannabis sativa*). Families, whose income level is very low, rarely participate in community dinking activity. Many buy their drink in the market area, after their work, and bring along with them to home in the evening.

Part time political activity, and social work:

Participating in local political parties, and their activities is another part -time activity for many. Youth and leaders among Mehtars take pride in such association with the political leaders. Some proudly boasts of their relationship with certain influential leaders in various parties. Most of them, who actively participate in such political and social work activities, are not completely engaged in the scavenging work. Either some one is working on their behalf or if it is private work, given to others on *Badli ka kaam*. Joining a political party or maintaining close relations with government officials is regarded as some achievement among the community members in the basti. These persons who are connected to political parties like Congress, *Telugu Desam*, *Bharatiya Janata party*, *Majlis ittehadul Muslimeen* etc, often manage in getting funds for the various activities in the basti. One informant is successful in getting funds through his political connections and is able to organize the *Ganesh chaturthi* very successfully. A few are also engaged in the local dispute resolution, with the active support from their political bosses. Some participate in the social work. These people collect the names of the some of the eligible beneficiaries for government developmental programmes. They maintain good relations with the beneficiary, as well as the officials in processing their papers for a loan. Though people in the community have objections about these middlemen, they seldom protest, and rather go to them again and again to pursue their

matters with officials. A few youth are officially elected as members of the local level organization for the political parties. The relations are always used to assert individual domination on others, in the basti, for getting some favours from the local public as well as government institutions. These may include the local police station to private businessmen in the neighbourhood. There are many events managed in the basti with active financial support from the various sponsors. In spite of jealousy and personal interests in everyday life there are no conflicts among them. Though the community is one in many respects there exists a strong notion of self-identity among these individuals who are potential harbingers of and change.

Self- esteem and the individual:

Though there is certain amount of self-elevation and glorification among many castes, it is seldom aimed at ridiculing the others. In many of the ex untouchable communities it is found that their self esteem and prestige is derived by opposing or contesting the upper castes. And in the process they ridicule or invent gossip on them. This is evident in many riddles and myths analyzed by the ethnographers. (Moffat 1979, Dehege: 1998). Mehtars engaged in the scavenging occupation never agree that the scavenging occupation is a choice for them, but thrust upon them, and they are doing it out of the necessity. Many felt that the very occupation gives them certain privileges. unlike many others It is pointed that there will be no takers for this job of sweeping and hence there is no competition for them in getting a work for livelihood

Therefore no one can challenge his or her right to pursue this occupation. In spite of other castes joining the municipal jobs and other private organizations, there is no significant threat perceived for their job security. It is a common perception among Mehtars that no body comes and intervenes in their affairs. Whether it is at a government office work or in a private organization, there is no involvement from others, particularly from the officials. This is because there are no significant stakes for them in this kind of a job.

Occupational unity and Caste:

There is a common feeling among Mehtars that no body comes to their rescue in the times of crisis. Most of them feel that their occupation is linked with low status, for others seldom come to rescue them, as they cannot benefit in any manner. This perception made them to believe that a community unity only helps them to protect their interests. In the hours of crisis and also in normal time they come together on various issues. Unlike other occupations this gave them a chance to benefit from the various kinds of public and private sector employment. It is also noticed among them a strong bond of kinship ties. If any thing happens to any persons either man or woman in the neighbourhood or elsewhere in the city, all of them go to their rescue. Once there was clash between some outsiders and Mehtars in the local toddy shop. In no time there are nearly a dozen people gathered there for his rescue. Though he belongs to the rival group, they did not mind helping him. The mobilization of people happens in no time irrespective of the issue. Mehtars in the study area also maintain a close relationship with Mehtars working in other areas. In fact they are connected through family and kin relations. They also often come to their rescue if needed. There is a well-developed communication network among them to inform the activities of one another. Generally they meet at various work places and exchange news on matters of mutual interest. In many of the disputes involving such issues like land and property dealings with others, Mehtars help each other by negotiation as well as resorting to mild violent practices. They very much know that their caste identity bring them strength in negotiation. The common perception of the neighboring people is that it is futile to have a fight with the Mehtars, as they are considered, as people capable of creating unease for them.

Another feature of the community is that certain people emerged within the community as leaders, who have questionable criminal background who were booked under various criminal acts in police station. Most of them, with cases pending in the court or some who participated or convicted for many unlawful activities, emerged as leaders in course of time. Some later started working for

political parties or else functioning individually. They help people in solving disputes regarding property and other related activities. These kinds of individuals are known as '*Tigers*' among the Mehtar community. They yield power in the locality as well as influence the local, leadership and bureaucracy. Many issues, which cannot be solved in normal conditions, come to these people who solve them quickly. They use all means in dealing with the problem, which some times include very severe punishments involving life. In their biographical narrations of the events, it is noticed that a good number of people are involved in such activities. These individual have created a niche for themselves as well as for the community. Many a times, the community identity goes along with the individual and individuals with the community. This situation helps many to negotiate or to deal with certain issues very firmly. The members of the community are well aware of these individuals and their activities.

Polluted Identity and Violence:

In the neighborhood many feel that Mehtars live a life style of very peculiar sorts. Eating pork and rearing pigs are considered as equally polluting along with the occupation they are engaged. Mehtars are also aware of the others notions about them and their caste identity. Normally life passes off peacefully in the basti except in rare occasions. But many of the disputes and feuds happen out side the basti. Potential dispute sites are local teashops, small business units and the liquor shops in the neighbourhood. The collective identity of the Mehtars strengthens their unity in the hours of crisis. Once there is an incident in the local bangle shop involving a girl from the Mehtar community. The case is that Mehtar girl is assaulted by the bangle seller, while she is bargaining in the shop. It also reported to some of the youth that the vender touched and squeezed the hands of the girl. Within a few minutes time a handful of youth from the basti went to the area and barged into shop of the bangle seller and gave him severe beatings. The seller did not report to the police, as it is a big hassle for him. He is afraid that the case may hamper his business. Later when the youth returned from the shop they took great pride in beating the businessman not because he assaulted the girl but he did not report to the police. One

of the youth proudly claimed that *'it is because of Mehtars that the businessman did not complain to the police. If it is some Telugu caste person beats him, he might have retaliated immediately. Mehtars are Mehtars, they cannot be conquered'*.

In another incident a Mehtar youth is beaten and stabbed by a person in the local toddy shop. Immediately after listening the news, a group of people from the basti went and beat the whole group present in the toddy shop. After a few hours of shouting from both the sides, the matter ended peacefully. One of the youth opined that no body can hurt a Mehtar, since they know about our 'power' and 'tiger's. There are numerous incidents where Mehtars out witted many in their fighting. During many of the communal clashes that occurred in the neighbourhood Mehtars had violent fights with the local Muslim population. During one of the communal clashes in the year 1997, many were killed in the violence. Mehtar youth went to defense as the rival Muslim group stoned their basti. The fight occurred on a large scale with all possible destructive weapons like swords and spears. One of the Mehtar youth was shot dead in the police firing. After a few weeks the matter was forgotten but the memories of the death still persist among many. In some of the conversations many pointed out that it is Mehtars, the people who are engaged in the dirty occupation defended the majority community who are other wise attacked by the Muslims. The community took great pride in this, that it defended many and it is only possible for them but not others. One of the informant says that *'it is because of our valour and bravery the pride of the Hindus is protected. But we are still treated as low by them'*. The notion that they are contributing productively to their fellow citizens is very strong among the Mehtar community. The relative isolation and subjugation in caste hierarchy makes many Mehtar youth feel that they cannot be stopped by any body, in whatever activity they do. They felt that the society owes them in many respects. It is a strong feeling prevailing among many Mehtars that the very acts they do reflect the freedom they enjoy. The relative isolation and living in a basti with a stigmatized identity, gave Mehtars an unbridled freedom. The polluted identity and relative segregation of the basti made many local Telugus to shy away from them. They also felt that they couldn't be threatened by any one, as the people are aware of the consequences. This has contributed to a sense of freedom and security from others.

Segregation and Strength:

The relative isolation resulting from the polluted identity of work turned into a positive element in the day-to-day life of Mehtars. Various notions built around them by the outsiders also became a plus point for many Mehtars. When some wants to enter the basti, they cautiously manage themselves and surroundings. First it is mandatory for any body to speak to the local leadership, before embarking on any work. Outsiders always have suspicious eyes with regard to valmiki basti. No body in the neighbourhood wishes to maintain relations with them except for routine works. There exists no fear among Mehtars that some body will enter the basti to steal or do some harm to them. As pointed out by an informant, people are scared of us; no body can dare to enter this basti. No one can steal our pigs. Hence no theft problem arises. He further says that if at all anything happens it is because of our people but not because of outsiders. There is a sense of freedom among the Mehtars, which is a result of their occupational identity, and relative segregation. One informant says that outsiders do not like pigs roaming around in the basti. They do not eat pork. That is the reason why they try to avoid coming to the basti. People in the neighbourhood try the maximum to avoid contact with Mehtars in the basti. Mehtars also feel that, others are scared of them because of the past incidents involving Mehtars in many violent activities in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. Some of them even proudly boast of their valour in fighting. With a laughing voice they say *log dartha hai* (people are scared of us). These perceptions of Mehtars are derived from their, every day interaction with the people at work place and as well as with others. One of my informant while describing the basti to me says that '*ye Mehtar Basti hai Idar aane keliye log ko sochana padta hai Because this is Mehtar Basti. One needs to think before entering here. It is Very notorious and the den for the tigers*'. These perceptions reflect the Mehtars understanding of others and as well as themselves. Many development personal and people related to various government offices though make visits on official works; they seldom stay for a few minutes in the basti. They quickly complete their job or either hand over some responsibilities to the local person. In the community hall located in the basti, teachers are supposed to come

to give feed to the children under child development scheme. But rarely the teacher visits and the work is managed by a local person. There is a feeling among the Mehtars that they are obliged to none either in the neighborhood or outside, and they are empowered to get the maximum benefits from the society.

Lobbying for Development:

Mehtars in the basti are quite confident of getting any development benefit. There are provisions for certain development initiatives, and the community leaders are successful in getting their due in time. This is made possible because of the strong lobbying skills, coupled with the community identity. Everywhere the identity of the community becomes strength in forming a pressure group to demand certain benefit or program. The degrading identity of caste is perceived as strength in many ways to assert their right and to get the benefits in quick manner. The lobbying skills of the leaders helped them to get many facilities in time. For laying a tar road in the basti the community leader went to the municipal officials and convinced them to lay the road according to his wish. Within the community there are certain leaders who became brokers for the development programs and mediate between the community and government officials. Though there is some opposition for such individuals within the community, people are submissive as they get their loans and other benefits through them and often depended on their help. The inferior status of caste, at times gains strength in itself for demanding the benefits and favours. The assertion of many that they need more benefits, comes from the notion that they are treated as low and they work for others by cleaning their filth, which no other person ever willing to do. The comparison with others, and individuals belonging to other castes is a common trait in the life style of the Mehtars.

State initiatives and Affirmative action:

Several programmes and special development schemes aimed at scheduled castes and particularly communities engaged in menial occupations benefited the Mehtars to a great extent in spite of some lapses here and there. The special constitutional safeguards and several measures

taken up by the respective governments both at National level and regional level helped and motivated these underprivileged communities to take up modern occupations and gain access to education and other public facilities.

Mehtars in Hyderabad experienced significant change during the late sixties with the Municipal administration coming into existence. Till then they were employed by the private houses and engaged in occupations in royal houses. When municipal administration has taken over the supervision of public amenities like sanitation and health, Mehtars are absorbed into jobs available with the Government. Most of them joined in the public sector jobs as scavengers and helpers in sanitary work. Subsequently they are into two spheres of work one in public sphere with an organized workforce and another in private sphere with independent working schedules and rules governed by the traditional institution of the community.

This shift towards the public sphere brought considerable change in their life style and outlook. Coupled with these changes government programmes aimed at the development of scheduled castes also helped them to get exposure to the outside world much more than earlier period. Near about eighty percent of the population in the basti are beneficiaries of some development programmes. It is found that more than thirty percent of the households benefited with the auto rickshaw loans provided by the state. Though some of them are not successful in running these autos, quite a large number of them are able to get benefit from this scheme. A community center was established in the late eighties in the basti with the aim of taking care of children and their nutritional needs. This community hall also helped the people to organize themselves effectively. Apart from being a center for children development this hall is quite often used for arranging community feasts and celebrating festivals and recreation center for youth and children. A school was setup with the local governments initiative, which is running successfully, but some prefer to send their children to private English medium schools. Unlike the earlier period the special housing schemes aimed at scavengers in particular paved the way for construction of a colony. This is an important programme, which transformed the life

style of the community as they shifted from thatched houses to pucca houses with water and electricity supply. This gradual transformation subsequently led to the incorporation of many new things in everyday life.

Apart from many programmes the special developmental programmes under the scheme of eradication of scavenging and other menial occupations by the government of India has benefited the community. Self employment schemes like auto driving, pig rearing petty business heavy vehicle driving sewing machines and various other training programmes aimed at imparting technical and professional skills have brought positive changes among the Mehtars. A sewing center in the basti was established to impart various technical skills for girls is successfully managed in the basti. It has achieved considerable change in economic development and well being of the society. Assertive policies in educational institutions also paved the way for many to have access to the opportunities. Number of families benefited under this scheme are very few, but they became role models for many in the community.

These programmes aimed at the particular occupational group brought changes in their everyday life. Occupational shift is one such positive result of the program. Shift of occupation and increased income levels and purchasing power paved the way for social mobility. Most families realized the importance of education and invested substantial amount of their earnings in educating their children. But the drop out levels and discontinuation at school were common. The success of a few families in the process inspired others. However development programmes aimed at the eradication of scavenging work have not brought any note worth change. But this programme benefited who are in search of alternative work. These changes helped them to gain mobility in terms of earning capacity securing diverse job avenues and higher standard of living compared to the past. But Mehtars still feel that they are a segregated lot. The community and the individuals made several efforts in the process to be identified with the larger society outside though selectively. The positive changes brought out by these policies further strengthened the urge among individuals to organize themselves through various ceremonies and festivals of popular kind.

These activities are two fold in nature one to enhance the individual and self-identity at one end and secondly the communities in general.

We the Mehtars (*Hum mehtar samaaj ki*):

Among most people in the basti, the strong feeling of caste identity exists. There are innumerable references made to the community in various contexts, and discourses. In every day discussion on any topic ranging from politics to marriage, the 'we' feeling is consciously built in the minds of Mehtars. In valourizing the community, various symbolic expressions are used. Mehtars glorify themselves by saying that they never die. There is no death for Mehtars. After the death from this world they become *bawries* and hence the community lives forever. Many hail food habits of the community as superior. For example eating pork is considered as a sign of strength and physical well-being They attribute many qualities of valour to by citing various incidents in history though vaguely. They relate their contemporary position to certain historical mishaps or mistake.

Most of them especially the elderly felt that the occupation they are doing is for livelihood. As told by one elderly man , *"We do the work for rearing our children This work has to be done (kaam karna padta hai) There is no escape from the work We do not consider this as dirty We are serving the society as mothers care their children In fact we are working for others, not for u"* Families from low income groups and a few families who are engaged in daily wage work felt that this work is inevitable for their survival (*majburi se ye kaam karna padta hai*) *'Whether one likes it or not we are supposed to work for living Who do not want better work, we certainly want to shift to other occupation, but there are no opportunities'*

Many hold the view that they serve the society as mothers But the attitude to work changed according to occupational and educational levels of the households. Sixty-nine respondents replied that the scavenging is a family work, which they inherited from their parents and grand parents. Out of these respondents majority belong to the families whose primary income is not from the scavenging work. Equally, about sixty-eight respondents said that the work they are doing that is

sweeping is inevitable, and there is no alternative for it, and hence they are doing that work. Some felt that the work gives them plenty of leisure, which no other occupation gives. A few felt that this work may not be continued by their children as they are not interested to keep their children in this occupation. Twelve respondents said that some dominant forces thrust this work, upon them in the past. Because they wanted them to be slaves forever. Forty-four respondents felt the need to change the occupation. They feel that there is no meaning in continuing in the same occupation when others are also changing. But the desire for the change into other professions is more in the respondent's households who are getting secondary income from the scavenging work. Following table gives their views.

Views on the nature of work according to occupational status

S No	Occupation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
1	Scavenging	11	11	1	1	2	1	6		33
2	Non-Scavenging*	52	51	5	2	7	11	3	8	
3	Others **	2	2				1	1		25
	Percentage	69	68	8	3	9	12	4	1	
								4	8	

* They do not engage themselves in scavenging they sold the work right, their Fathers, or mothers have done it

** Others include those who are completely out of scavenging occupation But living among the community people

This is our family work

This work is Inevitable

This work gives us lots leisure

Our children may engage in scavenging work

Our children should not do scavenging work

This work thrust upon us

There is need to change the occupation

This not our original occupation

No Response

Opinion towards the work also varied according to the educational levels of the individual respondents in the households. Majority respondents felt that the work they

are doing is family work, which they inherited from their parents and grand parents. In the second category sixty-four respondents felt that the work is inevitable and is required for survival. Interestingly the views are contradictory from those who are educated and illiterate. There is a common understanding among many that the work they are doing is for survival, and it is not by choice. Many are also willing to change the occupation as some still wanted to continue as it provides benefits such as leisure and other securities. The following table shows the respondents views on work, according to their educational levels.

Attitude to work, according to Educational level of Households.

S.No.	Education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
1	Nil	17	19	3	4	4	2	1	50
2	Primary	24	17	2	2	5	2	3	55
3	Secondary	29	19	2	5	10	6	8	79
4	Intermediate	15	5	1	2	2	2	2	28
5	Degree	9	1				2	1	13
6	Post Graduate	3	3					1	7
Total									231

1. This is our family work
2. This work is Inevitable
3. This work gives us lots of leisure
4. Children may or may not prefer to do this work
5. we should change our occupation
6. This occupation is thrust upon us
7. This is not our original occupation

Mehtars work in two spheres one in public and the other in private. They have adapted themselves in the work structure by coping with the challenges posed by the polluted identity resulted by their traditional work. Mehtars looked at the traditional work of scavenging as a means to their livelihood but not beyond. Many try to valorize their work as a service and productive contribution to the wider society. The relative segregation and polluted notion attached to the work are overcome by adopting various coping mechanisms. For instance, creating or citing such problems like unable to attend work giving false reasons for not attending or putting stones in the toilets so that cleaning becomes a difficult and puts them at better end in

gaining with the householder. In certain instances absenteeism from work is also practiced to make the others realize their importance. The relative leisure they get from the work is seen as freedom, which no other occupation provides. The notion of leisure and free time thus intertwined among the Mehtars. The segregation and other aspects attached to their work on the other hand strengthened their unity and spirit of community, which helped them to manage a slight leverage than others in demanding certain benefits. The community also made efforts to diversify their occupation and attain better access to education and occupational mobility. The increased income levels better standards of living enhanced the community's spirit to identify with others and inventing new methods and cultural symbols in the process. Mehtars argue that they are the victims of history who are relegated to and forced to work as scavengers. Many do not accept their inferior status as scavengers but relate to it as some mishap happened in history against their wish. Most of them claim themselves as a warrior race and farmers who fought against the Moughal invaders. But in spite of their rejection of their occupational identity many feel that they are serving the society like mothers care about their children.

FOR A BETTER POSITION: MAGICAL RITUALS AND CRIME

Mehtar's entry into the magical practices, gained popularity as the number of people who visit them has increased in the past one decade. Many people in the neighbourhood believe that Mehtar possess healing powers. It is observed by some that as Mehtars remove human excreta, and other garbage material, they can deal with the malevolent spirits better than any one else. They became popular in the area and known in the local Telugu dialect as '*Mantragadu*' who can diagnose people suffering from a variety of psychological, physical and other problems caused by the spirits. Mehtars used to worship their family deities and other *Bawries* (family and village deities) in the basti, as part of their religious beliefs. Till the 1980's hardly any person in the *Basti*, took to magical practices as a full time or part time activity. But from 1990 onwards more and more people showed interest in learning and practicing rituals as an alternative occupation. By 1999 there are more than forty practicing Bhagats and ritual specialists in the *Basti* who deal with variety of clients. Out of them more than a dozen people are engaged in this occupation with regular clientele from the city and nearby areas. The number of young people getting into this practice is increased enormously. Living standards are also improved along with the growth of these magical practices in the *Basti*. Though many rituals connected with the family deities are household in nature, they have been largely revived and practiced with much fanfare for the sake of clients as well as to attract the attention of the people. Most of them take pride in performing such unique rituals and like to be associated with them, as they involve some incentives like food, meat etc during the performance of pujas and related activities. These practices and practioners have their own critics in the basti who do not believe in these rituals involving sumptuous exposition of materials and goods. Some even criticize the authenticity of such practices saying that they are merely acts of wit and intelligence, to attract the people and earn easy money. The increase in the number of practioners of ritual healing brought a new identity for the Mehtar's as well as to the individuals who practice it. Their networks with other communities' and people have increased, otherwise

ot possible with their occupational identity. Some of these practioners established themselves as successful ritual practioners. They are popular outside the basti as healers and magical practioners. Some have spread their operations even to the overseas clients, such as non-resident Indians who work in Saudi Arabia and in the Middle East. Except few all are able to own modern digital gadgets, which are gifted to them, by their clients.

Rituals and magical practices in the urban setting:

Though ritual practioners in the urban setting is common, it has got new connotation and familiarity in the recent past (Blazer1993, Kendall1998, Carol Lade Man 1981, Caroline Humphry 1999). Many discussed these practices as a response and adoption to the economic adjustments or transformation (Kendall 1996). Others described it as element involving implicit and explicit behaviour of the individual and the community. As Levi-Strauss (1963) points out stories of anomalies in magical practice, rather casting doubt upon the prevailing belief system, they add to its force. Some enter the practice of magic to disprove and in course they become the strength of the very practice Quesalid, a Kwakitul Indian became shaman in order to expose “trickery”. But he ended up as powerful shaman. “ Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman” (Levi-Strauss 1963:180). According to Levi-Strauss the success of Quesalid is due to the respect of his clients and esteem of colleagues. In the basti magical practices gained momentum in response to certain cultural practices observed by the outsiders and the Mehtars urge to get a better deal with the dominant society around. The growth of these practices can also be attributed to the low income and polluted identity of the Mehtars in the area.. Many opted for this profession by choice, as there is instant money and recognition. Performing rituals for others though not a custom in their life style, it has become an alternative profession for many in the basti. Various factors influenced the Mehtars to get into this activity.

The large-scale revival of traditional rituals is one aspect of asserting their cultural identity. Many of them even went back to the native villages in Haryana in northern India, to learn the techniques of the worship of the *Bawries* and malevolent spirits. Even after convicted in many cases and continuing with undesirable life style for

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a long time, a few Mehtars spent two to three years time among the experienced ritual specialists in their villages and came back to Hyderabad to start their new careers as bhagats.¹ Most of them are well connected to various people, in the neighborhood and in the city. They range from the small businessmen, to people who are into various consultancies engaged in sending people to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. These clients are the people who provide networks for the Mehtar ritualists and contribute significantly both for the popularity and prosperity of these practitioners in the basti.

Mehtar Ritualists and their Clients:

Ritual practitioners in the basti receive a variety of clients from all communities and economic backgrounds. They serve a variety of people from various backgrounds. Though majority clients are from lower economic strata, quite often they also get clients from high-income groups. Generally such high-income groups belong to business classes or people from Saudi Arabia and gulf. It is noticed that clients from these countries also approach them for services. In the neighbourhood a few Telugu clients visit them though rarely. Most of the clients come from the far-off places in the city. A Mehtar ritualist in the basti classifies the clients into two categories. One, the '*Girak*' and the other. Clients in the first category are known as people who come for the treatment and approach the ritualists directly without any third party mediation or help. They directly approach the Bhagats in the basti for solving their problems. In the second category people who approach the Bhagats through intermediaries or middlemen. These middlemen were the same people who were once the clients of the Bhagats. Some times they may not be their old clients but for friendship or other relations they bring clients for them. These middlemen get some commission for such works. Individuals, who are satisfied with the services of these specialists, would become successful middlemen in course of time. Majority of clients belong to the Muslim community who constitute nearly ninety five percent of the total visitors to the basti, who approach these practitioners with their problems. As Rana points out majority people who come for treatment to them are Muslims with family problems. Cases of domestic violence, husband beating the wife, barren women seeking children, people who suspect

Rana:

Rana works in Municipality as a sweeper. He is born into a family of eight siblings and he is the third one. He did not go to school due to economic and other family problems. After the death of his mother he joined in a mechanic shop and works in the shed. After a few months, he joined the job of his mother who worked as a sweeper with the municipality. He got married at the age of eighteen years. He worked hard during the early years even some times doing over time to support his family. During this process he experienced the spirit possession. He says that the spirits also possessed even his grandfather and grandmother, and it is a hereditary tradition in their family. He said that he had no guru who taught lessons of these rituals. But he learned on his own. He says that “when I sit to perform puja, I get to see all the past and future in my memory”. He also gets clients through his colleagues at his work place. He says that ‘I am the devotee of the Goddess. I show the way to my clients on how to go. The goddess helps me in guiding them.’ He receives three to five clients a day, of whom at least four belongs to Muslim community.

While narrating an incident he tells, “Once a Muslim family approached me. Mother from the family came to treat her son who is employed in Dubai. Whenever he visited India he would spend more time at his mother-in-law's house and paid less attention to his mother and other family members. He also stopped sending the money to his mother. The mother of the boy asked me to give the treatment in such a way that his son should visit only their home but not his in-law's home. I sent my spirits and treated the problem within a month and her son started visiting his mother. In another case I treated a person possessed by the spirits and though they are Muslims they performed *puja* to the goddess, here, in my home by sacrificing a goat. I have also attended a case again in a Muslim family. The husband left his home and eloped with his lover. His wife came to me saying that her husband should come back to her at any cost. I settled this problem within fifteen days and she was happy and overwhelmed gave me sweets

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and money'. He further comments that he never charges any body beyond their capacity but he receives whatever the clients give him.

Anurag:

Anurag narrated his experiences in the following manner.

In my childhood I led a very difficult life. My father was a drunkard. He is supposed to take care of our family. Nearly eight members have to eat from his earnings. I am the second son in the family. Mother did not work in the beginning, but she started working eight years back. I went to school but never studied well and instead played the games with friends. I never had any books and used to borrow from the friends. Some how I was able to manage up to ninth class in the school. I was unable to write the exam, as I could not pay the fees. Then I left the school and joined the sweeping work in individual homes and I worked as sweeper for three years. I drove auto and did some small jobs. When I was sixteen years of age got introduced to various ritual performances. In fact I developed an interest in spirit worship as some rivals subjected my father to these evils. He lost his senses due to the black magic targeted against him. In our house someone would throw lemon and other ritual items to scare us. I would clean them every time. In course of time I became interested in discovering who is doing all these activities. I started learning the magical practices My guru stayed at *dud khan* and his name is Kiran. I learned the intricacies of the profession from him. While learning one should not look at the ladies One has to consider everyone as mother and goddess. My guru used to give some mantras and asked me to recite them repeatedly. In this learning and in practice one should possess good character. If the Goddess is possessed one should drink the burning ghee (clarified butter) from the lamp made of rice flour. One has to give the guru clothes, meat and drinks after completing the learning process. After receiving the blessings of the guru, we start working as *bahagats*. Though one learns all the techniques, to practice successfully, one needs the luck (*kismat sat dena*), and the blessings of the goddess Many Telugu people also come to me with their problems. You know I have helped people suffering with fertility problems. They go to doctor and also come to me. I give them better advice. I can deal with any spirit, however dangerous it is. I tell you a story of a client; one gentleman came to me saying

that his wife is having some illegitimate contacts with some one at her mother's home. She would visit her mother's home quite frequently and some times for months together. He told me that he was unable to bear this pain and asked to make his wife change her mind and love him. I gave him a medicine, which I asked him to mix in the food and serve her. He did so. After four months he visited me saying that his wife is now staying with him and left her lover. He gave me a pair of clothes sandals and a few rupees as gift (751Rs). The extra rupee is for good fortune.

In another case, a young girl came for treatment. Her mother died and father married to another woman. After one and half year, father has also passed away, and her problems started from then on wards. The stepsister became an enemy to her. This unmarried girl suffered a lot as her stepmother spoiled all the alliances who ever proposed to her. The girl narrated all her sorrows to me and asked my help. Then she asked me how much it would cost to correct her evil-minded stepmother. I told her that I would not take money from her and solved the problem and made her live happily. I do not take money from such people whom I consider as my sisters whether they are rich or poor. I started the rituals and after two and half months she got married at *Yadagiri gutta*, a nearby pilgrimage center. She married out side the home because her stepmother is still against marriage. I personally attended the wedding along with my friend Ramu. Now she leads a happy life. You know it is my conviction and as per the advise of my guru's orders, I should not take money from them.

In another case, I got a patient who happens to be a Muslim girl, eloped with Telugu boy. The girl is niece of police officer. The boy and the girl are in Hyderabad. I helped them in such a way that the girl and boy returned home within four hours. The girl was brought here. I explained her not to do such things and one should respect the sentiments of the elders. Then she left the Telugu boy and accepted to marry a Muslim boy. Later I went and attended their marriage. She came to me afterwards and presented me two sarees. In another incident I cured a woman aged 65 years, who is suffering from the knee problem. She is also unable to walk. I was taken to their home. And asked for some items for performing the ritual to solve the problem. I asked for liver

of the goat, *saat pan ki patte*, seven items of sweets, seven incense sticks and two cloves and one sweet *paan* (beetle leaf) along with vermilion and turmeric. After performing the *Puja*, I took all the material in hand, went round her and kept the material in the *Kali* temple. Within thirty minutes, she became normal and went to bathroom, walked around without any help. The family showed the gratitude by paying me Rs1101, as my fees. You know if it is purely physical ailment, I can't deal with them. If it is a cancer, T.B, or stone formation in the kidney etc, those things will be cured only by doctors, but not by us. First we will see the client and then start the process of our practice.

Among Mehtars who practice in these rituals, majority expressed the desire that they should be known as more than a Mehtar. Some very candidly said that they are not satisfied with their traditional occupation of scavenging. Many aspired to become a ritual specialist as it gives them privilege of being ritual expert and carriers of secret knowledge of rituals. Many have seen a new life in practicing this occupation, and in spite of many difficulties they tried to stick to it. The life of Vikram Bhagat who is 42 years old stands out as an example in this regard. He hates the occupation of scavenging, and says that '*every morning when all people see god or some good things we need to see the dirty human excreta to clean it, what a life it is*'.

Vikram Bhagat in his own words;

I am from village Bhagna in Haryana. My parents worked as agricultural labour in the fields. We have also reared our own cows in the village. Ours is larger family with two boys and five girls. All of them worked hard to eke out a living. We also worked as daily wageworkers under *Jhats*. I came to Hyderabad in the year 1972 to see my sister. I stayed here for five years. Later I went back to the village and did some retail cloth business. In the year of 1984 I got married at the age of twenty-five. As usual I started working as scavenger. I hated this work (*mai ne nafira kartata*). You know anybody who wakes up in the early morning, perform pujas. But we need to do this work. I took up cloth business and go around the bastis on cycle with a bag of cloths. But my wife Naina would work as *safai karam chari*. I again went back to village and worked in the agricultural fields. During that time, I met a *Sadhu* who taught me occult practices. I spent 2-3 years learning the art. Then in 1995 I returned to

Hyderabad. In fact I visited Hyderabad to attend my niece's marriage. My mother-in-law asked me to stay back here, and practice these magical rituals. I also thought that I could live with my family if I am in Hyderabad. I receive patients who got possessed by the spirits. Some are satisfied with my treatment and some are not. The patients bring flowers and sweets to me. Usually I attend to 3-10 cases, in a week, and many of them are Muslims. Because they believe in spirits. A few Hindus also come here but rarely. You know some time these problems are mysterious. Some come with physical ailments like Gas problems, indigestion etc. I give them *Vibhuthi* kept in the goddess puja. Yesterday one boy came to me, of course you are here, to observe. He is in love with one girl and she is not, giving him proper attention and dislikes him. He asked me to help him. I told that it will cost Rs1200, and takes two to three month's time. Though initially he is bit hesitant about the fees, later agreed for the treatment.

An identity, which is degrading in the eyes of the larger society, kept Mehtars always in the watch list. Irrespective of their efforts and honesty showed in other works they are never treated equal. Some even struggled through out their lives and still remained dissatisfied. They partially or completely adapted to such practices of devotion, *Bhakti*, and magical practices in their very day life. The every day discourse of these people is aimed at self-propagation and struggle for asserting their individuality. This happens in many cases. Some glorify their past deeds and some live with the very fact that they can not be treated equals by others and hence try to either imitate or reciprocate with similar cultural symbols and practices of larger society. Prabhu Das Valmiki is a person who tried establishing himself, with the community and outside. He finally ended up as *Sadhu* who built his private temple in the basti. Some times he becomes critical about his own community about their practices. He never denied the fact that Mehtars worship various spirits and their authority in ritual performance, but at times he criticizes the individuals who he says are not fit for the job. Prabhu Das had a long itinerary in this regard.

Prabhu Das Valmiki:

I was born in Lahore (presently in Pakistan) in a small village. After partition we moved to Haryana. My father was an employee of Railways. We first came to Delhi and stayed in the village *karal* for fifteen years. After that my family went to Bombay to work in Bombay Municipality. There we stayed for two years. Again we went back to village and decided to come to Hyderabad. My mother-in-law had some relatives in Hyderabad and it is one of the reasons we shifted to Hyderabad in search of work. I was appointed as scavenger cum caretaker of dogs in the *haveli* of *saiduarj bahadur*. After a short stint there I went and worked with my community people as sweeper in private houses. Later I joined the malaria prevention department and retired in the same department. From 1976, onwards I started making pujas. I also write poetry. I wrote on life of Valmiki. I learned all the rituals from *Chandigi Ram*. During my work in the government offices I experienced severe problems. The officers punished me and discriminated a lot. I spent life like an animal. In those days it was time of Muslims. I worked in the *balidia*. After that I did social work. In 1976 I constructed a small temple here. Every one came here with the problems. But we are not blessed with happiness. (*humko suk ki prapti nahi*). In those days work was more but payments were less. Some Muslims got promotion. But we did not get it. These people always looked at me in a filthy way. These Hindus and Muslims have treated us in the same manner. My boss abused me many times referring to my *Valmiki jati*. I always try to spend more time with visitors in my temple. I like to do pujas and *bhajans* than performing magical practices like others in the basti. Do you know what they do under the carpet?

Prabhu Das did not elaborate his talk on this point. Unlike others he leads a different life style. He believes in the Ram and story on Ramayan. He has good collection of books of Ramayan. In the company of children and visitors he sings songs in the evening. He has also recited Ramayan on the valmiki *jayanti* day. He says that the Mehtars belong to *Shiv gan* and otherwise born in the same stock of people where Brahmins are born.² He has evolved his life style, unlike other Mehtars in the basti. He also identifies the community with those warriors of the yester years.

² Details are given in ethnographic chapter.

Bhagats and their Magical Practices:

Bhagats² who are practicing these rituals in the *Basti*, are into this occupation either as full time or part-time work. Persons working in government offices as sweepers, usually practice as part-time Bhagats. A few housewives do practice but not on a large scale. On the other hand, some individuals assist the full time or part-time bhagats to earn money as well as to learn the techniques involved in it. Some entered the profession, as it is more lucrative than their traditional job while others entered for both the money and status involved in it. As Rana points out 'There is much more demand for this occupation as our neighbouring people migrate to Saudi for jobs. This will put us in touch with many people in the daily life, which is other wise is very difficult to achieve by doing *safai ka kaam* (sweeping work)'. A few practicing ritualists have established themselves in such a way that they manage their daily schedule like an employee in a commercial firm. They maintain office boys, messengers, and public relations in-charge. These people regularly maintain contacts with the clients and help the bhagats to get new clients. Very posh settings are erected in some of the consulting rooms for the guests. It is observed in one of the bhagat's house where visitors lounge is neatly maintained with the carpet, flowers and air conditioning. This woman Bhagat gets clients from such far off places like Dubai, Saudi Arabia and the local areas, majority of whom are neo-rich, who acquired wealth from the recent job opportunities in the Middle East. There are varied reasons for practicing this occupation as mentioned earlier. Following is a case study of Jani Singh who entered into the field of magical practices due to poverty and insufficient income from sweeping In his own words

"In my childhood my father and mother used to work in private homes as sweepers. I went to school up to 4th standard and stopped my education. My father and mother would come home by 4 o'clock in the evening. Ours is a large family with seven brothers and nine sisters. It has become very difficult for my father to provide them food and clothing. When my brothers want something to eat, there is nothing in my house. These events in the family compelled my father to put me in the work. I have great interest in education. I used to sweep the homes near my school in *Yakutpura*. And continued my education till fifth standard. My schedule of the day used to start at 4 o

clock in the morning. I also swept the houses of some Muslim families in the area. With a small amount of 10-15 Paisa I would have my breakfast in the nearby shops. After the work I used to attend the school till 4 o'clock in the evening. This helped the family to recover little bit from the financial hardship. In the school many students came to know that I am working as scavenger in the households. One of them even saw me during my work. I felt ashamed in the class. I asked my father to either keep me in the work or school. My father told that studies any way won't give anything, and asked me to settle down in the work. I became full-time sweeper. But later I learnt about the *Bhagats* and their ritual practices and I learned the techniques from one of them. And started practicing. Later I got job in DDL a public sector institution as sweeper. A few also entered the profession with humiliating experiences in schools poverty at home, domestic problems and hatred towards the traditional occupation and its identity.

Bhagat Mohan aged twenty-three years, suffered due to his identity as Mehtar, which made him to explore the possibilities for a respectable alternative occupation. Magical practices are very handy and looked lucrative and he started learning it in spite of difficulties. He served many senior ritual specialists in the basti and is now on the look out to start his own shop in the basti.

Bhagat Mohan stopped his school education, and got initial training from his father who is also a ritual specialist. This young man regularly makes visits to various goddess temples in Haryana and Gurgam. He says that in his school days, he had fought with his teacher. The son of the *Pandit* and he were good friends. But he says he received cane beatings from his teacher for every small thing. In his own words "I tolerated many times. But some times I would tell him to stop beating me without any reason. Once my teacher looked at me and said, what can you do? Then immediately I took a brick nearby and hit him on his forehead. After that I did not go to school for two months. Later when I attended the school everything went well for three months, but again *lafda* (problems) started. It so happened that one day the teacher commented by saying that you 'Mehtars always are like that, fighting with the people doing nonsense.' Then immediately I took a broken leg of the wooden chair nearby and beat him on his legs. And after that incident I stopped going to school. Later I worked as sweeper in houses. A few months passed by and I thought this work of *Bhagats* suits me well and I started working with senior

Bhagats in the basti as their assistant to learn the various methods involved in it. Further he says that ' you know people learn these techniques on their own Some times, with a Guru, in my village there are many Bhagats and *Jadus* (Magicians). And I visit them annually. Otherwise, these goddesses do harm. Many worship these goddesses according to their wishes.

Some have developed natural inclination to various rituals performances and started practicing it. They are also of the opinion that scavenging is more menial and practicing as a Bhagat is more respectable. As Rathod says, it gives the practioner satisfaction of a doctor. He narrates his coming to the profession with little ease and satisfaction. In his own words...

When I was 10 years old, I experienced the religious devotion. I had relatively new feeling since then. I started worshipping the mother goddess. I started my early life as a scavenger. But some how this occupation did not suit me. *Nafrat aati hai* (used to hate, and pity my self). At times my parents scold me why I was not going to work. I left home, and started staying in a temple, living, eating and sleeping in the friends home who are Hindus. It was exactly thirty-five years ago, I left home. During my stay in the temple one person introduced me to *Aryasamaj*. With the guidance received by them I started learning about Vedas and other books. After a short stay at *Aryasamaj*. I thought of becoming a *sanyasi*. But my brother stopped me. I have become an employee. I got married at the age of twenty-nine years. I started practicing the herbal medicine, which I learned from my guru Sri Amaligi also taught me some occult sciences. I learned some techniques from a Bengali guru also. Why I am attracted in this is, you know doctors do not treat poor properly. I believe in the goddess and started giving, medicines to these poor people. I receive whatever they give as my fee. I never demand any thing from them. I do not accept these goddesses from Haryana, as they need lots of blood in the offerings. I do not know much about them. My aim and work in life is to save the poor. Some times I also face problems within the family. I take pride in begging food from the people. As I cannot supplement, my income. *Chori muj se accha nai lagti hai* (I don't like stealing). Some times I pay my self for the medicines. I help the poor in such matters. *hamara gharib bhai dukhi na ho* (let our poor brothers not suffer). You know men generally get ill due to lack of strength. I treated many people with water. I read a

mantra and get the poison out from snakebite. I have treated many snakebit cases. Some times our doctors commit such horrible mistakes of removing important parts of the body while operating the patients. Doctors cut the pregnant woman, by doing cesarean operation. *Hum ise darwajse ana hai* (People should take birth from the natural way). Men should born from the right womb and come out from the right door. Fifteen years ago one woman came to me. Her newborn babies are dying every time after she give birth. I treated her with my prayers to the Sun God. I gave her some herbal medicine also. Now she is mother of a thirteen-year-old son. I did this with mantra. I always pray to *Surya*. There are only two gods; one is sun and another moon. Some approach me for the treatment of physical ailments, insect bites and disease. Some people come with family problems also. Some come here with hysteria and I keep them for two hours and treat them. Some come with sexual problems like impotency, erectile problems. I give them homeopathic treatment. Some patients approached me with kidney problems also. So far I have treated three such patients I give them water and prayed with mantras. I recite some mantras of *Surya Dev*. Because he is omnipresent and universal. Further commenting on his own community he says that these people eat pigs and drink liquor and worship spirits. Some times misled by the *Mantri* (minister) even the King becomes an ordinary man.

But unlike Rathod, Suresh suffered both poverty and developed a kind of hatred to the occupation of scavenging. He tried and relentlessly searched for a venture, which will bring new identity and money to him. He is one of the successful young Bhagats in the basti, who is looked at jealously by the other Bhagats. Suresh is twenty six year old young man in the basti, who is practicing magical rituals from the last seven years. He says at very young age he lost his father who was main bread earner in the family. Later his mother helped all the family members to live in dignity. She worked in private homes in addition to her employment in Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad. He joined the school but unable to study as he used to work in the lunch hours as sweeper in the market areas. Later he joined in the private houses for the salary of Rs300 a month. With the help of his uncle he was able to join in a chemical factory, where he worked for a long period. After 10th class in the school he left the school and took up sweeping as a full time occupation. But still the family was in trouble and they

were struggling to see both ends meet. His mother was struggling with great difficulty to maintain the family. His uncle took him to Chandigarh where he learned the techniques of ritual performances and now successfully managing his shop. He says it is profitable and meaningful to him as he is able to support his family. In his own words “ after entering into this field I am able to buy two houses. I left sweeping work and gave it to others under *badli ka kaam*. I treat patients without demanding any thing from them. Majority of my clients are Muslims. Some come to me with their problems, which are deeply rooted in poverty and family. People come from all social backgrounds. I make them to touch my feet. They know very much that I am a Mehtar and clean their toilets. But still they respect me. I get variety of clients including prostitutes of nearby areas who come to me to complain about poor business they are doing. They ask me to help them in such a way that more lovers approach them. Some complain against their neighbours who are disturbing them. They ask me to do something to shut their mouth.

Suresh tries to put his occupation as a Bhagat at the forefront than his traditional occupation of sweeping. He also tried to explain the researcher that he is the most professional in dealing with his clients. He introduced me to some of his clients to verify his claims about his work and honesty. During the course of conversation it is learnt that many factors such as poverty, family disputes, and anxiety influencing the clients to come to these Bhagats. Here is a conversation with a client of Suresh who is a small time businessman in the old city of Hyderabad.

Suresh asked him to talk with the researcher, regarding his experiences with him.

Client:

Babu khan:

I have been visiting this basti for the last six months and consulted two persons for my problems. One is Kiran and another is Ramu. They could not solve my problem. Ours is a big family of four brothers and we have dispute over the share of the property. We are a joint family and having a family business. We have one sister who is not married. My sister- in- law is wicked and selfish that she wants to retain all the property, including a lorry owned by our family. We in the family come to know that my sister in law approached a Bhagat to keep us silent on this matter. Whenever I see her I become nervous and my knees gets weakened and I pissed many a times. This has been

happening for many days. Then I doubted that this is the work of the *Jaadu*. (Black magic). I approached the Bhagats to keep my sister in law silent on all matters. But the two persons I approached failed to deal with this problem. Disappointed I tried to go back home. Being Muslim, I do not have much knowledge about this basti. I am little hesitant to ask people about the other practioners in the basti. I have seen some Muslims entering into Suresh's house. I have enquired about him. They told me that he cures fast and also charges little money. I went to him immediately after they left his room. I am also convinced about his talents. Since then I have been visiting him. After three months, I see some progress in my family affairs Now I want him to totally shut the mouth of my sister- in- law and her powerful family members.

Suresh:

Ask him whether he has experienced any change or not? You know I take small amounts and treat patients. I may complete his work by next full moon day. The case is getting complicated, and becoming powerful Hence it is necessary to kill one of his family members, so that the lady will mourn the death and keep quiet. You know they have to see my real magic Oh! I asked one of my helpers to leave me. He is demanding more remuneration for his help. You know all these people are jealous of my earnings. They don't know how much hardship I have undergone to become successful in this work. Have you seen this tape recorder? It is beautiful. And gives good music, its in very good condition. It is a gift to me by one of my client, who is a resident of Dubai.

Researcher: You get good gifts from your clients.

Sanjay (Magical Ritualist):

I earned more than seven and half lakh rupees during last eight years. These small kids, who work with me, think very high of themselves. This *bhagat* (pointing to one of his assistants) says he spent fifteen lakh rupees, how is it possible? You tell me. Is it possible for a youth aged twenty-one years? Further he is asking me to provide him a Muslim girl. You know forty percent of my clients are prostitutes. If he goes there he may loose his ritual powers These small kids do not listen to me. In my child hood, I faced lot of difficulties As my father passed away at a very young age of twenty-eight years, my mother took all the burden of the family. She would get Rs 27 a

month and somehow managed the family. I cleaned the toilets and function halls even while I am studying at school. In the early morning I would drink only water and go to school. After work in the function halls and house I was provided some food there My friends were so surprised by looking at me working as scavenger. After college hours, in the evening I would go to garage as helper boy to earn money. I have spent my entire child hood in misery, and hunger. Our neighbours some times beat up my mother, and we the children were the mute spectators to the scene. You see today! I own flats in Shamshabad and Jubilee hills area and now I purchased three houses. I maintain two phones and a cell phone. And I am going to earn some more. What these assistants think of me. They are fools of their thinking

Suresh ended his commentary by asking me to understand it. Apart from aspiring for other modern occupations some preferred to the magical practices and performing the rituals to have their own identity and assertion among the community and wider society. Domestic violence, patriarchy and drunken habits of the husbands also forced some women into these magical practices. Though their number is small, the cases are strong enough to prove their assertive identity by adapting to new works like magical practices. In the basti there is a woman practioner who is the most successful of all. She also owns a three-storied building. two cars and properties elsewhere in the city of Hyderabad. Following is the case study of another successful woman ritualist who entered the field recently but successful with her practice. She took to mother goddess worship, and every year she installs a *pandal* for the goddess *Durga* and celebrates the Dashera with great attention by performing sumptuous rituals.

Sunanada: A woman Ritual Practitioner

She narrated her Auto-ethnography with questions asked by me in between.

Suananda in her own words,

My father worked in army. He is a soldier at Ahmedabad When I was eleven years old he died. I have undergone many turbulent events in my life. I lost my elder sister the following year. I have also got three brothers. One of them works in the army. Third one is job less. I got married at very young age of fifteen and came to Hyderabad My husband works in Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad. I faced difficulties in my own house, with the mother- in- law. My in-laws would beat me for no reason They are

not satisfied with the money and my earnings. I did not bring any dowry. Moreover I am second wife to my husband. I never received love and affection in the home. Some times even food is a rarity for me in my home. I tolerated and stayed because, *mi, kaan dan ka ladki* (because I am a family girl). I became devotional in course of time and started worshipping *Durga*. I stopped eating pork and non -vegetarian food. But if some times if clients bring any meat I eat it. The goddess possesses me on Tuesdays, Wednesday, and Sundays. Even on normal days also I get possessed if I pray to *Durga Mata*. I regularly get patients from variety of social backgrounds. Hindus, Muslims and Telugus also come here for solving their problems. All are one but we made the castes. Scavenging work is not a hindrance to me. If it is, let it be a hindrance to the world. Sweeping occupation is our necessity and livelihood. *Pet tho papi hai tho kuchbi karna padtahi* (The sin is with the stomach. One has to do anything to fill it).

My patients come to me with variety of problems. Some with health problems and some with family problems, for example that their children are not listening to them, husbands are not coming home properly etc. You know earlier I would perform rituals by taking small loans from friends. But now the *Durga Mata* is giving me every thing. My patients donate money to the goddess. They also bring all necessary items for *maataji ka puja*. Most of the cases are related to wife and husband and their problems. I give them sacred amulet, which they wear after the *puja*. Once a Muslim came here with her son. The spirits regularly possessed her. These spirits ask for chicken, liver, sweets etc. Some spirits ask for fruits. I treat them with my *Mantras*, and make them to speak out through spirits. The clients need not bring all items demanded by the spirits. When I treat them with my *Mantra dand* (Magic wand) spirits go away from them.

Once a Christian also came to me for treatment. I treat physical illness also. A Guru trained me in treating these physical ailments. Every year I go to the *tulja pur* mantra to visit and pray. There is no *muhabat* in Hindus. But among Muslims whatever they say they do it They offer coconuts, sweets. They bring sarees. Even during *ganesh Chaturthi* they come here and perform the *puja*. Hindus cry and weep on others. Hindus do not give or help others even if one is dying. But Muslims do a lot of service.

and they help others. I always invite people into my Durbar (the main hall in the house). There is no discrimination in my treatment.

While Sunanda is narrating two young persons came there. They complained about the tenant of the house. They are not vacating their house. The two youth asked Sunanda to help them to get rid off the tenants. She gave them some powder packed in small packs and asked them to put into various corners of the house. She promised them that their tenants will vacate the house in fifteen days, and it will cost around thousand rupees to perform pujas. The youth agreed to give the fees. They paid half the fees immediately.

Relations between clients and the magical practioners are very cordial except in rare cases. Though there are no tensions between them, there are mild incidents of dissent, when the clients are not satisfied with them. Payments are generally made in cash. Clients provide all the ritual items, whatever is necessary to perform the pujas. There are some persons in this field who are powerful enough to demand what they want. In this category either they are generally well established in the field or have strong ties with clients across the city, both at their work place and other private activities. I term such people as enterprising Bhagats and magical practioners. They use multiple identities to attract the clients. And also use their occupational identity in a very intelligent manner to manipulate the situation, towards their benefit. They never express resentment, for what they are doing: rather they effectively use the available opportunity for their benefit. Raghu Veer is one such person who while working as a sweeper in the legislative assembly in Hyderabad meticulously managed his practice successfully. These individuals belong to one section among Mehtars, who do not hate the system much, in which they are living, unlike the others who dig into the injustice of the system where they were treated badly for their occupation of scavenging. As James Scott (1990) distinguishes between 'thick' and 'thin' versions of hegemony, a thick hegemony is one in which subalterns accepts the legitimacy of the system in which they are enmeshed, believing it to be right and just. A 'thin' hegemony is one in which the subaltern recognizes the injustice of the system. as phrases it, to define for subaltern what is realistic and what is not realistic, and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, of idle dreams

Following is the case study of Raghu Veer, who has very little opposition about the system in which he is living, but intelligently exploits his networks for the sake of his business. He narrates about himself and specific cases he treated. Being a son of one of the prominent leaders of the community, as well as a local leader of the *Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen* (local Muslim political party) he is popular among many in the basti and out side.

Raghu Veer in his own words:

Oh! In my childhood I spent relatively happier life, as my father Hukum Singh Chindalia was a leader in MIM. Now he is a basti leader. There were no problems in my child hood, but I did not go to school regularly, as my friends and others forced to play with them. My father then helped me start a cycle shop of my own. I started a small cycle repairing center in the basti, and registered in the local employment bureau for a job. In a very short period I got a job as a scavenger in assembly office. and I joined without any hesitation. You know in our family there is a tradition of Bhagats Our forefathers used to worship deities and spirits. We have inherited that tradition. I learned techniques of ritual performance from my father and grandfather and started practicing. I had started regular pujas since 1989, with rigorous rituals. Initially there are very few people coming to me, but once I treated some cases successfully. my name became popular among many in the city. People started coming to me from my work place as well. Friends also informed about me to many people. In due course of time I became popular, that there is an increase in flow of population, quite often I am unable to attend. Nearly 30% people come with family problems Another 20% people who come have love related problems and 10% with physical ailments. Another 20-25% come with some socio –economic problems like their business is not doing well etc Some come with problems like spirit possession etc. I generally treat 30-40 cases per month. Out of them except one or two all are successful.

Further he narrated the following cases, which he has taken up during the last few years.

Case1.

Once there is a case where a Muslim housewife eloped with her servant in the house. Her husband, who is twelve years elder than her, came to me. I told him that, I could get his wife back within a week. The wife who went to Delhi, along with the servant returned home after four days and told him, that she went to Bombay and other places for site seeing. But the angry husband beat her thoroughly, and secretly told her mother that he would cut her head. After listening to that his wife again fled. I told him that I wanted to see her first. But he unnecessarily aggravated the problem by beating her. Again he came to me for help, which I refused. He insisted, that I should help him. I received some money, and performed usual rituals, but not sincerely. Slowly he stopped coming.

Case2.

Khan Kalil came to me, whose sister married to a Sheik stayed in Dubai. The problem is the Sheik. Even after having 12 children, he wanted to marry second time, that too in Hyderabad. He visited Hyderabad with money, in search of a bride. The two brothers of the first wife came to me, and requested me, that some how I should stop this. They gave me his photograph and address. I did *puja* for a week, and the man spent all his money and returned empty handed. A few years later, he again came to Hyderabad, and the party approached me. This time I worked in such a way that he changed his mind, and bought a small piece of land to build a mosque. Then it so happened that, he also gave some money to his in laws to build the mosque. Since then he has been sending money to his in-laws. They are happy and paid me good amount of money as fee.

Case3.

Once, a family approached me regarding their daughter's marriage. She is not listening to her parents. They brought the daughter to me. I performed some *pujas* and asked her to maintain the decorum in the house. Once I made a visit to her college and saw the situation there. I asked her parents to bring her again, and tried to convince her. She agreed to my words and paid attention to her family members after that. Some unique cases also come to me. After the fixation of the

marriage dates they come secretly. They ask me to create some problem so that marriage will not take place. Some people come to me at an advanced stage of their affairs and these cases take weeks to tackle. Some not satisfied with my treatment come again and again and I repeat the ritual exercises. That is why I accept the cases very carefully.

Case4.

There is a case from Goa. I treated the case within a short time. This case belongs to one of my friend's wife. She used to behave in an abnormal way, and talk nonsense in the nights. She was actually disturbed by the spirits. He took her to many hospitals, before bringing here. When she was brought here I treated the case within seven days. You know when women's menstruating cloth is thrown away on the road, if a snake passes over that cloth; the spirits certainly possesses the women. Some times unknowingly they walk on the streets. The *saree pallu* if touches the ground, where people throw the *disti* (some ritual objects kept to wardoff the evil spirits). It will be a big deal for people like us to help them.

Case5.

You know once a person came to me with a problem in his heart. There was a hole in his heart valve. And he visited hospital, and wasted money on doctors. Doctors advised him to get operated. Poor guy came to me and I treated it within 6 days. The hole in the valve closed within five days, and the patient was very happy and paid me good amount of fee. Some times prostitutes, mainly belonging to Muslim community, approach me. They generally complain that they are not getting their lovers, and hence their business is slow. I give them some herbal powders, sandalwood, jasmine powder etc. After spraying them on their bodies, if they go out many will be attracted to them, and there are many such cases that are successful. I collect the required herbals and other material in nearby fields only.

The process and techniques of ritual healing though always kept secret are generally known to all key practioners in the basti, with little variation they change from person to person. But each person follows a typical pattern of rituals, taught by his Guru. It is found that rituals arranged for the spirits are some times very expensive and time consuming. In one of the cases treated by the Bhagat Mohan, he made a garland with the teeth of the pig. He kept this garland on the neck of the woman who is possessed

by the *xin* spirit. The payment for such ritual is Rs 15000. As Bhagat said, we demanded the fees because we made rituals to La beg *bowrie*, *Mata Pativali*. These rituals involved sacrificing of pigs and chicken in huge numbers.

In another case narrated by Bhagat Mohan, he delineates the process of healing and interaction with the clients.

Case1.

In the words of Mohan,

Once there was an interesting case, which was very difficult to tackle. The head of all spirits known as *Jind* possessed two persons. They happen to be wife and husband. They are very much disturbed by the male and female spirits. These spirits possess them in alternatively that's why it is very risky for me to treat. One day I kept this wife and husband together. I kept *kalavdath* (black gram), and the teeth of the pig in the *puja* and recited the mantras for three and half hours. Then I spoke to spirits face to face. They narrated me why they are troubling these couple. I have asked them to leave their bodies and go to others. But the spirits did not listen to me, saying that they wont leave the couple. Then I offered the smell of the camphor and *sambrani* for five and half hours and made the spirits to leave their bodies. I kept amulets made of pig teeth on the neck of the couple. I have completed the work within one and half month costing Rs 5,100. I took only Rs1500. The rest of the money was spent on the material for performing puja of the goddess.

Case2.

A Muslim woman came to me with her family problems. Who is a resident of Syed Ali Chabutra. She is facing problems with her mother-in-law, and with her husband who was a drunkard. He would beat her every day. The woman asked me to get her rid off the mother-in-law and make her husband normal. I have taken up this case and completed the work in seven days. I also gave her some medicines for her. I asked her to some how obtain the urine of her mother-in-law. This has to be mixed in the medicine I gave. This medicine sprinkled with the urine of the mother in law should be kept in her food. I gave her clear instructions and she followed them exactly. You know whoever it is if subjected to this treatment they will remain slaves to the person who gave them the food. The lady succeeded and paid me thirteen hundred rupees. I recited the

mantra by holding the medicine. You know with this mantra any spirit can be called or sent back. This mantra also helps to trace the missing persons. Finally this mantra makes people to surrender to us and they listen to us.

Following is the mantra recited by the Bhagat Mohan used in his treatments.

Kala Kalav kali Raat

Javo kalve uske paas,

Usko laavo mere paas.

I si raam ki tala

Mere so aman ketalo

Dardho kaleje phute

Alla mohammad, aapkare

Adiki kurshi ajaari

Chadi mohammad saab

E- safari la illa-

Ka- Jandara – Mohammad

Sarki kunji – chale mantri

Ishawr uvacha pind laacha

Mere Guruka sabat sacha

Dekure suleman paegambar

Tere lamka tamasha

Ancestors and Magical Practices:

Ancestor worship in the form of spirits for acquiring ritual power is common among Mehtars. The dead person in the house, usually a ritual specialist, becomes the *bawrie* (household god or goddess) for that household. These dead ancestors are both worshipped and invoked by the descendents. The common tradition among Mehtars is that whoever dies in the family without getting married becomes the deity for the household. Those, in the family who carry the ritual tradition, worship these Bawries specially. As one of the informants says that 'Mehtars never die like Hindus. There is no death and rebirth to Mehtars since they are alive as *bawries*'. They relate their magical

strength to these *Bawries*. Except a few in the basti, all have faith in the *bawries* and their strength in healing. Mehtar ritualists, who are into magical practices, regularly perform the *pujas* for these *bawries*. Clients who visit them are asked to sponsor the costs of these rituals. The magical practices and worshipping spirits, as many opined are their hereditary traditions. It is also said that they are the carriers of this secret knowledge of the mantras. It is felt by many that their traditional occupation gave them enough strength in worshipping the malevolent spirits. It is also noted by an informant that many secret rituals performed by them require Human excreta. One informant said that there are some secret rituals, requiring utterance of a particular Mantra by holding the excreta on the tongue. And hence the powers of the Mehtars are intact as no other person can dare to touch the human excreta except the Mehtar. He also says that 'these characters are unique to the Mehtar community, and hence they are best endowed with magical powers of the dead ancestors and spirits. No other community can possess powers like us'. People come to us, precisely for this reason for our help. The strong view that they are the carriers of the secret knowledge exists among many in the basti. But there are also people within the community who do not subscribe to the same views expressed by the Bhagats.

Magical Practices: An outlet to the outside World:

The major consequence of the magical practices by the members of the community is exposure to the world beyond the basti. They were able to peep into the lives of others. As described earlier, relative sense of isolation, polluted identity attached to the occupation, poverty coupled with family problems, and more than anything else, an urge to mingle with people and earn easy money are the reasons for many in the basti to opt for such practices as an alternative to earn their living. Due to this practice many Mehtars have a feeling that they are becoming closer to outside society. Though their value remains the same in the society, their proximity with their clients, made them feel like any other person, and a sense of belongingness. Majority clients are from Muslim community, maintained intimate connections with the Mehtars, and shared many personal things. This made many Mehtars feel, that they are privileged enough to peep into other's lives. In the normal working conditions, either as scavengers or people belonging to non Muslim community, they might not have got the chance to interact so closely with them

As it is evident, many individuals have elevated themselves through this ritual healing practices. These clients helped the Mehtars by paying huge amounts of money as fee. They developed contacts with an array of people from all walks of life in the city. This helped some of the Bhagats to interact with people, which is otherwise not possible in normal conditions. They maintained relations with these people, later went beyond the usual practice and made alliances with some businessmen. There are occasions where some young Bhagats have maintained, romantic relations with their clients. In a conversation I had with Suresh, he boasted himself of having romantic affairs with some of his clients. Further the clients have also gone beyond their usual routine and treated relationship with these practitioners as unique as they are troubleshooters of the most complicated problems faced by them. These clients also started inviting Bhagats to their private and family functions. This helped many Mehtars to get their status elevated. As Suresh says that he felt proud in attending one of his client's marriage ceremony in the city. In his own words " I would have never received such an invitation to the party without my client. I wore a suit specially purchased for the occasion. I had drinks with his friends and danced the entire night to the tunes of melodious music". These kinds of events made Mehtars to identify with the social groups, and a sense of pride prevailed upon them. These incidents coupled with the increased human contacts helped them to climb the ladder of social mobility and a sense of achievement.

Apart from the social mobility they achieved through these relationships, there is valuable accumulation of material wealth among them. Ninety percent of the persons engaged in the ritual practices, maintain cell phones. Most of them have two wheelers. Some have purchased cars and sold later. One of the richest practitioner in the basti a woman, maintain two cars and an array of modern gadgets for communicating with her clients in India and abroad. Gifts received by these ritualists from their clients include all kinds of fancy and electronic items. Some donate Television sets, tape recorders, cellular phones, and other kinds of fancy items. This eventually changed the life style of these Bhagats and their families, which became envy of the community. Lured by these material comforts, others also aspire for the acquisition of the same in the basti. Many felt that they will stop those practices at some point, once they are satisfied with their earnings. As Vikas says, who will believe all this in the era of

technology? I am thinking to stop this business. I have already purchased a plot in jubilee hills. I will shift my residence soon and keep my children in that. They should be away from this basti. Otherwise they will get spoiled. Suresh also expressed similar opinion saying that, though this practice gives money, in the long run he wants to quit this to start some business of his own. Though some individuals are satisfied with their accomplishments and earnings, they seldom identify with the community. Rather they want to live outside the community once they achieve sufficient economic freedom. Though some of the people failed in their efforts to live in the middle class neighborhoods, many still feel to go out. Some prefer to identify with caste and their occupation for the sake of personal security and safety. But when comes to the self-interest it overtakes the community interest for fulfilling personal goals. This is evident among many Bhagats who, in spite of their success, as magical practioners, nevertheless criticize other colleagues in the basti.

But they seldom acknowledge their merit in healing practice. In spite of knowing each other's capabilities, they try to be individualistic in many cases. There is no common code among them in dealing with the clients. Everyone has carved their own niche in dealing with their clients and related activities. Self-identity is always in flux with the community identity for both practicing prosperous Bhagats as well as the mobile individuals in the basti as they continuously negotiate the terms between the community and their personal interests

Self-Individual and Community:

Among the practicing Bhagats, everyone tries to blame each other, by pointing others inability to attend successfully to cases successfully. They try to have an individual identity for themselves. There is no hesitation to criticize their fellow ritualsits for enhancing their personal pride. Whether it is practicing Bhagats or some one like leaders in the basti are often try to establish identity, different from their caste It is learnt from some of the Bhagats, that they try to connect themselves with some middlemen in the city and maintain closely-knit relations with them. When these clients visit the basti, they were taken into their homes directly. They see to it that no other person in the basti contacts them either for a usual greeting or a business talk Their helpers and well wishers strictly guard the relations maintained by these practitioners. It is noticed by many, that in

spite of a closely-knit family bonds among Mehtars, these primordial sentiments play little role when come to their, individual career or interests relating to business and other dealings of economic and political importance. The community identity is limited to the residential arrangement that is living in the same geographical zone. The self and community are clearly demarcated phenomena among the Mehtars. The personal and familial squabbles demarcated clear lines of the individual and the community in the basti. The individual tries to express himself or herself, through his acts and maintain relations with outsiders, with his skills in ritual practices.³ Each individual practioner established their own network and organize certain festivals like *Dashera* and *Vinayak Chaturthi* on their own. These ritual specialists are not only trying to establish, themselves as unique than others, but they are trying to assert their presence in the light of other dominant individuals, and families within the community. Their dominators are some times the community leadership, persons who have reached some level of status, with their wealth and education have exposure to out side world. The Bhagats also protest these people and their families, though in subtle manner but they try to imitate them for their own mobility.

The cases of Suresh, Sunanda, Raghuveer are important for illustrating the above statement.

Suresh as described earlier is a young man with dreams of his own, who wants to quit the occupation of magical practices, and start a new enterprise. Unlike others in the basti, he wants to be in the forefront of the boys with good image. He slowly nurtured into a successful Bhagat with his work and tactics. In one of the long conversations he revealed the internal dynamics of his community, and how he is trying to struggle with those elements that always tried to look down. He has many things to be proud of and he described the people in the basti as people aspiring to earn money and prestige. He refers to some of the dominant families in the basti, for their political wickedness, in asserting their power He tells that he belong to the gotra, whose

³ Here I would like to distinguish between persons who engaged in magical activities and others. Persons, who are attached to various political parties, members of associations or self-proclaimed leaders, try to be different from the average Mehtar in the basti. But for the present discussion, I cover only individuals who are into the practice of shamanism in the basti

members are always small in number and hence they have no say in the larger Mehtar community in the basti. All the decision-making process and organization of events are taken care by families who are numerically dominant. They never allow others in the basti to part take in their organizational process. Hence I have taken to this magical practices, through which I can make money and build a house, Suresh offered the researcher that he can provide a dinner for him in any of the hotels in the city, as he has wide connections with his friends, who were once his clients. The neighboring people also never tolerated his progress and tried to create problems for his mother by dragging her into petty quarrels in the basti. He confesses that he had some affairs with the visiting clients who belong to Muslim community. He attacks those who are criticizing him of cheating people. He says that they have gone up and better off than us the poor families. Why they criticize us, it is they who exploited poor families in the basti, in the name of *badli ka kaam*⁴. They behave like *Marvaris*.

Suresh is trying to boost his own image in the basti, in spite of all these odds. He still remembers the suffering undergone by his mother in bringing her children. He points out that it is not the only dominant families show discrimination against them but it is also equally practiced by the prosperous Bhagats. He says that he needs to obey whatever they say in the matters related to the ritual healing. Some also look at him with suspicion, and this makes him further worried about his safety. He wants to come out of this dragging net to become a new man. When I asked him about his marriage, he says all will happen by the blessings of the goddess. But he says that before his marriage, he would like to build a house. I have to look after my brother's children and take care of mother. Though he is bit angry about the people's attitude towards Mehtars, and their work, he says that there is nothing wrong in doing any work, which provides livelihood. His identification with the community is two fold. One is at family level, and another through occupation. But he nevertheless, hesitates to be identified with common Mehtars in the basti, as he always tries to be at a different level. He says, *mai to jhadu se kaam*

⁴ As explained elsewhere in the text, *badli ka kaam* means, working for some body else. In this agreement the owner of the work, for example appoints some one to work on behalf of him as sweeper. Usually earnings are shared equally. But it is always the worker who is at the losing end, as he cannot demand the amount he thinks appropriate. Family dominance, Community leaders, and other factors like poverty of the worker play a role in these arrangements. In the basti more than twenty percent people are engaged in the *badli ka kaam*. But due to the fear many did not reveal it in my household census.

kiya hai. *Lekin mere jaise koi dukh nai dekha* (I have also worked with the broom. But they have never experienced difficulties like me). Vikas's construction of himself and his community, are fluid and they are interwoven. But nevertheless he is not ready to loose the community identity as it gives him the security, and offers benefits. The case of Vikas is also same but he relates himself with his great ancestors in ascertaining his position.

Vikas:

Vikas is relatively well off than Suresh, but he never experienced the poverty as is the case with the latter. Vikas is also a practicing ritual specialist, with rich clients from the neighbouring areas. He was quite reluctant to talk to me. He firmly believes in the Mehtar traditions and challenged whether I can with stand if he sends a spirit on to me. One of the evenings I had a long conversation with him. He opines that 'Many does this (Magical practices), but not with knowledge but with their wits. Al hough at times it is saddening me to be part of this game, but still I have to continue for some time' says Vikas. He learned his techniques of ritual practice from his own father, who was a Bhagat. His family belongs to a gotra⁵ who are very few in the basti. Vikas by explaining various societal problems says that though he is not totally convinced about these rituals and *bawries*, one has to do it for a living. In his own words " Do you think I will stay in the basti forever by practicing this healing and treatment business? I have a plot in the *banjara* hills. After some time, I will leave this basti and build a home for my children. They will be educated if they are out side the basti". He is not alienating from the identity of the community. It is evident in his dialogues, that he acknowledges the contributions of the community and its role in the erstwhile kingdoms as soldiers. He is searching for new alternatives to escape the impure identity attached to the caste and its occupation. He is trying to construct his own reality and hope for his future. He nevertheless is very confident about leaving the basti. He took me to his brother, who is an aspirant for the leadership in the basti.

⁵ I have used the term gotra in the ethnographic profile chapter. Mehatrs have got names as their surnames. There are nearly 33 gotras in the basti. Majority families belong to Bidlan, kagda, chindalia, parcha, dulgaj etc. rest of them have relatively small representation in the basti. And hence many tend to think that others are dominating them in all respects

He says, even if he leaves the basti, there are people like him who will take care of the basti. By referring to this kind of ideas, Vikas is not attempting to completely negate his affiliations with people in the basti. But trying, to search a respectful living for him self and his children. He also plans to buy a *maruti* car. But he says that one should not invite the problem of the 'evil eye'. And hence wants to buy it after he leaves the basti. Vikas not only points, about the dominant leaders in the basti, but also says, that they lack the courage and hence, hang on to their traditional roles in the community. He is not optimistic about the education of the youth in the basti. He says that people never get civilized if they stay here. As they eat pork and drink liquor, they can never be led to the right path. But when asked about himself, whether he eats the pork or not, he smilingly says 'Yes', to my query, by further elaborating his argument that it is the family which makes people. Vikas contest the traditional leadership, in the community. He opines that they yield power only to dominate the fellow Mehtars. But they cannot get any respect or power outside their caste. He also mentions that through the magical practices, and also by amassing material wealth and public contacts, one cannot achieve status. He tries to use these ritual practices aiming to be different from the community as well as building his networks, away from the stigmatized identity of their caste and occupation.

Some, while participating in the community rituals and festivals organized in the basti try to maintain distance. This indifference or self-esteem management however, is not completely a protest but rather a way of expressing ones own disagreement within the community. They try to be specialists and carriers of unique knowledge than others and in this way use these practices for promoting themselves and their families. They have either experienced utter turmoil in their family or merely have no role to play in the community. They keep asserting their identity through various practices, which are unique in style, and get the attention of others. Sunanda a housewife has started magical practices, which are unique and trying to connect to those practices with an element of spirituality in worshipping the goddess *Kali*. Despite the fact that she is relatively, a new face in the basti among senior practitioners, she has attracted enough attention of people in and outside the basti. Sunanda has experienced severe problems at her home with her in- laws and her husband. Vexed with these domestic turmoil, and no

body is around to help in the family, she resorted to the worship of the goddess. Every year she installs a statue of the goddess Kali at her home. Under the leadership of the elders, a common platform is erected every year for celebrating Dashera and *Vinayak Chaturthi*. But she makes her own arrangements. Apart from Sunanda there are other individuals who also started installing their pandals⁶ in the basti.

Sunanda invites her clients, to sponsor, or contribute some money towards performing puja for the seven days. She says that she is not like others who do the puja in a routine manner. She comments that 'I sit for puja with lots of attention and devotion. I do not even touch the water during the daytime, till the puja is completed. In her own words 'I myself perform the puja for the goddess and do not allow anybody to meddle in the process. My home becomes sacred on these seven days, and whatever I ask the goddess *kali* I get it. I will be able to treat my patients better in those days. You name it any ailment I will cure them in days'. When asked about her, visiting the other kali pandals in the basti, she says that one has to obey the community also, but any way 'Goddess is one and omnipresent' is her answer. Though she is not in a position to contest the others but in private she claims to have possessed more powers due to her unique worship. She worked as sweeper for some time and later left the job and gave it to others under *Badli ka kaam*. She is able to manage things in a better way at home and outside. She created an ambience, which is very unique in its presentation. She prepares amulets, and collects herbs by sending her sons to nearby areas in the city. In the family she is able to minimize the tensions, if not every day, particularly on the ritual occasions. She attained a special status in the home, as she became a source of income. She narrates her wish to do good to others, by saying that 'Many people come to me, but for what purpose? To fulfill their wishes! I ensure that they fulfill their wishes, and the goddess grants my wishes. Sunanda tries to be modest keeping in view of her social position in the basti when compared to relatively influential Bhagats. She tries to achieve her objectives of escaping the marginalization by means of magical practices, and adopting various symbolic elements in goddess worship

⁶ A pandal is a raised platform on wooden sticks or empty barrels. This gives the look of brick built platform, when it is covered with cloth. On this beautifully decorated idols of Durga and Vinayaka are adorned every year as part of the festival celebrations in the city. Though a recent entry into the Mehtars life style this is well absorbed by the community

Contesting the Bhagats and their Magical Practices:

Among the Mehtar community there is some discontent regarding the *Bhagats*. As one informant who criticized these people says that “ these Bhagats do nothing, but play with the minds of the people. The poor and hapless Muslims who visit them believe that they fulfill their wishes. But it is the time, which drags the problem. In the mean time things become normal, and the clients think it is all due to the efforts of the Bhagats, that their problems are solved. The same argument is heard among many people in the basti. But all of them either belong to non- scavenging occupation or persons who do not derive their primary income from the scavenging occupation. A few of them, though know that the practicing Bhagats do nothing, do support their practice by saying that they need some income and livelihood. The general notion that prevails among many is that the gods and goddesses they worship are true and powerful. But when it comes to their invocation, for carrying out some specific tasks they say that it is not possible for these practicing Bhagats. Some of the Mehtars particularly those who are into sweeping occupation, consult the Bhagats for particular problems. If some one is not feeling well in the house, or children are having small ailments etc, approach them for performing pujas. But the families who possess slightly better education and mobility and who are aware of many alternative practices of medical care hardly approach these people for the cure. Some even filed complaints against the practicing Bhagats in police stations. These kinds of attempts are made to disturb their practice for personal differences and jealousy. It helped the people to have a working relationship with the local police. As per the law one should not practice or encourage people to follow occult practices and are said to be illegal. However many are aware of these laws, but nobody is scared about them. It is observed that police visit them to take their dues. It is also noted by one of my informant Dharam Veer that ‘ these police take their usual bribe and keep silent. Otherwise, why, all these Bhagats are not arrested. By pointing to a very prosperous woman in the basti, he says that I have tried to get her

convicted, but our community people and elders resisted me, as it will bring bad name to our community. You know I can challenge them and prove their wickedness. There is no truth in all these acts, it is all about money and they play with the minds'. Dharam Veer who is an employee in the central government office narrates his experience with the Bhagats and about himself in defending his argument.

Dharam Veer:

My grand father was a Bhagat. He died in the year 1985. I do perform regular *pujas* but not the kind of *pujas* performed by these Bhagats. I do not believe in their practices. It all depends on individual thinking. In our community education is uncommon and people are ignorant. And people who got degrees are unable to get jobs. Drinking is not a habit in our families. But otherwise some people drink due to necessity, as they work in drainages and lift filthy things with hand. In our basti drinking is a everyday affair. Some drink because of domestic problems. In our families no body is interested in ritual performances. But some times people do it because of helplessness. There are no other alternatives. The leaders of the community have done nothing for the betterment of the community. I do not have hopes that they will do any good for the community in future too. Government has a policy to keep our caste as low that is why we are like this. Earlier due to illiteracy, our people were unable to get any jobs. But now they are literate, why they are not getting any job. It is the government policy to keep us away. In our community people with degrees are living as auto drivers. What's the use of that degree? Children are not getting proper attention due to drinking habits of some parents. Earlier we are assured of a Municipal sweeper job. Now that guarantee is not there. In the present situation many remain idle in the basti, particularly the youth. All this is the handiwork of the upper castes. Even if our people wanted to do safai work, government is not allowing them to do by giving those works to contractors. And hence youth became idle in our community and they are passing time leisurely. Hence youth are attracted to these magical practices, as it gives them easy money. *Majburi se admi kuch bi karta hai.* (In a helpless situation Human being does anything for survival).

Occupational identity and Magical practices:

On the whole the outsiders identify the Valmiki basti as a place of the Bhagats and magical practitioners. Though it has a traditional identity derived from its occupation, in course of time it also acquired multiple identities other than the 'Mehtar'. Many regretted about naming of the *Basti* by outsiders. Many try to refer it as *Valmiki* basti. A few educated are of the opinion that the people in the basti are miserably wasting their money in performing these rituals. Although they are critical about the rituals within the basti, seldom criticize the *Bhagats* who perform them. There is a common elation and a sense of pride among many in the basti. If a Bhagat in the basti gets a new client, who happens to come in a car, he feels proud. His status gets elevated if he keeps attracting new clients who can afford a car to visit him. They also regularly, keep their contacts with these clients for developing possible future relations. Some even ask them to donate money for organizing such festivals like Ganesh chaturthi, and *Dasherra* in the basti. Even if People in the basti do not identify or support the activities directly, they do derive a sense of pride. Since the prospering Bhagats bring not only wealth for themselves but are potential contributors of material and other kinds of support for the community. Many issues like part-time employment, getting a loan, and other kinds of favours are easily available to people, if a Bhagat refers to his influential clients in the city. On the other hand these connections are also used in dispute resolution and settling petty business dealings in the city. Many approach these individuals to, solve a problem or settle the business dealings. They efficiently manage these things through his networking with the clients in the city. The prosperous Bhagats not only support themselves, but they have become harbingers of opportunities for others. Persons in the basti are related to one another on two grounds, one is due to co residence with the same occupational group, and secondly sharing the common goals in every day life. These may range from the mutual business understandings to work relation ship like *badli ka kaam* to the status levels among them. The Mehtar identity and their ritual identity as Bhagats or magical practioners are intertwined in many respects. The criticism of magical practices is often comes from the individual differences, jealousy and other family differences. However people who do not criticize these specialists are either have cordial relations with them or connected by kin

The opponents of these Bhagats say that they (people who are engaged in ritual healing) are simply, searching for their alternative career and income generating activities. But they do not possess any powers as they boast of themselves. In contrast to them, people who have some lenience towards them say, that they have been engaged in the occupation for a long time as Bhagats. But it is effectively used in the recent times for the public good. They are assisting people, who come with various problems. They say that it is the people who are coming to these Bhagats searching solutions for their problems, but bhagats are not going to them'. They validate and support the practice, by pointing to the tradition of the Mehtars as well as the local situation of the community. They try to use the Mehtar identity of the community, both to validate the position of practicing ritualists as well as upholding their right to do so. The polluted identity has become strength in itself in defending these practices. The traditional ritual practices of Mehtars are used in inventing the new identity, status and livelihood for the community. In the process of struggle for a better position they have resorted to numerous activities such as adoption of popular festivals and symbols. Substantial numbers of people are also into various activities termed as unlawful, for several reasons. Working for private gangs is common among them. However various forces of the locality, made them to resort to such practices and pressurized them to plunge into such activities but they eventually derive a sense of satisfaction and pride as being part of such groups.

Crime and Community:

One fourth of the individuals have a long track of criminal records in the basti. Most of them are taken to police stations several times and are charge sheeted. These crimes vary in their nature and context. However many of them are charge sheeted as Rowdy-Sheeters, by the police. People in the basti are well aware of these developments. Traditional leaders in the basti also know about these activities. On the other hand the outsiders and immediate neighbourhood population perceive the Mehtars in the basti in a negative way. As one informant puts it 'these people are nasty, and indulge in all such activities. They also have questionable

records with them, hence no one touches them'. These kinds of attitudes are common in the locality and its surroundings. Though these attitudes are very general, yet many respect some persons belonging to the first generation in the basti. Moreover some of the basti people are involved in many communal clashes in the locality, which became another point of suspicion even by the police. Residents in the basti are either convicted for committing small crimes or for some disputes in and outside basti. Some are even charge-sheeted during the communal riots.

These individuals who emerged as rowdy-sheeters have long histories of themselves and their respective families. Most of them hail from the families who first settled in basti, for working as scavengers. Some of them are even known for their skills in the wrestling and sports. They were good sportsmen once, and also earned a good amount of money for their livelihood. Some of them hail from relatively, well off families within the community. Their educational levels are also better than many in the basti. People belonging to these families are also quite known with others in the neighbourhood as 'respectable' persons. Though Rowdy-Sheeters in the area belong to various communities, Mehtar community is viewed differently than others.

Rowdy-Sheeters in the Basti:

Most of the times it is the Mehtars, who are identified as people with potential harbingers of trouble and violence. If some trouble breaks out in some part of the neighborhood or else where, the police immediately suspect the involvement of Basti people and rounds them up. It happened several times during my fieldwork. It is observed that some times police searched for a person for weeks together. In the house I stayed during the fieldwork period, I was cautioned by one of the key informant that, if any police comes he asked me to tell them that the house owner is a traditional scavenger, working in the private houses. The person to whom the house belongs in fact narrated many stories to me, regarding his personal life and involvement in some land dealing cases. He told time and again that he wanted to change his life style and wanted to be on the good path. Like him there are many individuals in the basti, who often either caught by the police or voluntarily

surrendered to them. In many cases, community is well aware of these individuals, and seldom there is any objection to their activities. Many view these individuals as people who are earning their livelihood or people whose life style is very difficult to change. As my key informant says, that ' it is their life style. They are tuned to it. You cannot bring them back by force, when they realize that, it is not good for them then automatically they come out of it. *Machili paani me jeena chahatahai* (Fish wants to live in waters only). Others, though aware of the actions of these people outside the basti, remain mum and leave it to their families and kin groups to take care. Several people also call them, as 'tigers' meaning people who can make others scary with their actions and can yield power among the police and the politicians. Such individuals are also respected quite often but in the process, it is community, which became significant. They identify the individuals as some one who is an asset for the community. These individuals also help the community people, in their hours of need and crisis. Hence they gain sympathies from them and get the emotional support. There are also quite good number of people who oppose these 'tigers' on several grounds. The reasons range from enmity, associated with the family and old disputes in the kin groups etc. In spite of these, their consciousness about the community prevails. As one informant says ' they may be doing bad things and indulging in many illegal acts, but after all they are our caste people, who will support them, if not, us'.

They also join with the people in other parts of the city, where they are engaged in the deviant behaviour, mentioned above. They generally engage in property disputes and take money from the parties who assign the task. Most of the times, the police are less interested in these dealings and the parties also bribe them. In the recently expanding real estate business a large amounts of money transaction was takes place, where disputes are common. In these dealings many people rely upon the private parties and these tigers than the 'institutional' set up of the Law. Though in recent times it has come down a bit, they still favour to engage in such activities Other kinds of activities are acting as middlemen for business deals between individuals. Apart from these activities there are some activities, which are very negligible, like part time crimes, like stealing etc. Most of the activities operated outside the basti and

far away from the neighbourhood. Each individual is highly conscious about their interests as well as the communities. Members who are involved in these activities share information. The pride and feeling of the belongingness exists among them. People make good references about them during the daily conversations. There is an intimate association and communication between the individuals who engage in such activities.

Types of Crimes:

Persons engaged in these activities can be classified into two-three categories. Generally people, who are into these activities, seldom attend their traditional work that is scavenging. They may give the work either to some one to work on their behalf, or sell it. They sometimes engage other people to work on their behalf in government offices or elsewhere. The first category people can be described as people who manage all their affairs on their own and these people function individually, by taking part-time assistance from others. They generally hail from the traditional dominant families in the community, whose forefathers are traditional leaders of the caste. Many of them are also moneylenders, who used to lend money within the community. These people also command some respect in their respective families and influence certain people in the city. They generally attend the dealings involving huge amounts in transactions. These individuals are also harbingers of change in the community. They have the potential in influencing the people and their everyday life. Many follow them in their everyday life. People give some importance to these people and their sayings.

Some families and individuals maintain close relations with them, and receive favours. In the community there exists a clear distinction between these people and others who achieved greater social mobility with their occupational change and education. But these persons engaged in the activities of business deals always try to attain the status of certain level on par with the families who achieved mobility with their good credentials in education. Most of them started sending their children to the schools regularly, which is an important change in the past ten years. In the second category, come people who work under some body in the basti, or elsewhere and engage in activities on their behalf. They regularly maintain contacts with their master

receive the orders and implement them. They also engage in their traditional occupation of scavenging and do their work as any other Mehtar in the Basti. They seldom try to identify with the socially mobile group in the community. But it is noticed that many try to have their independent life, by starting some small business etc, but very few succeeded in their efforts. In this category there are families where both wife and husband work as sweepers. In the third category, there are people who by doing both scavenging as well as other occupations, tend to engage themselves as middlemen for business disputes. These people seldom dream to improve their condition, but rather they try to eek out a living. Their life is a hand to mouth existence, and they rarely question the dominance of their bosses over them. These people either work for some body, or they take up small problems to deal with.

Crime and Caste:

In the neighbourhood and the locality, it is generally perceived that the Mehtars are the people with potential for committing crime. Many opine that the community and its life style are quite unusual, and they can be easily triggered to fighting. The surrounding communities, who are largely Telugu speaking people, see them in the above manner. They say that ' *Mehtarolu* always like that, they are dirty and rear pigs, what kind of life it is'. In their every day interaction it is the caste identity, which surfaces than any other things. The caste identity is nothing but their occupational identity. As revealed by many informants in the basti, 'outsiders always looked at their caste than any other thing in their every day interaction. In most of the cases registered in the police stations, Mehtars are charge sheeted as Rowdy- sheeters. And in the local area some of these people have Rowdy sheets, as suffix to their name. These things made many to believe that the scavengers living in the area commit crime and they cannot be believed. In the normal everyday interaction with the many people outside the basti, it is found that almost all of them are having similar opinion about the community. There are also many individual instances where, many fights occurred due to the utterance of the caste name. Many such feuds made the people to believe that Mehtars possess a violent character and are dangerous to deal with. Apart from this in most of the communal roits that broke out in the locality, Mehtar

community became the focus of the police. During the firing incidents, many are injured and one boy was shot dead. These memories coupled with the local fights earned the Mehtars an image of fighters and violators of the law. These general perceptions along with the history of case sheets against them strengthened the views of many in this respect. In the eyes of the police they are a stereotype. Wherever there is an incident of crime and other related activity they rush to the Mehtar basti and make enquiries about the suspected people.

Crime, Individuals and Self-esteem:

Most of the people, engaged in criminal activities directly or indirectly, maintain excellent public contacts both within and wider society. They quite often resort to various cultural strategies to maintain their status. Some families have excellent rapport with these people and maintain good relations. Families respect these individuals for their contributions to the community as well as to the respective families. These individuals are also very active in many of the festivals and rituals organized in the basti. Quite often they sponsor those events. They maintain good rapport with outsiders also. Whenever they organize the festivals they go out and manage good financing for their festivals. In many situations it is observed that they go to politicians whoever is close to them for getting funds for organizing various popular festivals. Another important feature of the choice of the festivals is selection of popular Hindu festivals. Although it is a recent phenomenon the organization of these festivals is quite attractive in many aspects. Festivals like *Dashera*, *Ganesh chaturthi*, are celebrated with great fanfare. These leaders organize these events with total involvement and enthusiasm. In the basti these two festivals so meticulously organized, that even the local leaders paid visits to these events. These individuals try to negotiate their identity with the community as well as the outsiders. They mask the identity of their past or the present situation by resorting to these cultural practices. Some times organizing a festival brings a lot of appreciation from the community. And this enhances the moral standing of these people, who in turn derive happiness from these events, and satisfy their needs. Though many know the person is involved in the criminal activities or charge sheeted, it hardly matters in their

ry day life. As one informant says that they learned to live with it. It is noted by many that these individuals somehow manage the funds by some means to maintain their status, but rarely they were part of the traditional leadership of the community. The traditional leadership does not consider them as the true leaders. But on the other hand, the people in the community accepted them as their leaders, as they cater to the needs of the individuals and families in the basti.

Individuals who are into these activities balance their work between the community members and outsiders. They equally maintain good relations with people in other areas. In every day life they have been in touch with all kinds of people, from police to the petty traders. There is a well-knit network among these people and the petty businessman. The inner city of Hyderabad is well organized with these traders. The trading communities role in the local small markets are subject to rapid transformation. These changes brought new tensions and conflicts within the community and intra community relations. Disputes are mainly with regard to business, at times they cross these barriers and aim at settling personal rivalries. Many feel that the justice is delayed in police stations and hence they approach the people who can act as middlemen to settle their differences, if needed using physical force. Their immediate focus will be on those people who are into this kind of activities, or people who have earlier listed as Rowdy sheeters. Others perceive Mehtars in the neighborhood as having the potential to deal with such situations. They hire them for doing such jobs. In this process, Mehtars slowly integrated into the unorganized sector of dispute solving mechanism. Even some of the politicians maintain close relations with the *Valmiki Nagar*. Most of the basti people are close aids of the leading politicians in the city. Apart from being party workers, they also actively engage in the activities of trouble making. At times, leading politicians used the Mehtars to create the communal strife in the sensitive areas of the old city. The social identity coupled with the pressures from the local socio-political situation, led to the culture of crime in the basti. Many are easily drawn into its fold due to vulnerability of their living standards, along with the social segregation they experience. These established relations with various people made Mehtars more comfortable. In a sense they are related with the close interactions they enjoyed with outsiders, which otherwise is not

possible because of their caste identity. These outsiders have also encouraged them, by providing good finances to meet their needs. In course of time, these Mehtar leaders adopted and tried to integrate into mainstream cultural activities by organizing popular festivals. Getting identified with the public is much easier with these festivals. They imitated their own political bosses in organizing and sponsoring the cultural events. Many have become sponsors of cultural activities in the community. This participation has enabled them to get a new status within and outside the community. And this philanthropic activity became a means for maintaining their social status within and outside the community.

Following case studies demonstrate these phenomena.

Ravi Singh (Ex-Rowdy Sheeter):

My childhood passed very happily. My father Gulab Singh was a *pahilwan* (wrestler). He was highly respected among the community members. He provided a rickshaw to my brother to go to school. He was also a powerful man in those days. But fate had decided something else. During my childhood, due to quarrels at school, I left it very early. I had also worked as sweeper in some households. Slowly I came into contact with some friends and started learning the skills in wrestling. My forefathers were also good wrestlers. One day I happened to meet my old client, who is a Marwari businessman. He invited me to settle a case involving property dealings. He has been fighting with his fellow businessman for quite long time. He served me Toddy. I was already drunk on that day. I used some toddy to wash my face. He became angry, for my act. He said how dare I am to do that in front of him. I told him that it is very common among our community. 'why do you feel bad about it'. Then he said that 'how can a Mehtar can talk like this'. He said he is not scared of any Mehtar, even if he is a *Pahilwan* (wrestler). Immediately his friends and family relatives surrounded him, and there was a scene. He started abusing me by calling my caste name, and I was alone there. I left for my home, immediately. I returned to his house with a big *Talwar* (sword). In the basti, family members resisted me a lot, not to go there. But I did not listen to them. My three brothers accompanied me. I barged into his house and directly went to that Marwari, and hit him on his head with the sword. There was a big fight there. We three brothers fled the

place immediately. The *Marwari* with injuries on his head got hospitalized. It was big news in those Days. Police started searching for me. My brothers and me were fled to various places. I went to Nizamabad. The police commissioner was suspended, as he could not control the Rowdy- sheeters. During this time there is an increasing pressure from my family members to surrender to the police. Even some of my close friends requested me to surrender. Some police even secretly approached and asked for my surrender. I agreed to surrender but only on one condition that I will be allowed to go to the police station by a Rickshaw. The police did not chain me. But their higher authorities, suspended them for not chaining my hands. I was beaten up very severely in the police station. I am jailed for six months. I came back from the prison and became popular. I started meeting people in the crime world. I came into contact with most powerful and influential political leaders. Some political parties asked me to join their parties. The local MLA supported me a great deal. Many lured me with their cash offerings. I did many things for the local politicians – created troubles in the basti, beat people up, etc. I was also associated my self in creating problems in the communally sensitive areas in the old city. I was paid well for these activities. Many political parties lured us with the money. Recently it is the ruling party in the state, which tried its best to lure us. We have also assisted many politicians in settling their property disputes in their villages. In this case we were paid a large sum of 2 lakh Rupees. Once I attended a case, where a *Marwari* and a *Rajput Thakur* were fighting over a piece of land. I tried to convince the *Thakur*, about the compromise plan. The *Thakur* responded to me saying, that ‘ how can a Mehtar dictate terms and conditions for him. Further he said that ‘ Mehtars work in our homes, and eat the left over food. I am a *Rajput*. I don’t care you Then immediately I shouted back saying see we are also *Rajputs*, but due to poverty and circumstances we are doing this work (Scavenging). We are brave enough to defend ourselves We are not like you, who converted to Islam without any resistance and gave your daughters and wives to *Moughals*. We are protecting you. Don’t you know this fact? And after this there is a big fight among the groups. People from both sides died in the clash. Again there was a bandh. Police became highly alert. I went in to underground once again. After some months everything became normal and now I am living like this.

Ravi is now father of grown up children. He constantly makes every effort to come out of this vicious circle of criminal identity. In every day interaction within the community, he tries to be a modest person. At the teashops and at *Valmiki* temple, he moves closely with his community. He says, ' I would like to leave this, I am sincerely thinking on this matter. But the people finding it difficult to forget my past. I wanted to give better education to my last son. At least I wanted to see him as an employee'. Ravi also contributed significant amount of money to the construction of an arch to the *Valmiki* temple. He mooted the proposal that his *Paarcha* family would like to sponsor the construction of an Arch in front of the *Valmiki* temple. He regrets for differences and inequalities based on personal prejudices and family disputes. His elder son who got married is not employed. But he quite often takes up works as middleman. The police arrested him recently in connection with a murder case Following is the narration of Vikram Singh, son of Vinod.

Vikram Singh:

When I was studying in school, I regularly missed the classes. My father was a well known Rowdy-sheeter by that time. I never went to school regularly and watched some movies in nearby theaters, during the morning hours as well as in the afternoon. I got married at the age of fifteen. Once there was a fight in the basti. In this fight some people beat up my sister in law. I became furious at the incident and have beaten those people severely. That person was bleeding. Heavily injured he was admitted into the hospital. Police arrested me. I spent eight days in the police custody. Some how my father managed to get me out of the jail. But finally we won the case in the court. From that day, police started suspecting me for every act. Whenever and wherever some incident occurs, they rush to me and suspect my involvement. Yesterday I was severely beaten up by the police. See my swollen hand. They are suspecting my involvement in a murder that took place recently, near *Charminar* area I left that gang long back. But still they suspect my involvement in that incident. I have never committed a crime deliberately. I am at times dragged by the prevailing

conditions around. But police listed me, and I cannot escape from their eye, as they are not going to believe what I say.

Following is the case study of kumar who worked under many noted politicians as well as gang leaders. He is now trying to establish himself as a responsible householder. Father of three children, he is struggling to start a small *kirana* shop, so that his family income can be supplemented. His wife works in the private homes as sweeper. They are also into spiritual activities and his wife is a devotee of Goddess Kali. Kumar feels that he has been in the field of social work, and as middleman, in settling business disputes. but never thought of working independently, as there are many pressures in the field. Following is his narration.

Kumar:

My child hood has been spent in the very large joint family. I was able to continue my education till my first year B.A and discontinued that course. I assisted my parents in their work, while studying in school. My father worked in the Zoo, and I helped him in the evening hours. Soon after my school hours, I attended his work at the zoo. And we together returned by 7'o clock. In the morning I would get up at 5'o clock and started preparing to attend the usual work. I fought with many people in the school. My caste became a problem at school. I had good friends among the *Pardhis*. The other schoolboys are frightened at the very looks of our friends. We are like 'tigers'. At the very young age I got engaged to my fiancé. I had fallen in love with many girls. I never hide my caste identity. I am also a good dancer. I worked very hard during my school days. I worked as boy in a makeshift restaurant in the *Abids* area of Hyderabad. I have realized that money is everything and thought that I should earn money by any means. I got married during this time. During college days I made friend ship with rich boys. One of the boys told me that he had sexual relations with Mehtar girls. He said that ' Mehtar girls are easily available and are of loose morals. I have beaten him without any hesitation. After some time I stopped going to college. Though I gave the exam, I failed. Slowly I entered into the world of politics with Malla who is a well-known Rowdy sheeter by that time. I worked as his

assistant, collected money from various people on his behalf. He paid me good amounts of money for the services. I enjoyed that type of job very much. In course of time I entered the gangs and got used to their life styles. I was introduced to many criminal leaders during that period. People like Gulab Singh of *Dhulpet*, *Sattupaka*, *Munna Singh* etc. But after a while I stopped all these activities as Malla became ill. I have opened a kirana shop. I also entered into the chits business. During this process I have come across other noted people in this field, and worked for them on part-time basis.

Malla:

Oh! What is there to tell, about my life? I have passed my childhood relatively in a happy mood. My father is a renowned wrestler and well known in those days. He provided us good education when compared to others in the basti. He worked as *safai karamchhari* for a few years, and quit that occupation. He has taken up money lending business afterwards. Though I have discontinued my B.com, I am the only one among the four brothers who continued education till the graduation. My ambition was to become a sub-inspector. I made it till the interview board. But some of our own caste people created a problem and they stopped my chances of selection. They have complained to the officials branding me as a Rowdy. I was not a Rowdy-sheeter though. From then onwards my problems started. I could not achieve my goal of becoming a police officer. Then I entered into a new mode of livelihood that is dispute resolution. I acted as middleman for many disputes. These assignments earned me name and money. In those days there were lot of fights within the community. No body believed the other. Here, in the basti, there are families from various villages of Haryana. They think that they are different from each other. Again there are differences based on *gotras*. But things have changed now. Now day's boys are addicted to alcohol. They are not working properly. They imitate the Heroes and Villains in the movies. No body is interested in education. You know these boys eat lots of pork, some times even a kilogram, without doing any work. What happens in that circumstances they get sleep and sleep only! They watch all rubbish on the television and get spoiled. Perhaps the kind of work they are into, and the leisure they

enjoy might be the reason for these developments. No body is aware of ones own culture. If you ask them about their deities no body will answer you. They tell you instead about heroes and heroines in the movie. I do have faith in these deities, but there are no capable Bhagats in the basti now. Once it so happened in my village, that I was sleeping outside the house after taking little alcohol. In the dreams I saw a woman clad in white saree and big claws sat on me. I could not move my legs. But I was wearing an amulet, which is very powerful. This helped me and the *Bawrie* ran away. Once a client approached me to solve his problems. He was a Muslim guy, and wanted to settle his problems with a girl, with whom he has fallen in love. But she is married to a Sheik in Dubai. He brought some of her clothes, and asked me to help him. I took him to one of the healers in the basti. And the case is finally not succeeded. You know these people get addicted to various things after they see money, and run to these bhagats for every small problem. In another case one of the bhagats was successful in helping a person possessed by some spirits. He charged him heavily, and later I persuaded him to return the extra money he has taken from the patients. I always insisted that my children study well. But they did not listen to me. They are spoiled, due to the basti environment. Here parents do not take proper care. And in the absence of parents they do all non-sense. Parents return from the work in the evening. They drink in front of their children. And it spoils the kids. Though in recent times basti has been undergoing lots of changes, there is no progress in the youth. My son returned home, after leaving the navy. He likes this place, and wants to live here. This is the environment he is adapted to.

Following is the case study and narrative of young Man who was convicted once and worked as a part time assistant for many people. Now he is living with his parents, by selling pork and exporting pigs to other parts of the country. His narration is important in understanding how persons are drawn to the world of felony and subsequent pressures of the outside world on them. Moreover this case study is important, as there is complete narration of the criminal act committed by him. Pratap is a young man of twenty-seven years old. He is engaged in the business of selling pork and pigs at present.

Pratap:

I dreamed a lot in my child hood. My parents were poor, and we stayed in a rented house in the basti. I played a lot in my childhood. I moved more with Telugu friends of the neighbouring area than with our caste people. I maintained distance from our boys. I watched the life of the Telugu boys a lot. I wanted to be like them. Wanted to go to school dress like them and liked to ride a bicycle. My elder brother left the family after his marriage. But he helped me in joining the school at *Aliabad*. I went to school by walking without any *chappals*. One day my friend gifted me a cattle bar. On way back from the school; I shot a bird with it. I felt very bad about it. I almost shivered. I fell ill and got fever. I did not recover for seven days. My mother worked in a nearby household as scavenger. Everyone knows in the school that I am her son. In the school I was treated as low caste boy. One-day teacher commented at me saying, oh! Mehtar you people have come to this level. In the interval. I waited outside the class for the teacher. When the teacher came out of the class, I had hit him with a duster nearby. Again outside the school I hit him with the brick, and injured him severely. I did not go to school for fifteen days after this incident. My father has beaten me very severely and locked me in a room. He accompanied me to my head master in the school. The son of the head master Mr. Anand helped me to come out of this problem. I said sorry to the teacher, and started going to school. My mother passed away. There are some problems within the family. Our joint family is not all that good. There were lots of quarrels among the family members. We shifted to a new house. We have nothing in our house. Even there is no lamp. I was always gloomy about my home. My neighbours have every thing. Why not us? My father used to give all his earnings to my uncle to save it. Once during the *divali* festival my brother and sister in law came to our house. There is no money with us Everyone is celebrating the festival. With great despair I watched the people who are celebrating. My sister in law brought me some fire works and gave me. Later my sisters got married I was still a student in the school. I used to help my mother in safai work. I continued like this for three years. Later I decided to leave this work and start a new life. I always regretted why I was able to lead a free life like others. This

question is always saddened me. I made friend ship with Venu and Sony in the basti. We shared our problems among ourselves. We formed a group and fought on petty things with others. My friend Guna took me to a Theater and provided a job. He had some problems with a friend due to some love affair. I had some fight s with his friends and they harassed me a lot. All this is due to their problems. These two guys are fallen in love with the same girl. One day he has beaten me very brutally. I also retaliated with the same might. My uncle has seen all this drama. One of my friends Shankar was also there. After seeing our fighting skills, my uncle thought that we would be useful for him in assisting his illicit activities. Those people who have beaten me came for the compromise. But when we went to see them for compromise, they attacked us. My uncle told me once that the Ravi is parting with them, and he is enemy to us. He provoked us saying that we should attack this Ravi. But I resisted saying that whatever is happened is happened. Let us not fight.

I have also told him that I am not in a position to fight. I also told him that I wanted to study and change my life style. I started my studies and gave my SSC examinations. My friend has fallen in love with one girl. He used to tell me about his lover and other stories. Again my uncle came to me and asked us to join with him. He told us that Ravi beat him up. He asked us to smash his head and legs. My uncle's friend came and kept a wad of currency notes in front of us. I am lured after seeing the wad of notes, as my sister's marriage is on the cards. We are surprised at the kind of offer he made to us. But we are still in a dilemma, whether to accept his offer or not? My friend Sony advised me not to miss this opportunity, as it gives good money to meet my needs. But we are still in quandary as it may spoil our lives. Finally we decided to use this money for the family needs, and ready to take up the assignment. Due to impending economic needs at home we resorted to such a decision. Again we questioned ourselves, whether it is a good choice. My friend advised me to get trained, so that he can fight Ravi effectively. It has become big deal for me. Some people in the basti like Giri also encouraged us for accepting the offer. They all encouraged and told me that i am not bold enough to tackle Ravi. It pinched me and asked him who is this Ravi anyway? I told to my friends that I could easily smash him. I also challenged my friends, saying that I will meet this challenge. The

next day Jany has taken me to a hotel and showed me Ravi. My uncle is also there in the hotel, waiting for us. We are served some Beer by my uncle. He said that 'let's go. Take beer and finish the Job. They asked us to see a movie in a nearby theater. During the interval, I came out of the movie theater, as I felt vomiting sensation. Shankar made me eat more food and drink beer, and said that this is the right time to kill Ravi. But I am frightened with his choice. But moments after, I recollected my challenge to friends and followed my uncle on two-wheeler, along with other five persons, who followed us in Auto. One of my friends designed the plan of action. We barged into the house of Ravi. I am unable to take out the knife. Sunil is forcing to act immediately. In the mean time there is lots of fuss around. We forcibly made our way towards Ravi. Ravi held my uncles neck. On one hand he had a sword. I immediately went in defense of uncle, and pushed Ravi away. And my uncle became free and came forward. In the mean time my accomplices switched off the current. I hit Ravi with huge wooden pole, and Shankar stabbed him with a dagger. Ravi stabbed me with another knife. Immediately I took off the knife and stabbed him repeatedly. Ravi was dead. His mother and other basti people cornered us. I am shaken at my act. We managed to escape from the crowd and ran away from the scene on scooter. Sony still in the crowd and some how managed to escape. My friend gave me the scooter to ride. After a while, Sunil came running towards us. And we managed to run away and reached *Medchal* road in the early hours, around 2'o clock. Finally my other colleagues also managed to reach us by Auto. At *Boinpalli* cross roads we were followed by a police Jeep. Sony is scared, and lost hope, thinking that the police may catch us. I told him even if we manage to run they will follow. I asked him to convey my parents that I was dead. The dagger was still with me. It was kept under the matt of the scooter. Two policemen in uniforms came near us, and asked us to come near to them. They checked us. I told a lie to the police, saying that, my grand father is dead and hence we are in hurry and going to relatives to inform. Police did not recognize what exactly is happening. We succeeded in escaping from that place. We headed towards *Medchal* road, and am bleeding and shivering in the cold weather. I gave the scooter to sunil to drive. We stopped at a tea stall, and asked them how long it will take to reach *Medchal*. While we are approaching the main road Shankar and

his friends are waiting there. I became very angry at Shankar. I hit him on his head. His nose started bleeding. I hit the scooter with a stone. I became almost uncontrollable. I threw a burning cigarette on the scooter and it is burnt. He has taken us to a secret place. In the morning he brought his friend, who is an influential MLA of the ruling party. He assured us that nothing is going to happen. He asked to remain cool and calm for some days. My friend took to an ayurvedic hospital for treatment. I was injured very severely. The doctor asked me to remove my clothes. Shankar tried to help me out. But I again became angry and hit him. Because I felt, that due to him all this mess has happened. My uncle made me cool. I removed my clothes and cleaned the wounds. I am scared and in total confusion, for the incident that occurred last night. I prayed to God, so that my soul rests in peace. Some friends came around 6:30 in the morning and gave me some solace. The day was 1st January. I told them I want to go home I burned my clothes with blood markings. I threw the knife in the local toilet. My friend hired car and asked us to leave for the home. We asked for the money he offered earlier. He told us that he would give the cash at home. I asked him how would they go without giving money. He paid me Rs7000. I asked my uncle to pay my cash. He said money is there. I will give you. I told to Sudheer that if any thing goes wrong, I would not spare him. I told him that I would show the same path like the one shown to Ravi. I have come home without any trouble. One of the elderly people in our family Vikram Rana came to know about this incident. He has beaten me. And asked about the Banu I started crying in front of him. Banu is very much known to the mother of the Ravi. Police started their enquiry with the Banu. I am scared, as I believed that police would come to arrest me. My friends gave a lot of moral support and made me relax. They provided lots of beer on that day. My parents came to know about this incident. They have scolded me for this act. All the family members abused me. Unable to bear these insults I went to stay with one of the Sony's brothers on the outskirts of the city. Then we have decided to contact Subash. Banu went to the bank and joined his work. He gave us 3000Rs that day. He told us that the police are being taken care of by the Shankar. And told us that the police were paid some amount. He said that the local circle inspector is with us and there is no need for panic. Shankar paid Rs30000 to him to safe guards us. Four fake members presented

themselves as culprits before the police station. But the victim's parents did not agree with the police. They approached the assistant commissioner of police and requested him to take up the case. Somehow the news of circle inspector taking sides with the culprits reached the Assistant commissioner. He transferred the CI from that police station. On the other hand there spread a rumor in the basti, that some of the people in the basti are involved in the murder. I along with some friends went to Delhi, and stayed there for 22 days. We were returning to Hyderabad. We came to know that the police are searching for us. We have almost jumped from the train at Moulali station. Some of the important people like giri's father and Sony's father were arrested. Friends informed me that police might be searching for me. They advised me hide some where in the city. I told to my friends it is better to surrender to the police than hiding. Gopal came to my help. He is searching for a good lawyer to deal our case. To save Banu Pal also came forward. In fact he made us to surrender. Giri's mother sensed some thing bad happening and advised us not to surrender. I am bit frightened with her advise. Gopal confirmed his mother's suspicion. He told us that, some people in the basti are playing to protect Banu from life imprisonment. Gopal brought an SI to us, who promised us saying that if we reveal the total case in detail, we would be provided some mercy. The police later caught Gopal. I have come to conclusion that at any time the police will raid my home. The very thought of this scared me I have decided not to trouble my parents I went to the police station, and asked for the circle Inspector. I sat on the bench for a while. I am scared that the police will beat me up. I came out of the police station. I have seen Gopal and others with a car Gopal asked me why I am doing like this? . I told him that I should not be a problem to my father. He made me sit in the car and took me to an advocate. The advocate along with some people took us to the police station. The circle inspector Dharendra asked me full details of the murder. I narrated the total incident to him as advised by the lawyer. I told him when Shankar went to kill Ravi I tried to stop him. But in the process I am injured. Terrified with the incident we ran away from the scene. I also told him, that the total members involved are five and not more than that. Then he asked me who is Sony? I told him that he is our friend. After some time Anurag Sharma the assistant commissioner of police asked me to give total narration of the story, including knife.

Sony and the payments we received. Police arrested Azzad, a friend of Sony to nab him. Police are beating the boy. After seeing that I told them, that I would tell about Sony. I requested the police to leave the boy. I asked the police to make an enquiry on how we committed the crime. Police have beaten me severely. But I was very tough to give them full details of the murder. They have also beaten Giri. I requested him to keep quite, as it is not proper to reveal Sony's involvement. There was a big fight among us. The policeman came and warranted us. Later we compromised and cried. Finally we have come to know that Sony is also attending the court. We were jailed for thirteen days. Even the CI, SI, and others shared beer with us, to get some clues about the murder. They served us good food and *biryani*. We were sent to *Musheerabad* Jail. They keep changing our rooms in the jail. Later we spent fifty-six days in Jail. I got bail order. Others also got it. When we were in jail many people visited us, including representatives of some prominent political parties, such as MIM, Congress, MBT, Khan Mustaf etc. They extended their support, and invited us to join their political parties. I never believed that this kind of things would happen. Politicians lured me with money and promised me that they will save us. One person came to me and took me to one prominent political leader. Later I worked with him for some time. After some time I joined under a different leader. One of the basti leaders introduced me to a well-known Rowdy sheeter in the city, who belonged to our community. He supported me a lot. He encouraged me by saying whatever happened is happened, and asked me to forget everything. Many people used me in settling the real estate property dealings. Many castes including Muslims used our services, to settle their scores. From 1995 I have been engaged in pork business. My uncle Mr. Kher Singh helped me in settling into the pork business. Later I am into small businesses like finance, chits and other family businesses. The case is closed on 25th June 1995.

Individuals from the community are drawn into these activities not by choice but by various compulsions within and outside the basti environment. Some have entered the world of criminal activities compelled by the family problems like poverty and lack of proper parental care. A few are drawn towards these activities by the lure of

money, and for certain status. They also enjoyed those recognitions and economic prosperity it brought. Moreover, the general environment in the basti at times, so subtle for any person, to restrain from entering into such activities. The general stigma attached to the community related to their traditional occupation, further aggravated the temptation of some to choose this path. It is noticed in many cases that by an accident or due to some unavoidable circumstances, they are caught in the trap. Once the police register them as a rowdy -sheeter it becomes very difficult for a person to come out of the 'branded identity'. These very branded identities circulate in the popular notions of the society and public at large, and help build the perceptions about these communities. The trivial situation that is state popular opinion and stigmatized identity of the community, structured these individuals. Some individuals' derived personal satisfaction by working with those branded people. Or by enjoying the monetary and material comforts derived from those assignments. But the people and civil society on the whole look down the community. They are always viewed as people with potential to instigate or commit some crime or violent activity. In many cases their occupational identity became a hindrance to come out of this branded structures.

POPULAR FESTIVALS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ASSERTION

Apart from celebrating many traditional festivals and ceremonies, Mehtars also incorporated popular festivals in their everyday life. They include traditional Hindu festivals like *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Durga puja* etc. These were not part of the Mehtar life style in the past. How these festivals are managed and staged by the actors involved is important. Rituals have been interpreted and analyzed in a number of frame works, by various ethnographers. Broader discussions of rituals are devoted to the ritual construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of society via the evocation of sentiments, reified social borders, and the nature of domination and resistance as specified cases (respectively) of fusionary and fissionary process (Bruce Lincoln, 1987). Other prominent interpretations of rituals are rituals of rebellion (Gluckman 1963. In, Bruce Lincoln: 1987). Socio-political and sentimental dimensions (Bruce Lincoln, 1987), symbolic actions as integral probabilities of life situations (Levi Strauss 1963; Gluckman 1965; Leach 1973). Ritual symbolism as frame work in understanding socio cultural behaviour of the group, and its relations (Durkheim 1954; Smith 1956; Radcliff Brown 1964; Firth 1967; Turner .V.W 1964; Leach 1976). If the ideological backdrop is seen along with ritual action, they may yield significant insights of community and group in focus (Geertz 1977, Turner V.W 1967). The ritual actions are generalized medium of social interaction, characterized by various marks of symbols, acts, talk and forms etc, which are mutually intelligible with the group's cultural life. Moreover, rituals help to understand the contemporary life situation. They represent in varying degrees the world as microcosm.

Mehtars in the basti celebrate a variety of ceremonies rituals and festivals, which are part of their life style. Though they have been celebrating the *Valmiki jayanti* ever since they have accepted him as their Guru, the birthday celebrations of the saint. acquired new colours in course of time, in the basti.¹ The systematic development

¹ Mehtars in the basti used to worship various gods and goddesses of their local traditions. One informant also told me that till recently that is till 1990, they used to worship Baba kaksha, Lal beg and other saints. He also showed me the small temple that is located in a corner of the basti. As, noted by Vijay Parshad (Vijay Parshad, 2000

organization, and incorporation of various religious and cultural symbols are unique feature of this festival. Before discussing the festivals and rituals of the Mehtars in the basti, a brief discussion about the religious behaviour in the basti in the past and present is in order.

Religion in the basti:

Mehtars in the basti as described in the second chapter, follow the cults of different gods and goddesses, which also include their family deities, who are their dead ancestors. Ever since Mehtars came to Hyderabad, to work in the Nizam state, they brought all their local traditions along with them. They worship their cult leader like *baba kaksha*, *lal baig* etc. Apart from them, they worshipped a variety of goddesses, like *patrivali*, *gurgan vali*, *MataDutini* etc. Primarily their worship involved, folk traditions along with a mixture of parochial traditions of Telugu people and Muslims. They also worship and visit various Muslim *Darghas* in the old city of Hyderabad. In course of time they started worshipping the local village goddesses, by visiting them in the neighborhood during the festival occasions. There was not much change in their mode of worship till 1990. But things have changed after a series of communal riots in the neighborhood between Mehtars and Muslim population living adjacent to the basti. During these riots some got killed from both sides. These events made some local leaders to approach the Mehtars for joining their political parties². some leaders in the basti joined the political parties either as local volunteers or ward members or as simply as members. These parties include the local *Telugu Desam*, and the *Bharatiya Janata Party*. It is also noticed that a couple of years ago, a few persons also joined the *Bahujan Samaj Party*. The subsequent interaction with the leaders of these parties and their participation in the local political life has transformed the social life in the basti. Many started sponsoring the festivals like

Untouchable freedom A social history of a dalit community) Mehtars are drawn to the worship of *Valmiki* the legendary author of *Ramayana* by Hindu volunteers. He further notes that 'the militant Hindus claimed that the earlier faith came to these dalits from Muslim rulers, who, they erroneously claimed, captured and confined the *Balmikis*. As these dalits increasingly placed culpability for their oppression on the Muslims, they entered willy-nilly into the framework of *Hindutava* despite the fact that most Hindus refused to sup with them or to marry them

² It is to be noted here, that in the early days covering until 1987, many leaders of the Mehtar community are with the local Muslim party known as *Majlis Itehadul Muslimeen*. Some of the Mehtars are also in the congress. The relations between Mehtars and Muslim community are quite normal. It is also noted by one informant that they used to get better treatment from the Muslim households than the Hindus, where they worked as sweepers. The loyalties and perceptions of the people have changed drastically after the communal riots in the basti.

Ganesh Chaturthi and *Dashhera* in the basti, by giving donations and other material assistance. These changes not only brought new cultural symbols and practices in the basti, but helped individuals to expand their networks and assert their identity within and outside the community. In doing so, the community made its presence felt in the neighbourhood. Some leaders have taken control of the events and their organization in the basti. This resulted in competition among them. This will be discussed later in this chapter. Given below is ethnography of *Valmiki Jayanti* and its systematic celebration in the basti.

Valmiki Jayanti:

A few years, after the Mehtar basti came into existence, a small place under the banyan tree was dedicated as temple place for the *Valmiki*. Initially there was no idol, except for the banyan tree. A few years later, some one in the basti contributed money to make an idol of Saint *Valmiki*. The idol though in crude form was installed and remained under the tree for some years. The basti residents celebrate *Valmiki Jayanti* every year, in the month of June. Till the last decade they worshipped *Valmiki* during the *Jayanti* day. In the early years, *Valmiki* festival was just a festival for one day, where some of the people in the basti used to offer fruits and sweet made of ghee in the puja. In the evening, particularly the women folk bring the fruits and sweets in plates covering it with a cloth. The temple did not exist during those years. The temple construction started in the late nineties, with contributions from the people in the basti and from individual donations. This festival has remained as one of the big social event, in the basti. Rana a self-proclaimed leader of the basti and also a member of the congress party, made it as an enthusiastic event in the neighbourhood. The event gained prominence that it even attracted the top leadership of the *Baharatiya Janata* party in the year 1998. From the early period of formation of the basti to the late eighties, no one worshipped *Valmiki* either at home or in temple. But from the beginning of the nineties leaders in the basti transformed the event on par with many popular Hindu festivals. For many it has become mandatory to contribute some money for this festival. In the past it is purely voluntary, and some people who could not contribute any amount are left out. It is observed that huge amounts were spent in organizing this event. People in fancy dress like Lord *Rama*, *Valmiki*, and *lav Kush* are seated on a decorated platform on a four-wheeler. In the evening around 4 o'clock the procession is taken out from the basti, towards the Gowliguda basti. (Another small Mehtar

basti, where another valmiki temple is built). At this place some of the political leaders welcomed by the leaders of the basti, are presented a shawl as mark of respect. They were also given colourful headgears as mark of respect. A huge procession with two horses in the front and saffron flags, bearing the sign of the sun god is taken out. Women and children in the basti are specially asked to wear good dress and participate in the procession. A good number of women participated in the procession. A huge painting of the valmiki is placed on the top of the lorry with garland put around the frame. Two leaders of the basti Rana and Pavan managed the traffic police while the procession is going on the road. The *Jayanti* procession is taken out from the old city Valmiki basti to the main city center known as tank bund in Hyderabad³. The procession passed through many narrow roads and market areas and drew good attention from the crowd. The procession ended by 9 o'clock in the evening. The next day, the news of the procession appeared in all the news papers with the photographs of its leaders, which again became a point of discussion for many in the basti. Though some are ambivalent about these activities, they remain mum, as the festival is symbolic representation of their community. Rana is well appreciated by many people in the basti. On the same night he arranged some cultural programmes. When asked where he is getting money for these activities he replies saying that he gets from his sponsors and political bosses. Rana is not the only young politician who is enthusiastic in managing events. He takes pride in putting the *Valmiki* photo in his office. He also competes with traditional leadership in the basti. A close associate of some of the top brass of the congress leadership in the city, he is able to gain observer status in the state for the committee on eradication of scavenging and other menial occupations setup by the Government of India. He also became one of the nodal persons to oversee the implementation of the developmental programmes aimed at the scavenger community in the state. Rana takes pride in telling that he has helped many in the basti to get loans and other benefits from the government agencies. He gets funds from the political leaders to organize various ceremonies and festivals in the basti. Though criticized by his own community people that he gets funds from those politicians who are not so good for the

³ In the city of Hyderabad, tank bund is located in the heart of the city. The place attained significance due to its central location. Some of the idols of the leaders and poets are kept here signifying the great contributions made by them. There is also a statue of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in a nearby junction. The procession of the Mehtars is taken till this statue in the year 1998.

community, Rana manages to function in a balanced manner, with the support from his family and members belonging to his *Gotram*.

Valmiki Jayanti as an Instrument of Self-assertion and Identity:

People in the basti, feel that they should not be addressed as Mehtars. Instead they will be happy to be known as *Valmikis*. It is said that the word Mehtar signifies their occupation but not their caste. Even though they are engaged in the occupation, others need not call them as Mehtars, which is derogatory in many respects. As one informant puts it, “ why they call us *Mehtarodu*? Why not by name of the individual? They (others) wanted to identify us with that name. And hence they call us as *Mehtarodu*’. Most of them prefer to be addressed by their names. They add their gotra names as suffix with slight modifications. Though it indicates that everyone is trying to get better identity, they feel that their caste should not be known to others in the public life, particularly when they deal with people outside their work sphere that is scavenging. *Valmiki Jayanti* has become an instrument in propagating their uniqueness from others in the neighbourhood and elsewhere in the city. In the following year of 1999, there is another procession taken out on the occasion of *Valmikijayanti*. This time Rana managed to cover-up some differences within the community, by inviting leaders in the rival groups of families in the basti to participate in the *Jayanti* celebrations. A procession was taken out in the neighbouring areas, including the Muslim dominated residential areas. There was wide publicity given to the event. The local cable operator covered the event and telecast it in the evening news. This event brought a great joy among many in the basti. Youth leaders celebrated in joy and particularly elated and everyone tried to identify with the success of the function. Irrespective of family disputes, all elders came to the temple. Valmiki temple was white washed and colorfully painted*. Although everyone in the basti are not familiar, they know *Valmiki*'s name and his story, it has become mandatory to visit the temple at least once in a year. Donations are collected from the households depending upon their earning capacity. This particular festival is celebrated in the basti as a community festival, unlike others,

* Even the researcher helped them in their activities. The researcher was asked to officiate the rituals in the temple, as there is no one to take care of the money received during the rituals. However the researcher quietly kept away from it.

which are celebrated as household ceremonies. The community gets recognition not only with the organization of the festival but they also invite the local leaders to visit the temple. This brings them a sense of having a particular tradition of their own which is popular in the wider society. It helped in forging relationship with the outside people from different walks of life. However there is a common belief among folks about *Valmiki* as their guru, there are people within the basti who contest these perceptions by providing alternative explanations. Even among some of the elders strong sentiments have been expressed with regard to *Valmiki* as the guru of Mehtars. Following is the case study of Giri who belong to *Taank* gotra, whose family members are small in numbers. He is also one of the organizing members of the *Valmiki* festival, who has taken care of the financial matters related to temple and its decoration etc. He is one of the active members of the community who is always in the forefront in organizing the people. Youth in the basti are trained by him who to get into the state level sports training.

In his own words, Girilal:

In my childhood and in school days, I was the class monitor in the school. I studied well. I was a captain in sports and won many gold medals. I dreamed of becoming lawyer. But again due to financial problems I could not continue after intermediate education. The way back, around twenty years ago there was plenty of work. But the payments were very less. Some of my friends helped me to start a small business. I am also interested in social work. I had educated and helped many people in the community to get benefit from the state and central government schemes. I also questioned the local politicians about their sincerity in working for our cause. I criticized the Sulab International for their policy. We have been working in the dry latrines for the last hundred years. Now sewage and flush latrines have come and these organizations employ and pay us such small amounts as Rs 2 per latrine for our work. Benefits went to private organizations. Those people from Bihar are employed in the *Sulab* international in Hyderabad. Same people who hated this work have joined these occupations They employed us as wage labourers. We have organized many press conferences but the government went against our wishes. We have struggled against this oppression. We made several attempts for achieving the positive things for the community. In our society bad, good, rich and poor people are there. I tried to bring unity among the Mehtars in the basti

and else where. Many issues, which are not part of our tradition, are encroaching into us. Many are demanding the dowry now. We have settled some cases by calling them to our panchayat. I acted as general secretary for the *panchayat* many times. We punished people who demanded the dowry. I also acted as general secretary for Andhra Pradesh *Valmiki Samaj*, and all India *safai majdoor* congress. Through these organizations I participated in many social activities beneficial to the community. We have also tried to educate people. I had never taken any money for doing these things. Though some senior political leaders criticized me for my style of functioning, I never showed my back. I kept doing things. We (I) accept Ambedkar as our leader. We tell the students to follow him and his ideology. Our community people think that they are dirty. We always try to change their mind set. We also tell the families and their parents to educate their children at least till graduate degree. I also organize sports events on 26th January, 14th April and on Valmiki Jayanti day. We celebrated Ambedkar centenary in the basti, by inviting educated people of the community. Among them IAS and IPS officers are there. We take rallies every year. These rallies pass through many areas in the city covering *sha Ali banda*, *charminar*, *Afjal ganj Nampally Basheer bagh* and *tank bund*³. Girilal continued his narrative when asked about saint *Valmiki* and how he became their (Mehtar) Guru, and why they are following him.

Giri lal:

In fact *Valmiki* was a Brahmin. But in *Tulsi Das* Ramayan he was depicted as A '*Bhil*'. We have accepted him as guru thinking that a person belonging to '*Bhil*' has written Ramayan. The '*sabari*' is also '*Bhil*'. We have also accepted Hanuman as our *guru*. whatever characters depicted in Ramayan belong to our community. Valmiki is not respected even after he has written Ramayana. You will find *Ram*, *lakshman* temple, *Hanuman* temple, but not the *Valmiki* temple. So we built a temple for him, and accepted him as our guru.

In the same way many contend that Valmiki became their guru by accident. Even an elder named *Maharaj* says that it was the *pandu Ami chand* who made Mehtars as *Valmikis*. Raj singh another respected leader of the community has altogether

³ These are the prominent places in the city, which historically important and occupies important place in Hyderabad city.

different interpretation of Ramayana, where he denies *Valmiki* as their Guru. But in spite of these views and sentiments the symbol of the *valmiki* has become an identity for them. And they are trying to use this symbol to assert the community identity in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. It is very interesting to observe that in many instances the community does not want to get identified as Mehtars, as the word is derogatory in meaning. Rather they like to be known as *Valmikis*. In spite of their denial, that *Valmiki* is not their Guru; they accepted him as the symbolic representation of the community. Most of the times it is the individuals in the basti who made fervent efforts in registering various voluntary associations in the name of *Valmiki*. Except for few individuals like Girilal, many consciously or unconsciously subscribed and relate themselves to the *valmiki*.

Valmiki temple has become a symbolic identity for the community. It has also become reference for others to identify the Mehtar basti. This temple especially became a landmark in the local neighbourhood. Some leaders from city and are invited to the temple for a *darshan* of *Valmiki*. This has strengthened the morale of the community leaders further. It has also become a meeting point for many. Any activity, meetings important sessions of the local *panchayat* are held here. But in course of time it has also received criticism from its own people. Some in the basti are of opinion that few individuals are benefiting from such meetings, and try to dominate others. As some like Maharaj says that, it is unlawful to manage a temple without government intervention. This man of course has no say in the temple administration and he constructed his own temple in the basti. As described earlier *Valmiki* temple has become a platform to assert both individual identity and the community identity at large. Individuals try to engage in variety of activities like Sagar and Randheer to have their dominance in community affairs and as well as achieving a distinct identity outside the basti. At the same time, they are successful in managing many events. These individuals try to attain a secular image for the caste and their occupation.

There are other festivals which became significant among Mehtars are the popular *Vinayak Chaturthi* and *Dasherra*. I call them as 'symbolic adaptations' in the context of Mehtars life style, as these are used by the community to relate themselves to the larger society outside, and tried to incorporate into their life styles. Yet these festivals also offer an insight about how the community struggles for secular identity for their

occupation and the community. Individuals and community made efforts to be part of the popular celebrations not because these festivals give any material gain, but benefits from the cognitive point of view. It helps to create a sense of belongingness, and inclusion where they can be proud of their capability in organizing such festivals.

Valmiki festival and Mehtar Identity:

Though many followers of Hinduism accept *Valmiki* as a Sage, who wrote the sacred text of Ramayana, they seldom worship him as deity or as Guru in temples or at home. After Mehtars and other communities engaged in the scavenging accepted him as their Guru, they started constructing the temples for him. Eventually the celebration of *Valmiki Jayanti* became the part and parcel of the annual festival Calendar of the Mehtar community.

As noted earlier *Valmiki Jayanti* celebration is non- Mehtar festival like *Dashera* and *Navaratri*, which belong to wider Hindu community. The organization and conduct of the *jayanti* procession of *Valmiki* festival epitomizes the eagerness and efforts of the community in asserting their identity in the multi cultural and multi lingual neighbourhoods in the city. The constant changes that have been taking place in the form and content of the festival are some of the empirical facts for the above assumption. In celebrating the Valmiki festival Mehtars are not in total agreement with the perception that *Valmiki* is their true guru. This is evident in most cases in their preference of organizing of the festival in colourful way. Most of them also felt the need to identify themselves as *Valmikis* instead of Mehtars. The organization of the festival is also an attempt aimed at identifying with others. In each and every step of celebration they tried to incorporate the general values and behaviour of the others to get a place for themselves in the cultural milieu of the city. The invitations given to various political leaders, and felicitating them on the *Valmiki Jayanti* day is case in point. They also taken care that it should be publicized widely, so that people will come to know about their existence and political support they enjoy. Moreover the adoption of certain symbols of popular Hindu festivals is also to be taken note. Symbols like Sun God, saffron flags, in the procession is part of their strategy to share similar cultural platform with other Hindus. This they feel never curtailed their identity as *Valmikis*; rather many felt that it will strengthen their

position among the people and the society at large. The fancy dresses of the children in attires like *Rama*, *lakshmana*, *Hanuman*, and *Valmiki* is also part of this exercise. In spite of strong criticism of these mythological figures they have adopted them in their cultural life. This is to hide the polluted identity and to lobby the place for a dignified status. In effect the procession is invented and designed very colourfully. They keep improving various techniques of presentation and adopted all modern instruments of electronic media in arranging these public events. It is repeatedly described by all members of the community that 'it is those Hindus who do like that, or have done so etc'. This reference to, out side society as Hindus and *Musalman* reflects the clear dichotomy in their perception of 'we' and 'they' feeling. But nevertheless they follow the very symbols and cultural strategies of the larger population, in order to contest and challenge the polluted identity they inherited. A sense of achievement and shared sense of belonging through these rituals are felt by the Mehtars. As Anthony Cohen (1985) has argued that symbolic activities are relatively fluid and expansive enough to allow participants to articulate a shared sense of belonging, of common identity, and of difference from non- participants.

Some leaders in the basti maintained their contacts with the influential people in the city by organizing these popular festivals. They have activated their earlier contacts with them and built an active network with the outside world. They were also able to extend the day-to-day interactions with other people in the city. The leadership is also successful in using the media for popularizing their activities. During the *Valmiki* festival they have invited the local cable network to telecast the celebrations in the temple. Some of the leaders also spoke of the importance of the *Valmiki Jayanti*. All the important leaders in the basti except few hosted saffron flag with the sun God symbol. They also gave these photographs to local dailies to be published as news items. Here some of the leaders have successfully utilized their networks in dealing with the outside world. Nevertheless there is usual frustration within the leadership about the perceptions of others about them and *Valmiki* festival as such. Some individuals felt that their caste people identified with the *Valmikis* initial life as a robber but not with his reformed part of life. Commenting on this, one of the informant says some times our people are also pleased with this identity, because the mistakes they commit can be forgiven or defended by

comparing to the *Valmiki* guru.⁷ The leadership in the basti is also not too much concerned about this identity when it comes to the political relationships and networks. Unlike in the past, now every political party has its representation in the basti. And these very networks make the basti adopt and invent novel processes in organizing the festivals to cope up with the degraded identity.

Ganesh Chaturthi in the city of Hyderabad:

Popularly known as *Vinayaka chaviti*, the festival of the elephant headed god acquired, prominence during independence struggle. Started in the mid nineteenth century, by Balagangadhar Tilak, a revolutionary freedom fighter from Maharashtra, the household ceremony has become a popular public festival. This festival like in many parts of India attained significance in Hyderabad too. Most of the participants are Hindu youth. It transformed in many ways in its style and presentation. It attracted particularly the youth for its festive and celebrative element. In Hyderabad, this festival has become an important event in the cities annual festival calendar. Massive processions are taken out from all corners of the city. They merge at the center of the city, *Hussain Saagar Lake* for the immersion of the idols. The youth and the organizers have never compromised in showing the novelty in their presentation of the god. There are many creative elements go into the making of the idols. Beautifully decorated motorcars and four wheelers are a common element in the *Ganesh* processions. This festival is celebrated for a period of three to nine days period. During the last two decades, the festival of *Ganesh* has been transformed into many novel ways. The festival particularly became Attractive to many of the low-income neighborhoods in the city, where youth are mostly unemployed or under employed. Many collect the donations from people as well as from the traders in various localities. This festival also became popular in Hyderabad, due to communal riots occurring during the processions. It has many connotations in the context of its place and history. In the old city of Hyderabad, the festival is well organized by various groups under the banner of Hyderabad *Ganesh utsav* committee. In recent times huge *Pandals* are erected in all junctions of main roads. The

⁷ Valmiki is saint, who belonged to the Bhil community and authored the popular Hindu Mythological text Ramayan. Before becoming a saint valmiki used to rob the people in the forest and loot the wealth from the travelers. Later he is transformed into a saint with the blessings of a Guru

presentation of the Lord *Ganesh* also changed every time with some of the important events and changes that occurs in the country or in the city. For example during the Kargil war, *Ganesh* has been depicted in the form of soldier, in many places in the old city of Hyderabad⁴. The politicians from various political parties in the city address processions. On the last day of the celebrations a huge procession is taken out where number of people participate along with the beautifully decorated vehicles carrying the idols of lord *Ganesh*. This festival also became a community event. Many install the Lord *Ganesh* under banners of their community or colony names. It is quite normal in the localities where traders live in large numbers; there will be a *Ganesh Pandal*, under the name of their association. In the small neighbourhoods, it is people who come together to organize the festival. And hence it also became a tool for many to assert their community and caste identity. Moreover many of these *Pandals* also receive political patronage of some local parties. Leaders belonging to these parties also visit regularly. Cordial relationship is maintained among the leaders and the local members of the party. Many individuals feel proud if a leader visits his residential area, and it gives him a special place among his people in the neighbourhood. Thus the *Ganesh* festival and procession motivated many individuals and the communities in expressing their community identity as well as their status and prestige. The adoption and organization of the festival in the Mehtar basti, though recent in nature; acquired all necessary skills and traits to imitate the other people in the immediate surroundings and the neighbourhood.

Ganesh festival in the Mehtar basti:

Ganesh festival in the basti was initiated by a few youth in the late nineties. Children especially in the age group of 13-20 years participate and install small idols of *Ganesh*, which is a common feature in all the localities in the city. But after the communal violence that broke out in the basti and its adjacent area in the late eighties, the urge to organize a *Ganesh* festival in large scale became a necessity to show the strength to others. Many youth in the basti have close connections with the local politicians in the city, as they are very 'active workers' of the political parties. They assist them in all circumstances to fulfill the needs of the politicians,

⁴ Kargil war is fought by India with Pakistan, over the Pakistani intrusions into the Kashmir valley in the year 1998 India emerged victorious in this short-term war

in organizing meetings, protests etc. They patronize the Mehtar youth irrespective of their caste identity as they assist these politicians in the hours of crisis. Moreover these youth are available to them in all occasions. Close contacts they had with politicians are one side of the coin, as they also maintain relations with the local traders. Traders prefer to take their help for many reasons. They assist these traders in their everyday business problems, land and financial dealings with the various parties. These closely knitted contacts helped the youth to raise funds for the sumptuous arrangements of the *Ganesh* festivals in the basti. *Rana* who is the key person in organizing the festival, collected huge donations from his political net works to organize the events in the basti. He also invited some of the important politicians to inaugurate the events. During the year 1998 and 1999 the festival was organized with lavish decorations in the *Pandal*. Huge sets are arranged in the basti with focus lights. Film music is played in loud speakers throughout the day and all nine days. Some film set makers are brought to create artificial cave settings in the premises where the lord *Ganesh* idol was installed in the basti. In the evenings, musical programmes are arranged with hired artists from the city. Every day children and some volunteers are asked to give their services in the evening to organize the people who are visiting the *Pandal* for the darshan. On the inaugural day a Brahmin was hired from the city, to install the *Ganesh* idol. Some volunteers in the nearby *valmiki* temple prepared special food offered to the god. The committee looked after the arrangements of the festival is titled as *Valmiki sammaaj Ganesh Puja* committee. *Rana* acted as chairman of the committee, who is also treasurer of the festival. On the last day of the festival a lorry is hired to keep the *Ganesh* idol on the beautifully decorated vehicle. *Sunanda* a lady who practices magical ritual healing has installed a *Ganesh* idol at her home, later kept it along with the main idol in the basti, to be taken for the procession. After taking the vehicle around the basti and neighbourhood it joined the main procession at *Charminar*, where all the similar vehicles assembled to go around the city for procession.

There are another group of people in the basti, who have some differences with *Rana* group and installed another *Ganesh* Idol in their premises. *Sarat* and others who led the group are also sponsored by some of the traders in the city. They have taken out a different procession, and not joined the other group. Belonging to different clan, they always had some or other differences among them, regarding land and other family

disputes. This group also competed with the Rana group in number of ways. Whenever I would visit the *Pandal*, they asked me to comment which one is better organized. They also invited a Brahmin of slightly higher rank who performs the pujas in big temples in the city. They narrated me that this Brahmin performs *pujas* perfectly than the others who performs similar rituals in the basti during the festival. It is also stressed that their mode of worship and presentation are more authentic than anybody else, as others are only interested in glittering lights and bright filmy sets. Some youth belonging to this group opined that there is no need for loud music during the festival. By commenting on the other group, who arranged loud speakers and dance programmes, they did not mention the names or individuals in that group. Though they have arranged the event on a small scale, they competed with them in Dashhera festival, where huge idol of the goddess *kali* was installed in their area, with fan fare.

Dashera Celebrations in the Basti:

Dashhera, popularly known as *navaratri* festival is the festival of the Goddess *Kali*. This festival is celebrated to mark the occasion of the Goddess *Kali's* victory over the demon *Mahishasura*. The festival is popular among the Hindus and particularly celebrated as community festival in urban centers. In the city of Hyderabad, this festival though not very popular unlike the *Ganesh* festival, a few communities celebrate it by installing idols of *kali* at street corners. The city is also known for the mass celebrations of *Devi Navaratri*⁵. In some of the old city neighbourhoods *Gujarati* speaking *marvari* community also installs such huge *Pandals*. Though relatively new to the Hyderabad city, these *Devi Navaratri* festivals are incorporated into the cities religious life, particularly among urban middle class residential areas. Apart from these some small *Pandals* are erected in some areas.

Mehtars started celebrating the *Navaratri*s only in the late nineties. The festival also acquired significance in the basti due to two reasons. There is an open competition for people within the basti in organizing the events like, *Ganesh chaturthi*, and *kali* festival. Two there is an increased consciousness among Mehtar leaders to identify

⁵ During the Dashhera celebrations, the goddess *kali* is installed on a raised platform for nine days. During these days the goddess is worshiped with all Vedic rituals. After the puja ceremonies, generally cultural programmes follow, which continue through out the night. Hence the festival is also known as *Devi Navratri*.

with the larger community outside the basti. In the nearby basti where Telugu-speaking population are large in numbers ceremonies related to goddess are organized in the temple quite often. It is also important to note that after the communal riots, some neighbouring population vandalized the popular temple of the goddess known as *Akkanna* and *Madanna* temple. The over all cultural setting of the neighbourhood and its surroundings influenced them to organize these festivals.

Sarat is the key person in organizing the *Devi navratris* in the basti.

Maataji ka Vishal Jagaran (A reverential night for the goddess): Near the eastern end of the basti, a beautifully decorated *Pandal* is erected during the Dasherra festival. Though the celebration is for nine days, the platform was constructed with cement base so that it will remain permanently. Sarat and his friends relentlessly worked for almost a week to supervise the arrangements. Youth belonging to, some of these families, who are bit opposed to the other group, took up this task seriously. All activities concerned with the erection and decorating the *Pandal* are organized by the youth. The *Pandal* along with all its decorated settings remained for nine days in the basti. Loud speakers are arranged to air the *bhakti* songs both from the popular film as well as devotional songs from the special audiocassettes. It is explained by one informant from this group, that they are not like others who put filmy music, 'we follow the importance of this *Devi puja*, and hence we choose only devotional songs for the event'. Due to many restrictions imposed by the police, airing of the songs had to be stopped by 9 o' clock in the evening, however some times it is continued till the 10 o' clock. People belonging to other group used to complain about such activity, to elders in the basti. One people from the other group murmured saying that 'these people think that they are the only persons who are organizing the festival, they should also know about others'. These kinds of comments and gossip are common within the basti, about the opponent groups.

People maintain the *pandal* with hygiene and care. No body is allowed to enter the makeshift premises without permission. One should not enter the premises with *chappals*. All the nine days, every morning and evening women in the basti washed the floor and decorated it with white flour designs. In the evening specially appointed Brahmin used to come to perform pujas and other rituals. Women visit in the

evening with coconuts and flowers to offer the puja, with help of the Brahmin priest. A sword and *trishul* are kept in front of the *Pandal*, symbolizing the invocation of the goddess. Lemons are fixed on it as yellow cloth with turmeric is tied to this *trishul*. Interestingly there is no animal sacrifice in the ritual process. When asked why it is so, one informant said that they should avoid it to maintain the sacredness of the event. He also said that, any way we are eating the non- vegetarian food every day why not leave it for nine days for worshipping the goddess.

Sarat and his group left no option in making this event a grand success. He invited top political leaders to grace the occasion on the seventh day, where all night devotional music is arranged. He also went to the extent of inviting a minister, but he could not succeed in it. Some local politicians turned up for the event. A private orchestra is booked to sing devotional songs for the night. A local *Marvari* who is famous for singing the devotional songs was invited and paid Rs10,000 for organizing the orchestra. Invitations are printed on a glossy paper, for the event. Printed posters were pasted in the basti and neighbouring residential areas inviting people to participate in the event. Specially purchased material was used to prepare the sweet for offering to the goddess. This sacred food was neatly packed in the banana leaf and later distributed to important families in the basti. The evening wore a festive look in that part of the basti, as women dressed neatly with colorful sarees while children wearing fancy dresses. Some of the basti leaders were specially invited to grace the occasion. These leaders later individually called to the podium meant for the orchestra. Before the orchestra begins the Sarat felicitates these leaders by giving them flowers and shawls. Later the devotional music started which went on till 3 A.M in the morning. Both men and women also started singing songs along with the orchestra. Some individuals also offered cash gifts to particular songs sung by the singers. Whenever a person is presenting some money, his name is announced three times in the mike and the singer, used to bless him on behalf of his team and the Goddess. On the other hand the other group of the Rana and his friends came to watch the event as spectators. There is small discussion among them about the arrangements made and about the success of the program. They stood apart and watched the entire program from a distance and left early. The festival and other ceremonies conducted in the basti illustrate the dynamics of the community identity. These are also a

manifestation of how community and individual use popular festivals for promoting the asserting self and the community identity.

Living with the locality: Challenging the past with popular festivals:

The organization of the festivals especially *Ganesh chaturthi* and *Navratri* celebrations are especially meant to follow the religious processes for asserting their place in society. Mehtars in the basti are identified by the others as people with odd habits and characters. And hence living in the neighbourhood is itself linked with some sort of stigma. To avoid these stigmatized notions Mehtars as a community used all sorts of symbols and popular elements in their daily life. The absorption and novel celebration of *Ganesh puja*, and installation of *Durga* idol and all-night devotional music are some of the activities towards this goal. Though there are elements of individual differences and rivalries exist within the community, the successful management of the festivals epitomizes their community unity, in projecting their identity. They have incorporated elements from both Muslim and Hindu neighbours in the process of innovation of rituals and their subsequent presentation. Mehtars of the basti visit some of the *Dargas* nearby and attend the ceremonies. Some also attend to the festival of peers. Families visit *Dargas* to fulfill promises made earlier. Offering of goats is a common practice in those rituals. Very simple customs like covering the ritual objects with cloth, and imitation of dress style are some of the features they adopted from the local style. Some of the ways and means of organizing particular ceremony or festival, cultural symbols etc are also adopted from the local culture. By resorting to such techniques of novel presentation methods the leaders in the basti achieved a veneer of professionalism in their acts. Organization of these two festivals also showed the public their material well-being and prosperity. This helped to elevate the public image and status of the leaders in the beginning and the community afterwards. Despite rivalries among individuals they were never surfaced, rather these differences remained within the community identity. The community leaders were able to produce reliable cultural symbols to present to the local neighbourhoods and other communities. The *Pandals* erected for installing Ganesh and the Goddess idols are recognized by the *Bhagyanagar Ganesh utsav samiti* as one of the important *Pandals* in the city. The Samiti leaders have visited these *Pandals*. The local leaders and other personalities visit even the *Goddess Pandal*. Here the self-elevation of the

individual community status elevation coupled with acceptability by wider society is made possible with these festivals. However the level of acceptance is again a contestable element, the immediate satisfaction derived by the visits of the dignitaries is significant, in the basti vis a vis its relations to the neighbouring people.

In projecting these rituals, the leaders of the community are very enterprising and innovative in approach. While giving the press reports and speeches they always interpreted these rituals as great traditions of the country. They tried to identify with the larger or popular notions about the festivals and ceremonies. But in the private discourse, they vehemently denied the rituals as some thing part of their tradition. They always felt that these are things some times inevitable and one has to perform for being part of society. The subtle references made against some of these traditions are note worthy in this regard. In a discussion, with one of the very important leaders of the community, who is also local representative of the *Bharatiya Janata Party*, he seldom agreed that these festivals are part of their tradition. He says that these have encroached into our lives and a few are following them, as it is very much essential to counter the dominance of the others. In his own words ' if you participate in such activities, only then you will be able to defeat the enemy better, you should always be an insider but not outsider.'⁶

Every individual wants to be identified with his or her special characteristics. In the process of organizing the rituals and festivals in the basti it is these differences, which surface every time. Yet they are not in direct confrontation, with each other as their every day interaction is quite normal without any troubles. There are many, who are ready to share conflicting perceptions about one another. These basically revealed their inner structural adjustment within the community and also the hierarchical structure of the community. Ritual performances in the basti, as noted earlier are organized by self proclaimed leaders in the basti reveal many facets of the self and community identity in the basti.

⁶ I had intensive discussions with this young leader in the basti. He has been working in the right wing political party for a long time. He has also lost his younger brother in communal violence that broke out between Hindus and the Muslims. This prompted him to join the political party. He says he can only achieve his goals by joining a political party. On some other occasion he introduced me to a local BJP, M.L.A. But he did not listen to him properly and paid very scanty attention to him. He tried to meet him but failed. Later, he interpreted to me saying that they very much know they are always kept away and hence he wanted to join them only to defeat them.

Two Festivals and their Organizers:

Leaders and their struggle for self-identity can be understood with their involvement in the two popular festivals in the basti. Those are, *Ganesh* festival, and *Dasherra*. Within the community, family disputes and the age-old rivalries made some families to live apart in the basti, although they share common occupational identity. One of my informants while trying to narrate the events and subsequent differences within the community used the word 'caste feeling in the basti'. In this context it is not the hatred towards the other, but it is a struggle for leadership and sharing of resources and power. The early settlers in Hyderabad city, claim the status of *chowdary*, and equate symbolically themselves with the by gone Zamindari system, and try to impose such dominant practices on others. This is not acceptable to others, who also claim the similar status by saying that every one come here in search of a livelihood, and hence there is no meaning in claiming superiority on one another. However there are constant changes occurring, in the, social structure of the basti. Some went back to their native villages in Haryana and some remained here. People who earlier controlled others sold their work and established themselves in other fields. Some families started money-lending business some are drawn into politics and in private gangs. The internal dynamics of the community and craving for respect within the community and out side paved the way for conflicts and subsequently led to divisions within the community.

When one group of people organized the *Ganesh puja* in the basti, the other group remained indifferent and their participation is nil. They have made a courtesy visit for once and there ended the matter. The same has happened with the other group who organized the *Durga puja* with great fanfare. In the *Ganesh Pandal*, there are no restrictions for the people and the visitors except following the queue. They organized the festival without much fanfare there is much fun and frolic in the basti during those events. But the *Durga puja* organized under the Sarat leadership, there were strict rules laid down on various aspects of every day rituals. The hiring of the Brahmin priest from the temple was boasted as a great achievement. There was sacred fire lit up in front of the

Pandal, symbolizing the *Sanskritic* rituals. Every evening some special pujas were offered and strict rules are observed in organizing this. The all night devotional music is yet another attraction of the Sarat managed festival. With this he proved himself as more capable and connected than the former. Each group competed in giving the press statements about their festivals in the basti. During these events every effort is made to invite some political or local leader as the guest. Apart from this there is also another *Durga Pandal* installed in the community hall in the basti. This belonged to the other group who with little money could setup the small idol of *Durga* in the community hall. But there are no all night cultural shows organized. What comes out of this ethnography is that there is strong competition within the group for leadership and acquiring public recognition within and outside community. In spite of their community identity they have successfully managed to link up with the outside world, through these activities. There is also an element of superiority in some of these groups. Some claim relatively better by following the popular Hindu traditions. Few established excellent net works with the politicians and feel superior to other upcoming youth in the basti. Kinship and family relations become important in differentiating other community people Leaders or individuals whoever got better proximity with those in the city are considered more powerful in the basti and command respect in the community. These veiled differences never became hindrance in asserting their community identity.

Festival as protest:

Many individuals in the basti, have connections with the most influential politicians in the city. Though they act as normal workers in the party, the politicians use them in various activities from business deals to dispute resolution. These activities some times, go beyond the law and take twists and turns, beyond ones imagination. The activities for which, they are employed are not transparent. They may range from small disputes between two businessmen, to property disputes involving land worth lakhs and crores. Though some of the persons in the basti do engage in small fights and other violent activities, it is very much negligible when compared to the above dealings. Individuals who engage in these bigger dealings are very much well versed in the

activities and subsequent implications of those. Most of the times the police and other agencies made searches in the basti, either to nab the culprits or to bookcases of theft or cheating. In recent years the frequency of these activities came down, and eventually there is considerable change in the basti, especially in its religious life. Of these the organization of the *Ganesh* and *Dasherra* festivals gained prominence as the leaders who organize them are not only connected to powerful but also engage in diverse social activities. During the house hold survey when I asked for what occupation or job they do some replied 'social work'. When questioned inquisitively what kind of social work they are into I got the same answer. The researcher found it very difficult to trace the nature of social work, and in couple of years my informants as well as the people who replied their answers as social work, revealed their political connections and other activities they carry out.

The two festivals described earlier are not only reflections about the communities struggle for a self-identity but it also includes individual's efforts in promoting themselves for a respectable place within and out side the community. As many know what they do under the rubric of social work, some questions the very credentials of these two persons as festival organizers, though in private. Rana the one who successfully manage several Ganesh festivals also has similar connections with the leaders of questionable status. Most of the time he proudly boasts of how much money he gained by sponsorship. And he also manages to get some money through organizing the festival of *Ganesh*. He documents the photos of the festival to show to his sponsors. At times my informants became wild to share some of the sensitive information about the organizers of these festivals. Many usually say that ' who does not know from where they are getting money, and how they are managing the show'. One informant by pointing to a scooter belonging to a person says ' we know how he manipulated a business man to get this scooter, they behave as if we do not know any thing'. There is some honesty in each and every one engaged in 'social work'. They also admitted to some extent that they indulge in such practices, as there is no other way. They are deeply into this and cannot avoid it. They also help others and come to the rescue in case of trouble.

Festivals became an entry point for many in the basti, to pave way and interact with outside society and assert their identity. Even some individual's managed to install their goddess statues and *Ganesh* idols at home. This is nothing but the withdrawl

from the main event. Many in this category are people who are engaged in the magical practices. The organization of the festival is closely linked with the self-esteem management of the leaders and individuals who are grappling for an identity of their own. These men also negotiate community identity simultaneously, by keeping the tag of their occupational identity. The Mehtar caste identity is an undeniable fact for them and hence they are bound to negotiate these identities with the larger section of the society, through these festivals or in some other platform. These celebrations enabled to mask though temporarily, some of the veiled identities of persons in the basti.

Identity, Inclusion and Celebration:

The festivals and processions celebrated in the basti can be classified as festivals of identity and festivals of adoption. The celebration of *Valmiki Jayanti* by taking out a procession in the city is an example of how the community makes efforts to be recognized as Valmikis. Whereas festivals like *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Dashhera* are adoptive in nature, and the community selectively taken them into their life style. I use this classification because the festivals that are celebrated by the Mehtars in the basti are not part of their religious traditions but are taken from the popular practices of the dominant society. But the festival of *Valmiki* can be seen as specific to the community. They also accept the Valmiki as their guru, in spite of contested arguments, and some expressed their reservations. Valmiki procession is designed modified and moulded into a community festival by its leaders. The long processions they take out reflect their eagerness to identify as a particular group of followers of Valmiki. Even if every one do not have equal stakes in their argument and do not have equal role in participation, there is common agreement that the term Valmiki belongs to them. Self and individual interests also play a role in that whole process of organization. Most of them feel that the Valmiki identity is better than the caste identity, which is familiar with public. They like others to recognize them as a Valmikis but not as Mehtars. The Valmiki Jayanti in this respect played a role in bringing together the people under one umbrella, unlike the other festivals of *Ganesh chaturthi* and *Dashhera* festivals. Therefore the *Valmiki* procession is understood as a religious practice for getting better place in the society. Though there are manifold of the community and the individuals, they want to be known from some thing other than their caste and occupation. Degraded identity still haunts them. In spite of their own cultural

practices they craved for some thing that gives them better recognition. Quickly they adapted to local popular cultural practices and symbols by making *Ganesh* and *Durga puja* as part of their every day life and community activity. The celebration of these events also brings out other facets of community life in a segregated situation, and religious boundaries of the community. Mehatrs are struggling with branded identities imposed by the neighbourhoods and trying to cope up with the tragedy of the inevitable. And in the process they resort to the practices, often not their own, but appears to be followers of the tradition in the eye of the others⁷. The practices and performances of the Mehtars are always watched through the suspicious eyes of the wider society. They projected an image that they are followers of the popular Hindu traditions and festivals. In spite of this the neighboring Telugu speaking Hindu communities still treated Mehtars with inferior status.

Ganesh puja and *Devi puja* are adopted by the Mehtars in recent years as a response to the local religious sentiments and dominant cultural setting. By adopting the popular festivals like *Ganesh Chaturthi* and *Dashhera*, Mehtars in the basti showed that they are capable enough in organizing and managing these events. Though there are some limitations regarding this adoption, the successful staging of these events in the public elevated their position. It is noted by one of the old resident of the area that ' Mehtars improved a lot. From food to dress in their beliefs and practices, these people earlier followed the Muslims, or lenient towards them, but there is a great change among them'. He is particularly referring to their adoption of the popular Hindu festivals and ceremonies in their life style. As described earlier, many communal conflicts in the area resulted in great damage to property and life of the people in the basti. These events subsequently made the community to adopt certain ritual practices on par with other dominant communities in the area. This adoption is not out of their desire to be part of the larger Hindu community, but to protect their own space and self-interest. As noted by a key leader in the community, both Hindus and Muslims treated them in the same way, but only with little difference.

⁷ In this case it is Muslim community. Mehtars have undergone very tumultuous situations with them in much communal violence. In the eyes of the Muslims Mehtars are Hindus and the every practice and symbol they carry represent the Hinduism for them. Whereas for the surrounding Hindu communities Mehtars are nothing but untouchable Sweeper community, speaking their own language and following their gods and spirits

This adoption also reflects the efforts of the community to identify with dominant society and the urge to be recognized as a dignified community. The symbolic presentations of the festivals of both categories only reflected their adoptive nature. They have brought the novelty to these festivals, by imitating the styles of festival celebration in the city. The visitors mostly the local leaders further enhance the pride of the leaders in the community. Though these events are local in its spread received attention from the outsiders particularly the political leaders and media. These acts helped to strengthen the sense of community among them. Mehtars, constantly, negotiate their identity with the neighbouring communities. Their rituals and festivals are embodiment of this phenomenon ever since they started practicing them. The adoption and performance of these festivals do not necessarily imply that Mehtars are endorsing them as valid cultural symbols for their mobility. But there are some of the cultural practices adopted by them to escape the stigmatized identity.

**LIVING WITH POLLUTED IDENTITY:
MEHTAR CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELF AND SOCIETY**

Mehtars in the basti have their worldview and perceptions different from the larger society, who consists of Hindus and Muslims, in the neighbourhood. They express feelings and reactions, emanating from an inferior identity, which is the most degrading in the eyes of dominant society. They not only perceive the society differently, but do not subscribe to the values and notions about the sacred and the rebirth in the popular Hindu thought. Their outlook and perceptions about them and outside world is the result about the multiple experiences of these people, who other wise have little access to mingle with the dominant society. Though some of the people have managed to escape from the scavenging occupation, their caste identity remained the same. Many of the concepts and constructions of Mehtars come from their everyday life and experiences. These notions and ideas make them dynamic and at times sully them. These every day experiences make them to construct reality around them and help in coping with the degraded status. People from different occupations have come out with both explanations and strategies in dealing with the situation. They not only depended on their own experiences to reveal their understanding about themselves and society but also on others experiences. They are also not in total agreement with the community perceptions, but at times contradict those notions. Nevertheless, there is a common feeling among them regarding the identity of their work. All of them are on the same platform, in vehemently opposing the caste tag attached to them by others. Many also opined that it is this identity, which prevented them from progress and distanced from others. Some are very philosophical in accepting the fate or karma but not in the same spirit as the wider Hindu society accepts it.

Some strongly oppose the way people treat them with their caste identity. They are not ready to accept the system, but they continue to support the alternative practices of their people. If some one engaged in theft or some illegal activity, the identity of community is invoked in defense. These arguments legitimize the mistake, rather than opposing it. Though this is not a big rebellion of the sort, it does convey the dissent and protest. Suraj narrated his story, with confident voice and expressed the deep nexus of suppression and crime. Many also contest the perceptions and outlook of the people outside their cultural realm, who treat them as creatures of low category. As noted by Vincent Nathan (1993) 'They can, however, cognitively escape the negative value accorded to their identity by viewing people and society differently, that is, by having different underlying concepts of person and society which explain their position in a way that does not damage their self-esteem'. Suraj who is working as sweeper in a local telephone exchange and possess some criminal record narrates his views in the following manner.

These Hindus do not treat us properly. They have also taken, away our traditional work of scavenging¹. However trustworthy we are, nobody believes us, and call us as Mehtars. Even though we clean the dirt and toilets of the people, they do not respect us. Even if I serve them with honesty, by cleaning their dirty feet with water and drink that, they don't believe me. Instead they believe their own caste persons and help them with various favours What is this? *Aap ko kya kehna hai?* (What do you say?). Doctor who everyday touches human excreta for testing is respected. He cuts the body and puts his hands in the womb, and cleans it and he is respected, people salute him. Don't they think that we are equal like them? Once there was an incident, which cannot be forgotten in my life, it happened in my native village in Haryana. In the village there is a common well where people take drinking water. After hard days work I sat on the nearby flat stone, as there is some tree shade falling on it. The Brahman of the village came there and after seeing him I just leaned on the other side and offered him a seat there. He sat on the other side of

¹ Here he means that many other castes are also applying for the jobs of sweepers in the municipality and other private Non Governmental organizations have undertaken sanitary work, by depriving the chances for the Mehtar caste, which are doing this job traditionally

the stone. He started chatting with me, and asked me who I am; I told that I am a Mehtar. He immediately squirmed at me. And asked whether I know the rules of the village. I told him in Hyderabad people like him come and sit with me and eat food. I also told him that I gave him respect for his age not for his caste. It is also conceived generally in the society that many activities they do under the ritual practices and other activities are highly criticized. There is no common agreement within the community for all the ventures of others. They wanted to identify with the other kinds mobility than the acts of some people who are practicing a variety of occupations for their survival and identity. Shiv Kumar who is sixty-five years old have some reservations on people who practice magical rituals on a commercial basis.

Shiv kumar:

My uncle brought us to Hyderabad, some twenty-eight years ago. We are basically cultivators in the village and also engaged as wage laborers. Our people used to work in the fields and remove cow dung in the lands. We used to get a few rotis and little milk as our salary. Later the farmers also give a few *anaz* to us. After some time our community realized that this work is not rewarding and they started migrating to various places in search of better livelihood. Some came to Hyderabad and settled here as Mehtars and spread in the Deccan country. Mehtars is the name of our work. Like many Sudras, we have started working, but we did the scavenging work and hence we are known as Mehtar. In fact we are known as Valmikis in Haryana.

Due to poverty and lack of work and wages we came here. I worked in more than twenty companies and would earn 20-30 rupees per month. In those days the ceremonies were less expensive. Drinking and eating pork was a common thing in marriages. Now a days there is no respect for the elderly in the basti. Those days they avoided standing in front of the elders; never smoke in front of them. But now it is a common feature. Earlier marriages are celebrated with traditional rules. Now it is the TV, which is telling us how to celebrate a marriage. One day I am watching a program on the TV. Where a girl is asking her father to arrange for her marriage, as she is

pregnant. And I am watching the programme with my grand daughters, what these girls think after watching such programmes. They try to imitate the same thing.

In my opinion our community should adopt new businesses. And our traditional work of scavenging is slowly vanishing. People who practice this (*chu mantar*) are ridiculous. You know these practioners do not show anything. Doctors show medicine, what these people show? All is magic. I believe in *Shiv Bhagavan*. Our families believe in Bowries, it is a family tradition, our Bowrie is *Gangaram* Bowri. My grand father worshiped this deity. He himself became a bowrie after his death. These magical practioners make fools of public. Earlier there are one or two Bhagtas in the basti, but now their number is not countable. Public made them as magicians. These Muslim people believe in our Mehtar community. They are holding moneyboxes now. They go to Dubai and earn a lot of money. Generally these ritual specialists attend cases and ten percent of them get well. And people think it is because of these bhagats they get well. From the period of my grand father, our community believed in Bowries and *Goraknath*. But now they are slowly changing their worship. I believe in the god and Bowries but I do not believe in this magic. As mentioned elsewhere in the earlier chapters in spite of the denial of the validity of magical practitioners, many keep silent on their activities as it is seen as means of livelihood for some families.

Occupational Identity and Conflict:

Many felt that persons who employed them as sweepers either abuse them indirectly at the work place or treat them with inferior status. The occupational identity of the caste became an important factor for many conflicts. It is also noted by several people in the batsi, that they do not care such people who treat them as different kinds of human beings. There is a great sense of satisfaction and service, among the Mehtars, in interpreting their work. Many say that after all they are serving the society like any other professional. As one informant puts it, some work with pen and some with knife and scissor and we work with the Jhaadu (Broom stick). He also jokingly referred to their occupation code as BJP (*Bucket, jhadu, paikana*) meaning the Bucket they carry, Broom they use, and toilets they clean. Though Mehtars behave

in a normal way during the time of work they never tolerated any insult based on their occupational identity. There are instances of violent fights with the people who abused them with their caste name. Pratap Singh has one case to narrate to me. He said that he lost all his temper and has beaten up the *Marwari* Brahmin injuring his head.

Pratap Singh:

Pratap Singh belongs to traditional Mehtar family. His father works as sweeper in private households. His family is relatively large and is a joint family. He lost his mother, at the age of three years. His father married to another woman. He got step motherly treatment from her. She also used to beat him quite often. Pratap says, that he would get up early in the morning at 4 o'clock to go for scavenging work. After returning from the work he attended the school. After completing ninth standard he dropped out of the school and got married at a very young age of 16 years. Due to family disputes he separated from the family and lived with his wife. He has also worked under *badli ka kaam*. He along with his wife work in private households. He also goes in search of work every day. Generally he finds the work in the market area and new construction sites. He follows *Narasimha* cult and worship Lord *Narasimha*. He says that he never support the animal sacrifice in the name of god. He strongly believes, that due to the blessings of the lord *Narasimha* and guru *Maharaj*, he is living happily with five children. Commenting on the work of scavenging he says that if we do not go for scavenging work how can we live? I have to bear the insults wreathed by this work. Some times I have to ignore these abuses. One has to lead the life. He feels that due to the circumstances and historical situation they were forced to become sweepers. But it is not their wish to work as sweepers. He says that Telugu speaking people and Muslims use the word 'Mehtar' rather in a subtle manner, while addressing them.. In fact he says that they belong to a warrior caste and fought the wars along with the *Rana pratap*. He continues by saying ' *Rana* lost the war with *Akbar*. He challenged *Akbar* again and won the war he used to stay in the forest and eat the food in the earthen pot. The army of *Rana* is nothing but our community only. These people who fought for him went into the forest along with him. But the queen died in the mean time. Since then we are known by a variety of

names. Later many names were invented to refer the community. We spread around and branched out into many castes. Then to protect from the *Moughls* we have kept our identity secret. Some are engaged in the scavenging occupation and hence became a lower jati'. He continues to describe his experiences with a person with whom he fought very severely.

He says that 'once there was a big fight between him and a *Marwari* Brahmin. He did not pay my monthly payment in time. He kept postponing the payment by giving various reasons. One day I told him in anger that I will not work for him from that day. He abused me immediately. We hit each other with words and I left that premises. I am few yards away from his house, and then he started shouting at me Oh! Mehtar, come here. I went to him with anger and gave him some fists on his face. He also hit me on my head. And many people assembled there, and separated us apart. I asked him that whether my caste name is written on my head? Is it the right way to call me with the caste name? I told him that we are from the clan of *Rana pratap*. Then people assembled there and asked him to pay my money. Later I continued to work in his house, and we also became good friends. Why to fight, after all we are small people, and cannot afford the court. Nothing improved in my life, our leaders take commissions to arrange the loan, so why to believe any body'.

Pratap in his narration not only discredited the identity given by the outside world, but defended the community identity and related their present position to some historical mishap in the past. In doing so he identified with the dominant caste and tells that they belong to the same branch of the origin. It is understood that in every day life Mehtars create an alternative ideology to defend their position and to cope up with the inevitable stigma.

Caste Identity and Enterprising Individuals:

Some persons in the basti who made progress in various fields and able to achieve some positions in the society, still feel that their caste identity haunts them. They say in spite of their success in various fields like business and other areas, they were always looked down due to their community. Some, though tried to live outside the basti are meted out with insulting

behaviour and treatment of the neighbours. They opined that it is better to live in their basti than in other areas.

In every day life as well as in institutional settings Mehtars feel that they are identified and discriminated. Guru Jai Singh is one successful businessman and social worker points that the Mehtar word itself is a dirty thing for many and hence others cannot tolerate their progress in any field. In spite of many difficulties he managed to do good business.

Guru jai Singh:

Like many Mehtar boys Jai Singh also worked as sweeper in his school days. He continued his education till the college and completed his B.Com degree. He is also good in Karate during his college days. He participated in many competitions and won medals at an international Karate meet in Colombo. During that period he happened to meet some officials in the scheduled caste development corporation. He made friendship with an official, who also revealed him many loopholes and corruption there. The official asked him to beat one corrupt official in the office. Later the same official arranged a loan for him, to buy the auto. Jai Singh managed his joint family successfully, since he is eldest of the children. He subsequently ventured into four wheeler businesses, where he acted as a broker for purchase dealings. He managed to get a *maruti* van for himself and slowly established as a successful dealer. His close association with the government officials helped him to arrange loans for the needy in the basti. He assists many youth in providing job works. He says that he also helped many other telugu people to get loans from the government schemes. He says that 'now days children are not provided proper books, and in the basti people spend lots of money on rituals and festivals and drinks etc. This is an unnecessary expenditure on their part, whenever relatives visit they throw parties for them'. Though he is determined for the progress of the community he seldom agreed for the inter-caste marriages. He prefers marriages within the community as he feels that it benefits them, as the educated boys remain in their caste. He switched over to discuss his experiences as student in the college.

Guru jai Singh:

In my college days, I had many friends. I am also a body builder and participated in many competitions. As I am known wrestler in the college a marwari made friendship with me. This *marwari* boy is very lavish in spending and especially on girl friends. He would give his bike to me many times. He also invited me to a marriage function of his friend in Rajasthan. One day we are gossiping under a tree and during our talk he made some dirty remarks about the Mehtar girls who work as sweepers in the households. He said that, having sex with a Mehtar and Bhangi girl is very easy. He asked me to show him some good-looking girls. He also said that he can stop any Mehtar girl who sweeps his home and can have sex with her who does not even complain. Then I got angry and beaten him severely and hit him on his head. Many people assembled there. First time in the college students have come to know that I belong to Mehtar community. After this incident two persons belonging to our community approached me. We became friends for many years. You know people do not give respect even if you dress well. People came to know about my real identity and started distancing from me. I attended parties dressing like politician with gold chain and glasses, immediately people started enquiring about my caste. The moment they come to know about the caste name they distance from me. You know though I have money and van etc, the boys who work as helpers in cinema theaters also distance me. They look at me with suspicious eyes. These boys do not have single paisa, but still feel superior to me. One of the boys working in theater complained, on me to thier boss, saying why he maintains a close friend ship with the Mehtar. You know once I worked as sweeper in the same theater. These people always point to my caste. Just a few days back the boy said Oh! This Mehtar feels that he attained high status etc. I complained to my friend in the theater to look into the matter. You know however successful you are, they always treat you in the same manner, with the caste identity. He says after the college incident he asked many girls not to work in the houses. And also, influenced the leaders in the basti, to make strict rules, for prohibiting young girls working as sweepers in the households. Though it is successful now only 2% of them are working to support their parents'. In his narration,

though he is not very radical in approach, he tried to associate with outsiders with his wits. But he feels that his identity as Mehtars curtailed his attempts to be one among them as dignified man. Some though not able to protest like others, tried to live with the identity with the self-satisfying explanations. They tend to see the strength within them and seldom look at the outsiders except for the usual business in day-to-day life. Karam Veer, who is a successful businessman and dealer for the Bajaj Auto Company, explains why living in the community is better than the outside society.

Karam Veer:

Karam Veer is the only successful businessman as far as the size and turnover is concerned. He came along with his parents to Hyderabad at the age of sixteen. He tells that the school where he studied is dominated with the *Jhat* students. Schoolteacher, who belongs to *Jhat's* community, liked me very much for my sportsmanship in football. I have never seen such a good teacher and human being in my life. He was very kind to me. My father brought me to Hyderabad to work along with him. Even though my father worked in the agricultural fields we faced lot of difficulties in life. Living with a single meal in a day is very difficult for us. I started working as scavenger at the age of seventeen and continued that job for twelve years. I have also worked as auto driver, and learned some mechanic work. I would save some money from my extra earnings. Then with this money I started chits and finance within and out side the basti. After a few years when I became stable in the business I left the scavenging occupation and settled as auto trader. Later my business progressed and I took the dealership of the Bajaj autos and I am now running it with the help of my elder son. In fact our Valmiki community do not work much. By pointing to a young man nearby, he says see this young man, he became mad. Parents do not give their children proper education. They often leave them to their fate. You will find people like me, one in hundred thousand. I think you might have observed in the basti, there is no unity among us. This is a big lacuna. You know that these community people think that I should loose all my property and become one like them. They are jealous of my business growth. I have two cars with me. They do not think to work more and earn more and buy things. They want everything free. These days

dowry also became a big problem in our community. People are secretly demanding it. Anything comes free is good for them. Even after I succeeded as a businessman this caste society do not treat me as equal. In my show room, people would wish me as *Namaste Setji!* But after knowing about my caste, they stopped wishing me. And they think I should wish them first. This really made me uncomfortable. Today, if a Reddy or Naidu or some body else opens a show room all will go to his show room. Who will come to my shop. I faced a lot such problems in my business. I took a loan of 17 lakh from a bank, now I am scared to invest in my business, with the anticipation whether customers come to my show room or not. Many a times I too feel like others to leave the basti, build a new house and lead a good life elsewhere. But I tell you one story. One of my friends who is social welfare officer, went to city, and he got insulted by neighbours, because of his caste identity. And he returned to the basti. An insect, which lives in the sewage pipe, is powerful, when it comes out of it, it loses strength and becomes weak. Like that if I stay in the basti, it is good for me, if I go out there will be no change in my life or in the basti. See how dogs are defecating on the roads. If I am around, these people clean it. Otherwise no body will attend to it. These governments are spending crores of rupees in giving loans to us. Do you think any business is possible with Rs10000-20000. I advise them to start public companies and employ us in it, instead of giving loans for the individuals. If you can employ 100 people seven hundred people live. See now a days youth are wasting their time in the basti. The traditional *safai* work is also vanishing these days as attached bathrooms are becoming popular. No body will allow a Mehtar to enter their house and clean it. What these youth will do. They engage in crime, theft, and murders. Whose responsibility is this? That's why proper employment should be available to them. In my family one person got married to a Telugu girl. I do not care what *paanch* tells me to do. If inter caste marriage happens it is better that of other castes blood will mix with us. I become a father in law for a Telugu girl. If any problem is there we can fight united. I strongly support such marriages at least it will eradicate this untouchability. You know these governments want us to be on par with others. Once these people get enlightened they may be in trouble. In our basti, leaders of the community collect money only to drink and smoke *ganja*. You know even if people like me or Dr. Raghu stay in the

basti, there will be no change. We are just 1% of the population. What about 99% of them. They live here with the same problem. If they go out, they cannot get respect as citizens, but if they stay in the basti they remain idle. But still they stay here for they will be stronger in their home.

Karam Veer by upholding his community identity became rational in his analysis of residential choice of the people. He nevertheless made attempts in having alliances with the other castes. He is not reluctant for mixing with others, as it is the caste identity, which became a hurdle in everyday life. Most people like him, in the basti try to excel and prosper but handicapped by the stigma attached to their caste. There is inherent grunt and opposition to such practices, but they compensate these by involving very actively in the activities which are subtle and satirical. Sudarshan Singh is another case where he successfully managed to achieve his business goals by acting timely and wittily. There is no subjugation in his acts but there is constant urge to come up and live on par with others.

Sudarshan Singh:

Sudarshan Singh is young and dynamic entrepreneur in the basti, who is the first cable television operator in the basti. He convinced the basti people to have a cable connection, and is well known to all in the basti. He owns a cable network unit and efficiently manages this without any complaints from his clients. He efficiently manages a cable network unit without any complaints from the public.

In his own words;

I discontinued my degree. I am not good with my memory power. After discontinuing from studies I worked as safai karamchhari in private houses. I worked in the houses in and around this neighbourhood. In those days this area is known as *talaab katta*. This place is central point for channeling all the sewage water in this part of the city. In those days we stayed in huts with no electricity. Many were engaged in *safai* work, almost 100%, except a few people. Around that time, a few used to go to school and we are not at all aware of other things in life except work and sleep. The caste *panchayats* are very strong and even the love marriages within the

community is not accepted by the *panchayat*. Our *parcha* families are actually wrestlers in the basti. Earlier a few families came here and went back to Haryana due to communal violence in the area. Some of the *bidlan* families come here first and brought some people along with them. Nizam of the then Hyderabad state asked them to look after the management of all *safai* work. Hence they are relatively well off than others. I worked as scavenger for two years after I discontinued my studies. It so happened one day that my *Marwari* friend in school asked what I do. I did not tell him that I am engaged in the scavenging work, though he knows my caste, fearing that he may not continue friendship with me. I never hide my caste; my friends come here and had tea many times. This friend advised me to do the retail tea powder business. First day I went to him and bought 1Kg of tea powder for Rs10. I supplied that powder, by travelling around the basti. I am able to sell this within a day. But the next day no body bought the powder from me. I struggled for few months and later left the business. After some time my brother asked me, why not we continue the same business in a big way. Earlier we used to buy the powder in the old city, and sold it for small commissions. But later we realized that tea powder could be obtained for a small price, at a wholesale market in Abids. Then we mortgaged whatever gold we have at home and with that money of Rs300, we bought a lot of tea powder at the shop. My brother and I kept them in small packs and sold them in the basti. Our business slowly progressed we became popular in the basti. During that time, a new shopping complex was constructed in the nearby neighbourhood. And we requested the landlord to allot us one plot in the complex. Initially he refused but after repeated requests he agreed to give us the place for Rs 5000. And we mortgaged all our property and gold and finally secured that shop, and started our tea business in the neighbourhood. We slowly progressed and established ourselves in the tea powder business in the area. In the year 1985, big communal violence broke out in the area. The local cable TV operator who, a Muslim gave an earth connection and entire cable operative system collapsed. T.V sets also spoiled. No body came forward to take up the cable TV operation in the basti. I approached the person who is the owner of the network. He told me that he is not interested in our locality as he has seen the damage to his establishment. Later he told me, that he can give connection, provided, I manage

the net works very carefully in the basti. I could secure some connections for the cable TV. In a very short period I secured 50 connections in the basti. Attracted by the number of connections I am able to get, he asked me to give him 50% of income from my earnings. I rejected the deal for he disconnected the cable. Then I approached another man who runs a big cable net -work. He provided me the line for a reasonable price. By that time I could secure more than 150 subscribers to my cable. Again some friends created the problem, they felt that this Mehtar should not be allowed to take over the business. The owner of the cable network also started asking me to pay him more money. A boy belonging to *padmashali* caste (Weaver's community) was working with me at that time, as I did not know anything about this cable operation. The owner of the cable net work asked me how come he is working with a Mehtar and stay in my house. They asked him to cut the relations with me. He stopped coming to me. Finally he disconnected my In-cable connection. Then all my family members sat together and decided to start our own business. But we needed money. During this time my mother retired from her MCH job and she got Rs55,000. She asked us to take that money for the business. On the same day we bought the 'Dish' for cable TV and other equipment and installed in the evening. After two days, we started transmitting to our clients in the basti. One friend in the city helped us with all the arrangements. Slowly I learned all the techniques of operating the system. I used to air good films and popular movies on the TV. With these services we became popular again in the basti. Later I approached the city cable network and they gave me permission to operate in this region. Though it is very difficult to get the regular payments from our people, I am some how able to mangle the things. Our people enjoy the drink and meat but they do not pay me Rs100 per month. I want to put my children in schools outside the basti, so that they will study well.

God and Spirituality:

In the Basti majority believe in god in one way or the other. They worship gods and goddesses of multiple varieties. And also believe in the family deities or bowries. But the constant change of religious practices in the basti and Mehtars exposure to the other religious faiths gave a new perspective to their

outlook on religion and society. Some who follow other faiths hardly ever agree with the religious practices of the community. They offer quite incongruous views, unlike the shared beliefs of the community. These individuals though are few in numbers, command respect and standing in the society. And hence their views are important to note.

Amar preet who is sixty-five years old narrates her religious experience within the system of community beliefs and her family.

Amar Preet:

I spent my childhood without any tribulations in the village of Haryana. Nearly fifty years have passed from now in Hyderabad. I got married at the age of fifteen. Along with my husband, I would rear goats and other animals in the village, while my parents worked in the fields of Jhats. After some time I along with my husband came to Hyderabad. Those are the good olden days. We would go for the work very early in the morning at 3 o' clock. We used to receive payments in cash as well as alms from the clients. In those days I carried the night soil in a wooden carton. We have to bear all the dirt and smell of the excreta I got accustomed to work very hard. I never liked to clean the dog's shit. But now when I am supposed to do it, I shed tears many a times. There were difficult times that made me weep. But I am helpless since I am in the house of mother in law And you have to respect their duty. I am still working, as scavenger as there is no escape from this work. There is no employment for the children. Ours is a big family. I have become very devotional from the last five years. Mother goddess appeared in my dreams and asked to make *Pujas* for her. In the past I used to worship the goddess with simple rituals by lighting a lamp. But now I am regularly performing the rituals and am very happy. Now a days everyone is eating pork with us. How can we leave this caste and become some other caste. It is not possible. Now I am working for Suneram under *badlika kaam*. He also taught me how to perform *Puja* for the goddess The goddess does possess me quite often. The peers also possess me. When I get possessed I do not know what I am speaking. Some times my family members help me in answering the questions. I do not cook any non -vegetarian food for all these nine days (Nav-Ratris). You know

even if you believe in stone it becomes god. Our bowries are very powerful in this view. They appear in my dreams incessantly’.

Amar Preet constantly tries to escape from her marginality by adopting new religious practices, but feels strength in her own traditional belief in family deities. This is the case with many others too. They try to imitate or follow some faith either vexed with the traditional religious practices or to escape the stigmatized identity of the caste and occupation. They interpret their religion as some thing superstitious and also waste of money and time. Amar preet is one such lady who, in spite of accepting the community identity follows the *Aryasamaj* and also *Brahma kumaris*. She says that she does not have any faith in the traditional gods and goddesses of the community. She further elaborates by saying that ‘they follow the *Satan Dharma*. A dharma of the evil. *Eshwar* is one. The creator is one. There is *Ataman*, and *paramatma* in this world. *Paramatma* stays off from the ataman as this ataman commits sins all the time’. By referring to ritual healing practices in the basti she ridicules them as merely some blind beliefs. She made entire family stop worshipping these bawries and family deities of the community. Commenting on their traditional work of scavenging she says that ‘we work with our hands to clean others dirt, and hence we are more cleaner than any one else’. She says that their origin is from Raj Puts. As they refused converting to Islam, the kings made them as slaves and assigned them this work of scavenging as punishment. She points that they are the breed of the Aryans and hence possesses the qualities of the warrior race. She opines that people should treat them as real Hindus as they defended the religion by not converting into other faiths at that time. She opines that there should not be any intercaste marriage as it hurts the community sentiment. She has no hesitation in accepting the girls from other families and castes But wants the boys of the community to marry within the community. ‘How can others follow our traditions and respect us, it will never happen’ declares Amar preet She also opines that the caste system is a man made evil and she does not have any faith in it.

By dwelling these things she tried to give an ideal image of the community. She nevertheless accepts the caste identity, as she says that she has to live with it, as it is their occupation. She never regrets for the scavenging work they do, but she upholds their right to live in dignity.

Occupational identity and school:

As described earlier many have either fight with their fellow students or teachers in their school. Some of them either completely dropped out of the school or discontinued their education due to these events. From the earlier chapters, it is known that others have abused them either with their caste name or insulted them personally. In all these cases their occupation has become main hurdle in their everyday life. One informant who is into pig rearing business says, that 'why we are called as Mehtar, in spite of our appearance and looks we are similar to others, but why still they call us *Mehatrodu*'? Many feel that except a few individuals, rest of them treat them in same way in everyday public life. Manoj while narrating his opinion felt that in his school days on wards he was alienated and treated separately. Manoj is now a successful tailor, runs a shop with two sewing machines. by employing two persons as his assistants. He is a man with common sense and he manages one and all with his fun tactics. He says that there is no other way than behaving like this. But at another level he tries to escape, and cope up with his degraded identity of caste in this manner.

Manoj Kumar:

Ours is a large family with six brothers and four sisters. Father is the only one who works in the family and the sole bread earner. Because of this reason he was not able to provide us good education. All our brothers started working from very young age as sweepers, to supplement family income. My father thought that since four children are already working, he sent me to school. He worked as sweeper in the same school (*Dharanath* Hindu High school). That school is good and discrimination is very less (heen *bhavana*). Because of that reason many get educated there, including people like us. But my fate took a different turn as a man named Satta

Reddy joined the school as schoolteacher. He made us to remember our caste and work. On one occasion he said that who we are? Where we came from? He repeatedly made us to remember our past (*aap kya hai? Kya kar rahe hai? Aaj tak kya kar ti aayehai? Yaad karo aap kyati?*) He made us remember our traditional work again and again. This behaviour of the teacher upset my mind. Later I stopped going to school and slowly learned tailoring and you see how I settled now as tailor. One way I should remember Satta Reddy for his indecent talk for he made me to change my occupation. Now I am no more a scavenger. My Hindi teacher was very kind to me. They taught us good things and took special care. Even now by working as tailor I am studying. I have completed my Hindi *Vidwan* test. I respect the elders and my ancestors. You know Mehtar is the person who really does the complete work. Because everyone use toilets and make it dirty and it is Mehtar who clean those toilets. Every one cleans their own filth, but our people clean the others. These people are great !they are gods!

In san punya kamane keliye gaai ko ghas kilati, roti kilatemache ko double roti kilate garibomka kharna kilata, pyasoko pani pilatanange ko kapad dilatagis ki sar pe chat nahi hai uskouska ghar ko chat dal ko deataour jis ki sahar nahi hai uski sahar deat, puny kamana kelia insane kay kya nai karta, aur apne papoka prayachit keliye insane bhagavan ki darshan karat hai Jananamse kaya kaun kaha jata hai, punya kamane kelie,lekin kiski jahanese or na jahanese punye prapt nai hota, lekin mehatr kaali baitke punya kamata Isiliye jati baed mat karo. Punya karo Os punyako neeche giradiye aap Ek achi insane hai to WO hai Mehtar

To get blessings of the god and eternal bliss, people do a lot of things. They give grass to the cows. give bread. they feed the poor, and the thirsty are served water. Orphans are given clothes. home less are provided with shelter. Man does every thing to get that moksha and blissfulness. To get a glimpse of the lord he travels all the mountains and what not But this Mehtar gets all that *punya* (blessings of the eternal) by simply doing his job If there is any good human being on earth he is the Mehtar.

Living with Destiny:

Though some glorify their community and occupation, yet there are many people who just quietly live with the stigmatized identity. They do not attribute their condition to any body, but rather cynical in their out look. And they just lead the life by memorizing the past experiences. People who have reached some level of recognition and glory couche around in the past, by silently accepting their present day condition. Prithvi Singh is one such person who in spite of his great talents remained in the scavenging work. But he nevertheless does not blame any one except his fate.

Prithvi Singh:

In my child hood, I lead relatively happier life. My father worked in baldia². He worked as bodyguard for the Nizam. He was a great body builder of his time. Even my grand father also a great wrestler. My great grand father was *Samsher*. My father was also worked as sweeper in *laldarwaja* area of old city. He lifted the human excreta on his head and worked in horrible conditions. He won many medals in wrestling, and got medals from the kings of Iran and Iraq. I went to the school but left it at the second class itself. You know all my family members are wrestlers. I used to bring liquor to my father and family members. When they finished drinking I would mix water in the left over liquor and drink it. Slowly I lost interest in studies and quit my education.

I showed interest in wrestling and started learning it. Once I stole food from an old woman and started running. My brother, asked me to stop. He threw a small knife and it hit me on my back. I did not notice it and ran. I went to the school as usual. I sat on my table. My teacher noticed the injury, and asked me to come near him. A lot of blood is spilled over my body. Then I have seen the injury caused by the knife thrown by my brother. The teacher helped me to get bandage. Oh! My brother brought me home. I have recovered after a long time and due to good services rendered by my family. There was fight within the basti over a

² Baldia is a word used for old city Municipality of Hyderabad

piece of land. The basti *paanch* wanted it for the temple, but we have rejected. We won the case in the court, to the bigotry of others in the basti. Some of us later had beaten the *Paanch* leaders for their unfair means like taking liquor and pork to give judgment. They filed more than twenty-five cases on us and finally we won the case. The lawyer (Mohammad Hussein) who fought for us also got good name. A few years later my father and mother passed away. I got married at the very young age of fifteen. Our two brothers also got married at the young age. After the marriage I started wrestling and my family supported me. I used to drink 10 liters of raw milk in the morning and evening. Would eat plenty of pork and slept leisurely. At the age of fifteen I had participated in wrestling competition in Lal Bahdur stadium, in Hyderabad. I won the title of *Andhra Kesari* from the Queen Indra of Iran. I got a certificate and a watch as gift. Then I went to Bangalore, on behalf of the government of Andhra Pradesh, to participate in all India competition, for the title of *Indkesari*. There also I got the award, but not *Indkesari*. There the referee played some tricks. At the 13th round he gave me negative points for me. There I have also played for entertainment. Many attended the shows by buying a ticket for Rs100. There are lot of crowds. Due to my fate I joined the *safai* work in 1948. I did wrestling for twelve years. While doing *safai* work I also practiced the wrestling. I worked only for an hour in houses. I worked in private houses as sweeper till I got a work opportunity in the local hospital *Ye tho kismat ki baat hai* (this is all about the fate). *Jo milega milta hai* (whichever is available, you will get). I was insulted many times at the work place. I collect Rs2-3 from people who use toilets. In the hospital, the officer abused me by saying that I am taking bribe from patients. But I tried to explain him. He did not listen to me. While working as sweeper I was not able to fill my stomach. Now I go to work early in the morning at 4 o'clock and return by evening 4 o'clock. As the hospital is specialized in delivery cases, there is lots of grime at the dustbins and other areas. At times I feel like quitting the job. But you see now I have two young daughters who attained marriageable age. If I go away from this work, how can I survive?

Unlike Prithvi, there are also people in the basti who are self reflective about themselves and their society. These category belong to slightly mobile group of people who are better educated than their fellow caste men. Their children

are in better jobs than others in the basti. Even though they never deny their caste identity, they emerged as self sponsored commentators of the community. In spite of their identity these people feel that they can uphold the status of the community by practicing good manners and customs.

Suraj Bhan:

My mother passed away in my child hood. Mother's sisters brought me up. My father worked in Hyderabad. I studied upto, Matric in Haryana. After studying six to seven years in the college I came to Hyderabad. I joined as seaman and went to Cochin for training in Indian navy (INS Brahamputra). My wife stayed in Haryana while I worked in Navy. I have also visited Andaman as part of my Training. After serving ten years in Indian navy, I resigned and joined the BDL organization as security officer in June 1974. My father did money-lending business, and I helped him in his activities. This was known as low interest money lending (*Sahakar*), and was very popular in the basti (*Sahakar Badli*). I have got a daughter who works as junior lecturer; she is a qualified teacher who earned B.Sc, M.A, and B.Ed degrees. My second son is working in CRPF. My wife worked very hard in rearing the children. She has faced lots of troubles in the family with her stepmother. She would wake up at 4 o' clock in the morning to prepare food. She came to Hyderabad in the year 1971. My second daughter Reena works as junior lecturer in Delhi. My third daughter is also qualified and she did her translation studies. She earns Rs10,000 per month and my second daughter earns Rs14000.per month

Reflecting on the basti:

My fourth son failed in Matric, due to the *mohalla* culture and bad company. This basti is not a good place. Because people consume lots of *Gudumba* (cheap liquor). Some of them also sell this here. They drink a lot and eat pork etc. Here all are Mehtar workers. They possess no education. Only few families are educated. Because of drinking and gambling habits of the Parents many children did not study properly.

That's why they accept *Valmiki*. They do not know about Ambedkar. Even they hate him (*Ye logonka inse nafrat hi*). Because they are illiterate. There is too much idol worship in the basti. Many worship, *patrivali*, *gurgamvali* and *bowries*. Pigs and other animals are sacrificed for the festivals. In the basti there are more than hundred magical practioners. They do some magic and are looting Muslims. Because these Muslims have 4-5 wives with them, they do not trust each other. They are very cunning. If they get some bad dreams they come running to our basti. There is good income from these sources. Some Bhagats (*chu chavda wala*) drink liquor with this money and offer to others. They are many looters in the basti. They took loans from the government and did not repay them back. Lakhs of rupees are spent on them. These people wanted to enjoy the life and celebrate. Some got auto loans and they never drive. They rent the vehicle and get Rs100 a day.

About healers in the basti:

There is a magical practioner in the basti known as Ratan. He in fact deals with land properties and does brokerage for parties. In one of the cases he cheated a Muslim family. These practioners, who are illiterate, are minting lakhs of rupees. He makes parties with the money. These veiled women just dump money for these people. He worships Devi, with 100 coconuts and enjoys the life. Whenever he brings his wife to Hyderabad, she runs away after a few days stay.

There is another woman known as Kiran a woman ritualist (*Chu-Mantarvali*). She is a rich lady. She owns four lorries and plots and is having a three-storied building, with marble flooring. She is able to get rich Muslim clientele even from abroad. These Muslims don't know anything. She visits Saudi Arabia frequently. Whenever she would go there, she attires herself like a Muslim woman. She brings dollars and riyals and sells them in Hyderabad. She employs Muslim girls in the house to work. Many of the clients arrange their people to serve her. She gets all services from these poor people. Many ladies approach her for either broken relationship with men or with reasons like their husband is not sleeping with them. The male clientele also visits with similar reasons, suspecting their wives loyalty. These practioners are very intelligent and they do tricky business with these poor chaps. The children of these magical practioners are enjoying a lot. Of course that is

their job. Some of them also involve in criminal activities. Some take neck chains from the ladies. Police protect them as they get good bribes from them. Why goddess possesses only these filthy ladies why not good people. These people are getting bad name for the goddess. Why they are showing off with many things, because they wanted to hide their dirty acts.

About leadership:

In the basti there are 5-6 leaders representing all the political parties. They are able to convince the people that they can get loans for them. They also take commissions from the people in the name of loans. When loan comes, after lot of difficulty, these people spend them on *Pujas*, pilgrimage and rituals for the goddess. Once in year they celebrate *Valmiki Jayanti*. Only four or five people perform the tasks. Only four five people do *Puja* to the *Valmiki*, everyday. Many drink, eat and enjoy. There is an incessant effort by some individuals to excel and be part of wider society. These people though deny the very logic of the caste system try to interpret their superiority in their own way. Nachiket, who is a self-employed man and runs a small teashop in the basti, defends his argument about the unique ness of their society and culture.

Nachiket:

My father and mother are agricultural labourer in Haryana and they have come to Hyderabad in search of livelihood. They have brought along with them, their near and dear relations to Hyderabad. My father worked as scavenger in private house holds, and he passed away recently. After 10th class I stopped my education and decided to start a small teashop in the basti. But there is no respect for our community. I feel that people should treat us as human beings. There should not be any untouchability. Whatever are the qualities attributed to *Valmiki*, he is considered as our guru. People should think who made *Valmiki* as our guru.? I ask all our ritual specialists, Bhagats and intelligent people in the basti and outsiders that why we are treated as low. Every leader should have proper understanding of our community. And they should tell us why we are *Valmikis*. And in Hinduism all sects of *Valmikis* should unite and fight for their rights. In Delhi they are known as

'*Jamdars*' and in Bombay they are known as 'Bhangis' and in Haryana as 'Valmikis', why they should have different names. They should be known as *Valmikis* only. I insist on this. I tell you our marriage system is the best in the world. In other countries there is no untouchability, why here. Our community respects each other, and people go for marriages avoiding any blood relation. And hence I request the society to respect our community. Our people should get caste certificates under the name of *Valmiki* only. I do not believe in the magical practices and the rituals. These mantras and *Yantars* are the job of the devtas. People who experience them can only practice. This untouchability should go. Even though the constitution of India writes it off, it still exists. People keep us away from entering new jobs. First I am an Indian and then only I am a *Valmiki*.

Amar, instead presents a different outlook about his community, as if they are the receptors of only dirty things.

'I did my schooling till the tenth class. Later I discontinued my work and worked in private houses as sweeper. In the school days it was very difficult for me to get a good dress. My fellow students used to refer me as Mehtar. These things led to small fights many a times. After a few years I was able to get a job as passing clerk. My mother passed away and the entire responsibility of the family fell upon me. I did scavenging work again in the private houses to earn more money. I am able to look after my younger brothers and sisters. I worked as *safai karamchari* in the board of secondary education. There, in a fight, I hit the superintendent and got suspended. While working as scavenger I have also taken care of business of selling old vehicles. Then slowly I entered into politics. I did both my job and private house work while still continuing as part time worker. In 1984 I became divisional president for the *Telugu Desam* party. I continued in the position for four years. Later I was elected as vice president for the city cell of the party. I have also acted as president of *safai karam Chari* association. In the basti people practice many things like *Chu Mantar (Magical rituals)*, but I do not believe in them. People are very scary about many things in life and hence they believe in these practioners of rituals. I am against the inter caste marriage. Because if one marries within the community they can contribute to the

growth and development of the community. Here many are living in joint families and they are interested in education. In our basti people accept bad things first and because they are oriented like that. They pick up bad things very fast. Now it is better that children are going to schools. But parents spoil their kids with their drinking habits. I have helped many to get auto loans and other kinds of finances. But they are picking up bad things in life. We lack unity in the basti. One can fight only when we are united. From unity you get ability, to fight.

Ran Dheer has more radical opinion about his community and its members.

Aged 31 years, Ran Dheer has been working in DMRL since 1983 as technical staff. In his narration,

When I was six years old, I was admitted in a local school. But I quit the school immediately due to my drunkard father. When I reached the age of ten, I started doing the sweeping work in the private. I worked in the Saifabad area and also worked in dry latrines. If there is no drainage, one has to remove the excreta manually. This is a very dirty task. I worked in this manner for four years. During the communal violence I lost my close friend who was stabbed by the Muslim. I am scared after this incident and stopped working in Muslim areas. Then I joined a small cycle shop as assistant. I worked there for five years. Again there was a small fight between my mama and me and I left the job. Later I went to AG college area and worked in a beer factory as a wage labourer for Rs13 a day. After a year I joined the AG College as *safai karamchari* and worked there for three years. After quitting this job I started pig-rearing unit at home. Here people used to address us as *Mehtarollu* and *maakilavde* etc. they would say that we have come here with pigs and spoiling the surroundings. I quit the pig rearing also and joined DMRL. There I worked as sweeper for three years. The director of the organization Mr. Acharyulu gave me promotion as technical staff in furnace. Since then I have been working without any problem. Many people appreciated my work there. Some officers also recommended me for the promotion. Then within the unit I got a contract for fifteen thousand rupees. From then onwards I am getting contracts regularly to hire other sweepers and work. In the mean time my father passed away. And I got his job.

About magical practioners in the basti:

You know I don't believe in these activities at all. They earn a lot of money. Even the educated do not earn that much money like them. In one day they can earn Rs10000. What is this? 'Zooti Jaban' (all lies). They are fraud. Now a day they also started their practice and opened their outlets in other countries, like Dubai, Saudi etc. One of these practioners a woman is actually worked as a sweeper in the past. She cleaned the toilets. These people are simply cheating the public. If they have that much power, why they are not earning money directly. They should be paraded nakedly in the street. It has become a business for them. These drinking habits bring bad name to the community. Because of this children are not taken care of. With joint families living together, it is very difficult to manage them with this drinking habit of people. We tried to stop this but in vain. Some of our community people are not helping us in this matter. I have been trying to stop since last five years through all means but there is no sign of improvement.

We are not cared:

You see we have been cleaning the roads of this Deccan area for the last sixty years. But we are not given any support or care by the government. Sulabh like institutions are encroaching into our work sphere and are cornering benefits. This is all phony. If they really want to develop us let them start small-scale industries. They will give us better employment than these autos. See they are lying unused. There is no use in giving them these autos. Instead a petrol bunk serves the purpose better. It should be given to a group of people. Providing a small shopping mall also helps. Our leaders are our betrayers. They mediate between the community and the government officials. Our *paanch* leaders also suppress the facts. They do not allow us to speak the truth.

About Inter Caste Marriage:

This is not at all possible, how can it be? If an educated man marries within the community he can contribute for its progress. I married to a poor girl, though settled happily. Earlier people who got married to other

castes are excommunicated. No body talks to them. Even if my own brother tries to marry girl from other caste, I will ask him to leave the house.

Bole Ram is a 30-year-old person working as auto driver. He has very radical out look about the people around and the government policies.

Bole Ram: My father worked in DMRL, and mother worked in municipality. I studied in government school in Hindi medium. Ours is a large family consisting of ten members. I started working as sweeper from the age of eight years. Many people kept a distance from us. Even when I entered the house they did not even give water with hands, instead they keep it in the corner. Food, if it is given is thrown into the bowl. They sprinkle the water on our footsteps, when we go back after finishing the cleaning job. But there are people who also treat us in the normal way. In one Marwari house, they used to give me sweets and talked very nicely. But among Muslims and Hindus the story is different. Earlier Muslims would treat us normally, but these days they have changed a lot. Some Muslims are also into the sweepers job. But now every one is coming to do this job. If any one is in deep trouble and in frustration he will do anything. He may engage in crime, loot, and steal. If he is not getting money for his work, he will do anything. Later I took to auto driving and have been in this profession since last fifteen years. But in this also there is not much profit. Some times I work for others on lease base. I have not received any help from the government. This is a sense less government. With proper work, you will be able to get food, kerosene etc. If there is no work and wages what else we can do? We can do anything. I got married at the age of 27. My wife stay, at home. Now a days the scavenging work is also in demand. You know if there is no work available they may sell gudumba (Cheap liquor), and do any other private works that are assigned and available. You know some time ago four people have committed suicide by jumping from the top of the charminar. Do you think others will do the same thing? Our own leaders are eating our money. I went to the collectorate for a loan. I have also showed them that I have an auto license. But so far nothing is passed in my favour. You know why they take bribes and I am failed to satisfy them. I have obtained heavy vehicle license, and some

Individuals try to interpret the community and society from their every day interaction with the society around them. Their outlook and perceptions change according to their level of exposure to the outside society, and people they interact. The traditional reconciliation, with the past, yet questioning the everyday context is common among those who have relatively small avenues to explore and upgrade their status. On the other hand people who tried to climb the social ladder with all possible means at their end have different opinion and notion about the people and the society. They are the strong contests of the dominant values in the society. These people made every effort to be on par with the other fellow beings. They were at times are not accepted by the society or received inhuman treatment from them. These people have always seen their occupational identity as a hurdle for their progress. They tried their best and searched the alternatives to cope up with those challenges and achieved considerable progress in their respective enterprises. These group of people feel that others already construct opinion about them, and it is very difficult to change those. Here some people feel that it is better not to dig the hole, rather adapt to it, and gain strength within ones own tradition. One entrepreneur says, it is better to live among the community people, where you are strong rather than living among the people, who hate you every moment they see you. A few took to alternative religious ideology, but still have respect for their own traditions. Another set of people are self-reflexive in their outlook about their own community. They see strength in the community, but feel it is miss used by the people. They were optimistic about the progress, and these individuals seldom consider that they are inferior to others, and hence there is less attention paid others who treat them with inferior status.

people promised me job in the Road Transport Corporation. Those who are able to give bribes secured those jobs. I now settled as broker for buying and selling of second hand autos. I am getting good commission on this. This is all about money. The rich create helplessness, by using the poor people. You know Gandhi is the betrayer of our cause. He first took the broom and everyone followed him. That's why we remained backward.

If this is the view of self-employed man, the slightly better off people in the basti like persons working in government jobs, etc have different views. By valorizing the community, they tend to see alternative mechanism for the advancement of the community. Initially a sweeper by occupation, Gaurav became a section officer in the Andhra Pradesh government. He did start as sweeper at the very young age of thirteen, till he got a government job.

In his words,

Our people belong to warrior caste in Haryana. Our great grand father is Bakshi lal Harnam Singh. Our ancestors are great warriors. In spite of the rough methods used by the Muslim rulers, they never converted us to Islam. We have faith in Hinduism. We have fought many wars on behalf of many kings. Our people became prisoners of war and British captured them and assigned them this kind of low jobs. Simultaneously the Nizam brings some people to Hyderabad, and they have become full-fledged sweepers. They have worked in various places in the Deccan region. Our people were also engaged in agriculture and other allied occupations. We have also land in some areas of Deccan. My family still possesses 300 acres of land in the village. In my childhood I have faced lots of discrimination and I we are asked to sit separately. My father many times asked them why they are practicing such things. He used to fight with them. Now I am in a good position and helped many community people. I also helped in getting the sewing center with my influence. We are different in many things. We are not like local scheduled caste people. They are not brave. They are not stable. They cannot fight like us. If any trouble arises they run away from the scene. There are, only two castes on the earth, they are men and women. If any developed caste is there they should help others. In our community there are some people who by their actions getting bad name for the community.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In Anthropology there have been discussions on the concept of work, ever since the discipline started studying the simple societies. Different aspects were dealt at length, particularly the institutions and functional aspects. At the macro level issues like labour, market were the focus for many. When anthropologists started studying different societies, there emerged some methodological problems. These are particularly related to the study of non-western societies. Anthropologists faced problems in understanding the work culture of these societies, as some of the models of the west are not applicable to these traditional societies. Traditional institutions like religion, social organization, and political economy are different from those of the western civilization. But the contributions from these societies enriched the holistic understanding of the work culture. Many emphasized that the division of labour is the result of the hierarchy in the society. Meanings and social aspects of work are understood in the light of the ethnographic accounts of traditional societies. Studies focused on the basic elements involved in the work and productive processes. These are land, labour, capital, time information and identity. Some issues like gender, caste, and race are yet to be looked at in building models for the study of work. Some scholars emphasized that the universal models of work, can be avoided, as the work culture is specific to cultural contexts. Here the opinion is that the man tries to control the nature, and derives his living, by imposing certain norms and rules on it. In this process, competition, and restriction of accessibility to resources are important, as they involve many social dynamics. But the conceptions of work vary from society to society as the particular contexts and needs are different from one another. Work is understood not only as economic activity. But it is interpreted in relation to religion and politics and its potential contribution to other aspects of life, other than the economic benefit. Some times when the work is seen as an activity emanating within, its economic value is undermined to its social value. Maintaining status and personal esteem is important, whether it is for authority within the family or reputation in the society. But again the work is seen as something, which controls

the uncertainties of the future. Researchers pointed the general principles of understanding the work, like production, management and conversion of resources for livelihood etc, Further work is also understood in the context of hereditary principles; who controls it? Who evaluates? Who does it? etc. These notions are also related to physical, psychological social symbolic value of the work, and more importantly the relevance of doing a particular work. In the Indian context the notion of the work is quite different from the western notions. Here the principles of karma and dharma operate at both ideological and functional levels. Ritual purity and pollution attached to each occupation further complicates the process of evaluating and understanding the work in Indian context. Various occupations carried out by people are hereditary and hence 'logical notions of work' cannot be applied to these occupational groups. The work of a normal activity is some times regarded as a means of achievement, while works with no economic value are treated as high in some societies, or works of despised tasks or socially inferior, may become a source of dignity and pride.

Ex-Untouchables formed the focus for several ethnographers and sociologists. These communities have been interpreted with great attention and erudite scholarship. Number of models are generated to understand these communities. Models like Images of alignment or integration, outcaste, self-contained groups, consensus, diversity, models of fusion, etc. have enriched the understanding of the particular groups. These studies offered, if not completely, academically sound models, which contributed to the Anthropological knowledge of the communities.

But many of the studies tend to see these groups as isolated phenomena, with few exceptions. The individual and personal contributions of the people within the communities are hardly highlighted. In most of these studies, the notion of self is under represented or at times totally neglected. Though the ethnographic texts are derived from the individual experiences of the other, there is hardly any mention about other selves. i.e. the self of the individual, is not taken care of. For example how a person struggles to cope up in a variety of situations. how his self come into play with the other and community etc. But the knowledge

generated is undoubtedly, made explicit, the functional aspects of the particular group. Occupations pursued by the ex-untouchable communities are considered degraded in the general outlook of the society. And in many cases these professions are hereditary in nature and hence do not have the chance for mobility. The menial occupations like removing the dead and carrying night soil are regarded as polluted works, which are normally attached to the lower castes. These communities undergo double humiliation for the lower status accorded to them and the identity acquired through occupation. Castes engaged in scavenging occupation in India, are not a single group. Many castes who are engaged in this are from the lower rung of the society. Mehatrs or popularly known as Valmiki's are one such group who have been engaged in the scavenging occupation, ever since the emergence of the town planning in India.

Present study is conducted on the Mehtar community in the city of Hyderabad. They have been engaged in the occupation of sweeping for a long time. They were migrants from the Northern states of Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh. But majority belong to the Haryana state. The traditional institutions like political organization, the institution of marriage, family traditions and religious beliefs are still in tact though with some modifications. The other major institution that is subjected to change is their religious beliefs. Mehtars have undergone a rapid transformation since the last two decades, which changed their life style. Material wealth coupled with awareness and education brought many changes. They continued many traditions of their ancestors and religious beliefs in spite of adapting to the local situation. Living in a Multicultural setting in the inner city of Hyderabad, the search for a secular identity, among other castes became a nightmare for them, in spite of adapting many practices outside their cultural realm.

Some of their traditional institutions like 'political leadership' became highly questionable within the community. The younger generation is no more attentive to the traditional leadership, which is subjected to severe criticism. With the enforcement of law and entry of democratic institutions, this traditional institution is at flux, with regular incidents of violence in the community. The institution of family and marriage remained altogether in the same fashion with few

exceptions. The former is subjected to great changes. Dowry in marriages became a common practice, though it is voluntary. There is an increase in the number of nuclear families in the basti. Many aspire for one or the other kind of social mobility. For most of them income generating activities have become primary activity. Some feel that the new festivals they celebrate are alien to their traditions. But still there is a sigh of relief among many, as these festivals brought a sense that they are part of the larger Hindu society. There is always dilemma of belonging and not belonging to certain cultural practices followed by wider society. By adapting to the surroundings they have been innovative and creative in practicing certain traditional and popular rituals and ceremonies.

After the municipal corporation of Hyderabad has taken over the management of sanitary services in the city municipality, the traditional working sweepers from the Mehtar community are taken into various offices and departments, as sweepers. Their traditional organizational structure got slightly altered due to this shift. Mehtars are now part of two spheres of work as sweepers. One is working in public sphere, the other in the private. Before the entry of the municipal corporation, Mehtars worked in Private houses as sweepers. Mutual exchange of the work is a common practice. The shift from the private sphere to public sphere is an institutional change with regard to management of sweeping in the community. Most of them Mehtars adapted to this change without much tension. But there is some resentment within the community, with other castes entering this occupation. They feel that the private organizations like Sulabh are grabbing their work and getting profits from it.

They feel that they are doing the work due to poverty and helplessness. There is no regret for doing these kinds of work. It is said that like any other human being they have taken up a work for the livelihood. Majority felt that the work they do is in the interest of society. And felt that the returns they get are meager. They have adapted themselves to the work structure by coping with the challenges posed by the polluted identity resulted in by their traditional work. Mehtars looked at the traditional work of scavenging as a means to their livelihood but not beyond. Many try to glorify their work as a service and production as

contribution to the society at large. The relative segregation and polluted notion attached to the work are overcome by adopting various coping mechanisms. For instance, creating or citing such problems like unable to attend work giving false reasons etc. In certain instances absenteeism from work is also practiced to make the others realize their importance. The relative leisure they derive from their work is seen as freedom, which no other occupation provides. The notion of leisure and free time thus intertwined among the Mehtars. Many derive the strength from the low status, in this regard the polluted identity of their occupation and caste. Many point to the brighter side saying that they are privileged enough as no one can enjoy the kind of freedom and leisure they get. With great strength, they enact the various roles in the social space at their disposal. Here 'social space' refers to the kind of limitation, segregation, thrust upon them. As no other individual comes forward to do such occupation, Mehtars claim that they are 'energetic' than others to perform their duty. Work may not be evaluated in a structured manner, as it involves, an array of variables. The concept of time is of no value to a Mehtar, when it comes to his job activity; executing the job a few hours in the morning and some times late in the evening, is a work meant for livelihood and hence he never attributes time value to such work. He measures work only in terms of earning a livelihood. Probably the degraded identity of work and inferior status attached to it, refrain him from ascribing a value to it. But the everyday life of the community reveals, that the inferior status became strength in itself and helped to negotiate for a better position and identity. The work structure of the community became a facilitator for many to take up other subsidiary occupations, which enabled them to get the higher status. At every action a Mehtar is aware of his caste, particularly his occupational identity. They combine such subtle identities of self, community, and pragmatism as guiding spirit, in their every day life in upholding and asserting their identity in the public life. The segregation and other aspects attached to their work on the other hand strengthened their spirit of community, which helped them to bargain a better deal in developmental programmes. The increased income levels and better standards of living strengthened the community's spirit to identify with others and inventing new methods and cultural symbols in the process. Mehtars argue that they are the

victims of history who are relegated to and forced to work as scavengers. Many do not accept their inferior status as scavengers but attribute to it as some incident happened in history against their wish. Most of them claim themselves as a warrior race and farmers who fought against the Moughal invaders. But in spite of rejecting their occupational identity they attempt to project it that they are serving the society like mothers care about their children.

Traditional religious beliefs of Mehtars are meticulously integrated into their changing life style. The tradition of the bhagats has helped some of the community members to elevate their social status in the wider society. In the last two decades there is an increasing number of ritual practitioners in the *Basti*. A few women also joined and are successful in managing their enterprise. Though criticize these acts as nothing but rubbish, still they endorse them as they are earning their livelihood through these practices. Many felt that the increase in the number of ritual healers is due to unemployment problem. But the healers say that apart from the income they derive, it brings them some status and recognition in wider society. A variety of clients approach them with various problems. Many of the opponents of magical practitioners are from that section of the Mehtars who received better education and achieved considerable mobility. Some of them are believers of the spirits but they straightaway reject these practitioners. Magical practitioners have achieved social mobility during the past one-decade. Most of them able to earn good income from this practice. They feel that this healing practice brought them not only money, but also made life easy. They are able to move with the outside society much more freely, than earlier. It has become an outlet for them and opened new opportunities. They are able to start new businesses with the help of their networks, which were established due to their connections with various people. Though everyone carries their caste label, it is the 'Self', which is a reference point for many of the practitioners. Competition among these practitioners made them to claim superiority among themselves. In their traditional occupation of scavenging, it is felt by the community that they could not have earned the accolades or money. Bhagats not only earn for themselves but also are potential contributors of material and other kinds of support for the community. These practitioners are harbingers of

opportunity for others, and hence receive support if not total rejection from the community. These supporters invoke the community traditions in validating the acts of the magical practitioners. In a way Mehatrs adapted this ritual healing as means to achieve certain practical goals like status achievement, mobility, escape from the stigmatized identity, and material comforts. In coping with the degraded identity of their work, they efficiently used the traditional institution of *Bhagats* as a tool to mitigate their social position.

The polluted identity of work and the many pressures brought by the caste identity created a kind of uncertainty within the community. Both individuals and the community are struggling with these pressures and uncertainties. The individuals are also subjected severe turmoil and conflicts outside the community. The community as a whole experienced a traumatic situation, where their occupational identity became a hurdle in their every day life.

Many pressures brought by their caste and occupational identity, led them to enter into the sphere, which is not considered as legal and not acceptable to the general norms of the society. Many resorted to violent methods of protest as well as physical assault. This is evident from the many incidents that occurred in various contexts of everyday life of the Mehtars. The intense pressures of the external world made some of them to plunge into the violent acts, which further affected their social position. One fourth of them are branded as Rowdy- Sheeters in the local police stations. Much of the violence is attributed to the community, in spite of the fact that others are also responsible for similar activities. They use the strength of the community to cope up with these challenges. And in turn they will be able to manipulate it, for their betterment. It is observed that at every moment in their life, their caste identity haunted them. Many felt that even in the situations where caste is immaterial, the fellow citizens refer to it to ascertain their superiority. They feel that these kinds of situations made them to take extreme steps. They are forced to do certain things due to inevitable circumstances. Their participation in various criminal acts is the result of such pressures from the wider society. Most of them are tuned to this life style and became part and parcel of the network. Criminal identity made many uncomfortable, as one informant pointed out that why not other

communities branded like this? Is it because they belong to respectable occupations? The participation in criminal activities is manifold in the basti as they practice a variety of crimes. There are people who function individually and work under some one as assistants. They also established good networks with the political leaders, who often use them for their personal works. But Mehtars constantly use these net works to climb up the social ladder and to mitigate their identity. It has become a common practice for many as it gave them money, power and influence among certain people and organizations. This has become strength in itself, as some of them are also proud of the outcome. They constantly try to cover up these activities by actively participating in the social life in the basti and quite often elsewhere. They are respected in the community, in spite of their criminal activities. In the eye of the community they are the members who share the common values of the caste. In course of their practices, they invent strategies and mechanisms to get a respectable position and place within and outside the community. Magical rituals and crime one inspired by tradition and the other thrust upon by society became strengths by themselves and helped them to cope up with the degrading identity.

Celebration of popular festivals and ceremonies became an important tool in the process of asserting a better community identity. Some of the popular festival are adopted and presented in an innovative fashion in an effort to project the image in the larger society. They have been worshipping *Gugapeer*, *partivali*, *sulamata* and multiple gods and goddesses. Since they have accepted the *Valmiki* as their guru they also started worshipping him, but not at household level.

The celebration of the Valmiki festival has undergone many changes in the last ten years. Many novel things are invented in it The festival became a matter of identity for Mehtars. There is an active participation by many political leaders in the festival. The procession is taken out in the city with all fanfare. Many popular Hindu symbols are used in this procession. The individuals and community derive a satisfaction from these acts and trying to assert their uniqueness. While adopting the symbols, they managed to recreate the social setting by the very symbols, which they perceive as antagonistic towards them. As commented by one youth leader the use of symbols is only to show and to be

recognized, and no one is worried about their validity. The community is successful in using certain popular religious ceremonies in formulating their identity.

By adopting the popular festivals, Mehtars in the basti showed that they are capable enough in projecting the community identity. Though there are some limitations regarding this adoption, the successful staging of these events in the public elevated their position. It is noted by one of the very old resident of the area that ' Mehtars improved a lot. From food to dress in their beliefs and practices, these people earlier followed the Muslims, or lenient towards them, but there is a great change among them'. As described earlier, many communal conflicts in the area resulted in great damage to property and life of the people in the basti. These events subsequently made the community to adopt certain ritual practices on par with others in the area. This adoption is not out of their desire to be part of the larger Hindu community, but to protect their own space. As noted by a key leader in the community, both Hindus and Muslims treated them in the same way, but only with little difference, within and out side the basti.

This adoption has taken place due to the efforts of the community to identify with dominant society and the urge to be recognized as dignified people. They have brought novelty to these festivals, by imitating the styles of festival celebration in the city. The visitors, mostly the local leaders further enhance the pride of the leaders in the community. These events are local in nature but received attention from the outsiders particularly the political leaders and media. These acts helped to strengthen the sense of community among them. Mehtars, constantly, negotiate their position and identity with the neighbouring communities with their acts. Their rituals and festivals are embodiment of this phenomenon. The adoption and performance of these festivals do not necessarily, imply that Mehtars are endorsing or accepting them as valid cultural symbols. But these are some of the cultural strategies adopted by them to escape the stigmatized identity.

They also visit the *Dargas* and offer prayers. Leaders in the basti effectively used the popular festivals for maintaining their status and prestige within and out side the community. There is competition among leaders in organizing these festivals in the basti. Huge amounts of money are spent on the lavish

decoration of the podiums, where the idols of gods and goddesses are kept. Organization of these events has become tools for these individuals in asserting their power and influence within the community. Some are able to get good donations from the traders and politicians in the city. These festivals are viewed as strength and capability of the community. The leaders in the basti not only are able to present these cultural symbols but showed their capability to outsiders as well.

Persons or Individuals negotiate with meanings by constructing meanings, interpretations to suit their emotional and social needs. These can be best understood with the narratives of those persons. As Bhaktin (1985) points, every dialogue occurs against the back drop of a present but invisible third party. In the individual narratives Mehtars as an occupational group are very critical about themselves and the society around. They seldom accepted the norms laid down or followed by the general public. It is noted by many that caste became a factor for many of the conflicts. And yet they are not averse to their occupation. As one informant puts it, some work with pen and some with knife and scissor, and we work with Jhadu (broom stick). The uniqueness of Mehtars in the society is emphasized by citing their contribution to the society as scavengers. In everyday life at school and in business, many of the conflicts have taken place due to their occupational identity. Mehtars felt that in spite of their personal credentials, people bog them down due to their occupational identity. A few felt that it is destiny, which made them like this. The inevitability of the status and occupation is viewed as the main hurdle in their progress. Most of them are averse to be known as Mehtars. As it signifies their work they do. Instead they prefer to be known as Valmikiis.

Individuals try to interpret the community and society from their every day experiences. Their outlook and perceptions change according to their level of exposure to the outside society and people they interact. Reconciliation, with the past, yet questioning the everyday context is common among those who have relatively small avenues to explore and upgrade their status. On the other hand people who tried to climb the social ladder with all possible

means at their end have different opinion and notion about the people and the society. They are the strong contestants of the dominant values in the society. These people made every effort to be on par with the other fellow beings. They were at times not accepted by the society or received inhuman treatment from them. These people have always seen their occupational identity as an impediment for their progress. They searched the alternatives to cope up with those challenges. These group of people feel that others already constructed opinion about them, and it is very difficult to change those. Here some people feel that it is better to avoid challenging, rather adapt to it and gain strength within ones own tradition. One entrepreneur says, it is better to live among the community people, where you are strong rather than living among the people, who hate you every moment they see you. A few took to alternative religious ideology, but still have respect for their own traditions. Another set of people are self-reflexive in their outlook. They see strength in the community, yet feel the people misuse it. They were optimistic about the progress and these individuals seldom consider that they are inferior to others, and hence there is less attention paid to such behaviour of others. Even though some people reconcile with their past, they question the hegemony of the dominant society. Few individuals, though challenge the oppressive authority and discrimination of the society around, they try to search for options and avenues to climb the ladder of mobility. These people see strength within the community. By reinventing and modifying its institutions and strengths, Mehtars tries to avoid the ritual impurity or the lower status attached to them, by incorporating and adopting itself with the larger whole. They create and re-create certain cultural modes of expression though with some dissent. The acceptance of popular festivals and cultural practices is not blind but with selective approach.

There is protest and contestation in their everyday life. However the popular cultural symbols are used and recycled in the process for achieving status and better position. The self and particularly the mobile individual are always in confrontation with his community identity and himself. Here he constantly oscillates between his achieved status and ascribed status in the

various cultural practices and invent their own traditional strategies for achieving the desired status. By emulating the popular practices and religious behaviour they wanted to show the society their capacity in competing with them rather than their acceptance of these rituals and hierarchical notions of the dominant society. These adoptions are focused on showing their ability and strength but not their consensus with the dominant value system around. Though they share certain cultural conceptions of the popular Hinduism their interpretation of the religion and ritual life is non hegemonic in nature. Moreover the total emulation of the dominant values by the Mehtars did not take place, as their position in the traditional caste hierarchy is quite distinct. In their everyday life they contest and protest against the upper castes and their attitude towards them. These people emulate the accepted norms and acts with defiance Mehtars use all popular symbols to project themselves as better selves in the public. Mehtars in the basti cope with their stigmatized identity with mechanisms and practices convenient to the local situations. In doing so Mehtars are aware of their degraded identity and create and recreate various cultural practices. In the process of espousing popular rituals they do not completely commend the hierarchy but aim only to get a better treatment and place in the society.

APPENDIX

Myth-1. The story of Gurgamvali:

Patrivali is born to Gujjar family. The *pandits* and Brahmins, attended the birth ceremony of the family, who ascertained that her birth is inauspicious, and by referring to *Ved*, they confirmed, that she is '*MataDutini jami*'. They thought that if this becomes true she might destroy people. *Gujjars* asked *pandit* for some solution. And the *purohit* advised them to dump her in a water bin, closing it on top. It so happened, that one *sadhu maharaja*, passing by stopped at the water bin on the pavement to get drinking water. But to his surprise, the bowl he dipped in the water became so heavy and could not lift it. He heard the voice; saying ' I am *MataDutini*' please pull me out. Then *sadhu maharaja* realized the nature of '*Dutimi*' and laid down three rules, to pull her. The *sadhu*, performed '*puja*' for her, and kept her in his hair by his magical powers. But *dutini* came out of it and disappeared. He went into meditation, and came to know of its power, and made her to appear before him. Answering to *sadhu Maharaj* she said that ' I can also disappear, now, but I will full fill the promises made to you'. I disappeared only to let you know my might. Then '*Dutini*' offered him her interest in becoming a disciple of *Sadhu Maharaj*. Accepting him as guru, *Dutimi* become a follower, and started curing disease and illness among villagers. She became goddess of the *Valmiki*s. She is also known as *sikpatri*. *Gurgamvali* came in the dreams of a farmer, and later became a goddess, worshipped by people. *Patrivali* came from *Gujjars*; both of them are from upper caste.

Myth II: Story of Goddess Patrivali:

Mapatrivali is gujjar woman Her father is Sohan gujjar. She is ferocious, black in colour with big eyes, and long legs, and looks like handicapped. Her caste people are scared of her for her ugly looks, and dumped her in *Bawdi* (water bin /dirty well) to get rid off. Then in *Valmiki* society, one man, known as '*siddipurrush Nangyababa*' a *Mahayogi*, helped her to come out of the well

during his visit to the *Gujjars* village. He set right her eyes, legs and draped her with white cloth. She was made small in appearance and kept her in a metal box. The traveling Baba went to another village, to select a place to perform his *pujas*. There one, *Nattusevadar*, a *Valmiki* noticed that some smoke is coming out of the cave, where Baba performing his puja. This *Valmiki* who is a Shepard rear animals, like goats and cows. This *Nattusevadar* supplied milk and fruits to the Baba for forty days Impressed by his services, '*siddi purush*' gave him the 'metal box' lying with him in which *Maapatrivali* is present. *Nattusevadar*, kept this *holi kund* (box) on the shelf in his hut, and as usual engaged in his daily activities. One evening, when he returned from field, he is very enthusiastic to know, what is there in the box, and opened it. To his surprise a small girl is sitting in the box, which suddenly attained a '*viraat rup*' (larger than a human being). *Nattu sevadar* is scared of her presence, but did not do anything. From that day onwards, she would raid the Jhat's villages stealing goats to eat. By every evening she returned to *sevadar's* house. The villagers catch once this *Patrivali*, and panchayat is called. These village elders punished '*Nattu sevadar*' since *Patrivali* is staying in his house. *Nattu* fell on the feet of the *Patrivali* and begged her not to create any harm to him, and said that he is ready to give anything she wants. She asked him to give her one black pig everyday. To feed her, *Nattu* went to Uttarpradesh, and stolen 500 white pigs. painted them black so that others may not recognize them. *Nattu*, served one pig a day to *Patrivali*. But still *Patrivali* did not stop her activities, but later she disappeared, by killing *nattu*, later she did things to people, who worshipped her as *Patrivali*.

Saat Bawries:

Mahaveer Paarcha, a practicing Bhagat, narrated 'how these '*saatbowries*' are born.

"It was told by my grand patents. There was a couple whose names are '*Yamraj*' and '*Rajdeta*', but without any issues. They were advised by the people to worship '*Guru Gorankanth*' to get children. The couple prayed to him, and met a Baba, who blessed them, but on condition that the first-born should be given to him. who will be disciple of the Baba. But after the birth of the first child, the couple felt

bad to loose the first kid, as he is very beautiful. Instead, the second kid who is darker in colour is taken to *Baba*. The *Baba* has come to know about the second kid and threw the baby into the sea. Instead of drowning into the waters, the baby was floating on the waves of the ocean. The baby kid blessed by the *baba Jogi Maharaj*, become powerful, and attained all the healing powers. Later his mother gave birth to five children who became disciples of their brother. With their magical powers they started healing ailing villagers. The elder brother becomes a spirit, and helped people through his younger brothers. People did not believe in God but only in Bhagat. People asked this spirit, what he wants as offerings. He replied by saying '*Barak kaatra, unkanaam leke parch logomka kiloma pilana*'- And this Bawries name is *sabarmal Bawri*, who was more powerful (Shaktiman). Now they are worshipped at *seharsaffidan*. Other bawris are '*kesarmal bawri, Sabat Singh Bawri, Himat singh, Zeetmal, Haree Singh Heeralal, Chaparmal*'. They also have two sisters, namely *shyam Kour, Sheddo*. *Shyam Kaur*, worked in the house, and one day it so happened that she was arrested and molested by eight men belong to *Mughal pathans*. She complained this, to her brothers who are playing chess (*Chatranji*). Knowing the assault on their sister, the brothers got angry and Sanar Singh decided to cut the hands of pathans. Then Mughal pathans saw, these five brothers are coming to towards them. There was a country '*inaaru ka Desh*' (kingdom of crocodile). Its king is *Maru*. This '*Maru King*' was approached by Mughal pathans for shelter. But the seven brothers are successful in their fight with *pathans* and killed all of them. *Maru* king thought it better to beg mercy. He said to those brothers that he only sheltered those people but not enemy to these seven brothers. The people worship these seven brothers. In those days, people are poor. *Marwaris, Shawkars*, denied to give them loans. People would approach *Bawries*, who in turn helped them to get money from *Marwaris*. *Bawries* helped them in every day life. If a *Bawri* sends a person, the *Marwari* has to oblige him. People performed '*pujas*' for them. Slaughtered animals in their name and ate them together. That is how *Bawries* became popular among us¹.

¹ Based on conversation with 'Mahaveer Paarcha', a key informant during the fieldwork.

Baba Kaksha:

People who do not prefer animal sacrifice, and drink alcohol worship *Baba Kaksha*. But some of the Mehtars also worship *Bawries*, and sacrifice animals. Multiple gods and goddess are worshipped by Mehtars; they also follow different sects, like *guruGoraknath*, *kabeer* Panth and worships *Gugapeer*².

Apart from *Bawries*, *Gurugorak*, and *Gugapeer* are worshipped by the Mehtars in the Basti. Every household celebrates the *Gugapeer*' festival. On the day of worship, *Bertha* (fasting) is observed by the head of the household. At 12 P.M Offerings are made to the sun god followed by small feast consisting of fruits. The following morning *Gugapeer* is worshipped with, by performing rituals on sacred fire, and burning ghee on the cow dung cakes. Some sacrifice goats and hens to the peer.

There are two myths narrated about the *Guru Goraknath*. and *Gugaper* by two *Bhagats* who are my key informants, in the *Basti*. The myth -1 follows as it is.

Guru Goraknath Myth-1

Basmasur and *Parvati* are in love. But *Eshwar* (Shiv) don't know about it. Oh! If *Mahadev* knows what happens! Then *Basmasur* made *tapashya* (meditation). Pleased with his devotion *Mahadev* opened his eyes. *Mahadev* asked, oh! Muni who are you? *Mahadev* gave him a boon. This made *Basmasur* more powerful and he can destroy anybody into ashes, with the very touch of his hands. *Basmasura* takes away *Basam kankan* from *Shiva*. *Basmasur* tries to kill *Mahadev*, and *Mahadev* runs way. *Basmasura* dreams at this time to make love with *parvati*. *Shankar* hides himself for 5 years. The *Narath* informs Vishnu of the impending danger of *Parvati* falling in to the hands of *Basmasura*. He transforms into a female like *Parvati* and go to *Basmasura*, to make him dance. *Basmasura* dances with the 'Vishnu '. On the other hand Vishnu wakes up '*Mahadev*' from the cave. But *Mahadev* says, how can I trust you, you may be '*Basmasura*' in false garb. Then Vishnu throws the '*Kankan*' towards *Shiva*, and finally *Shiva* comes out. He sees

² Bhangis followed a variety of sects, which offer philosophy of universal brother hood, and belief in the existence of god, an omnipresent omnipotent, a supreme being who regulates the total activities of the universe. There are many sects like *Goraknath*, *buritinath* panth, *Kabirs*, *nowal*, *dathareya*. See Shyamalal 1992, pp 142-159

'Vishnu" in the form of a beautiful *Parvati*. *Uska Veeryu out Hojati* (He emits his semen) Vishnu holds that semen, and says, 'Oh! *Brahmadev*, if it falls on the earth, it will become infertile what to do? One woman, named Anjani, performs puja for a son. Vishnu gave the sperm to her. He sends the semen through ears of the *Anjani*. Sperm is a '*Gundhi Cheej hai*' (dirty thing). Some part of the semen, falls on the *Gobar* (cow dung) nearby. From there emerges '*Guru Goraknath*'. *Vishnu's* hand is still filthy; he washes it in the ocean. A fish in the sea, which gives birth to '*Machendranath*', eats the left over semen. This *Machendranath*, from the time he was born meditates, and he grows up fast. His students bring that cow dung cakes, to be used in sacred fire. Once, the burnt cow dung ashes are given to a barren (Banz) Marwari lady. But her husband ridicules her saying that 'this ash won't bring any children'. This woman throws this *Vibhuti* (Cow dung cake) into '*Kacchrakundi*' (dust bin). After twelve years, *Machendranath* visits the house of this woman and asks for her son. But this woman replies in negative by saying 'Oh! Swami I threw the *Vibuthi* in to the dustbin? *Machendra Nath* asks her to show the *kundi*, there he recite the following words '*alkriranjan*' and says '*Ur landike Dek Kour aayahai* (wake up, see, who has come). A twelve year old boy emerges from the dustbin, who later becomes '*Guru Goraknath*' who is very powerful, than the Guru. *Guru Machendranath* fell in love with '*Sonal deep Rani*'. After this incident, there is division among Sadhus. One wears ring and other do not. *Jalendranath*, is one such person, and his disciple is *Kanipa Jalendranath* and *GopiChand Bortori* fought with each other. *Gopichand* throws *Jlaendranth* in a water bin, by putting horse shit on it. Later *Kanip*, cleans that, and tries to pull his Guru out. *Guru Goraknath*, passes by that way with his 1400 disciples, and asks, *Kanipa*, what is he doing there. And he replies, saying that 'don't you see my Guru inside this pot, am trying to pull him out ". Angered with the answer, *Guru Gorknath* says, that ' if you are able to get him out of the pot, I will consider you a *Sidda* (An enlightened Man). *Kanipa* also says, if you can bring back our *Guru Machedranath* who is in love with the queen, I consider you *sidda*. Angered with his words *Guru Goraknath*, curses him saying that '*Landiki dim dugnuni, Raat chaugini Ho Jae'*. The shit in the pot doubles in the daytime, and multiplies four times in the Night, making it difficult for the *Kanipa* to pull his Guru out. On the other '*Guru*

Goraknath' is not even allowed to enter into the border of the Kingdom where his *Gurumachendranath* is staying. Then a group of *Banjaras* who are passing by are going to perform in the palace, Guru *Goraknath* becomes a butterfly and enter into drums of the *Banjaras* in disguise. While the drum is played by *Banjaras* at the palace, it sounds " Jaag Jaag Gurumachendranath, *Gorak Yaha aaya'*... for three times. (Wake up guru... Gorak has come here). *Machendranath* looks around and says if you have come, why are you hiding show up your self '. *Guru Goraknath* appears in front of his Guru and salutes him. The queens, who are also magicians, try to kill *Guru Goraknath* with their tricks but they fail, as *Goraknath* appears in *Bajar* form (metal form). Then *Goraknath* says ' *chal landiki*, that's it, these two queens becomes donkeys. Surprised with his acts, *Machendranath* says oh! What have you done to these people? *Goraknath* replies saying that 'they are doing black magic on him. If I keep quiet; you may say what kind of disciple. I am Hence I did this. (Ye muje warpowar karnete, jab aap kamosh baite!). After this. *Goraknath* makes them to come back to their original form. On the second day *Goraknath* requested, *machendranath* to come back as he has seen enough world *Machendranath* replied saying that 'he will return after three days. The two queens. with whom *Machendra* Stayed, have two kids, who suffer from loose motions There are sent to *Goraknath* for treatment by saying '*ja jake jadal'* (go and defecate). *Goraknath*, with his magic wand, makes them to hang on the wall by peeling off their skin. *Machandra*, surprised with his act, says 'what have you done? Guruji. you only told me to do this. *Machendranath*, also brings along with him 2 golden bricks. to give feast to the 1400 disciples of *Goraknath*. On their itinerary *Machendra*. asked his disciples *Goraknath* to look after the bag containing golden bricks as he went to urinate, in a nearby place. The weight of the bag surprises him, as he lifts it, and opens it. To his surprise, two golden bricks are found, which he throws off into the water. *Machendra* comes to know about it and tells to *Goraknath*, that he brought them to give a feast to the disciples. Then *Goraknath* goes to a nearby hill and urinates there, by making the entire hill into a Golden object. *Macchandra*, says that oh *Gorakh*, *tuj maay-me mujse be aage nikal gaya'*. (You are well ahead of me in magic). They reach the place where *Jolendranath* is still suffering in the water tub *Gorak* says to *Kapalia*. 'See I have

brought Your 'Guru". Machandra tells Goraknath, to help *Kapali*. His magic wand makes *Jalandra* to come out of it. *Kapalia* gives a Big feast to all the disciples of *Goraknath* and *Machendra* and they disperse from there.

Myth.1.2: Guga Peer

Goraknath on his sacred itinerary reaches a royal palace in Rajasthan. The *Raja 'Jewar'* and his wife '*Baachel'*' welcome *Goraknath* to their palace. Queen Baachel is a barren woman. *Goraknath* makes a huge *Dhona* with cow dung cakes, for performing rituals. Under a Banyan tree all the rituals are performed. While performing these rituals he send his disciples for collecting food (Biksha). Rani Bachel comes with gold and diamonds, and *Goraknath* says, *oh, Rani Bachel insekya Banega, Hamko Anandan Chahiye*. (What can be made out of these, we want food.) Bachel becomes the disciple of *Goraknath* for 12 years, and looks after the *Goraknath* and his disciples, by arranging food. When she is expected to receive a 'mantra' (a secret sermon) from Guru *Goraknath*. "*Kkache 'sister of Rani Baachel*. comes to know about it. She requests her sister to lend her clothes for one day. By wearing her sister clothes she meets, *Guru Goraknath*, for getting the boon. *Goraknath* gives her *ghyom*" (wheat seeds). Later *Baachel* go to *Goraknath* for the boon, and request him. *oh! Muni today you asked me to come, to receive the mantra* Surprised, the *Guru* says *oh! I have given it you*, She explains that it is her sister who took it by dressing like her. Again Baachel meditates for another 12 years, and huge anthills forms around He gives the boon to her. He brings '*guggad'* from *paatal* (world below the earth) from the *Raja baisakh* (snake King), and gives it, to Raani Baachel. Rani Baachel gives the '*Guggad'* to three people, and all of them eat it. They give birth to four kinds of people. One was Narsing Pande, who was a *pandit*, second one gives birth to *Ratan haaji*, who is a *Bhangi*, third one gives birth to *bajji*, who, is a *chamar*, fourth one eaten by horse belonging to Baachel. And it gives birth to a blue horse. *Baachel* gives birth to '*Gugapeer'*. '*Gugapeer* is born and all other five are also born. *Srikrishna* born on *Asthami*, and '*Gugapeer* was born on-'*Navami*'. On the other side the snake king sends his army to kill *Gugapeer*. '*Guga*' assures his mother. by saying '*kayavate sarpake polan barbem'* (I will make them sleep). '*Cow teere me in sampka nity bandu'* (I will make them as sticks) *hearobiki naath manga ke naath due*

ua (I will make their nostrils closed). Snake warriors run away from the scene. *Guga* marries *Serriel*, a disciple of *Sammal Jogu* (A magician). *Guga* marries her after overcoming a lot of hurdles. *Guru Goraknath*, *baisknath* help him in the *baraat* (marriage procession etc.). After marriage 'guga' comes back to his home, but faces stiff resistance from cousins. '*Urjansingh*' brothers. Who are sons of *Kaachal*. In a fight, *guga*, chops off their heads. This act angers his mother. *Guga's* Mother (*Baachel*) orders him to leave the palace. But his wife stays in the palace. *Guga* meets his wife in secret but his mother suspects her by saying '*tum kiskeliye ye singar karti hai*'. *Guga's* wife says 'oh! Mother don't blame me. Your son visiting me in the nights. You can see him if you want. After knowing this *Gugasmother* wants to excuse him. *Gugapeer* leaves the place permanently to go to *Baaghad*, and there he reads *Muslim Daikalma* (2 1/2 kalma), after attending saint hood, *Guga* went into the earth, which is split open. The earth closed after *Guga* was in burying him alive. It becomes a scared seminary and later a temple was built for *Guga*. This place is known as '*Gugamedi*' and hence he is known as '*Peer*' - "*Gugapeer*".

Myth1.3 (Gugapeer)

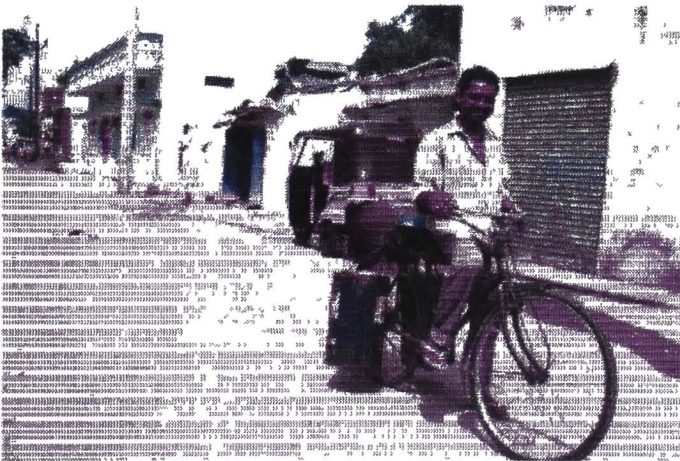
There is a shehar (city), known as *Dadreja* in Rajasthan. *Umar* has two sons '*Jewar*', and '*Newar*'. *Jewar* is a *Badsha* (A King). When he is on tour, he happens to see a *Mehtarani* (a *Bhangi* woman). She immediately covers her face with a veil, and hides herself. The king "*Jewar*" surprised at her acts, asked her why she did not wish him and instead hid herself under veil (*Mandi pattaya*). The poor *Mehtarani* replied, yeh! Maharaj, if any one sees the face of a child less sultan on the very morning, he or she will not get his food on the day. (Heh! *Maharau*. *Bina sultan, jiseko baccha paid nanho, unke suraj deknese, saamtak, and bhojannai milta*). The king surprised, at the conclusions of an ordinary Mehtar woman. The king left his kingdom to go to forest, to meditate with saints, for children By the time king left for forest his wife *Baachel* is already on her way to forest. *Mehtarani's* words lent the Queen, and she left the palace. But she came back to palace to perform *pujas* for *sadhu* saints. In the forest *Raja Jewar*, met a *Brahman*, who told him to plant nine-lakh trees and make a *Baagh*. (A garden) The king followed his advice and planted a nine-lakh plants at "*Dadreja Shehar*" But the

garden burnt to ashes. Here queen is worried as the king is still in the forest. At palace, queen *Baachel*, became a disciple of Guru *Goraknath*. She spent 12 years, by devoting herself to *Bhakti marg*. *Goraknath*, coming to know about her idea visit the palace along with his 1400 disciples to know what is there in *Baachel's* heart. On his way to palace, he the Garden. But it is dry and hot at night. (*swkete, neechese retiharan, dup garwn*). Distrubed with the weather, and the wind in the Garden, the disciples asked *Gorknath*, the reasons for the wind. *Goraknath* replied that 'Queen *Baachel* is worshipping him for 12 years, and waiting for his *darshan*. This wind is symbolic of her powers. He asked all disciples to make *Dhuni* to perform pujas. The garden, come back to its normal position and flowers. *mor papaya, (birds), sabiavaj Koyao, raato rat, pedemake baitake, apana apana Bajan, Gama, Suru Kiya*. Rani does not know, that her *Daasi* (maid serwant) has seen the flourished garden, much before her. *Goraknath* entered palace by saying oh! Rani *Baachel*, here I am, for whom you have been meditating for years. Rani offered him, a feast along with sweets (*kheer*). And bowed in front of him. Guru *Goraknath* is on *mandap*. (A raised plat form with mud, for ritual pyre). He opened his eyes, to see Rani *Baachel*. He asked her who is she? Where she coming from? And what is her problem? Why she came to him? With folded hand she replied, that she is the Queen of the *Buoghad*, insulted by many as she is a barren woman, and she cannot even sit along with other women. She said, that 'if you do not give me the boon for children I will end my life here". He told her, to come next day morning to get the fruit. She told everything to her sister *kaachel* who is queen of *Narwar*. Yeh! *Kaacal GuruGoraknath* promised me a boon. The next day her sister went to *Gurkanth*, dressing like *Baachel* and got the boon to get children. When *Baachel* went to Guru he said Yeh! *Baachel!* Already I gave you boon to get children. Why do you come again? She told that, it is her sister who comes first, but *Goraknath* told her he couldn't do anything. Ok! Said *Guraknath*, I will give you one son, who is brave and very strong. All Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, *Sab isko puja karenge. Jis ka naam gurgapper, and jawarpeer Saare dumiyaane iski shanarat hongi. Subse bade balwan hong* (Hindu, sikhs and Muslims will worship him, the world will respect him, and he will be the strongest). He was born on *Badewa* ka month. When *Gurga* attained eighteen years of age, his cousins *Arjun, Surjan*, brings the proposal of sharing the property and the Kingdom. But *Guga* denies the proposal, and

says that it is ancestral property, and cannot be divided. The brother went back to Delhi to meet Naurng Sha Badsha and pleaded him to give his army to fight *Guga*. These two brothers marched with armies of Sha, towards *Dedreva Sehhar*. They reached the city by night. Queen serial wife of *Guga* observed the troops from the fort. She told that to her mother -in-law *Baachel*, her *mata*, some troops are coming towards the fort. *Rani Bachel* told to *Guga* about the invasion. By seeing her crying mother *Guga* became angry. She told him that war may be inevitable, and that her daughter -in-law may be captured. He solaced her mother, by saying that he will take care of the invaders. He sat on a blue horse armed with a sword. He moved towards the troops. There he saw Arjun, and sajan horse. *Guga* told them oh! Brothers first you start the war. Then the horse said oh! *Guga*, you are lonely man in the battlefield. And these troops are one lakh. Please help me and bless me". At that time *Goraknath* sent invincible warriors, whose number is 52 to fight and win the war. These fifty-two warriors entered into the troops and killed all of them. There was a river of blood. Then *Arjun* and *Sarjan* marched towards *Gugaji* to kill him. He could not digest the fact that his brothers are coming to kill him. He chopped off their head with his sword; and kept the heads of the horseback. There is nobody to fight. There his mother is waiting and *Guga* touched her feet on arrival in front of the Fort. She said before giving *haarti* let me know the details of the war. Then *Guga* replied that 'my cousins, *Anjun*, *Sarjan*, are lost, and your son *jowarveer* (*Guga*) won the war. After seeing that chopped heads of Arun and Sarjan she is worried and said they are your brothers, you have committed a mistake. You should not have killed them. *Bacchel* said, yeh! *Guga*, if you are my son, and obey the words of the mother, go away from here, don't show me your face again. You need not stay in the palace. And *Guga* left the palace went away along with his horse, and headed towards *gerkita*, and prayed to goddess of the Earth (*Bhoomata*), to take him. The earth around *Guga*, is split open and *Guga* along with his horse entered inside to bury alive. Only a flag of *Guga* is seen on top of his seminary to which people offer their prayers. He respected the 'word' of his mother.



A Street in Valmiki basti.



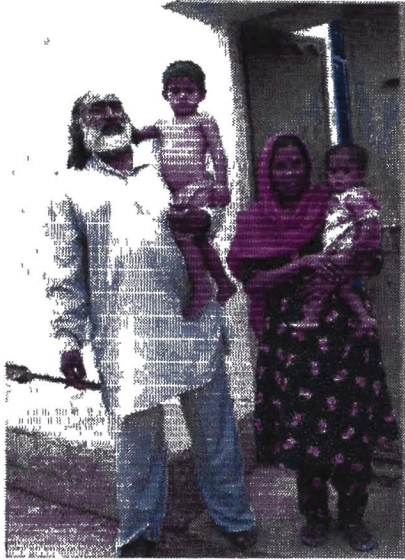
A Mehtar returns from his work. He is carrying feed on his bicycle for his piggery.



Women in the basti are relaxing after hard days work.



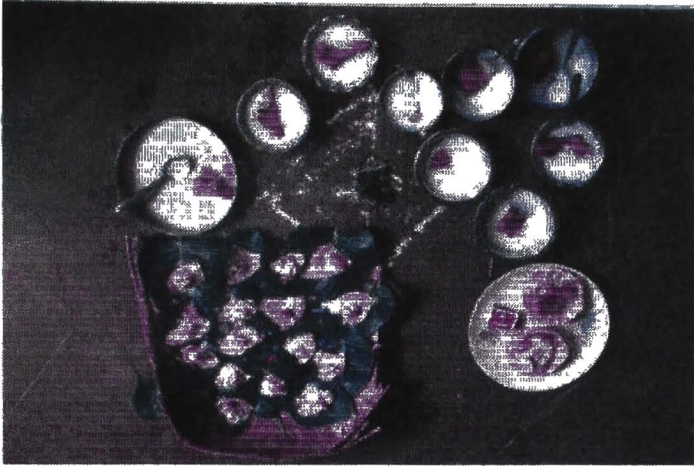
Middle-aged men gather in the basti daily after their day's work.



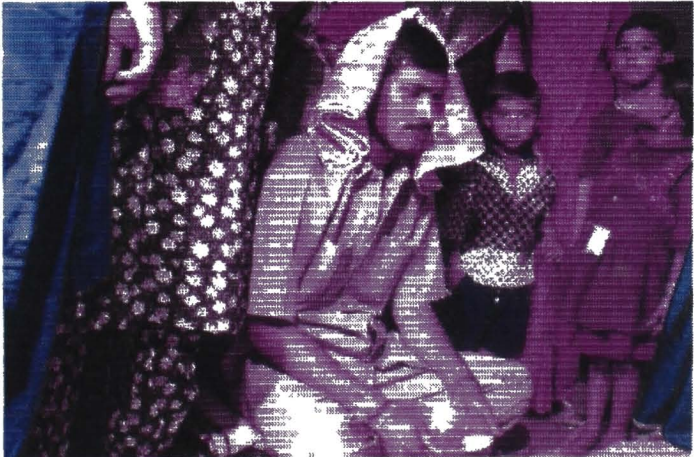
A ritual healer with his wife and children



An old couple in the basti



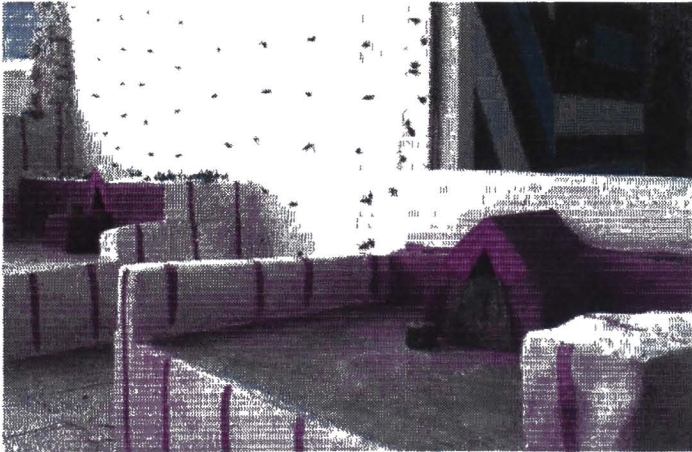
Pitramavas-Ancestral worship. On this day *Kheer* a sweet made of rice and milk is offered to the ancestors. A *puja* is performed in the home and these offerings are kept on the roof to be eaten by crows, which it is believed represents the ancestral spirits.



Bridegroom receiving gifts during a marriage ceremony.



Traditional temple of 'Babakaksha' in the Valmiki basti.



A traditional temple in the basti dedicated to their Goddess. A small shrine is also present beside this.



Valmiki temple in the basti.



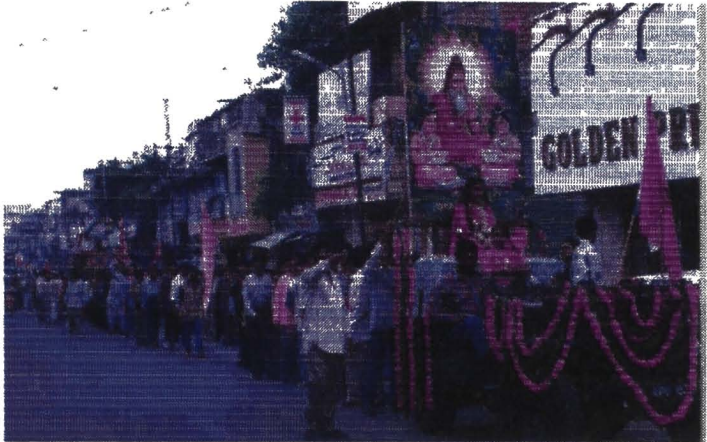
Ritual space in the Valmiki temple. The *Shivling* and the *Homakund* are also seen.



A colourful makeshift *pandal* is erected in the basti for installation of Ganesh idol during the *Ganesh chaturthi* celebrations.



Youth in the basti with Ganesh Idol, during Ganesh Chaturthi celebration



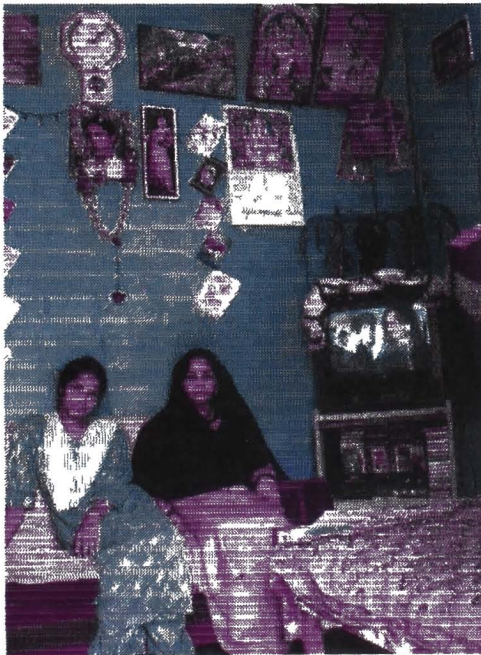
The procession organized by the Mehtar community on the occasion of Valmiki Jayanti.



Dashera celebrations in the basti.



Ritual healer at work with his client a muslim woman.



A living room in one of the homes in the basti

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