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Private Acts, Public Stories:
Sanitation NGOs during the 'Clean India' Mission

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Abstract

Private Acts, Public Stories: Sanitation NGOs during the 'Clean India' Mission

By Jennifer Anne Barr

On October 2nd, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, leader of the far-right wing party, launched the “Clean India” Mission (*Swachh Bharat Mission*, or SBM), promising to make India clean by October 2nd, 2019. This began a national push towards sanitation—the safe disposal of human fecal waste. Sanitation is a complex topic in India, entwined with cultural notions of gender, the state, caste, and purity/pollution. This dissertation explores the networks and lifeworlds of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) engaged with sanitation under a government with contentious relations with NGOs.

This work is based on 19 months of fieldwork in Delhi, India, from March 2016 until April 2017, including 82 semi-structured interviews; media review; and participant-observation in offices and events. I argue that NGOs must be understood as entities defined by their horizontal relations to other actors and not simply as isolated as vertical productions linking beneficiaries to donors. This work is situated at the intersection of discard studies and the anthropology of global health.

This work compares three NGOs: WaterAid-India; Sulabh International; and *Safai Karmachari Andolan* (“Manual scavenger mission”, or SKA). I compare their organizational structures; modes of self-representation; and relationships with the state, other NGOs, and media.

WaterAid-India represents the international sanitation sector. They balance working with and advocating for marginalized groups with advising the volatile government to accomplish their overall goals of expanding sanitation coverage. Sulabh is a famous India-based organization founded and controlled by a single charismatic leader. It has the reputation of a charity but functions as a business building and maintaining toilets. SKA is an activist organization dedicated to the eradication of manual scavenging (human collection of feces) by means of community mobilization and legal pressure and challenges.

As they influence the broader discourse, these NGOs make arguments about purity/pollution. Shit and caste are constructed as technical variables; as substances that can be transformed through the infusion of ‘purer’ matter; or as symptoms of a system of inequality that needs to be abolished. These arguments are influenced by not only the political and material configurations of the individual organizations, but their underlying ideologies and values.

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Acronyms

- BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party (“Indian People’s Party”)
- BMGF: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- CLTS: Community-Led Total Sanitation
- CSE: Centre for Science and Environment
- CSO: Civil Society Organization
- CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility
- DFID: Department for International Development
- FCRA: Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
- FICCI: Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- FSM: Fecal Sludge Management
- GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Society for International Cooperation)
- GOI: Government of India (Central government)
- MDGs: Millennium Development Goals
- MDWS: Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation
- MHM: Menstrual Hygiene Management
- MOUD: Ministry of Urban Development
- MSJW: Ministry of Social Justice and Women
- NBA: Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (“Clean India Mission”)
- NGO: Nongovernmental organization
- NRI: Non-resident Indian
- OBC: Other backwards castes
- ODF: Open Defecation Free
- SBM: Swachh Bharat Mission (“Clean India Mission”)
- SC: Scheduled Caste
- SDG: Sustainable Development Goals
- SISO: Sulabh International Social Service Organization
- SKA: Safai Karmachari Andolan (“Manual Scavenger Mission”)
- ST: Scheduled Tribe
- TSC: Total Sanitation Campaign
- UN: United Nations
- UNDP: United Nations Development Program
- UNICEF: United Nations Children Fund
- USAID: United States Agency for International Development
- WA-I: WaterAid-India
- WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- WHO: World Health Organization

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Introduction

“After Independence, after so many years of Independence, when we stand at the threshold of one and half decades of the 21st century, do we still want to live in filthiness?”

*--Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India
Independence Day Speech
August 15, 2014*

On August 15, 2014, the celebration of India’s 68th year of Independence, Prime Minister Modi solemnly stood on a flower-strewn stage in front of the Lahore Gate of the Red Fort in Delhi, surrounded by a small contingent of grim-faced body guards. He swathed his famously 56-inch chest—the broad chest he used to boast about in his campaign¹—in a cream *kurta*² with a Nehru collar and covered his thinning gray hair with a saffron-colored turban. His hands rested passively on the podium. The end of his turban fluttered in the warm summer breeze.

“My dear countrymen,” he began.³ “Today, all Indians in the country and also abroad are celebrating the festival of Independence. On this day of sacred festival of Independence, the prime servant of India extends greetings to *all* dear countrymen.” His speech quickly gained momentum, his thick arms gesticulating for emphasis and in passion.

¹ During his campaigning, he frequently bragged about his 56-inch chest size as a sign of his strength and decisiveness, as opposed to the presumably weak-chested Congressional candidate, Rahul Gandhi.

² A long tunic, worn by both men and women

³ His speech was in Hindi, but I am using a translation from The Indian Express (Full Text: Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Speech on 68th Independence Day 2014).

He gave this speech only three months after being sworn in, a few months after his party, the far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), swept the national elections. Citizens were full of hope that Modi would bring the country development, or *vikas*, as he promised in his many campaign speeches. “My dear countrymen,” Modi shouted, “a national festival is an occasion to refine and rebuild the national character. This national festival inspires us to resolve ourselves to lead a life where our character gets refined further, to dedicate ourselves to the nation and our every activity is linked to the interest of the nation, and only then this festival of freedom can be a festival of inspiration to take India to newer heights.”

He outlined large, sweeping programs that would become the signatures of his administration: Make in India, Skill India, Digital India. He spoke of how India is transforming, rising, how with its youth it is taking a place on the world stage. He spoke of pride and India’s long history. He spoke of service and development and governance. He spoke of moving together as a people and of preventing the suicides of farmers unable to repay their crippling debt. He spoke of the importance of girls, and he spoke of holding boys accountable for rape. He spoke of being an outsider to Delhi and its political machinations, and how he would take India forward into a bright, developed future.

“Brothers and sisters,” he said, “we want to promote tourism. Tourism provides employment to the poorest of the poor. Gram seller earns something, auto-rickshaw driver earns something, *pakoda* seller earns something, and tea seller also earns something. When there is talk of tea seller, I feel a sense of belongingness,” he added, reminding everyone yet again that he used to be a *chaiwala* himself. “Tourism provides employment to the poorest of the poor.” And then his speech made a turn. “But there is a big obstacle in promoting tourism and in our national character and that is the filthiness (*gandagi*) all around us.”

“Whether after Independence, after so many years of Independence, when we stand at the threshold of one and half decades of the 21st century, [do] we still want to live in filthiness?” He challenged. “...Cleanliness is very big work. Why cannot our country be clean? If one hundred and twenty-five crore⁴ countrymen decide that they will never spread filthiness, which power in the world has ability to spread filthiness in our cities and villages? Can’t we resolve this much?” He spoke about how women lose their dignity defecating in the open. “I come from a poor family, I have seen poverty. The poor need respect, and it begins with cleanliness. I, therefore, have to launch a ‘clean India’ campaign from 2nd October this year and carry it forward in 4 years.” On October 2nd, 2019, M.K. Gandhi’s 150th birthday, he promised, India would be clean in a program that he would call Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), or Clean India Mission.

‘I nearly fell off my couch when I heard the Prime Minister,’ a former WaterAid CEO told me. A prime minister talking about toilets and sanitation from the Red Fort? It was unthinkable. For years, NGOs had been desperately trying to get politicians and government officials to pay greater attention to sanitation—the safe disposal of human fecal waste. But until that time, as one consultant put it pre-SBM, “Sanitation is like a corrupt brother-in-law. You can’t get rid of him, but you don’t want to introduce him to your friends.” The government has had campaigns since Indian Independence in 1947, but none had ever come with as much political fanfare or political capital.

Over the next few months after Modi’s announcement in August 2014, through a series of press releases, press conferences, guidelines, working documents, cleanliness became better defined. In this clean India, the whole country would be open defecation free. Everyone would defecate in toilets. All human waste would be treated. Rivers would be clean. Garbage would be picked up. The country would sparkle with bright modernity, the rural areas would glow with pastoral wholesomeness. The campaign

⁴ A crore is a common Indian numerical term equivalent to 10 million.

was officially launched on October 2nd, 2014 with Modi picking up a broom to sweep the streets in a sweeper colony.

SBM was a mainstay of headlines for years after the launch, news sources crowded with the carefully choreographed photo opportunities of ministers, officials, and movie stars picking up a broom to make India clean, with government “swachh” programs that cleaned up offices, with children taking SBM pledges, with the promises and failures of the program.

Sanitation is a difficult problem to address, especially in India. It is a complicated and fraught topic, tied in with gender, caste, bodies, politics, and a long history of colonialism. It is not politically glamorous. In spite of multiple programs of previous post-Independence governments to address the issue, India’s sanitation coverage, like for a significant fraction of the world, remains poor.

Globally, approximately 2.3 billion people, approximately 32% of the world’s population, lack access to basic sanitation⁵ (WHO/UNICEF Joint Water Supply and Sanitation Monitoring Programme 2017). They shit in buckets, plastic bags, bushes, open drains, railroad tracks. They shit in brick-lined latrines where people come to scrape out the shit twice a day using hand tools and hands and carry it in baskets, trying not to vomit. They wait in lines for hours to shit in stinking holes in the ground where local urban mafias charge them. They get in their cars with families to drive to their favorite field to defecate in. They walk with the ladies in their village in the cold dark of the morning, their breath clouding in the frosted air.

60% of the world population’s sanitation is not considered “safely managed,” meaning that they do not share their facilities and that the shit is contained and treated (WHO/UNICEF Joint Water Supply

⁵ Basic sanitation is defined as “the use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households.” “Improved” facilities include flush/pour flush to piped sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines, ventilated improved pit latrines, composting toilets, or pit latrines with slabs. This is in contrast to unimproved sanitation—which are pits that have no slab or platform, hanging latrines, or bucket latrines—and open defecation, which refers to defecation in the open.

and Sanitation Monitoring Programme 2017). They flush into lakes, oceans, rivers, streams, open drains. The feces spread. You find it on hands, on faces, on the legs of flies, in rivers and streams, seeping into groundwater, on the surfaces of a kitchen, on crops, blowing in the wind as dust. The feces spreads throughout landscapes, both rural and urban. It carries countless diseases and parasites: polio, cholera, norovirus, shigella, E. coli, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis E, rotavirus, dysentery, tape worms, round worms. 1.5 million people get sick every year. And 600,000 children under five die (Why Sanitation and Hygiene? n.d.). They die from slow, grinding malnutrition, or the swift, excruciating death of shitting so much that you dry yourself out into a husk.

Sanitation is the disposal of human shit⁶. Safe sanitation takes the human waste from billions of individual bodies and treats it before it is released into the environment in some form so that it no longer spreads disease. It comes in the forms of wastewater treatment plants, pit latrines, composting latrines, septic tanks, composting. The implementation of sanitation strategies enable people to live in cities and not die of disease. But globally, we are not reaching everyone, and people are dying from diseases that, for many populations, are relics of the Victorian age.

India's sanitation situations is one of the most significant and critical globally, and the sheer size of the problem renders it daunting. India is the second largest country on earth, with a population of 1.2 billion people with no sign of slowing its growth. Out of those 1.2 billion, an estimated 56% lack access to "improved" sanitation, and 40% of the population defecate in the open (WHO/UNICEF Joint Water Supply and Sanitation Monitoring Programme 2015). However, even if people have access to latrines that are connected to sewers, only 22% of the sewage is treated (DTE Staff 2016a), resulting in 80% of the country's surface water being contaminated with sewage (Sushmi Dey 2015).

⁶ Like other social scientists and journalists, I will use the word "shit." Other synonyms for shit can sound clinical and infantile. "Shit," from the Latin meaning "to separate," is used to gesture to the lived reality of the substance (George 2009).

Institutions have been trying to solve sanitation in India for centuries: colonial powers, local governments, corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Millions of dollars have been spent, and the landscape lies littered with broken latrines and still wastewater treatment plants of failed attempts that were not able to be sustained beyond the initial pushes. Even more than just physical infrastructure, sanitation involves systems of social and political infrastructure—the toilets need to be used, the waste needs to be treated, someone needs to be regulating and monitoring these systems. Such systems of sanitation are embedded in complex and contested social and political calculations and cultural schema.

There are hundreds of actors operating at all levels of social life who engage with sanitation. The varying levels of government do so for various reasons, perhaps from a sense that this is their obligation or from trying to garner political capital among their voters. Corporations build toilets trumpet them as corporate social responsibility (CSR) or sell cement to others who build. Journalists cover stories of corruption or success. NGOs build toilets, run education programs, or pressure the government. These different actors may work together, against each other, or somehow in relative isolation.

But even as they carry out these actions, they are also making arguments in the broader conversation about sanitation, about what it is, how it should be done, and who should do it. As they make these arguments about sanitation, they are also making arguments about a range of other ideas that are intimately entwined with sanitation, like body and gender and caste and filth and purity and pollution and ideas of what the nation and state are for. As actors try to push their own goals, they are also creating and shaping the broad discourse around sanitation and all of the many complex ideas tied to it.

This dissertation focuses on those broad conversations. What are the arguments of those actors—both individual and organizational? Why are they making those arguments? How are they doing

so? What are the meanings and implications of those arguments? I particularly focus on the sanitation politics of India through the experiences and perspectives of NGOs. I provide a comparative ethnography of three NGOs that work on sanitation and elucidate the complex social, historical, and political context in which they operate. The organizations I focus on are trying to influence national level policies and conversations, to create and move within and shape these larger discourses so they can accomplish their goals. I offer a description of a less elucidated part of development—not the vertical relations of development, but the horizontal ones, where NGOs must interact with different institutions—for support, for money, for power, for survival. I delve into the complex ecology of NGOs and the ways in which those relations are produced as a combination of individuals choices and organizational needs and mandates.

All NGOs are caught in that space of negotiating their position in development and political networks. But in this dissertation, I am examining the strategies, challenges, and calculations of organizations who deal with one of the least glamorous, most universal, and perhaps most fraught topics in development: the management of human shit and the bodies who make it. Shit is individual and social, biological and cultural. It is a lived experience and an abstract statistic. It is technical and political and economic. It is a democratically produced environmental pollutant. It is a health menace and a potential economic resource.

In this project, I am exploring the ways in which these different meanings and levels of meanings of shit manifest and operate in a politicized space. I examine the ways in which NGOs interact and take on the different meanings of shit, and what it means for NGOs to work on sanitation in India at a very particular moment in time, where sanitation is not only one of the most visible topics politically, but also one of the most politically contested. This project is a story about organizations making stories—about themselves, about their work, and about shit. It is about taking the private nature of the internal

machinations of organizations and making it public. And it is about how organizations take the private act of sanitation and make it into a public story.

In this Introduction, I first contextualize the discussion by summarizing and outlining the social and scientific literatures which this study draws from, explaining how this project brings together two different and emerging fields of study: anthropology of global health and development and the interdisciplinary body of work on shit and filth. I also describe the complexity of sanitation as a subject, discussing caste, gender, and some of the underlying themes and tensions that underlie this book. I then briefly discuss Swachh Bharat Mission and the party backing it. The next portion of the Introduction introduces my methods and practices, including a brief note about confidentiality and anonymity, especially in regard to my case studies. The section concludes with an outline of the chapters that are to follow.



Figure 1: Modi is sweeping with a bevy of government officials and a few municipal employees in a sweeper colony at the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission. A common photo opportunity during the Swachh Bharat Mission years was for officials or celebrities to be photographed picking up traditional straw brooms and sweeping, a job that historically has been the purview of one of the lower castes (source: Press Information Bureau, photo ID 57537).

Literature and context

This project marks an intersection between two literatures: the anthropology of global health and development and shit studies. In this project, I draw on the anthropology of global health and development and apply it to the specific issue of sanitation. I use shit studies to understand how this particular development areas contains different valences and meanings than others. I specifically describe the meanings of filth in India—not just from a kind of classical perspective, but filth, shit, purity/pollution as a politicized topic that reflects not only cultural notions, but dynamics of power.

Anthropology and global health

Medical anthropology's engagement with global health can be divided into two areas: anthropology *in* global health and anthropology *of* global health.

Anthropology *in* global health, which emerged in the 1950s, predominantly features anthropologists who are a part of the development/global health apparatus. Their focus is usually in the applied field, or with the understanding that someone should apply their work. Anthropologists in this field often work to make particular projects or initiatives more effective or sustainable by understanding the social and cultural systems and beliefs in place. Earlier work in this field tended to focus solely on the cultural "beliefs" of the targeted populations, often examining existing ethnomedical practices and how they may or may not map onto health project goals. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the emergence of the school of thought known as Critical Medical Anthropology (CMA), anthropologists in global health would take into greater account structural and systemic issues that drive health inequalities, such as racism and poverty (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002; Farmer 2001; Singer 1989), and critique narratives which highlight "cultural" practices as primary drivers of health inequalities.

The emergence of CMA as a field of study also brought into relief the notion that Western biomedicine itself is a cultural project and an object of study. The anthropology *of* global health takes inspiration, in part, from this turn. The anthropology of global health turns the anthropological gaze onto the institutions and people who shape global health projects and programs. It is interested in the formations and flows of power and resources as well as delving into the culture of the global health apparatus, recognizing that the people who create global health programming and policy are as bound by cultural and social constraints as the people they study. It recognizes that understanding global

health systems and priorities requires explicit study of those who are implementing them. This subfield is particularly influenced by the anthropology of development.

The anthropology of development is a wide and active subfield of anthropology. In this subfield, “development” is broadly understood, encompassing a massive range of activities, institutions, actors, and sites that contribute to economic development. “As studied by anthropologists, international development entails social processes that are inevitably transnational, intercultural, and multiscalar and involve the interaction and intermediation of extensive actor networks, with different logics and life-worlds” (Mosse 2013:228). The anthropology of development has examined different processes of development from very grounded work to more policy-focused. As a field, much of the work has focused on economic development or the ways in which economics influence and inflect development and neoliberal ideologies permeate the space (Mosse 2013; Bardhan 2012; Elyachar 2005).

There has been a turn, however, in the subfield that has been focusing on development not merely as abstract practices, but as grounded practices of individuals. Anthropology of development, as a field, has shifted from a critique of “the discursive power of development toward the ethnographic treatment of development as a category of practice” (Mosse 2013:227). In recent years, there has been a particular interest in ethnography of development and aid, applying ethnography to the lifeworlds of the people who make up NGOs or who inhabit what Mosse calls “Aidland” (Mosse 2011). Similar to how ethnography is being used again as a tool in understanding politics (Curtis and Spencer 2012), ethnography is being applied to the NGO employees, consultants, aid staff, volunteers, and aid professionals in order to understand the “social and cultural practices of Aidland” (Mosse 2013; Fechter 2012; Fechter and Hindman 2011; Mosse 2011; Stirrat 2008). Examining the politics of international development and the “lifeworlds” of development is being called “aidnography” (Mosse 2013; Kontinen 2004; Mosse 2011). This dissertation is embedded and speaks to this body of literature, using ethnographic techniques to “study up,” or to understand the lifeworlds of the policy and decision

makers in the development process of sanitation. This project is also unique in that it takes a comparative approach in doing so, as I select three different organizations with three very different sets of life rhythms, values, and daily practices that alter how they interact with other organizations.

While my project has been influenced by these works from the anthropology of development, my work has been more informed by the works from the anthropology of global health and concerns with health structures.

The anthropology of global health is a fairly nascent subfield, and most of it focuses on vertical relations in the programs, from targets of development to the implementers of varying levels. Judith Justice's book *Policies, Plans & People* serves as a classic in the genre (Justice 1989) and established the idea of the study of programming as an important element of medical anthropology. Svea Closser's more recent *Chasing Polio in Pakistan* is unique in that it looks at multiple levels of the polio eradication program in Pakistan, from the recipients of the polio vaccination programs to donors in Switzerland (Closser 2010). Her work studies the vertical relations in a particularly prominent and well-funded global health campaign, delving into the social realities for workers and officials at all levels of the chain and pushing beyond the relentlessly optimistic narratives about polio eradication that actors feel obligated to espouse.

This project, however, offers a series of case studies to compare how different sector actors approach what is ostensibly the same subfield. By "actor", I mean not only organizations, but particular individuals who may have a voice in the public discourse. I discuss not only the in-depth lives and experiences of the NGOs, as discussed in the anthropology of development literature, but the horizontal relations of power, how institutional actors create and maintain relations with each other. I am unpacking the connections and ecology of the sector. By "ecology" I do not necessarily refer to the massive body of literature of political ecology (Orr, Lansing, and Dove 2015), but instead use the word as

a metaphor to refer to how different actors relate to each other. While most work in the anthropology of development and the anthropology of global health focuses on relations between actors as vertically oriented (from beneficiaries to donors), I focus on the relations of organizations to each other.

There is a great deal of debate regarding definitions and parameters of the term NGO (see the beginning of Chapter 1 for a greater discussion of this), but in this project I use Vakil's definition: NGOs are "self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people" (Vakil 1997:2060). Vakil includes in his definition the idea that to be an NGO in his definition means that they must be "geared" towards improving the quality of life of people. As this dissertation will illustrate, an organization may tell that narrative about themselves while having another agenda prioritized—for the purposes of this study, the fact that other people consider them to be geared towards improving life quality is enough for me to consider them an NGO as well. Vakil's definition is structural-operational one and is meant to include a wide range of actors while excluding government, media, and corporations. I do explore how NGOs interact with those other institutional actors; their relations with these actors often is vital to their strategy and their survival as NGOs.

A significant part of developing, creating, and maintaining relationships with other actors in the ecology of NGOs involves a substantial amount of work in terms of language, discourse, and performance. Much of the work on that particular area comes from the field of anthropology of development, rather than the anthropology of global health.

In his now-classic work, *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott describes how the state apparatus must render the complex messiness of the world—whether people, cities, or ecologies—into a form that is "legible" to it. To render an object legible usually involves flattening it, often with quantitative measurements, into a form of knowledge that enables the state to "see" the object. This rendering of object legible results in loss of meaning or complexity. Sometimes, this can lead to the destruction of the

object or the inability of the state to carry out its intended goals (Scott 1985). But what this process involves is fundamentally a linguistic and social exercise of translation and transmutation, in which an entity is transformed from a real-life manifestation—which is messy, complex, contradictory, and unwieldy—into forms that are able to be consumed or understood by other entities. In his ethnography of a development project in India, David Mosse highlights the importance of rendering activities and objects of study meaningful from one actor to another, saying that NGOs must “read the meaning of a project into the different institutional languages of its stakeholder supporters, constantly creating interest and making real” (Mosse 2005:9) and “actors in development devote their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events” (Mosse 2005:2).

Ferguson argues that “development” translates what are highly political issues into technical ones, erasing and subverting power struggles into numbers, graphs, projects (Ferguson 1990). In their respective ethnographies, both Li and Englund examine the ways in which political problems become rendered as technical ones, consumable by the broader parlance of international development and expertise (Li 2007; Englund 2006). Bierschenk describes how African elites used the cover of depoliticization to manipulate development programs for their own benefit (Bierschenk 2008).

Projects of translation and narration in a politicized context underlie this dissertation. While some of the actors described—particularly ones that are more easily categorized as “development” actors—do try to render the political into technical language, other actors are quite explicitly political. This dissertation takes a very wide view of who development and sanitation actors are, and, in doing so, encompasses a range of different actors with different narratives. But what the public narrations often are at odds with what the internal dynamics are.

Scott also articulates the duality of these narratives by speaking to the idea that there are public transcripts of development and private transcripts of development (Scott 1992). Mosse built on this idea

in his ethnography of development as well (Mosse 2005). I use the notion of private versus public transcripts of development to help understand public facing versus internal discussions and discourse, but I take this project quite literally. Much of the public transcripts that I am exploring are literal words and documents that are meant to be public.

The exploration of the construction of these narratives as the products of political entities is relatively unexplored in much of development literature. Mosse looked at the production of discourse and policy through the levels of one project (Mosse 2005), but I take a comparative approach, looking at the variation between actors who are all NGOs working on sanitation issues but produce massively different narratives. While there has been a significant amount of work looking at program implementation, what this project instead focuses on is the creation of coherent representations and narratives that are meant to operate on national and international levels.

In a related project, Rob Nixon, a scholar in environmental humanities, is also interested in the production of narratives, specifically in regard to what he calls “slow violence.” Slow violence is a violence that “occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (Nixon 2013:2). Diarrhea, except when it appears in more spectacular epidemics like cholera, is invisible to the public eye, and the intestinal destruction and stunting caused by guts inflamed from the ingestion of fecal matter is invisible to everything but expensive testing techniques. The destruction caused by poor sanitation, like the examples of the environmental pollutants Nixon cites in his book, is a form of slow violence, particularly towards the vulnerable poor. Nixon’s primary project in his book is to discuss and unpack the ways in which activists and authors from the global South wrest compelling narratives from incidents of slow violence. The narratives that he discusses are not meant to be static representational exercises, but living documents that move and push actors and ideologies in a world crowded with gory spectacle: “How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies

whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?” (Nixon 2013: 3). This dissertation looks at the creation of narratives around shit and sanitation as not only exercises in imagination and literature, but as politicized strategic documents meant to render their work legible to a variety of audiences.

As an ethnography of global health, this project is interested in “not whether, but *how* development works” (Mosse 2005:2). I will reiterate Mosse’s claims as well that

[A]s an ethnographic account, the book does not follow the logic of the consultancy report, the donor mission memorandum or the evaluation study. It does not make a judgement about success, does not aim to explain outcomes in terms of design, to prescribe solutions to problems or to conclude with recommendations. In short, it departs from a managerial view...because its interest is in relationships and the unfolding of events (Mosse 2005:x).

This book is not interested in how effective the NGOs’ programming is in the managerial or monitoring and evaluation sense of the word; I do not measure morbidity, mortality, toilets built or meetings held. What I am interested in the way in which development happens as not only a function of a vertically-oriented organizations implementing programs onto a populace, but the ways in which different actors are embedded into an ecology of other NGO actors and the ways in which they have effects on broader discourses and narratives. I am interested in power relations unfolding and unpacking the ways in which the material conditions of organizations and the individuals that make up these organizations interact with other entities and push larger narratives about sanitation, development, and Indianness.

For all that sanitation is an important part of global health, anthropologists of global health have not engaged with sanitation in a significant way. While there are works that discuss waste and sanitation, they are usually not from the perspective of NGOs working in this arena. This project lies at a

relatively unexplored intersection between anthropology of global health and an anthropology of sanitation and shit and contributes to both.

Studies of Discards, Filth, and Shit

This project focuses on organizations that work in the sanitation field of development. Sanitation—the safe management of human fecal waste—is an important part of managing population health and preventing the spread of disease. Fundamentally, however, sanitation is about managing and dealing with human shit, which, like all human universals, has complex social and cultural meanings in both private and public spheres. In spite of this centrality of shitting to human experience, however, the literature on shit is relatively sparse, and coarsely speaking, can be understood in terms of two approaches: biological/technical and humanistic.

In biological/technical approaches, shit is viewed in terms of biological and physical properties. It can be used as a diagnostic tool for health conditions. It is a public health hazard by spreading disease. It is a technical problem in wastewater engineering. Biologically, shit is the waste product of metabolic processes. It is mostly water mixed in with cholesterol, inorganic substances, proteins, dead cells, and indigestible food material like cellulose (Feces | Biology n.d.) in addition to any live bacteria, viruses, or parasites that the person may be carrying. In biological and technical approaches, shit is treated primarily as a biochemical substance, divorcing it from its human meanings.

Humanistic approaches come from a variety of disciplines, such as anthropology, cultural geography, sociology, history, and psychology. They may or may not integrate or respond to biological/technical approaches, but their focus is on shit as it relates to being human in different social, cultural, and historical contexts. Work from more humanistic angles tends to use the word “shit,” as opposed to other synonyms like “feces” or “stool.” “Shit,” from the Latin word for “to separate,” is a

term used by writers and social scientists to refer to the social and lived experience of feces, to render the topic more real and remove the veil of clinical or technical detachment (George 2009).

Understandings of shit can be split into two overall areas: shitting as personal and psychological—a product of individual bodies—and what happens when shit is separated from the body and enters a public space.

Shitting is an intimate bodily act that forces us to contend with our fundamental animal nature. As sociologist Harvey Molotch reflects:

The toilet is a foundational start point where each of us deals directly with our bodies and confronts whatever it provides, often on a schedule not of our own making. The animal in us comes to the fore, and we must accommodate to its tendencies and demands. It is ‘bare life,’ as it surfaces in social existence (Molotch 2010:2).

Inglis refers to the constellation of choreographies around shit as “fecal habitus,” the set of practices around how we take care of this most intimate and urgent of needs (Inglis 2001). Psychologists have suggested that some cultural anxiety around shit comes from the anus’s proximity to the sexual organs (Angyal 1941) or that it is a function of both “core” disgust (i.e., preventing a human from eating another person’s feces), or a function of “animal reminder” disgust, in that it reminds us of our animal nature (Haidt et al. 1997).

In most societies, the fecal habitus of the healthy, slim, able-bodied male is considered the norm (Greed 2010), with any others considered deviant or incorrect. These assumptions are often built into architectures of restrooms that fail to accommodate a range of bodies and needs (Barcan 2010; Greed 2010; Serlin 2010). Barcan postulates that this disgust of the castings off of the body is a result of consumer culture, which stigmatizes anybody that is not tight and hairless, or “sealed off” (Barcan 2010). Marginalizing the fecal habitus of marginalized groups increases their marginalization as they

often buy into hegemonic notions of what a “correct” body and fecal habitus is (Pickering, Neale, and Nettleton 2013; Weinberg and Williams 2005). However, studies of fecal habitus and shitting are limited and are often limited to Western developed contexts (Kira 1976; Inglis 2001; Barcan 2010; Serlin 2010; Pickering, Neale, and Nettleton 2013). Exceptions include work from a public health angle from Coffey and Spears (Coffey and Spears 2017; Coffey et al. 2014) and from a cultural geographer’s angle, Kathleen O’Reilly (O’Reilly 2010).

Once it is out of our body and out of our house, our waste and our relationship to it is “transformed” (Hawkins 2006: 46). It becomes a public substance and a public problem; it moves from a realm of the private to the realm of the social, and in doing so, blurs the lines between the two. The management of the shit and shitting bodies of people is when shit moves from a private act into a public one. As journalist Rose George wrote, “the irony of defecation is that it is a solitary business yet its repercussions are plural and public” (George 2009:179).

Earlier social science that has discussed shit as a social or public element has focused on shit’s role in rituals or witchcraft (Kira 1976; Bourke 1968; Douglas 1966; Barrett 2008). The 1891 text *The Scatologic Rights of All Nations* by John G. Bourke is a key example of early work focused on shit. It is compiled somewhat as a catalog of oddities, combining his firsthand observation with testimonials from other scientists and travelers. The first sentence of the preface attests to the same sort of tension most shit studies scholars feel obligated to address today:

The subject of scatologic or stercoaceous rites and practices, however repellent it may be under some of its aspects, is none the less deserving of the profoundest consideration,—if for no other reason than that from the formal (Angyal 1941) dissemination of such aberrations of the intellect, as well as of the religious impulses of the human race, and their present curtailment or

restriction, the progress of humanity upward and onward may best be measured (Bourke 1968:1).

Bourke begins his book by stating while yes, shit is repellant, it is also important to study. His view on the subject is very much couched in terms of 19th century ideas of progress, that these are the rituals of “primitive” cultures. But modern scholars of shit often find themselves feeling obligated to state this as well, to state that yes, it is gross, but it is an important topic. The book goes on to describe a litany of rituals and practices from different cultures and time periods that involve shit and urine, from the use of feces in medicine to the “urine dance of the Zunis” (Bourke 1968). Shit and feces often make brief mentions in works that focus on witchcraft or religious ritual, as describing how concerns with harvesting of feces for witchcraft of the people of the Taita Hills of Kenya made them more reluctant to adopt latrines (Smith 2009) or describing how certain religious figures would consume feces as a form of ingesting ritual pollution (Barrett 2008). In these kinds of works, shit is a powerful and polluting substance in the religious and ritual space—potent and dangerous.

However, a series of scholars including anthropologists, cultural geographers, and historians have studied sanitation as a means to understand morality, gender relations, social anxieties, power relations, and the role of the state; in other words, as an entrance point to understand broad social, political, and cultural movements. Shit and sanitation are important not just for their ritual properties, which usually refers to relatively small amounts of shit. Like water, large amounts of shit and sewage⁷ have flows and can reveal flows of power.

For example, the French philosopher Dominique LaPorte in his 1978 book *The history of shit* tackles the lines between public and private and how they are navigated and negotiated through

⁷ “Sewage” or “black water” refers to wastewater, which, in addition to human metabolic wastes, may include a range of other substances, such as cleaners, industrial toxins, and garbage. Sewage refers to the wastewater flow from when the substances enter a waterborne waste treatment system.

shit/sewage. When shit becomes public, it becomes sewage. Who is responsible for the sewage speaks to profound configurations of self, body, capitalism and state. "Surely, the State is the sewer," he wrote, gesturing to the ways in which the State manages the waste of a society and the invisibility with which the State carries this out (Laporte 2002). Foucault tackled similar ideas when he described the ways in which actors exert "biopower" over bodies to subjugate and control populations and peoples (Foucault 2012a).

To control defecation and feces is to control bodies and a population. In Hoy's work about America's development of cleanliness and hygiene norms, she traces the way in which anxieties about women being in public and their roles as caretakers of private cleanliness and home paralleled their entrance into workforce (Hoy 1996). Anderson describes the innumerable ways in which America used language of hygiene and cleanliness in their subjugation of Filipinos during the Colonial occupation (Warwick Anderson 2006). In a more modern example, Briggs and Mantini-Briggs describe the ways in which narratives of filth and pathogenic bodies entwined with racist beliefs and power dynamics and a cholera outbreak in Venezuela (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002). In all of these examples, discourses of morality, racism, gender, and political hierarchies manifest as discourses on filth, disease, shit, and hygiene. A great deal of similar work has focused on South Asia, which will be discussed shortly.

In many of these discussions, there are "correct" bodies and "incorrect bodies." The correct body is sealed and disciplined. It has been elevated away from or sealed from the animalistic nature of bodies. Those in power have correct bodies, and those below them have incorrect bodies or bodily praxes that must be altered, often through brutal means. This process of change is framed morally, as a form of salvation, or in terms of civilizing, such as what Anderson describes in the American colonization of the Filipinos: "Ideally, then the colonizing process would resemble a civilizing process a training of childlike Filipinos in the correct techniques of the body, rationalized as hygiene" (Warwick Anderson

2006:106). These practices may also be framed as means of preventing the spread of disease (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002; Warwick Anderson 2006).

Many of the examples discussed in the literature have focused on the relationship between governments or state apparatuses (of different scales) and populations. In this book, however, I examine the nonstate and nongovernmental actors. They too, engage in these same politics of power and body and filth with varying degrees of power or success. But I do engage with government and state discourses, since most NGOs in India are defined in great part by their relations to the government. One of the interesting themes or ideas to trace is the ways in which these NGOs, which aim to improve the lives of the marginalized, can mirror the same power discourses as oppressive states.

People's relationship with shit is entwined with the relationship to the bodies and the humanity of others. The shit that is most disgusting, the shitting that is considered most problematic is a way to articulate anxiety and disgust around Others—women, homosexuals, people with disabilities, the elderly, other classes, other races, other castes, other nationalities. Many sanitary technologies are concerned with “sealing off” shit and shitting bodies—sometimes sealing our shit off from ourselves, as with defecating in water, which prevents odor from reaching us—or sealing away problematic bodies, such as sewer technologies that prevent the spread of waste of Others.

Many of the other discussions of shit are embedded into larger discussions about the human emotion of disgust and social concepts of filth or pollution/purity.

Some early authors on the subject have called human shit a universal disgust elicitor (Angyal 1941). Disgust as a human emotion, like shit, has not been studied in nearly as much depth as other human emotions, but the varied literature can be roughly divided into two categories: biological and social. Biological models contest that repulsion or disgust is a human universal, a biologically innate adaptation to avoid dangerous and pathogenic substances (Case, Repacholi, and Stevenson 2006; Curtis,

de Barra, and Aunger 2011; Darwin 1965; Fessler and Navarrete 2003; Prokop, Usak, and Fančovičová 2010). Social models contest that that which is considered “dirt”, polluting, or disgusting is a cultural construction, unique to a particular context and a central organizing feature of a society’s values (Cohen and Johnson 2004; Douglas 1966; Dumont 1981; Miller 1998; Van der Geest 1998). One of the classic models of this is Mary Douglas’s structural approach, in which dirt is defined as “matter out of place”—or anything which is outside a given system or schema. Disgust is on the far end of the spectrum of reactions to dirt (Douglas 1966).

Human shit is disgusting in the biological model, as it has great capacity to cause harm, and in most sociocultural contexts. *Why* it is disgusting and to what degree is ultimately contingent on a range of factors that are specific to particular contexts and people. Human aversion to shit is probably some combination of biological and cultural factors that future work is needed to untangle and parse. This project, however, instead focuses on shit not as much as eliciting disgust from or being a polluting topic for an individual, but as a topic of public and social discourse.

In this way, this project is part of a loosely assembled field of study called discard studies. Beyond examining questions like why do people do or do not recycle, discard studies is concerned with larger systems of power and meaning and the circulations of waste globally (Reno 2015; Libiron 2018). It examines “the productive afterlife of waste—its impact on and significance for humans and nonhumans” (Reno 2015:558). It takes inspiration from some scholarship of infrastructure studies and views waste and discards as another aspect of the hidden aspects of everyday life (Larkin 2013).⁸ Many of the scholars who align with discard studies take infrastructures of waste as their primary object of

⁸ Infrastructure studies is another body of literature that is adjacent to this work, but one which I do not significantly engage with. Infrastructure studies are more grounded and based on material realities (Larkin 2013; Star 1999; Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015; Chakrabarty 1992; Gandy 2014; Nikhil Anand 2015); my work focuses on more discursive and policy levels. While infrastructure is at the heart of the discussions I examine, infrastructure itself as a material entity woven into geographical spaces is largely divorced from this.

study, such as examining the “urban sanitation imaginary” in Argentina (Morales, Harris, and Öberg 2014) or decentralized wastewater treatment in India (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018; Alley, Barr, and Mehta 2018). Most discard studies have focused on garbage or solid waste, but scholars also examine nuclear waste, industrial waste, people as waste, and other topics that broadly fit into the notion of “discards” (Nagle 2014; Barnes and Barnes 2006; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Auyero and Swistun 2009; Alley 1992; Arnold 2016; Arnold 1993; Reno 2015; Libiron 2018; Hawkins 2006; Bullard 2000; Hoy 1996; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009; Spears 2014; Das and Unnithan-Kumar 2000; Davis 2007; Petryna 2013).

Like most of the work in discard studies, this project is more concerned with shit as a political and social substance than a religious one. However, unlike in many of the discard studies work that I have cited, I am more interested in shit as an *idea* in the political discourse, rather than a material reality (Appadurai 2001; Robins 2014). In the discard studies literature, however, shit is particularly unique. It is, for example, a uniquely democratic pollutant in that everyone produces it. It is also a ‘natural’ discard in that it comes from the body. And because it comes from the body, the act of shitting is an intimate “technique of the self” (Hawkins 2006:54). This means that even as I engage with shit as a political substance, I continue to consider the intimate and universal nature of it.

Many studies on shit have focused on South Asia. The above section was intended to give a broader overview—and, like the literature—tended towards Western European countries and the US. In the following section, I more specifically discuss shit in India, and the long legacy of the meanings of filth and associated topics in scholarship about India.

Filth in India

From Colonial preoccupations of filth of the subcontinent to purity/pollution and caste, shit, purity, pollution and filth have long been prominent lenses through which India has been viewed. In starting with a broader geographical lens, however, I wanted to highlight that these dynamics are not solely limited to India and its caste system. Concerns with shit and shitting bodies have organized and influenced social, cultural, and political arrangements in every country; India is not the only culture that has both biomedical and non-biomedical systems of being disgusted, in spite of discussions and work that claims otherwise (Coffey and Spears 2017). However, there are several aspects that are unique to the South Asian context. Briefly, I will outline the association of filth/shit and colonialism, notions of purity/pollution, and caste.

Colonialism and Filth

Several scholars have tackled the role of filth and sanitation during the Colonial period. Chakrabarty explores this in-depth, quoting from 19th century accounts, such as MA Sherring's account of his visit to Banaras in 1868, in which he described Banaras in terms of its "foul wells and tanks," "deadly" water breeding cholera and fever, "loathsome and disgusting state" of the temples, and the "stagnant cesspools, accumulated refuse and dead bodies of animals" in the "narrow streets" (Chakrabarty 1992:541). Chakrabarty emphasizes how the British had a particular way of seeing, how Indian sense of space and order violated their own and was then rendered to be filthy, pathogenic and dangerous in their accounts. This was in part propagated by the strong associations of India and cholera, a disease that killed far more British people than Indians did.

In Bauman's studies of Christian missionaries in India during the 19th century, he articulates the ways in which altering the bodily practices of the natives—their clothes, their hair, their cleanliness—in

combination with their medicine as a form of proselytizing, of “civilizing” the unkempt primitive populations (Bauman 2008). Tolen describes similar practices and beliefs among the Salvation Army (Tolen 1991). Mann relates how in Delhi, after the 1857 Uprising, after Delhi had been razed to the ground by British forces, when the British rebuilt the city, owing in part to their own fears and anxieties about keeping Indians and British separate, they kept even the water and sewerage separate (Mann 2007a:15). This was erected as fear of the Indian as violence and the Indian bodies and landscapes as pathogenic and carrying cholera and disease.

Mann also describes how, in the debates over how the British would rebuilt Delhi, the discussions of the appropriate technology were couched in terms of “cultural differences”: “Emphasizing the cultural differences, it was pointed out in 1858 that water closets would be a totally new thing to Indians and, therefore, they would not like it” (Mann 2007a:13). The notion of people rejecting sanitation interventions as a function of cultural conservatism and distaste carries into modern conversations. Modern discussions in public health and policy circles often focus not on designing technologies that fit the population, but on how a kind of perceived monolithic Indian “culture” (which is colored by Orientalist views of India as filthy) will result in the rejection of modern cleanliness technologies.

In this dissertation, I borrow lenses and lessons from these historical studies, examining how many of the modern power structures produce narratives that echo these colonial ones. But instead of leaving these discourses as reflecting primarily power and racial inequalities, I view these narrative productions as also being informed by pragmatic and political realities of these organizations. Additionally, and similar to responses to global health development critiques, I try to recognize that many people are actively trying to address what they see as disasters of health and human rights. By examining Indian NGOs as well, I challenge the way in which the filth/cleanliness binary is usually

portrayed as a foreign/Indian one, examining how different classes and castes of Indians also create and manipulate these discourses.

Table 1: A brief sidebar describing manual scavenging, which will become an important topic in this dissertation.

Manual scavenging

According to The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, a “manual scavenger” is anyone who is employed in cleaning, handling, or disposing of human fecal waste before it is safely decomposed (Baruah 2014). This can occur in dry latrines, sewerage and septic tanks, open drains, railways, public restrooms, and sites of open defecation. The ‘traditional’ mode of manual scavenging is women cleaning out dry latrines, but the 2013 law and most activists recognize the wider range of activities to be manual scavenging. This work puts the people doing it at severe health risks from exposure to feces and hazardous work environments. Manual scavengers may be employed by NGOs, municipal bodies, government ministries, or private bodies. Often times, culpability is obscured by hiring them through one or a series of contractors and subcontractors (Singh 2014; Gita 2011).

This practice is most commonly recognized as an issue in South Asian countries because of the way it is associated with caste discrimination. Those who are employed to be manual scavengers historically have been predominantly from Dalit castes. They are considered to be ritually polluted by birth and unfit to do any other labor, and society relegates the handling of shit and waste to these groups (Gita 2011; Singh 2014; Sagar 2017). Currently, Dalits seem to dominate in manual scavenging, but migrants (particularly from poorer parts of India) doing this work is also quite common. There is a severe lack of solid data around the issue, however, meaning that exact numbers of manual scavengers are uncertain (Barr 2017).

Purity, pollution and caste

One of the main ways in which filth and cleanliness has dominated the discussions around India is through the scholarship on caste. “Caste” is a term of European origin that describes “the social groupings that many South Asians recognize as distinguishing different kinds of human beings from others” (Mines and Lamb 2010:145). These rankings are hierarchical, but these hierarchies are complex and often contingent on time and place. Rankings are often associated with relative purity and power in a given community or context. Caste groups are endogamous and often dictate the community of people in which individuals and family units interact with. Traditionally, those who are higher castes may avoid eating or interacting with those of lower castes (Mines and Lamb 2010:145; Dumont 1981). Names are often associated with caste, and it is common for people to infer caste status from last names. It is a form of classifying people and understanding one’s own identity and the identities of others. Fundamentally, caste is a hierarchically organized “modality of interrelating to others” (Mines 2005:16). Ambedkar, a historically important legal scholar and Dalit activist, describes the caste system as an “ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt” (Ambedkar qtd. in Roy 2014:24; see Table 3 for a description of Ambedkar).

Purity and pollution in these discussions are associated not only with caste, but also in regards to everyday life, to religious practices, to environments (Barrett 2008; Alley 1992; Dumont 1981; Chakrabarti 2015; Mines 2005; Mines and Lamb 2010)—“purity and pollution” is a phrase that often encompasses a wide range of nonbiotechnical assessments of substances that should generally be avoided. Assessments of that which is pure and that which is polluted may or may not line up with biological or technical assessments. Human shit, for example, is polluting in both the biological sense and in the ritual sense, but cow dung is biologically polluting and ritually purifying. Alley delves into this in great depth in her seminal work examining these contrasting and conflicted notions of cleanliness in the Ganga River (Alley 1992), and Chakrabarti examines similar issues in the Colonial context

(Chakrabarti 2015). These works delve into how purity and pollution are understood and lived, how they are constructed through religious perspectives, through casteist practices, and through political and ecologic factors.

The Sanskrit word *jati* is the more common translation and refers to very specific caste groupings. There are also groupings called *varna*, which are much broader categories. One's *jati* is a part of a *varna* group, but there is not standard practice across the subcontinent about which *jati* belongs to each *varna*. There are thousands and thousands of *jatis*, of castes and subcastes. *Jati* are considered the "actual social units" of life, or "Jati can be regarded as the empirical manifestations of caste and the level at which occupational diversification, endogamy, and purity and pollution rites are actually performed" (Vaid 2014:393). *Varna*, on the other hand, is more associated with scripture and religion (Vaid 2014:394). Some believe that *varna* groups are derived from the Sanskrit text the Manusmriti, which suggests that the four *varnas* come from the body of the original divine being, Brahma. There are four *varnas*: Brahmins (priests and doctors), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (business men) and Shudras (lowest, artisans and manual laborers). *Jati* and caste are often associated with hereditary occupations. While there is some evidence for occupational mobility in more modern times, there is also a great deal of intergenerational continuity (Vaid 2014:397), which shows in the way in which the wealthiest and most powerful individuals are usually upper caste (Ambedkar and Roy 2014).⁹

There is a fifth group who are not a part of the four *varnas* and supposedly do not come from the divine body at all, and thus are considered subhuman. This group is often referred to as "Untouchables." "Untouchables"—often called Dalits or Scheduled Castes (see Table 2 for a discussion of the terms)—are the lowest of the caste groups and are considered impure and polluting. They are

⁹ In a majority of this book, I will use the word "caste," mostly using it to refer to *jati*, not *varna*. This is usually because this is the language with which my informants spoke to me about the topic and probably the most common word used in policy discourse.

excluded from performing ritual activities (Vaid 2014) and are ‘supposed’ to do the most ritually polluting jobs, such as leather work, sweeping, or any sanitation work (Omvedt 2006; Omvedt 1994; Roy 2017; Pawar 2009; Jaffrelot 2005; Prashad 2001a; Shah et al. 2006; Doron and Jeffrey 2018; Lynch 1969).

The term “Untouchable” refers to the way in which people in this community are excluded from social life and are considered so polluting that they should not be interacted with. Those who belong to this category are systematically discriminated against and stigmatized in Indian society in a range of structural ways, and people from this community are often systematically excluded from positions of power, wealth, and prestige. As activists have pointed out, Dalits can be at significant risk for often singularly brutal violence should they be perceived by others as challenging the caste order. Roy writes that

Each region of India has lovingly perfected its own unique version of caste-based cruelty, based on an unwritten code that is much worse than the Jim Crow laws. In addition to being forced to live in segregated settlements, Untouchables were not allowed to use the public roads that privileged castes used, they were not allowed to drink from common wells, they were not allowed into Hindu temples, they were not allowed into privileged-caste schools, they were not permitted to cover their upper bodies, they were only allowed to wear certain kinds of clothes and certain kinds of jewelry (Roy 2014:24).

While Untouchability and the trappings of it have been illegal since Indian Independence in 1947, many of these practices still exist today. Even when outward violence or stigma is not being enacted, Dalits continue to be underrepresented in politics, business, education, and other spaces of power.

Table 2: A brief description of the terms “Untouchable” and “Dalit,” and notes on how they will be used in this dissertation.

A note on terms

“Untouchable” is probably the most widely understood of the synonyms for the lowest of the caste groups. Headlines in non-Indian newspapers are most likely to use the word “Untouchable” (McCarthy 2016; Dhillon 2018); it is English, and it is highly evocative of the kind of social stigma this group undergoes. It specifically refers to the aspect in which those of upper castes are considered so polluting that they may not even touch others. Dr. Ambedkar used to use the word as a way to look unflinchingly at the problem. Sulabh International, one of the NGO case studies of this book, also commonly uses it—perhaps to be more legible to a larger audience, or perhaps as an artifact of an older discourse. However, it is infrequently used in Indian discourse and media coverage.

“Dalit” is one of the more accepted terms in current modern political discourse. One writer pens that “Dalits, used in a similar manner as ‘Blacks’ in the US, has been used by the community as a symbolic reassertion of identity and struggle against an oppressive, caste-ridden society.” The word is traceable to the reformer Jyotirao Phule in the 1930s (Gulati 2018). In the 1970s, it began to acquire a political and militant meaning, especially with the formation of the group the Dalit Panthers (Gulati 2018).

Scheduled Caste (SC) is a governmental category first established in 1935 as a subcategory of the British category of “depressed classes,” which encompassed not only the “Untouchables” but also tribal groups (Viswanath 2012). It is the term that is used in policy and governmental discourse.

However, as scholar Rupa Viswanath points out, “SC” and “Dalit”, while seemingly interchangeable, actually excludes a significant group of people. The governmental term SC explicitly excludes Dalits who have converted to Christianity or Islam, only recognizing Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. This exclusion means that Dalits who had converted away from Hinduism would not receive reservations, special services, or protection under the 1989 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Prevention of

Atrocities Act (Viswanath 2012), which increases the consequences of crimes committed under this act and provides resources for rehabilitation for victims.

The word “*harijan*” appears occasionally in the discourse but is considered out of date and offensive.

“*Harijan*” means “children of God” and was famously coined by Mohandas Gandhi, but it has been criticized for being overly euphemistic (Guha 2017). The term is considered condescending now, although it can be found in some of the writings of people who consider themselves devout followers of Gandhi.

In this book, I am fluid in my usage, usually mirroring the language of whoever I am speaking about or matching the language to meet the particular discussion. However, I tend to veer towards using the word “*Dalit*,” as this is a self-chosen term.

Caste is an important and vital lens with which to understand view the social and political lives of people in India. Historically, social science scholarship on South Asia has been dominated almost exclusively by work on caste. In his 1986 article “Theory in anthropology: center and periphery,” Appadurai wrote that in studies of South Asia, caste is a “gatekeeping concept”: concepts “that seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question, and that define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region” (Appadurai 1986a:357). How scholars have viewed caste, however, has shifted in very key ways.

Early work on caste was influenced by structuralist approaches and was based more on textual readings and abstractions than ethnographic work. The French sociologist Louis Dumont published the seminal work *Homo hierarchicus: the caste system and its implications* in 1966. Inspired by other structuralists, he portrays caste as a static hierarchy that is primarily organized around the notion of purity versus impurity. Like most structuralists, he believed in looking past lived experiences and

perceptions of caste to intuit a system or whole. To Dumont, purity and pollution were the primary organizers of the caste system. Many later scholars of caste have used Dumont in particular as a jumping-off point, usually in a critical way, saying that Dumont only used selective sources, privileged religious and Brahminical perspectives, echoed Orientalist viewpoints, and ignored economic and political implications of caste (Reddy 2016; Appadurai 1986b; Quigley 1993).

Mirroring debates in the social sciences at large at the time, there were also more material perspectives that focused on caste's occupational and economic implications. For example, Marvin Harris's classic essay asserts that cows are sacred in Hinduism because they are materially and economically beneficial to the populace (Harris 1978). In regards to caste, materialists such as Joan Mencher and Owen Lynch argued that caste, and more particularly the *jajmani* system of hereditary caste-based occupation, was based on economic structures and necessity (Lynch 1969; Mencher 1974).

Relatively concurrent, however, there were scholars who pioneered more ethnographic approaches (Marriott 1958; Srinivas 1952). Srinivas, most notably, introduced the idea of Sanskritization, in which particular caste groups adopt the practices of higher castes and thus functionally elevate themselves (Srinivas 1952). His work helped to introduce the idea of mobility into the system, one which perspectives like Dumont's do not account for.

More modern work on caste has fractured and splintered into a range of different studies that examine how caste intersects with caste, race, genetics, colonialism, labor markets, and ethnicity (Reddy 2016). As such, they introduced notions of power, gender, politics, and caste mobility into their narratives. They contextualize caste relations in terms of power and economics and speak to the flexibility and fluidity of caste with other power interactions (Dirks 2011; Omvedt 2006; Vaid 2014; Apffel 1977; Mines 2005; Srinivas 1952; Lynch 1969). This later scholarship, in particular, focuses on the

idea that caste is inflected by political and material factors, and is not solely based on religion or purity and pollution.

NGOs are beginning to look at caste again in the context of sanitation, thanks in great part to work done by Diane Coffey and Dean Spears and the r.i.c.e. institute (the research institute for compassionate economics)¹⁰. In their works (and particularly in their book), based on surveys done in rural areas about sanitation habits and needs, they argue that the reason that India's sanitation problem is so seemingly intractable is that Indian preoccupations with caste and ritual impurity means they will not use toilets, even if they are constructed (Coffey and Spears 2017; Coffey et al. 2014). In Coffey's and Spears's characterization of caste and purity, caste is static, and the notion of purity and pollution dominates the understanding, an echo of Dumont. Such a narrative about caste, however, fails to take into account the way in which understandings of caste and purity have changed and how purity and pollution are not necessarily the primary drivers of individual actions. Indeed, this perception not only echoes Dumont's notions of caste as being entirely dominated by purity/pollution hierarchies but echoes colonial perceptions that toilet technologies would be rejected by Indians as a function of their "culture" (Prashad 2001b).

This argument is convincing to some people in the NGO space, but not to others¹¹. Part of the work of this ethnography, which is explored in Chapter 5 of this book, is to look at caste not just as a life practice, but as a vital narrative device and myth that some of the practitioners of development create

¹⁰ The r.i.c.e. institute is a small nonprofit research organization based in India. They have conducted large surveys and studies that examine sanitation and child height. Their work has been influential, and they are unique in having a high reputation for solid research work.

¹¹ Other people find other factors far more salient in determining latrine usage, such as such as poverty, class, power dynamics, gender (O'Reilly 2010; O'Reilly, Dhanju, and Goel 2017; O'Reilly and Louis 2014) relationship with community leaders (Researchers Investigate Sanitation Facility Use in Indian Slums 2019), lack of access (Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015; Biran et al. 2011), and the filth of latrines (Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015). Emerging work on wastewater reuse also complicates the picture, suggesting that institutional configurations and cost are more significant drivers (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018). However, this is a matter of some debate, and Coffey's and Spears's argument has gained significant traction, particularly among international practitioners.

about the people who are targets of development. I am less interested in caste as a concept that changes how people live, but as an object of discourse. Caste and attached notions of purity/pollution are important parts of how many of the decision makers and professionals studied in this work discuss sanitation. Or, what is equally important to note, is when these discourses are noticeably absent. I trace caste practices not only as a part of lived life in these urban settings, but as objects of contested discourse. While I acknowledge that purity and pollution and caste are important elements that underlie sanitation, I do not use them as the primary lens. Instead, I view it as *a* lens, to be added to the many other dimensions of Indian life. Like in Alley's work, purity and pollution are common themes, but they are mutable and changeable in response to the needs and political realities of stakeholders (Alley 2002).

But caste is also important in that it inflects the lived realities of the people I study. My work borrows from many of the more modern scholars who take more of an ethnographic approach to caste, viewing it as it is lived, spoken about, and perceived (Kapur, Choudhury, and Srinivas 2017; Channa 2005; Channa and Mencher 2013; Vaid 2014; Gupta 2000; Kapur et al. 2010; Doron and Jeffrey 2018).

Table 3 A brief description of Gandhi, Ambedkar, and their respective views on caste.

Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Untouchables

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) is known globally as a leader of the Indian Independence movement and an advocate for nonviolent civil disobedience as a means of protest. He has been globally venerated as a leader in human rights and continues to be a key public figure in public discourse in India. There is no city without a Gandhi *Marg* (street). His birthday is a national holiday. And his image adorns all of the rupee bills. He is a source of pride and is sometimes called the father of the nation.

However, Gandhi's attitudes towards Untouchables and Dalits have been criticized and vigorously debated. In her sharp and incisive forward to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, Arundhati Roy argues that Gandhi was a supporter of the caste system and is the "Saint of the Status Quo" (Roy 2014:40). In her reading, Gandhi believed that caste is a vital part of Indian social organization. He wished to dismiss the hierarchy, but Gandhi was not an advocate for the political organization of Dalits or the dismissal of the caste system from India. He told manual scavengers that their work is noble and that they should not aspire beyond it, calling the work of cleaning human waste sacred (Roy 2014:101). In his own actions, he reportedly practiced elements of Untouchability, such as not eating food prepared by people from the scavenger community (Ambedkar and Roy 2014). This reading has been fiercely debated, most prominently by Rajmohan Gandhi, Gandhi's grandson (Gandhi 2015a; Gandhi 2015b; Oza 2015; Roy 2015). However, setting aside the actuality of Gandhi's thoughts and beliefs, Gandhi as a symbol has a contested and ambiguous relationship with Dalits and manual scavengers who see his opinions as being in line with the hegemonic and oppressive powers.

Less known outside of India and less celebrated inside of the country is Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956), an Indian lawyer, jurist, politician and activist who wrote the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar comes from an Untouchable caste and is considered one of the most important Dalit activists and thinkers. He was a key figure in the Independence movement and in the establishment of the new nation, and his relationship with Gandhi was contested throughout their lives. Ambedkar was a vocal critic of Hinduism, saying that "To the Untouchables, Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors." He sought an "annihilation" of caste, for humanism and law to dominate social organization. He frequently directly confronted and challenged Gandhi on his perspectives on caste. He himself would convert to Buddhism, to the horror of Hindu leaders. (For more work on Ambedkar, see (Omvedt 1994; Omvedt 2003; Ambedkar and Roy 2014).

These two figures are powerful in Indian memory and in political discourse. While both are dead, they continue to be active and living symbols in the political discourse and the meanings of their lives and legacies continue to be debated, shaped, and reshaped.

Women, purity, and pollution

In May of 2014, two teenage girls in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, went out to the field in the night, supposedly to relieve themselves. They were gang raped and found hanging from a mango tree the next morning. The Badaun Rapes, as they came to be known in media shorthand, were vivid and horrifying. The event attracted international attention, with different actors wrestling over the meanings of the event. News reports began to focus on the fact that these girls were ostensibly going outside to relieve themselves, and this act of gendered violence suddenly became about sanitation. Sulabh International, one of the NGOs that was studied for this work, “adopted” the village and built toilets for everyone in the village. Other NGOs and outlets used this incident to underline how sanitation and women’s safety are entwined and that sanitation is important (Dash 2014; Jitendra 2015). Throughout media coverage of sanitation and the conversations around it, people continually refer to the importance of sanitation in protecting the safety and dignity of women.

In many communities and cultures globally, women’s bodies are a point of contention and conflict. They become repositories of family honor and purity, meaning that their bodies are closely patrolled and guarded. In many cases, men are expected to control the women of their families (Wadley 2002; Mandelbaum 1998). Many families, particularly Muslim and upper-caste Hindus in the north, expect women to practice purdah, keeping their faces veiled and limiting their activities outside of the home (Jacobson 1982; Mehta 1996; Ring 2006). And in terms of their safety in public spaces, women are

expected to limit their mobility rather society or the state apparatus ensuring spaces are safe for them (Phadke 2013).

In sanitation, safety, protection of bodies, and public space intersect. Kathleen O'Reilly has done some of the most important work on sanitation and gender in India, noting that for many women in conservative areas that practice purdah, going out to use the fields to defecate is one of the few times in their day that they are allowed to go outside and socialize with other women (O'Reilly 2010). Other work has examined women's experiences of defecation (Caruso et al. 2015; Caruso et al. 2017; Sahoo et al. 2015). Many campaigns under the SBM banner focused on pressuring people to build toilets to protect their women's dignity.

Most of the other work regarding the confluence of sanitation and gender has focused more on violence. Politically and in media coverage, the idea that women are assaulted while going to defecate in the open is an incredibly common trope. Epidemiological work found that women defecate in the open are twice as likely to face non-partner sexual violence as women with a household toilet (Jadhav, Weitzman, and Smith-Greenaway 2016), but most of the work and data around this issue suffers from the chronic under-reporting of rape and sexual assault. When sanitation and gender intersect in discourse, sanitation is used to bolster patriarchal narratives about how women's bodies need to be protected by men or that the exposure of women's bodies results in a loss of family honor. Conversely, like in the case of Badaun, sanitation ends up dominating what should be a larger conversation about women's safety and gender violence more broadly; the solution to protecting women and girls from assault is not to keep them locked up, including to use the toilet, it is to address the violence. Women and girls should be able to walk around doing anything without threat of violence. Overall, in-depth scholarship work on women and sanitation is relatively sparse.

The work of this project is to not investigate the sanitation habits of women, however, but to understand how these meanings and ideas of gender are lived by and taken up by development professionals. Gender is an integral part of the story of sanitation, and it is woven throughout the book, even if it is not targeted explicitly. For much of this book, gender equals women's issues. Gender becomes an important part of this project primarily in two ways: one, in the ways in which it influences practices in the office and two, in how people construct a notion of gender for the people who they view as needing sanitation and why.

The Government of India and SBM

Much of the lives and work of NGOs is dealing with the government—responding to, assisting, criticizing, avoiding. India prides itself on being the “world's largest democracy,” with a population of 1.2 billion people. As of 2017, India's GDP was 2.06 trillion dollars with a growth rate of approximately 6.7%. It is a massive country, and while the World Bank classifies it as a lower middle income country, it has a lot of capital (India | Data n.d.).¹² India also has a lot of government, with governing bodies at all levels, and a fairly powerful central government, usually called Government of India (GOI). This is in comparison to other countries in which the state apparatus is less present, and NGOs take on many of the state roles and become a kind of “shadow state” (Karim 2011). In India, NGOs are dealing with the government, even if it is by actively avoiding it; while the government may or may not be considered “strong” or effective, they are present in so many parts of people's lives. And any sanitation NGO operating in India during 2014-2017 is responding to, in some way, SBM.

The Swachh Bharat Mission originated as a promise by Prime Minister that India would be clean by the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth, October 2nd, 2019. The cleanliness of SBM extends beyond

¹² This wealth, however, is very unequally distributed (Patnaik 2018).

human fecal waste management. The main metric is declaring all of India open defecation free (ODF), but SBM also claims to address garbage collection, cleaning rivers, cleaning streets, cleaning of monuments, and manual scavenging (at least in the initial launch, but this was later removed). Indeed, many of the most prominent images of the campaign include Modi (or some other official or celebrity) wielding a broom to sweep up garbage.

The program is a massive cross-cutting government initiative that is led and pushed by the central government, but according to constitutional law, water and sanitation are state subjects. The Ministry for Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) leads the program, although they are primarily concerned with the rural aspect. The Ministry of Urban Development (MOUD) handles the urban aspects. Almost all of the other government ministries have been pressured to be a part of it in some form, from considering the importance of *swachhata* (cleanliness) in their own offices and domains to engaging in a *swachhata pakhwada*, or ‘cleanliness fortnight,’ in which employees will clean some part of a city or site. The Ministry of Human Development worked on ensuring toilets in schools. The Ministry of Tourism held workshops to figure out how to make tourist destinations cleaner.

The research of this book was conducted in 2016-2017. I attended Indosan, the government-sponsored exposition meant to celebrate and mark the halfway point to cleanliness. This period in SBM was crucial and revealing. It was long enough after the start of the program for initial excitement and optimism from both the public and the NGO sphere to wear thin. Cracks in the program’s efficacy were showing, from fudged numbers, inaccurate counts, poorly built toilets, corruption, and anecdotes of people being abused by government officials who sought to declare their district ODF, the prime marker of achievement the government uses throughout the campaign (Aiyar and Kapur 2016; Kapur, Choudhury, and Srinivas 2017; Aiyar, Kapur, and Srinivas n.d.; Rajagopal 2017; Jain 2017; Jha 2016; In Desperation, Villagers Turn Washrooms into Storerooms 2017; sbmgramin 2016; HT Correspondent 2016; Sagar 2017).

The government has spent massive amounts of funds and elicited donations from corporations as well. In the 2016-2017 fiscal year alone, the GOI allocation for SBM rural was 9,000 crore rupees, or approximately 1.3 billion USD. (This does not take into account other government funding streams.) (Kapur, Choudhury, and Srinivas 2017). Since October 2014, as of January 2019, the government claims they have constructed over 91 million household toilets (Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) n.d.).

While SBM is a large and prominent governmental sanitation campaign, it is not the Indian government's first one. Previous sanitation drives and programs in the country have included several initiatives under Congress party-led governments, with the most recent ones being the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) and the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan ("Clean India Mission").¹³ Many actors blame a lack of political will on all levels of the government and a lack of focus on education and behavior change in their relative failure to significantly improve India's sanitation (Hueso and Bell 2013).

It is still to be seen whether SBM will be any different in terms of efficacy in accomplishing goals regarding sanitation coverage, although mid-term reports and early indications suggest that SBM will also fall well short of universal sanitation coverage (Sagar 2017; Coffey and Spears 2017; Sen n.d.). In terms of discourse, however, there are a few key differences in the politics of SBM in comparison to previous campaigns: its size, its prominence in the political discourse, and the fact that it arises from the far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People Party).

SBM is highly visible. Between the years of 2014-2017, the GOI alone spent 530 crore rupees (approximately 76 million USD) on advertising the campaign on radio, television, and print (Deep 2017). The campaign is nearly omnipresent, on billboards, in radio ads. When you walk around Delhi, billboards

¹³ Previous GOI campaigns to tackle sanitation have included the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (launched in 1986) and the Total Sanitation Campaign (1999) which was renamed the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan in 2012. Neither of these programs officially "ended," but instead became folded into the current work. They also did they succeed in their goals. They also were mostly based in rural areas. Other programs, such as some of the river cleaning programs, dealt more with the wastewater and urban areas (Alley 2002)

with Modi's face remind you to pick up your trash. It's interwoven throughout government speeches. Dozens of high-profile celebrities have participated, such as movie stars Priyanka Chopra, Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan and Salman Khan and cricket star Sachin Tendulkar. It spawned a Bollywood movie starring star Akshay Kumar, called *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* ("Toilet: A Love Story"). Many NGOs, seeing an opportunity to advance their goals of sanitation, jumped on board. Bill Gates has publicly praised the initiative, and the Gates Foundation has brought a huge amount of money for sanitation work in the country. Large corporations, seeing a way to satisfy their legal obligations to donate a certain percentage of their profits to charitable causes¹⁴ while also currying political and public favor, began toilet construction and cleanup drives. Media continually covers cleanliness. Among the urban elite, professionals, and media, SBM is a common theme.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindutva and Modi

SBM is Modi, and Modi is the BJP. It is vital to ground one's analysis in understanding the BJP to understand why SBM is different than other campaigns and the context of sanitation in India.

The BJP is the political party of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("National Volunteer Organization", RSS), a right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary organization modeled after fascist organizations of Europe. The RSS's founder believed that Nazi Germany had manifested "race pride at its highest" by purging Jews from Europe. RSS believes that India should be for Hindus. The RSS is traditionally dominated by upper-caste Hindus and has led or supported vicious attacks on minorities, particularly Muslims and lower-caste communities (Mishra 2014; Ambedkar and Roy 2014). "The Hindu Right has two arguments: first, the caste system was a working and unoppressive organization of society and, second, the oppressive aspects of the caste system are a consequence of Islamic invasions" (Khair

¹⁴ Corporate Social Responsibility laws, or CSR, requires corporations that make annual revenues of 10 billion rupees or more to give 2% of their net profit to charitable causes.

2015). RSS supports a Hindu nation that speaks Hindi and is ruled by the dominant castes. Most of the BJP politicians and leaders come from RSS backgrounds, and the two are inextricably entwined.

In 2014, the BJP won the national elections and was able to place Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister. BJP's rise to power marks the "banalization of Hindutva," in which it is not a fringe ideology but a political party ostensibly concerned with development, modernization, and the rise of India on the international stage (Jaffrelot 2015a). "Internationally, India is successfully cultivating an image as a country of the future — open to development and investment" (Khair 2015). This image of associating the BJP with development in the 2014 elections was accomplished in great part by placing Narendra Modi as front and center (Jaffrelot 2015a).

Prime Minister Modi is a popular, media-savvy politician who is a lifelong member and organizer in the RSS. From 2001-2014, he served as the mostly very popular chief minister of the western Indian state of Gujarat. During his tenure, Gujarat became known for being a good place to do business, and their GDP soared. This became known as the "Gujarat model," a narrative by which a state can become economically successful. His talks of national pride and promises of development appealed to a wide range of Indian voters, including the middle class, who propelled his party to victory in the 2014 elections:

[Modi] has come to embody the collective longing, especially among India's middle class of 300 million, for an economic rebirth of the nation: after all, under his stewardship, the economy of the state of Gujrat, for which he has been chief minister since 2001, has nearly tripled in size. He also has a reputation for decisiveness, getting things done, rooting out corruption, stimulating investment and slashing through the bureaucratic red tape and outdated, cumbersome regulations (Dalrymple 2014).

However, critics have pointed out that Gujrat's mode of development have done very little to improve education, lessen inequality, improve health outcomes, gender inequality, malnutrition or health (Dalrymple 2014; Devadeep Purohit 2018; Jaffrelot 2015b).

Most concerning to note about Modi's tenure in Gujrat are the 2002 Gujrat riots, in which as many as 2,000 people—mostly Muslim—were slaughtered in the streets and 200,000 more were displaced in a communal bloodbath. Men and women were raped and tortured in the streets for days. Modi has been accused of allowing this to happen; others suggest he helped start the riots by parading bodies of Hindu pilgrims who were killed in a train fire in the streets. Others suggest he actually directly told the police to let rioters continue (Dalrymple 2014; Human Rights Watch 2012). While he has been cleared of Indian courts of wrongdoing, he has never apologized for the riots or expressed horror at them. He refuses to answer questions on the topic (Dalrymple 2014). He has actively blocked whistleblowers from seeking justice for the victims of these riots, including targeting prominent NGOs by revoking their funding licenses. In 2005, he was denied a visa to visit the United States because of his part in these riots (Human Rights Watch 2012).

Under Modi's government, dozens of people—mostly Muslims—have been assaulted and sometimes killed by "cow protection vigilantes" (*gau rakshaks*), who punish people who they view as hurting cattle. Others have perpetuated the narrative that Muslims are marrying nice Hindu girls and forcing them to convert in a "love jihad" (Slater 2018). BJP officials regularly spew hate speech and incendiary statements against Muslims and Dalits. Political organizations and protests by Dalit groups and allies have risen to many of these incidents, and there are debates about what this will mean for the 2019 national elections (Kaushik Deka 2018).

SBM hits on many of BJP's key themes: development, Hinduism and caste concerns (as expressed through cleanliness and purity) and placing India as a leader on the global stage. Some claim

SBM as a brand new program, unlike anything that's happened before. Others claim that it is the same thing as has happened in previous governments. But what SBM marks is a Hindutva-inflected reframing of the kind of governmental program that has happened before.

Important to note for the context of this study is the 2016 Demonetization, which abruptly shifted the economic situation and the unilateral, abrupt move emphasized the unpredictability of this government. On November 8, 2016, about two years after the launch of SBM, Modi abruptly announced that all 500- and 1000-rupee bills would no longer be legal tender, affecting 86% of all currency in circulation in what is primarily a cash economy. Demonetization was like an anvil dropped on the economy. Crop prices dropped. Wages declined. Sales of everything dropped. People lost jobs. People waited for hours in lines at banks and ATMs. People struggled to exchange their notes. Senior citizens collapsed while waiting in long lines for money. Low wage workers went unpaid. Informal sector was particularly hard hit. Lower GDP growth was in part blamed on the drastic measure (Singhal 2018). Stated justifications for the massive decision shifted changed over time: to attack corruption and black money; to make India cashless; to target the "corruption of the privileged"; to force people to put their savings in banks; to combat terrorists; to expand the tax base; to bring down real estate prices; to create a "larger and cleaner" GDP; and to integrate the informal economy into the formal sector (Wire Staff 2017).

This move by the government was well-received by many, who viewed it as a way to tackle corruption. But politically, what it accomplished for Modi was looking like a strong, decisive leader who will make bold moves to tackle problems that affect people. It also made him look more unpredictable and domineering. The narrative about demonetization even integrated with SBM, with Modi saying that demonetization was also a move to "clean India," just like SBM (Express Web Desk 2017).

Demonetization affected all of the NGOs in study, whether from the personal frustrations of dealing with the fallout or, more broadly, by adding to the air of uncertainty around the BJP government: if he could wreck the economy with a single speech, what else could he do?

Sanitation is a deeply fraught topic in India, tying into notions of body, caste, Colonialism, the state, and gender, even in the calmest of times. A small but growing body of social science literature has been focusing on Indian sanitation, examining and unpacking the layers of complexity (Chaplin 1999; Chaplin 2011; O'Reilly 2010; O'Reilly, Dhanju, and Goel 2017; Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015; Arnold 1993; Doron and Jeffrey 2018; Prashad 2001b; Chakrabarti 2015; Chakrabarty 1992; Hueso and Bell 2013; Hueso González 2013; Appadurai 2001). This project, however, is relatively unique in that it focuses on the NGOs and how they are inhabiting a space of development that has historically been dominated by the state.

NGOs must learn to operate in and negotiate with all of these meanings of sanitation. In the political clime of the BJP and with the implementation of SBM, these valences are rendered more salient and urgent by the right-wing policies and rhetoric of the ruling party. As will be discussed in this book, NGOs rely on and respond to the government. This book, therefore, is an ethnography of NGOs working on an ever-present topic but is still very much situated in a particular political moment and clime.

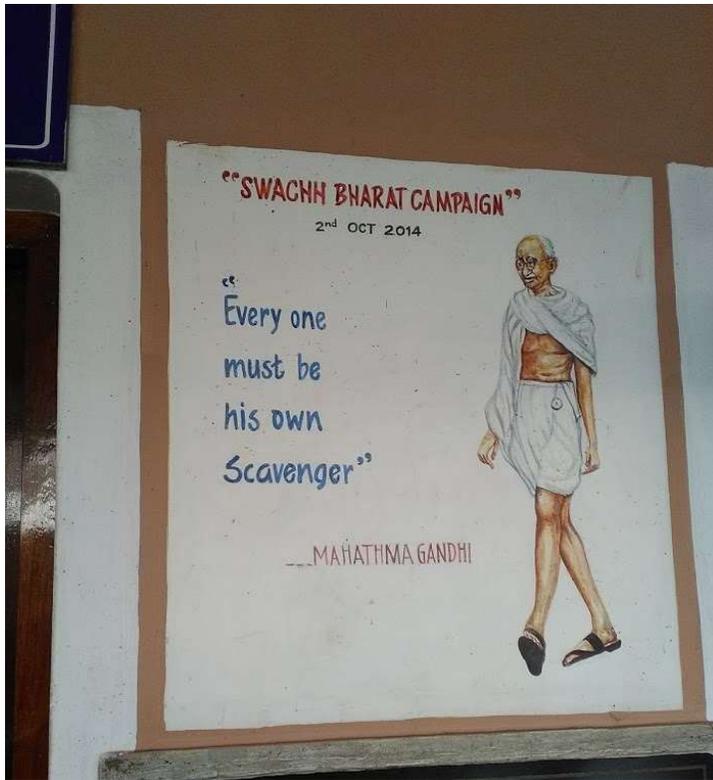


Figure 2: A painting in a railway station in Kozhikode, Kerala, intended to remind patrons of the railway station to pick up their own trash. However, the quote points to Gandhi's controversial and contested relationship with manual scavenging. In Gandhi's perspective, he viewed scavenging as a noble activity that should be venerated. Activists often take issue with this interpretation of scavenging.

Private acts, public stories

Shitting is a private act. In trying to present a veneer of modernity—as defined by a historically and politically produced series of events—it is hidden away and sealed. But shit is a public problem. The tensions of private and public are an undercurrent to this dissertation, a theme that weaves in and out of the larger narrative and the larger questions about how NGOs that work on shit operate in a politicized space.

This dissertation focuses on the actors who are collaborating to create narratives from slow violence that create concrete action in the realm of policy, media, and discourse. Not only are they creating narratives about slow violence, but they are creating narratives about sanitation. They are

public stories about a private act, a private substance. And in creating these narratives about such a private thing, they are also creating narratives about politics, society, gender, caste, and social and political meanings of filth.

And the narratives of the cause—improving sanitation—and the organizations are entwined. Given the disgusting, stigmatized, and ostensibly “taboo” nature of discussing sanitation, organizations deal with this issue risk “contamination”, their organizational reputation contaminated by this topic. The inner workings of organization are another form of private. The grit of day to day life in the office, the strategy meetings, the complex arithmetic of keeping enough funding to keep the lights on and enough political power to matter. Organizations are constantly in a state of producing narratives about themselves and the causes that they engage in. They are talking to people whose ideas they are seeking to change; trying to drum up support amongst a population; seeking donations; asking for grants; looking for access to people of power; seeking political support or “buy in”; creating reports; creating press releases; doing speeches; holding rallies or demonstrations; tweeting reminders about the situation. Every interaction forces the actors to create a narrative, one that both relates to the cause and one that relates to the organization. They are not only creating public stories about sanitation, but public stories about themselves as an organization. Organizations may conceal their own “shit” while rendering visible shit as a topic.¹⁵

¹⁵ This may be seen as analogous to the literature on informality as a mode of governance and urban planning, which also speaks to understanding what is revealed and what is concealed. Work on informality has explored how elites—particular government officials and corporations—intentionally disguise processes around infrastructural projects in order to benefit themselves (Roy 2005; Follmann 2015; Ranganathan 2014; Ranganathan 2018). It suggests that informality is a key “idiom of planning” that is at odds with “governance, justice, and development” (Roy 2009:81). This body of literature is largely distinct from the literature in the anthropology of development that focuses on the informal economy, but instead refers to informality and ambiguity as an integral part of infrastructure and government.

An analogy can be drawn from this to some of the processes of Sulabh International, who navigate similar governmental processes as described in the informality literature. However, as will be clear from Chapter 3, I was not able to delve into these processes in any meaningful way for me to speak to it. The literature on informality speaks to how institutional actors intentionally make systems and processes vague and somewhat ad hoc so that

This project explores the boundaries between public and private. It looks at how permeable those boundaries are and what the relations between public and private are. It explores who or what is private and who or what is made public. It explores when the public and the private do not match, and it explores the flows of information, resources, and power between the two elements. It is about narratives that can render things visible or conceal them and moves between the two. Who or what is allowed to be seen? How is the private rendered public? How is the public narrative created? Who or what is hidden? What are the relations between the two? Who gets to conceal their shit? What is public and what is private when shitting becomes a matter for public discourse and gaze?

Anonymity and confidentiality

The standard practice in ethnography is to change names of interviewees, and I have done this as much as I could. In certain cases, I will obscure even the jobs of the respondent in order to protect their identity. In the cases of certain figures, however, it was difficult to protect confidentiality. Dr.

Bindeshwar Pathak and Mr. Bezwada Wilson, the leaders of two of the NGOs that I study, are each prominent public figures in their own rights. I did inform them that I would not be able to protect their

they can be reconfigured in the most beneficial way to them, which may be seen as analogous to the ways in which NGOs try to remain flexible and may not create bureaucratic systems.

The work on informality focuses on accomplishing particular ends that usually manifest as something material. This project is more about maintaining relations. While the work on informality also discusses relations between institutional actors, it is to accomplish a particular end; in many of the cases in this book, the relations can be the end itself.

This dissertation differs from the informality literature in several key ways. Literature on informality usually focuses on governmental processes, which this dissertation does not delve into in any great depth. Secondly, the literature on informality refers to physical infrastructure. While this project does circulate around physical infrastructure, it is largely absent from this work. Instead, my work focuses on discursive levels that are often detached from physical spaces and planning. Additionally, work on informality is often about obscuring and concealing, and it speaks very little to what is highlighted. Much of this dissertation work is about narrative creation. The work on informality also speaks to projects that operate in a particular physical space; this research works on a far more discursive level.

confidentiality or anonymity, and in both cases, they gave permission for me to attribute their quotes. Other employees at the organizations, however, are disguised. On occasion, I created what is known in creative nonfiction writing as ‘composite characters,’ in which several quotes or aspects are mashed into one attributed person. This is also to protect the people I spoke with and to cloud origins of particular statements.

I do use the actual names of the organizations I discuss. There is no way to disguise who these organizations are without concealing almost everything about the organization. The sector in some ways is large, but in others, it is small. These organizations have been selected for their uniqueness, and the identities of these organizations are immediately evident from even the most cursory of descriptions. I notified the organizations of this when I asked for permission to study them.

I would like to repeat that this project is not an assessment of their efficacy as sanitation organizations—however that might be defined—and is not intended as a monitoring and evaluation report. My studies of the organizations did not contain enough breadth to make assessments as to program efficacy, but instead to understand how they work.

Methods

This project is based on 19 months of fieldwork from 2015 until 2018, spread out over three phases. Exploratory research for this project took place from May to August in 2014. I conducted 19 interviews with professionals representing 15 nongovernmental organizations involved in sanitation work. These interviews were informal. I discussed with them their own backgrounds, what they saw as the key issues in sanitation in India, the key challenges, and what their organizations did. What emerged as the common theme of those interviews and discussions was the perception that sanitation was a neglected

topic, and these stakeholders often struggled to get the attention of the government and the public in pushing sanitation agenda.

In March 2016, I returned to Delhi for fieldwork and returned to the US in April 2017. I spent my 13 months of fieldwork almost entirely in Delhi and the NCR (National Capital Region). Delhi is the capital of India, and as such, is where national policy and discourse is centered. Most NGOs and particularly those with international ties maintain either their primary headquarters there or at least a branch. NGOs that began in one region of the country would often move their headquarters to Delhi when their organizations became national.

In September 2018, I returned to India as an assistant on a National Science Foundation-funded project that examines the institutional factors around decentralized wastewater treatment in India, with site visits in Delhi, Rishikesh, and Bangalore (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018). During this visit, I interviewed water and sanitation advocates in Bangalore and had the opportunity to revisit my case study organizations in Delhi.

My methods can be divided into four parts: media analysis, case studies of three organizations, stakeholder interviews, and participant observation at key events. Work was conducted in both English and Hindi, with a majority of the work in English. Some of this is because my Hindi is only advanced intermediate, but it is also reflective of the fact that English is a key language in this space. English is often the default language for educated Indians, particularly since South Indians tend to learn English, not Hindi, as a second language.

Media analysis

From March 2016 until May 2017, I skimmed the headlines of English language newspapers and news outlets to get a general sense of current events and politics in order to add context to my understanding

of the situation on a daily basis. I frequently used information gleaned from these news skims as prompts in interviews or unstructured interactions.

I also set Google alerts (a service by which Google searches for news stories relevant to the keywords you program in and emails a digest to you in your inbox) for key phrases. Initially, I set alerts for “Swachh Bharat”, “India toilet”, and “India sanitation.” Later in my project, when I realized that my current search was not yielding results about urban sanitation or manual scavenging, I added “India sewage” and “manual scavenging” to the list. Sometimes, too, certain key figures I was interested in (the leaders of the organizations I studied) would appear in the news separate from “sanitation”, and thus I set separate alerts for “Safai Karmachari Andolan”, “Bindeshwar Pathak”, “Bezwada Wilson”, “WaterAid” and “Sulabh.”

I also checked Twitter on a daily basis as I had set up a list of Twitter accounts of government agencies, news agencies, key government officials, NGOs, or key NGO actors. I also did a daily brief check of the government press releases and invitations from pib.nic.in, looking for relevant events or information releases.

Articles, tweets, or press releases gleaned from these examinations that were deemed particularly relevant, interesting, presented a new perspective, covered a particularly important event, or were representative of a common kind of story were selected and saved as a PDF. The collection was not systematic and is only meant to bolster the other analyses and data sets. Approximately 1,500 articles and news items were collected between approximately March 2016 and April 2017. Additional articles outside of this timeframe have been added to the database as relevant to particular issues.

To enhance my media analysis, I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with journalists working on sanitation issues (approximately five semi-structured interviews with three journalists).

Table 4 An outline of the methods used in this dissertation

Media analysis	Context	Observations	Case studies
<p>Google alerts on keywords “Swachh Bharat”, “India toilet”, “India sanitation”, “India sewage”, “manual scavenging”, “Bezwada Wilson”, “Safai Karmachari Andolan”, “WaterAid”, “Sulabh”, and “Bindeshwar Pathak”</p> <p>Skimming of Twitter feeds of key actors</p> <p>Surveying of government press releases</p> <p>Daily skim of news media for media context</p> <p>Interviews with journalists who have covered sanitation or key sanitation actors (5)</p>	<p>45 interviews with number of people representing 37 entities, including NGOs, multilaterals, bilaterals, foundations, and government</p> <p>Surveys of pamphlets, public relations material, outdoor advertising and art</p>	<p>Attendance at 22 events, including conferences, press conferences, government meetings</p> <p>Informal interview with people in attendance</p> <p>Collection of written materials at these events</p>	<p>Three to four months of participant observation at each organization</p> <p>Attendance at key events and meetings</p> <p>Collecting documents, press releases, and other written material</p> <p>Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with staff members</p>

Network interviews

In order to better understand the larger NGO context and the network of NGOs, I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews, representing approximately 37 organizations, spanning small NGOs to major

donors. These interviews helped elucidate the variation in the sector and helped me to understand how different actors understood the case study organizations and SBM overall. I also was able to interview a few government officials and former government officials but accessing national level government officials proved difficult throughout the study.

Observations

I attended approximately 22 conferences, interorganizational meetings, press conferences, and publicity events where I participated, observed, recorded speeches, collected media distributed, and took photos and video as needed to supplement observations. I had several informal interactions with professionals, and frequently made connections that I would later follow up on for interviews. These events included government events, such as a SBM-Gramin (Rural) press question and answer session; NGO-focused events (with some government officials in attendance), such as a civil society meeting meant to coordinate how to achieve SDGs; and public-facing events, such as a street fair meant to promote sanitation and hygiene messaging.

Case studies

My case studies form the core of this project: Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), WaterAid-India, and Sulabh International. I spent three to four months full-time with each of the three organizations, attending the office most weekdays and some weekends at the beginning of the workday and leaving at the end of the workday. At SKA and WaterAid, I had active roles in their office work, writing reports or helping with projects as needed; at Sulabh, they declined my assistance. For each case study, I participated in and observed office life and special events or meetings. I conducted semi-structured interviews and many informal and unstructured interviews with employees or visitors to the offices. I also collected written materials that the organizations produced while I was there, including reports, press releases, social media outputs, and books. Each organization is radically different, and so my

methods shifted depending on the case study. A more detailed description of how my methods shifted depending on the organization begins each chapter.

Outline of the dissertation

In this Introduction, I have sought to not only explain the central project, the themes, the literature, but, most importantly, the context of NGOs working on sanitation issues in India in 2016-2017. I have reviewed the literature on anthropology of global health and the anthropology of discard studies and filth. I have discussed the context of sanitation in India, the ways in which it is part of a long, complex and fraught story, and discussed SBM's immediate context. I have also introduced what is one of the central lenses or themes of this book, the notion of private acts and public stories and how this book is about exploring those boundaries.

Chapter 1 outlines ways of understanding and categorizing different sanitation actors: not only by their pragmatic attributes, but, perhaps more importantly, their internal and private values and attributes that animate and mobilize what they do. I finish with a typology that helps to classify the public images of these organizations and three different elements that can be used to type their public images. This chapter sets up the following three which go in-depth on the three case studies.

In these case study chapters, I focus on the political and pragmatic. I outline the operations and structures of the NGOs and focus on how they interact with the other actors in the space.

In Chapter 2, I begin my case studies with WaterAid-India (usually referred to as simply WaterAid). WaterAid-India is the Indian affiliate of WaterAid, one of the world's largest and most prominent WASH organizations. Their main goal is the achievement of quality water, sanitation, and hygiene for all. In this study, they represent the mode of a 'typical' international sanitation actor, one

with international ties and international funding (although, as the chapter will discuss, the funding structure is shifting). They are typed as a “Western” style INGO, but, as I discuss in the chapter, this relies on a narrow definition of Indianness that is problematic. Through my discussion of WaterAid, I illustrate and discuss the “WASH” sector—in this book, as defined by the INGOs.

In this study, WaterAid is unique in that they position themselves as being a “critical friend” to the government and a sector convener, uneasily balancing between multiple actors with markedly different priorities and values. While I did not start with this organization in my fieldwork, I will start with them in this work, since most readers of this book will be more familiar with this kind of organization that is connected to and reflective of international networks. In the experiences and projects of people at WaterAid, the links between sanitation discourse of the NGOs and the international and national sector are most explicitly laid out. WaterAid is also a good illustration of a sort of “classic” development INGO. In describing them and their work, I hope to complicate and challenge some of the classic depictions of development organizations in development.

Chapter 3 describes Sulabh International Social Service Organization (SISSO), usually called “Sulabh.” Sulabh was started in 1968 in the Indian state of Bihar by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, a sociologist and former school teacher, who still heads the organization today as the central charismatic figure. Sulabh’s overall stated mission is the liberation and rehabilitation of all manual scavengers, but most of what the organization does and is known for is the operation of pay-per-use public toilets and the construction of twin pit latrines.

Sulabh works in Bhutan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and South Africa, but they originate in India, and they have not picked up the identity or presentation of one of the “Western” based INGOs. It is a massive organization, claiming to employ over 50,000 people, yet still try to maintain much of the trappings and reputation of a smaller, grassroots movement. Sulabh is frequently invoked in

international discussions or in news media as an example of a “successful” Indian sanitation NGO, meaning that they have an outsized mark on the discourse of the sanitation world. To talk about sanitation in India is frequently to invoke or cite Sulabh and Dr. Pathak. This chapter explores how Sulabh performs a certain kind of Indianness, is centered around a charismatic leader, and expends a massive amount of resources in ensuring their place in the public sphere.

In Chapter 4, I describe Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), or Manual Scavenger Mission. SKA is not usually viewed as a sanitation actor. They focus entirely on manual scavengers as a community. Their goal is to eradicate manual scavenging and, ultimately, eradicate caste, and they work to do so through leveraging legal mechanisms, community organizing, and advocacy. They are a relatively small organization from India and are led by Bezwada Wilson, a man who is from the manual scavenger caste community. While they are a part of the range of sanitation NGO actors, they do not consider themselves a part of the sanitation sector; instead, they view themselves and their work as being about human rights and community organization. Their work overlaps and connects to the other two organizations in interesting ways, and their engagement with the ecology helps to challenge what an NGO acts like.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous descriptive chapters to understand the narratives of sanitation and filth that are being created and perpetuated in the public discourse, focusing on the NGO case studies as an entrance into this larger discussion. I grapple with shit, filth, body and caste and the narratives that each of these NGOs construct around them and their implications for these larger discourses.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I summarize the main themes and points throughout this book, focusing primarily on the interplay between private acts and public stories and what these themes mean for building a better, more equitable and sustainable global sanitation system.

In the Appendix, I attach some full-length resources from the dissertation work as well as an outline of suggestions that practitioners or applied researchers may find useful moving forward.

1

A Crowded Field: Categorizing NGOs in the Sanitation Sector

If God wanted just one organization to work on sanitation, there would only be one organization.

—Swamini Adityananda Saraswati, Director of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance at Parmarth Niketan

There a *lot* of NGOs in India.

A 2002 study by Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Johns Hopkins University estimated that approximately 1.2 million NGOs populate the subcontinent. A 2015 study by Bain & Company estimated about 2 million NPOs (Tandon 2017). An even larger estimate by the Central Bureau of Investigation is that there are at least 3,100,000 in the country: more than double the number of schools and 250 times the number of government hospitals (Utkarsh Anand 2015). In a bout of ill-concealed frustration and bewilderment, Rajesh Tandon, an NGO founder himself, wrote in a 2017 *Economics and Political Weekly* Column:

What constitutes an NGO in India? How many such organizations are operating today? What do they do? What do they contribute to the Indian society? How are they funded? How are they managed and governed? How are they regulated? A detailed review of these questions may suggest a perplexing answer—no one knows! There is no data about the numbers and types of NGOs in the country today. None! No single agency or office knows, not because NGOs are

hiding information, but because the present institutional framework is so complex and archaic that no one can know (Tandon 2017).

Mapping out, understanding, and classifying the range of NGOs that operate on the Indian subcontinent is a vast task, hindered by difficult institutional systems, lack of clarity of definitions, and, especially in recent years, a governmental hostility towards them.

The governmental hostility towards NGOs is in great part because of the rise of the BJP and the far-right Hindutva ideology, which is often hostile towards outside influences and is unaccepting of criticism. This will be discussed through the lenses of different organizations in greater detail in the coming chapters. In the best of times, the relationship between NGOs and the government is complex and contested, but under the current BJP regime, this tension has increased, particularly for those who view critical engagement with the government as one of their key roles. Nearly every NGO representative I interviewed spoke about their anxiety about maintaining a positive relationship with the government, the tension and concern that rupturing their relationship with this government does not just mean lack of access, but can be an actual existential threat to the organization.

As discussed in the Introduction, the BJP and Modi are hyper-nationalist. They have actively spoken out against international organizations as being “anti-nationalist” and have leveled attacks against NGOs and civil society who they view as threatening their power or as obstructing their own goals (Jaffrelot 2015a; Dalrymple 2014; Slater 2018).

This can take place in many ways. Sometimes, a rebuke may be relatively mild; an organization may simply no longer be invited to speak with the government. Other organizations have had their work publicly attacked in Parliament or have been on the receiving end of angry and sometimes threatening phone calls. But one of the most common tools that the current government regime is levying against

civil society organizations is the recent weaponization of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA).

FCRA was signed into being in 1976 as a means to limit foreign influence through NGOs. To receive funds from a foreign source, organizations must acquire an FCRA license. Foreign funding is extremely common in the sector, particularly for organizations that have any kind of critical relationship with the government. Domestic funding tends to be corporate, thus avoiding anything even vaguely political. Organizations that work on Dalit or Adivasi rights, in particular, often rely on foreign funding. Ashok Bharti, founder of the National Confederation of Dalit Organizations, a “public platform that lobbies the government and donor agencies to support Dalit organizations across the country” commented that: “In India, barely a handful of Dalit and Adivasi rights groups get any kind of funding at all—foreign or Indian. Normally, corporate funders and even foreign agencies don’t like to support organizations that take on the government” (Johari 2017).

Under the current regime, this revocation of this licensing has been used as a political weapon to target actors who challenge the government. In December 2016, the government cancelled the FCRA licenses of 20,000 out of 33,000 NGOs after they were found to “have allegedly violated various provisions of the act” (Bhatnagar 2016). Organizations who lost their licenses included the Lawyers Collective, a legal organization fighting for justice of victims of the 2002 Gujarat riots and whose prominent leader has been a vocal critic of the Modi (Gopinath 2016).

Another organization that lost their license was Navsarjan Trust, Gujarat’s oldest Dalit organization, which ran schools and rehabilitation programs for Dalits. Their FCRA cancellation was on the grounds that the trust was involved in “undesirable activities aimed to affect prejudicially harmony between religious, racial, social, linguistic, regional groups, castes, or communities” (Johari 2017) While the governmental order did not enumerate examples of these activities nor offer any other explanation,

Navsarjan members and many others in civil society believe that this was in response to Navsarjan's role in the widespread Dalit protests following the July 2016 brutal beatings of four Dalit tanners in Una, Gujrat (Johari 2017). The organization released all of its employees, saying that 80% of its expenses were from foreign funding. Other organizations that lost their licenses included Compassion East India, Centre for Promotion of Social Concerns (People's Watch), Sanchal Foundation Hazards Centre, Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) and Institute of Public Health (Bengaluru).

NGOs and civil society actors are often close. They have worked in the same organizations, have fought the same battles. When some organizations lose their FCRA, like Navsarjan, they are decimated, and the fear and anxiety that such events provoke is close and visceral.

In response to the massive revocation of licenses, a large number of NGOs and prominent individuals wrote a public statement to express solidarity. Signatories to the statement include Amnesty International, Greenpeace India, TARSHI Delhi, the Delhi Drug Users Forum, and Centre for Social Justice.

In their statement, the organizations say that "the State is following a systematic and sustained agenda of suppressing those very dissenting voices that have consistently challenged the system. The current FCRA registration refusals are the most immediate example of this escalating problem, whereby the government maligns and criminalizes those very organizations and individuals that stand for human rights and liberal values" (Solidarity Letter: FCRA Renewals Rejected for 25 Organisations 2016). They accused the letters of being vague and "legally or procedurally invalid." According to the statement, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) also suggested that the NGOs were working against "national interest," a phrasing and condemnation that has particularly terrifying salience and can operate as a dog whistle (Solidarity Letter: FCRA Renewals Rejected for 25 Organisations 2016:1).

There is a vast array of ways to organize and type NGOs, such as by pragmatic elements like size, funding system, national/international affiliations, what kinds of work they do, and where they do it. While not specifically about NGOs, Weber's classifications of legitimate authority are useful (and will be referred to later in this dissertation): traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal (or bureaucratic). Traditional authority comes from long-established cultural patterns. Charismatic authority comes from the particular powers and characteristics of a single individual. Rational-legal authority comes from systems and carefully laid out rules and regulations (Weber 1978). This frame is useful when thinking about the leadership structures of the NGOs and the ways in which power and authority operate within an NGO.

According to Indian law, there are three legal forms of not-for-profits (NPOs): trusts, societies, and limited (Section 8) companies. Public charitable trusts "may be established for a number of purposes, including poverty relief, education, medical relief, the provision of facilities for recreation, and any other objective of general public utility." There is no national law that governs trusts, but some states do. Generally, public trusts are considered irrevocable. Societies, on the other hand, are membership organizations "that may be registered for charitable purposes" and are managed by a council or committee. They are managed by the Societies Registration Act and can be legally dissolved. Section 8 Companies have had a license issued to them by the GOI and is intended for small companies that promote "commerce, art, science, sport, education, research, social welfare, religion, charity, protection of the environment" or protection of similar objects. All profits and income are to be turned towards the cause of the organization. Most of the organizations under these legal headings are exempt from corporate income taxes (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2018).

The NGOs India website classifies NGOs along two dimensions: who they are designed to benefit and what the NGO does (Raj n.d.). Cousins from the Asian Development Bank classifies NGOs in terms of orientation (charitable, service, participatory, and empowering) and level of operation (community,

citywide, national or international) (Types of NGOs: By Orientation and Level of Operation n.d.). Other authors choose more abstract elements, such as directions and systems of accountability and resource control (Fowler 1985). Most systems of classifying and typing NGOs focus on organizational-structural elements (Vakil 1997; Salamon and Anheier 1992) which describe orientations of power, money, accountability, or action. In another case, the authors set out a range of NGO categories according to the roles, history, funding, purpose and structures of the NGO (Farrington and Bebbington 1993). Pearce sets up a range of binaries: international versus indigenous, membership versus non-membership, and service delivery versus advocacy (Pearce 1997).

Another system suggests categorizing NGOs by their scale and ability to complete particular kinds of projects (Morton 1997). Sen and Grown take a very specific tact and position the NGOs they study in relation to their positions on women's empowerment (Sen and Grown 2013), which, because of its less material focus, more closely mirrors the typologies I put forth. Some scholars, such as Vakil (1997) are skeptical of any single rubric to categorize NGOs and suggest using a range of typologies depending on the context.

This chapter puts forth three new ways to classify and organize NGO actors. These typologies focus on *relations* and rely on dichotomies of public vs. private that underpin much of the concerns of this book. I focus on sanitation, but these typologies can be adapted for other development topics, such as food security or gender empowerment. These typologies seek to type organizations not only by their public transcripts, but their private ones, by implicit strategies, orientations, and values. Focusing on these elements reveals not only the political nature of the interactions within and between actors but helps to get at the meanings behind their interactions and actions and the ways in which actors construct and are constructed by private vs. public narratives. These typologies seek to engage with and classify organizations not merely by their actions or practical orientations, but their philosophies, values, and strategies that make up their private transcripts.

To understand the number and range of NGOs even in one sector is a massive task. With the launch of the SBM, there was suddenly political will, political currency, and a lot of money in sanitation. Organizations that had been tangentially interested in sanitation now put more energy and currency into that area. The field of actors massively expanded. There are foundations, religious groups, civil society groups, think tanks, activists, coalition groups, multilateral aid actors, bilateral aid institutions, academic and associated academic institutions. These actors may or may not identify as an NGO—they may say they are a movement, a nonprofit, or a multilateral organization, but they fit under the intentionally broad definition used in this project: self-governing, private, not-for-profit and aimed at improving quality of life of disadvantaged people (Vakil 1997:2060).

This vast array of actors forms a network of institutions with complex relations to each other. As the next several chapters illustrate, NGOs often rely on their relationships with each other; for partnerships, for funding, for access, for support when going to the government to make change. Their place in the network affects their relations with government, with other NGOs, and with the media. All of these relationships are important in accomplishing the goals of the organization. Their relations to each other often constitute their identity.

There are certain organizations that are generally accepted as being the main sanitation NGO actors; they are the main players, the ones who are most prominent, powerful, connected to government and consistent sources of funding. They are explicit in their goals of improving sanitation. Most interviewees were consistent in identifying the same organizations as the “most prominent” in the sanitation sector: UNICEF, WaterAid, Gates Foundation, and the World Bank. Occasionally, Sulabh was also listed as a major player during my 45 interviews with professionals in the sector (See “Methods” in Introduction). SKA almost never was.

While the NGOs identified as being the ‘best’ or ‘most influential’ are all explicitly working in the sanitation sector, the range of actors in the sanitation space is actually much broader than those who identify as sanitation organizations. To truly understand the field of sanitation actors—to understand the full variability and spread—requires looking beyond just the entities that claim they are a “sanitation organization” to any actor that grapples with sanitation during any part of the process.

The first typology describes NGOs in terms of their relationship with sanitation: as an ends, means, or battlefield. It describes the relationship between this particular development topic with the other activities and goals of the organization. The second typology organizes NGOs by frames of reference, or the mobilizing values and tropes that organize their work. This typology helps to elucidate the relationship of an actor to other actors in the space. The third typology refers to three elements of reputation, the configuration and emphasis of which cement the organization’s niche in the ecology and the way in which the public transcripts are created and how they relate to the public transcripts of other actors. After discussing these three typologies, I then outline the three case studies of this project and justify their inclusion.

These typologies, like most typologies, are meant as broad heuristics. Organizations fluctuate and change. In the NGO sphere, organizations may completely change their philosophies and directions over the course of a few months with new leadership or a massive staff turnover. Within an organization, there is also a great deal of heterogeneity—the communications department may have a different approach than the policy department. To decide as an organization and as individuals what one’s goals and values are is vital in creating a consistent identity that inculcates trust among other organizations and individuals.

Typology 1: The position of sanitation within the organization

This first set of categories describes the positioning of sanitation at an organization in relation to other potential priorities and purposes. As previously established, there are a lot of actors who engage in sanitation work in a variety of ways. But what does the organization *actually* want to accomplish? How does sanitation relate to those goals? The answers may be explicitly stated in public documents, or they may be more internal, part of the private transcripts. For many organizations, the answers may be unclear even to themselves.

These three categories can be described as sanitation as ends, means, and battlefield. This typology can be applied to not only NGOs, but other organizational endeavors and configurations, from government initiatives to media productions; it is a way of viewing actors overall. It can also, in a limited capacity, be applied to individuals, who may or may not have orientations that match the overall organizational orientation. Overall, there are three ways that NGOs relate to sanitation: as an ends, as a means, and as a battlefield.

Sanitation as end

For some combination of reasons and factors—either internal or external—sanitation is viewed as being an ethical and worthy goal in and of itself. All other goals and issues are subverted in the achievement of this goal. Organizational success or efficacy is defined in terms of whether sanitation—whatever definition of sanitation is used—is achieved.

Most organizations will not explicitly identify as being an organization that considers sanitation as an end, but their orientation becomes evident through study of their actions and discourse. They are more likely to identify as a sanitation actor. They may believe that sanitation will lead to another outcome, but they consider their own work and role to be completed with the achievement of

sanitation. When pressed, they may vaguely admit that sanitation is related to a greater goal, but they do not hold themselves accountable to the achievement of that goal. Their goals may involve stated goals such as “open defecation free” (ODF), 100% wastewater treatment, a toilet in every household, or a toilet in every school.

For actors to whom sanitation is an end, there is less concern about the means of getting there. In the words of a government official, “Anything which works.” Actors that have a “sanitation as ends” orientation are less concerned about potential collateral damage on the way to achieve sanitation goals. For example, a campaign in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, reinforced gender stereotypes by saying that men need to protect their sisters’ modesty by gifting them a toilet (Times of India 2016), but reinforcement of gender stereotypes was not a matter of concern—instead, they focused on whether the campaign helped progress them towards open defecation free status.

In terms of alliances and collaborations, NGOs with an ends-orientation are more likely to have fewer concerns about other views of a partner or actor they support and more focused on whether this actor will help them achieve sanitation outcomes. This is illustrated by a conversation I had with one NGO manager about whether it was problematic to support SBM given Modi’s alignment with a party known to attack NGOs and damage human rights:

Manager: Why am I obsessed with what he's saying? And that's my question to a lot of the activists. He [Modi] can be on Facebook and Twitter all his life.¹⁶ If it's having an effect on development, that's what we're here for, right? We're not here to put Modi down. Or what he says.

¹⁶ Modi has been criticized particularly for following Twitter users who are abusive and have tweets that feature death threats, rape threats, and hate speech. He has even hosted a reception at his home for 150 of his online supporters (Hume 2018).

Me: Why not?

Manager: Because it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to the common man. From my perspective, what am I here for? I am here to make sure people get access [to toilets], to make sure it's good quality, to make sure they use it, to have better impact, etcetera etcetera, poverty alleviation. If it's having a positive impact on all of those things that are my objective, from my point view, I don't care.

This conversation illustrates the perspective of sanitation as an end. His view of the scope of his responsibility in the broader discourse is narrow—he is not meant to comment on what Modi says, to criticize the government. The scope of responsibility that he claims is narrowly focused—his role is to assist in development, to make sure people have access to high quality sanitation. He is dismissive about what sanitation leads to—“etcetera etcetera, poverty alleviation”—and instead, his language focuses on achieving sanitation and development. The linkage to poverty alleviation is taken as a given, and thus is not prioritized within his mindset. He does not take responsibility or interest particularly in what Modi says on social media accounts or in his other political utterances; instead, he is more concerned with whether Modi can assist in achieving the positive goal of sanitation. Whatever else the government says or does is not his worry.

One of the key examples of an actor with a “sanitation as ends” mentality is the Swachh Bharat Mission apparatus itself. While they may talk about development, health, gender empowerment, etc., these topics are used to bolster the strength of sanitation as an end goal. The measurements of their success are in terms of how many toilets are built, sewer coverage, open defecation free area. Concerns about issues regarding equality of access, manual scavenging, or gender equality and empowerment are subverted into the larger narrative of sanitation as a good.

Sanitation as means

Sanitation is a means to or element of a larger goal, and sanitation is merely the concrete set of actions or goals that enable the actor to achieve these larger goals. These larger goals may be another development task (such as increasing education) or a set of values (such as addressing inequality). Their larger goals may be for social welfare or for self-interest, such as profit or political power. Their measurements of success are more likely to include more than sanitation metrics or they may have a clear idea how sanitation-related metrics translate into metrics that measure progress towards their ultimate goal. They will compromise on achieving better sanitation (as measured by number of toilets) in favor of achieving their larger goals. They will de-prioritize sanitation rather than compromise on their larger goal. They are less likely to identify as a sanitation actor. They are also more likely to engage in a range of activities that go beyond sanitation. Actors who view sanitation as a means may be more likely to be comfortable engaging in more politicized topics, such as poverty and gender inequality; while sanitation is viewed as apolitical, gender inequality and wealth inequality are much more likely to be politically charged topics.

One example of an organization with a “sanitation as means” mentality is Nine is Mine. Nine is Mine is a child-led advocacy group for the fulfillment of SDGs in the context of India and its children. They have engaged in a great deal of advocacy around sanitation, partnering with UNICEF and WaterAid for campaigns like Team Swachh, that included setting up street fairs to promote awareness of sanitation and hygiene. While these events focused on and promoted sanitation and hygiene, the main overarching goal of Nine is Mine is not to promote sanitation but to develop a sense of citizen engagement among youth and an awareness of their rights. Their work focuses on giving young people, often from vulnerable and marginalized backgrounds, the drive and the tools to actively engage in democratic processes. Sanitation is a secondary element to that and is being used as a means to achieve

that larger end, in great part because of the resources that the partnerships with sanitation organizations bring to the table. Sanitation, however, is not their priority.



Figure 3: A photograph of “Swachh Raahgiri” street fair event on March 27, 2016, in which young representatives of the group Nine is Mine perform songs, dances, and skits and host informational booths and games to promote sanitation and hygiene messaging. The event was sponsored and done in collaboration with UNICEF and WaterAid. (Author photo)

Sanitation as battlefield

Most actors in a given sector or field are willing and active participants in the space. They may not be thrilled about the idea that sanitation coverage is so horrible that they feel they must address the issue directly, but they have chosen to participate in the sector as a means to achieve their goals. Sanitation as battlefield is a unique division that refers to actors that are *unwillingly* in this space. Their relationship with sanitation is that they do not want to have a relationship with sanitation. They may be involved because they represent a group of people who—perhaps because of financial or sociocultural

pressures—are in the sanitation space. Organizations that have this orientation are often political or work on the rights of the most marginalized.

In this study, the main actors who inhabit this space are organizations that work on the liberation of Dalits from the work of manual scavenging, such as Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA, or Manual Scavenger Mission). To them, the fact that they are a part of the sanitation space is a symptom of their oppression. The fact that they *are* in the sanitation sector means that they have not achieved their ultimate goals. To them, sanitation is neither an end nor a means; extricating themselves from the issue is the goal. This is a relatively uncommon category, with very few actors who can be classified this.

This typology recognizes that actors will position sanitation differently within their organizations' activities overall. They view sanitation as an end, as a means, or as a topic that they unwillingly engage in. This typology can be applied to other development topics, such as nutrition, gender empowerment, or forest preservation, and can be applied to all kinds of organizational actors.

Typology 2: Frames of reference

The frame of reference describes the underlying values and motivations of an organizational actor's engagement with sanitation.¹⁷ It refers to a set of underlying values that orient the organization's direction, priorities, and allocation of resources (including material, social, and political). It is a way to

¹⁷ In spite of the use of the word "frame," this typology is not meant to be a reference to Erving Goffman's framing theory or any of the other linguistic or communications theory work under that name. That work focuses on metanarratives of texts and when brought to discourse analysis, it is done so usually in the context of conversations and texts (Tannen 1993). It can also be understood as how particular statements are "framed" to an audience and how the audience's frames influence what they see and think (Chong and Druckman 2007) While my overall dissertation may also engage in the work of exploring underlying meanings, particularly in Chapter 5, this typology goes beyond text to include actions, funding, conversations, values, and beliefs of individuals as enacted through the organization. It is less of a frame in this sense as an orientation or underlying value.

understand not just *why* they are involved with sanitation, but also the mentalities, values, information, and organizational culture that informs *how* they do so.

For example, as will be discussed in greater detail later, an organization who works on sanitation with an environmental frame behaves and is treated far differently than an organization who operates in a more human rights-oriented frame. The frame affects what projects they go after, what else the organization does, who they work with, how other actors treat them, what narratives they create, what other agencies ally with them, how the media treats them, and who funds them.

This typology is meant to be applied primarily to organizations or institutions, or, occasionally, individual actors whose discursive imprint is large enough to be analogous to an institution (some politicians, for example). The complexity of individual psychologies is not so easily categorized. But individuals within an organization usually bring their own orientations and values.

This system of classification is primarily meant as a tool with which actors can better understand themselves and the others in the sector. It is meant to diversify the range of sanitation actors to beyond the classic WASH players and to understand that different actors have different frames of reference, rhetorical strategies, underlying principles, and goals. It is a tool, too, to understand the diversity of actors working on the same issue, and to understand where and how conflicts occur. Actors may work on sanitation, but because they come at the topic with different frames of reference, they will approach the issue very differently.

Sometimes, ascertaining the primary frame appears relatively simple; the organization can be very explicit in their ultimate goals and values. The Centre for Science and *Environment* appears to operate within an environmental frame. Parmath Niketan says they are in “service of God and humanity,” and with its saffron-drenched homepage and prominent Swami leader, their affiliation to a religious frame is clear. However, this typology is meant to go beyond public transcripts to include

underlying values and private transcripts. As such, while one can make an educated guess as to an organization's frame from its public transcripts, more in-depth investigation into an organization—such as interviews, examination of funding streams, or close observation—is necessary to be more certain and clear. To identify the frame of reference involves a critical eye and a deeper analysis of not only their public utterances, but what the organization does, who they work or ally with, how they present themselves and their work, and the imagery they use to present themselves and their work.

The frame that an organization may publicly try to ally with is not necessarily reflective of the organization's actual frame. Sulabh International, for example, would probably identify as operating within a human rights frame, but closer examination of their exploitive labor practices towards the communities they claim to help would belie that. An examination of their literature, observation of the practices of the office, learning more about funding, and understanding daily practices within the office spaces, however, reveals that the organization is far better classified as operating within a more charismatic frame (see Chapters 3 and 5 for a greater discussion of Sulabh International).

These frames are particularly intended to be understood as a way to understand and differentiate organizations from each other, to help organize one's understanding of the sector. They are less meant to be absolute rulings on an organization itself than as a way to better organize the complex politics of the space. Similar to structuralist arguments, these organizations are in some ways defined by what they are *not*, which this particular typology helps to reveal.

Frames are particularly useful in understanding the alliances and collaborations that are developed and the networks of communication. Understanding that Safai Karmachari Andolan operates under a human rights frame explains why they work with actors who work on government transparency and appear at rallies protesting demonetization. Understanding that Centre for Science and Environment operates primarily within an environmental frame helps to explain why they have

relatively minimal collaboration and communication with an organization like Save the Children, who also works on sanitation, but does so with more of a children-based frame.¹⁸ Clarifying the frames of reference is a way to type the private domains of the organization in order to better understand how horizontal relations are configured.

Generally, an organization is dominated by a single frame of reference. A particular campaign or subset may have a different one, but the organizations studied in this work demonstrated a clear dominance of a single frame, particularly when the organization is analyzed historically. Most actors invoke ideas that touch on other frames of reference. Indeed, invoking multiple discourses is a means to try to create new alliances, bolster your cause, or try to appeal to one particular actor (often a funding agency or the government). You may operate in a health frame but discuss the effects of sanitation on women in order to make your cause catch media attention. You might operate in an environmental frame but invoke human rights in order to apply for a human rights-oriented grant. You may operate in an aesthetics frame but talk about human health in order to justify your actions.

One way to discern between a talking point and a frame is to notice what is deprioritized in actions. While an actor may talk about how sanitation is important to human health, in their programming and work, they may pay little attention to the actual safe containment of human fecal waste and more to the construction of toilets. They talk about health, but it is not the actual underlying frame. An organization may cite the environment as a key factor in their work, but if some projects that the organization does actively damages the environment, this is an indication that environment is not their key frames.

I describe the frames that I found in my research of sanitation organizations below and briefly discuss some of the trends and implications around organizations with that orientation. These

¹⁸ The characterization of Save the Children as operating within a child-based framework is based on very minimal analysis and interaction and is thus somewhat of a guess. Far more work would be needed to truly get at their frame of reference.

categories were developed looking at sanitation NGOs in India, but these categories can also be used for sanitation organizations more globally. This kind of typology would be useful to also create for other development and health topics, such as food, gender empowerment, or economic empowerment. The categories for other topics, however, may vary.

I provide examples of organizations that appear to fit these frames, but, with the exception of the three organizations that I did case studies about, the categorization of their frame is based on only preliminary analyses.

These frames are:

- Disaster
- Gender
- Environment
- Health
- Charismatic
- Children/youth
- Aesthetics/modernity
- Religion
- Economic
- Human rights

What follows is a brief discussion of each frame, with examples and brief analyses of the implications.

Disaster

There are a host of organizations that will engage in what the development sector calls disaster relief—short-term alleviation of a disaster. The destruction of infrastructure forms one of the key challenges of

managing an area after a disaster, and the loss of sanitation systems, vulnerable populations, and widespread water can lead to an increase in waterborne illnesses. For organizations that deal with disaster relief, their interest in sanitation is primarily limited to building as many toilets as possible in as brief a time as possible. Many organizations do hope or try to ensure that their efforts in the wake of disaster are longer-lasting, but for organizations that operate in a disaster-relief frame, their focus is on saving lives and preventing secondary disaster of disease outbreak, not reforming long-term systems. CARE's work in India, for example, tends to be more in a disaster frame.

Climate change—a classic slow-moving disaster—would seem an obvious addition to this list of frames; it is a discourse that is becoming more and more prominent in development discourse. However, there were no organizations for whom climate change was the *frame* of reference. There are funding mechanisms that are explicitly framed as climate change that sanitation organizations may go after, but I did not find any organization that I would classify as operating through this lens in the sanitation field.¹⁹

Gender

Organizations that operate within a gender-based frame primarily consider women and girls, but some are working to address the needs of third genders or the transgendered communities. They may discuss gender violence in relation open defecation, the effects of sanitation access on women's mobility, and the struggles of non-males in safely and comfortably accessing toilets at different points in their lives and day. They may consider women or transgender people as the way to improve sanitation in a

¹⁹ A rising interest in climate change is leading to a reconfiguration of institutional actors around the topic, and a similar typing to this based around climate change NGOs would be interesting. However, this project focuses on sanitation actors, and the incursion of climate change into that discourse is relatively minor yet and has not begun to significantly reconfigure the sector.

community, as a sufferer or poor sanitation, or a combination of both. Some gender-framed actors describe providing access to safe sanitation for women or using women in sanitation campaigns as “empowering.”

To be based in a gender-centric discourse does not mean that they are being culturally “progressive.” Indeed, many examples of gender-centric discourse can be viewed as regressive, enforcing conservative notions around protecting females, causes of gender-based violence, or the management of female bodies. When actors describe an assault or rape while a woman was allegedly going to defecate in the open as a result of poor sanitation, they are enforcing the notion that women should not be going out at night and erasing the underlying story that a woman should be able to go anywhere at any time doing anything without being assaulted. Other gender-based frames and discourses enforce the notion that women are responsible for cleanliness—not only in the home, but in the community.

One particularly prominent example of gender-based framing is the 2017 Bollywood film *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* (*Toilet: a love story*) starring (and co-produced by) superstar Akshay Kumar. Akshay Kumar plays the hero Keshav, the son of a priest who falls in love with and marries Jaya (played by Bhumi Pednekar), an educated “modern” woman. After they marry, Jaya is horrified to find out that Keshav and his family do not have a toilet, forcing her to travel with a group of the village women out to the fields to defecate before dawn. In this film, the great tragedy and problem with a lack of sanitation is that it makes life harder on women, exposing them to the terrors of darkness and the gazes of other men. A man is failing in his duties as a man when he forces his wife to go out to defecate in the open. In a moment of failure, Keshav mourns, “Lovers built the Taj Mahal for their love, but I couldn’t build a loo.” The movie was a commercial success (HT Staff 2017), and Bill Gates tweeted in support of the film (Suresh 2017) The man is expected to care about sanitation as proof of his masculinity and as a way to

enforce traditional gender roles. This same theme was echoed in a series of government campaigns that propagated the notions of “No toilet, no bride” or giving one’s sister a toilet for *rakhi*²⁰.

Other actors operating in a gender-based frame may invoke the notion that women should not carry water (and thus pipe sanitation); that women are often the ones forced to manage their bodies when they lack access to public facilities (and thus their ability to live free and healthy lives is compromised); and, most prominently, the effects that poor access to sanitary facilities has on menstrual health. (A common variation on the latter is to push the idea that girls, when start menstruating, drop out of school because they lack access to a place on the premises to manage their menstrual hygiene.)

Discussing the women-centric aspects of sanitation is perhaps one of the most common themes in the discourse; nearly every organization operating in every frame invokes the effects that sanitation has on gender at one point or another. However, the concern about gender is almost always secondary; it does not organize their activities so much as act as a means to validate them. Organizations and actors that do primarily operate within a gendered lens usually are not directly involved in sanitation issues. For actors that push a more progressive, liberal view of gender, to engage actively in sanitation debates threatens their very position by reinforcing the notion that women’s bodies are more vulnerable and problematic.

²⁰ A Hindu festival in which brothers and sisters exchange gifts and pledges of devotion and protection



Figure 4: The outlet of the Najafgarh Drain, Delhi, a river turned into what is functionally an open sewer canal that runs through Delhi and empties into the Yamuna River. This view is a stop on the Swechha Yamuna walk (Author photo).



Figure 5: A serene, peaceful part of the Yamuna River before it enters into Delhi and another stop on the Stop on the Swechha Yamuna River Walk (Author photo).

Environment

Actors who approach sanitation from an environmental frame often discuss both surface and groundwater pollution due to poor sanitation treatment. They may invoke include notions of obligations

to nature or invoking the notion of being stewards of the future. The environment is often seen as a victim of poorly carried out development. The notion of responsibility is frequently invoked, including collective and individual responsibilities. Environmental actors are going to be more likely to invoke connection to place, such as a connection to a river or nature writ large. They also are more likely to appeal and connect to global environmental discourses and may mention climate change as a part of that. They often invoke human health as a key reason, but they also discuss environmental pollution and ecology. They are more likely to focus strongly on waste disposal and treatment, particularly in urban areas, and less likely to make individual behavior change as a key element of their work. Environmental actors' relationships to the environment may be predicated on science, religion, or humanistic feelings of environmental altruism. Environmental actors are often siloed from other sanitation actors and may not work closely with health-framed actors.

Because many rivers in India are sacred, such as the Ganga and the Yamuna, environmental framing and religious framing can become similar, or the two frames may borrow from each other. However, while those who operate within an environmental framework may cite the spiritual nature of the river as another way for people to emotionally connect to the river, this spiritual element is only one aspect of how they ask people to connect to the river.

Environmental framing also is more likely than many of the other frames to make their case using photos or visual photography. They can show ravages of pollution and the ill-treatment of the land by depicting waste being dumped in a site or depict an ideal of pristine environment that has been desecrated and destroyed by human action.

Swechha, an NGO based in Delhi that works on "education, environment, and enterprise" hosted a Yamuna River Walk in December of 2016 during the Delhi Walk Festival. The organization invited the public to go on one of the walks they usually host for groups of youth. We met early, the

sharp chill of night still lingering over the city. We were driven to a spot on the Yamuna before it hits Delhi at the Wazirabad Barrage. It was startlingly quiet there. On either side of us, thin wisps of a lingering morning fog drifted between fields planted with cabbage and mustard. We walked along a brick path, only seeing one motorcycle. Our guide told us about how people all along the Yamuna are dependent on the river for sustenance, for economic well-being, for drinking, for spiritual guidance. She invoked a range of themes, but the dominant one for us is the sheer sensory nature of this experience, the quiet, the cool mist. She invited us to stand at the river's edge and stare out at the water and just to sink into the moment. In the distance, a deer picked its way through reeds.

Then we loaded back into the van and drove to the Wazirabad barrage. We stand next to the Najafgarh drain, one of the largest drains in Delhi, so large that it is said that the flow of raw sewage has tides. It is black, fetid. The odor is a nearly palpable presence, coating the inside of your throat. The contrast with upstream is viscerally disturbing.

Actors who operate in the environmental frame are often good at combining different themes with sensory storytelling: responsibility, interconnectivity, connections to other peoples and places, an ecological perspective. The walk too, highlighted themes of government responsibility, connectivity, river as space of life, and the contrast of development versus nature.

Health

As discussed in the Introduction, poor sanitation has catastrophic effects on human health. Most human health framed discourses revolve around prevention of the spread of diseases through the common fecal-oral pathway. These include cholera, hepatitis A, parasitic diseases, or the variable host of diarrheal diseases.

Much of the self-identified WASH sector is animated by this frame, such as UNICEF. The link between water, sanitation, and hygiene is that they prevent the spread of fecal oral diseases. Actors that operate in a health-oriented frame also may discuss stunting, a more recently emerging issue. Actors who operate primarily in a health frame have a people-centric view and may work in both rural and urban spaces. They are often likely to build an identity based on authority or validity and less likely to predicate their reputational identity on authenticity.

WaterAid is an excellent example of an organization whose operating frame is health. Their activities focus on WASH activities that are organized around the prevention of fecal-oral disease. In an email newsletter aimed at promoting the Healthy Start campaign, an advocacy campaign focused on improving children's health, they included a large graphic highlighting India's infant mortality rate. This graphic was laid out like a scientific graph. It is predicated on a key public health statistic, that of infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Infant mortality is the explicitly stated negative effect that WaterAid's activities will presumably fix. The subject on the email was, "Our babies need a Healthy Start."



Figure 6: Graphic from a July 27, 2016 email from WaterAid India sent to their mailing list to promote their "Healthy Start" campaign (used with permission from WaterAid).

Individual

The individual frame is based around the values, beliefs, and teachings of a single actor usually a charismatic one, in the Weberian sense of the word (Weber 1978). The actor him or herself may operate within a different frame, but the organization is centered around that individual. Their organizations rely on the authority or authenticity of this individual to create their space in the NGO ecology. In their communications work, the charismatic figure is front and center; they are the main voice of the organization, and even if others are speaking, they usually refer to the main actor. What the organization does and the narrations of who they are revolve around furthering the interests, goals, and stature of the single individual.

It is also common to have one charismatic actor be backed up by the images and invocation of a second. The Swachh Bharat Mission itself, for example, is mostly framed in terms of Modi himself. However, Modi's image is backed up by Gandhi's.

Sulabh International is one of the better examples of an organization based on the individual frame of reference. The founder Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak's energy, values, and reputation mobilizes and drives the entire organization and what it does. Dr. Pathak's images and words dominate both public and private narratives of the organization. Sulabh does sanitation, but they also have adopted widows, opened a school for the blind, and sponsored a poetry magazine—the unifying principle is that these are endeavors that Dr. Pathak values or sees utility in. Sulabh will also invoke other charismatic personalities when it is useful, using them to either bolster Dr. Pathak's reputation or to make other alliances. Since 2014, Sulabh commonly invokes Modi, and historically, Sulabh compares Dr. Pathak to Gandhi.

Children/youth

Many organizations focus on children or youth, writ large, such as UNICEF or Save the Children.

Organizational actors that operate in a children or youth frame are more likely to work on maternal well-being or schools, although sometimes, they focus on a wide range of activities in the name of children's well-being (UNICEF, for example). Actors may focus on youth because they are affected by poor sanitation or on youth as active change-makers in the process. Their work often will address women as well, but women as mothers and caretakers. Adult men usually do not have a significant role in their project targets or campaigns. Organizations operating in this frame often cite ideas related to the notion that "children are our future." Their public discourse usually prominently features children in their photography or textual narratives.

One key example of an organization operating in this frame is Save the Children. Their name is a clear signaling that they are oriented towards children. They frequently work within or through schools. Like many children/youth-oriented organizations, their greater focus is on "software" aspects of sanitation, like education and behavior change, rather than construction. They also address community issues, working on urban sanitation, but the key is that this must be framed as being related to children. They work in those spaces only because, as a staff member told me in an interview, "this is where the children live." With that flexibility, organizations in a youth frame can expand into a wide range of activities with sometimes tenuous connections to child-related issues. But what is important is that these issues must always be framed in a way that benefits children or youth because it is the mandate of the organization.

Aesthetics/modernity

For some actors in the space, their engagement with sanitation is framed by appearances and/or appearing “modern.” Their concern is less the actual effects of poor sanitation and far more on the appearances. They may discuss the filthiness of an area, the stench of wastewater, the eyesore of open urinals. They cite how filthy India and/or Indians are in comparison to other nations. They may contrast images of Indian cities with images of Singapore. (Since Singapore is an Asian city, it is often used as a contrast city or a goal to work towards.) Organizations that operate in this frame often talk about both toilets and garbage together, as both lead to filthy appearances. They will use before and after images to compel similar action or to demonstrate success. They may discuss open defecation as being a shame on India and talk about the visual of seeing people squatting in public places. They may be more concerned with building a superstructure of sanitation—the building that prevents people defecating from being seen defecating—than with safe disposal of waste. In actions, they are less likely to be concerned about measuring health impacts or environmental impacts. Underlying concerns with aesthetics may be a concern to appear “modern” or developed. How can India be a super power when people still shit in the open? How can India be developed when there are piles of rotting garbage in the streets?

One actor who operates in an aesthetic frame is The Ugly Indian, a grassroots organization that chooses public spaces that are particularly filthy, then volunteers anonymously to clean and brighten such public places up with paint or landscaping (<https://www.theuglyindian.com/>). Their work is focused on improving public spaces, increasing civic engagement, and reforming behavior through aesthetically improved public spaces (The Ugly Indian n.d.).

Religion

Actors who operate in a religious frame may be any religion. They may see sanitation work as a way to do the divine work of helping people. For Hindu organizations, sanitation work is an extension of their concerns and beliefs with cleanliness, purity, and/or protection of the goddess river Ganga.

Parmarth Niketan, based in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, is an example of a religious-framed sanitation organization. They have an ashram in Rishikesh, teach yoga, promote sanitation, run a cow welfare program, and participate in organic farming programs—a mixture of activities that reveals their own religious focus by participating and supporting activities that engage with Hindu notions of cleanliness and purity. They are a key member of the Global Interfaith Wash Alliance, a consortium of religious leaders and groups who aim to promote sanitation among their followers or congregations (Home n.d.). Their website is dominated by pictures of saffron-clad gurus, their ashram, their nightly Ganga aarti, and prodigious amounts of yoga. But they also actively promote themselves in sanitation spaces as religious leaders of sanitation, such as blessing the installation of a bioremediation plant at a *nala* (drain or river) in Rishikesh (From Sewage to Selfie Point 2018). In a Centre for Policy Research event on Scaling Up Urban Sanitation, Swamini Adityananda Saraswati, one of the leaders of Parmarth Niketan, said that 99% of all people in the world belong to a faith, and that they turn to their faith leaders in times of need or for advice; but in addition to viewing themselves as leaders of people who must be involved in all aspects of people's lives, their other activities reveal that they are interested in maintaining and perpetuating particular notions of cleanliness. Their emphasis on yoga and cow support point to their concern with Hindu notions of cleanliness.

In practice, many organizations that have a religious frame are also strongly associated with charismatic leaders. Most large religious organizations in India are led by individuals that many people acerbically call “God men.” Parmarth Niketan, for example, is led by H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand

Saraswatiji, who dominates the organization's public image. More internal study would be needed in order to differentiate to what extent an organization operates in a religious frame versus a charismatic one.

Economics and economic development

Actors who operate in an economics frame are animated by financial concerns, whether microeconomic or macroeconomic. They may be concerned with the GDP of the nation, the costs of sanitation to households, or the effects of poor sanitation on the economic productivity of households. They may also be focused on the potential to make profit, either through contracting to bodies who are required to treat waste or by creating a marketable product through the conversion of waste into energy or fertilizer. While there are microeconomic implications for sanitation in terms of the household, actors who are mobilized around these concerns are mostly concerned with larger-level issues. They often measure or discuss problems and solutions in terms of costs and benefits. They may convert non-economic measurements of the costs or consequences of sanitation such as time spent carrying water, illness, lost productivity, and death into economic measurements of capital loss. They often make their case with numbers and charts and are less likely to be animated by qualitative stories.

In 2011, the Water Sanitation Program (WSP) commissioned a study of the economic impacts of sanitation in India. The study sought to estimate the costs of premature mortality, cost of healthcare, productivity losses, household treatment of drinking water, use of bottled water by households, piped water, hauling cleaner water from a distance, cost of additional time needed for accessing shared toilets, cost of school and work absence time for girls and women, loss of tourist revenues, and loss of revenue from foreign tourists falling ill (De Francis 2011:8). The study calculated that the total annual economic impact of inadequate sanitation in India in 2006 was approximately 53.8 billion USD. This is

equivalent to 6.4% of India's GDP of that year (De Francis 2011:9). The number 6.4% of India's GDP was commonly cited by government officials during meetings, conferences, and press appearance. The number—which even some of the report authors found problematic—was highly influential. This number brought people and actors concerned with improving India's financial standing the world into the sanitation orbit.

Another variant on economic frame actors are those who focus on “innovation,” technology, and entrepreneurship. Sanitation is a business opportunity, a gap in the market. The businesspeople are valorized as addressing a basic need that people often do not realize they need (or at least this is how it is framed). As one researcher stated, in water, private contractors are seen as evil; but in sanitation, they are seen as benevolent. This is perhaps because sanitation is something that is difficult to monetize, in great part because the benefits are often hidden to recipients of it. A company who manages to treat wastewater and make money becomes a kind of hero of both social good and capitalism, whereas privatization of water has globally led to significant backlash and protest (Spronk 2007). Common ways for groups to try to monetize sanitation is to act as a contractor for bodies who are required to treat wastewater or waste products (such as municipalities or private apartment buildings²¹) or to recycle the wastewater or waste into desirable products such as energy or fertilizer (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018). A company that manages to successfully make an economically viable model for wastewater using innovation and technology is considered something of a panacea.

Actors who operate within an economics frame usually do not say they are operating within this frame; while economic reasoning is very mobilizing for many actors, people are not going to state that is

²¹ In different states across the country, apartment buildings, hotels, hospitals, and other large developments are required to have their own wastewater treatment and/or recycling system (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018).

a main reason for fear that they will appear immoral. Instead, they utilize other themes and tropes to justify their actions, even as economic and business needs are what organize and motivate them.

In October 2016, the GOI held a large conference called IndoSan, which primarily functioned as a means for the government to proclaim progress regarding SBM. Attached to the conference were several large exhibition halls and tents filled with different government bodies, NGOs, and private companies showing off particular initiatives or technologies. Many of the private companies and “start-ups” showcased technologies upon which tier business was based. In their arguments, they had a functioning technology that was different than their competitors that cleaned wastewater and enabled them to be a sustainable and successful business. One of these was Absolute Water, a small startup that installs small-scale wastewater recycling plants. While they discussed environmental impacts of their work, they were there to demonstrate technology and to get business from large clients who can help their business continue.

Human rights

Human rights has a range of definitions , depending on the person or organization. The UN defines human rights as “rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more” (Human Rights 2016).

Actors who work on sanitation and operate in this frame share a set of similar values. Human rights actors are fundamentally concerned with inequality, whether due to wealth, caste, or gender. They are human-centric. Frequently, they will avoid “typical” NGO metrics and instead focus on longer, slower successes, such as policy advocacy or litigation. They are more likely to be unabashedly political

and engage in a range of other issues in the human sector. They are more likely to position themselves as critical of the government. Many of the actors who focus on caste could be associated with this category, the ones who engage in sanitation issues because of the caste aspects and oppression. They often engage in a wide range of activities and make alliances with similar causes with similar value sets. In terms of creating alliances, what is more important is shared values than efficacy or topic. They are concerned with language and not compromising other human rights goals. Usually, they are sanitation as a means or sanitation as a battlefield case.

SKA is a human rights-centric actor (described in Chapter 4). *Jan Sahas* is another actor in this space. They are an organization “committed to promote the development and protect the rights of socially excluded communities with the special focus on girls and women” (Jan Sahas n.d.). They engage in a range of activities, including empowering women to end violence, skill development for marginalized communities, legal aid, food security, and agricultural development.

There is, of course, an overlap between those with Gender as a frame and those with Human Rights as a frame. However, the Human Rights category is meant to include and capture the actors who are concerned with radical inequality. Gender is usually acknowledged to be a dimension of inequality but is not the sole concern of a Human Rights frame actor.

Where Jan Sahas intersects with sanitation is their work on freeing people from manual scavenging. One of their key initiatives in recent years has been working with the government to help register manual scavengers for the government census. Their work is community-based. They will be political, engaging in criticism of the government. They would never say they are a sanitation actor, but

because of their focus on the marginalized and freeing people from debt bondage or debt slavery²² (of which they consider manual scavenging an example), they engage in the sanitation sector.

Classifying actors by the frame within which they operate serves as a means to organize actors by their values. In many ways, it often helps explain alliances that, on the surface, seem befuddling. Actors will make alliances with other actors who operate in the same frame, even though they may work on a different topic. One actor may engage in a range of activities that, from someone else's perspective, seem unrelated. Classifying actors by the frame they operate in can explain some of their activities better than trying to type them by many of the more standard ways to classify NGOs described at the beginning of this chapter.

Organizations, however, are dynamic, and many aspects about organizations fluctuate and change. The frame of reference or the underlying orientation of the organization tends to be much harder to change. It is integrated into the founding mission, the goals and activities, the ways that other actors view them, and who joins the organization. Once an organization has committed to a frame and has embedded into the ecology of NGO actors, it is difficult to change. The orientation reproduces itself. If an actor is in a health frame, they tend to hire people who are interested in health; get funding from health agencies (who continue to be a source of funding over time); get asked by media about health-related topics; have a long history of health-related research to refer to; get called in by governmental and nongovernmental partners to speak to this issue; and establish authority on this topic. It is a bit like gene canalization in genetics, in which environments may fluctuate, but there is a particular momentum that keeps this frame of reference or orientation the same (Waddington 1942). To break out of one's

²² Debt bondage or debt slavery refers to when individuals are forced to work off a debt with little to no control over their pay or their lives.

primary frame or to shift it often requires rupturing former connections and fighting against a reputation, which is something that most organizations are unwilling to do.

However, change can and does occur. One particular form of change that seems somewhat common is the shift away from a individual frame to a different one. Anil Agarwal started the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in 1980, and some of the professionals active in the sector at the time said that CSE really circulated around him, that it was propelled and based on his personality and ideas. Agarwal passed away in 2002, however, and the organization seems to have successfully shifted its frame to being more an environmental one, rather than simply a individual one.²³ However, this shift was only really possible because the environment was such a common element in their work.

The shift away from what I have described as a individual “frame” to an environmental one is analogous to a shift in type of legitimacy, as defined by Weber, from charismatic to a more rational-bureaucratic one (Weber 1978). An environmental frame maps more into a form of rational-bureaucratic legitimacy. Legitimacy, however, is a term that speaks to power dynamics, and my frames of reference are more meant to speak to cultures and orientations. My typologies are not intended to be used in isolation from other forms of typologies, and, indeed, in this remainder of this work I frequently reference multiple kinds.

²³ This analysis is based on mostly external viewing and reputation in the sector, plus a few interviews and interactions with CSE employees. This is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of CSE’s frame of reference, as I did not profile them and was not present during Agarwal’s tenure. However, I am using this primarily as a way to illustrate the ways in which change of orientation can and does occur.

Typology 3: Elements of reputation

As the next three chapters detail, organizations rely on reputation: for alliances, for governmental access, for funding, for the ability to stay out of jail, or to matter at all. Reputation is what gets you invited to conferences, gets you funded, gets your organization in the media, gets your reports circulated and read. It dictates who you will partner with, who you listen to, who listens to you, who you get funded by. It is an organization's outward-facing identity that maps how they fit into the complex ecology of the international development space. Much of one's reputation is predicated on the notion of legitimacy. Here, by legitimacy, I mean the reputation as being credible, or being worthy of listening to, funding, or partnering with. Legitimacy is a term that is also closely associated with Weber's typology, described at the beginning of this chapter. However, in this typology, the legitimacy that is being established is less among vertical power relations—the people who work for the NGO or the people who are the targets of development—but among other actors. This typology helps describe how organizations maintain legitimacy among and compared to other NGOs.

Reputation is independent from an objective truth about the efficacy of an organization. An organization may say that they do extremely rigorous science, but do not do so. They may present themselves as authoritative or powerful, but an examination of their awards or campaigns that they have used to present themselves as authoritative may demonstrate the awards are from no-name organizations or are all 30 years old. An organization may present itself as an authentic "Indian" organization but be severely detached from most Indians' lives. Instead, reputation reflects a narrative about the organization that is shared with decision makers, media, funders, and potential partners. These narratives are also not based on a rational assessment, but instead a constellation of public relations, experiences of individuals, international reputation and prestige, media engagement, outputs,

history, and rumor. These reputations are not necessarily shared by citizens or targets of development but exist among the networks of those who shape programs.

What the following section describes are three different elements of creating legitimacy in the development space: authority, authenticity, and validity. Most actors' reputations are based on two of them at any one time. They may seek to invoke a third, but validity and authenticity are often seen as oppositional, which will be explained.

These may be intentionally carried out, or they may be produced in part by other actors creating a broad narrative of the overall network of NGOs. For example, an actor may be construed as being particularly "authentic" by media outlets in order to place it in opposition to other organizations that are deemed as being less authentic.

Authority

Basing an organization's reputation on authority is to establish an actor as the best, the greatest, the most prominent, the only, the most accepted by powerful actors. They may make claims about being the first, the inventor, the biggest. They often appeal to an international presence or connections but may also base their claims of authority on an in-depth knowledge of the local. Their authority can be based on power, on money, or on knowledge, but the main idea is that their primacy, their prominence in the sector, is not able to be challenged or that you cannot engage in their area without taking their work into account. To present as authoritative is to predicate your reputation on being powerful and being recognized by important players as powerful.

An actor may invite powerful actors to a conference in an upscale hotel, showing that they can bring powerful (often financially influential or in the government) actors to their event. They may emphasize those actors' presence by placing their logos on all of the backgrounds, so that media

coverage of the event will show those logos placed together. Holding the event in an upscale place shows that the organization is wealthy, and wealth is often equated with success and power. An actor may invite special guests to attend their events; the more prominent the guests, the more powerful the actor may seem. They may stake their authority through the crisp, Western-professional layout of the office, with color-coordinated walls and a professionally-designed logo. They may prominently display on their website achievements and number of what they have achieved or display awards, gifts, and commendations in spaces that visitors will likely see. They may put significant resources into publicizing their events, efforts, campaigns or reports have a great deal of coverage and recognition by media—and, through that—the sector.

Validity

“Validity” is based on scientific discourse—on statistics, graphs, or expertise marked by university degrees. NGOs with reputations of being valid publish reports couched in terms of science and statistics. They use numbers to bolster their argument and lend credence not only to their particular initiative, but to themselves as an organization. They couch their work and their arguments in terms of objective perspectives, usually using detached and emotionless language. They may avoid political topics or the appearance of politics. If they engage in political-adjacent topics, it is done so in rational language. To predicate on validity is a claim to truth through ostensibly objective practices of science.

Organizations that rely on validity release reports of studies or research. These documents often feature statistics, data, and describe methodologies. They may employ people with PhDs. They may identify as a thinktank or a research center. They may gather data from a variety of sources and collate it into new reports. They may ally themselves with other scientific institutions or universities, especially

abroad. They primarily speak in English, the language of science and upward mobility. They may emphasize their detachment with a clean, crisp aesthetic that mirrors labs or corporate offices.

Authenticity

Tourism studies have examined and debated the notion of authenticity, and the notion that I describe is based on two different but related ideas.

In MacCannell's seminal work on the subject, he deploys Erving Goffman's notion of front space and back space. The front space is the performance, carefully constructed to present a particular image to a particular gaze. The back space is the "authentic" that tourists seek, a kind of forbidden or more real space. It is the kitchen at the restaurant where you can see chefs making the food. It is the broom closet in a ski chalet. It is invoked by hanging a fishnet in a seafood restaurant. It is seen in "behind the scenes" tours or in the viewing deck of the New York Stock Exchange (MacCannell 1973). Authenticity, in MacCannell's frame, is the perception on the part of the viewer that they are seeing into the private spaces of an entity, a kind of unvarnished and non-engineered reality.

The other kind of authenticity is a sense that you are seeing into the "real" India (or whatever country this discussion is being applied in). "Real" and "authentic" India are of course subjective, dependent on the gaze of the viewer, but they have a sense of the exotic, a sense of Other, timelessness, and a harkening back to a more 'real' version of a culture. It is produced in part by an Orientalist memory of place. An "authentic" or real Indian image is often predicated on poor, rural, tribal—in opposition to urban, elite, educated, middle class.

In the development space, actors whose reputations are based on authenticity portray themselves as being more 'real' and 'Indian' than the other actors. They put forth that there is no difference between front space and back space of their organization, that what you see is their reality.

They do not put forth a front, and when you are invited to view the organization, you are seeing all elements of it, all of the spaces. They are “real” Indians. Their presentation may be a bit rough. They and their public performances may lack polish or crispness to the edges which makes the organization feel like you are seeing behind a front into something more ‘real’ or indicative of the activities that go behind the front. In development parlance, they are more “on the ground” or “grassroots.” You may cite that you are part of a marginalized community, a grassroots movement, that you are associated with rural or the poor or simply “Indianness.” Authenticity is rough around the edges. It’s rural or poor. It’s Gandhi and prayers and clasped hands and charismatic god men. It’s saris and tribal clothing and poverty and Nehru collars and Ambedkar statues. In many ways, it is an essentialist notion of India and authenticity. It’s steeped in Hinduism and saffron or poverty and filth. Your English may be broken, your logo looks homemade, your office is perhaps a little dirty or lacks the sense of corporate polish you may see elsewhere. There are different modalities of authenticity that an organization may present, and the SKA and Sulabh chapters of this book delve into two different ones.

Authenticity can also allow an organization to not mirror the kinds of practices and performances that are expected of other organizations. An organization that is seen as authentic, for example, may not be judged as harshly for having substandard web pages or a lack of reports. They will not be judged negatively for having a slightly shabby office. It is less of a concern if they do not publish regular reports that denote their activities in clear to follow metrics or are assessed by third party operators. Indeed, trying to change some of these elements can actually damage the appearance of their authenticity.

But appearing too “authentic” can also damage their ability to make claims that rely on a reputation of validity. Validity is based on idioms of international science and a distant, detached scientific gaze; authenticity, however, is more grounded in notions of the local. Actors whose reputations are based on authenticity may make statistical or numbers-based claims, but these numbers

are not always treated as being true. SKA's reputation is primarily based on a combination of authenticity and authority. So when they present numbers about sewer deaths, they are not treated with the same sense of gravity as an organization that has a greater amount of validity in their reputation.

These three elements of reputation appear in different configurations throughout the development sector. Usually, an actor's reputation is dominated by one, maybe two of these elements at any one time. Particular events may deploy multiple of these elements, sometimes in an attempt to change a reputation or highlight some aspect of the organization for a particular purpose, but most organizations are firmly based on one or two of these elements. In the next three chapters of this work, I discuss how the three case study organizations relate to these three elements of reputation and how these elements are produced.

Case studies

The following chapters focus on the three organizations that served as my in-depth case studies: WaterAid India (usually referred to simply as WaterAid), Sulabh International Social Service Organization (Sulabh), and Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA). These three actors inhabit significantly different parts of development ecology and represent different types of the classifications described above. In each chapter, I discuss how these actors inhabit these different types.

As will be discussed, while WaterAid presents itself as homogenous, internally, they are an extremely heterogenous organization. WaterAid represents an organization that, as an institution, views sanitation as an end, but many of the individuals involved often consider it as a means, which causes the

organization to sometimes be inconsistent in how they act and the narratives they create. It also enables them to create more alliances with actors who view sanitation as both ends and means. They also operate within the health frame, which most INGO WASH organizations do, and I will use this chapter to discuss the international discourse around sanitation as a part of WASH. Their reputation is predicated almost entirely around authority and validity.

Sulabh is a sanitation as means organization, in many ways, as a detailing of their activities and their power structure will show. They operate very strongly within a individual frame, with the energy and power of the organization focusing on Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, the founder. Sulabh predicates its identity on being Indian and spends a significant amount of resources presenting themselves as both an authority and as authentically Indian—but a kind of Indianness that is based on hegemonic notions of Indian identity.

In Chapter 4, I discuss Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), or Manual Scavenger Mission. For SKA, sanitation is a battlefield that represents their oppression. And while they have someone who can be called a charismatic leader (albeit very different than Sulabh's), their primary frame is human rights. Externally, like Sulabh, their reputation is predicated on both authority and authenticity, but a radically different kind of authenticity and representation of Indianness than Sulabh's and a very different means of establishing authority.

Each of case study chapters is formatted the same. In a brief interlude before the chapter begins, I describe a typical morning in the office, taking into account the details of the office. By describing a morning, I hope to not only humanize and ground the following descriptions of the organization in thick description, but also to underline and heighten the contrast between the

organizations.²⁴ These descriptions of the office also work to describe how the offices themselves might look to a visitor, thus beginning to explore the private/public divides.

At the beginning of each chapter, I briefly outline my entrance into the organization and my role within it. From there, I describe the goals and activities of the organization; the daily office life and people; the leadership; and the funding structures. These are the practical elements necessary to understanding organizations as material entities, grounded in the practicalities of people living lives and of organizations needing funding. These material and structural-organizational elements ground the discussion, helping to explain what these organizations are and what it is they do. These elements straddle the line between public and private. Some elements are more public than others, and where those lines are drawn varies depending on the organization.

I then move into a more analytical portion, examining the actors' relationships with the government; their relationships with NGOs; and their engagement with media. These sections are at the core of my interest, speaking to horizontal relations between the NGOs and different key actors that can help or hinder them in their primary goals. These sections detail not only the ways in which these relationships manifest publicly, but the often-hidden strategizing and experiences of the people who are producing and negotiating those relationships.

Finally, I conclude by discussing the NGOs' placement within the typologies outlined in this chapter and more explicitly discuss the relationship between the private and public transcripts of the organization.

²⁴ The Introduction outlines a series of researchers who have explored the ethnography of development, including phenomenological descriptions of offices as I include in this project. However, the explicit study of offices as a space of lived experience and anthropological inquiry is not limited to ethnography. These kinds of studies have been carried out to great effect in similar contexts in government settings, as with Matthew Hull's study of paper and bureaucracy in Pakistan (Hull 2012) or Akhil Gupta's ethnography of bureaucracy in India (Gupta 2012)

Table 5: A table summarizing different aspects of the three case study organizations

	WaterAid	Sulabh	SKA
Goals and activities of org Explicit goals v. implicit	<p>“Safe water, sanitation and hygiene for everyone, everywhere by 2030” (WaterAid India 2015).</p> <p>Abstract, WASH-focused goal matches actions</p> <p>Tech advice, project piloting, advocacy, policy shaping</p>	<p>“a nonprofit voluntary social organization...dedicated to Gandhian ideology of emancipation of scavengers...working for the removal of untouchability and social discrimination against scavengers” (Sulabh Sanitation Movement n.d.).</p> <p>Most resources go into toilet construction and maintenance and building of pay-per-use restrooms</p> <p>A builder of toilets and promoter of Sulabh messaging</p>	<p>“a national movement committed to the total eradication of manual scavenging and the liberation and rehabilitation of all safai karmacharis engaged in manual scavenging into dignified occupations. SKA is also fighting to stop deaths of workers in sewer lines and septic tanks. SKA is committed to the Ambedkar ideology of equality, equity, and human dignity” (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2016).</p> <p>Educating community, educating and empowering community about caste and Ambedkar ideology, advocacy on national stage, filing with courts, demanding rights already promised by law</p>
Organization structure Who does what? How are decisions made? Who holds the power?	<p>Individuals have a lot of power to make decisions, but they also will collaborate in their teams. Senior management team has final say. While there is a clear “chain of command” people can move around it pretty well.</p> <p>Relation with international partners and WaterAid central:</p>	<p>Pretty much everything goes through Dr. Pathak. Even approving flowers for an event.</p>	<p>Bezwada Wilson is the catalyst in the national office but will defer or be challenged. Other strong personalities round out office dynamics. Strong personalities in other regional offices also leads to a spread of power.</p>

	two-way flow of information and decision-making power		
Daily office life and people	<p>Middle and upper class</p> <p>College educated from corporate, government, and NGO sectors</p> <p>Formal “professionalized” setting in the Western, affluent sense of the word</p> <p>Continually busy and overworked sense</p> <p>Friendly office—warm, celebrate birthdays, morning breakfast sharing group with a few people</p> <p>Clean, branded, bright office with décor consistent with other branding messages and themes</p>	<p>Range of classes present on campus, but only higher class and caste are present in upper rankings.</p> <p>More employees than work means that there are lots of slow times and lag time.</p> <p>Toilet museum serves as a focal point for visitors</p> <p>Clean, spruced up aesthetically pleasing office with lots and lots of photos of VIPs and quotes from Dr. Pathak on the walls</p>	<p>Warm congenial office, where everyone eats together and shares food.</p> <p>Office is not highly polished, reflecting resource prioritization.</p> <p>Range of people in the office, but many are from safai karmachari castes. Most of the workers are from Dalit castes, but many people like Bhasha or Divas are hired from higher castes as well to supplement with their skills.</p> <p>Office life tends to hum along, but sometimes you will see it go into overdrive, with long nights. However, people are always allowed to leave to take care of family and the like.</p>
Leadership	<p>Senior management team and CEO. Power is shared among team.</p> <p>CEO is a former social worker. Says that if any of the work became focused on him, it would be a failure.</p>	<p>Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak is larger than life, charismatic figure.</p> <p>Pathak is a Brahman who saved the Untouchables.</p> <p>Sometimes claims he is not director, but he is in charge of everything.</p>	<p>Bezwada Wilson is from the Dalit community.</p> <p>Is all right being center of attention, if that’s what needs to happen. Is talking about splitting leadership with other people.</p> <p>Charismatic leader</p>

		<p>Culture of hero worship around the office. Face of all outward facing communications.</p> <p>Dr. Pathak is Sulabh and Sulabh is Dr. Pathak.</p> <p>Micromanages</p>	Micromanages
<p>Funding Where does the money come from and how do they get it?</p>	Government, foundations, corporate foundations, individual donations, WaterAid-UK	<p>Corporations "Self-funded" Government contracts UN Donations</p> <p>However, often claim NOT to take donations and be entirely funded through the pay-per-use model.</p>	<p>Foundations, charities, individual donations.</p> <p>Often takes funding from foreign Christian organizations like Bread for the World.</p>
<p>Frames of reference What frames are they appealing to? Where are they slotted in the sector? What are the frames they operate in and appeal to?</p>	Firmly centered on health discourse like a "classic" WASH org, but also will invoke human rights	Individual around Dr. Pathak	Human rights, gender
<p>Relationship with government and parties</p>	<p>"critical friend"</p> <p>Walking a tightrope between being able to call out nonsense or advocate for marginalized without alienating the government. Often puts them in awkward positions. Tension really shapes organization.</p>	<p>Aggressively non-critical towards all government, but particularly effusive in praising Modi and BJP</p> <p>Relies on government for municipal contracts and contracts in places like historical landmarks and railways</p> <p>Dr. Pathak is "swachh ambassador" for the railway program</p>	<p>Not a great relationship with MDWS or MOUD, particularly because of outspoken criticism of SBM.</p> <p>However, great relationship with MSJW where Wilson is a frequent speaker.</p> <p>In spite of stereotype, has close relationship with many government</p>

		<p>Positive relationship with government means that they are sometimes seen as politically “neutral” for international organizations that want to appear to not be political while endorsing sanitation.</p>	<p>branches because he is seen as a man of integrity.</p> <p>Outspoken critic of Modi—less him overall, but will call out specific actions or failure of actions. But really calls out everybody. Doesn’t favor a party.</p>
<p>Relationship with other NGOs Who do they work with? What is their reputation in the sector? How do others see and view them?</p>	<p>WA also will fund events or partner with other orgs.</p> <p>We also see professionals from other orgs moving into WaterAid. This helps maintain particular lines of connectivity and work.</p> <p>Creating alliances and collaborations is one of their key roles.</p> <p>Moves between interacting with partners like UNICEF and World Bank and Civil Society groups, like Wada Na Todo Abhiyan. Tries to play both sides with mixed success.</p> <p>Often times alliances manifest as being seen at and attending events and conferences.</p> <p>Great reputation. Known more for tech work and support. Seen as</p>	<p>They have at least a historically tight relationship with UN and WHO, with the two giving awards back to each other. They will host orgs like CSE or WaterAid for learning.</p> <p>Their newsletter highlights small orgs and initiatives, but we’re not seeing a lot of collaboration or effort to create alliances with other orgs.</p> <p>Sulabh has a reputation for not liking to work with others because they assume they are correct and are the experts.</p> <p>You don’t see them signing on with other civil society orgs to make a statement</p> <p>They are however a member of ISC.</p> <p>They also make friends with controversial figures who can lend celebrity</p>	<p>BW is a frequent speaker at other organization events in the sanitation sector.</p> <p>Wilson is respected as an individual, but SKA is not necessarily known in the sanitation sector.</p> <p>Usually not considered as part of the “sanitation” sector at all.</p> <p>Seen only as an “activist” and not as offering solutions. Some vexation with what is seen as a lack of practicality.</p> <p>However, very good reputation for integrity. Seen as strong representative for the community and human rights person.</p>

	<p>influential player. Commonly cited as one of the best organizations in sanitation in interviews with professionals.</p> <p>However, sometimes rocky relationship with grassroots/activist leaning groups because of endorsement of SBM and government, which are seen as oppressive.</p>	<p>Incredibly uneven reputation. For some, incredibly positive: “he does good work”, “pioneer”, etc. For others, “He’s the worst.” “Fraud.” Known to be difficult to work with.</p> <p>Pathak himself is often seen as either egotistical or great man. Polarizing oppositional reputation.</p>	
<p>Media engagement How do they engage with the media? What are their messages? What are the media’s engagements with them?</p>	<p>Has explicit media strategies and people whose job it is to engage with media</p> <p>Creates spectacles, reports, campaigns to particularly appeal to media</p> <p>Creates reports that feature particular bites they know will appeal to news sources</p> <p>Active social media presence</p>	<p>Spends a lot of time and resources engaging in media spectacle</p> <p>Incentivizes media to cover them</p> <p>Creates own media and distributes to a long list of politicians and NGOs</p> <p>Active on social media</p> <p>Dr. Pathak is the first stop of any foreign journalist who is doing a story on sanitation.</p>	<p>Wilson is the go-to person anytime the newspapers need someone to represent Untouchables or a human rights issue. Will speak to almost anyone.</p> <p>Relies on media to be their public mouthpiece, which means they sometimes lose control over their narrative.</p> <p>Creation of spectacle (protest) for attention</p> <p>Reputation and high standing of Wilson means that media come to them</p> <p>Did not even have a formal report or brochure</p> <p>No consistent media strategy</p>

<p>Relationship/engagement with shit/pollution</p>	<p>Engages with manual scavenging and caste in various ways in their advocacy</p> <p>Sees pollution ideas as something to be educated away from, as something that can be abolished through modernity or modern practices. Or at least mitigated with kinds of affirmative action.</p> <p>Inconsistent values about shit.</p> <p>Primary engagement with shit is as a biological hazard.</p>	<p>Tries to valorize sanitation as a topic.</p> <p>Pushing transformative narratives. The shit can be transformed into clean water or fertilizer—the manual scavengers can be transformed into Brahmin.</p> <p>Couches the notion of sanitation as being a part of Indian culture—reframes Indian history.</p> <p>Valorizes sanitation, particularly by linking it strongly to Gandhi</p>	<p>Seeks to abolish caste structures and entirely reject them.</p> <p>Does not try to advocate for transformation of shit, because that would cause a setback as an excuse to perpetuate scavenging practices. If people say that shit is clean, then the casteism will just become legal.</p> <p>Seeks to replace caste-inflected perceptions with language of science, democracy, following Ambedkarian thought.</p>
<p>Private vs. public transcript alignment? To what extent do private and public transcripts align? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Mixed values and approaches within the office among individuals leads to varying degrees of discrepancy; strategic discrepancies in order to create positive relationship with gov or particular allies.</p> <p>This mismatch sometimes creates frustration and friction within the organization and contributes to flux.</p>	<p>Public outputs are manufactured primarily by and as a megaphone for Dr. Pathak and his goals</p> <p>Core values of organization are highly variable</p>	<p>Highly consistent between public values and private conversations Sometimes more moderate in internal conversations, and more extreme in public ones in order to push for the ideal. However, internally, far more pragmatic.</p>

Welcome to the office

WaterAid-India

The WaterAid-India office is located in a swanky tennis stadium and sports complex bordering two middle and upper-class neighborhoods and abutting a large park. There is a constant flow of people who are entering and exiting the building—crisp shirt-clad men on their way to the office; sweaty men or women returning from a workout at the posh gym; a small horde of children in their party clothes on their way to a birthday party in the marbled lobby. Middle and upper class, elites. Inside this complex, you do not find the raw edges of poverty, but the kind of middle-class sensibility-shaped aesthetic that WaterAid, like other INGOs, performs. The walls of the compound quiet the noisy chaos of traffic and poverty and pollution outside.

WHO is on the first floor of this building; whether the proximity was intentional or not, I was never able to tell, but it lent more authority to the odd location and reinforced WaterAid's role as an international actor with international ties. WaterAid is on the second floor, which it shares with an office that seemed to be in a state of near-perpetual construction—dust billowing, paint fumes wafting, and the welding sparks spraying out.

“Good morning,” I smile at the black uniform-clad at the desk.

“Good morning,” he smiles back. His English isn't good, and neither is my Hindi, but between the two, we have a warm friendliness, which is particularly useful when I forget my swipe card that unlocks the door to the offices.



Figure 7: A picture of the WaterAid India office and lobby (Author photo)

There are two halves to the WaterAid office with glass walls and doors separating them both, giving a sense both of security and an architecturally explicit statement of transparency. To the right are banks of offices and desks where people actually work, and to the left is the reception desk, meeting rooms and a break room. The waiting area is small, with a few modern chairs and sofas, a stack of newspapers on a wooden side table, and an anemic potted palm tree. During Christmas, one of the office managers decorated the palm, and it sagged under the weight of tinsel. Still, though, the decorations lent a bit of warmth to the office.

Walking into the office feels like walking into a WaterAid brochure, with the colors, fonts, and aesthetics on the walls matching the WaterAid-International sanctioned palette and style guide. It's the kind of office you can find in any country, with a slick middle-class, international, Western "professionalized" look: white ceiling tiles, pale walls, modern furniture, bright lighting.

Myself, with my middle-class Western upbringing and experience in development, find the office perfectly legible, perfectly familiar; in many ways, it is the same as a million offices in a million

countries. Once you enter the office, with the exception of a large map of India on the wall, you could be anywhere.

“Did you *mean* for the office to look like a WaterAid brochure?” I ask one of the WaterAid folks one afternoon.

She looked around and laughed. “Yeah, I guess it does. I think the director of communications consulted when we opened the new office.”

The first visual that visitors will see when they arrive at the office is a map of India painted on the wall with the heading “Where we work” with the states that WaterAid is active in highlighted, and the WaterAid logo sits in the center. The walls are a warm white and are painted in geometric designs reminiscent of plumbing in WaterAid international’s sanctioned palette of blues and yellows. Interspersed among the plumbing are spigots from which large drops of colors ballooned, sharing the statistics that underlie their work and lend credence to the sense of urgency that they imbue their work with: the number of people who lack access to safe water; the number of people who defecate in the open; how many cities in India have a fully piped sewage system. The kinds of statistics that any WaterAid presentation may start out with or any WaterAid report would sketch in its introduction. For visitors, it is educational and positions WaterAid as a WASH organization; for the employees, it creates a bright cheery atmosphere and reminders of the work to be done.

The slick aesthetic of the office reinforces the international organizational identity; through understated wealth and invocation of international (Western) tropes of professionalization, they establish authority. The clean sterility of the office, reminiscent of a laboratory, lends credence to their validity of their science. Their art—statistics, a map of India, smiling children—is positive and noncontroversial. Like in their political positioning, the office itself is a kind of careful visage of neutrality and unobjectionability.

The “Pantry” is a large bright room, with red furniture that does not match the sanctioned color scheme. This is where people eat lunch, drink tea, take a break. Large tinted windows reveal the slate grey of a Delhi winter sky, and on the wall are a series of handprints in bright gloppy paint with signatures and large text reading, “the WaterAid family.” I do not know several of the names on the wall, employees who have left for other jobs. WaterAid’s “family” is often in flux.

My first stop in the morning is to leave my lunch tiffin²⁵ here, and one of the office assistants will help manage the line for the microwave at lunch by microwaving everyone’s tiffin, a nod to the ever-bustling and efficiency that often dominates the culture here. But the frantic efficiency is interspersed with quiet moments, usually over food or tea. A few women are sitting at the table, chatting with tea and biscuits and foil-wrapped parathas from home. This morning they are talking about the best places to buy furniture.

“Have you tried Kirti Nagar?” One woman suggests.

I grab a white coffee mug from the drawer, wondering again who brought the mug that says “Get shit done” and why they never seem to use it. The coffee machine is a large Nespresso maker that makes appalling chai but decent coffee. The technological replacement for what is usually a person’s job seems to be illustrative of something greater, but before my first coffee, I cannot guess what it is. I press the buttons and wait while it grinds the coffee.

“Would you like some paratha, Jenny?” one of the women ask.

“Thank you,” I say, tearing off a piece. I have been in India long enough to have learned that you should always accept food when offered. “I have to get back to work, but I will see you later.”

²⁵ A tiffin is traditionally a metal stacked lunch pail, but the word more broadly refers to any kind of portable lunch container, including plastic ones.

I grab my cup and head to the other half of the office where all the desks and offices are. A small “library” at the entrance stores a thin collection of old reports and awards and commendations and is cheered by an arrangement of impractical but decorative pillows.

The office work area itself is airy and open, with large windows that let in the sun. The office is divided into teams, with each team sharing a square area and desks facing towards the walls. Senior management have their own glass walled offices with frosting on the glass to give a modicum of privacy, but if you jump and wave they’ll see you.

My desk is tucked near the HR group and some of the regional staff, right near the entrance to the office half. I’ve been lent out to the policy team, where I do work for the head of campaigns and advocacy. Today, I need to track down which Indian states have written plans for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a task that involves a lot of Googling, a lot of emails, a few phone calls, and patience.

Wrapping my shawl around me to ward off the frigid air conditioning, I boot up my computer and begin to work, listening to the ticking of keyboards, the soft chatter of coworkers, and the unintentionally loud voice from a Skype call across the room.



Figure 8: Inside the WaterAid office in the section called the library (Author photo)

2

“A critical friend”: WaterAid-India

“Access to safe sanitation is a global development priority. However, almost one in every two Indians doesn’t have access to safe toilets. Universal access to sustainable sanitation services is critical to the health of human beings as one gram of faeces can contain up to 10,000,000 viruses, 1,000,000 bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts, and 100 parasite eggs.”

--WaterAid strategy document

WaterAid’s relationship between private and public is negotiated, mitigated and concealed through the homogenizing influence of their brand. Externally, they are a typical WASH INGO, with a slick brand and a well-established global expertise. The media looks to them for credible, scientific and well-vaunted data. The government invites them to meetings, and other WASH professionals consistently regard them as one of the key actors in the sanitation space. They have a long history of working in the country, and a vast network that spans continents. Internally, WaterAid is heterogenous and dynamic, responding to development industry trends, current governmental needs, and organizational mandates from both within the country and externally.

WaterAid was the second organizational case study of my work, taking place from September 2016 until January 2017, although I had contact and interviews with them both before and after this period. Much of the work at WaterAid is carried out in siloes, and so I spent more time at WaterAid conducting individual interviews than at the other case study organizations, interviewing a majority of people in their Delhi office, which came to 23 formal semi-structured interviews, in addition to numerous informal interactions over the desk or a cup of coffee in the cafeteria.

The outline follows the same format as described in the previous chapter. I begin by grounding my discussion in the concrete realities, of what they do, who they are, the rhythms and culture of the office, the sources of funding, before I push my discussion into their position in the ecology and their positioning in the discourse. In the concluding portions of the chapter, I explain WaterAid’s role in regard to the typologies described in Chapter 1.

Goals and activities

WaterAid-International’s global strategy document for 2015-2020 is called “Everyone, Everywhere 2030.” On the first pages, they set out their overarching goals:

Our vision is a world where everyone, everywhere has safe water, sanitation and hygiene. Our mission is to transform the lives of the poorest and most marginalized people by improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WaterAid India 2015:1).

They mirror the corporate sector’s terminology of “vision” and “mission.” While they speak to the notion that WASH will do something positive in the lives of the people they target, they are ambiguous as to the how, merely using the word “transform.” The main idea to come out of their vision statement is that they are, above all else, a WASH organization. Aiming to benefit the “most marginalized” and the poor is a common way for NGOs to differentiate themselves from the government in WASH services—in this framing, the government provides for the majority, but the NGOs create a role for themselves by focusing on those “left behind,” a phrase commonly used in the sector. While WaterAid-India is becoming relatively independent (which will be described in greater detail later), this vision equally applies to their own office. To accomplish their goals, WaterAid conducts a wide range of activities in the realms of programming, policy, and research. To see a description of their focus areas excerpted from the WaterAid India strategy document, see Table 6: .

Programming: WaterAid’s sanitation programming covers a wide span of activities, from the use of new technologies (although they de-emphasize this) to education, to creating systems of government accountability or monitoring and evaluation. A project might involve assisting a local government agency to monitor sewage effluent; promoting or educating a community to maintain or demand sanitation systems; supporting local supply chains and supporting masons for sanitation work; promoting new technical options that are location-appropriate; helping local communities develop WASH plans; or piloting a new fecal sludge management technology. For most of their history, like most of the WASH sector, WaterAid focused on “service delivery”, a model by which a community deficit is identified and then the organization delivers the system—functionally, build toilets or water pumps in a place that needed them. However, as NGOs recognized that their projects were often unsustainable and lacked longevity, they shifted to projects that try to develop long-term solutions and systems that are integrated with local government.

In addition to sanitation, WaterAid also works in the areas of water and hygiene, including menstrual hygiene management and drinking water quality. Most of their programming work is through implementing partners who carry out the activities while WaterAid provides technical support, monitoring and evaluation, and funding.

Policy: The other main area of their work is policy, in which they try to influence Indian government policies to reflect “best practice” WASH learnings, to create widespread momentum around WASH issues, and to influence broader discourse. Policy activities might include advocating for a policy that requires that WASH facilities be in all hospitals; having government adopt a particular handbook regarding how to create and maintain WASH systems that account for people with disabilities; creating a campaign to raise awareness of manual scavenging; or to codify the inclusion of particular communities into accountability mechanisms. They create policy documents, sometimes praising, sometimes highlighting potential problems, sometimes very diplomatically and carefully pointing out that certain

government claims have not been substantiated by reliable data. Additionally, the policy team works with other NGOs in order to create collaborations and to create more impactful coalitions.

Research: WaterAid is also a producer and compiler of data and knowledge. They carry out research projects (usually in conjunction with partners), arrange meetings where research findings can be disseminated, or create reports or media documents that help publicize other research findings.

What unifies their work is, unsurprisingly, the pursuit of WASH. In much of their overall work, however, they recognize that they do not have the capacity to replace the government in terms of service provision, but they are instead trying to improve systems and create new approaches that will improve WASH outcomes. It is difficult to summarize what it is that WaterAid does at any given time given how diverse a range of activities they are and a diverse range of goals. (See their goals in their focus areas in Table 6.)

Table 6: WaterAid India's six strategic areas of focus according to their strategic document (WaterAid India 2015:21)

Rural sanitation	Accelerate rural sanitation, aligning to the national flagship programme of Swachh Bharat Mission, enabling people to realise their entitlements and influence governance to ensure effective and inclusive delivery.
Drinking water security	Promote sustainability of rural water supply service, based on clear operating, maintenance and management procedures including operation and maintenance (O&M), measurement for equitable distribution, and transparent arrangement for renewal, replacement and expansion of the source and/or the systems.
Urban WASH	Improving water, sanitation and hygiene services for the low-income urban areas is challenging and can be more effectively addressed by intervening at the level of city policy and planning. Urban WASH is about strengthening urban policies and plans with community participation to ensure equitable access and sustainable treatment of waste.
WASH in health and nutrition	Recognising the importance of WASH in health and nutrition, we combine WASH infrastructure and education with nutrition and health facilities; ensure

	safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene necessities are accessible to pregnant and lactating women, and children under five years of age in all contexts including health care centres and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres.
WASH in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation	Integrating WASH preparedness in states disaster risk reduction measures and promoting resilience measures both in technologies and community programmes as a regular part of WASH development work.
WASH in schools	WASH in schools promotes access to safe water, appropriate sanitation and hygiene systems and also supports and strengthens national and local institutions to sustain the progress and progressively improve the school environment under the broader rubric of Right to Education.

Organization structure

WaterAid International was established in 1981 in the UK and began work in India five years later.

Today, the organization works in 28 countries and is supported by additional offices in the US, Australia, Sweden, Canada, and Japan, who primarily fundraise and provide international support. The WaterAid-International head office continues to be in London. The country offices are further organized into regional groups. The India office makes up the majority of the South Asian region, but the block also includes their offices in Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

In 2016, WaterAid India shifted from becoming a branch office of the WaterAid International to being WaterAid's first "member" organization. WaterAid-India is now registered as an independent organization in India (under the name "Jal Sewa", or "Water Mission"), meaning that they have a greater deal of autonomy from the international unit. They are also responsible for becoming more self-sustainable; by 2021, they plan to have 80% of their office's funding come from in-country sources.

WaterAid-India's national office is based in Delhi, but they have teams in 11 states across the country: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra

Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi²⁶, and Rajasthan. The national office houses approximately 40 employees, and the remainder of this chapter focuses solely on the national headquarters.

There are six teams of people in Delhi: Programming; Policy; Finance and Program Monitoring and Evaluation; Administration and Human Resources; Resource Mobilization; and Media and Communications. Each of these teams has a separate manager, who then works under one of the three members of the senior management team (who will be discussed in the Leadership section). In addition, two coordinators for the South Asian region also sit in the Delhi office and coordinate with other offices in the region from there. People who are working on projects in Delhi also work out of this central office.

Programming team supports and coordinates state programs. The Policy team coordinates policy work, campaigns, advocacy, and research. The Finance and Program Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) team monitors internal budgeting; coordinates donor reporting requirements; and conducts quality assessments of programs. Resource Mobilization (RM) acquires and manages funding and other resources through donations and grants. The Media and Communications team coordinates media relations, unifies all outward-facing communications, and supports communications needs within the organization. The two South Asian region coordinators manage resource management and campaigning and advocacy, respectively. The remainder of people in the office include administrative assistants, IT, human resources, and the office manager and his assistant, who enable the office to function smoothly by coordinating special lunches, meetings spaces, and other tasks.

²⁶ Within the national headquarters, there are people who focus on programs in Delhi.

Daily office life and people

With the exception of an occasional visitor from the UK office, everyone at the WaterAid-India office is Indian. Overall, they are college-educated, urban middle class, and speak fluent English. Within the scope of middle class, educated Indians, their respective backgrounds differ significantly. Some come from government; others business; others from civil rights and activism; others from research.

One man, for example, started in academia, completing a PhD in Indian History, before he became involved with the right to literacy movement. Another person entered the development workforce when she found a job that at another organization that combined her skillsets in a new and interesting way. Another person was a social worker with strong connections to civil society organizations. Another had a PhD in public health. Another worked for the Indian government. Often times, these individuals maintain their networks from their previous jobs. Particularly in the cases of those who come from major NGOs or the government, this network is an important part of the skills they offer to WaterAid.

Most people who work at WaterAid have not done so for very long and likely will not stay for more than a few years. For corporations in India, turnover of 6-8% is considered normal. At WaterAid India, about five to six people leave the Delhi office in a year. While from a managerial perspective, this might be considered typical, it adds to a sense of constant flux and change, a sense of instability among the employees. It also contributes to a sense that for the employees here, WaterAid is a part of a professional career, not a 'calling.' In many ways, the changeover illustrates Weber's idea of a bureaucracy, in which people become interchangeable (Weber 1978). Most of the people who leave are departing for other opportunities, usually within the NGO sector.

However, each person brings a different set of values, expertise, and, more importantly, networks to their position that fundamentally changes how their position functions in the overall

structure. This high rate of changeover allows the organization to be fluid and flexible, to change the demographics of the organization to fit their current goals, values, ideology, and needs. With the diversity of people's backgrounds and the fluctuation and change in the personnel, from the inside, the organization can feel fragmented, shifting, unsteady and unstable. But this heterogeneity, this constant change, under a veneer of consistent branding and a simple goal is what WaterAid fundamentally is.

The office is not mobilized by an underlying passion for WASH as a cause. People care, and some care deeply, but the ethos often gives way to a gentle, perseverant, dogged pragmatism. They recognize that change can be as incremental and seemingly small as a change in a line of policy. The younger staff sometimes feel the lack of this fire and regard it with a certain amount of frustration. But there is perhaps something in the work culture of an office like this, somewhere between the Excel spreadsheets and the bureaucracy and the strategic goals that is necessary to maintaining WaterAid and its role as a source of validity and an authority in the network .

WaterAid's work and ethos is a calm, methodical, iterative process, in which people are shaping, rephrasing, connecting, forcing unity and collaboration in the chaotic space of all of the actors interacting. This allows them to maintain relationships with the government and many of the more conservative organizations, like the bilaterals or multilateral aid organizations, who would shy away from anything that may be conceived of as political activism. It also makes the lifestyle more sustainable for many people; they can seek a work-life balance. There are plenty of people who do have passion, though, but it does not dominate the office as a whole.

Overall, the office maps well onto a bureaucratic sensibility and middle-class work. Labor is divided into specialized teams. There are distinct hierarchies, in which people report to managers, who report to the senior management team.

Leadership

Leadership at WaterAid is shared among the Senior Management Team (SMT), comprising of the CEO; the director of program and policy; the head of PME, IT, and Finance; and the director of resource mobilization. The media, communications, and administration teams report directly to the CEO. Major decisions for the organization are not decided unilaterally by the CEO but are often shared among the SMT. Particularly since declaring themselves as an independent entity, the leadership in the India office have a significant amount of autonomy from the London office, and decisions and strategies are often formed collaboratively.

The current CEO is intelligent, practical, pragmatic, methodical, and precise. He has only been in the position for a few months during my time with them, but he has had a long history of working and managing development organizations, starting with early work in the social work sector. He describes that he sees his role as being a “sounding board” and that his job is to ensure that “we are all moving together as one team to achieve the objectives that we've set up” and to “steer people in the right direction.” Much of his work is not only to troubleshoot pragmatic realities, but, more importantly, to render the disparate and heterogenous activities and people of WaterAid cohesive to a particular mission or narrative—a narrative that itself has been iteratively produced by different layers in the organization.

Also important to note is that in describing the role of the CEO, the language of charismatic leadership is absent. This will particularly contrast with the leadership of Sulabh International and Safai Karmachari Andolan. WaterAid’s power, influence, branding do not come from a particular quality of leadership. There is an interchangeability to the CEO role in the sense that the departure of any one CEO, while may rupture some of the personal networks that were attached to them, does not fundamentally throw the identity or future of the organization into doubt or question. As a former CEO

told me: “I’m probably the 4th CEO in the last 15 years. We’re just a means to an end. If WaterAid’s identity became limited to mine, then I will have actually failed.”

The CEO also is not the only one who speaks for the organization in interactions with government, other NGOs, or the media; while the CEO is an important voice, they are far from the only voice. When the CEO speaks, it is as a representative of the WaterAid name, not meant to represent the totality of it. Other managers or experts at WaterAid—both national and state levels—will also speak on WaterAid’s behalf, although these interactions may be managed by the media office. The relatively frequent changeover of leadership and the dispersion of power ensures that WaterAid’s overall public image continues to be as an organization, not an extension of an individual.

Funding

While all of the WA teams consider funding to some extent, the recently-created Resource Management team is in charge of securing funds for the newly-independent WaterAid India. Prior to 2016, WaterAid India’s funding came through WaterAid International, the central office. This funding was unrestricted, meaning that WaterAid UK would give WaterAid India money to use for whatever they had articulated were the priorities for the region. The lines of financial accountability were between WA-I and the central office.

However, with India’s growing economic independence; the implementation of CSR rules²⁷; and an increasing distrust of foreign organizations, WaterAid (both the international head office and the India office) recognized that establishing WaterAid-India as a separate organization with a separate form

²⁷ In 2013, the Indian government enacted Section 135 of the Indian Companies Act which mandated that companies with a net worth of five billion rupees or more, a turnover of ten billion rupees or more, or a net profit of 50 million or more rupees per year are required to spend 2% of their average net profits on CSR activities (Jain and Gopalan 2017).

of funding would be more sustainable and strategic in the long-run. It would also adhere to their goals of trying to localize their work. In their blog post on the subject of WaterAid India becoming a member country of WaterAid alliance instead of a branch office, they wrote that “becoming a local entity also means that we can access local resources, have an opportunity to participate in Indian policy conversations as a local rather than an outsider, and can gain greater credibility” (Jain and Kumar 2016).

WaterAid-India’s independence pushes their identity as an Indian organization, not a foreign organization that has jumped in to help a helpless poor country. India is fighting to establish their identity as a major world power, and having foreign organizations come in to help them “develop” counters that narrative. Their dual identity is strategic; when it is advantageous, they are international, plugged into a vast network of expertise. They can invoke their global standing and credibility. In other instances, they can proclaim their “Indianness,” their financial independence, their Indian staff, and their 30 years of operations in the country.

When WaterAid-India became its own organization in 2016, the priority of the leadership began to center on ensuring that they had enough money to actually back up their claims of independence. The goal is to become financially independent from the central headquarters in five years: five years to set up the complex networks of trust and funding and branding that will ensure secure support for the full range of programs that they want. In five years, they plan to figure out the systems that will ensure that WaterAid India can do the work they deem high priority while still appealing to and working with a whole new set of donors.

The Communications team is vital in maintaining and establishing a reputation and brand that individuals and donor organizations want to donate to. The PME team ensures monitoring and accountability systems are in place to ensure money is spent well and accounting mechanisms are in place. The RM team, on the other hand, is the one in charge of actually getting money.

Each staff member on the RM team (with the exception of managerial and support staff members) have a portfolio of potential funders they are charged to pursue: institutional donors (bilaterals, multilaterals, and large foundational donors such as Gates); corporate partnerships; and individual donations. Much of the work of the individuals in charge of each of these portfolios involves strategizing how to connect based on the needs and desires of the donors.

The institutional portfolio is the best established, with the organizational relationships going back pre-WaterAid India independence. The head of this portfolio finds Calls for Proposals (CFPs) from institutional donor through funding email lists, grant websites, and personal networks. These CFPs must match WaterAid's general parameters in terms of both geography and topic, but whether a CFP is a good "fit" is a matter of significant internal negotiation, involving circuitous email chains that can incorporate RM, WaterAid regional heads, central office, and the senior management team.

These negotiations often circulate about how far WaterAid can "push" itself to qualify for a grant. Through partnership with a different organization or linguistic wrangling, would they be able to render themselves legible to a particular donor grant? In one such negotiation, an internal email asks, "If we partner with -----, can we put in for this human rights and minorities grant? How far outside of our scope is that?" These conversations are private, hidden, and internal negotiations. They can bring individual interests to the fore, and thus become a way that individual WaterAid staff members can influence the actual directions and activities of the organization. Individuals who are passionate about human rights saw a particular human rights grant as a way to push WaterAid in that direction. They pushed a plan for partnering with a different organization that has a more explicit human rights focus so that they were rendered more legible as a human rights organization to the donor. When they won the human rights grant, they publicly established themselves as an actor in this space. Negotiations about whether or not to go for a grant function as internal negotiations about what WaterAid is.

Anika²⁸ is in charge of corporate donations, which is a new funding source. A young bright and upbeat woman with an infectious smile, her affable personality helps her to create new networks. “To [get funds for WaterAid], I need to interact with as many corporate partners as I can,” she said. The setting to get donations is already favorable: governmental CSR policies have ensured that there is a large number of organizations who need to donate, and the visibility of SBM has helped ensure that there is a pool of corporate donors who are interested in putting their required CSR funds into sanitation. Part of Anika’s job is to also push to potential donors the idea that corporations can leverage the images and successes of the WaterAid project to improve their own public images.

To establish the networks, Anika spends a great deal of time “stalking on the internet,” pinpointing which corporations with CSR requirements seem to have interests that would align with WaterAid’s. A CSR company may have direct ties to water and sanitation, like a bottled water company, or their CSR policy says that water and sanitation are their foci. She tries to get the phone number of the CSR head, through phone or email or networks, but sometimes, “We throw ourselves at them.” Organizations like the India Sanitation Coalition throws events which enable face to face meetings. Sometimes, Anika simply searches on the internet for a photo of a person who she wants to meet, approaches him or her at the meeting, and “throws” a card at them so they can reconnect later. Or she might go to a large meeting and look for the person with whom everyone seems to be talking and approach them with her pitch and card. The approach is a unique combination of haphazard and deliberate, a practiced scattershot approach that involves an individual putting him or herself out there over and over again.

WaterAid also solicits individual donations, through emails, social media, newsletters, and cold calls. Because of their international branding and name recognition, wealthy individuals or NRIs with a

²⁸ Not her real name

desire to “give back” will come to WaterAid. However, many times these individuals ask that these projects be done in a certain village or community, often the one they currently live in or perhaps grew up in. But WaterAid’s global strategy has a set number of geographic locations they work in, and they are moving away from service delivery, and so in these cases, they may refer the individual to an organization that will fulfill their needs.

As with all nonprofits and NGOs that rely on donations and grants, there is a constant tension and negotiation between the integrity of the organization—their brand, integrity, quality, focus, adhering to their own values and strategies—and being open enough to a variety of funding streams and projects, to be flexible and accommodating, so they can acquire enough funds to survive.

Because WaterAid has international ties and international funding, this enables a certain amount of leeway. They can and do turn money away. The objections to working with certain donors can come from multiple perspectives, whether the practical (we simply cannot afford to do all of the reporting they ask of us) to the ideological (we will not ally ourselves with these) to the strategic (they are asking us to work in a geographic site that is not one of the ones we have selected to work in). While I worked there, the RM team was in the process of developing a guide regarding the ethics of who they will take money from. No tobacco companies or weapons manufacturers, for example, one of the women told me. This was a conversation with members from Program Monitoring and Evaluation Team, the Resource Management team, and the Senior Management team.

As with a Weberian bureaucracy, the codification of these guidelines is necessary. By documenting these guidelines, it gives them a form of legitimacy; ensures consistency in an environment in which the individuals are heterogenous; and also serves as a kind of final authority or backstop in situations in which individual decisions may be challenged. If a corporation offers her money and Anika needs to refuse it, she can cite the depersonalized guidelines as a reason for her refusal

instead of relying on her own authority. This abdication of responsibility can defuse or depoliticize a given situation, preserving certain individual networks.

In spite of guidelines and fundraising handbooks, much of fundraising is individual and idiosyncratic. It involves knowing how to speak to the right person in the right way; it involves cold calls and individuals approaching strangers. It depends knowing the right language with which to approach an organization and learning how to render WaterAid and its activities legible to a variety of partners.

Relationship with government

In 2016, WaterAid did an internal assessment of the state of WASH in schools in nine states that they work in. They were not entirely happy with how the study was done, but the results and conclusions matched what seemed to be going on in the country and pointed to broader truths: that there were severe problems with the state of WASH in schools in the country.

They floated the report amongst the WASH in Schools Coalition, a consortium of different NGOs engaged in the space. The members of the coalition agreed that the report seemed fairly accurate from their points of view: across the country there was inadequate access to clean, safe drinking water and safely managed, gender-segregated toilets. Menstrual hygiene facilities were almost nonexistent. Modi had promised that there would be 100% sanitation coverage in schools, and on August 15th, 2015, one year after announcing the Swachh Bharat Mission, he announced that the SBM was on its way to success with the first promise fulfilled: there were now toilets at every school in the country. “This study had found otherwise,” Nisha²⁹, the WaterAid head of school WASH policy, said baldly in my interview (Tiberghien 2016).

²⁹ Not her real name

WaterAid planned to send the report to the media, but before they did so, they worked with the communications team to create a risk mitigation plan, which was circulated to the whole team. In it was a list of non-negotiable aspects of their interactions with the government and media: primary among those, they would not reveal the identities of the study schools. As researchers, this would be a huge breach of ethics. As practitioners, it would be a violation of the careful trust that they have with the schools and communities they work with. “As a development agency that does research, our first priority is to make sure those we work with come to no harm,” Nisha told me.

WaterAid sent their report to the media. Propelled by a juicy story of a third party failing to verify the government’s grandiose claims of success, the Times of India, one of the country’s most prominent newspapers, covered the story (Dash 2016). Someone at the Department of Education read it and circulated it in the office. “And I got a call,” Nisha said. “From the director of Swachh Vidyalaya [Clean Schools].”

“So I spoke to the director and I went and met him, and he was very open, very lovely about it. And he said that, ‘oh, this is great,’ and I’m like, ‘oh, this great!’ ‘Yeah, the findings are really positive,’ he said. And I’m like, ‘really?’ ‘Yes, you should have seen where we were before and how much progress has been made.’” She paused with a smile. “That’s another way of looking at it. I should stop being that cynical. And saying yes, progress has been made. I keep forgetting that.”

The director of Swachh Vidyalaya said that they would like to keep working with WaterAid and that they should keep in touch. She didn’t hear from him after that.

In September 2016, there was a national level consultation on menstrual hygiene management that was convened with UNICEF in collaboration with the Department of Education (DOE). Many NGOs, government officials were there, including a high-level secretary for the Department of Education. Nisha, along with another senior member of WaterAid, went to meet this woman “because she is high

up there, and I wanted to know if she had read this report.” They approached, introduced themselves, and asked if they could talk about this report. “And then she took off.”

Nisha continued: “[The official said that] NGOs are out to badmouth the government and all we want to do is say that the government does nothing. And she went on for about twenty minutes publicly yelling at us where there was a gathering of about 100 people and said all sorts of things, that the data we produced was false and that she wanted the list of schools that we had done the study in so that she could pull them up. That she would take us to court because we were hiding information and producing false data. A lot was said. I always anticipated backlash, but I don't think I anticipated this kind of backlash...I didn't expect it to be such a public declaration.”

“It really shook me up in a way,” Nisha said. “She was looking to make a spectacle of us. And she did that. And for the rest of the day, no other organization wanted to speak with us or be at the same table as us.” “It's a report,” another policy member told me. “Someone will forget about it in a year's time. But no one's going to forget that WaterAid's been yelled at by the secretary at a meeting.”

In October 2016, a month after that explosive meeting, WaterAid received the first official letter from the government. “Please furnish the list of schools and other details as you deem fit.” That's when they sent the response they had drafted during the risk plan, explaining their research methodology and how it wasn't meant to be a representative sample. “For god's sake, we were looking at 54 schools per state. That's hardly representative,” one staff member told me. It was just meant to be a “snapshot” and an internal assessment; these were schools that WaterAid was working in as well, and so the poor status was also a reflection of their own performance and was meant to give them direction.

Many people, including people at WaterAid, tried to convince Nisha to give up the list of schools, the exact names of the poor performers, saying that the government needed those names to help them. Maybe it's the researcher in me, Nisha said, but this was always non-negotiable. To give up

the names was to put those schools and individuals who responded to their survey at risk of government backlash and censure. Those respondents could be targeted for assisting in the creation of a public document that contravened the broader governmental narrative of SBM success. If they want to know the schools that have problems, Nisha suggested, they should do their own study.

Finally, after much internal debate, WaterAid responded with district level aggregated data, and their methods, but they have not heard back as of December of that year. "Just waiting," Nisha said, her lips pressed in a tight line.

The above instance was both a moment of triumph of dealing with the government and a more negative interaction. They did what they felt WaterAid should do, to call government on false numbers that threaten to cover up the situation of marginalized people. They also had a positive interaction with a high level official who spoke of continuing their relationship and took their numbers seriously. But in this instance as well, governmental relationships were ruptured and their standing among other NGOs and potential allies was set back. They were publicly belittled and branded as being "oppositional" to the government.

This incident speaks to the difficulty in maintaining a careful and balanced relationship with a heterogenous and sometimes capricious and vindictive government while still maintaining integrity as an organization. It also speaks to the personal strain that this takes on individuals, many of whom come from more outspoken and activist backgrounds and for whom these kinds of setbacks can be personally stressful. There is a strain of holding your tongue when you might shout, a strain of being quiet, a strain of being publicly humiliated, a strain of long, patient slogs and little nudges and often only incremental successes. Throughout all of the strain and tightrope walking between stakeholders, WaterAid, as an organization, is committed to working with the government.

The nature of WaterAid's relationship with the government in a constant state of flux and negotiation. It is a balancing act, with, on the one side, the desire to stand up to the nonsense, stand up for human rights, and criticize the many problems. and on the other side, the desire not to be shut out of the halls of power and to be listened to.

I met him at a bar. Too-loud trendy music pounded through the nearly empty bar, and outside, colored lights set the domes of ancient tombs glowing in the night. "I hear from a lot of people at WaterAid that they're frustrated that the organization isn't being aggressive enough," I said.

He sighed. He's obviously heard this before. "Some people say we're too aggressive, others say we're not aggressive enough. I like to think of our position as a 'critical friend' to the government," he said.

"Critical friend" was a phrase I heard repeatedly, and it's obvious that it has been batted around strategy meetings. The concern that they are getting too close to the government—not being challenging enough—is a source of commonly expressed anxiety.

For an independent NGO to work with the government can be full of tension, a careful balancing act between internal principle and government sensitivity. "As long as you're supporting the government, everything is fine," one woman told me. "The moment you stand and up and say, you know, here's a red flag, then they want to shut you off. That's the problem with the current government." Being "shut off" can mean stigma amongst other NGOs, as with the narrative at the beginning of this section. It can mean that officials cease to take your meetings, your memos and reports go unread, and you are no longer able to suggest changes to policy. You are no longer able to influence the state apparatus, which is the means by which WaterAid has chosen to make change.

There are also existential risks to the organization, as described in Chapter 1 with the revocation of an FCRA license (a license that enables organizations to receive money from foreign sources) or government charges. While WaterAid may have some protection from some of these methods by being

an international organization, to many individuals who work at WaterAid, these threats feel very real. The government has many mechanisms to fight NGOs they disagree with and “really destroy them,” one man told me. “Because many organizations we have worked with, those organizations have been thoroughly destroyed.” Many people at WaterAid had personal and work relationships with the organizations that have been shut down.

So how do you actually work with the government when challenging them risks alienation, loss of funding, humiliation, or organizational death?

While public narratives about WaterAid’s relationship with the government and how they communicate with it might seem methodical and systematic, actual practices of influence and engagement are often haphazard. One manager described the approach:

There’s no preset formulations. It would be naive to think that institutions are driven by pure rationality...The government works in extremely complex ways, it’s not linear, and it’s not driven only by evidence or rationality. So there is no formula to nudge them in a particular direction. Some of it is trial and error, and some of it is sticking to what you believe is right and finding the right time and the right opportunity to actually suggest it...I don’t think it’s only trial and error, it’s also don’t give up.

There is no one way to influence the government. Reports, research, and programmatic experience inform their interactions with the government, but much of their work is individual to individual interaction, allowing personal networks to be established over time. Sometimes they hire former government employees, but most people at WaterAid were not. Working with the government is often a function of finding the right person at the right time to talk to them, similar to the first person at the Department of Education who WaterAid interacted with. One policy team member summarized the approach: “Seize the moment, seize the person, and then you push it.” You push it with meetings, with phone calls, with reports and memos and concrete and actionable items for improvement.

Interpersonal meetings, the person-to-person connections, are the sites where their most persuasive advocacy work takes place. Their written work, including reports, memos, and press releases informs and backs up this interpersonal work. The importance of phrasing and precise word choice is highly evident in this written work. After the SBM was announced, WaterAid issued a memo to outline things that need to be focused on or changed in the mission. They framed it as such:

The following is a working paper that proposes areas where SBM can be built on to enhance the prospects so that it will deliver lasting success" (Underlines mine.) (WaterAid 2014:1).

To write that these changes are to "build on" SBM, not change it, frames these ideas as positive suggestions rather than confrontational resistance. SBM is great *and*, not SBM is great *but*. They suggest that these changes are not necessary for any kind of success—suggesting change or fail—but that these changes will ensure *lasting* success. This word choice is upbeat and avoids being overtly critical, it changes the tone of the whole exchange. In WaterAid's phrasing, it indicates that the program as it stands is great and will be successful, but WaterAid's comments will make it *more* successful. It echoes governmental narratives and discourses that assume program success.

The focus on constructive solutions is important. If your voice is solely critical, then the government will begin to characterize your organization as "activist": in this case, they think of "activists" as being oppositional voices who shout and oppose, who do not offer solutions. One manager told me:

The state is not interested in what the problems are, they want solutions and ideas, especially good ones. Some people might think it is naive to think there are people in government who want to change, but I believe that. You don't want to be seen as someone who just points out what the problems are; this won't lead to long-term engagement...Right balance to just being critical and being able to offer constructive criticism.

WaterAid must carefully walk the line between constructive and “activist,” in the eyes of the government. At the same time, they must adhere to the organizational mandate to advocate for the marginalized .

For example, the issue of caste is seen as inherently political. To raise the topic of caste is to tap into larger discourses that tie into explicitly political concerns, such as political party organization. But WaterAid’s identity as a technical brand and their reputation enables them to engage in some of these issues extremely carefully, using language of social science and statistics. They avoid human rights discourse except when those topics are explicitly framed as technical sanitation discussions.

But even as WaterAid frames much of their work in terms of solutions or being positive towards government initiatives, they consider being critical an important part of their role. Unlike organizations with bilateral or multilateral agreements such as UNICEF or USAID, WaterAid is uniquely positioned to carry out a direct challenge of governmental claims. This kind of challenging and monitoring of governmental claims is often framed as “holding the government accountable.” WaterAid has strong claims to scientific rigor, with many research-trained scientists on their team or in their sphere of contractors. They have a reputation for solid statistics and studies, so when WaterAid—a reputable organization with an internationally recognized reputation for scientific work—asserts the government is not being accurate, people—specifically, media and oppositional parties--listen.

Unfortunately, unlike the governmental agencies, WaterAid does not have the resources to undertake widespread assessments—their data is not going to be able to compete with a government census, for example, in terms of breadth. So instead, their numbers’ strength is based on WaterAid’s reputation for validity and scientific rigor. As a PME employee explained:

The scale of the intervention of private organizations like ours is fairly small, so when we make a claim based on our limited interventions, again the methodology and the science around it has to be smart enough to challenge the numbers [of the government data]. So that’s where a large

amount of our effort and a large chunk of our prioritization needs to go to, to make sure you are on really strong ground when you are challenging numbers that are being, almost at a census level being collected...So the methodology, the partners that are along with you as a research organization, really needs to have that as a really smart and statistically viable challenge.

They back their numbers up with scientific rigor and articulate methodology and staff members with research backgrounds and advanced degrees. Not stated here is that WaterAid's reputation, their image and authoritative positioning in the sector is also backing these numbers up.

These numbers can be deployed in different ways. Sometimes they are shared directly with the government, but sometimes WaterAid releases them to the media. The media then, ideally, create enough public pressure to mandate a government response. This kind of reach is powerful in that it comes with political pressure, but is also risky, as it may be read as humiliating and oppositional.

WaterAid's relationship with the government is precarious and the negotiation of their role as a "critical friend" takes a lot of work that can create tension and stress among the individuals of the organization. They have mixed success. Sometimes, they are successful; they find the right person to talk to at the right time, and they are able to push forward their messages and agenda. Other times, they are rebuked or pushed away, shut out of a conversation. The incident with the Department of Education at the beginning of this section was a mixture. WaterAid's commitment to working with the government to affect change means that change is often incremental, painstaking, and uneven, but this commitment to working with the government is necessary in to makes changes at the scale they aim for.

Relationship with other NGOs

WaterAid, like many NGOs, relies on other NGOs: as funders, as programmatic partners, as allies in advocacy, as sources of information. Sometimes, a relationship may come down to simply “moral support,” as one person described. These partnerships can be as complex as a contractual relationship, as simple as shared attendance at a meeting, as abstract as a secondhand rumor or as concrete as a long meeting in a conference room with concept notes. But often, WaterAid is also competing with other organizations: for both money and attention from the media and the government. Sometimes these competitions are delineated by cause: there are more causes than resources to fight them. But when you are working on the same cause, competitions are more delineated by organizational identity.

WaterAid relies on partners for programming, and, to some of these partners, they consider WaterAid more of a funder than an ally. Other programmatic partnerships may focus on a particular campaign. In most campaigns, the purposes of these activities are in layers, from explicit goals to more implicit ones. For WaterAid, explicit goals tend to be the most WASH-related and less controversial or “political.” The implicit goals are where WaterAid finds their common ground with their partners, who have their own set of explicit goals. What matters for longer-term partnerships and alliances is less a similarity of explicit goals and more a similarity of their implicit goals; less the similarity of their public transcripts, and more a similarity of their private transcripts.

Most programming partnerships occur at local levels, in which they work with community partners to carry out a particular program. Sometimes, WaterAid will partner with an organization that has particular expertise in a kind of special community, such as a women’s group, or with those who are more embedded in a particular geographical community. They may do this for a program, a campaign, or a particular research project. For many of their partners, WaterAid provides financing or a kind of

internationally couched validity or authority; while community partners have strong expertise in their area, partnering with someone like WaterAid acts as a way to kind of elevate them and their work.

In other cases, WaterAid makes alliances in order to better approach and work with the government. Going to the government as a group is much stronger than going as individual organizations. As one manager described it, “Because you've got three experts who are the largest players in the sector in the country and also probably globally who are together saying that this makes sense, this makes an impact.” Sometimes alliances are made in order to promote their ability to be powerful to government; sometimes, organizations will talk to each just to share ideas and strategies about how to interact with the government, to strategize about how to get across their message without risking their organization.

WaterAid is seeking to develop their identity as a sector “convener.” They work with a wide range of actors—from government to corporates to activist—and they try to bring them together to sit at the same table—whether a literal table at a conference, or more metaphorically by working to render the conversations and meanings of one actor more legible to another.

For example, in 2014, WaterAid management team decided that in order to solidify their reputation as a convener in the WASH arena, they would hold a public conference, an India WASH summit that would gather together the vast diversity of actors with whom WaterAid works into one space. They went out to find partners and, more importantly, to get partners who would put in money and allow WaterAid to use their logo on the conference materials. Logos of partner organizations would be on the backdrop behind the speakers; on press releases; on reports and materials that came out of the event. It was quite explicit when they designed the water summit that they wanted to make an event that made them look like a “leader.”

“We want our logo up there. [These were] all explicit conversations. We even decided who are the other big logos we wanted up there,” a former manager told me. ‘We got whoever mattered in the sector there.’ 600 people were in attendance, with ‘everybody from across India’ and 20-30 international figures, including several notable personalities in the sector, such as Robert Chambers, the author of CLTS. They had the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation as partners. World Bank, DFID, UNICEF, BMGF partnered and put money into the event. Then 15 smaller organizations, like Plan and Save the Children partnered and put money in. The event had 100 speakers and lasted for 3 days. In the eyes of the management team who created and coordinated it, the event was not really about sharing information or learnings but almost entirely about creating a large (and expensive) event that positioned WaterAid as a leader and “convener” in the ecology of actors.

Much of the role of being a convener is (re)writing and translating the goals, values, and actions of one organization into the language of another, to couch these things into different institutional languages, into different frames. James Scott wrote extensively of the notion of legibility, of rendering the complexity of reality into a particular language so that it is understandable and actionable by another actor, usually the state (Scott 1998). WaterAid is constantly trying to render the work of one actor legible to another, translating both the complex reality of a situation into a language that the state or donors might understand, but also working to take the language of other organizations—their reports, their public appearances, their media presence—into something that may be considered legible to different actors. As a convener, WaterAid often finds itself trying to translate human rights issues to corporations, or feminism to the government, or international development to activists. They draw on their individual employees’ expertise to do so, to try to connect these different linguistic registers and values.

WaterAid's work on manual scavenging—and their partnership with SKA—is an example. SKA would never call themselves a WASH or sanitation organization. As I will discuss in greater detail in the SKA chapter, the idea that they and their community is associated with sanitation at all is what they are fighting against. Informed in part by the individual interests of people at WaterAid, WaterAid has chosen to grapple with manual scavenging issues. In doing so, WaterAid has helped move SKA and its cause into the WASH space, when, historically, manual scavenging has only been the purview of human rights and labor organizations. This is a kind of rhetorical re-framing, but also a rebranding; because WaterAid has such a strong brand as a WASH organization, because that has been their identity for so long, anything that WaterAid is involved with becomes a WASH issue.

Part of the way in which WaterAid negotiates their role as convener is that they send different people to different meetings. As discussed above, WaterAid is heterogenous; this heterogeneity means they have a range of people to deploy when they want to appeal to particular groups. The woman who used to be an activist is the one they will send to CSO meetings. To the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the powerful business entity, they send a former banker. Maintaining diversity amongst their team enables them to carry out their strategy of appealing to multiple groups.

WaterAid has conscientiously cultivated a relationship among other NGOs as being a partner, an authority, and a convener. Through their internal heterogeneity, their engagement with a wide range of discourses, and their ability to create partnerships with prominent actors, WaterAid has established itself as a powerful actor in this space. However, this very heterogeneity and the desire to convene all actors too has led to anxiety among other NGO actors, who are sometimes uncertain where WaterAid stands at any given time.

Media

While media engagement had been a part of WaterAid for a long time, it wasn't until 2014 that the then-CEO established a formal Communications Team, who are meant to produce original content for the website and social media accounts, support the needs of other teams, and work with the media at large. They call themselves the "custodians of the WaterAid brand," managing and making sure that whatever goes out—any non-internal documents—meets standards of quality and professionalism. They are the ones that make sure people are using the right colors and fonts; they are ones who will make posters for an event; they will be the ones who the media calls to comment on a story; and they are the ones releasing stories. The CEO at the time had a background in marketing and decided that having a team dedicated to managing the WaterAid "brand" was important, particularly when WaterAid India would have to seek out new sources of funding.

The media needs stories to cover and information to feed those stories. WaterAid needs a positive reputation and a platform for communicating their positions. Media coverage can enable them to rally other actors by describing good work they have done or by stating their own position, thereby inviting others to join. Media engagement is often an important part of advocacy, as WaterAid seeks to shape the public discourse around their key areas or pressure others to act. It is also important in ensuring their funding streams. Or they can use the media to pressure governmental actors to act, as described in the government section.

Reputation maintenance or brand maintenance is perhaps one of the most key aspects of their media relations work. As a WaterAid Communications team member described, the intention of engaging with media is "positioning WaterAid as a credible and respected WASH organization in India. Not just a WASH organization, but a credible nonprofit doing work in the WASH space in India." Another person described the financial realities of maintaining a good reputation in the media: "For anybody to give you funding, you should have a brand name, you should be a credible player in the sector."

“Credibility” is a vital part in their media and brand maintenance work that they carry out through media.

While WaterAid staff members may seek to engage the media in a variety of ways, the two methods that have gained the most consistent coverage and are most effective can be divided into two categories: spectacle and reports.

In theater, one of the elements of playwriting is spectacle. It can be small, it can be large. A choreographed stunt with flying actors—a single live candle flame. The important part is that you introduce an element of unpredictability and wonder that keeps people questioning—will the actor fall? Will the candle burn someone? Will it go out? In terms of NGO media engagement, it is an event that is deliberately constructed to be out of the ordinary upon which one can hang particular meanings and messages on.

One major spectacular event during my fieldwork was the Global Citizens Festival, an initiative by the Global Poverty Project, that aims to promote the SDGs. WaterAid is a major sponsor, and the 2016 Mumbai festival³⁰ took place on November 19th, World Toilet Day, in order to highlight the SDG sanitation goals. It was a star-studded event, with performances by Coldplay and Jay-Z, a video message by Prime Minister Modi, and a host of well-known celebrities from music, film, and sports: Demi Lovato, A.R. Rahman, Shah Rukh Khan, Alia Bhatt, Sachin Tendulkar, and Amitabh Bachchan. The heady mixture of celebrity, internationalism, music, and social media meant that eyes were turned towards the event, particularly those of a middle class suburban millennial elite, who would be able to afford tickets and travel and propagate the messages through social media. This event included “key policy asks” from policymakers, such as asking them to commit to making five cities open defecation free by a certain timeline. The intention with this event, as the WaterAid staff member told me, is to put pressure on

³⁰ The festival is part of a series of festivals that take place in different locations throughout the globe. The November 2016 one took place in Mumbai. A separate festival took place in New York in September of that year.

government officials to act on commitments to the SDGs by creating awareness among masses to hold the government accountable.

Another example of a media spectacle is the “Loo with a view,” an art installation that made appearances at the religious festival of the Simhastha Kumbh and the Glastonbury Art Festival in the UK. The “Loo with a view” is a portable toilet with a one-way mirror on the door, and is meant to simulate what it is like to defecate in the open, feeling exposed and vulnerable and seen (Loo with a View 2016). The installation is strange, slightly funny, and uncomfortable—it caught the attention of media and the people at these events.

The other significant way—and probably a more important one—WaterAid engages with the media is through the release reports. Media were far more likely to pick up on reports than they were spectacles. The news articles may not dwell on the entirety of a report, but they would print elements of it. Media tended to pick up WaterAid reports either because the report was seen as a solid source of valid data or because of the analogies or factoids that were presented in the report.



Figure 9: “Loo With a View” at the Simhastha Kumbh (Courtesy of WaterAid/Prashanath Vishwanathan 2016)



Figure 10: Inside of the “Loo With a View.” A one-way mirror is intended to simulate the effect of defecating in the open. (Courtesy of WaterAid/Prashanath Vishwanathan 2016)

For example, a *Financial Express* article cited a 2015 WaterAid report to describe the percentage of people in the country who do not have access to safe, private toilets (Doley 2017); this is particularly interesting to note that the newspaper did *not* use governmental data, when they could have. The governmental data on this particular issue, however, is notoriously inflated, and so WaterAid, because of its carefully constructed reputation around the notion of validity, was cited.

The other way in which WaterAid reports are cited is the eye-catching factoids and analogies. For example, the Hindustan Times carried a news story from the Press Trust of India that described an excerpt from the report *Overflowing Cities: The State of the World's Toilets 2016*: "The report said the problem was so big that the daily waste produced on the streets of India's towns and cities was enough to fill eight Olympic-sized swimming pools, or 16 jumbo jets with faeces every day" (PTI 2016). A previous report called *It's No Joke* described that if you formed a line of all of the people who needed a household toilet in India, it would go from Earth to the moon (Wheeler 2015). "It's just a very funny way of saying the same thing," a Communications team member told me.

On a basic level, analogies help to render concrete numbers that are so vast as to be complete abstractions. It is difficult to conceptualize the vast tonnage of shit that is produced in a city, but much easier to conceive of eight Olympic-sized swimming pools of shit. It is difficult to wrap one's mind around the number of people who lack sanitation in India; it is much easier to grasp the vastness of this number by thinking of a line of people to the moon.

But these kinds of analogies, like the Loo with a View, add elements of humor and strangeness to the conversation. Such analogies are intended to spread media coverage and, hopefully, increase the number of people reading a given report.

Humor is a common way for INGOs to discuss sanitation in their media materials. "Sanitation is yucky," one of the communications team members tell me. In order to grapple with that, humor is often

utilized, whether it's in WaterAid's report "It's no joke" (that features jokes) or the UNICEF Poo2theLoo campaign that featured anthropomorphized dancing turds (UNICEF n.d.), INGOs often use humorous openers or spectacles to open discussions about sanitation in order to navigate the disgust factor.

And yet, there is no precedent in any other area of poverty and development. NGOs generally do not use humor to discuss malnutrition, disease, or violence. The acceptability of using humor to discuss sanitation betrays middle class sensibilities of the people who are working on these campaigns. Unlike malnutrition, disease, or violence, there is no comfortable distance between the development practitioners and the problem. Shit is democratic. We all produce it. We have all eaten it. It is an intimate problem both in terms of how it is mapped on the body and in terms of its position to practitioners. No one in India has *not* had an encounter with problematic food or had to negotiate situations in which fecal oral diseases are prevalent. And yet for middle class and elites, it is an inconvenience, a quick trip to the doctor or a bad night. It lacks the life or death aspects which it has for the poor. Humor may render the topic more comfortable for middle class or elites, but it threatens to trivialize a narrative that is tragic for the poor.

By distilling the issue into humorous or strange factoids, WaterAid threatens to efface the horrific tragedy of sanitation. The reports and press releases often will follow up these factoids by numbers describing in clear scientific terms the scope of the problem—the pathogenicity of shit, the number of children who are estimated to die—but these numbers are overshadowed by the analogies, by images of jumbo jets of shit. Many media outlets do not even follow up the factoids by these more serious facts, leaving readers behind with an image that is both repulsive and absurd.

WaterAid's use of statistics and spectacle to engage with and shape the broader discourse also fits into their strategy of keeping their role as mostly technical and apolitical. The emotional reactions to their media engagement are sadness, pity, consternation, national shame; anger is absent. Poor

sanitation becomes less a function of social inequality and class and caste struggle, and more of a technical problem to be fixed.

Many of these social justice issues, of inequality and active marginalization of these issues, end up either in private conversations or in the more limited release media, such as the WaterAid newsletter, which is received only by people who sign up for it and is presumably read only by people who are actively interested in it. There, you will find headlines about access to toilets for those with disabilities (“Why is this perfectly healthy adult woman wearing diapers to work?”) or access by domestic workers (“Do you allow your domestic workers to use toilets in your house?”).

WaterAid’s communication team has a set number of messages which they have agreed to push as WaterAid’s key messaging, what they call “top line messaging.” For sanitation, the “top line messaging” is that everyone should have a safe place to defecate; that the nation must cut down on open defecation; that a safe place to defecate means that feces must be contained and managed safely; and that poor sanitation has effects on health, nutrition, labor, and economy. The themes that seemed more evident in my analysis of the media is the extent of the sanitation problem (number of people defecating, toilet coverage, pollution of water) and the health effects of poor sanitation. These messages are relatively uncontroversial and simple, the straightforward case for good sanitation. But as WaterAid promotes these, they are, intentionally or not, also pushing forward certain values and narratives.

The extent to which this is deliberate or accepted varies significantly across the individuals of the organization. For some, talking about sanitation is almost like a Trojan horse: present something uncontroversial, simple, agreed-upon while also slipping in more radical and political notions of radical

equality, caste struggle, class struggle, and reconfiguring society in order to accept and empower all kinds of bodies and people. They view sanitation as a means. For others at the organization:

“We're not trying to enforce values. We're not here to do that. We're just here to advocate for WASH and make sure everybody has access to good sanitation and they demand access to good sanitation. So whatever we see is prevalent in that community that will encourage them to demand good safe sanitation.”

People like this view sanitation as an end.

This inconsistency in the perspective of sanitation as being an end or means leads to significant inconsistency in the values that are being pushed and has resulted in a mismatch in the private discussions vs. public discussions.

Frames of reference

As discussed in Chapter 1, different organizations operate within different rhetorical frames. This is evident in the media they produce, the discussions they have, the directions in which they seek to push the conversation. While WaterAid frequently taps into other frames of reference and tries to connect with other ones in order to promote alliances, go after particular funding, or reflect the interests/consciences of individuals or campaigns, the organization is primarily organized around the frame of health, and specifically the prevention the spread of fecal-oral diseases. Most self-identified WASH INGOs operate within this same frame.

My acerbic flatmate described the India International Centre as a club of retired old guys sitting around and talking about glory days. In the lobby, I perched on the edge of an upholstered chair, my back ramrod straight. Buttoned-up businessmen come through, a few people attending conferences and meetings on the other floors until one man came up to me. ‘Are you Jennifer?’ he asked.

I sprang up. ‘Yes, and you must be Dr. Gupta³¹,’ I said, shaking his hand. We took the elevator up to the lounge floor, engaging in obligatory small talk regarding the state of traffic in Delhi (terrible) and the autumnal air pollution (also terrible). Finally, we settle on facing couches and order cold coffees.

“So where did you dig me up out of my grave, so to speak?” he asked.

Like many of my connections, a name in a news article—a few emails and conversations in the WaterAid office—a phone number scrawled on the edge of my fieldnotes—another conversation—an email—waiting—a final fluster of emails.

Dr. Gupta is a man in his late fifties. He’s slightly portly, with lively brown eyes peering through wiry glasses. A rumpled bucket hat was shoved on his head. He was easy to relax around. We exchanged business cards, and I skimmed his quickly. There were about fifteen titles written on it. “That’s a lot of titles,” I said.

“That’s not all of them,” he said. “I just ran out of space.”

Dr. Gupta has been involved with sanitation for decades and has worked in nonprofit and development work at every level, from working for the government in Gujrat to UN meetings. “People like me in the sector because I’m not afraid to be critical,” he told me.

Back in the 1980s, Dr. Gupta had a meeting with communication officers on a UN project as they were trying to come up with a way to conceptualize and market the “holy trinity” of cleanliness: water, sanitation, and hygiene. “So why not WASH?” he asked. Initially, they thought to avoid the WASH acronym since USAID was using it for another project, but USAID told him to go ahead with it.

WASH refers to water, sanitation, and hygiene, the three primary interventions for preventing the spread of fecal-oral diseases. “It took us a while to figure out what WASH was going to be. A

³¹ Not his real name

program? A general acronym? We eventually settled on it being a general acronym that can be used by anybody,” he said. WASH was centered around health outcomes, specifically the decrease in morbidity and mortality, an intentional narrow definition. “Sanitation” in broader parlance, can also mean garbage collection (as in the US, where garbage collectors are called “sanitation workers.”) Water became water quality (primarily regarding fecal content); hygiene was understood primarily as handwashing; and sanitation was about human fecal waste. These foci were meant to emphasize the health-related aspects of WASH. Most WASH organizations—meaning organizations that actually identify as WASH organizations—operate in or are heavily influenced by a health frame.

While the fecal-oral transmission route had been the early organizing principle behind grouping the ‘classic’ elements of WASH, in the 1990s, the definitions of the sector began to be more fluid, with new elements being introduced such as toilet access, fecal sludge management, and menstrual hygiene management. In India, amongst the sector professionals, WaterAid is considered to have pioneered the introduction of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into the WASH space. As one professional described, the women’s empowerment sector had not taken it on, and MHM was adjacent to their concerns. There is a certain amount of prestige and reputation that can be gained if one is to introduce a new WASH topic that is picked up by other actors in the sector. WaterAid is frequently credited by other actors as also being pioneers in school WASH and WASH in healthcare.

But one must also stay within the boundaries of WASH in order to retain the identity and brand of the organization, a fact that the individuals are aware of and continuously bring up in negotiating new projects. In an internal email discussing whether they would be able to go after a particular human rights grant regarding manual scavengers, a coordinator writes,

“I just want to know—whether it is fine for WaterAid to work towards addressing the overall rights violations in reference to the ‘manual scavenging community’ and not just their ‘WASH

rights.'...In your view, does this fit with WA's focus in the strategy period—considering that we are not just looking right to water and sanitation?"

To push too far outside the boundaries of the core WASH space is to risk diluting the brand, losing one's place in the sector, and damaging the integrity of institutional identity.

WASH historically has positioned itself as apolitical, an observation of several development professionals who then later shifted to WASH. While literacy movements, gender empowerment, and food rights have all been comfortable with a political identity, WASH has never taken that on. In one conference, I asked one woman whether her organization was "political" or "technical." I had misspoken; I had merely meant to ask if they affected policy. But she responded with something akin to horror. "Oh *no*, we're not political." Part of this is that in many places, and in India in particular, WASH works with the government, and being seen as political can damage that relationship, particularly when regimes change.

WaterAid frequently invokes different discursive frames other than health. They may discuss how women and children are affected by WASH issues. In some of their outward facing work, they point to how India is "behind," invoking frames regarding modernity. They cite the effects that WASH has on the economy, talk about caste, and point to the damage of the environment. Their recent strategies rely heavily on the languages of human rights, speaking of the right to sanitation or the right to water. They invoke nearly all of the discursive frames at some point or another in order to broaden their WASH coalition and create alliances with as many actors as possible.

Yet even as WaterAid invokes frames across the whole spectrum, WaterAid, like other WASH-identifying INGOs, is fundamentally based in the health discourse. The morbidity and mortality of WASH-related diseases is the centerpiece of all of their work; it is the background and foreground of their media presence. It is included in every report, every press release. The prevention of fecal-oral diseases is what organizes their organization; their triumvirate of foci is that they aim for better water, sanitation,

and hygiene. As my discussion with Dr. Gupta indicates, the prevention of fecal-oral diseases has always been what links these two together. The expansion of WASH—to menstrual hygiene, to labor, to human rights, to environmental works—serves only to broaden the WASH coalition.

Private vs. public

WaterAid interacts with funders, the government, other NGOs, and the media—all external influences, allies, challenges and constraints that are necessary in working to carry out their goals in the ways they have chosen to. As has been described in this chapter, each of these interactions carries their own challenges and strategies, and I have described both the outward appearance—the product of these interactions—and the internal strategizing and attitudes behind them.

In his classic work *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss described two ways in which mythologies are created: bricolage or engineering. Bricolage puts pre-existing elements together in new ways; in engineering, the notion is to work from raw materials (Levi-Strauss 1966). The messaging of WaterAid is fundamentally a bricolage, driven by individual interests, goals, constraints, and values, by current events and news items and the flow of the sector. This bricolage is smoothed to give a sense of unity, of engineering, of being a cohesive holistic policy that was crafted from raw materials. Through unifying visuals of fonts, colors, templates and a Western notion of what professionalized discourse looks like, WaterAid is able to give the appearance of an engineered message and public narrative.

While WaterAid's external messaging may differ from utterance to utterance, what unites all of their external performance at the basic level is that "WASH is a good thing and people need WASH." But beyond the common unifying theme—that WASH is good—there is a range of values and meanings, themes, betraying in the external the heterogeneity within the organization. As I have written, WaterAid has a wide range of individuals who bring different values to the organization, which results in heterogenous meanings and messages.

For example, there were workshops and a significant amount of workplace discussion and concern about coercive behavior change. Yet the communications department created and circulated a video of children doing just that—blowing whistles and bothering people trying to defecate in the fields—and those same children were touted at the Global Citizens Festival (WaterAid 2016). Most of the external messaging around sanitation focuses on the need to improve coverage and protect health, but other internal documents focus more on the most marginalized and improving quality of sanitation coverage, such as access for people with disabilities or removing the stigma of allowing domestic workers to use the toilets in a house.

The tension here often comes down to a conflict of whether WaterAid is an organization for which sanitation is an end or a means and different individuals' interpretation of that conflict: is the idea of WASH an end within itself, or is it another vehicle to fight for more basic struggles of equality and rights? To what extent do the ends of WASH justify the means of obtaining it? At what point do the means compromise the primary mission?

On the one hand, there are those who see WASH as a means to enable better human rights and equality. It is one of many means to address this, whether you work in sectors of caste, nutrition, literacy, or right to information. Many of the people who have this ideology come from activist or social work backgrounds. WASH is a means by which more radical means of addressing inequality can be accomplished. As such, they will choose means and messages that will not hinder messages of equality. For some, they would rather compromise WASH outcomes (such as toilet coverage) than compromise on themes like gender empowerment, community self-determination, increasing stigma, or the ever-fluid concept of "dignity."

On the other end of the spectrum is the idea that WASH is in and of itself a good that is worth pursuing. Children who blow whistles and shame their elders into not defecating in the open promotes sanitation, and thus is a story worth highlighting. When the women were raped and killed in Badaun,

ostensibly while going to the fields to defecate, the narrative was wrested away from discussions about gender violence or caste and instead focused on access to toilets (see Introduction for details).

Most individuals fall somewhere in the middle. WaterAid tries to achieve a balance, but it is debatable whether a true balance can be achieved. As with their relationships with the government, what ends up happening is compromise which, as one frustrated manager described, “means everyone is angry.”

This heterogeneity in values can be both a source of conflict and strength. It can cause people to work at cross-purposes and create inconsistent messaging, as described above. It can lead to personal frustration on the parts of individuals and may contribute to people’s decision to leave the organization. It can stymie communications between teams and individuals. This is especially true in that many of these debates are not brought into explicit light. One manager tells me that, “The bigger conversations about development—about patriarchy—are just starting to happen in some places. WaterAid has tried to put some of these things into their long-term plan.” These discussions of values are just starting to seep in, but the busyness of the workplace, the often-breakneck pace of work often prevents these discussions from happening often.

But this heterogeneity is also a strength of WaterAid. It enables fluidity of organization and the protection of their non-threatening brand. They can send someone with strong social change leanings to the meeting populated by activists, who can show their work in increasing the visibility of the cause in manual scavengers; they can send someone with a banking background to a corporate foundation meeting and describe the impact that their work has on children; they can go to the media with strong research studies with good methods to back up their numbers and maintain their reputation as scientific; they can send a former government official to speak to the government about ways to negotiate policies or shape programs. Their inconsistency and heterogeneity enables them to better

respond to a diversity of actors and contexts, but also means others sometimes have difficulty in understanding their role.

Conclusion

In many ways, WaterAid is a prime example of a WASH INGO. They are branded as such. Their reputation is predicated on their international identity. They have a brand, a color scheme, slick offices and a middle-class workspace. They are dominated by a bureaucratic, managerial mindset and work culture. They try to talk to every actor and walk careful tightropes in all of their relationships. They focus on health and the spread of fecal-oral diseases. They are widely regarded as a sector leader and have a significant position in the sector, predicated both on their authority and their validity. Internally, they are fluid, dynamic and heterogenous.

“A lot of your colleagues have said that WaterAid is undergoing a lot of changes lately,” I prompted an employee during an interview in one of the small meeting rooms. Outside, the sun has set, and the dusk is smudgy gray.

The woman, who has been with WaterAid longer than most people there, shrugs. “We are always changing. Every two years we are changing, in how we work, how we thought. Every year, we are constantly aligning ourselves with the changing context. India is also changing...I don’t think any two years we can say we’ve been static.”

“So is change itself the norm?” I ask.

“Yes.”

Welcome to the office

Sulabh International

Just off the highway exit towards Sulabh's main Delhi campus and national headquarters, past the fencing and barbed wire, a few of the children of the street dwellers who live and work at the underpass squat and defecate in the triangle of dirt and grass and filth.

Turn right and you enter the haphazardly built but relatively wealthy neighborhood Munirka Enclave. Years ago, this was the site of one of the numerous satellite villages around Delhi; now, like most of those satellite villages, it has been consumed by urban morass. Furniture from one of the shops spills out haphazardly onto the sidewalk; a fading sign advertises a pharmacy; a glass office building gleams in the morning light. The headquarters are far away from most of the other NGOs, which tend to cluster in the swanky South Delhi suburbs. According to some employee accounts, Sulabh had gotten a good deal on land here years ago, and the development had sprung up around it. But now, Sulabh's place being far away from any other NGO office seems to reinforce their narrative: that Sulabh is an NGO unlike any other.

Sulabh Gram ("village") is surrounded by a ten-foot tall white wall and solid metal gates, giving it an almost fortress-like quality, but color-saturated photos of rivers running through mountains on the outside and lush landscaping softens the effect. A large blue sign over the entrance proclaims this as "Sulabh International Social Service Organization." Two gates provide entrance, with security guards at the one entrance. I slip in, smiling and saying good morning to the guards.

As soon as you step into the compound, it feels cooler, and the sounds of traffic and chaos of outside are muted. There is a wide driveway lined with lights that curls to the main building in front.

Extensively manicured lawns and gardening dominate the main space, and a tunnel of flowering vines lead you to the school and museum areas to the left. In the spring, the campus smells faintly of honey.

Buell discusses a recurring theme in American toxic discourse is the distance and contrast between “is” and “ought” (Buell 1998:646). During the Love Canal disaster, dreams and images of idealized suburbia were contrasted with toxic wastes and unnatural silences. Walking in from the chaos of the neighborhood outside into Sulabh’s campus is its own contrast, the inside of the compound a vast distance from the outside world. Sulabh’s campus is an illustration of the “ought” that a shit-free, sparkling clean Sulabh world can be. With green lawns, bright flowers, obsessively swept sidewalks, and happy children playing in a brightly painted school, the organization has created a visual odyssey that appeals to multiple discourses and visions of an ideal India, an ideal place.

Every wall space is covered with signs and photos on large waterproof placards, in both Hindi and English. It’s a bit overwhelming, like being surrounded by a hundred conversations or walking into someone’s scrapbook. Some signs only appear once; others recur throughout the compound. One of the recurring signs reads:

If you have not helped anybody in distress you have not prayed to God yet. -Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak is the founder and leader of Sulabh, a larger-than-life figure whose presence is felt in every corner of this organization and space, from the quotes on the walls to the photographs of Dr. Pathak beaming down at you in every office and classroom.

The other placards on the wall are a pastiche of Sulabh philosophy, of exhortations and reminders to the people who work there, and a demonstration of power and authority to the visitors. Quotes are carefully attributed to their speakers, usually politicians or noted humanitarians. Other

placards read general sayings or exhortations to mind yourself in Sulabh. I recognize some of the speakers, but many of them I look up after.

We talk Gandhi, but Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak does Gandhi.--Shri GVVSDS Prasad Gopal, Secretary of Sarva Seva Sangh and Convener of Sevagram Ashram Pratishtan, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh

Soch badlo, desh badlega—Shri Narendra Modi (Change your thoughts, and the country will change)

PLEASE SMILE YOU ARE IN SULABH

Why is Ravan burnt alive every year? He had insulted and humiliated a woman. Please never, ever insult or humiliate a woman. – Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

One has seen power of money, power of post and place, but I saw that power of compassion, love and respect for others, which is instilled in Dr. Pathak's character since childhood, can create magic in the lives of the needy people and transform their lives. – Abha Kumar

PLEASE SMILE YOU ARE IN SULABH

There are many more quotations.

In between the text are giant photos of Dr. Pathak with different prominent personalities: a judge, Shri Shri Ravi Shankar³² (controversial religious figure with links to Hindutva and the far right), Amit Shah (head of the BJP), and Prime Minister Modi. One placard contains the lyrics of a poem that Dr. Pathak penned in praise of Modi with a photo of a white dove perched on the Prime Minister's outstretched hand.

³² For a paper discussing Shri Shri Ravi Shankar's controversy regarding his Art of Living Foundation and the environmental damage he wreaked on the flood plains in Delhi, see my paper (Alley, Barr, and Mehta 2018)

To the left is the visitors building, with overstuffed pleather couches and chairs, glass coffee tables, thick carpets, and a heavy wooden table for lunches or board meetings. The guest bathroom in there is bright, swanky, with a bidet, and the only employees who can ever use it are the vice presidents. A magazine rack and a large table contain a vast array of literature which visitors peruse while waiting to meet with Dr. Pathak or wait for the morning assembly to start. Glossy-paged color books with titles like “Untouchability no more” or “Toilets in Every House” that commemorate specific Sulabh events, Sulabh efforts, or highlight Dr. Pathak’s history. The brochures are in both Hindi and English.

I often sit in this room in the mornings, gathering my thoughts, or tucking my bag somewhere in a corner. One of the VPs bustles in, a tall tidily-dressed man with an infectious smile and a talent for making people feel welcome. “Good morning,” he says.

“Good morning. Is the assembly about to start?” I ask.

“Yes yes,” he says. “You will stand on the stage?”

I wince. “I’d rather not,” I respond.

“Founder sir said that he would like you to.”

I sigh and nod. “Will he be here this morning?”

“No, not today.” This is not unusual. Dr. Pathak frequently travels or is in meetings.

We walk into the large assembly hall at 9 AM. The assembly hall is a large open room with a stage. Behind the stage and on the walls are more blue signs with quotes from and about Dr. Pathak. One large sign behind the stage quotes Modi, saying “Toilet first, temples later,” just below a picture of

Modi accepting a rakhi³³ from one of the widows that Sulabh has “adopted.” There are a few other framed photos on the wall of Dr. Pathak with prominent personalities, including one of him accepting an award from Prime Minister Modi.

The hall is full with the denizens of Sulabh’s campus: the young women from the trade school and the staff, standing in neat lines, women in the front, men in the back. It is perhaps 75 people all told. It’s a cold morning, and everyone is bundled in sweaters and scarves. Nearly every day there are visitors; there is just a significant amount of variation in their relative prestige, and thus how many stops are pulled out for them. This morning, however, is a fairly typical morning, with a class of nursing students here to tour the facilities. They are lined up in the corner, giggling, as their teacher glares at them from the dais.



Figure 11: Inside the Sulabh assembly hall in the morning for prayers (Author photo).

³³ Raksha Bandhan is a festival, usually Hindu, that celebrates brother and sister relationships. It usually involves gifting someone a rakhi, usually a small thread bracelet, to someone whom one feels a sibling-like relationship with.

The assemblage of people who stand on the dais frequently changes, but the general outline is at least one of the VPs, special guests (if a whole class is visiting, then just the teachers), and myself. The morning assembly is a production that requires a staff: there is the photographer, who is moving around snapping photos of the audience and the guests; a videographer; a computer tech who is fiddling with the couple of screen displays that will show the video; a man at the mixer; a tabla player; a harmonium player; a keyboard player; two singers; and at least one random person who bustles around doing whatever is needed.

As the harmonium begins, everyone stands with their hands pressed in prayer position and begin singing the Sulabh anthem, although mostly I hear the professional singers who sing into their microphones. The song is in Hindi, but for foreign visitors, they hand out papers with an English translation:

...Keep the earth sparkling clean, light the lamp of beauty,

Let's edify the world with righteousness and humanism.

Keep clean, be helpful and happy,

Let us learn and spread this message.

Embrace everyone to make another world,

All come together to make the Sulabh world.³⁴

This anthem is followed by the Sulabh prayer:

³⁴ For a complete transcript of the anthem, see Appendix.

Sulabh does not mean an easy way out

It is an ideology of celebration of life

Sulabh movement is a guide

And has non-violence as its beacon-light

Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.³⁵

This then is followed by showing of a video that was created a year or two ago called “Hasna Mera Kaam,” or “Laughter is my work.” It is a slick music video, professionally produced that features a song that Dr. Pathak wrote with an alarmingly catchy tune. The video features Dr. Pathak lip syncing that “laughter is my work” and “Gandhi, Modi made a vow, clean India with me now.” Children from the school skip and dance with a former Miss India winner turned TV actress Aishwarya Sakhuja and Indian TV actor Himanshu Malhotra as the hosts sing about people don't have to go outside to defecate and that Sulabh toilets are everywhere you go. It proclaims how Gandhi started this journey of cleanliness, and Modi and Dr. Pathak are finishing it. This video is played every day and at every event, whether there are visitors or not. If there are visitors, it serves as a way to display the many of the themes that Sulabh emphasizes. It shifts the focus of the narrative around sanitation as being about something gross and unpleasant to being about laughter and joy. It also got stuck in my head frequently.

“Do you ever get tired of it?” I asked one of the staff later.

She looked over her shoulder. “Yes,” she said. “Maybe you can say something to sir about it.”

Pause. “Without mentioning our names.”

³⁵ For a complete transcript of the prayer, see Appendix.

After the video, there is some constellation of speeches: a welcome speech from the VP, a thought of the day read by a VP or a student from the school. Then guests are announced and welcomed with polite but bored applause, and they are given a garland and a shawl, the first stop on the tour. The whole morning assembly lasts anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour, depending on how many speakers there are, how many guests there are to welcome, the relative prestige of the guests, whether the guests also do a speech, and whether Dr. Pathak is present or not. All staff are expected to attend the assembly. Sometimes, they may report that someone had skipped out; sometimes, Dr. Pathak will randomly give everyone present 500 rupees. Sometimes, if someone repeatedly misses the event, that person will be reprimanded. It is a practice of solidarity, welcoming, and surveillance.

After the assembly, the photographer will click photos of the guests with some selection of Sulabh staff and the students, and the visitors will be whisked away with crisp and practiced ease on their tour of the facilities (which I will detail later). The rest of the people present disperse to their respective places: either giving the tour, their offices for work, the kitchens to make chai, or their classrooms.

Without an interview scheduled or a particular event to observe, I follow today's visitor group and watched their tour. The guide smiles at me, used to my observations.

"Do *you* just want to start giving tours?" she asks.

I grin. "I probably could at this point," I say, "but today I'll just watch."

Trailing behind the group, I listen to the students chat and watching them click photos of the displays of toilets in the secondary courtyard as we begin the tour.

3

“Sanitation is our religion”: Sulabh International Social Service Organization

Keep the earth sparkling clean, light the lamp of beauty,

Let's edify the world with righteousness and humanism.

Keep clean, be helpful and happy,

Let us learn and spread this message.

Embrace everyone to make another world,

All come together to make the Sulabh world.

—Sulabh anthem

I spent two and a half months working intensely with Sulabh International Social Service Organization (or just Sulabh), from January until April 2017. They were the third organization I intensely studied. From January to April, I went to the main campus downtown five days a week. As with the other organizations, I volunteered my services, and I got an honestly confused response. “What for?” Sulabh has so many people, they had no need for my work. And so my days were often unstructured and meandering, with slow afternoons sitting in the visitors’ lounge talking to the people who passed through or drinking chai with employees. While many people were welcoming, not having a particular role or job meant that I never had the ability to deeply embed and to truly become a part of the organization.

While WaterAid was comfortable and familiar, I found Sulabh in many ways impenetrable, contradictory, and confusing. It is an organization of extremes—of heady spectacles alternating with slow sleepy afternoons of nothing; of five-star hotels and mattresses on the floor; of exuberant excess and restraint. It is an organization that, on the one hand, has been recognized and praised by personalities as diverse and prominent as Pope John Paul II, Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York, UNDP, UNICEF, Stockholm Water Week, and Gandhi's grandson; and yet in the quiet currents of rumor, in conversations with sources who insist on anonymity, they say Dr. Pathak is a fraud, a crook, a charlatan who hurts the cause of people he claims to help. Sulabh publishes reams of books and papers, a monthly magazine, and a weekly newspaper. Full-time photographers and videographers capture every moment of the organization. There is almost an excess of documentation.

And yet there is also a great deal of opaqueness and contradiction. They do not always document their work in clear formats. To find certain parts of the organization, I was told quietly by someone, then had to research to verify. In many cases, I often got conflicting views of what probably should have been considered straightforward facts such as how the organization was organized or the funding streams. Sometimes these conflicts seemed a function of simple confusion—of changes or simply a lack of knowledge. (I found many people at Sulabh did not know a lot of things about the organization.) In other cases, these conflicts seemed to rise as a function of audience. I managed to sit in on a lot of meetings with different people, from students to movie stars to corporations, and, like most actors, Sulabh's narrative shifted to appeal to their audience. In other cases, the conflicts were more direct, such as Dr. Pathak telling me he has never had a problem with the press, while a newspaper editor tells me that Sulabh has sued reporters for negative press coverage, or an NGO worker telling me that he has spoken to employees who told him that the biogas generator only runs about 30% on biogas while Sulabh claims that it is 100% on biogas. When I could, I sought to verify, but doing so was not in the purview of this project.

Part of the reason that I stopped going to Sulabh fulltime was that there was a point that I realized I was not going to be able to penetrate beyond the marigold pollen-dusted surface of brochure words and professionally-produced videos. There was a sense of watching and waiting that permeated the office so much that even moments of simple unguarded honesty like, “I really hate watching that video every day” were uttered with a glance over the shoulder. Sulabh is both radically transparent, open, effusive with hospitality and information and phenomenally opaque. No informant seemed to be able or willing to speak to me about the extent of all of the activities, the funding structures, the organization, or precise details.

But what was never in dispute is their power, size, prestige, and influence. If you wanted to talk about sanitation in India, Sulabh is the gate keeper, a one-stop shop. It was one of the first sanitation-oriented organizations in India. The organization was started in 1970 by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, a government worker, sociologist, and school teacher who continues to dominate the organization with a larger-than-life persona.

The prominence of Dr. Pathak, his uniqueness and fame, meant that I never have been able to ensure confidentiality or anonymity. In one of my first conversations with Dr. Pathak, I said as much, and he waved dismissively. “Everything I say is on record.” In contrast with Dr. Pathak’s statements, I am keeping the statements of employees strictly anonymous and confidential, as many expressed a nervousness about losing their jobs or falling into disfavor with Dr. Pathak. Many employees did have positive things to say and would doubtless own their words, but in favor of protecting the others, I have rendered all anonymous.

In addition to interviews both unstructured and semi-structured, formal and informal, observations at the campus and multiple events, Sulabh produces an extensive number of publications, which I draw from heavily. I examined approximately 250 of them throughout my period of study. These

are, overall, very consistent with their messaging and the narratives they produce around the organization.

Sulabh is a powerful organization, and the fact that they have been one of the few nongovernmental actors who have been pushing for better sanitation for so long is a marked accomplishment. They have a global reputation, a strong political standing, and a lot of wealth. They have created and perpetuated an “authentic” Indian identity and combined it with a powerful authority on the subject.

Goals and activities

In my first conversation with Dr. Pathak, in a long meandering conversation about caste and philosophy and what exactly Sulabh is, he told me of Sulabh that “Everything here is my vision.” The biogas, the sanitary napkins, the museum. “They are my followers,” he said of the employees³⁶.

The origin story of Sulabh from their own materials and Dr. Pathak’s numerous public interviews is that Dr. Pathak invented the twin pit pour-flush toilet system in 1968 for the purpose of liberating manual scavengers while working for a government initiative in Bihar³⁷. The notion behind the twin-pit latrine is that you dig two pits for excreta disposal but block one off. When the first pit is full, it is covered, and the waste is allowed to compost. At this point, the reasoning goes, anyone can clean the pit, and thus manual scavenging is not required. (Further discussion of these claims is in Chapter 5.)

In 1970, Sulabh was registered as a nonprofit organization with the stated aim to liberate manual scavengers through the installation and spread of the twin pit technology. One of the major

³⁶ Technically and legally, no one at Sulabh is an employee, but a “volunteer.” The significance of this will be described later, but I use the term here as it is indicative of the power relations.

³⁷ The Bihar Gandhi Centenary Celebration Committee

elements of Sulabh was added in 1974, when Dr. Pathak opened the first pay-per-use public restroom in a Bihari railway station (Timeline of Sulabh History n.d.).

Today, Sulabh describes itself and its work as: “India’s leading NGO fulfils Mahatma Gandhi’s unfinished task to restore human rights and dignity to the ‘untouchables’ while providing affordable sanitary facilities to masses throughout the country” (Sulabh Sanitation Movement n.d.). Their core missions and activities are the construction of twin pit latrines for individual households; the maintenance of pay-per-use public restrooms; a school for children (on the Delhi campus); and the rehabilitation of former manual scavengers through vocational training.



Figure 12: Sulabh International logo as designed by Dr. Pathak. The image portrays a manual scavenger on the left side and a diagram of a twin-pit latrine on the other.

Construction of twin pit latrines: Sulabh is often contracted to construct twin-pit latrines for individuals, villages, districts, or other communities. It may be by individuals who desire this or, more frequently, by corporations fulfilling their CSR obligations. In a few well-publicized events, Sulabh has built twin pits for an entire village. According to their website, they have constructed 1.5 million household toilets (Meet Sulabh 2019).

Pay-per-use public restrooms: While this element is not vaunted as highly in the tours as the others, the pay-per-use public restrooms are how most people know and interact with Sulabh. These public restrooms are commonly found in metro stations, tourist locations, railway stations, pilgrimage sites, government installations, informal

housing, or other prominent sites. The quality of the restrooms varies widely, and they do not have a particularly good reputation.

Sulabh School: The first stop on the tour for visitors to Sulabh Gram is the Sulabh school campus, in which children from marginalized backgrounds (including, according to the tour, children of former scavengers) are educated along with children from other social classes. The school runs up to 10th standard. According to one brochure, 430 children attend the school, with 60% of them from scavenger households. They attend free of cost and are provided with uniforms and supplies.

Rehabilitation of manual scavengers: At three sites—Delhi, Alwar, and Tonk—Sulabh runs vocational training for women who used to do manual scavenging. They are trained in beauty, tailoring, typography, making of foodstuffs, making of bags, and embroidery. In addition to the vocational training, Sulabh has coordinated multiple prominent events with the ostensible aim to remove caste stigma, including a fashion show (in which former scavengers walked down runways with models); taking of the former scavengers into temples from which they were previously banned; a “conversion” ceremony and event, in which the former scavengers of Alwar were deemed to be Brahmins; and a massive event in which government officials and eminent individuals sat down to eat a meal with the former scavengers in violation of caste separation practices.

These are the primary elements of the organization that are highlighted in tours, media elements, and promotional materials; they form the core of Sulabh’s public image. But Sulabh works in a wide range of other activities. I have listed some of the other major projects, but I am still not certain if I have encompassed all of them, as documentation as to all of the parts and verification as to their current status does not appear to exist in public materials, at least. No informant seemed able to confirm the full extent of their activities either.

- International Museum of Toilets: a small museum housed on the Sulabh campus with a series of displays showing the history of the toilet (www.sulabhtoiletmuseum.org)

- Widows of Vrindavan: A project in which Sulabh has “adopted” a group of widows who were cast out of their homes and moved to the city of Vrindavan. Upper-caste Hindu practices traditionally view widows as dirty, and thus they are banned from wearing colors, eating certain kinds of food, or celebrating holidays. In many cases, these women are cut off from their families. Sulabh has “adopted” a temple and gives them healthcare, a stipend, and holds events in which they celebrate holidays.
- Biogas plant construction: Using fecal waste from toilets, they have installed 200 biogas plants across the country, according to the numbers they gave during an MP’s tour.
- Social research: A research center that funds researchers looking at topics related to sanitation.
- Research and development lab: A group of approximately 12 researchers who test the water coming out of the biogas plant daily and look at other treatment solutions
- Sulabh Sanitation Club: a children’s club based out of the school that makes menstrual pads and promotes sanitation and hygiene
- WaterATM: An initiative mostly in West Bengal in which people can pay a small fee in exchange for clean water.
- ENVIS (Environmental Information System): ENVIS is a Ministry of Environment and Forestry initiative to provide information centers on different environmental topics. Sulabh holds the contract to manage and maintain the ENVIS point for sanitation.
- Publications: Sulabh funds several publications, including a magazine called *The Parliamentarian*, which covers politics, the weekly Sulabh Swachh Bharat newsletter, and a literary/philosophy magazine.
- Housekeeping/janitorial and maintenance: As part of the Sulabh Mission Foundation (which is listed as a separate organization for financial and legal purposes), they also run a housekeeping business which cleans and maintains different large institutional buildings and structures. The

housekeeping business holds contracts for many prominent institutions, including the Coffee Board, Delhi; Nirma University; the Ministry of Defense; Ministry of Corporate Affairs; the President's House; AIIMS; and many other universities, government installations, and tourist sites. They also have cleaning contracts on most railway stations.

Their work, then, spans the range from what an organization like WaterAid might call “programmatically”—or on the ground, concrete actions—to the more policy-based and discursive realm. Two primary themes connect the range of work: social inequality and sanitation/cleanliness, broadly defined. These two themes, however, can be unified by thinking of Sulabh as an organization that deals with filth and cleanliness—in both the physical, biological sense and in the cultural and social sense.

On one quiet night, in the courtyard of a five-star hotel while on tour, in a long conversation with Dr. Pathak, he tells me that he adds these other projects at his own whim, that he will take up any challenge that he finds interesting or difficult. When a woman approached him about the plight of the deaf and mute children in Delhi, he funded a school. When a judge suggested that he help the widows, he did. More importantly than the notion of cleanliness, what truly unifies Sulabh's activities is what Dr. Pathak is interested in.

Organization structure

Sulabh International Social Service Organization (SISSO) is based in Delhi. By their count, they have 50,000 volunteers across 26 states, 4 union territories, 551 districts, and 1733 towns (Meet Sulabh 2019). Additionally, they do work in Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and South Africa. In much of their work, they refer to themselves as less of a nonprofit or NGO, but instead a “movement’ towards cleanliness and equality.

Very few—if any—of the people who work at Sulabh are officially designated as employees but are instead listed as volunteers. However, this number is somewhat dubious. “Are there really 50,000 people who work at Sulabh?” I asked one employee. He did not pause. “No. I’ve seen the rolls, and no, we do not have that many people. I really don’t know where they get that number from.” They are not paid employees with benefits, but volunteers who receive stipends. Many make below the government-mandated minimum wage (Singh 2012), but many of the higher-ranked people get significant salaries and benefits. It is also common practice for individuals to ask Dr. Pathak for loans or gifts, which are often granted.

The main office for SISO is in Delhi, but there are other offices in different states, where they manage the CSR and latrine construction efforts and the public restrooms. At the national level, Sulabh has organized itself into several entities: the Sulabh International Centre for Action Sociology (SICAS), the Museum of Toilets, the Academy of Public Health, and the Mission Foundation. They also have their own publication office and separate offices for the publication the Parliamentarian magazine and the Sulabh Swachh Bharat newsletter. SICAS, for example, is funded by SISO and manages the school, the Sulabh Sanitation Club, the vocational training, and the South African office of Sulabh. The Mission Foundation has its own tax status and manages CSR projects as well as the housekeeping business. The Museum is also part of SISO. Many pieces of Sulabh are registered as separate organizations or entities for tax or legal purposes. The Mission Foundation, for example, is set up to take foreign donations, which enables the primary organization to continue to make the claim that they take no donations. Legally, SISO at least is considered a charitable trust and is therefore exempt from paying taxes on the profits they receive the pay-per-use toilets (Dy. CIT v Sulabh International Social Service Organisation 2011).³⁸

³⁸ I was not able to obtain the exact breakdown of all of the subsidiaries and parts of Sulabh and all of their different tax statuses and legal entity identifications. I chose not to push to get this information. In part, this is

The structure in the main office is that power is greatly consolidated with Dr. Pathak himself. Mr. Kumar Dilip is listed as “president” on the website, although he may be only president of the foundation. In addition, there is a chairman, Mr. S.P. Singh, a former government employee. Most of the day-to-day decisions rest with one of the many vice presidents or “honorary” vice presidents, who manage divisions such as SICAS or publications.

But while there is a hierarchy, Dr. Pathak or, as he is frequently called, “founder sir”, is the decision maker. When a reporter asked him whether the Sulabh Swachh Bharat Newsletter was his idea, he easily replied, “I decide everything here.” One employee confided that Dr. Pathak must even approve the bouquets given to VIPs.

There are no additional systems of accountability other than Dr. Pathak. For example, as of the time of study, there was no system for monitoring and evaluation to keep track of successes or even the status of the public restrooms. “We don’t need to do that,” an employee told me. ‘We know what works.’ When I ask about success rates, everyone told me that all of their projects were working successfully.

When I asked whether anyone did an assessment of the public restrooms in the country, an employee responded, ‘Anyone can make a complaint directly to Dr. Pathak. He is very attentive, and it hurts us personally if our toilets are not well-maintained.’ From which bouquet should be presented to the special guest to whether the VP who came into conflict with another should be removed from her position, from the news story at the front of the Sulabh Swachh Bharat newspaper to the theme of the

because it does not expressly answer my research questions, but perhaps an even greater part of this decision is that to do so put my own research relationship at risk and had the potential to put the jobs of some of my key informants at risk. This lack of clarity is perhaps analogous to some of the work on informality, which also relates to how certain processes are concealed in order to benefit the organization (Roy 2009; Roy 2005; Ranganathan 2018). However, I did not gather this data, so I will not make arguments about why this organization is organized the way it is in terms of legal and financial entities.

next event, the power at Sulabh is firmly with Dr. Pathak. The different sections and units of Sulabh are merely different cells of his own power, and the people below him are meant to extend his will.

Daily office life and people

I fingered the edge of the petite white porcelain cup from which I am drinking the milk.

“Have you ever noticed,” I asked the man whose office I often sat in, “that the upper level staff drink from ceramic cups, and most of the other staff drink from paper cups?”

He laughed uncomfortably. “Yeah, that’s the kind of observation I’m looking forward to reading about from you.”

The utilization of paper cups by a majority of the staff may be practical on the one hand; there are so many people on campus that the dishes would be nearly unmanageable. But the practice has the uncomfortable echo of the clay cups that Dalits were forced to use, then smash, so that no upper caste would defile themselves by drinking from the same cup.

“Equality’ is a common theme throughout Sulabh’s published literature, speeches, and even the quotes plastered on the walls. And yet in day-to-day functioning of the office, the inequalities are marked in small but significant ways. Some staff members have their coffee delivered to them in offices; others drink from a paper cup. Only VPs can use the “guest” bathrooms, which are particularly nice. When travelling, Dr. Pathak flies first class, his guests ride economy, and the assistants take a train.

“[The employees] love Dr. Pathak,” one of the employees told me, his voice edged with scorn. “He hires anyone. He hires people who are unemployable anywhere else.” In the main Delhi office, there are about 55 employees. These 55 people run the gambit of education, from nearly uneducated villagers to people with PhDs and a prior history of prestigious government posts.

In the upper echelons of the organization, below Dr. Pathak, are about a dozen people, most of whom carry the title of vice president or honorary vice president. Many of these come from upper caste backgrounds, in particular a certain Bihari Brahmin caste. A significant fraction of those hired as vice presidents have been hired at least in part because of their connections. Many of the employees are retired government employees or are married to current government officials. (One individual claimed he used to work for the secret police.) This helps Sulabh maintain a close and positive relationship with the government. Others may have extensive media connections which they will be expected to utilize to better promote Sulabh. A former UN official I spoke to was offered a position but turned it down.

Other members of staff are from highly educated backgrounds, with bachelors or masters degrees in everything from lab sciences to communications. They work in the labs, the museum, the ENVIS center, or at visitors services. There are many young people in these mid-range positions. Many times, employees are related to someone who was already working at Sulabh. Entire families are employed within the organization.

Many of the other members of staff are uneducated, some of whom came from villages to ask for a job. There are people to do nearly every task and keep the whole site humming: people who make chai, people who deliver chai, drivers, photographers, people who light biogas lamp during the tour, people who open the gates for special guests, people who turn on the water during tours, people who cook lunch.

Dr. Pathak gives nearly everyone who asks work, which means that there is a sense of almost overcrowding. In the Sulabh museum, for example, there will often be four tour guides/assistants on hand in addition to the curator; this means that everyone who comes to visit gets a personal tour, and even then, the others have a significant amount of downtime that sometimes is used to work, but sometimes is just to relax.

The rhythm of any single day is often dictated by approximately three parameters: (1) the presence or absence of guests (2) the prestige of those guests and (3) whether Dr. Pathak is in the office. On days where there are no special guests, the day has a low hum of activity in the morning, like a well-oiled machine going about the daily rituals, and a sleepy afternoon where elderly men pull plastic chairs out into the courtyard and fall asleep in the sun. There are “regular” guests nearly daily, usually students, smalltime officials, or people visiting the museum, but they are usually gone by the afternoon, except for a few tourists wandering into the museum. This contrasts with days with special events or special guests—higher-ranking officials and people deemed more powerful--which happens at least three or four times a month. All staff members are expected to attend these events unless they have an excuse. These events can be hectic and go long into the night. Dr. Pathak may not be there for lower-ranked visitors, but he is always there for the high-ranked and “special” visitors. On days with Dr. Pathak is in the office, people avoid at least the appearance of downtime, and there is a sense of industriousness in the space. You are expected to be at your desk should Dr. Pathak call you. The activities, the daily life, the energy, and the power rotate around Dr. Pathak.

“What’s it like working at Sulabh?” I asked one man as we sit in his private office.

“Nerve-wracking,” he said. “It’s unpredictable and unstable.”

Working at Sulabh gives you a sense of being watched at all times. This centering around Dr. Pathak though has created a kind of underlying tension, a desperation to not displease him for fear that you will be cut off. Some people are actively cut out; they are fired. But for others, what is more likely should one fail to meet expectations or are forgotten by Dr. Pathak is that they are slowly cut off. They may get no calls, no new work. ‘How long will they stay in a situation like that?’ the man asked me.

People are expected to participate in the daily rituals and in the showpieces. At morning assemblies, you may be randomly awarded for your attendance if Dr. Pathak suddenly decides to give everyone in the room 500 rupees. If you do not show up, it is noted. The omnipresent cameras and videographer adds to the sense of being watched. People will be competitive with each other, particularly at higher levels, jockeying for Dr. Pathak's favor and attention.

But there are warm moments too. There is collective pride at what Dr. Pathak has accomplished, and excitement over some of the guests. There are friendships and conversations over chai. There are long conversations in the jasmine-scented courtyard and delight at the performances of the school children. But in many ways, on a day to day basis, people tend to be isolated in their work units, and many people told me that they felt isolated.

Hours can be irregular if there is a particular guest or event, which happens at least once a week. When Shri Shri Ravi Shankar came to visit the campus, people were expected to stay late until at least 8 PM. When setting up for a book release event, staff members were staying at the event hall until nearly midnight. At some events, whether the staff member is involved in the actual carrying out of it, they are expected to attend for the duration of the event. At an evening when a VIP guest was arriving 2 hours late, one of the women fretted anxiously about returning home to her children but did not feel like she could leave.

But there are many advantages at working at Sulabh, that make up for the disadvantages for many people. For one VP, for example, he only worked part-time, and yet Sulabh provided him with an apartment, a driver, and a handsome salary. To work at Sulabh in the main office is to mostly be well-compensated, or to be in a kind of lottery where one can receive additional gifts or the ability to move forward.

And most people honestly admire Dr. Pathak and what he does. They seem him as successful or wise or revolutionary. The other elements of his personality often are seen as foibles of a great man or just necessary parts of being a great leader.

Sulabh, like WaterAid, has variety of people with different networks and connections. There is overall a strong loyalty to Dr. Pathak and a strong regard for the man, even as a tension, a sense of being watched, undergirds daily life. The organization is also markedly stratified, with VPs in a different space than the lower staff. But everything rotates around the singular personality of Dr. Pathak.

Leadership: Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

Dr. Pathak's office is large, with wood paneling and a massive desk that dominates the room. Around the desk are several chairs for the many visitors and employees who come in and out of the room. The walls are covered with a range of accolades, from glittering plaques I cannot read from where I sit to photos of himself with different prominent people. One of them is of him and Hillary Clinton; another of him and Modi; him and the pope; him and Rajnath Singh, the BJP home minister; him and Amitabh Bachchan; and Usha, one of the manual scavengers he has "liberated", with Prime Minister Modi, being presented an award. An ugly wall clock made with rocks that I suspect is a gift hangs behind the desk.

Dr. Pathak himself is in his mid-70s now, dressed, as he always is, in white kurta, churidar³⁹, and a Nehru-collared vest that alternates between saffron, red, and blue depending on the occasion or the political party of the guest. In his coat pocket, he keeps a comb to straighten his thinning black hair for photo opportunities or after an over-enthusiastic embrace from a devotee musses it. His dark eyes are bright behind round wire-rimmed spectacles.

³⁹ Traditional tight-fitting pants worn by both men and women in South Asia

After the morning assembly, he once invited me to come and sit with him in his office. In between employees coming in and out, phone calls on one of his five iPhones, and the arrival of a tray of coffee and nuts delivered on pristine white saucers, I had a conversation with him after having spent a few days at the office.

“What is it that you do for Sulabh, exactly?” I asked, still trying to place his role.

“I’m the founder,” he said simply.

“Yes, but what else?” I pushed gently. From his prominence and busyness, he is not merely a figure of the organization’s past.

“I’m a philosophical light for them,” he said.

Dr. Pathak is more than just the founder of “philosophical light,” for the organization. Sulabh *is* Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, and Dr. Pathak is Sulabh; Sulabh is an extension of his vision, his control, his planning. As described earlier, he makes decisions both large and small. He is described by employees as a workaholic, keeping late hours and answering phone calls at odd times from people across the country—begging for a job to be returned, a concern about some internal matter, a plea for some extra benefit. In one interview, Dr. Pathak compared his late night work listening to people across the country as that of a king listening to his subjects. This assessment of the people who work for him speaks to his own perceptions of his importance and relationship with them; he sees himself as fundamentally above the people he works for.

Dr. Pathak is recognized by international figures from around the world. The list of awards and recognitions ranges from awards from international organizations, such as the WHO Public Health Champion Award (2016); to WASH awards, such as the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize; to Indian government recognitions, such as the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian award in India; to

recognition by foreign leaders, such as when New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio declared April 14th, 2016, “Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak Day.” When Dr. Pathak wins an award while travelling, on his return to the Sulabh office, he is greeted with great fanfare—live music, flowers and garlands from everyone at Sulabh (which used to be purchased by the organization itself), and sweets for the whole office.

When visitors leave the office, they leave with a bag of literature, including a 200-page glossy profile of Dr. Pathak. In addition to the founder profile, they find innumerable profiles, interviews, and excerpts about Dr. Pathak or in his voice. The public narrative of Sulabh is the narrative of Dr. Pathak and his life.

Dr. Pathak was born in 1943 in a village in Bihar to a Brahmin family. In explaining his interests in Untouchability, he often recounts an incident from childhood to explain his own experiences encountering Untouchability. In one of the founder profiles that Sulabh distributes, a 107-page glossy softbound book that is available in hard copy or on CD, the incident is described as such:

When Dr. Pathak was just a child he touched an untouchable scavenger lady which was seen by his grandmother. All hell broke loose and his grandmother apart from berating him made him eat cow dung, drink cow urine and pour Ganges water over his head in order to purify him (Profile of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Soldier of Sanitation n.d.:12).

This story has multiple functions. On a basic level, it is intended to show how unclean Untouchables were considered when he grew up. However, the story is centered on the young Pathak’s suffering. *He* was berated. *He* had to eat cow dung and drink cow urine. Drinking of cow dung and cow urine is a common way to counter impurity in Hindu practices, as the bodily substances of the divine animal are considered cleansing. But in this story, this Hindu practice was portrayed as the filthy element, not the “Untouchable” person. The Untouchable in this story remains hidden, and Dr. Pathak becomes the one who is wronged, who is exposed to filth from ignorance. Additionally, this story is a visceral illustration

of an oft-repeated fact that Dr. Pathak is himself Brahmin and from a Brahmin family, the highest of the caste groups.

In 1968, he began work at the Mahatma Gandhi Centenary Committee, a governmental initiative to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Gandhi's birth. As he has said, his job there was to "fulfill the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and rescue the Untouchables." So he moved to a colony of Untouchables in Champaran district, Bihar—the same place "where Mahatma Gandhi had started his freedom movement"(Profile of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Soldier of Sanitation n.d.:14). Champaran district is the site where Gandhi started the first "Satyagraha," or civil protest, to protest mistreatment of farmers.

The invocation of Gandhi this early on in Dr. Pathak's origin story is intentional and consistent with the other references to him throughout the narratives that Dr. Pathak presents of himself. Dr. Pathak identifies himself as a follower of Gandhi's teachings, and guest accolades that are reprinted in Sulabh publications often compare him to Gandhi. In 2009, Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, visited Sulabh Gram and stated that, "I am the son of the son of Mahatma Gandhi, but Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak is the son of his soul. If we were to go to meet Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, he would first greet Dr. Pathak for the noble work that he is doing and then meet me. Dr. Pathak has restored human rights and dignity to people engaged in the manual cleaning of human excreta which they carried as head-load" (Profile of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Soldier of Sanitation n.d.:37). Dr. Pathak frequently positions himself as a Gandhian; the ramifications for that in regard to his relationship with manual scavenging will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Dr. Pathak lived in the Untouchable colony for three months where, as he describes, he learned their 'culture,' their food, the origins of Untouchability, and 'their habits.' His Brahmanical family and in-laws stigmatized and scolded him for living in this community.

In one story he recounts, he saw a young man wearing a red shirt attacked by a bull. Several people rushed forward to help him, but then someone shouted that he was from the Untouchable community, and then no one wanted to touch him. The young man died in the hospital. “Dr. Pathak then took a vow to fulfill the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi and free the untouchables from this demeaning practice of cleaning excreta manually. From here his story begins” (Profile of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Soldier of Sanitation n.d.:14).

According to the Sulabh narrative, Dr. Pathak came to realize that eliminating scavenging would require the invention of a technology that could replace dry latrines. In 1970, he ostensibly invented the twin-pit latrine,⁴⁰ and he established Sulabh as an organization. From there, Sulabh grew, with the addition of the pay-per-use toilet in 1974 and the first biogas plant in 1977. In the 1980s, in response to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s calls for action, Dr. Pathak began to take up the cause of “rehabilitation” of scavengers by creating vocational training programs (Profile of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Soldier of Sanitation n.d.:21). In 1985, he received his doctorate from Patna University in Sociology with his dissertation, *Liberation of Scavengers through Low-Cost Sanitation in Bihar* (Pathak 1999).

Dr. Pathak’s life story, as Sulabh frames it, is of a privileged man who is wrested from his position of privilege by the teachings of Gandhi. He is heroic, an inventor and a thought leader who stands up to ignorance and prejudice armed with the teachings of Gandhi. He is the hero of this story—a lone hero in the fight against ignorance and prejudice, and in his struggle, he has gathered a following, a “movement.”

⁴⁰ Whether he actually invented the twin pit latrine is a matter of some debate and derision. One former UN official told me directly that Dr. Pathak did *not* invent the twin pit latrine, that the design was under UN and WHO development for years. ‘The idea that he invented it is nonsense.’ In a 2003 WHO report, Dr. Pathak is quoted as having been influenced by the WHO book ‘Excreta Disposal for Rural Areas and Small Communities’ (World Health Organization 2003:11). In that same book, a Mr. R.L. Das was credited with co-inventing the design of what would be called the Sulabh *Shauchalaya*, although I have not heard nor read that name in any more recent reports or materials.

The literature and promotional material that I collected from Sulabh over the months described him as a “Missionary of Sanitation,” a “Messiah of the Untouchables,” “a Soldier of Sanitation,” a “Guardian Angel of the Downtrodden.” He is described as a “versatile genius” and describes his own journey as “turning the pages of Indian history.” He identifies himself as a social scientist, sociologist, engineer, administrator, writer, poet, singer, “humanist,” “social reformer,” and “institution-builder.” He has not just created a toilet design, he has revolutionized sanitation. He has not instituted programs for Untouchable rehabilitation, he has “liberated” the Untouchables and banished Untouchability. Dr. Pathak is framed as being a kind of god-man, a cultural icon more than a sanitation icon. Through sanitation, he has managed to create a space in which he compares himself to Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus. He is a larger-than-life character and a “great man” in all aspects, not just in creating a successful organization. Indeed, the organization only serves to magnify Dr. Pathak. And while Dr. Pathak himself does not publicly profess them, those who work closely with him tell me that he has greater ambitions, either political office or a Nobel Peace Prize.

The core of Dr. Pathak’s narrative of himself is that of a social redeemer and the leader of a social justice movement. He does not present himself as a businessman, although that frame may be the most useful in understanding what Sulabh has accomplished. Dr. Pathak has created an organization whose public image is entirely focused on him and his story and whose daily workings are dependent upon his decisions. The ramifications for the public image, and the complexity of Dr. Pathak/Sulabh’s public image and reputation, will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Funding

“We are a self-sustaining NGO,” one of the Sulabh tour guides proclaimed to a group of wide-eyed students and professionals during the tour. In the narrative of funding that they perpetuate in these campus tours, they fund all of their good works with the proceeds from the pay-per-use toilets.

In reality, the funding streams of Sulabh are a bit more patchwork. The dominant narrative is this: they are self-sustaining, with their profits from the pay-per-use toilets. They also take CSR funds to carry out toilet construction campaigns at specific sites. One thing that was explicitly insisted to me by Dr. Pathak was that they take no donations, and they especially do not take foreign donations.

This narrative is one of the ways in which Sulabh establishes its superiority, its authority and primacy in the crowded NGO space. Unlike other NGOs which are often dependent on the largesse of foreign entities, they are independent, financially successful and viable. This appeals to multiple actors. In a neoliberally-shaped world, the notion of financial sustainability is a unicorn of development and seen as an ultimate measure of success. Additionally, this notion of not being dependent on foreign sources is also appealing to the strain of anti-foreigner trust and Indian nationality, a streak that, while perhaps always present, has gained new edge and salience in recent years.

But there are hints that the reality is perhaps more complicated. To establish: Sulabh is extremely wealthy. Dr. Pathak is extremely wealthy. This is an organization that will spend 3 lakh rupees (approximately 4500 USD) for flowers for a VIP event. Dr. Pathak lives in what his employees describe as a “palace” in one of the most expensive parts of Delhi and always flies first class. This is an organization who will lavish thousands of dollars of camera equipment to a foreign photographer who says he is writing a biography about Dr. Pathak. Money flows like water.

Claims about self-sustainability may be true to an extent, but the fact that Sulabh has multiple branches that are registered separately and under different headings makes claims more difficult to track. The Sulabh Mission Foundation, for example, has buttons for donations on their website and holds an FCRA license. This is also the branch that undertakes CSR activities, with a 15% implementation charge to cover construction, management, and IEC. In one account from an employee, they have 90 corporate partnerships.

Less publicized, although not secret, is Sulabh's housekeeping business, which is registered under the Sulabh Mission Foundation. I had not heard of it until one employee explicitly mentioned it to me after being at the organization nearly a month, although later I had heard Dr. Pathak tell a visiting corporate head about it. In an older brochure which is no longer distributed, the housekeeping business is described as "provid[ing] housekeeping services that meets the specific requirements for floor cleaning, road cleaning, water tank cleaning, office building cleaning, toilet cleaning and maintenance etc." On the current Sulabh Mission Foundation website, they assert that the housekeeping "helps us to employ trained and skilled staff from weaker section of society and also helps us in utilising our trained people to get jobs easily" (Housekeeping Projects 2018).

The housekeeping business threatens Sulabh's overall and grander narrative on multiple accounts. For one, it counters the narrative that Sulabh's good works can be funded entirely through the success of pay-per-use model and that the pay-per-use model sustains all of Sulabh. Additionally, as several sanitation sector professionals and journalists expressed to me, this housekeeping business threatens to violate the narrative that Sulabh is about protecting the marginalized and promoting equality. While there is not extensive coverage of this, Sulabh has been taken to court for paying this staff below minimum wage, making the argument that they are not employees but volunteers working for a social service organization (Singh 2012). Among professionals in the sector and among journalists who have followed the organization, the common belief is that Sulabh hires the very Dalits they claim to rehabilitate from manual scavenging, in both housekeeping and in their public toilet maintenance; this is seen by many as hypocritical, taking advantage of marginalized. One newsman went so far as to call it a 'new kind of slavery.'

The story of the pay-per-use toilets is also murky when you speak to former government officials who are aware of some of the municipal politics. According to one professional, the way that their business model started was that the municipality would provide the land, water, power and

restroom, and Sulabh would maintain these facilities. Because the municipality was providing so much, Sulabh could receive a significant amount of money from the usage charges. Some municipalities have reportedly refused to work with Sulabh after they realized this. However, Sulabh toilets continue to be ubiquitous across the country. Sulabh's literature claims that approximately 1.2 million people use their toilets per day, but some employees I spoke to were skeptical of that number, as 'that much money isn't coming in.'

The CSR is arguably one of their most prominent and currently successful funding streams. For the corporations, Sulabh has a reputation to get toilets built, and in a political climate where public and highly visible construction of latrines is seen as a political boon, corporations are interested. To partner with Sulabh means that you can decide how many toilets you want and where you want them, and they will be built. In addition, you will be able to purchase Sulabh's cultural currency—their backing as an institution of high status and reputation—as well and perhaps be able to tap into their vast network of political connections.

Sulabh's public narrative is that of an NGO that has managed to become self-sustaining and viable from public toilets and the vision of their founder. However, this narrative fragments when you look more deeply. In many ways, their model is less of an NGO model and more alike to a business model, especially when you take into account their housekeeping contracts. However, the idea that Sulabh is an NGO is vital to their public image and is mobilized in maintaining some of their labor practices—specifically, their compensation structures. By maintaining their status as a nonprofit charity, they can continue to justify paying their workers below minimum wage and not extending to them employee protections, such as contracts, working hours, leave policies, and dismissal procedures. This self-sustainability that is not dependent on foreign powers is a widely accepted narrative and is vital in

maintaining their organizational identity as the most authoritative and authentic voice in the sanitation sector.

Relationship with government and other parties

Months before my intensive engagement with the organization, a Sulabh informant and friend called me to notify me that there was a large event happening tomorrow that I may be interested in. The invitation he emailed me featured a large photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Happy Birthday Wishes to

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi

Harbinger of Nationalism: A Devoted Son of Mother India

The invitation goes on to describe that Sulabh was going to hold a celebratory event on Modi's birthday they called "Sanitation Day," September 17th, 2016. "May our country prosper with your mission of sanitation, cleanliness, health and harmony, ascend the steps of progress may your fame shine like the full moon on the horizon of time, and may all work be performed smoothly with your blessings." The event's special guests include Suresh Parbhakar Prabhu, the Minister of Railways; Tarun Vijay, an editor of an RSS magazine; and the managing director of an event planning company in Ahmedabad. Both Prabhu and Vijay are closely affiliated with BJP and conservative right-wing fundamentalist groups.

The event was the kind of all-out lushness that I would later come to associate with Sulabh events. As one approached the entrance to the conference hall, twelve-foot tall signs welcome each of the special guests by name. On either side of the red carpet were Sulabh school children holding banners, posters and signs depicting Sulabh's accomplishments, mostly photos of Dr. Pathak posing with toilets constructed under CSR projects. The Sulabh van was parked behind that display, with the pictures

of Modi and Dr. Pathak smiling above the heads of the children. At the far end of the carpet were 'liberated' manual scavengers, holding signs describing how Sulabh liberated them.

The auditorium was packed beyond its 675-person capacity, with people sitting and standing in the aisles. It took a moment for me to realize that most of the audience comprised of Sulabh staff and beneficiaries: former manual scavengers in blue saris; the widows that Sulabh adopted in white; the women from the village that Sulabh has adopted in a range of bright colors; children from the school on the balcony; representatives from Sulabh's work in other countries holding signs proclaiming they are delegates. Interspersed between these groups were non-staff guests. Assistants hustled and wove through the fray, bringing bottled water to the special guests. The room bristled with cameras from both Sulabh's internal media team and external media sources.

While the event was called "Sanitation Day," it was inarguably a day of Modi: his face was on the posters, the backdrop, the projected screens, his name was spelled out in flowers. The whole room dripped with marigold, and the room glowed with the saffron color that is affiliated with both Hinduism and the BJP. With Hindu rituals—blessings, the lighting of a lamp, and the blowing of conch shells to render the event auspicious—the event began. This is in spite of the ostensible secular nature of the Indian state. But Modi, the BJP, and Sulabh all lean into a performance of a Hindu identity and the establishment of a Hindu identity as an Indian one.

The event was a kaleidoscope of videos, speeches, dances, skits, book releases, more speeches—all of which circulated around either Dr. Pathak's achievements or Modi's greatness. Sulabh is Dr. Pathak, Sulabh is sanitation, Modi is sanitation, Modi and Sulabh and Dr. Pathak are all entwined through sanitation, through purity, through greatness, through vision, through development.

An hour into the event, the special guests on stage dramatically unveiled the spectacular centerpiece of the day, an 1,100-pound ladoo, or Indian sweet made of ghee, syrup and gram flour. It

was a giant orange lump with “Happy Birthday Modi Ji” written on it. In newspaper coverage of the event, most of the headlines picked up on this first, the enormous spectacle of the enormous laddoo that was shared with the entire audience.



Figure 13: Guests of honor unveiling the 1100-pound laddoo at the Modi day celebration (Courtesy of Sulabh International)

The event stretched out over the day and went late into the night. There were more speeches. The Sulabh members of the audience did not leave, pressured to staying and listening to the continuation of speeches and the showcasing of videos, like the “Laughter is my work” music video that they play at the Sulabh center every morning. This event was not for most of the audience members. The Sulabh audience members were as much of a part of the production as the backdrops and the laddoo; their numbers gave a sense of weight, of grandness to the event. They enforced the importance

of the players, of the event. They became witnesses to this convergence of Sulabh-Pathak-Modi-Sanitation.

Towards the middle of the event, the Minister of Railways publicly announced that they will be partnering with Sulabh to manage every rail station in the country and that Dr. Pathak will be the Railways “Swachh Ambassador.” As Swachh Ambassador, Dr. Pathak would star in an ad campaign to promote cleanliness to the public in rail stations and on trains. There was thunderous applause, and Dr. Pathak grinned widely.

As I stepped out of the event to make a quick phone call, I ran into the employee who had invited me. “You asked the point of events like this is? It’s that,” he said, pointing to the auditorium. “That railway project. The Minister made this big announcement in such a public place.” While Sulabh has done work for the railways previously, such a public announcement at such an event of unity and affiliation is a major boon for Sulabh’s authority and prestige and cements their closeness with the government.

Sulabh is effusive in most of their relationships, but their relationship with Modi and his party is particularly so. ‘Modi loves sanitation from the “core of his heart,” just like Gandhi did,’ Dr. Pathak told me in one conversation. ‘I have written 9 or 10 poems about Modi. They just come to me. I have not done that for any other minister.’ One of these poems, “Son of India,” was put to music and produced as a seven-and-a-half-minute video available in Hindi, English, Assamese, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Meitei Manipuri, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telegu, and Urdu⁴¹.

⁴¹ All versions of the song can be found on Sulabh’s YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/SulabhVideos/featured>

Walking around the campus, large placards on the wall make Modi's presence and influence clear. To the left as you enter is a photo of Modi posing with white doves with a poem that describes how Modi is spreading his message to the world. Below, are photos of Dr. Pathak posing with Modi as Dr. Pathak gifts Modi a coffee table book about Gandhi's life, one with the two men exchanging flowers, and the final photo is just of Modi with a shovel cleaning the Assi Ghat in Varanasi. "Toilet first, temple later"—one of Modi's campaign platforms—is in multiple places throughout the compound, and in particular behind the stage on which they do the morning assemblies. Also behind the stage is a photo of some of the widows that Sulabh had adopted tying rakhi to the Prime Minister.⁴² Modi makes an appearance in the Hasna Mera Kaam ("Laughter is my work") music video; children sing "Gandhi Modi made a vow, clean India with me now" as images of Gandhi and Modi flash side-by-side. Print material endorsing Modi abounds, from the biography of Modi that Dr. Pathak penned to the musical-greeting style card that plays "Hasna Mera Kaam" when you open it up and is emblazoned with images of Gandhi and Modi together.

⁴² Rakhi, or Raksha Bandhan, is a celebration in which someone ties a bracelet around the wrist of another. While originally centering around sisters tying it around the wrist of their brothers, it has expanded and become popularized.



Figure 14: The inside of Sulabh campus (Author photo).

When Modi announced Swachh Bharat and made it one of the flagship initiatives of his administration, Sulabh found it a validation of their mission, a culmination of their work. Some employees even say that SBM was directly inspired by Sulabh. Dr. Pathak has said in an interview and in several conversations that Modi's endorsement was personally fulfilling and validating. While previous GOI administrations have made sanitation initiatives over the years, Modi is undoubtedly the first to make it such a central element of his tenure. Even when speaking to foreign leaders, Dr. Pathak told me, Modi has spoken about toilets. 'No other Prime Minister has done that.'

In addition to Modi, Sulabh also works very hard to ensure they are constantly in the minds of different levels of government officials. Government officials, and often very high-ranking ones, frequently visit the organization; during the three months I studied Sulabh, three Members of Parliament came to the main office for a tour and a meeting with Dr. Pathak. All of Sulabh's publications are mailed to a massive mailing list that includes all of the Members of Parliament, judges, local and

state officials, and embassies. The print run of their monthly magazine is about 2,000, but for particular events or publications, the circulation list may increase massively.

The effusive response to Modi is a way to further their own sanitation goals by endorsing someone whose work aligns with theirs. Modi is a popular leader, and utilizing his image and words validates and lends authority to Sulabh's own endeavors and Dr. Pathak himself. Working closely with the government makes it easier for Sulabh on the ground: easier to obtain housekeeping contracts, public toilet contracts, toilet construction contracts, to get political access to leaders. Being politically connected smooths their way in a range of activities and challenges as well as lending prestige. It also means that corporations are more likely to want to partner with them so they can improve their own relationship with the government. Working so closely and uncritically with the government also gives opportunities for Dr. Pathak to expand his power and brand, as when the Ministry of Railways declared Dr. Pathak the Railways Swachh Ambassador.

But Sulabh does not view itself as political, and I was frequently told that they were not political. Over the months spent with Sulabh, I often asked whether Sulabh was political, or whether they were concerned with some of the allies they have made or endorsed.

'No no,' Dr. Pathak told me. 'We work everywhere. We work in West Bengal, and they aren't BJP controlled. We are not political.'

'Do you get that question a lot?' I asked.

'Not from Indian journalists, no. They know. Sometimes I get it from foreign ones. It's just that Modi love sanitation from the core of his heart, like Gandhi did.'

Even when I spoke with employees, they told me that Sulabh was not political, even when I asked about the pictures of Modi everywhere. Sulabh asserts they are not political, that they have

endorsed and welcomed every political leader from every political party. This is true, but even by Dr. Pathak's own admission, the adoration for BJP and Modi go beyond his previous expressions of support of previous leaders.

But Sulabh's endorsement of Modi goes beyond just appreciating SBM. In their public materials, they often endorse Modi and the BJP beyond their sanitation efforts. Placards memorialize meetings between Dr. Pathak and Amit Shah. One describes Amit Shah as a "great man. A man with a great soul, great thought, and great ideology." Amit Shah is the head of the BJP and has been accused and charged with corruption, extortion, kidnapping, and murder in addition to inciting sectarian violence (Joshi 2014; Trivedi 2014).

In the song "Son of India," Dr. Pathak writes that Modi has "held India's head up high, he's the apple of India's eye." The song lauds the propane gas subsidy initiative, which involved Modi asking wealthier Indians to give up their propane subsidy so the poor can get propane connections; Modi's Make in India initiative, a poorly-planned campaign to encourage manufacturing to move to India (D'Cunha 2017); and the November 2016 demonetization.⁴³ "He's more than human, he's super human and an ocean of knowledge," the song rejoices. Such effusive adoration moves into the realm of political *bhakti*⁴⁴, or a kind of political adoration that is common in the Indian political context (Pathak 2017b).

Much of Sulabh's relationship with the government can be understood through two lenses: Sulabh's philosophy of what an NGO should be in relation to the government and the similarity in values to the current government.

⁴³ The 2016 demonetization, in which Modi abruptly announced that all 500 and 100 rupee notes would no longer be legal tender at midnight of November 8th, significantly damaged the economy, hurt mostly low income and marginalized people, and is widely believed by economists to have failed to achieve its stated goals. See Introduction for a longer description

⁴⁴ *Bhakti*, or worship, is commonly used in a Hindu religious context as well.

“NGOs should not fight,” Dr. Pathak told me in one conversation. In another, “We are actionists. We collaborate with the government. We do not shout. There are some people who are activists. They shout.” In his phrasing “shouting” means to criticize without offering solutions. Dr. Pathak went on to explain that the government should be criticized by opposition parties, not NGOs.

Fundamentally, Dr. Pathak does not view Sulabh’s—or any NGO’s—role as being critical of the government. While Dr. Pathak may express frustration that he has *told* the government how to fix sanitation in the country, but they continue to not listen to them, overall, Dr. Pathak will not mount greater or vocal criticism. This is particularly interesting in regard to issues they make claims to be experts or leaders in, such as manual scavenging. The Ministry of Railways, for example, is regarded by most experts and activists as being one of the largest employers of manual scavengers (Moyna 2015), and yet his role as the Swachh Ambassador seems to disregard this. In none of their literature or public appearances will Sulabh mount a criticism of what the government may be doing or how they are doing it. Dr. Pathak views that kind of work as mere “shouting,” and he views his work as actions.

This is a fundamentally different viewpoint on what NGOs are for as opposed to what WaterAid or SKA represent. Sulabh sees itself in a way almost as a contractor and adviser, building toilets and maintaining restrooms. They do not see their work in terms of advocacy. While they speak as representing marginalized people such as manual scavengers, they will not do so if it means criticizing or going against the government.

The other way to understand their relationship with the government is to think of the similarity in values with the current regime. On a more surface level, as described in the Introduction, the current government has loudly advocated for sanitation and cleanliness and made it a key part of their messaging. Both the BJP and Sulabh are animated by a Hindu-based ideology of hierarchies and cleanliness, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. But part of the reason that Sulabh has

so successfully cultivated a positive relationship with the current government is this similarity in values such as nationalism and Hinduism.

Sulabh is effusive in their endorsement of Modi, not only for his cleanliness program, but his entire regime. This is both useful in helping them maintain positive relationships with various government officials and thus smooth their ability to continue with business, but also relates to a similarity in values and structures. Sulabh views the role of an NGO not as a “critical friend” as WaterAid categorizes itself, or an advocate for the most marginalized as SKA might describe themselves, but as an ostensibly politically neutral organization that takes “actions”—primarily the construction and maintenance of toilets—as their primary role. Maintaining a positive relationship with the government is important to carrying out those activities. They maintain this positive role through resource-intensive spectacles such as the birthday celebration; through the cultivation of individual relationships with powerful individuals; through the frequent issuing of materials to a wide swath of politicians; by hiring politically connected individuals; and through acts of political devotion and endorsement.

Relationship with NGOs

Sulabh does not partner with other NGOs, they do not ask for funding, they are not trying to learn from other programs or ally with them to make advocacy messages heard more loudly. Sulabh sees itself as successful; its relationship with other NGOs is predicated on being recognized for their own expertise. Consultants from other NGOs come to *me* for advice, Dr. Pathak told me. And, in many cases, individuals from organizations like the UN are hired by Dr. Pathak after retirement, often at exorbitant salary rates for little work.

At the Sulabh main office, there is a constant stream of visitors from other NGOs: UN agencies (mostly UNDP and UNICEF), Center for Science and Environment, or smaller organizations. A USAID communications person takes a tour of the museum to help him write about the history of sanitation. A group of government officials from around the world tour through as part of a Centre for Science and Environment course. A UK-India institute comes in trying to partner with Sulabh. Sulabh literature proudly cites a plethora of recognitions and awards from international institutes, like the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize, their UN consultative status, the fact that a 2003 UNDP report stated their work was “pioneering,” representatives from UN-HABITAT attended one of their capacity building workshops, and former manual scavengers who Sulabh had rehabilitated were invited to a UN meeting in New York in 2008.

UN agencies and Sulabh, in particular, have a tight connection, with a significant amount of exchange. As one former UNICEF official said, Sulabh is a “posterchild” for the UN agencies on how to do sanitation, and between the awards and general endorsements, the UN has done a lot of work to elevate Sulabh’s status globally. This UNICEF official told me that the UN are so eager to find successful case studies and icons for their key issues that they don’t necessarily look closely. This relationship began in 2003, when Sulabh had the “cheek” to give the WHO an award for “its seminal role in promoting good health and clean living and also publishing a book the reading of which enabled Dr. Pathak to change the face of slums in India as well as in many other places all around the world” (Global Sanitation Award Being Presented to World Health Organisation (WHO) | Sulabh International n.d.). ‘So the international community returned the courtesy,’ the official added dryly.

This began a relationship in which Sulabh became a key case study for sanitation in international development, which rippled out to other organizations. The steady flow of visitors to Sulabh’s campus reflects that they have been elevated on the international stage to being depicted as a key case study,

an illustration of what a successful NGO looks like. More importantly, they are an *Indian* NGO, an “indigenous” example of a financially viable, productive NGO that contributes to UN goals.

It is also very easy to feature Sulabh as a case study. Their office is in Delhi, and they are set up to take visitors. They have a range of exhibits on display every day related to sanitation next to the school they have made for rehabilitation. They are exceedingly generous and hospitable with all of their visitors. As a study abroad coordinator, a reporter, a school teacher, or an NGO coordinator creating a course, you can bring your group there at 10 AM (in the summers) any day of the week and they will be treated royally, greeted, given gifts, have a tour, and be treated to a generous lunch cooked on Sulabh’s biogas stoves. If you have more time or interest, they will send you to their manual scavenger rehabilitation center in Alwar in an airconditioned car or give you a tour of work done in Delhi slums. No matter who you are or what you want to do, Sulabh will work to make that happen. And Sulabh will absorb the cost.

If you are a prominent official, Sulabh will help you make connections to other key officials, both government and international. The placards and photos around the Sulabh office enforce the notion that Sulabh is exceedingly well-connected and can facilitate connections to a wide variety of actors. The publication machine of Sulabh also ensures that other NGOs do not forget Sulabh’s presence and are aware of their work and status by mailing out books and fliers about Sulabh’s accolades and noted visitors. In the collection that I amassed while there, I have glossy booklets from the visits of two American ambassadors, a Swedish ambassador, Amit Shah of the BJP, and a Prince from the Netherlands.

All of these techniques help Sulabh to contribute to the sanitation conversation and to continue to hold their place as being the primary source for everything sanitation-related in India. As such, the

messages and meaning that they disseminate have a wide audience and they cement their reputation as a key sanitation player, a successful actor, and a force for human rights.

While on an institutional level, Sulabh appears to have widespread support, in speaking to individuals, Sulabh's reputation among professionals in the NGO sector is heavily mixed, ambiguous, full of frustration and anger and admiration. Even for Sulabh's detractors and critics, they acknowledge and admire the fact that Dr. Pathak was instrumental in starting a conversation that no one wanted to have, in making sanitation and toilets and shit a part of a public conversation, long before others were trying to do so. Dr. Pathak is unafraid of equating his name with toilets and sanitation. But Sulabh and Dr. Pathak also have a powerfully negative reputation, as ridiculous, as wasting money, as corrupt, as a fraud, as a human rights problem, as manipulative and even potentially dangerous.

In an interview in a coffee shop, I asked a long-time professional about Dr. Pathak and Sulabh. He looked over his shoulder. "Um—he who shall not—how was that in Harry Potter?"

"He shall not be named? Like *Voldemort*?"

"Yes." He grinned. "He who shall not be named. I would stay away from them."

"*Why*?" I pushed. At this point, I have some reservations about how the organization uses people in performing their work, but this seemed more sinister.

"He's very powerful," he says, shaking his head. "I would—just study another organization."

At an NGO that works with manual scavengers, an employee pulled out one of Sulabh's books with a frown. "They keep sending us these," he said. "I have no idea why." He ran his fingers over the heavy glossy paper. "This must have been so expensive," he said wistfully, and we are both keenly aware of the peeling paint on the walls of their own organization.

These criticisms come from multiple places and relate to multiple aspects of Sulabh's work and business practice. On more local levels, they are reputed to be aggressive in their competition and desire to dominate the sanitation space. In one account I heard, Sulabh pressured the local government, who in turned pressured a small NGO, to take over the management of this small NGO's pilot project into innovative public restroom design. In another account, a municipality sought an actor to build and maintain a certain number of community latrines. Sulabh put themselves forward, but the municipality insisted on putting out a proper call for bids. Many NGOs stepped forward, but it came out later that almost all of these other NGOs were suspect, with board members who were actually a part of Sulabh. Most of the other bidders were still primarily Sulabh entities. In other accounts, Sulabh has purportedly used their political connections to go after any NGO who criticizes them and run them into the ground. Others criticized Sulabh for taking advantage of municipalities, chasing out competition yet running public toilets to a substandard level while still making a profit.

More scathing critics refer to Sulabh and Dr. Pathak as "frauds." In one interview account, the biogas plant that Sulabh opened on Gandhi Marg in Patna, Bihar, that supposedly lights the entire street using the power generate from a single public restroom is actually run about 70% of the time on purchased diesel. Others have expressed a staid belief that while there has been no explicit proof or investigation of this, Sulabh is somehow fixing their financial books to conceal financial fraud. Many people expressed to me their belief that Sulabh bribes government officials. "If there is a third-party evaluation of Sulabh," one man told me, "then Sulabh would not exist."

For some, Dr. Pathak is seen as somewhat ridiculous and frustratingly egotistical. "Look at this!" the woman told me, pulling the brochure out of a pile of her reports on her desk with a flourish. I was familiar with the document; I somehow managed to acquire three of them. On the front are images of Modi and Gandhi. When you open it, a chip inside begins to play the Sulabh theme song, like a greeting card. "This is absurd!" She said. It looks almost childish and stands in stark contrast to the Western-

professional setting that we sat in at that moment. He comes into events with two women on his arm, an NGO worker told me, like he has some sort of “Jesus complex.” At one panel that he attended, one professional told me, Dr. Pathak spoke over all of the other speakers. At another, he showed the Laughter is My Work music video, and the audience of WASH professionals looked on in confusion and frustration, wanting to return to the discussion at hand. The plethora of publications that are constantly sent out with their effusive endorsement of Modi and hyperbolic language adds to this image, particularly among progressive and activist groups.

And for others, Sulabh has perpetuated human rights violations. They have declared certain parts of the country to be manual scavenging free even as other activist groups continue to catalog instances; however, Sulabh’s declaration, because of their political positioning, is more likely to carry weight. The fact that Sulabh employs primarily Dalits in their housekeeping and public restroom maintenance is an open secret. By employing Dalits and giving them clothes and such, another man told me, they have created a captive labor force. They are taking money from municipalities and “screwing the poor,” one man told me. To some people, the way that he objectifies and displays the former manual scavenger women is troubling in and of itself.

Professionals expressed frustration with Sulabh’s responses to their criticisms: even if the toilet runs on biogas only 30% of the time, Sulabh has said, isn’t that still better than 0? Even if I have rehabilitated only 300 people instead of 3000, isn’t that better than 0? Even if the people we have rehabilitated are cleaning public restrooms, isn’t that better than cleaning out dry latrines? Criticisms from other NGOs, those who cannot be necessarily silenced, are often pushed aside by comparing their work to “better than nothing.” This argument is effective, and, in many cases, true. But it places the critic in an indefensible role, in trying to negate the notion that 300 people is not good. This philosophy of small actions are better than nothing runs through the entire organization. Dr. Pathak has said that even if you cannot plant a whole forest, you can at least plant one tree. He responds to critics often

times by asking them how many scavengers *they* have saved, how many toilets *they* have built. He does not tolerate criticism.

What is notable about Sulabh's reputation and place in the NGO sector is the incredibly dual nature of it. On the one hand, they are well-known, respected, well-vaunted. They have the endorsement of some of the world's most powerful international development players, and they make sure that everyone knows it. Dr. Pathak is a pioneer, talking about a cause that no one else wanted to bring up.

But they also are widely known to be problematic, ineffective. They do not collaborate or engage with anyone else in the sector as equals. Dr. Pathak has expressed scorn for the work or expertise of any other NGO, calling their work as "just shouting." To some, Dr. Pathak is ridiculous with a predilection for egotistical and expensive media events; to others, he has suspicious values, connections, and practices. Criticisms are kept in the place of suspicions and stories, not elevated to the point where there are journalistic pieces or research. The praises are much louder, which means that Sulabh continues to have a significant presence on the stage of international development and effect on sanitation conversations.

Media

In a quiet conversation with Dr. Pathak, between the plethora of meetings and decisions, I asked him about what his strategy is in putting so much energy and resources into PR. He immediately cut me off and said, "We do not do PR." He continued to say that they have no governmental power. Just people come and visit, and we have the website and social media. "We do not do PR," he reiterated.

I did not follow up the question particularly well, as I was flabbergasted at the disavowal that they did not conscientiously try to promote themselves. Sulabh spends a significant amount time and money in creating publications, travelling to events or award ceremonies, or putting on grand spectacles. These actions act to promote Sulabh's key messages: the importance of toilets and the importance of Dr. Pathak. They establish and perpetuate Sulabh's authority as a key power player in the international development ecology.

The primary modality with which Sulabh engages with the media is through spectacles. Sulabh is a master at orchestrating spectacles in the theatrical sense, particularly ones that catch the media's attention and generate a degree of wonder. These spectacles often will headline the event in media coverage, as when Sulabh commissioned the creation of an 1100-pound laddoo for PM Modi's birthday as described before.

In another spectacle, in June 2017, Sulabh declared a village in the state of Haryana to be "Trump Village."⁴⁵ During a visit to the US and in a speech to an Indian-American group in Virginia, Dr. Pathak announced his intent to rename a village where he is building toilets after the US President, to "honor Trump and improve bilateral relations between the US and India" (Gowen 2017). Media in both India and US covered the ceremony, in which posters of Trump grinned down on crowds of sari-clad women. Residents purportedly knew very little about Trump himself but were content with the renaming since it brought money to their small town.⁴⁶ The event combined several elements that made it key for attracting media attention: the invocation of a controversial celebrity and a sense of the absurd. This event was done not only to appeal to the media, but also as a direct sop to the Indian-

⁴⁵ This was after the period of study, but the example is too apt not to include.

⁴⁶ In an epilogue, district officials rejected the name change as it was not done with permission. In particular, internal sources have told me that some of this tension arose from the fact that the district had been declared ODF. The highly visible naming of the village by a toilet organization along with the accompanying opening up of toilets countered this narrative, leading to embarrassment.

Americans who Dr. Pathak has tried to woo for donations. Later, Dr. Pathak would hold a ceremony to celebrate the creation of the “world’s largest toilet pot” at this village for World Toilet Day (Press Trust of India 2017).

Fashion shows are another spectacular event that Sulabh has used in multiple instances to attract media attention. In 2007 and 2008, Sulabh held fashion shows in which former manual scavengers walked down a fashion runway with professional models wearing garments embroidered by them. One of these events was in New York during a UN meeting. These events were covered in the media as examples of feel-good stories in which women who were formerly manual scavengers publicly performed their elevation. It was optically good; the outfits were beautiful, the models were beautiful, the event was full of glitz and glamor, the media were well-taken care of and accommodated to cover the event. In a similar event in October 2016, Sulabh hosted an event in which the widows that Sulabh adopted walked down a runway with professional models. This event was framed as being a mark of liberation for these women, who, according to strict Hindu tenets, are not supposed to wear color.



Figure 15: Professional model walks with two widows in Sulabh event (Courtesy of Sulabh International).

Sulabh is constantly producing media spectacles that originate in the mind of Dr. Pathak. The cleaning of a fetid temple pond. A show of songs and dances in honor of the visit of a Spanish singer who sang in one Bollywood movie. A large book release event featuring prominent governmental guests. The creation of a coffee table book on Gandhi's life. The release of a coffee table book on Modi's life. Sometimes the spectacle is in the sheer glamor and glitter of it. Sometimes the spectacle is about scale, such as the giant ladoo to celebrate Modi's birthday or the giant toilet for World Toilet Day. Sometimes, as with the Trump Village fiasco, it comes from more of a sense of the absurd—whether intended or not.

The creation of large public events is not in and of itself unusual for an NGO to do. Most NGOs do. But one of the things that marks Sulabh's spectacles is their often tenuous connection to Sulabh's

causes and potentially problematic secondary implications. The primary meaning and message these spectacles push is recognition of Sulabh and Dr. Pathak. Trump, for example, is not known for advocating for international aid or development and is notably hostile and racist in much of his language; Trump's often incendiary rhetoric and inflammatory persona do not match with stated Sulabh rhetoric about peace and equality. Proclamations that the women who used to work as manual scavengers are "liberated" from their Untouchability is undermined by the fact that they are required to wear blue saris (then later saffron) at many of these events, clearly demarcating their difference.

Many spectacles are tied to figures who are already prominent, as with the Modi's birthday or the Trump village. In some of these cases, the juxtaposition of the charismatic figure with toilets—the absurdity of it—is enough to grab the headlines as well as signaling solidarity with particular actors or groups.

Another way of creating an attention-grabbing spectacle is by celebrating the presence of a prominent visitor. Sulabh has been visited by Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar, a former Miss Universe, a Thai princess, the Prince of Orange, two US ambassadors, and many others. The events themselves are often grand and expensive. An estimated 3500 USD are spent on flowers for a single VIP visit⁴⁷, spent on the dozens of bouquets presented to the visitor by the Sulabh beneficiaries who are bussed in: the women from the village nearby that Sulabh has adopted and made open defecation free; the villagers who get water from the WaterATM in West Bengal; the widows of Vrindivan; the former scavengers of Alwar and Tonk. Also presenting bouquets are students from the school (both the children and the adult vocational) and representatives from the office. Marigolds drip from the buildings and the lights anytime a visitor comes to visit. A large sign is printed out with the image of the visitor and is placed in front of the center to proclaim to anyone nearby that this visitor is coming to them.

⁴⁷ This is according to an interview with a staff member.

A third commonly-used method of attracting attention is to become involved with a news event that is already prominent, inserting their name into the narrative. In 2014, two Dalit women in a rural village were raped and lynched, purportedly on their way to use the fields to defecate. National and international media covered this widely as an example of India's barbarism towards women. Sulabh went into the village and built toilets for every household (Dash 2014). In another well-publicized event, a woman from Uttar Pradesh left her new husband, supposedly because he did not have a toilet. Sulabh then went in, awarded her with a great check of money, and has since co-opted her as a "sanitation ambassador" (Mehrotra 2015). Any time that sanitation is invoked in a major news story, Sulabh ensures that they are a part of it. This ensures not only their primacy in the national narrative around sanitation, but also ensure that the conversation on the event circulates around sanitation and toilets. The attack of the Dalit women, for example, could very well have become a narrative about caste and gender violence in general, but Sulabh's presence helped to ensure that the media narrative centered on the lack of access to toilets.

But they also have inserted themselves into stories that do not have to do with sanitation. The Trump village, for example, can be seen as example of managing to insert themselves into the narrative about the US election. In a horrifying story in September 2016, a man in the state of Odisha carried his dead wife's body 10 kilometers after being denied a hearse by hospital authorities when he could not afford one. This story provoked national anger. Dr. Pathak sent a representative to the man and gifted the man 5 lakh rupees (approximately 7,300 USD), a 10 thousand rupee stipend every month for his daughters' education (145 USD), and a bank account that will be accessible in 2021 that will be worth 733,920 rupees (10 thousand USD) (Press Trust of India 2016). This story had nothing to do with Sulabh's sanitation activities nor any of their other initiatives, but this act put Sulabh in the news again and continued to frame Dr. Pathak as a philanthropist.



Figure 16: A table stacked with orchid bouquets for Sulabh's VIP guest (Author photo).

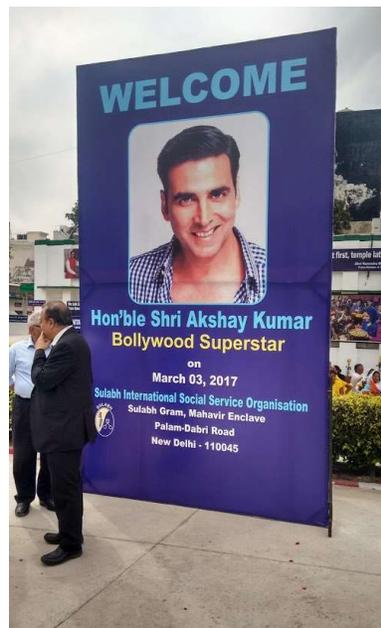


Figure 17: A banner greeting one of Sulabh's VIPs (Author photo)



Figure 18: School girls and pandits line the driveway in Sulabh to await the arrival of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Author photo).

Sulabh is excellent at capitalizing on the visitors' presence after the event. After the visit, Sulabh may create placards that hang on the walls; will post photos and videos on their social media; print a story about it in one of their publications; may even publish a book that they mail out to their thousands of contacts. Nothing is done quietly at Sulabh. "At Sulabh," one employee told me, "More is more is more."

If the sheer nature of the event is not enough to attract attention, Sulabh maintains a network of media contacts who can personally be called to cover an event. One Sulabh employee and one independent journalist I spoke to both confirmed that Sulabh will pay reporters from popular news outlets to cover Sulabh events. Sometimes, a certain amount of media audience is created by simply hiring reporters to be Sulabh employees. These journalists will often continue to write and publish in their original publications, or at least maintain their ties, while writing about Sulabh.

In addition to events and spectacles, Sulabh continually has a presence in the news media. Any time anyone wants to write about sanitation, Sulabh makes it incredibly easy to visit and shape a story. If a reporter comes in, they merely have to state their needs, and Sulabh will make it happen. They have a museum and school with adults and children who are always available to be photographed. If school is not out, they will round up children to pose for your photo shoot. If you would like to learn more about sanitation in a village, they have a model village only a few hours' drive from Delhi and they will take you there in an air-conditioned car to speak to women who are used to having this discussion. The women will sing songs to celebrate your arrival. If you would like to do a story on urban sanitation, they will take you to a slum in Delhi where they do work. In the words of a reporter turned Sulabh employee, Sulabh is a "one stop shop" for sanitation. Dr. Pathak will make himself available for interviews and has a compelling set of anecdotes and stories that are infinitely quotable. ("I have 32 stories," he said. "I just told one this evening." "Do you have a list?" "Yes, I will get it to you." To my disappointment, he never did.) This contributes in particular to their international media footprint.

The museum is also a key piece in their media campaign. The International Museum of Toilets is a standard part of the Sulabh tour and often draws in tourists from around the world. It's a relatively small room towards the back of the campus crammed with a wide assortment of toilet-themed memorabilia. The walls are packed with signs and plaques describing toilets throughout history, from the drains in Mohenjo Daro to the world's most expensive toilet on the international space station. It is listed in Delhi tourist guides and makes frequent appearances on travel channels or on lists of strange museums. If you visit, you are given a personal tour of the exhibits by one of the many docents who wait in the side office for visitors. These visitors are asked to sign the guest book and are photographed taking the tour. Those photos are then posted on Sulabh's Facebook page. The docents told me that this is in part to keep track of the foot traffic, but it also serves to perform the notion that Sulabh is

constantly being visited by people from around the world. The museum also helps to establish them as being authorities on the topic, as well as pushing some of their narratives about the importance of toilets and the importance of toilets in maintaining dignity.

Throughout their spectacles, museum, and other public efforts, Sulabh successfully presents themselves as a very “Indian” and “authentic” organization (in the sense described in Chapter 1). Sulabh’s presentation is not slick and does not have the sense of being workshopped by a horde of private contractors and marketing executives. Their logo looks like it was drawn in Microsoft paint. Dr. Pathak himself is soft spoken, wears an Indian kurta pajama and saffron vest. When you visit the office, you hear songs and prayers in Hindi and are greeted with a shawl and garland. To a foreign journalist, in particular, it *feels* foreign, feels authentic in a way that a visit to somewhere like a WaterAid office does not. By citing Sulabh and Dr. Pathak, you can get an “Indian” take on the sanitation problem, which is an important way in which they can appeal to media outlets.

Sulabh covers in their own media the media coverage of them, magnifying the impact of any given story. They continue to cite this media coverage as a means of establishing their authority and prominence. They also do not necessarily differentiate highly regarded (in terms of quality or prestige) coverage from less important outlets, meaning that in all of the literature, in the museum and on the walls, one is constantly surrounded by citations from different kinds of publications. They do not establish their authority through the select endorsements of a few publications: they establish their authority by inundating you with the deluge of press citations. From *Time* magazine listing Dr. Pathak as a hero of the environment, to *The Economist’s* Global Diversity List recognizing Dr. Pathak, to BBC Horizons program declaring Sulabh as one of the five unique inventions of the world, to the Hindustan Times listing the Sulabh-run restroom at the Taj Mahal as one of the top 10 fascinating urinals in the world, to the newsletter for the Pennsylvania Septage Management Association from 1999 mentioning

that if you're ever in India, go visit the Sulabh toilet museum. All of these quotes and media mentions are included and echoed in Sulabh literature.

In spite of all of the positive press coverage of their events or their awards, Dr. Pathak's relationship with the press is somewhat combative. Dr. Pathak himself seems to be continually frustrated with the press and their predilection for negative coverage. For example, in 2016, Dr. Pathak invited Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a spiritual guru based in Bangalore, to visit Sulabh. Sri Sri is a powerful figure with a massive global following, a wealthy foundation, and strong ties to key BJP leaders. He also became noted for a controversy only a few months before his visit to Sulabh. Through a tangle of legal and extralegal maneuvers, his foundation held a massive event on the floodplains of the Yamuna River, even after the protests and civil actions of environmental groups. This event destroyed the delicate ecology of the riverbed. The foundation was vocal in their protestations that they did not cause damage and refused to pay the full fine imposed on them by the court. The news story was loud and prominent, pitting environmental groups against a right-wing affiliated godman (Alley, Barr, and Mehta 2018).

I asked Dr. Pathak about Sri Sri's upcoming visit.

'Why is Sri Sri coming?'

'I met him at the Golden Peacock Awards, and I invited him to come, so he will.'

'Isn't he controversial?' I asked. Sulabh does invoke the cause of the environment and cite a concern with environmental cleanliness in some of their public narratives, so I was curious at their inviting someone who had so recently flouted environmental law.

Dr. Pathak shrugged. 'If you are successful, you are controversial.'

'But what about the whole thing with the World Cultural Festival?'

Dr. Pathak smiled. 'He had 8,500 people singing one song. Isn't that amazing? He put on such a great event. The press made the controversy up with the environmental issues. Instead of praising him for putting on such a wonderful event, they made some problem with the environment, but there was no problem. They cleaned it up before, and they cleaned it up after. They also paid some money to the government.'

Dr. Pathak's willingness to discount the concerns of the media as well as civil society groups over the damage caused to the Yamuna floodplains speaks not only to his contentious relationship with other NGOs, but also his relationship with the press.

I spoke to a long-time journalist, now an editor, who said that he has known Dr. Pathak for thirty years and has followed him and his work since nearly the beginning. When Dr. Pathak started Sulabh in Patna, Bihar, nearly 40 years ago, newspapers would sometimes write critical stories, covering problems with the public toilets or labor practices. But when those critical articles came out, Dr. Pathak would immediately sue them for defamation. Most of these newspapers could not handle the defamation case and would just retract the article and tender an apology. Then, the editor told me, smiling with cynical appreciation, Dr. Pathak would buy a full-page ad in the newspaper that the apology was in, so the apology and the ad would appear at the same time. It made it look like the newspaper was endorsing Sulabh. Since then, he said, no newspaper has been seriously interested in investigating Sulabh.

After hearing this, I asked Dr. Pathak if he had ever had troubles with the press. In the beginning, he told me, in Patna. But not here in Delhi. But the media will report things without substance or proof, he added. In various conversations, Dr. Pathak has expressed frustration that the media are so relentlessly negative.

But negative coverage of Sulabh is rare and often relegated to regional newspapers. In one story, a Sulabh-run public toilet was voted dirtiest in Mumbai (Pinto 2017); in another, a Sulabh worker

was murdered when he tried to stop people from drinking alcohol in the public toilet (Staff 2018). In the 13 months of research and media monitoring (March 2016-April 2017), I found one brief article in which Mangaluru South police registered a case against Sulabh in which the City Corporation accused the organization of engaging in manual scavenging (Case Registered against Sulabh International - The Hindu n.d.).

The editor I spoke to attributed the lack of critical examination of Sulabh to not only Sulabh's reputation for suing and their political power, but also a general lack of interest into delving into the issue; in spite of SBM, there is still not a large media appetite for sanitation articles.

As a result, in part, of Dr. Pathak's dislike of much of press coverage, Sulabh has a significant publication apparatus itself. A publication out of their Environmental Information System center (ENVIS) comes out monthly; a magazine called *Chakravak* (meaning goose) which contains "wisdom" and writings from poets, professors, and writers releases quarterly; the *Sulabh India* magazine releases monthly; and the Sulabh Swachh Bharat Newsletter releases weekly. (The relationship is less clear, but Sulabh also has control over the news magazine *The Parliamentarian*.) This Sulabh Swachh Bharat Newsletter, in particular, is meant to be an antidote to most news and only covers positive news—interspersed with articles on solar energy and movie stars are articles covering Sulabh, Dr. Pathak, and Modi. These publications are their way of propagating their own media narratives.

The media scape overall releases articles about Dr. Pathak regularly, usually focusing on a prestigious international award that Dr. Pathak had won recently, one of the aforementioned spectacles, the museum, or citing Dr. Pathak and work in an article about manual scavenging. Their media strategy is not concentrated, but often ends up haphazard, responding to the needs and trends of a particular moment rather than a long-term message. Part of the reason they have been covered so much in the media is because they are easy to cover, and they are aggressive in doing so. They are

constantly producing events that feature spectacles and people of interest to a wider audience. While in some ways, Dr. Pathak's view of Indian media is somewhat combative, he is a master at creating and shaping a narrative. In the words of one journalist, they have "killer imagery": of helping the poor, of bright spectacles and social philanthropy.

Sulabh relies on media to spread their message and to continue to place Sulabh and Dr. Pathak as the center of sanitation in India and *the* authority on the topic. In spite of Dr. Pathak's disavowal that they do PR, Sulabh is adept at using it.

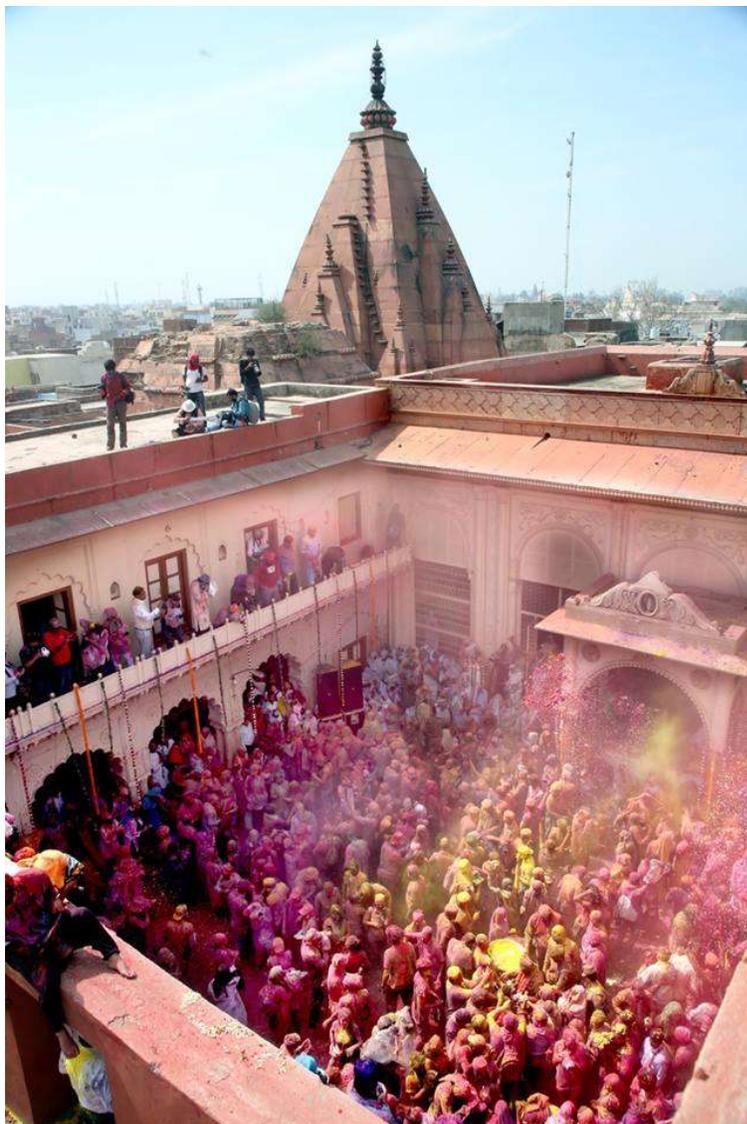


Figure 19: Widows celebrating holi at a Sulabh-sponsored event in Vrindivan. Widows in India are, in some traditions, prevented from celebrating holidays such as Holi. Every year, Sulabh holds a Holi celebration for the widows they have “adopted” at a temple in Vrindivan. Press is invited to the event and either participate or watch from above (photo courtesy of Sulabh International).

Frames of reference

Sulabh is constantly creating narratives and stories about sanitation. Sulabh speaks to many different actors, and, like most NGOs, will invoke the frames of reference and tropes that are most effective to speak to a particular audience: women’s safety, human rights, human health. But overall, these other

justifications and frames are ultimately subservient to the primary simple and key messages: toilets are important, and Dr. Pathak is important.

The primary message and meaning of Sulabh's narrative and meaning-making are firmly based in a individual figure frame. Sulabh focuses on three key figures: Gandhi, Dr. Pathak, and Modi. This relationship is best encapsulated, perhaps, by Dr. Pathak's assertion at several public events that "I am the bridge between Gandhi and Modi."

The focus on this is best seen even just walking around the campus. Images or quotes from Dr. Pathak are all over campus. In a single classroom, there are three photos of Dr. Pathak. On a van that is usually just parked in the courtyard, the images and words on the sides are of Modi or Dr. Pathak. While the purpose of the van is ostensibly about education, it does not seem to be designed to educate about health or wellbeing, but instead is emblazoned with the images of Dr. Pathak and Modi. All other frames and narratives are in the end subservient to the grand narrative of Dr. Pathak's brilliance.

The reliance on the frame of charismatic/political leaders leaves a lot of room open for interpretation and reinterpretation of their narrative. The overall simplicity of their arc means that the hundreds and thousands of visitors and allies—government, NGOs, and media—who come to Sulabh can place their own meanings and narratives on top of or in conjunction with Sulabh's primary narrative and frame. The Centre for Science and Environment comes to Sulabh's campus and pushes the environmental aspects of the narrative. Representatives from US congressman may push the health and safety themes. The advantage of the individual frame is it better enables the organization and a diversity of actors and allies to come up with their own meaning.

What happens though is that the charismatic figure may take on valences of significance. All of these layers of narrative and meaning making become attributed to and associated with the charismatic figure invoked. Gandhi may not have intended to become a public health hero, but those elements

become folded into his story. Modi is not an advocate for the liberation and well-being of manual scavengers, yet through his invocation and use of his images, and because Sulabh speaks to this issue, he has become a part of that story. Dr. Pathak, Modi, and Gandhi have all become a part of the same story.

A individual discursive frame is powerful in that you are immediately tapping into the power of the images and reputations of the figures you invoke; however, it can be alienating when these figures are controversial or are known to be antagonistic towards particular groups. Gandhi, for example, has a highly debated and contested relationship with manual scavengers.⁴⁸ Modi is controversial for the reasons discussed in the Introduction. Even as Dr. Pathak ties his own charismatic image to these others and their positive associations, the negative ones also come along with it; however, these negative ideas tend to be more hidden or only a part of the lens and perspective of certain groups.

Private vs. public

Like most organizations, Sulabh is made up of layers of private and public, of explicit and implicit messaging and strategizing. However, Sulabh's most private transcripts, the ones that decide how the organization actually acts, is inside Dr. Pathak's head.

Unlike WaterAid, strategizing about creating public messaging or interacting with other actors was never explicitly articulated to me, except for broad statements about raising awareness or "getting the message out." In spite of my questions, no one, not even Dr. Pathak, articulated that 'we hired this person because of their political connections' or 'we are trying to associate ourselves with this figure to improve our ability to access these government resources.' Most of their actions had strategic and

⁴⁸ See Table 3 in Introduction.

political import, but they did not articulate it. Instead, members of Sulabh adhered to the broad uncontroversial statements, even in the private layers I had access to.

Most of the employees would tell me that Sulabh is not political. They did so repeatedly and did not express concerns of Sulabh's predilection to ally themselves with controversial figures. Only in quiet conversations with key informants did I hear any even hints of political calculations; only through deduction and external research did I see and understand the results of some of these maneuverings, from favorable court rulings in labor disputes to noting the presence of particular government officials at Sulabh events.

Keeping the fact that they are political and strategic in some of their efforts and maneuvering hidden is fundamental to maintaining their public identity. They are not one of those NGOs who undermines actors or is political; they are spiritual, they are a movement, they are merely the outgrowth of a brilliant man's idea. The public transcript of Sulabh is that they are a socially oriented philanthropic organization dedicated to the spread of the Sulabh technology and the liberation of manual scavengers. This public image, this message is protective and productive. It enables them to maintain their position in the ecology of the sector by positioning them as a net good, a positive NGO who does not challenge the government. It enables them to spread their message and reputation through media by lending them a kind of veneer of authenticity, of verity. It enables them to push the narrative of Dr. Pathak as a "visionary" and spiritual guru/philanthropist/inventor, spreading his influence and ultimately helping improve his reputation. If you speak to some individuals in Dr. Pathak's inner circle, there are speculations that Dr. Pathak's end goal is political, that he is hoping for a prestigious political appointment like a governorship. Others state that Dr. Pathak is striving for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Sulabh's public transcript also enables them to protect themselves legally. When court cases come up that challenge Sulabh's business practices, whether their management of public facilities, their utilization of public resources for profit, or their labor practices, they are able to defend themselves as a philanthropic organization. They are not a for-profit business with problematic practices; they are a social movement with volunteers who are trying to do some good in the world. Maybe there is a blip, but they will fix it. When people like the Chief Justice of India come to visit in a large publicized event, it makes it seem like the courts are on Sulabh's side. Why would you not be on their side? They are a social movement working towards the well-being of the downtrodden and the health of the poor, and Dr. Pathak is the return of Gandhi's spirit, a social reformer.

As described in the previous section, Sulabh's public identity is based on and articulated through the individual of Dr. Pathak. They operate in an individual frame, centering their entire public discourse around this individual. This means that the public image is relatively consistent, as they will not violate their key themes or frames.

Delving into the backstage of Sulabh's public performances—backstage often being literal—there are striking mismatches between the public narrative and the private ones. This has been discussed previously, in the outward assertions that they are not political contrasting with their political bhakt of Modi and the BJP. They speak about the equality and liberation of manual scavengers, yet have a reputation for hiring them as “volunteers” to do household maintenance work and cleaning of public restrooms. They have not tried to conduct any kind of assessment or check of whether they themselves have taken advantage of the Untouchable castes. They describe themselves as a social movement, but in their aggressive business tactics and labor practices more closely mirror a corporation. They talk about liberating and nurturing widows, but at the fashion event supposedly demonstrating their liberation, several of the widows, exhausted with travel, slept on the cement floor in the lobby. They speak of

restoring dignity to the widows and to the scavengers, yet at public events, they are no more than props, dressed in uniforms that clearly mark the identity they have supposedly left behind.

Sulabh's overt messaging is about tolerance and unity, as with the lines from their morning prayer:

Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world

A happy co-existence, a harmonious order

Where there is no place for sectarian walls

Dividing us along religious, caste or gender

Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.

Yet Sulabh also publicly endorses figures from the BJP who are notably not tolerant of difference or harmony, who are responsible for sectarian violence. While they may speak about endorsing all religions, in more private conversations, as one employee said, "We are a Hindu organization." This latter is emphasized in the frequent invocation of caste, in the marigold—an auspicious flower in Hinduism—in the presence of priests at events, and the practice of Hindu rituals at public events. In a conversation with a member of the Sulabh Foundation who does some of their on-the-ground work, she told me that Muslims are dirtier and produce more children, even if they have money.

In private conversations, too, Dr. Pathak endorses a narrow and fundamentally conservative definition of what it means to be Indian. In a conversation with a highly educated employee from Indian middle and upper classes, Dr. Pathak said that the man was not a "real Indian" because he had not heard of the restrictions placed on widows. This had an added layer of meaning, as the man he was speaking to was of Northeastern descent. While this may not have been intended, people from the Northeast of India have long been considered as "outsiders" or not real Indians to people in the rest of the country.

To understand the public vs. private transcripts of Sulabh requires conceiving of the organization in layers and in hierarchies, of people inside and people outside. Employees within the organization oftentimes have the same narrative of the organization as the outward-facing one, the narrative of Dr. Pathak's greatness, of Sulabh's lack of politicization. Most people I spoke to about Dr. Pathak, even if they are critical in some respects, openly admire Dr. Pathak and his work.

While I tried to move past the public transcripts as much as I could, I did not feel I was able to penetrate very far. With the exceptions of a few key informants and casual comments, political maneuvering and strategizing was mostly opaque, tucked behind carefully curated public image and in the mind of Dr. Pathak.

Conclusion

Sulabh International is, in many ways, exemplary of a charismatically-led organization and organizes their work around Dr. Pathak. It is large, powerful, and complex. But perhaps most striking is the way in which they aggressively perform their identity as an *Indian* organization. Their notions of "Indianness" focus on a hegemonic, Hindu-oriented notion of what Indian identity is. Their reputation is carefully cultivated, with a significant amount of investment—in terms of not only financial capital, but political and social capital—in performing as one of the most important voices in sanitation in India, in being very closely affiliated with the government, in cultivating a reputation as an important voice in the NGO space, in dominating the sanitation conversation, and in being closely aligned with international actors. All of this is done in an individual frame, circling around the major ideas that toilets are Sulabh, and Dr. Pathak is Sulabh.

Welcome to the office

SKA

The SKA office is about ten minutes' walk away from the East Patel Nagar metro station.

Through metro commuter crowds, past a Domino's pizza that always smells like a better idea than it is.

Dodge the construction, weave through a mass of parked motorcycles, and ignore the e-rickshaw drivers calling.

A short walk away is a quiet residential neighborhood, with old trees that soften scorching summer heat. From the outside, there is no indication that the three-story apartment building houses SKA on the ground floor. When I push open the iron gate to the bottom floor of the building, a brown and black stray dog sneaks past me and flops on the cool marble floor, eyes half-lidded. "Hi Toby," I said. It's always the same dog, and he's always here, and I call him Toby for no reason whatsoever except I think he looks like one.

The door is marked only by a small placard that has the address and reads "S.K.A." In summers, the heavy wooden door is closed to keep the air conditioning inside. I arrive at about 11, and not everyone is in yet. Because the office is actually Wilson's home, the staff do him the courtesy of never arriving early. Office days start late and can go late—except for some of the women, who are accountable to life rhythms of their families, the timings of work are not very constant.

"Good morning Jenny," one of the members says from the desk.

"Good morning!" I greet some of the others in the office with smiles and waves if they look up from their computers.

The office is four rooms, three bathrooms, and a kitchen. The main room houses a small handful of desks (the exact number varied over my stay), shelves, file cabinets, a few brand new tables. The first thing on the wall you see in the place is a black and white framed poster of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the most important Dalit thinkers (see Table 4 in the Introduction for a discussion) staring resolutely to the side. On another wall is an electric billboard describing a countdown until the Bhim Yatra, one of SKA's major campaigns, the plug dangling from the wall. Stacks of plastic chairs are pushed to one side of the white board in readiness for one of the numerous large meetings that occur here, when other SKA members travel from their respective states or when there are visitors in the office.

Every horizontal space in the office is stacked with papers and folder and binders—a dizzying amount of material and data which has not been digitized yet: surveys conducted for legal case studies, records of scavengers who have died in sewers, records of the presence of scavengers, letters they have written, legal actions they have filed. Bulletin boards are covered with photos of SKA meetings and rallies or newspaper clippings about manual scavengers' deaths.

At any point during the day, there are up to a dozen SKA members in the office, although there are frequently fewer, as some people spend more of their time working among communities in Delhi than in the office itself. In addition to the regular employees, there is a constantly rotating range of guests and allies: state SKA members, a *safai karmachari* (manual scavenger) community member seeking assistance, a political party official, a member from another NGO, student volunteers, a journalist sipping on chai and biscuits while waiting for their meeting with Wilson. For a period of some months, a young man in his early twenties from Mumbai with a massive beard hung around the office, saying he was creating a documentary about Wilson and manual scavenging, but never seemed to get any closer to finishing it.

The office is tidy and clean, but it is a far cry from the slick and well-ordered halls of Sulabh or WaterAid. The chairs are perhaps a bit more worn, the walls a bit more scuffed, the files look a bit more haphazard, the posters on the walls less professionally designed. (Full disclosure: I created a poster for them in conjunction with one of more long-standing members. I am very much not a graphic designer, and it shows glaringly, although they seemed pleased with the product. One of the new employees would later tease me mercilessly about it.)

The office is not a polished showpiece meant to impress—this is a workspace, where energy and efforts and resources are spent keeping the organization alive and well and moving forward in their mission. They are not trying to nor do they need to assert their authority and authenticity through slick packaging; they are the only major organization working solely on manual scavenging, and that is all they need. Their claims of authority and place are because of their identity as a community movement.

To the left is a smaller office with three desks crammed into it where some of the young men who work on SKA's programming sit. To the right is another office with another three desks where the women who manage SKA's accounting work. Wilson's office is on the right. At one point during my stay, a second desk was moved in there for the journalist and other SKA leader to work when she was in the office, but most of the time, it was only occupied by Bezwada Wilson, the national convener of Safai Karmachai Andolan and its most prominent and charismatic figure.

Bezwada Wilson is in his early fifties but has the compressed energy of a chai-fueled hummingbird. In the morning in the office, arguably his most productive time, you will often see him talking on one phone, then as he is closing that phone call, he begins his second phone call, holding a phone to each ear simultaneously.

"I need to get a picture of that," I joke with him. He grins at me boyishly, and the other SKA leader laughs from her desk. Wilson has a singularly infectious grin, just one element of his charisma.

When he hangs up, we chat briefly about the current work I am doing for them, and then after, Wilson shouts out over the hum of office productivity, “Shikha!⁴⁹”

“Yes sir?” Shikha, a sleek stylish woman with hoop earrings, pops into the room. Wilson asks her for something, and I wave a little as I step out.

As I start to settle down in my spot in the corner of the office at a slightly creaky table, the office assistant makes the first batch of chai of the day. The sweet smell of hot creamy milk seeps out through the office. The assistant is quiet and shy and sweet. At SKA meetings, he is always given the chance to speak or contribute to the conversation, but rarely takes it. He pours it into mugs and carries a tray with chai and biscuits to everyone at their desks.

“You make the best chai,” I tell him in Hindi.

“Take this mug,” he says, pointing me to the largest mug.

I grin and take a biscuit. *“Thanks.”*

I flip open my laptop, plug it in, and begin to tick away at the project I have been chipping away at for the past several months, a photo album of the 125-day bus advocacy tour. Many days, I would be tucked in the corner, sorting photos, editing the daily journals, or searching how to make Microsoft Publisher do what I wanted it to. In the meantime, I kept an ear and eye out to the office, listening to the rhythms of the day, scribbling assorted notes in my ever-ready field notebook.

In the rest of the office is a productive hum, with Wilson’s naturally loud voice occasionally cutting through as he makes phone calls. In what feels like a maelstrom of papers, Wilson sweeps out of the office, waving farewell to people as he talks on the phone. *“Where is he going, do you know?”* I ask

⁴⁹ Not her real name

the office manager, a young man with a fondness for watching history documentaries who repeatedly tells me that my Hindi will get better if I just listen to more Bollywood songs.

He shrugs. "*Government office, I think,*" he says. Wilson is difficult to track. Sometimes, he leaves in a swirl of chaos; other times, he just seems to disappear, and you don't realize that he's gone until you go looking for him. But people carry on whether he is there or not—perhaps a bit more relaxed, as he is not going to shout out new suggestion, but work and office life continue on.

Sipping my chai—hot, thick, sweet—I return to work.

4

“Stop killing us!”: Safai Karmachari Andolan

Journalist: Why do you think manual scavenging is still continuing in India?

Bezwada Wilson: Because of the dirt in the minds of society and policy makers. Our movement to eradicate manual scavenging is basically a movement to break the shackles of caste. It directly questions patriarchy and caste-based discrimination. It exposes the whole sanitation system, which is terribly casteist. In one line, I can say that because of the lack of political will and casteist mindsets, manual scavenging still exists. The system wants a particular community to clean its shit. They don't want to change, but we are forcing them to bring the desired change.

I first encountered Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA, or Manual Scavenger Mission) in a news article. A quick internet search landed me on a webpage that looked like a relic from the 90s, but the phone number worked. Relatively quickly, I was able to coordinate an appointment to interview Bezwada Wilson, SKA's national convener, in April of 2016. The ease of getting an interview with him concealed for me his prominence; it wasn't until later that I would realize how influential of a figure he actually was, well-known among people in the human rights circles as an activist. After he won the Magsaysay Award⁵⁰ in July 2017, he shot to even greater visibility in the national gaze. SKA and their work are intimately entwined with sanitation, but most actors in the sector did not consider them to be a part of it.

⁵⁰ The Magsaysay Award is “Asia’s premier prize and highest honor” and “celebrates greatness of spirit and transformative leadership in Asia” (The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation • Honoring Greatness of Spirit and Transformative Leadership in Asia n.d.). This award has been out by the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, which is based out of the Philippines, for the last 60 years to leaders in human rights and humanitarian causes. One person described it to me as the “Nobel Peace Prize of Asia.”

When I asked Wilson if I could study the organization, he readily agreed. In exchange, I would do several projects for them; Wilson is eager to use any hands available. I worked at SKA more or less full-time from mid-May until September 2016, Monday to Friday, making them the first organizational case study of the field while being described last in this book. I also continued to be connected to them long after I left working there full-time, making irregular appearances in the office. My last few weeks of field study, I returned to working there again nearly full time, as I had hit a saturation point with Sulabh and my study questions and techniques had improved vastly at that point, meaning I could learn a great deal more.

SKA is a more informal organization, and so my methods were often correspondingly less formal than with the other two. Although I conducted a few formal semi-structured interviews with Bezwada Wilson, to do so with the others at the organization would feel unnatural and forced. Most of my learning comes from observation, from bits and pieces of snatched conversations and inferences, from informal conversations. In some ways, for all of the time I spent there, my picture of SKA feels less comprehensive. But in some ways, I think, this is less of a defect in my methodology, but more of the nature of the organization. Far more than WaterAid, SKA is dynamic, fluid. Their ideology is also very coherent and clear. This is a cause, a movement. For many people in the office, it is personal; many of the SKA employees come from Dalit communities or are life-long activists.

They produce very little in the way of media or written materials themselves, instead relying on professional media to magnify their words and messages. Much of the material I have gathered includes media reports, interviews, and public speeches, amounting to some 200 documents. Because they do not produce their own literature, they are often not in control of their narrative. Media, in an attempt to create a compelling story, often portray SKA and Wilson as far more oppositional to the government than a close study of their actual activities suggests.



Figure 20: A busy evening in the SKA office (Author photo).

Goals and activities

Safai Karmachai Andolan (SKA) “is a national movement committed to the total eradication of manual scavenging and the liberation and rehabilitation of all safai karmacharis engaged in manual scavenging into dignified occupations.” They define manual scavenging according to the 2013 legal definition, or any activity which involves the handling of human feces by another person, whether in dry latrines, sewers, septic tanks, railways, or open drains. (See Table 1 in the Introduction for a discussion of manual scavenging.) Their overall goals—their fundamental driving force—is the annihilation of patriarchy and caste. They are committed to the upliftment and dignity of the oppressed Dalit communities that work as manual scavengers and their families. As their material describes, they are “committed to the

Ambedkar ideology of equality, equity, and human dignity.”⁵¹ Most importantly, they consider themselves a movement “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Bhim Yatra Executive Version 2016:1). As of the time of study, SKA’s focus tended to be on dry latrine cleaners and sewer workers.

SKA was founded in the Kolar Gold Fields of Karnataka in 1985 by the children of people engaged in manual scavenging. In 2000, they expanded to a regional movement, encompassing the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. In 2004, they moved to Delhi and became a national movement. Today, they are spread across 22 states and include over 200 volunteers. The organization is led by the National Convener Bezwada Wilson, who was one of the founding members of the movement, and in public discourse, the organization’s identity is often equated with his.

SKA also considers itself an Ambedkarian institution, meaning they follow the teachings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the writer of the Indian Constitution and a prominent Dalit rights activist. Ambedkar believed in rule of law and a secular Indian society in which caste is completely abolished. (For a more detailed discussion of Ambedkar, see Table 4 in the Introduction.) While Untouchability has been illegal since Indian Independence in 1947, the practices continue, and caste continues to shape people’s lives (see Introduction).

SKA engages in a wide range of activities that fluctuate according to the needs and currents of the movement. They respond to current events, to the motions of Parliament, to current events or opportunities afforded them by partners and other civil society groups. Most of their work can be sorted into four categories: their work engaging with the community, their work engaging with governmental systems, working with other organizations and movements, and their data collection.

⁵¹ Both of these quotes come from handouts and material that I edited in collaboration with SKA staff. Final approval was by SKA leadership.

Government and law

Like Ambedkar, SKA believes in working through and shaping democratic institutions to be more democratic. On the national level, they have leveled massive lawsuits to hold actors accountable for upholding the laws that ban manual scavenging. For example, in 2003, they, alongside 18 other civil society organizations and individuals, filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in India's Supreme Court that named all of the states and the government ministries of Railways, Defense, Judiciary and Education as violators of the 1993 Prohibition Act (DTE Staff 2016b; Wilson, Bezwada 2016). They filed a lawsuit which resulted in the 2015 court ruling that the families of people who have died in sewers and septic tanks are entitled to legal compensation. Also on the national level, they have been instrumental in shaping modern laws. They lobbied for and helped to write the 2013 Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, which broadened the definition of manual scavengers, mandated rehabilitation, and mandated criminal prosecution for those who employ manual scavengers. On district levels, they educate local officials about the laws, enroll local community members in rehabilitation programs, and tally sanitation-related deaths that are legally required to be compensated by the government. They also spend a significant amount of time trying to pressure government officials, both local officials and Members of Parliament, into acknowledging and addressing the manual scavenging issue through campaigns, meetings, and letters.

Community

In regard to their work with the community, they always do this work directly themselves. Much of this work is described as “empowering” the community. In their case, this takes the form of meetings with members of the manual scavenging community, educating them on their legal rights, the caste system, and Ambedkarian thought. Much of their work—particularly in the early days of the organization—focuses on shifting the mindset of community members and teaching them that there *are* other opportunities for them, that cleaning shit is not their job, and that caste is an oppressive system to

break free from, not just the way things are. At meetings, members of the community are given a space to tell their own stories and experiences. SKA members lead marches and rallies in the areas where manual scavengers live to promote awareness and solidarity. SKA also assists community members in filing for their legally mandated rehabilitation compensation.

Some of the local branches carry out additional initiatives or support others. For example, the Delhi office piloted an education program, meant to supplement public education for the children of the manual scavenger communities. The curriculum was meant to help educate young people about Ambedkar, other career opportunities, and to give the young people a broader perspective on the world.

Another set of local initiatives focuses on rehabilitation of the families of people who died in sewer work and women from manual scavenging communities by developing small corporations that own sewer cleaning equipment. By owning the company and owning their lives, they hope that this will help the manual scavenger community members break away from “caste slavery.” Although, in the long term, they would like the community to break away from cleaning completely, they recognize that sometimes this is accomplished through smaller steps.

One of the more visible events that SKA holds every several years are their bus advocacy tours. The most recent, the Bhima Yatra, which ran from 2015-2016, was a 125-day tour through 500 districts in 29 states. The event commemorated the 125th birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. Along the bus route, they held rallies, community meetings, and visited district officials to educate them and pressure them about the laws. This event culminated in a massive rally in Delhi with members of the community and civil society leaders.

Collaborations

While not expressly a part of their mission, collaborating with other organizations and movements is an important part of their work. Sometimes the support they provide is moral or political—attending other rallies, speaking at other events, even if the relation to the other cause seems tangential, as when Wilson spoke at an event protesting demonetization. In other cases, the collaborations are more concrete—programs like surveying community members for a lawsuit (to support a contention that manual scavenging exists) or collaborating in a WASH program. Sometimes collaborations come with funding, and sometimes they do not.

They collaborate fairly frequently with other organizations and are constantly getting offers to do so from research organizations, universities, and other NGOs. SKA has the reputation for being the primary actor involved in anti-manual scavenging work. But they are fairly selective in who they partner with; they need to know that the community will be prioritized and that their partners share similar values.

Data collection

SKA collects information on the identities of manual scavengers as well as records of every person who dies in a sewer or septic tank. This information is used in media campaigns, to pressure government, and to assist in rehabilitation by identifying people who are entitled to governmental compensation. Much of this data is collected through their local conveners; if someone dies, then state conveners are asked to investigate and gather information and data. This is then sent to the national office. In other cases, SKA may assist another organization in conducting a survey, as when a partnership with a legal organization had them collecting surveys so that a court case could be filed against a municipal corporation for the employment of manual scavengers.

SKA is fluid, dynamic, and opportunistic in terms of the actual activities they engage in to achieve their overall long-term goals and visions. They are not a sanitation organization; they are a community movement, a human rights organization that has been drawn into sanitation discussions as a symptom of their oppression. SKA and the manual scavenger community have been forced to engage with shit and sanitation unwillingly. At the time of data collection, they did not engage with inventing alternative sanitation tools or inventing new toilets. “It’s not our job,” Wilson said. “By asking us to come up with alternative strategies, you are making it my work again.”

In 2018, however, SKA worked with Hyderabad Municipal Corporation to make Hyderabad the first manual scavenging free city in India by assisting and approving the designs of particular technologies that would prevent men from going down into sewers. This was a change of strategy, a recognition that the lots of sewer workers were not going to improve without his input, and he was well-placed to engage in these conversations. However, the notion that they are *not* a sanitation organization is still relevant. Some of this has altered in certain collaborations, which will be discussed in the NGO and government sections; they recognize that progress is incremental. But fundamentally, they are an organization for a people and a community.

Organizational structure

SKA is based in Delhi. The office described at the beginning of this chapter is called the National Secretariat, which manages both the international operations and houses the people who do programming in Delhi. Mr. Bezwada Wilson is the national convener, meaning that he leads most of the

operations and is the final decider on the directions of the movement. He is the one who is in the office nearly every day and often serves as the focal point of power in the organization.

In the National Secretariat there are approximately a dozen employees. Three focus on accounting; two focus on office management; two focus on more administrative support; and the remainder take programming duties as applicable, shifting between projects as needed.

In addition to Wilson, also steering the direction of the national movement is the National Advisory Council, a group of nine men and women. Many of these members are involved with other social movements or NGOs. Each of the members of the Council engage with SKA with different levels. One, for example, has a desk in the national office that she frequently uses; others, I never saw. Some of these members also function as state conveners and guide regions, and at national meetings, they demonstrated significant power.

At the state level, they have 17 state conveners to cover the 22 states where they work. These conveners manage local activities and often oversee other volunteers to carry out specific programs. In some places, SKA sought to shift away from conveners to having committees managing each state. In a summer planning meeting, in which all of the state conveners met in Delhi, Wilson and the national team sought to push state conveners to act more autonomously: "In SKA, each person is the commander...each person is the everything...please don't depend on us." How much each state accomplishes depends significantly on the individual capacities of the local team, resulting in significant variability.

Like many social movements (as opposed to a more bureaucratic organization), precise roles and structures will shift depending on the individuals, the priorities, and the resources available. Much of the power of the organization is centered on Wilson, but other dominant personalities involved in the organization—either in the national office or on the committee—balance out some of the power. While

his leadership style will be described in greater detail in the leadership section, Wilson controls and often micromanages the organization, yet there is enough space to challenge him. There are individuals within the organization who can operate with a great deal of autonomy, particularly in state offices. While Wilson may serve as a charismatic figurehead, he is not the sole element of the organization.

Daily life

Most of the people at SKA are from the manual scavenging community, Wilson tells me in his first interview. This is a point of pride, but also a claim to authority and authenticity. SKA calls itself a “movement of the people, for the people, and by the people” (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2016) Many of the people in SKA are from the community, but some are not. In the national office, some people are activists or social workers. Some have relatively little education, but others have advanced degrees in subjects like social work. One man is getting his doctorate in Dalit studies; another woman has a doctorate in social work. One man involved in programming worked for a political party and another NGO before joining SKA. Others found SKA through their communities. Many of the people who work here have done so for years; others have shorter-term commitments. For most though, this organization is a commitment, not a stepping stone to another position.

But everyone is drawn to the mission, to the project, to the movement. Some may not be as intensely involved. One woman, for example, is actually technically an employee of the NGO that has partnered with SKA for funding. SKA characterizes itself as a movement; it does not have the trappings of many NGOs like annual reports, professionalized logo, and firm roles within the organization. Its central organizing tenet is not necessities of bureaucracy. People are committed to the values of the movement and the community it represents. In terms of daily life and the people within the organization, this means that unlike organizations that may operate at some distance like WaterAid, for SKA, this is personal—this is their lives, and they will accept that achieving freedom from caste and

patriarchy requires confronting it in their own lives. When they discuss patriarchy, it is not just about fixing patriarchy in manual scavenging communities, it becomes a discussion of how to challenge patriarchal holiday rituals within one's own family. When they sit down to talk with members of the community about education, they share their own stories of being bullied for their caste identity. Their personal experiences become a part of how they relate to the communities they belong to and serve, to each other, and to the outside world. If they come from a different activist background, they relate the other causes they have worked on to this one.

Their commitment to the central values and mission of the organization are carefully and conscientiously carried out in day to day office life. Trappings of hierarchy and rank appear, but they are also called out and eliminated. In meetings, the woman who does the cleaning is given a chance to speak as much as any of the men who do something like programming. Wilson will wash dishes and can make some really good masala eggs. (Once, when several media photographers were in the office to take photos of Wilson, between his meetings, Wilson went to wash a dish he had used. Three photographers huddled at the door to take a photo, as if in awe that such a 'great man' would wash his own dishes.) During a national meeting, Wilson insisted that the men serve the food instead of the women.

It is important for SKA and its mission to develop the individuals who are a part of SKA. One woman who used to be a scavenger became an organizer for SKA, but it took a long time for that to happen. Her husband and son used to come to meetings instead of her. But after five or six years, she started to come out more. She even travelled alone and joined the Bhim Yatra. She came to a national strategy meeting alone. On a daily basis, the SKA staff are committed to developing the lives of their fellow staff members and doing so with a lot of patience.

On particular days, there may be a kind of themed special meeting or event. One day, on the birth of a particular Dalit poet, everyone sat in a circle in the middle of the office, and we discussed the effects of this poet on their lives. On another day, they held a meeting about patriarchy, and the women in the office were invited to share how it affects their lives. These kinds of meetings help to ground the organization ideologically and in values. They serve as affirmations of who they are and what they are working towards and connect their work to their own daily lives.

There is a great deal of warmth in the office, friendship and shared caring and love. From the day that one woman burst into tears and the others gathered around her and gave her a scalp massage to a birthday party with cake and singing and laughter, to sharing music and videos at 9 PM in the back office while drinking from someone's special stash of Kerala coffee he keeps in his desk drawer. For all that the work is brutal—for all of the tragedy and anger that may run under the surface in dealing with illness, death, injustice, with mourning a constant rotation of death—there is a great deal of humor and joy.

People are also unabashedly political. Elections are common topics of conversation. Once, the printers made an error and printed a set of trifolds not in the blue associated with Ambedkar that had been ordered. Instead, the trifolds came back in a kind of sickly mustard yellow that was uncomfortably close to the BJP-associated saffron. One woman threw up her hands and shouted, "This is the color of the *enemy*!" Current affairs and news animate the office, particularly since an event can send the office into a manic frenzy to address the problem or send Wilson halfway across the country to speak on an issue.

Daily life in the office can be uneven, swinging from sleepy afternoons to near-manic sessions. On a regular day, people come in late in the morning, leave in the evening around 5. Many people have far more irregular schedules, and it is common to see people in the office until late in the evening—

sometimes working on a project, sometimes just enjoying each other's company. People are welcome to take time off for their own personal needs, for family, for holidays, or for health reasons. But people will almost always be working. Wilson himself lives in the office—which is not a hyperbolic exaggeration, but a plain fact, one which I did not realize until I had been at the organization for some months. The office rarely closes, and they rarely take time off from fighting their cause.



Figure 21: Bezwada Wilson giving a talk in a park behind a college (Author photo).

Leadership

SKA members told me that Wilson would be speaking at a posh private college in South Delhi with a predilection towards conservatism that evening. The meeting place turned out to be a park behind the back gate of the college. It was a long narrow park where nearby residents take brisk evening strolls in sneakers and *salwar kameezes*⁵² and sweaty men jogged back and forth, staring curiously at the event as they passed. After a gruelingly hot day, it has finally cooled down, and a gentle breeze and overhead cloud coverage made it actually pleasant for the first time in days. I greeted the two or three SKA members I know. They had set up in a covered area with benches. The students had covered the area

⁵² A loose-fitting pants and tunic combination that is popular among women in South Asian countries.

with signs and banners with quotes from Ambedkar or Wilson himself or simple exhortations of equality. The crowd who came are college students, both men and women in a mixture of hip clothes, t-shirts, and ethnic wear. Also there were a few safai karmacharis, a documentary filmmaker, and a student from JNU.

'It's a good crowd,' one of the SKA members observed to me. A young man who works for another civil society group but also coordinates events with SKA told me that when he was planning this, he thought that maybe only 5 or 10 people would show, but there were some thirty or forty people. Originally, the event was supposed to be held on campus, but the college refused to invite Wilson. The student group who invited him here still wanted him to come and speak. There is a long history of student activism in India, and Wilson likes working with students.

Wilson himself, however, was late. This was not surprising. Wilson is always late, but somehow, it's hard to stay angry at him. Perhaps in part it is because there is no sense of personal arrogance in his lateness. When he is late, it is because he is viewing you as less important to his cause, not to him, combined with a sense of frenetic busyness and being a bit scattered. When he does arrive late, he tries not to make a significant entrance. Once, at a conference where he was the keynote speaker in, when he arrived late, he slipped quietly in the back, not noticed by anyone, still sweaty from hurrying. We grinned at each other, and I silently passed him a water bottle.

At the college, as we waited for Wilson to arrive, a jeep emblazoned with the logos of the BJP drove by slowly. There was a local election going on, so seeing politically-emblazoned cars was typical in neighborhoods. The jeep drove by again. Then again. Then again. At one point, it stopped, reversed, and the men inside stared.

'If they make trouble, that will really give you good information for your thesis,' one of the organizers said to me with a grin, as if somewhat hoping for something as easy and straightforward as physical violence instead of the long, slow, draining drudge of structural violence.

But they drove on. Wilson arrived only about 45 minutes late. The student organizer, a young woman, started the event off.

The students were the first ones to speak, and Wilson nodded appreciatively at them. He stood off to the side, not wanting to be a distraction from the student speakers.

When I transcribe Wilson's speeches, it never quite captures it. He is self-taught in English, and perhaps this is shown in the syntax of his sentences, in the flow of words. Looking at some of his words printed on a page, rendered static and still and two-dimensional, his speeches feel more fragmented, near inarticulate. But to merely transcribe Wilson's speeches, to flatten them into black and white is to kill them. In the audio recording of this event, a college student introduced Wilson as a speaker. Her voice was clear, passionate. But when Wilson starts to speak, the sound waves jump, punching into my computer's speakers.

His speeches move seamlessly from one topic to another. He began to talk of the importance of students carrying on democracy, about freedom to speak, about how we will clear space to speak, even if it is not granted. He talked about how freedom defines our humanity, about how the government is trying to limit our freedom, and how shameless this is.

Wilson is always topical, referring and riffing on the current controversies that crowd the headlines. At the time, there was much talk of banning the consumption of cow in all of India. When so many people are malnourished, how dare they try to restrict what we eat? He demanded. He spoke of how India has not striven for equality, how throughout history, it has oppressed people. "Direct challenge to all Indians in the country: can you say there is one village where all the citizens are living

equally and everywhere the same? No! Each caste, a different place in the village.” He talked of the vigilante mobs who have murdered people in the name of cow protection laws. From there, he settled into discussing manual scavenging, Swachh Bharat Mission, and the failure of the government to address these issues.

“Whose Swachh Bharat *is* it?” he shouted. ‘When we talk about caste, it is only *one* caste that cleans!’

To listen to him is to be carried along in his momentum. His voice cracks with passion, but he can immediately lower it to share a private joke. The intensity ebbs and flows, rises and falls, and you cannot help but lean in closer. He is funny too. His humor is dry. And he can zoom in and out on an issue, move from talking about how his parents were scavengers to freedom in India in the blink of an eye, and you just follow along. He switches between Hindi and English, and my Hindi-speaking friends assure me that his accent is strange—he is from Karnataka after all, and so neither of these languages are his mother tongues.

You could feel the energy ripple through the crowd, even though it was hot and muggy and we were sitting on walls and stone benches and there were middle aged aunties speed walking in circles around us. At the root of his speech, at the root of everything that he does is a belief in equality and democracy and the role of the government to serve its people.

After Wilson spoke, he gave the floor to the other speakers—Bhasha Singh, journalist and SKA member; then a few people are still working as safai karmacharis. The event ended with shouted exhortations, like *Jai Bhim!*⁵³ before dissipating.

After the event, the SKA people walked down the road to a nearby metro station. We purchased chai from a stand and stand on the street corner in the rapidly encroaching dark, the weather cooling,

⁵³ Jai, or “hail”, and “Bhim” is Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s first name.

the lights swirling. Wilson and Bhasha left, leaving me and some of the younger SKA staff under the overpass, still excitedly talking about democracy and SKA and Wilson and buying a second round of chai.

In many ways, Wilson is also a charismatic leader of his organization, in the Weberian sense.⁵⁴ He is the center of the organization. His personal story gives weight, legitimacy, authority, and authenticity to the organization. He will use his personal story to illustrate the problem of scavengers, showcasing pieces from his life, using his own identity to form the bedrock of the organization. He is the central locus of control, the primary identity of the organization. But he also continually tries to share that locus of control, to listen to others, and to establish different power structures within the organization by ensuring that there are others whose voice is nearly as important as his.

Bezwada Wilson is in his fifties, average height, an inch or so under six feet. His daily uniform is usually a long kurta and churidar. His dark hair, beard, and tightly trimmed mustache are peppered with grey.

Wilson frequently shares his life experience with media as a way to ground the narrative. His own life story is used to both illustrate the problems of manual scavenging community and also to establish his own authority in speaking for them. But there is no definitive place that his life story is written. The account that will follow has been cobbled together from a combination of discussions we had and the spate of news articles that came out about him after he won the Magsaysay Award. Sometimes the accounts differ, and I tried to consolidate where I could. But the elements and pieces I describe are all a part of his narrative and origin story, the public account that he shares with media and

⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 for a brief discussion of Weber.

others to establish his authority. All of these elements are his origin story. Usually they are shared in bits and pieces, not necessarily stitched together into a whole as I have done.

Wilson was born in 1966 in the southern state of Karnataka in an area called the Kolar Gold Fields, a mining region that had been active since ancient times before shutting down in 2001. Both of his parents worked as manual scavengers, and his brother did this work as well, first for the railways and then later in the fields. The family lived in a part of the community inhabited by people of that caste group.

Growing up, he had been sheltered from much of the stigma of his caste by the simple fact that everyone around him was the same caste. But when he turned 8, he began to attend school in a town 30 kilometers away. When other students asked him where he lived and he told them, they turned their backs. Upset, he told his parents, and they told him, "It's everywhere and nothing new." (Ghosh 2016) When he was still a teenager, he started teaching at night to fellow community members. He began to learn that alcoholism is a significant problem in the community as well, and he worked for a while at an alcohol rehabilitation camp. But then his worldview was complicated again: "Some people at the camp told me, you tell us not to drink. But if you see the way we work and where we work, you will understand why we drink," he said.

When Wilson was about 17, he saw the hideous reality of scavenging. He tells of locking himself in his room and weeping with despair at the horror of the practice. In his public accounts, this is really a key point in his activism, when he turned towards making the eradication of manual scavenging his life goal.

From 1986-89, Wilson wrote dozens of letters to authorities of the Gold Fields demanding that the dry latrines be destroyed. When that did not work, he wrote to the Prime Minister, threatening legal action. Under the GOI pressure, the town's dry latrines were converted (Wilson, Bezwada 2016). From

there, Wilson moved to Andhra Pradesh, where he continued gaining support and momentum. At one point, Wilson started training to become a Christian priest, but the principal at the seminary said they would not support a campaign against manual scavenging, and so he left.

It wasn't until his 20s, when he had already been engaged in activism for some years, that he was first exposed to Ambedkarian thought through participating in a bicycle rally from Andhra Pradesh to Karnataka. He learned about Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his writings about how to demolish the caste system. Eventually, Wilson would also receive a degree in political science from a correspondence course in Hyderabad. In addition to Ambedkar, one of Wilson's profound influences on his life was the mentorship of SR Sankaran, a government civil servant who was known for advocating for the poor. In the early 90s, in conjunction with Sankaran, Wilson more formally established SKA.

Wilson is from the community that he represents. When he speaks to media or people, he continually refers to his background as from the community, to the fact that his parents and his brother have done this work. In one interview, he more precisely describes his relationship to the cause and the community:

Journalist: What inspired you to become an activist?

Wilson: I am not an activist. I am from the same community. I have seen this since my childhood. The cruelty meted out to human beings and the plight of humanity moved me and I thought this cannot continue in our society. We talk about the Constitution, we talk about freedom, but we do engage human beings to clean human excreta. The two things cannot go together. It was just a response from me and in the process, I took on this role and people started calling me an activist. (Thomas 2016)

The positionality of SKA as a part of the community is in great part predicated on Wilson's membership in it. By sharing his personal story, he personalizes the struggle and makes himself a human face on the

caste problem. His claims of authority come from his authentic involvement with the community; his expertise is a function of his life.

An additional important element to note is that Wilson was influenced heavily by SR Sankaran and Ambedkar. One of those men was a government officer and civil servant; the other was the primary architect of the Indian Constitution. These ideological influences continue to shape the way that SKA engages with the government, shapes the way that Wilson talks about the government—the idea behind advocacy is to make the government do what it is supposed to, not to destroy it. Fundamentally, Wilson has faith in the *idea* of government. This relationship will be discussed in greater detail in the Government section.

Wilson has a long history in advocacy and organization, but he is not the most organized person. While SKA is effective in part as a community organization because of its flexibility and fluidity, and thus its ability to respond quickly to needs and resources of the moment, it also can be disorganized. Wilson himself is scattered and somewhat unfocused in regard to which element or initiative he is going to focus on at any given point. Projects get dropped in the heat of urgency; directions change. The initiative to digitize the database was derailed by a wave of Dalit protests. This can exasperate some of his colleagues, friends, and admirers, but most people seem to be fond of him.

In spite of his lack of focus and systematicity in regard to bureaucracy, he is always focused on his ultimate goals. As one colleague described, ‘His mind is working on just one thing 24/7. I have to think about my house, what vegetables I get, what my daughter will wear, did I make enough rotis, did I give Wilson rotis?’ Wilson laughed, agreeing. ‘But a single individual is how things change in Indian democracy,’ she continued.

“You know he sleeps in the office,” a documentary filmmaker told me once.

“It must seem like that,” I said. “He’s very dedicated.”

“No, really. Literally. His bed is in a mattress in the closet. He lives here.” This fact is not widely publicized outside of private circles; it’s not part of his public narrative.⁵⁵ The SKA office is his home, and the mission is his life. He spends all of his time and energy devoted to annihilation caste and patriarchy. He is continually painting grand ideas, images, plans, continually generating new projects.

He is also a bit of a micromanager. At the start of a national meeting, he spent ten minutes rearranging the seating. He will go over the precise wording on nearly every document. He is aware of his flaws though, and close colleagues and friends call him out, and he accepts the criticism with a sheepish grin. Talking to one of the SKA members, he said, ‘You’re used to my madness at least. I’m scaring the new guy.’

Between moments of pure passion and frenzied work, Wilson has moments of gentleness and small kindness. He will say good morning to everyone in the office when he comes in. On the day he won the Magsaysay, after a full day of interviews, he turns to the woman who has been helping manage this madness and says sympathetically, “There is so much pressure on *you* today.” At the end of a work day, he may walk around the entire office and insist that everyone leave, that they had been working too hard.

Many people who know him call him friend, and he knows many, many people. I poked my head into his office after hearing laughter from a group, and he told me that they just realized he has 60,000 contacts in his Outlook account. “Sir,” I said, “I only have 30 thousand people who live in my *city*.” This brought on a new wave of laughter from the group, and we weren’t sure if it was from the tininess of

⁵⁵ In the massive wave of news coverage after he won the Magsaysay Award, one newspaper mentioned it, thus I feel comfortable stating it here.

my town or the absurd size of Wilson's contact list. Wilson has an undeniable charisma that centers much of the work the organization does.

Returning from a speech at a college, one of the national council members tells me that they've made Wilson a symbol. Not really intentionally, she added, but he's become one.

'Yes, I became a symbol,' Wilson said. 'People put it on me. But we'll use that symbolism for strategy.'

Wilson has become the face of the organization. Many people have not heard of SKA, just Bezwada Wilson himself. Media coverage often focuses on Wilson, his opinions and his story. But his relationship with being the focal point of the organization is contentious and is sometimes ambiguous. Most of the SKA employees are very aware of his desire to not be shoved into the spotlight. As I sat down with one staff member to create posters, we were picking through photos of the Bhim Yatra. 'How about this one?' I asked.

The woman shook her head vigorously. 'Oh no, he won't like that. Not that one.'

'Even though he is literally just running through the edge of the photo?' I asked.

'Let's keep going.'

Wilson is aware that he has a spotlight, that people look to him to speak out for this community and that they will listen to him. He is aware that he is in a position to advocate for the community. But at the same time, he does not seem to enjoy it, admitting that he finds the attention exhausting and sometimes irritating. In the numerous interviews that he gave after winning the Magsaysay Award, he constantly referred back to "the women"—the women of the manual scavenging community who refused to return to scavenging. The media keeps coming to me, he said in one government workshop,

and does not go to the women. 'The media needs to stop focusing on me as an individual and start focusing on the issue.'

Too, awards are dangerous in a way to his mission. He has been offered many, he has said, and when he can, he turns them down. The mission is unfulfilled, he explained. People are offering me congratulations, but for what? There are still manual scavengers. Once, after some officials insistently kept calling the office trying to insist he take an award, he left the office (and his home) for a whole day and night. You can find a few awards he was unsuccessful at avoiding in the office, tucked unobtrusively into a bookshelf or in a desk drawer. When he returned with the Magsaysay Award, one of the staff members told me that Wilson was trying to figure out if he could scrape off the gold somehow or melt it down. And the coverage and work around receiving an award—from travelling to talking to journalists—can seriously derail and distract from other organizational priorities.

He is particularly aware of avoiding awards from governments, especially this one. If he accepts an award, it comes off as an endorsement, and the government can pretend that they care about this issue. In a similar vein, he has refused to go meet with any prime minister or president. Many of the other members and representatives of SKA have, but he himself refuses until manual scavenging is eradicated.

But he also acknowledges utility in winning the awards. His winning of the Magsaysay brought a significant amount of attention to him and his cause, more than he had had in a year. His international recognition has given him a wider platform on which to make his case and a certain degree of protection in an era in which vocal opponents of the government are often pressured and harassed. After Wilson's award, there were hundreds if not thousands of congratulations, think pieces, and articles written about him. (Noticeably absent was any comment from the Prime Minister's office.)

Wilson's charisma comes in great part from his honesty, his authenticity, his passion for equality, and his natural humility. Unlike Dr. Pathak, identity and image are predicated not on what he has accomplished, but what has *not* been accomplished—the causes he is still trying to fight. Wilson is a key figure in the organization, often micromanaging, but there is space to challenge him, particularly for those in his trusted circles. And as a speaker, he is passionate, charismatic. He draws in crowds with his combination of passion and humor, and the members of SKA stay not only for the cause, but because they believe in him.

Another important person in the leadership in the national office is Bhasha Singh. Singh is a journalist and activist who has been involved with SKA for many years. She is considered one of the national leaders of SKA and is close friends with Wilson. While she only works at SKA part-time, much of her journalistic work champions the SKA causes of Dalit rights and the eradication of manual scavenging. Her 2012 book *Adrishya Bharat* ("Unseen India"; the English version came out with the title *The Unseen*) is a collection of her Hindi-language articles on manual scavenging across the country and outlines not only the suffering of the community, but SKA and its fight. She often works at SKA as a media liaison, but she is also an important voice within and for the organization, appearing alongside Wilson at public rallies and speeches. She has become a close friend of Wilson's. Her presence and prominence helps to balance out the organization, preventing it from focusing on Wilson as much as it could.

Funding

For SKA, funding does not dominate their organization in the same way that it does for other NGOs. They are committed to the cause, and their organizational identity, their authority, and their own personal beliefs prevent them from compromising on principles in order to get funding.

SKA is not registered as an NGO; as Wilson insists, they are a movement. If they need to obtain money through foreign entities, however, they are under the aegis of the Association for Rural and Urban Needy (ARUN), a registered organization with an FCRA. ARUN, however, does not interfere directly with SKA's management, except in the case of an overlap of people on both boards.

SKA has accountants, but they do not have people who are specifically designated to fundraise. This is largely unnecessary; opportunities often come to SKA. As one of the most authoritative groups associated with manual scavenging in the country—and the only national one that focuses solely on manual scavenging—they are often approached by partners. WaterAid has worked with SKA. With their positive reputation, strong authority, powerful reputation for authenticity, strong community affiliations, and award-winning leader, SKA is a prime candidate for organizations to partner with. In projects that need access to the community of people who manually scavenge, SKA is a vital partner.

They are funded by an assortment of sources, such as individual donations and foundations (including Tata Foundation), some domestic, some international. They are never funded by the government, I am told emphatically, although they have been known to partner with them. But they are also wary of funding and partnerships. As one staff member told me, "If you take the money, you have to listen. But you need to take it to survive."

Their most regular donors are foreign Christian charities, which is common for Dalit organizations. Many India-based organizations, particularly corporations, do not want ally themselves with groups who are invested in disrupting the status quo and entrenched hierarchies. Historically, many Dalits convert to Christianity in order to try to escape the caste system, and many international groups working for Dalit rights have strong Christian ties. These ties and their reliance on foreign funding does place SKA in a precarious position in relation to the government, whose supporters have often spoken out against foreign influence, but Wilson disregards these arguments. He is aware of the risks, but what

else is he going to do, compromise? Stop? This is unacceptable, and so he moves forward anyway. He tries to keep funding and decisions about what they will do as separate as he can, and they are prominent enough of an organization that he can make that distinction.

These Christian organizations are reliable as funders in part because they do not require many of the metrics that other funding organizations do. SKA often hesitates to entangle themselves in organizations with too many strings attached, afraid that they will be asked to compromise their integrity or belief system. Wilson also refuses to label events as being 'brought to you by' someone. He will not hang a banner with an organization's logo on it. The events come from the community, he tells me. He will not compromise that narrative.⁵⁶

While funding is an important part of keeping their organization working, their prominence allows them to make it a secondary mandate; indeed, if they compromised their principles in order to obtain funding, it would make them lose their authority in the sanitation sector and probably among the community they seek to serve.

Government

SKA's ultimate goals are to liberate all manual scavengers, annihilate caste and casteism, and eradicate patriarchy. But the means by which they seek to accomplish these grand purposes is to create a government apparatus that is accountable to people and ensures equality and safety of all of its citizens. They want to create a mental shift in the nation—particularly among the government officials—that recognizes the fundamental equality and humanity of everyone.

⁵⁶ Unfortunately, I was unable to verify this statement or not, as I did not collect significant amounts of data from the community.

They work through the tools of democracy to accomplish their ends: submissions of memos to district officials, letters to every level of government official, duly permitted protests, court cases. SKA's values are rooted with the teachings of Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, and further shaped by Wilson's mentor, SR Sankaran, a government officer who fought for the rights of people.

Many people—both within the government and in the sector—view SKA as “just” being critical of the government, as offering criticisms without solutions. SKA, on the other hand, views its role more in terms of holding the government accountable to its duty to protect citizens and follow its own laws. Much of their work involves utilizing the mechanisms of government through lawsuits or pressuring government officials to carry out the law. They may seem oppositional, but they believe in government, they believe that rule of law is supreme and that it can change. They seek to push forward a rational mode of governance and, while not explicitly stating it, a separation of church and state by which religiously-originating prejudices no longer taint a cool, rational mode of law.

SKA models a process by which an organization maintains its own identity, does not bend and compromise, and instead finds parts of the government that it can work with; governments are hardly homogenous entities. SKA's relationship with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is long-standing and collaborative. Wilson jokes that he spends more time at the Shastri Bhawan, where the Ministries of Law and Justice, Culture, and Women and Child Development are housed, than he does at his own office. They do not have a positive relationship with Ministry of Urban Development or the Prime Minister's office. Some state governments they have close ties with; others, they do not. This is a more extreme version of what other organizations do. Finding allies within the government is vital, but SKA is more likely to feel comfortable actively alienating some parts of the government as they cultivate relationships with the other.

SKA's relationship with the government is predicated on their authority on the topic—not only because they are the only national organization to solely focus on this topic, but because they are known to have consistent values. Governments fluctuate, politics change, but SKA's reputation is predicated on the notion that their values and their commitment to the community does not.

Their reputation as being oppositional comes from some of their more visible actions and their language. Their rallies are intentionally disruptive. The rally to celebrate the return of the riders of the Bhim Yatra to Delhi was a spectacle. A large gathering of people with blue headbands that proclaim "Bhim Yatra—125 days of Bus Yatra" and black vests with a picture of Ambedkar on the back saying, 'We will definitely eliminate manual scavenging.' A group from the Ambedkar center slowly marched out to greet the bus, blocking a road of traffic, waving blue flags, carrying bright marigold garlands and a banner saying 'Welcome Bhim Yatris.' There were drums and shouts as the bus full of riders met with the greeting committee. Together, they circulated the traffic circle, blocking traffic with their march. They shouted "Jai Bhim" and danced to the heart pounding sound of drums. They claimed their space loudly, forcefully; even as through denial and apathy the government sought to render their community visible, they demand visibility (See Figure 22).

In a talk to a private college, Wilson said that 'People ask me, why are you so angry at the prime minister?' His voice rises. 'Who *do* I get to be angry at?'

So much of their work is predicated on patience, on trying again and again, of trying to get walls to listen. In one case, they gave one particular district commissioner a memo outlining the laws and the manual scavengers in his area 284 times, but with no action. Other times, they are harassed, suspected, accused. As a team walked around Delhi speaking to sewer and septic tank workers, a policeman on a motorcycle stopped by them, insisted on seeing paperwork, and made a phone call to his supervisor.

The SKA worker who headed the team, a powerful woman and social worker, had the papers in order and a fierce attitude. Eventually, the cop buzzed away.

SKA has spent a lot of time in courts, trying to render their community visible to the eyes of the government and the officials who continually turn a blind eye. At a meeting held by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Innovations of Swachh Bharat, Wilson described the long, agonizing process of being recognized in the courts in one particular public interest litigation suit.

They had to take photos of the women scavenging. 'It pains me to ask the safai karmacharis to do the work so that I can take a photo,' he told the audience gathered around conference tables in crisp dress shirts. 'My camera was so bad that it would take me two or three times to get the shot.' His voice strained with the painful memory of watching the women do this work over and over again so he could get a photo to prove to men hundreds of miles away that they existed. 'In 2004, they denied these photos. They said that they were faked or staged.' Over the years, they did this 28 times, taking 83 thousand photos and 263 hours of video to the courts. Over and over again, they were told that the footage had been faked or staged or that it was old. 'We gave the court so much information,' Wilson said, quivering with rage.

Officials continually passed the responsibility, from high courts to the Supreme Court. They went to 22 high courts. They were told that they needed to prove their case in two states, then five states, then one district. They were told to get more photos, more videos. They were threatened, saying that if they were being misleading, they would be punished. They were told by the courts they were wasting their time. In the district of Haridwar, government officers paid the manual scavengers two thousand rupees not to talk to anyone. One time, when SKA was told again their photos old, they posted a newspaper on the wall and took a photo of the women cleaning with it in the background. They found women to testify, but many of them did not have identification cards. Finally, they found six women

who were scavengers who would agree to testify who had identification cards. 'The district collector was sweating.' The judge gave the commissioner one month to take action to eliminate manual scavenging, but nothing happened after that. When they walked out of the court, one of the women who testified reached out and took Wilson's hand. 'What happened?' she asked.

Wilson was almost in tears. 'What do I *tell* her?' he asked the audience.

Much of SKA's work is rendering their community and the suffering of their community visible in a context of denial. But even as they are continually faced with apathy or hostility, SKA continues to believe in the possibility of democracy.



Figure 22: Bhim Yatra march to commemorate the arrival of the bus tour to Delhi (Author photo).

Other spectacles that have engaged in to gain attention for their issue have included symbolic burning during rallies. At several rallies, former manual scavenger women burned the baskets they used to use to scavenge. In a rally protesting sewer and septic tank deaths, they burned a paper effigy of a septic tank. Fire is hardly a language of gentle policy-driven compromise, but a language of finality and fury, a cleansing of an old world order that has oppressed their community. They see it as a visible protest and a way for members of the community symbolize to themselves that they are leaving behind this old world.

They have also done dry latrine demolition drives, in which the women who used to clean the dry latrines are given sledge hammers to destroy the latrines. This is usually done with public or community dry latrines. When people challenge this activity, SKA points out that legally, these dry latrines do not exist, so how can they be prosecuted for destroying something that does not exist? And so they destroy these dry latrines unopposed. In these dry latrine demolitions, they are using the very government blindness as a protection, even as they create a visible spectacle. They are subverting the very ways in which the government seeks to render them invisible. These visual performances enforce the notion that they are taking an oppositional stance to the government, even as their methods and work show that they value and work within government parameters.

Their motto for their campaign regarding deaths in sewers and septic tanks is to “stop killing us.” This phrase is seen on the banners at rallies, on posters around the office, on the banner taken to the Magsaysay Award ceremony, in letters to parliamentarians. It is not a request, a plea to reason, but a demand from citizens to the state apparatus. This language is not demure, clinical. It frames ‘accidents’ as murders by a state that is criminal in its exploitation of certain caste groups. The language is direct, like a punch to the gut. It has a clear subject (“you”, the government) and object (“us.”) Subjectivity is being granted to the government, and a victimhood is being claimed by the people. But not a passive victimhood—this victimhood is angry, defiant. “Stop killing us” is personal—it is not ‘stop

killing them' or 'cease sewer deaths.' Deaths are not a disembodied statistical filigree etched on glossy brochures. This is taking events that the state would like to frame as acts of god, victims of the city's function, and re-framing them as acts of direct violence.

In their letters to Parliament, news releases, or in material from their advocacy tour (see Figure 23), they demand that the government follow the laws and consider the government responsible for its citizens. Modelling after Ambedkar, SKA uses language of human rights, citizenship, and law. They come up with solutions and ideas, but ultimately, they view the government as being responsible for ensuring that solutions are carried out and that people are held responsible when there are problems.

But SKA is noticeably oppositional to the BJP/Modi government. Wilson has spoken at rallies against demonetization and cow murders. But more importantly, he has been an outspoken critic of SBM. The many toilets and septic tanks that are being built in a headlong rush are not connected, and SKA views these merely as ways that more of their community will die. They see millions of dollars being invested in a campaign to ostensibly clean up the country, but they see no money being used to support the eradication of manual scavenging, to rehabilitate former manual scavengers, or to compensate the families of those who have died in the sewers as has been promised in the legal documents. The government is not even investing to carry out a count to see how many manual scavengers there are in the country.

Media have stepped forth and presented Wilson as being an opponent of SBM. He will be called on to provide an opposing point of view to SBM supporters. Wilson describes the deaths of people in sewers. "Is this how India will become *swachh* (clean)?" he demands of viewers during a TV interview.⁵⁷ For Wilson, rendering the work of cleaning noble with photographic stunts like having celebrities

⁵⁷ I am not certain which interview this is. I heard the quote while sitting in another room of the office, and they recorded in the main room.

sweeping streets or cleaning out a twin pit latrine, as the government has done, only erases his community's suffering as they are continued to be denied legal rights.

In spite of utilizing spectacles and language that can be seen as confrontational and oppositional to government structures, SKA fundamentally views itself as a vital part of a vibrant democracy. They work to pressure existing government structures to defend the rights and well-being of their citizens by using government structures, such as Parliamentarians and courts. Their language is unflinching, and they will use highly visible spectacle in order to make their points. They are willing to sacrifice a positive working relationship with some parts of the government, recognizing that government will change and that their highest priority is to support the community they represent.

Demands of the Bhim Yatra

An official apology from the Government of India for violating the human dignity and human rights of safai karmacharis for over three thousand years

I. Stop Sewer deaths

1. The Government of India must present a blue paper in the Parliament on the number of deaths in sewer and septic tanks since Independence.
2. The Government must ensure that at any cost and whatever the situation, no person should enter into septic tanks or manholes.
3. We consider all sewer deaths as murders for which the State is responsible. We demand that the responsible public servants and other persons must be charged with murder for these deaths.
4. There should be immediate modernisation and mechanisation of sewer and septic tanks cleaning so that no person must enter and manually clean them.
5. The Government must immediately give Rs. 10 Lakhs compensation to the dependants of all persons who have died in sewer and septic tank cleaning work since 1993 as per order in the Supreme Court judgment of March 2014.
6. Give immediate compensation to persons injured in septic tank and sewer line cleaning and bear all the medical cost to treat those injuries.
7. Provide life insurance of minimum Rs. 10 lakhs to all safai karmacharis
8. The Government of India must form a national committee to prevent and stop septic tank and sewer hole deaths. The National Committee (a) will identify deaths in the sewer and septic tanks until date; (b) develop and deliver plans for dignified non-scavenging livelihoods for the families of the deceased and (c) prepare and deliver a time-bound action plan to modernise and mechanise sewer lines.
9. Establish a national mission to develop and establish a sanitation system with advanced technology to break the link between caste and this occupation.
10. Government must ensure that cleaning work in natural disasters and calamities should not be caste-based.
11. Establish a national fund to provide livelihoods to the families of persons who have died in sewer and septic tanks

II. Liberate and rehabilitate all manual scavengers

1. Total eradication of manual scavenging: The Government of India must declare the deadline to end manual scavenging. If the deadline is breached, the responsible public servants must be held accountable and punished.
2. Demolish all dry and insanitary latrines.
3. Implement the *Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013* fully and strictly.
4. Punish the violators of the *Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013* and the *SC/ST Atrocities (prevention) Amendment of 2015*.
5. Increase the one-time cash assistance amount to the liberated manual scavengers from Rs. 40,000 to Rs 5 lakhs.
6. Provide five acres of fertile land to safai karmacharis for dignified livelihoods.
7. Allot five cents housing plots to the safai karmacharis and construct three bedroom houses on it.
8. Provide special pension for safai karmacharis above 50 years of age.
9. Provide free quality education with monthly scholarship until the highest level for all safai karmachari children for as many generations as their parents had worked as safai karmacharis.
10. Provide job-oriented technical education to safai karmachari youth with residential facility.
11. Provide dignified non-scavenging livelihoods of their choice to safai karmachari women.
12. The safai karmacharis who are in regular and contractual employment in government, local bodies and private organisations should not be retrenched, but assigned non-scavenging, dignified, decent and permanent work in the same organisation, without any discrimination in pay and other benefits.
13. Stop contract system in sanitation work.

Figure 23: SKA's written list of demands from their bus advocacy tour, the Bhim Yatra (Ambedkar tour), which began December 10th, 2015 and ended April 13th, 2016, Ambedkar's birth anniversary (Safai Karmachari Andolan 2016).

Relationship with NGOs

SKA has a strong and consistent reputation as *the* organization to go to or work with when you want to work with the manual scavenging community, for whatever reason. If you want to go for a human rights grants, have a blessing on a new tool to clean septic tanks, address labor in your sanitation project, or add a unique perspective to your sanitation conference, SKA is sought out for partnerships, advice, or a stamp of approval. Wilson is invited to more talks than he could ever possibly attend, and during a call for proposals for a human rights grant, they had three different organizations vying to be their partner.

SKA offers its partners several different advantages. The most practical thing they offer is access to the community; they already have networks of trust and connection to this community. For a community with a long history of challenging relationships with authority, pre-established trust is invaluable. Less concretely and perhaps more important to many actors though is that SKA lends

authenticity and authority to their work in the development sector and policy levels. If SKA is on board with your project, then it gives the idea that it is closely aligned with the manual scavenger community.

Invoking SKA, too, is a connection to a group of activists and organizations that operate primarily in human rights frames and are characterized as activists. In some cases, this connection is a liability. Many organizations avoid working with SKA because they view them as too oppositional. I once asked an NGO founder whether he had heard of Bezwada Wilson. He said that Wilson is a nice man, but “He is an activist, and I have solutions.” A common perception of SKA and Wilson is that they are “merely activists.”⁵⁸ To be an activist, to them, is to be set in opposition to the government and to refrain from providing solutions—as discussed in the previous section, this is a mischaracterization of their relationship with the government.

To other organizations, SKA’s ties to activist groups is a chance to complicate their own image and reputation, to show a kind of tangential alliance without too much political risk. WaterAid has funded Wilson in the past, and while these alliances usually are confined to the space of sanitation, by allying with Wilson and SKA, WaterAid can establish greater credibility when they seek alliances with other civil society and grassroots organizations. However, they also are able to maintain a certain amount of distance and distinct identity.

When SKA works with partners, they also benefit. Sometimes it is a merely a practical benefit, like funding. In other cases, they may partner with an organization to actualize a longstanding agenda item, such as a rehabilitation project. In some cases, their partners may provide a particular expertise, such as when they partner with legal civil society organizations to file a public interest litigation or with a university to analyze a set of surveys they have collected. SKA also sees reaching out to students as an

⁵⁸ This NGO founder is actually Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, who is described in the previous chapter.

important part of their overall goals of promoting democracy and equality, and so by helping other partners with these goals, they hope to further their overall goals.

The closest alliances that SKA has forged are those with grassroots organizations, civil society, and Dalit support groups, organizations who are explicit and passionate in insisting on human rights, equality, and government accountability. The topic matters less than the values and approaches. Wilson has been a good friend to a diverse range of causes, speaking at their rallies, writing letters in support, or otherwise fighting in conjunction: Dalit rights, demonetization, right to food, governmental transparency, the supposed “cow protection” murders, violence against women, and right wing extremism. In an in-office meeting, he said that,

People across the globe are trying to change structures. Let’s support the voices that are speaking out against the structures that oppress them. We are against patriarchy, we are against racism, we are against regionalism, we are against casteism, we are against whenever somebody in a dominant region, we are against religions. We will support voices wherever there is fighting.

SKA’s alliances are based on similarity in values and these long-held goals. These organizations in turn also will support SKA and Wilson through articles, monetary support, coming to rallies, or simply ideological and moral support.

SKA’s relationship with many development or NGO actors can also contain friction, particularly with sanitation NGOs. Much of this friction comes from their fundamentally different priorities that can sometimes be at cross-purposes; some of this friction comes from sanitation actors’ misunderstanding or sidelining of the issue of manual scavenging and caste.

Many sanitation actors whole-heartedly endorsed SBM when the government announced it. They praised the government, excited that this issue which so many of them have sought to make a key

issue for so long is finally accorded attention. But SKA views SBM as an assault on their community's well-being, and to see some of their former allies rush to endorse the program is a kind of betrayal, an example of their community being shoved aside again. To SKA, SBM is an enforcement of an oppressive system which enslaves their community to shovel shit. In other cases, some NGOs are engaging in concerted efforts to professionalize the work, to erase the narrative that this is a caste-based form of slavery by reshaping the narrative around manual scavenging as a narrative about sanitation labor that can be valued or skilled.

At the National Conference on Social Innovations for Improving Urban Sanitation, held on December 14, 2016 by the Centre for Policy Research for WASH actors and thinktanks, Wilson was a keynote speaker. During the question and answer panel for his talk, someone in the audience said, 'We have to recognize that cleaning drains is hard work and takes a lot of skill.'

When it came time for Wilson to respond, he spoke with noticeable anger. 'Cleaning the shit is great work,' he said, paraphrasing. "Please stop this. Whoever you are, stop this." He went on to say that the work is inhuman. 'Stop it. Stop glorifying it.' Our community has been doing this work for centuries. It has been banned. You cannot tell me it's a skilled job. 'You have forced me to do this.' Why is there no research institution for safety? Because our community has to do it. Educated people are just subcontracting the work. "Please move forward, don't go back."

Internally, they have more moderate views, realizing that the community may have to continue to work in some kind of cleanliness-related activity as systems of oppression continue. In public spaces, SKA views it as their work to continue to challenge the idea that cleaning work is noble.

SKA often has to fight the concept from not only the government, but NGOs that sanitation work can be good work or that it is skilled work. To SKA, manual scavenging is caste-based slavery; to send people into septic tanks is political murder; to continue the practice is the loss of government

accountability and an act of caste and crime. To some actors in the sector, it is a labor issue that should be fixed with uniforms, safety practices, or education. This fundamental difference, this split, often creates friction and frustration. They see SKA as merely being critical instead of offering solutions that they view are practical.

SKA is continually working with and supporting other NGOs. They view working with these different actors as a key part of their work. While sometimes these partnerships can be productive, sometimes SKA finds itself trying to fight against narratives that threaten to erase their community. These kinds of discussions can mean that SKA is painted as “just” activists, oppositional, and unhelpfully critical. However, this kind of rhetoric and consistency in values is an important part in justifying their place in the network.

Media

On July 27th, 2016, the Magsaysay Award Committee announced that Bezwada Wilson was one of the year’s awardees. The Magsaysay Award was described to me as “like the Nobel Peace Prize, but for Asia.” At 5 PM, approximately six hours after the news broke, the office was still in relative chaos. The floor was damp from a hundred shoes tracking in the rain outside. The main room was in disarray, chairs scattered around the room, the coffee table in the middle floor with a tray that once held biscuits, now decimated, and the large salwar used for meetings sputtering on the last bits of chai. Paper cups were scattered haphazardly around the office. Bouquets of flowers from well-wishers lingered on every horizontal surface.

In one corner, a set of cameramen tinkered with their equipment. Reporters, mostly male, waited in clusters around the office for their chance to get a quote from Wilson, munching on biscuits

and sipping chai. The office phone was constantly ringing, and the office staff tried valiantly to keep up with the onslaught.

One of the state conveners who was at the national headquarters for a meeting walked through the office offering sweets in celebration. The SKA team were legitimately proud of Wilson, excited and overjoyed to see that he has gotten this recognition. One person told me too that this award has come at a good time, that with the recent Dalit uprisings against Hindutva ideologies and people, it had helped raise Wilson into a greater position of prominence.

Inside Wilson's office, it's manic. Wilson has two cell phones and a land line, which were all constantly ringing. He picked up a second phone, still holding the first to his ear. Bhasha Singh, a journalist and SKA national adviser member, handed him her cell phone when it rings between typing furiously. 'I'm typing his interview for the Wire,' she said.

'Both parts?' I asked.

'I've done so many with him, I know what he says,' she said.

Wilson grinned, holding one phone to his ear still. 'After so many years,' he said, 'She can write my interviews.'

I scribbled notes in my field notebook, and Bhasha continued to write her article. She looked frazzled, her hair slightly askew. Drawing on her own background in journalism and media, she had been managing Wilson and the media all day. She had been taking calls, answering initial questions from the journalists, and helping Wilson to manage his time with each reporter, working as an impromptu media liaison for the office.

We listened to Wilson on the phone with more journalists. He had been saying the same things over and over again to each reporter, the familiar rhetoric about manual scavenging, that this award

should really be for the women who have left the practice, that this award is not a celebration since there is so much work to be done, that he is from this community. Bhasha cast her eyes up at the heavens at one of the questions. 'Why don't they do basic research,' she bemoaned.

A reporter in striped pajamas moved into the office, trying to get another quote. 'One last question,' Wilson said, 'Or Bhasha will slap me.'

Bhasha laughed.

Wilson was talking to any and all media outlets. He tries to accept all invitations, all requests for interviews. He is SKA's primary media tool and primary mouthpiece, and on that day, he was taking advantage of all of the coverage of this prestigious national award to push the idea that this work is not done. On that day alone, I saw reporters from Times of India, the Hindustan Times, The Hindu, Catch News. Looking at the media coverage that emerged in the days and weeks after his receipt of the award, coverage of his award has dozens of newspapers. Over the next week, reporters would continue to pass through the offices. The whole event massively disrupted SKA's work schedule, delaying a planned campaign to demolish dry latrines. Instead, they had to turn their attentions to capitalizing on the massive influx of publicity. In later weeks, SKA members expressed ambivalence about it—on the one hand, the media coverage is good, but on the other hand, it prevented them from doing some of the community work that many people find more fulfilling.

That night, Wilson had been booked on a Hindi language talk show where he will be a guest of the journalist Ravish Kumar, a respected Hindi language news personality on NDTV, one of India's major news channels. Bhasha nearly shoved him into the bathroom. 'You need to tidy up!'

After a moment or two, we heard talking from the bathroom. 'Oh my god, he's talking on the phone in there,' Bhasha said. 'Wilson!' she yelled out.

Finally, the three of us climb into an SUV, and the driver gunned it. The car careened through the streets of Delhi, lights flying past. Meanwhile, Wilson and Bhasha were still working.

‘You need to return this phone call,’ she said, ‘but after you drink water,’ she added, handing him one of the bottles from the office that I had grabbed on our way out, feeling if nothing else that I could at least ensure he was hydrated. ‘Talk to this person from this outlet. And this friend from Andhra Pradesh.’

‘Did you take this bottle from the office?’ Wilson asked me with amusement, somehow managing to gracefully pour the water into his mouth from a few inches away while the car lurched to the side.

Bhasha was on the net on her tablet. ‘Wow, the Wire interview went up fast...Oh my gosh, they didn’t proofread it.’ Wilson’s phone rang. Bhasha picked it up. ‘This is his secretary,’ she said. I choked, and she grinned at me before passing the phone to Wilson.

‘There’s so much pressure on you today,’ Wilson told Bhasha in a breathing space. She brushed the comment aside, and they continued to wrangle the morass of phone calls and text messages. In between, Bhasha was looking at the internet on her tablet, pulling up numbers and statistics for Wilson to use in his interview. She clarified his speaking points, like people are willing to give money for sanitation, but not give people their rights. She told him that in an appearance like this, people want emotion, not just a bunch of data. They agreed that they need to continue to say that Swachh Bharat kills people, that these deaths are murders, that the government is failing in protecting their lives and livelihoods. He agreed, and then turned his attention to another phone call.

Outside, as the car zips through the traffic, we passed the red sandstone domes of the Parliament building, looming over the frenetic Delhi night.

SKA's engagement with media is not systematic, a function of a well-outlined process, but instead, a quickly planned and somewhat haphazard response to a current event. They do not have a designated media officer who works full-time in the office. They do not have specific procedures in place, written talking points, or many of the trappings and elements that are common to more institutionalized actors when dealing with the media. In place of a logo, they use a photo of Ambedkar. A few days before his departure to the Philippines to accept the Magsaysay Award, he mused that, "I should probably have some sort of fliers or something to give out." The office did not have any fliers, posters, trifold or brochures discussing the organization. His comment led to a frenzied few days in the office, flurried writing and late nights.

Like many of SKA's efforts, they shift to respond to the moment, and whoever is most available will be the one to engage with the media. When Bhasha is present, as a journalist herself, she often will handle, guide, or advise on media engagement. Wilson is usually the one who is giving quotes for news articles, but other conveners, coordinators, and volunteers are frequently quoted in news articles on manual scavenging issues; Wilson himself does not have the monopoly on being the voice of SKA, even though he frequently serves as the lead, and if a news agency calls, it is usually his voice they are trying to capture.

SKA does not engage directly in shaping their narrative in the media, as many other organizations do through the release of reports, literature, press releases, or social media content. Instead, they create their narrative through media outlets. They give access and information to the media, who then are the ones to create the story. Their website is sparse and has not been updated in

some time.⁵⁹ They have a facebook account, but do not update it consistently. There is a Twitter account that of ostensibly Bezwada Wilson, but Wilson has no knowledge of this account or who is behind it.⁶⁰

SKA becomes a part of the media because they are the experts, they have the authority and the authenticity to be the organization that journalists know to go to when covering manual scavenging.⁶¹ Wilson has become a prominent enough of an actor to be sought after for comment for issues related to manual scavenging or Swachh Bharat. A common thread, particularly in the media coverage after the Magsaysay Award, was setting Wilson up as oppositional to Swachh Bharat, or calling him the ‘real’ Swachh Bharat hero.

However, SKA is often unable to get many key issues covered on a particularly widespread basis. The Magsaysay Award was a key moment, in which nearly every news media outlet covered the event, but that was because it was an Indian winning a major international award. During the Bhim Yatra tour, they had moderate coverage. When Wilson speaks at a rally or an event, a few outlets may report on the event. But ideally, they would want consistent coverage of their issue, of their challenge. Men die in septic tanks, and it may only occasion an article or two. For all of their authority and placement, they still struggle to be heard amid the din of other causes and issues.

There are severe challenges in creating narratives about manual scavenging and sanitation, a fundamental tension that is common to many organizations that work in areas of tragedy and suffering: how do you create a narrative that reveals the suffering caused by the problem without compromising the dignity and well-being of the very people you are trying to help?

⁵⁹ In late 2018, a new version of the website was posted, the labor donated by a company headed by an admirer of Wilson’s. However, this website too has issues and does not always accurately mirror SKA’s ethos and mission.

⁶⁰ It wasn’t until late 2018 that SKA gained control over this Twitter account and now one of the staff members posts somewhat regularly on it.

⁶¹ In some news sources, SKA shares this position of expertise with Dr. Pathak from Sulabh International; it usually depends on the article or the outlet.

When Wilson travelled to the Philippines for the Magsaysay Award ceremony, he travelled with a couple of the national board members and a woman who was formerly a manual scavenger. She was introduced to me as the first woman to demolish latrines and leave manual scavenging. She is small, but tough and wiry, with a wide grin and a wicked sense of humor. Through one of the national members, who translated between English and her native Telegu, we talked in the taxi ride to the airport.

She became prominent in media as the woman who left manual scavenging. Visitors—journalists, officials, NGOs—came to see her. Some of her neighbors and community members warned her, saying these people may take her away, and she got scared. She was afraid that with all of the attention she might lose her new job with the government with all of the visitors disrupting her life. But she did not—there was too much public pressure for the government to fire her, and so she kept her visitors and she kept her job.

And when the visitors came, they asked her again and again to do the manual scavenging job so they could see what it looked like, could photograph it, could videotape it. She hated to do the work that she had cast aside again. Her prominence, her power as being the woman who left manual scavenging forced her to continually perform the work, again and again, for the sake of capturing the narratives. From their long journey to garner legal recognition to performing for media, SKA does this hated work in order to render it more visible—a source of discomfort, misery, and anger.

But there are other events that create visual narratives of their struggle that are more triumphant and less contentious. Like most organizations, spectacle is an important part of how they reach and engage with the media. However, in SKA's case, the spectacles for media are designed not with the media in mind, but are for the community or are to reach the government. In many cases, as previously discussed, these visual languages not only function as media spectacle, but often portray them as activists. Rallies and events—like the previously described burnings—draw media attention, but

perhaps more importantly, they are rituals of catharsis or solidarity, of taking action to destroy an old life or joyful celebrations of community. Women who were once forced to clean community dry latrines took up iron bars and hammers to destroy them. As one woman describes in *Unseen*, Bhasha Singh's account of manual scavengers:

The years of anger I suppressed inside me, burst forth. My heart began to smolder with rage. Only this thought came to me again and again that the building [the dry latrine] that had made me do this should be razed to the ground. No trace of it should be left on the surface of the earth. I just kept on shouting that we should *kulechiyali* this, we should destroy it. It should not reach our children" (Singh 2014:184).

In the April 13th 2016 rally at the culmination of the Bhim Yatra, they burned effigies of septic tanks. In other protests and moments of catharsis, women from the community burn the baskets that they had spent their lives using to scrape out the shit. At rallies and community meetings, members from the community don blue headbands, vests, and march in the streets with banners that demand of the government of the public to "Stop Killing Us!" While these events are photographed, videotaped, covered in the news, their inception lies not with constructed attempts at garnering media attention, but in creating and supporting resistance in the community. For events like basket burning, they will actively avoid spending too much effort to make it into a media spectacle. It is not a publicity event, Wilson said, it is *their* event. However, in spite of the inception of the event as being for the community, they offer key moments and highly visual moments for the media to cover.

This is not to say that SKA is unaware of media or disregards it. They are keenly aware of the fact that media attention is vital in creating momentum and helping create public pressure. But as with most of the actions, their first alliance and obligation is to the community, even at the detriment of creating materials that are more shocking and presumably eye-catching.

This can cause some tension, some frustration with some SKA members. When SKA printed posters for Wilson to bring to the Magsaysay Award ceremony, they came on glossy paper. Wilson immediately shook his head. ‘We can’t talk about death and have this glossy material,’ he said. One woman wanted to show pictures of the corpses of men who had died in septic tanks on a poster, but Wilson vehemently disagreed. Dead bodies can’t pose for pictures, he said, so we can’t use them. They avoid creating materials showing people manual scavenging or climbing into sewers. We don’t want people to shut down, Wilson said. We don’t want to show what we don’t want. While the posters with pictures of people climbing into sewers or manual scavenging were not discarded, not as many copies of those were printed out. Wilson gets the final say on many of the messages that go out and how they appear.

SKA’s engagement with the media is often unstructured and somewhat haphazard. They do not expend a great deal of effort reaching out to the media, instead waiting for the media to come to them. Most of their energy is spent in engaging with the government, with partners, with the community. To the media, they are an oppositional, activist force. They demand government accountability, they light things on fire in protest. Wilson is an outspoken Swachh Bharat critic. Their consistent values—their overarching goals—and the tendency to focus on Wilson has created coherence in their media narratives that speak to the coherence of the values of the organization itself. This ideological coherence, this consistency, has helped establish SKA as an authority on the subject, ensuring continued media coverage. Media coverage is often incidental to their work, to their challenges to the government or their meetings or rallies. While they are not prominent, especially as an organization (news articles are more likely to focus on Wilson rather than SKA), they are a consistent, persistent presence in the mediascape.

Frames of reference

When one of the women in the office and I sat down to create the posters that Wilson would take with him to the Magsaysay Award ceremony in the Philippines, Wilson grabbed some scratch paper and began to scrawl the kinds of things he wanted on the poster: “STOP IT.” “End manual scavenging.” “Am I not touchable?” “As long as MS continues” “Article 17 in Constitution.” “70 years of Indian independence.” “Stop killing us.” “Dignity.” “Swachh Bharat.” “12 crores.” “Equality.” “Money for corporations but not for us.” “How many will you kill in septic tanks?” He dashed the well-practiced phrases, numbers, and thoughts off easily. Behind the jumble of words and messy handwriting, they are the orienting concepts of the organization, the recurring themes of their work. To SKA, sanitation is a battlefield on which they wage what is fundamentally a fight for human rights.

Wilson said once that manual scavenging is two problems: human rights and sanitation, and it is vital to not confuse the two. While they acknowledge the role of having sanitation systems that function and do not require direct human intervention to be maintained is important in eliminating manual scavenging, they do not consider themselves a sanitation organization. Many actors continually pressure SKA to *be* a sanitation organization, to come up with solutions that would prevent people from going into the sewers, but to do so would violate their key messages: *You* have made shit their business. Their engagement with sanitation is a very symptom of their oppression. By asking them to come up with solutions, you are asking them to “dirty their minds.” “It is not my job,” Wilson insisted to a reporter during an interview. By asking them to come up with sanitation solutions, you are making it their job again. To SKA, sanitation is not an end or means, but a kind of battlefield—their involvement is a symptom of their oppression, and one of their most fundamental goals is to escape being involved with sanitation.

For SKA, manual scavenging is violence, it is slavery, it is a wound carved into the flesh of their community for centuries. It is perpetuated through caste, through ignorance and irrationality, through apathy and the structural violence of concerted invisibility. They create posters that say, “Stop Killing Us,” they call the deaths of people in septic tanks and sewers political murders. To them, manual scavenging is a violation of human rights, an ultimate act of dehumanization. In terms of the frames described in Chapter 1, SKA is fully a human rights-framed organization.

SKA frequently speaks of dignity—a fluid and contentious word to the say the least. In the most basic way, to them, it means having a job that does not involve scraping shit out of dark holes or wading chin deep in sewage. But more fundamentally, the demand for dignity is a demand to be recognized as equally human and to also recognize one’s own self as needing and deserving dignity. So much of their work—and perhaps historically, SKA’s greatest strengths—has been in talking to members of the manual scavenging community to convince them that cleaning shit is not their work, that life and dignity are more important than even a bit extra money. One of their posters, created for the Magsaysay trip and later displayed in the office, depicts a woman scavenger holding a basket with the words:

200,000 women are forced to clean the excreta of others in dry latrines, denying them

the right to LIFE

the right to DIGNITY

the right to EQUALITY.

Another poster reads, “Am I not touchable?”

Much of their work is not couched in terms of displaying misery or performing suffering, but almost a weaponized exasperation, pointing out absurdities of contrast and hypocrisy. They rail against the idea that the government claims there is no money for rehabilitation, but yet millions of rupees are

allocated to corporations. They point out the hypocrisy of politicians' rhetoric that India is modernizing, yet they have been waiting for manual scavenging to be eliminated for 70 years. They point out that over 1,400 people have died in sewers since 1993, and there has been no response, but if 1,400 cows had been killed "the entire country would have burnt." They point out that there is money to send rockets into space, but not to research how to clean sewers and septic tanks without sending their community members to die in them. They point out the fact that so much money and energy and resources are spent on combatting terrorism, but manual scavenging kills more people every year. Wilson often publicly attacks beliefs and practices that are divorced from rationality, science, and detachment. There is no effort to rewrite Hinduism or religions; SKA rejects religious thinking, as this kind of thinking has been used to justify the oppression of their community for centuries.

At the root of their fight is government accountability, law, science, and rationality and an international language of human rights. This is why Wilson has been an outspoken critic of the *gau rakshaks* ("cow protectors"), who take law into their own hands and assault and murder people who supposedly are harming cows. This is why during a question and answer session at a university talk, he asked the student *not* to look to history, to *vedas*⁶² for answers, but instead to look at issues in a scientific and rational manner. This is why, during that same talk, he said, 'I am not against the cow, I am against the irrational arguments they are making.' SKA works to render the government accountable and the rule of law supreme, as religious beliefs and bastardization of laws impacts and hurts them and other marginalized communities. To prevent their oppression, they feel that government needs to be rendered rational.

They also frequently invoke Ambedkar, and thus it could also be argued they are embedded within a charismatic frame as well. However, from narratives of the inception of the work and the

⁶² Vedas refer to Hindu religious texts.

relative prominence of the different discourses, Ambedkar is revered as an ideological father, but more in the way that he has shown the way to liberation. Wilson realized that he would dedicate his life to eradicating manual scavenging before he found Ambedkar; Ambedkar's writings gave him the means to accomplish this end. Ambedkar's writings bolster the fight; their work is not *because* of their reverence for him. Their work is because they view dignity and equality as their right as human beings.

Public vs. private

SKA is a movement, led by and in great part comprised of people from the community they are dedicated to liberating and supporting. As such, there is less of a notion that there are public and private transcripts, that there is a constructed bridge of strategy or a haphazard gap that marks the difference between what SKA says publicly and what they say privately. While they may carefully think through their public messaging, it is usually in service of emphasizing particular points or perhaps ensuring their facts are correct so they are not attacked by the government for spreading false information. SKA is explicit and clear in its primary values, messages, and goals: they are political, they fight patriarchy, they fight caste, and they believe in equality. As an organization that is centered on a set of values and that is personal to many people involved, there is more ideological homogeneity within the organization. As a group that is openly political and critical, the gap between public utterances and private ones is less.

This is not to say that there are no private conversations, no debates over the exact way the poster looks or the wording of the letters to Parliament. But these debates center around the form of the message, less so the message or underlying goal itself. While people may dispute whether this year's letter to Parliament should ask that budget be increased and that sewer deaths stop or whether they should just ask for the one, there is no debate that both of these things should happen, and both of these elements have been asked for in other arenas.

In office happenings and life too, there are consistent and concerted efforts to ensure that SKA demonstrates and lives the ideas that they seek to push, particularly in regard to fighting patriarchy and promoting equality. They are conscientious about putting their ideologies into practice into how their own organization is run. Sometimes, due to a lack of organization, these efforts do not always manifest fully, but they are continually returning to practicing their own values in the office and in their own lives.

Some elements and initiatives are not endorsed as heartily by everyone. After a meeting about addressing patriarchy with the state conveners, one of the organizers confided to me that some of the men did not seem to be on board with the notion, did not seem comfortable with the notion of fighting and dismantling patriarchy.

They also make sure to generally promote equality in their office life and all of their activities, as described in the Daily Life section. At national meetings, all of the state conveners were asked to clean their own utensils and no one person was designated to serve chai; people were expected to get it themselves. In a national meeting of state conveners, one of the state conveners showed a picture of him holding a meeting with a group of safai karmachari women. One of the other state conveners who also is a national board member had him return to the photo after his presentation.

“You are sitting in a chair,” she said. “They are on the ground.”

“I did it for eyesight,” he defended.

“But it looks like you didn’t want to sit on the ground,” she said.

He nodded, agreeing. “You’re right. Next time.”

From community meetings to organization meetings, they seek to be consistent in promoting equality and obviating the practices that have been the marks of caste structures.

While SKA overall aims to promote equality, the power in the organization often tends to revert to Wilson. There have been a few efforts on the part of Wilson to decentralize power. At one point, they had discussed shifting the leadership structure so that Wilson was not the national convener, but that it was a position of three national conveners working together. However, this did not materialize. For all his drive to shift attention and power elsewhere, there is a tendency for power and attention to lean towards Wilson. But his power is not absolute. Team members feel comfortable challenging him as well, speaking to a more equitable structure.

For SKA, the difference between public and private transcripts is usually not a matter of values, but a matter of form and practice. Because they are a human rights movement based around a particular community, they are relatively ideologically homogenous. They also take on their missions for equality as personal, seeking to address these problems in their own office and lives as well as with the people they work with. They try to decrease the existing gaps between their desire for a more equal world by putting into practice actions that promote a more equitable organization.

Conclusion

In a book on sanitation NGOs, SKA is, in many ways, not truly a sanitation NGO in the traditional sense. They are a human rights organization that has been pulled unwillingly into the sanitation space. However, they are still a vital player. They represent a set of stakeholders who are some of the most intimately entwined with the issues that the others seek to address. This has given them a great deal of authority and authenticity to act in this space, but their positioning has also sidelined them in many discussions, as they are seen as too political and too oppositional. Unlike NGOs that cleave to a narrative that they can engage with sanitation and not be political, SKA embraces that identity, making them both more honest and marginalizing them in many discussions. SKA has a clear grasp on what elements of

narrative that they want to push, but oftentimes they do not push it themselves, relying instead on the media to help push and amplify their voices and narratives.

In the final chapter of this work, I will first briefly compare and contrast the three organizations before moving into a more in-depth discussion about how this work speaks to not only literatures of filth and discard studies, but also the literatures of global health.

5

To serve Mother India by removing dirt: Filth and Health in SBM

“Ab hamara kartavya hain ki gandagi ko dhoor karke Bharat Mata ki sewa karein.”

Now it is our duty to serve Mother India by removing the dirt.

—Government of India Swachh Bharat pledge

Delhi is not just one city, but eight cities. Or nine. Or a million.

The tour guides will tell you about eight cities, the march of different empires and emperors building their own capitals, staking claim to this central space connected along the trade and travel routes: Qutub Minar, Siri, Tughlaqabad, Jahanpanah, Firozabad, Purana Qila, Shahjahanabad, and finally New Delhi. Legend says that any empire that declares Delhi their capitol will fall. In 1911, the British moved their capital from Calcutta to Delhi. In 1947, the British left India. The new nation retained Delhi as its capital.

You see all of these cities as you move about Delhi, often crammed next to signs of Delhi’s raging, rushing, giggling, glittering modernity. In the white colonnades of Connaught Place, where upright officials once motored on pristine and quiet streets, street sellers hawk glittering piles of jewelry or jewel-bright tapestries between antiseptic Starbucks or GAP stores. At Hauz Khas, after dancing around the insistent promoters handing you fliers for Ladies Night, you can step into a 13th century Madrasa. In the frenetic traffic of Chandni Chowk, where Mughal emperors once paraded on top of

gold-clad elephants, you can find the oldest spice market in Asia, hazy with cardamom and bustling with a hundred traders; an always-busy McDonald's; and a traffic accident between a bullock cart and a BMW.

In Vasant Vihar, one of the neighborhoods I stayed in during my fieldwork, I rented a room in a flat in a gated community. Across the busy street, in a triangular piece of land at the intersection of several roads, there was a small slum, with improvised homes and narrow walkways between the small homes. Clothing hung to dry on barbed wire fence. A drain empties out next to them, and there is an improvised dump, and in the summer, the stench is an almost palpable force. A young boy runs the stand of tobacco and *paan* and sells to drivers on the street, some on motorcycles, some in taxis, others in sleek sports cars.

The space that Delhi encompasses is huge: the entirety of the National Capital Region (NCR, the name given to the cluster of cities that comprise the lived experience of the city) spreads from its own territory to the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The population of the NCR is estimated to be some 47 million people, although much of the population is not conducive to being counted: they are crammed into slums and small spaces or are migratory, workers trying to make ends meet between growing seasons. The different neighborhoods, each with their own personalities, histories, and statuses, are crammed right next to each other in jarring juxtaposition—past and present, wealthy and poor, sparkling clean and garbage-ridden.

It is not profound or startling to say that Delhi is diverse with a great deal of history. It is also not profound to say that India is diverse with a great deal of history. These things are common points of contention and pride and identity. But the diversity and size of India is often crammed so close together that for someone who has grown up in carefully zoned cities, it is startling. Living and moving around a city like Delhi, claims of “Indianness” grow more abstract and less meaningful.

The rate of change too feels breakneck. One writer asked about Delhi, “How do you make sense of a city that is shifting so fast that you can become disoriented sitting in your own home?” (Chaturvedi 2010). In writing an ethnography of NGOs at a specific period of time, I was alternatively fascinated and frustrated by the living embodiment of James Clifford’s observation that “ ‘Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits” (Clifford and Marcus 1986:10). One of the major themes of this chapter is that what is “Indian” is heterogenous and dynamic, something that is mirrored in the city of Delhi itself which I have been visiting since 2009. The ideas of filth, cleanliness, and sanitation are as heterogenous and dynamic as the capital itself.

One change in the cityscape from 2014 when I did my pilot research over the course of my work is the introduction of the SBM logo into the cityscape. It permeates the city—on billboards, on toilet walls, on garbage dumps, on signs of random storekeepers. I used to make it a game to find as many spectacle logos as I could as I travelled around the city. On the side of a public restroom. On a political sign in the neighborhood with my favorite restaurant. On an anti-drug campaign sign in the metro. On the side of a government building. At the entrance to a neighborhood park. After the 2016 demonetization campaign, a tiny version of the logo adorns the bottom right corner of all of the currency.

The logo itself is relatively simple: a pair of round spectacles with an Indian tricolor replacing the nosepiece and the words “Swachh Bharat” in Devanagari script on the lenses. Depending on how you look at them, they are watching you, or you are looking at the world through them. They are meant to be Gandhi’s iconic glasses, invoking the central symbol of the campaign that promises a “clean India” by Gandhi’s birthday in 2019.

A former government employee, now working for a major international organization, described that the central government has mandated that the SBM logo be on every government advertisement

and be present at every external event. And there are no protections or guidelines for its use; anyone can use the SBM logo at any time on anything. It ensures that Gandhi's eyes are everywhere.

Choosing the logo for the Prime Minister's flagship campaign was a long process. As the guidelines were still being written, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) decided to hold a national contest for both a logo and a slogan for the campaign. Over 30,000 entries were submitted. The SBM office chose 200 to send to the Prime Minister's Office; the Prime Minister wanted to pick the logo personally. He rejected those 200. Then they sent another 200. Those were rejected. Finally, they sent all 2,000 logos on the 'short' list from the total entry pool, including the spectacles. The spectacles had not been added to any of the shortlist groups. The spectacles had nothing to do with toilets or sanitation.

After sifting through the vast pile of entries, Modi chose the spectacles and borrowed the SBM motto—"one step towards cleanliness" ("*ek kadam ki swachhata ki aur*")—from another entry. Modi reportedly chose the glasses because he *wanted* to convey the notion that Gandhi was looking at everyone, that he was seeing whether they were being clean. He *wanted* to promote the notion that there were eyes everywhere, like a Foucaultian panopticon (Foucault 1977). He wanted to promote the idea that people are being watched. When the officials asked why he chose a logo that had nothing to do with toilets, Modi reportedly said that SBM isn't about toilets. It's about cleanliness.

The glasses of the SBM logo are the iconic round wire shape of Gandhi's glasses, but Modi wears glasses too. His face is also ubiquitous on the city landscape—smiling as he exhorts you to have a clean India, to Make in India, to support other BJP politicians. Posters plastered on bus stops, billboards, restrooms, print ads. Modi too seems to be watching. For the groups that the BJP has hurt or targeted, there is something frightening about the surveillance. Gandhi is watching. Modi is watching. You are being watched, and if you choose to put on the spectacles, you too are watching.

Modi wants you to help him make the nation clean, and “clean” can mean a lot of things to the Hindu fundamentalist party. When Modi demonetized the economy, he said that it was a movement to clean India, just like SBM (Express Web Desk 2017). In the SBM pledge that is recited by everyone from schoolchildren to government officials, it says, “Now it is our duty to serve Mother India by removing the dirt” (*“Ab hamara kartavya hain ki gandagi ko dhoor karke Bharat Mata ki sewa karein”*). In the context of a party and a person who has obliterated several civil rights organizations, enabled the cow vigilante murders, and who were complicit with the 2002 massacre in Gujarat, it is hard for people to not wonder and fear what or who the dirt may be.

Caught in this fraught space are the NGOs. As the previous chapters attest, they are balancing their own relationships with cleanliness, with other NGOs, and with the government as they seek to accomplish their sanitation-related or sanitation-adjacent goals. As they do so, they engage with the layers of meaning around sanitation, with shit, caste, pollution and purity. Each of them makes an argument about these other ideas as they make statements about sanitation and themselves. They are engaging in and illustrating broader discussions about filth, dirt, caste, and Indianness. And they are also engaging in what is—at the base of everything—an incredibly important issue for global health.

In this chapter, I briefly compare and contrast WaterAid, Sulabh, and SKA along the same factors that I did in the ethnographic chapter. I argue too that if we are to capture “India”, we must make sure to include all of these organizations as being Indian. I then discuss different Indian concepts of shit, caste, and filth, first discussing some of the literature around these topics and then discussing how my work from studying NGOs adds to those literatures. I conclude this chapter by returning to questions from the study of global health and examine the implications of this work for global health practice. I speak to not only how shit and sanitation should be conceptualized in global health, but also address broader questions about the role of culture in global health.

Basic comparisons

In my chapters 2-4, I described with “thick” description (Geertz 1973) the operations, practices, goals, values, and relations of WaterAid-India, Sulabh International, and SKA. Here, I will briefly compare and contrast the organizations along those parameters as both a summary and to help set up the subsequent sections. For a summary of the three case study NGOs in table form, please refer to Table 5 on page 106.

In my main ethnographic chapters, I summarized who the NGOs are, what they do, how they are configured, and their relations with other actors. I also discussed how they create and maintain relationships with other actors: NGOs, the government, and media. I finally talked about their underlying frame of reference or orientation and the relationship between the public and private transcripts. These aspects summarize not only the activities of and the organizational structural aspects of the NGOs, but the way in which they negotiate with the networks in which they are enmeshed. These

Welcome to the office

The differences between these organizations are striking as soon as one steps into the office. WaterAid presents as a middle to upper-class institution. The office is sharp, clean, and carefully branded to match the materials and color schemes of the international brand. They hum along somewhat regular office hours that are punctuated by travel and intense labor. The office has an aesthetic and rhythm that you can find in offices all of over the world.

Sulabh, conversely, is markedly different, its values and orientations blatantly visible in the performative rhythms of everyday life. Mornings are reserved for an assembly, a group activity that enforces the superiority of Sulabh and the unity of the organization in a way that performs both unity

and “Indianness” to external visitors. The power differences between people are clear—there are those who stand on the stage, there are those who are below, but everyone is singing prayers and praises of Sulabh. The office itself is a compound that is plastered with praises and quotes of Modi, the BJP, Sulabh, and Dr. Pathak. It is rough around the edges, lacking polish in some ways, but the power and authority of the organization are present. It is also aggressively “Indian,” or a kind of Indianness. There are statues in the courtyard of Gandhi, Ambedkar, and a manual scavenger, but the statues are rough, almost crude, as if to enforce the notion that they are connected to a “real” India—as defined by an Orientalist vision of India as poor. The rhythm of daily life is based around daily rituals that enforce solidarity and perform it for the many visitors that come around; the signs that plaster the organization walls reinforce narratives of authority.

SKA is in a small office in an apartment basement, hardly noticeable unless you are looking for it. The office is small and clean, but there are cracks in the plaster. A photo of Ambedkar, their ideological leader and a Dalit activist, presides over a space spilling over with papers, folders, and activities. Office life is a little cozy, a little chaotic, but the photos of Ambedkar, the lack of ostentatious wealth, and the small staff enforce a narrative that this is a small grassroots organization.

The three organizations are different as soon as you walk in. They present themselves differently, and their internal rhythms and appearances mark them as being fundamentally different not only in appearances, but values, budgets, and orientations as well. These descriptions of the everyday phenomenological life of the office help to ground this work as being about “lifeworlds” of NGOs, and not merely abstracted policies and discussions (Mosse 2011).

Goals and activities

Each organization includes, in some way, sanitation in their goals and activities, but they each engage with the topic differently. For WaterAid, sanitation—in conjunction with water and hygiene—is their primary goal. They want a “world where everyone, everywhere has safe water, sanitation and hygiene” (WaterAid India 2015:2). While many of the individuals who work there conceive of their work as being a means to an end—human rights, equity, or poverty alleviation—the organization itself overall focuses on sanitation and its impacts on health. All of their work must be justified in terms of its relation to the elements of WASH. That range of activities and their metrics of success reveal their underlying frame of reference or orientation to health.

Sulabh’s stated mission is the “emancipation of scavengers,” (Meet Sulabh 2019:2). This is a part of sanitation, but that stated mission does not include anything about improving sanitation coverage. However, Sulabh is best known for its work maintaining pay-per-use toilets in public places and the construction of individual household latrines, making their engagement with sanitation far more direct. Sulabh conducts a wide range of philanthropic activities, such as the “adoption” of widows in the city of Vrindivan, running a school, the rehabilitation of manual scavengers through vocational training, publishing books and magazines (on sanitation, politics, and art), social research, and running a toilet museum. Sulabh also runs a housekeeping/janitorial and maintenance business, which holds the contracts of different institutional buildings and compounds.

While many of Sulabh’s activities relate to sanitation, the main thread that connects them—the underlying orientation of the organization—is what Dr. Pathak is interested in and what can help further his power and stature. Sulabh—or Dr. Pathak—has used the space of sanitation to elevate himself, and after doing so, has branched out into other activities. Sanitation is their main goal and brand. In their work, sanitation is framed as an exercise in furthering human rights, but a look into the private parts of

their organization reveal that that this is not their true orientation. Like WaterAid, Sulabh is associated with and entwined with sanitation. But unlike WaterAid, Sulabh's main orientation is the furthering of the goals of their charismatic leader; this pushes them to engage in activities far outside of a WASH space. WaterAid, conversely, must keep within the parameters of WASH to maintain their organizational identity and cleave to their organizational mandate. Sulabh's orientation and public identity (that of Dr. Pathak) enables them to engage in almost any area they want.

SKA is usually not thought of as a sanitation organization at all. SKA's stated goals are the eradication of manual scavenging, caste, and patriarchy. Their engagement with sanitation is that, for them, sanitation is a battleground (see Chapter 1)—they actively do not want to be in sanitation, because it is a symptom of the casteist oppression they want to annihilate. They are important actors in sanitation because the community they represent are the ones who make sanitation in India (sort of) function, to their physical, social, and psychological detriment. They become key pieces of the sanitation networks because they are one of the only organizations that works with this community. However, they do not always easily integrate or collaborate with WASH organizations like WaterAid, for whom sanitation coverage is the topic priority. While certain individuals at WaterAid share values and orientations with SKA, the overarching priority of WaterAid is, fundamentally, about increasing sanitation coverage. To increase sanitation coverage requires labor in some form, and in India, this has historically come from Dalit communities. Thus their relationships are sometimes uneasy.

For Sulabh, sanitation is something to celebrate, a way to further the stature of Dr. Pathak, but for SKA, sanitation is a broken system that they are trapped in. Additionally, Dr. Pathak views the role of Sulabh to build and not to criticize the government; SKA views criticizing the government, or, in another phrasing, holding them accountable, as one of their key purposes.

Organizational structures and leadership

These different three NGOs also have massively different organizational structures, which I explained at least partly in terms of Weber's modes of legitimacy and authority (Weber 1978). WaterAid's organization is clear, corporate. It is what Weber would call a "rational bureaucratic" mode of authority. They have a CEO as their prime leader. Who occupies that position changes every few years. As with Weber's descriptions, the people and leadership of the organization are relatively interchangeable. While different CEOs or senior managers may bring different priorities or skillsets that may steer the organization in one direction or another, they are still bound up in what is a fundamentally bureaucratic structure. While the senior management team is the final arbiter in most decisions, generally power is distributed throughout the organization. Decisions are made collaboratively among a group of individuals who have their own strong opinions and express them. Each member of the team—while somewhat replaceable as their duties are clearly defined—has their own voice.

Both SKA and Sulabh, on the other hand, are far more illustrative of what Weber would call charismatic forms of authority. Weber described charisma thus: "The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1978:241). Both Wilson and Pathak exemplify different kinds of charismatic leadership. SKA and Sulabh are both dominated by individual leaders who make many (if not most) decisions for the organization and around whom the organization revolves. For Sulabh, Pathak's dominance over the organization is complete. He is consulted on even day-to-day decisions. While there are people who are vice presidents, most lines of authority go directly to Pathak. Even people running a public toilet in Andhra Pradesh can and do call Pathak directly.

The main SKA office is run by Bezwada Wilson, who steers the whole organization. However, while Wilson's charismatic presence dominates the main office, there are others—both within the Delhi office and in offices in other states—who can sway Wilson's opinion and who bring their own ideas to the organization. While both Wilson and Pathak are dominant and powerful leaders of their organizations who often act as gatekeepers, Pathak's power is more authoritarian, with no room to challenge his edicts and no other sources of authority. SKA has multiple powerful individuals, and there is room to challenge Wilson.

The respective sources of Wilson's and Pathak's charisma and authority are mirror images. Pathak gains authority in great part because of his background as a Brahmin and his explicit and frequent references to Gandhi. Wilson's authority comes from his background as a Dalit and frequent references to Ambedkar. Gandhi and Ambedkar represent different modes of authority that Pathak and Wilson emulate. Like Gandhi, Pathak is a part of the establishment and enforces caste hierarchies and Hinduism. Like Ambedkar, Wilson seeks to challenge and revolutionize systems and relies on a secular, law-based authority. Pathak's authority comes from being a high-ranking person who became "enlightened" as to the plight of a more marginalized group through the guru Gandhi; Wilson grew up as a member of an oppressed group who was awakened as to how to eradicate those social structures through Ambedkar. Unlike senior management at WaterAid, neither of these individuals can be easily replaced within the organization.

Funding

Funding is a key issue in any NGO or nonprofit (Fowler 1992; AbouAssi 2013; Lewis and Sobhan 1999). In the context of sometimes precarious funding that has been exacerbated by the BJP's fear of 'outsiders' influencing the country (see Chapter 1), understanding funding is particularly important. The three

NGOs differ not only in their sources of funds, but in how acquiring those funds affects the organizations' operations.

WaterAid is has a more typical NGO model. They seek money from international agencies, foundations, charities, and individual donations. They are trying to create new streams of funding as the organization shifts to being a separate entity from WaterAid-International. As their own legal entity, they aim to no longer be dependent on WaterAid-International for funds, instead relying more on in-country funds.

Like other nonprofits, WaterAid must assert their quality and worth in order to continue to convince others to give them money, either through donations or by specifically responding to requests for proposals. They must expend a great number of resources—in terms of people, social capital, and political capital—in order to maintain that reputation. They conscientiously and carefully cultivate avenues of funding for this purpose. SKA, conversely, also depends on donations, but they spend no time actively seeking them out. Instead, they continue to do their work, and institutions and individuals come to them offering money. This is in great part because they are a highly visible actor for the sensitive issue of Dalit rights. SKA relies on funding, of course, but it is not always present in their day-to-day functioning. They are committed to not mitigating their own values or goals in order to seek funding. While they may compromise sometimes in other areas, they are unwilling to do so for just funding.

Sulabh tells people that they do not need donations. They are very public in their claims that they are self-funded; it is a key point in promoting their authority in the sector and prominence over NGOs. However, it appears that certain subsections of Sulabh, specifically the foundation, do take donations. Financially, however, Sulabh operates like a business. Their contracts for toilet construction and housekeeping and maintenance at both public and private institutions may fund their many other

activities. However, these lines of funding are hidden in order to maintain the more dominant narrative that their model of pay-per-use toilets is so successful that they can fund their largesse from it.

These basic attributes of the organizations—what they do, who the people are, their leadership, and their funding—are usually the prime lenses through which NGOs are analyzed and understood (Raj n.d.; Types of NGOs: By Orientation and Level of Operation n.d.; Vakil 1997; Fowler 1992; Salamon and Anheier 1992; Farrington and Bebbington 1993). But part of the contributions of this work is the focus on the production of relationships with other institutional actors: other NGOs, the government, and the media.

Relationships with other NGOs

NGOs are embedded in an ecology. They work with each other or against each other. They rely on each other for funding, for political alliances, or for support. Reputation among other NGOs can open doors or bolt them shut. How an NGO is placed within the ecology of NGOs is a vital part of understanding the function of an NGO.

Both SKA and WaterAid are highly integrated and interactive with other NGOs. They partner with them for programs, for alliances in their advocacy work, or for funding. WaterAid views its main role as being a convener—not only with other NGOs, but with the government as well. They try to bring diverse groups to the table, oftentimes actors with conflicting value sets, such as corporate foundations and activist groups. In their collaborations, SKA is often a source of authority or connection to the manual scavenging community, such as in projects with WaterAid where they act as the community liaison with the manual scavenging community. They also partner with others who have similar value sets to theirs, such as groups that advocate for the Right to Information or for Right to Food, but these

partnerships are often to support causes of democracy and equality more generally. Both SKA's and WaterAid's relationships with other NGOs is active and collaborative.

Sulabh also interacts a great deal with other NGOs, but not as a partner. They consider themselves experts. Their relationships with other NGOs is primarily one way in that they expect NGOs to come to them for expertise or advice, such as the Centre for Science and Environment bringing people to Sulabh for a workshop on biogas and toilet designs. They also interact with other NGOs when it comes to political maneuvering in terms of prestige; they may give awards or accept them from other NGOs. Their reputation among other NGOs is very mixed, with people either respecting Pathak and his work or professionals viewing Sulabh as a corrupt institution.

The nature of their relationships with other NGOs is as defining of an aspect of these NGOs as their activities or their organizational structure. It affects their ability to sway or influence the larger discourse and their relative political power.

Relationships with the government

The respective NGOs' relationships with the government are a key aspect in understanding the NGOs. Sulabh fully endorses the government's activities and is particularly commendatory towards Modi and his government. They expend huge amounts of financial and political resources in maintaining a positive relationship with the government and in making sure that that positive relationship is broadcast through publications and media. Pathak does not believe that the role of NGOs is to criticize the government at all, which has helped Sulabh maintain a positive relationship with the government for years. They hold government contracts and do work for the government; a significant amount of Sulabh's financing comes through these venues, and so it is vital for them not to damage their relationship with the government.

For WaterAid, being in a position to interact and influence the government is vital in working at the country-wide scale they hope to influence. They have decided that the only way they are going to be able to accomplish their goal of complete sanitation coverage for “everyone, everywhere” is to work through the government apparatus. They also believe that sanitation is something that the government should ultimately be responsible for ensuring. However, even while they must maintain their relationship with the government, they take seriously their role in advocating for the marginalized and trying to hold the government accountable. Their relationship with the government is probably best characterized as being a “critical friend.” Publicly, they are moderate in tone towards the government, gently and carefully walking lines of diplomacy, in spite of the fact that privately, many people are fiercely critical of the BJP. WaterAid also tries to challenge the government, pointing out inconsistencies of data and government claims. They are, in many ways, a classic international NGO, acting as nonpolitical technical experts; however, the motivations of the individuals within the organization push them to advocate for more social and political causes as well.

On the surface, SKA seems primarily oppositional to the government. Like WaterAid, they view the government as being ultimately responsible, and they demand accountability. However, unlike the moderate tone that WaterAid strikes, SKA uses sharp, strong language—they demand that the government “stop killing us” and call the deaths of people in sewers are “political murders.” This means that many people in the government and in other NGOs view SKA as being “merely” activists who only criticize.

But a closer examination shows that SKA works a great deal with the government. Their work is through the mechanisms of government, such as lobbying Members of Parliament and filing court cases. They believe that there should be a rational, bureaucratic, legal form of government and democracy—a platonic ideal of government and democracy as outlined in the Ambedkar’s Constitution. But SKA members are fiercely critical of the ways in which the government has deviated from the law. They fight

the ways in which apathy and casteism has penetrated the rational legal systems of the government. Their consistency in values, their representation of the community, and the respect they command as a human rights organization, however, has enabled them to remain a reference and authority on the topic. By *not* moderating their tone, SKA has managed to maintain a “critical friend” status with the government that WaterAid tries for. These different modes of engaging with the government illustrate different ways of being an NGO and different strategies for engaging with an important

Relationship with media

Media is vital for many NGOs to interact with. It enables them to establish reputation, create political power, create alliances, and raise awareness of themselves and their issues. It is where much of the shaping of public discourse takes place.

Both Sulabh and WaterAid have consistent, conscientious, and concerted engagements with the media. They both have media liaisons and media contacts who they use to magnify particular reports or spectacles that are created to gain media attention. They both have active social media presences and a reputation that means that journalists look to them for stories on sanitation.

SKA is more haphazard in their approach. For the most part, they do not create their own materials for distribution, but rather make themselves (and particularly Wilson) available and visible for the media to engage with them. This means that they are not the ones creating their media narrative; the media outlets are the ones who create the narrative. In many ways, this is not a problem; the organization is relatively ideologically homogenous and consistent, especially in regard to the issues of caste and manual scavenging. They are clear in their message, so it is unlikely to be misunderstood. Where this strategy can cause problems, however, is that the government has a predilection for

portraying SKA as far more extreme and oppositional that they end up characterized as “merely” an activist organization who criticizes but offers no solutions.

Private vs. public

The final section of the ethnographic chapters refers to the private versus public transcripts of their work, one of the key themes throughout this work. Building on the previous sections of the respective chapters, I examine whether there are gaps between what the internal workings of the organization and the public-facing narratives they perform. SKA is the most consistent. The people in the office may disagree on particulars, but everyone basically believes in the same set of values and goals. In an organization that is a “movement,” this kind of ideological cohesion is necessary in maintaining the dedication required to work there.

WaterAid, conversely, has to be far more careful navigating the lines of private versus public. They are ideologically heterogenous, with different individuals coming from different backgrounds and with different values and opinions. That heterogeneity enables them to work as a convener, but it also means that public messages can sometimes be inconsistent. There also many people at WaterAid who have more activist inclinations and have a marked dislike and distrust of the current government, but those perspectives are suppressed in order to continue to have a working relationship with the government.

Sulabh’s public transcripts have a significant gap from their private ones. In public, they discuss equality and the liberation of manual scavengers, while their labor practices suggest they may be exploiting those very communities in their work. While they may discuss equality, the organization is markedly hierarchical. These discrepancies are possibly why they expend so much energy and resources into maintaining that public transcript.

The above sections are a summary of the key variables and points of comparison discussed in the three ethnographic chapters. I offered a brief comparison of the organizations in order to emphasize the diversity of cultures, configurations and strategies represented in NGOs that work on sanitation. Now, I will briefly describe the idea of being an “Indian” NGO.

Being “Indian” and public/private

The three NGOs are both similar and different in organizational and structural configurations and the ways in which they negotiate their relationships with different actors. Sulabh and SKA both get characterized as being more “Indian,” in great part because so much of their external presentation and reputation is predicated on performing different kinds of authentic “Indianness.” (See Chapter 1 for a discussion of authenticity.) Sulabh often gets elevated by international groups like WHO and UN agencies as a prime example of what an “Indian” sanitation NGO looks like. Their voice gets privileged because they aggressively perform a particular kind of “Indianness” that gets read as being more authentic. WaterAid, conversely, often gets characterized as being “just” an international organization, and thus not representative of “real” India.

However, to characterize Sulabh as being “more” Indian and WaterAid as not being so is to privilege particular essentialist narratives about India, leaning into Oriental stereotypes (Said 1979). It claims that being Indian looks more like Sulabh than it looks like WaterAid. WaterAid has worked in India since 1986. Everyone in the office is Indian. Decisions are sometimes made in collaboration with WaterAid-International, but most of the funding and power come from within the WaterAid-India office. Sulabh and SKA both also have international ties and influences, but because of an “authentic” Indian presentation that aligns more with Orientalist-inflected ideas of what an Indian organization should look

like, they are characterized as being more Indian. WaterAid-India is also an Indian NGO. All three of the NGOs that I profile are Indian NGOs, and all provide examples of different arguments and strategies of Indian NGOs. The imagined community (Benedict Anderson 2006) they are a part of and representative of is India. And as the interlude at the beginning of this chapter vividly illustrates, there are many Indias. All of these NGOs represent Indian perspectives on India.

WaterAid represents an India that is global, that is middle class, educated, rational, and belonging to and contributing to the scientific community. Sulabh's India is a continuation of a long history, of transforming traditions and maintaining long-held systems of caste and hierarchy. SKA's India is one of the struggle for democracy, and that struggle for democracy is in step with people all over the world. These of course are multiple visions for and of India, and there are multiple visions of what a clean, modern India should look like.

But in discussions of India's sanitation, there is also a tendency to try to collapse what a modern, clean India should be or look like into a single vision. To WaterAid, a modern clean India is equitable and cleans up its shit. People defecate inside in safe and hygienic latrines. They wash their hands. Children do not grow up stunted from fecal-oral disease or die of diarrhea. Transformation of shit is possible through technology and declared safe with biological indicators. India becomes a part of the international discourse of cleanliness that is unhindered by specific "cultural" concerns. Caste becomes a relic of the past, obliterated by a 'rational' mindset that views people more equally. "Indianness" is not a factor in cleanliness; cleanliness is couched in an internationally recognized, scientific, ostensibly culture-neutral discourse.

To Sulabh, a modern clean Indian is one who uses a toilet and who respects people who work in sanitation, like the manual scavengers and Dr. Pathak. Sulabh, and more specifically, Dr. Pathak, through his wisdom and Indian-grown technology, is carrying on the work of Gandhi and is part of a long Indian

history of managing pollution. Purity and pollution do not need to be eliminated as a system; caste does not need to be eliminated as a system. These systems are part of Indian culture. Instead, filthy substances can be transformed into more pure substances. Shit can be transformed into biogas or fertilizer with technology. A biogas flame from human shit can be converted from something profane into something sacred through sandalwood and the endorsement or presence of religious figures or celebrities. A business building latrines and managing public toilets can be converted into a grand social enterprise through narrative building. People can be converted from scavengers into beauticians through education and prayers and the endorsement of Dr. Pathak. People can be converted from Untouchables into Brahmins through prayer and the patronage of upper castes. Systems need to be maintained, but transformation is possible through the infusion of upper caste symbols and people.

To SKA, a modern and clean India will be when caste is eradicated and casteism is scrubbed from people's minds. A modern and clean India will not require people to jump into sewers to clean them, but more importantly, a modern and clean India will not have a caste system that enables the radical dehumanization of people that would allow such a thing to happen. A modern India follows its own laws and holds people accountable for not following them. People are not divided by caste, and no one's identity will be dictated by their association with shit. A clean India involves cleansing caste from the country.

As these three sanitation organizations assert their ideals about a clean India should look like, they are doing so within a complex context, informed by their own organizational goals and needs and in a dense ecological network of other institutions. They are both shaping and are shaped by broader conversations of different actors in the population as India struggles to define for itself what a clean and modern India should be.

These ideas of a modern and clean India are in part public narratives that are a summation and a product of the private processes of these NGOs, described in the ethnographic chapters and summarized here. These NGOs are trying to render public and prominent their particular narratives about sanitation. SKA challenges notions of the hidden, using data and narratives and protests to try to make the centuries-old problem of caste and Untouchability public and prominent. Sulabh uses public narratives to push forward their agenda, to further their orientation of furthering Dr. Pathak's goals and stature. These public narratives help to conceal some of their private practices, such as the inequality in the office and the problematic labor practices that see them employing the very manual scavenging community they claim to help in doing filth-based work.

These divisions of public and private are also fundamental concerns in understanding filth and discards. This dissertation is situated at the intersection of discard studies and the anthropology of global health. The remainder of this chapter explores key questions of those fields through the work of this dissertation.

Discard studies and filth

Discard studies is emerging as its own discipline, pulling in work from psychology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, and history. It is fundamentally interested in questions about what people get rid of, what people avoid, and what people find filthy. As Max Libiron, curator of the online discard studies hub, describes,

The field of discard studies is united by a critical framework that questions premises of what seems normal or given, and analyzes the wider role of society and culture, including social

norms, economic systems, forms of labor, ideology, infrastructure, and power in definitions of, attitudes toward, behaviors around, and materialities of waste, broadly defined (Libiron 2018).

Discard studies takes as a key premise the notion that what is discarded is not inherently “disgusting, harmful, or morally offensive” but is produced by a larger socioeconomic system (Libiron 2018). In this section, I will discuss some of the ways in which this project has contributed to and speaks to key conversations from discard studies.

Most work regarding shit as a public issue that “studies up”—looking at the decision makers—has looked at sanitation and shit historically. It also looks at the ways in which discussions of shit and filth have revealed power dynamics and lines of prejudices, particularly in colonial contexts (Chakrabarti 2015; Arnold 1993; Tolen 1991; Arnold 2016; Appadurai 2001; Warwick Anderson 2006). In his work detailing American sanitation and hygiene initiatives in the Philippines, Anderson writes that, “Experiencing hygiene thus could also be a means of experiencing empire and race. Indeed, racialized agency was constructed and contested in the colonial Philippines more through the projects of hygiene and bodily reform than any other means” (Warwick Anderson 2006:2). In managing bodies and bodily practices, sanitation and hygiene become a classic example of what Foucault calls biopower, “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault 2012b:140). In the colonial context, this control is shot through with fear of the filthy native bodies of “others” (Mann 2007b; Prashad 2001a; Tolen 1991; Doron and Jeffrey 2018; Arnold 1993; Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015; Warwick Anderson 2006).

There have been a few other examples of studying the people who are deploying techniques of biopower through filth in more modern contexts as well. In their work in Venezuela during a cholera outbreak, Briggs and Mantini-Briggs detail similar dynamics of fear and power in the name of disease and hygiene. They describe the government’s efforts to blame the “unsanitary” rural Indians for the

cholera outbreak that threatened the “sanitary citizens” of the cities (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002). Doron and Jeffrey examine this in the context of waste in India, although, importantly, they also ground their analysis in the fact that India’s modern politics around waste reach back and echo the colonial past (Doron and Jeffrey 2018). However, this work is largely sparse and focuses more on systems of infrastructure and governance than systems of filth (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018).

My work is unique in these discussions in two ways: one, the decision makers that I am examining are alive, meaning that I can explore their lifeworlds and decisions with ethnographic techniques that help reveal some of the shades of complexity; and two, I am primarily studying NGOs. NGOs are strange actors in spaces of wastewater and sanitation, sometimes working in the interest of the dominant state (like Sulabh and sometimes WaterAid) and sometimes working against it (like SKA and sometimes WaterAid). LaPorte observed dryly that “Surely the State is the Sewer. Not just because it spews divine law from its ravenous mouth, but because it reigns as the law of cleanliness above its sewers” (Laporte 2002:57). Discussions about sanitation and shit largely privilege the role of the government in implementing sanitation. In the emergence of the early modern sewer systems in Paris and London in the mid to late 19th century, the government was the only one with the wealth and political power to undertake such massive urban projects (Johnson 2006; Barnes 2005; Barnes and Barnes 2006). The sanitation projects of the late 19th century in Europe set a precedent that such massive infrastructure is the purview of the state.

If we examine the context of shit and sanitation management in India, however, we see a range of institutional configurations for managing shit that go far beyond just the government. In this context of “infrastructural disarray,” there are private companies, corporations, private contractors, residential associations, NGOs, and INGOs who are all a part of managing the space of sanitation (Alley, Barr, and Mehta 2018; Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018). Thus studies that only examine sanitation as either a small, private entity or a large public scale one miss out on the influence and activities of the middle players

who do not have the power of the government, but also do not have the positioning of an entirely local actor. This project examines the actors who are engaged with filth and sanitation who are national, but do not have the state's power.

In this section, I will grapple with how the BJP and the NGOs that I studied grapple with notions of filth. First, I will discuss in perspectives on shit, specifically, then caste and Untouchability, before I use those discussions to more broadly speak to engagement with filth and its implications for culture.

Shit

Human shit is a key example of a discard in many societies and cultures. It is sometimes considered a universal disgust elicitor (Angyal 1941). Like drinking water, breathing, or eating, shitting is a human universal. But shit is also a cultural product as well, and as such "its meanings, its management, and its semiotic and material relations to the body change" (Hawkins 2006: 54). Shit is both a public and a private substance. When it leaves the body, it transforms into a public issue (Laporte 2002; Hawkins 2006). This work, however, examines what shit means in public discourses and, particularly, to decision makers who shape how a nation's shit is managed and treated. In the context of SBM, shit takes on different meanings, and different actors—both individual and institutional—make different arguments about what shit is and what its meanings are. This section explores at a most basic level the arguments that these three NGOs make regarding what is shit when it is in a public space and how do they talk about it.

For WaterAid, shit is dealt with primarily as a technical variable. With some exceptions, WaterAid does not engage with the topic on a visceral level that acknowledges the role of bodies. In visual imagery, the audience is not exposed to shit. In both internal and external-facing communication, there is a general paucity of actual images of shit or toilets. The discussion about shit is disembodied,

sanitized, cleaned. Their attitude is analogous to the way in which Western toilets are constructed, where, once created, the shit is “sealed” in water, isolated and distanced in both visual and olfactory terms (Barcan 2010). It becomes no longer a product of body. In WaterAid’s discourse, the object of inquiry and discussion is not so much shit as it is sanitation, a technical term for the management of shit.

Some of the detachment is a function of the medical or technical “gaze” with which they turn to the topic. In Foucault’s work, the medical “gaze” describes the way in which doctors examine patients as detached from their identities as humans (Foucault 2012b). Unsurprisingly, WaterAid levies a similar gaze on the issue of public health. In much of their work, they detach bodies from shit.

Some of this is a way to navigate the repulsiveness and discomfort with the topic that most middle-class individuals have. WaterAid is both comprised mostly of middle- or upper-class individuals who do not need or want to confront the sensory nature of their shit, and their policy level work is also aimed at similar people. They want to work with the government and corporate actors, not confront or distance them. To engage with shit as a topic of both your own body as well as a public problem is to make the problem intimate, personal, and massively uncomfortable. WaterAid’s strategy of being a “critical friend” and convener of actors relies on avoiding confrontational and repulsive tactics to discuss sanitation. To make sanitation technical is to make it safer for public discussion. To even discuss sanitation, historically, is to be daring enough.

But rendering of sanitation as a technical, detached topic is a privilege of a middle and upper class who often live in places where they can “flush and forget,” where the products of their own bodies do not need to be confronted. This mirrors the relationship that Anderson describes of American colonists in the Philippines thought of and portrayed their own bodies during their efforts to manage the bodies of the Filipinos:

White Americans talk, write, report, police, supervise servants, hunt, fish, and fight: but after reading the medical documents produced in the Philippines in the first decade of the century, one suspects they rarely, if ever, went to the toilet. Whatever happened to their lower bodily functions? These retentive colonialists seem to imagine themselves to have achieved a sort of transcendence of the natural body. American bodies become abstracted from the filthy exuberance of the tropics, represented as truly civilized models for the Filipinos (Anderson 2006:111).

Through science, through the lens of technical expertise, through financial privilege that translates to bodily privilege of safe defecation, the individuals in the organization are allowed to “transcend” their own functions. Similar to colonial narratives in both American Philippines and British India, in modern India, shitting is something that the poor, the marginalized, and the exotic do. This is in part highlighted by the simple linguistic norm of saying that people “practice” open defecation, as if it was a strange and unique cultural practice, but the people who create policies are never described as “practicing” “closed” defecation. In the 19th century, these dividing lines were between the British and the Indians; now, these dividing lines are along caste, class, and power. Poor, uneducated Indians of lower classes and castes are the ones with the bodily functions. Theirs are the ones whose bodies become a subject of public discourse. The powerful, the policymakers, the politicians are allowed to conceal their functions, to keep them and their bodies private.

There are different ways to render the private acts into parts of public discourse. When WaterAid talks about shit, they do so in an upbeat tone. Stories focus on the positive. Colors are bright. Photos are of people smiling, perhaps standing in front of a finished latrine building. Or they may use a photo of a clean toilet pan to illustrate the story. It is a cause for celebration, a story of empowerment or of people taking control over their lives.

WaterAid often will frame shit as connected to a broader and more ‘appealing’ topic, such as economy, politics or history. As one media person described it, “things that will actually interest people.” They operate on the assumption that shit is repulsive and uninteresting, and so to obviate this, they may frame their discussions or blogposts around a topic that they view as more compelling and more socially acceptable for people to talk about.

The other means by which they frame the topic is as a scientific or technical variable, measured in terms of “fecal coliform,” “feces,” or “fecal contamination.” “Feces” is a medico-scientific rendering of the concept (George 2009). By discussing shit in these terms, it is putting it on par as an environmental pollutant, disembodied and detached from bodies—particularly the bodies of the people who are creating these reports and narratives.

The other way in which shit is discussed in WaterAid’s policy and national level work is with euphemisms such as “poo,” as during their “poo-free Ganga” campaign which followed a paddle boarder who travelled down the length of the Ganga River, promoting an open defecation free (ODF) Ganga basin. “Poo” is a childish term and places discussions of shit as being something infantile, perhaps mildly funny. It renders sanitation as something humorous, something kids do or talk about, instead of a horrific situation.

Switching between different ways of talking about sanitation is yet another way in which WaterAid’s messaging and values systems are heterogenous and changeable depending on the audience that they are trying to engage with. However, none of their language or engagement with shit is confrontational, filthy, or repulsive; it is not meant to drive away people but to bring them into an upbeat discourse. Technical numbers of morbidity and mortality emphasize human costs but allow the viewer to retain a certain amount of detachment from the issue.

WaterAid mirrors the broader language of the international WASH sector when it comes to sanitation. A health-oriented, technical framing that does not engage with the animal nature of shit. Instead, in an attempt to frame it in a way that is appealing to the middle- and upper-class people who they try to appeal to, they maintain distance, framing the issue technically or humorously and in upbeat terms.

While Sulabh engages in other activities, the focus of their identity is the management of human shit. The management of human shit historically has been associated with lower castes, with low prestige, repulsion. In order for Sulabh to be accepted as a positive organization, to be well-regarded and respected, to have international standing, they have had to frame their work as being prestigious and important. Thus in their work, they need to reframe the management of shit as an ennobling enterprise.

The tour they take all of their visitors on reflects how they frame sanitation. The tour starts with the assembly and prayer, where through the combination of the Hindi prayers, the effusive welcomes, the shawls and garlands, you are immediately placed as being at an *Indian* organization—they perform a kind Indian authenticity. (For a discussion of how I use “authenticity,” see Chapter 2.) From there, you are whisked away by efficient and well-practiced tour guides.

First stop is the school, where you see children (60% of whom are the children of manual scavengers, the principal will tell you) and adults undergoing vocational training in beauty, typing, or tailoring. You stop in the Sulabh Sanitation Club room, where they show you how they make pads. By starting their tour school, they frame the issue in terms of *people* and in terms of the organization itself. Sulabh, Dr. Pathak, and the people he has helped are your first exposure to the topic, *not* shit or statistics. You start the tour in a positive frame of mind, with positive images of children learning and

women transforming their lives. Only after this is shit introduced in the form of the museum, the toilet models, the public restroom Sulabh operates, and the biogas plant.



Figure 24: A wastewater recycling plant at the Sulabh headquarters (Author photo).

The museum, in particular, is a key piece of their narrative production for the many visitors. It is a relatively small, crowded room, packed with hundreds of items and plaques regarding toilets. Like a lot of Sulabh's narrative, the museum itself feels somewhat haphazard, where plaques describing the drains of Mohenjo Daro are crammed next to a faded photo of two men walking to the fields with water with the caption, "Open Defecation – *Social Curse*." Glass cases display ornately decorated toilets from Victorian-era Europe. As you move further along, there are cartoons about toilets, a novelty greeting card, and a framed magazine article describing how Ben Affleck gave his then-girlfriend Jennifer Lopez a \$105,000 gem-encrusted portable toilet cover to use when she was out and about because she refused to use public toilets. Integrated throughout the museum are information and images of Sulabh and Dr. Pathak, such as pictures of the Swachh Rath (a Sulabh van used for promoting sanitation at events), a

model of the Sulabh latrine, and photos of Dr. Pathak receiving an award from Pope John Paul II. Each visitor to the museum receives a tour from one of the several docents, whose verbal narrative enforces the built one.

The museum tells a story that sanitation is as part of the human experience as any other basic need, that it has a long and storied history that should be respected. As the curator explains it, toilets are what separates us from animals, are what mark “civilization.” Sanitation and toilets should not be a gross thing that is shameful to own and discuss but deserve a place of pride. As such, they should be treated with respect. The topic should be approached with humor, with respect, with joy.



Figure 25: The International Museum of Toilets at Sulabh headquarters (Author photo)

But what Sulabh’s museum narrative also emphasizes is that sanitation has a long history *in India*. Far from promoting or privileging a narrative in which the “West” figured out sanitation sometime in the 19th century and India is now trying to catch up, which is common in international development overall, Sulabh begins the story of sanitation with the drains of Mohenjo Daro and Lothal of the Indus Valley Civilization. Other plaques describe “toilet etiquette,” as dictated by the ancient Hindu text the *Manusmriti*, which describe how those who are remaining celibate or are pursuing a saintly life need to

manage and adhere to the rules of urination and defecation more strongly than others. For everyone though, the right hand was to hold the water pot, and the left hand was to be used for cleaning. In this narrative, sanitation and cleanliness is a long part of Indian history and culture. Through this museum, they have built a history of sanitation, they have built a long and noble and international history of the topic and then they place themselves as an integral part of it. They have created a context and a story in which they themselves are the culmination. And perhaps more importantly, they have firmly placed this as being an *Indian* story, as being associated with good and noble pieces of Indian history. This kind of narrative pushes their identity as an *Indian* organization and appeals to nationalist sentiments. Strangely absent from the Museum's story, however, is the topic of manual scavenging in India.

Sulabh also tries to elevate sanitation by contrasting sacred and profane, pure and polluted by using traditional Brahmanical Hindu symbols. They invite religious leaders to view their toilets and greet them with the blow of a conch shell, which invokes the god Vishnu and purifies an area. Sulabh staff or guests will throw sandalwood shavings, associated with bringing one closer to the divine, on a fire generated by gas from human fecal waste during public spectacles. They drape marigolds, an auspicious flower, over toilets for special visitors or events. They cook food with the feces-generated biogas, and a common photo opportunity is to ask a prestigious guest to be photographed frying a *pappadam* over a biogas stove. These are intentional juxtapositions of shit and food, of profane and sacred. Like cow dung can purify the impure in Hinduism, Sulabh purifies its topic by the invocation and use of purifying agents. These symbols are in the language of Brahmanical Hinduism that are being used to elevate, purify, and transform sanitation and, by association, Sulabh.

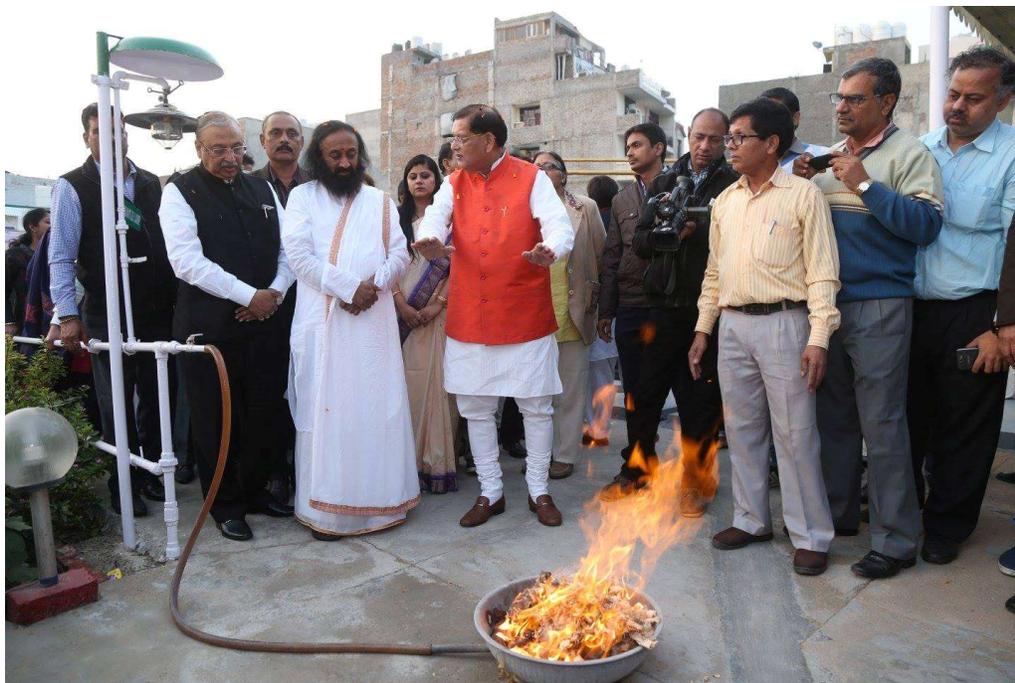


Figure 26: Controversial religious figure Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Dr. Pathak looking at a fire fueled by biogas and sprinkled with sandalwood shavings (Photo courtesy Sulabh International).



Figure 27: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar frying a pappadam over a biogas stove (photo courtesy Sulabh International).

Sulabh also tells people that their transformed shit is not disgusting by appealing to senses, demonstrating that the shit—once it is transformed through their processes or technology—lacks the texture or odor of shit. They show visitors balls of human shit and suggest they may be good toys for children. They invite visitors to smell the water that comes out of their wastewater recycling plant and observe that there is no odor. They once commissioned a team of Mexican artists to make a sculpture out of human shit that came out of one of their twin pit latrines (Sulabh Sanitation Movement n.d.:120). Sulabh invites visitors to buy into the idea that shit can be transformed into something non-repulsive. At no point do they ever try to lean into the notion of shit as repulsive in order to elicit a response; this is something that is taken for granted, and their narrative seeks to mute or transform that disgust response.

SKA's perspectives on shit is that it *is* polluting and that it is both a technical problem and a repulsive substance. Unlike Sulabh, they are not interested in trying to transform the substance. Their engagement with shit is often visceral, because their community's engagement with it is. Shit is described in repulsive detail, because this repulsion is a prominent and visceral symptom of the oppressive structure they are in. In an affidavit in their 2003 Supreme Court case, Ramrakhi, who had been cleaning toilets since she was 10, testified, "The gas emitted by the shit has spoilt my eyes, and my hands and feet also swell. It sticks to my hands and makes me nauseous" (Mander 2016). In Wilson's speeches, he describes women carrying shit in baskets on their heads, and when it rains, the shit drips down on their face.

This image is intimately sensory—it is about shit running in rivulets down face, down the mouth where one eats. When representatives of SKA—whether Wilson or any of the other members of the organization—tell stories about sanitation, their stories are about the odor and the stench, a palpable presence of a gas, spoiling bodies and selves. They talk about how people are forced to climb into sewers where they drown in shit or suffocate on the thick gases from waste. They talk about the

suffering of serving their children food with the same hands they use to scrape out dry latrines. They do not elide, hide, or try to change the narrative around shit. To them, shit is disgusting and dangerous and repulsive, and their engagement is both a symptom of and a means of perpetuating their oppression.

SKA is not concerned with whether shit can be transformed into something useful. They do not even concern themselves particularly with the safe disposal of it. They continually resist and criticize efforts to perpetuate the idea that shit is not polluting and that sanitary work is noble. Through speaking out at WASH conferences to criticizing the images of politicians sweeping or scooping out dry latrines, SKA points out that without addressing fundamental caste prejudices, these kinds of narratives will only perpetuate, validate or conceal actions which they view as oppression, as slavery, as violence towards their community.

One of the key issues that is being grappled with here is whether shit is “waste.” The Oxford Living Dictionary defines it (in part) as “unwanted or unusual material, substances, or by-products” (Oxford Dictionary 2019). To Sulabh, shit is not waste. It has potential to be transformed and reused. It is a resource. SKA, conversely, is skeptical of any arguments about transformation because those narratives often disguise continued oppression of their community. WaterAid tries to acknowledge both realities in their work, engaging in the horror of manual scavenging but also trying to maintain shit as an ostensibly nonpolitical technical variable.

To deal with shit solely as a technical variable is to elide the social meanings of shit. WaterAid tries to incorporate the social meanings of shit through their work with manual scavenging groups and discussions of and work with disability rights. However, those engagements must be framed as upbeat and popular in order to not alienate other actors who are potential allies and funders. Alienation would prevent them from carrying out their role as conveners.

These three NGOs also represent a range of ways to talk about shit. Sulabh and WaterAid try to create positive affect around waste, creating positive images. For WaterAid, this is to help get more actors involved and interested in talking about and dealing with the problem. For Sulabh, it is about ensuring their prominence and good reputation. SKA does want to create positive narratives around shit because it will, more likely than not, just end up harming their community in the end as it will elide their suffering. In making shit seem like a positive substance, it threatens to make sanitation work and manual scavenging seem like a great and noble job, an idea that SKA aggressively combats.

The narrative that the work of a manual scavenger originates with Gandhi, who wrote that the work of a manual scavenger is like that of a mother cleaning her child (Swachh Bharat, M.K. Gandhi and the Manual Scavengers 2017). The idea that cleaning up shit is noble work has been echoed by more modern figures as well. In his unreleased biography⁶³, Prime Minister Modi wrote that “I do not believe that they (Valmiks) have been doing this job just to sustain their livelihood. Had this been so, they would not have continued with this type of work generation after generation.”

At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their (Valmiks’) duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and the Gods; that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by Gods; and that this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries. This should have continued generation after generation. It is impossible to believe that their ancestors did not have the choice of adopting any other work or business (Shah 2007:n. qtd in).

The Prime Minister wrote that manual scavenging is a divinely ordained job, and that manual scavengers must have realized that this is a divine job and “spiritual activity,” or otherwise why would this caste

⁶³ Modi wrote this biography and distributed it to a group of politicians. One shared it with a journalist friend, who then leaked excerpts to the public. The book was never released because of electoral codes of conduct (Shah 2007).

community continue to do the work? In this narrative, Modi echoes the Gandhian notions that manual scavenging is spiritual work. He attributes the continuation of it not to oppressive structures, but to the choice of the manual scavenger community. While this sentiment was articulated by Modi, it is a widespread idea, particular in SBM discourse, where images abound of “saluting the soldiers of sanitation” through giving of awards or public photo opportunities of government officials or celebrities emptying out latrine pits. In this viewpoint, shared by the government, media outlets, many NGOs, and corporate actors, the work of sanitation is crucial and altruistic act of a community who chooses to do this work. In these narratives, the repulsive nature of shit is elided and erased. The structural factors by which certain marginalized segments predominantly do this work are ignored.

In summary, Sulabh sees sanitation as positive and noble and shit as transformable. WaterAid tries to make shit a positive topic of conversation and handles it primarily as a technical variable. SKA sees shit as a filthy irredeemable substance. These perspectives are produced and influenced by their respective underlying organizational goals and orientations and inflected by their material circumstances. How these perspectives more broadly point to notions of filth will be discussed at the end of this section.

Each of these organizations also have specific perspectives on people-as-filth, or Untouchability and manual scavenging.

Untouchability, “discarded people”, and the labor of sanitation

There is a theme and notion in social science work that denotes the idea of *people* as a kind of a waste, “often as a condition of colonialism, modernity, and capitalism” (McFann n.d.). In these discussions, there are a range of ways to refer to this, as such as “discarded people” (Desmond 1971), “disposable people” (Bales 2012), “garbaged” bodies (Scanlan 2005), “wasted humans” (Bauman 2013), and “waste

populations” (Beck 2009). The idea is that not only do particular materials become waste, but particular groups of people or populations become so as well. The notions of people as waste can be physical, like being displaced from their homes (Roy 2015); social, as in becoming social outcasts (Ambedkar and Roy 2014); or biological, as in being exposed to the health hazards that no one else wants to deal with.

Literature on environmental health has particularly focused on that final aspect. Sociology and anthropology of environmental health talk about the ways in which marginalized groups of people are at significantly more risk of being exposed to different kinds of waste and toxics (Petryna 2013; Bullard 2000; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009; Auyero and Swistun 2009; Spears 2014). As Petryna describes in her study of citizens exposed to radiation after the Chernobyl meltdown, the position of being marginalized and subject to different toxic wastes forces people into a kind of “biological citizenship,” in which they are continually negotiating exposure to toxics and their relationship with powerful interests, such as corporations and the state (Petryna 2013). Most work in social sciences has focused on toxic chemicals (as in industrial runoff) or solid waste.

In the South Asian context, the notion of people as waste tends to usually be viewed first and foremost through the caste system. Caste and waste have long been of interest to scholars of South Asia, as described in the Introduction (Lynch 1969; Mines and Lamb 2010; Mines 2005; Channa and Mencher 2013; Omvedt 2006; Prashad 2001a; Ambedkar and Roy 2014). In their recent work, *Waste of a Nation*, Doron and Jeffrey describe the lives of garbage and waste pickers and the ways in which not only does India generate waste, but also a class of people who become seen as waste as well (Doron and Jeffrey 2018). Others have been active in portraying the lifeworlds of manual scavengers who deal with

human fecal waste from an intimate perspective (Sagar 2017; Singh 2014; Gita 2011). In their work, they emphasize the links between caste and manual scavenging.⁶⁴

In the case of manual scavenging and Untouchability, we have a group of people who are considered “waste people.” This places them at significant physical and biological risk from their work and the toxics of unprotected sanitation work (Sagar 2017; Narayanan, Ashish Mittal, and Sowmyaa Bharadwaj 2014; Human Rights Watch 2014; Barr 2017; Barr 2019). In the case of sanitation labor and manual scavenging, it is necessary to integrate work from both discard studies and caste studies in order to understand manual scavenging/sanitation work and the ways in which it produces “humans as waste” who are at risk of not only the violence and stigma of the caste system, but grave physical and biological harm.

In the era of SBM, when so much political, social and economic capital have been invested by prominent actors—most notably the Government of India and Modi himself—into making SBM successful, there is an extra salience in how different actors treat caste and sanitation labor in this politicized space. The Government of India and the BJP, SKA, Sulabh, and WaterAid all have different approaches to addressing the intersections of caste and sanitation that are informed by not only the broader political moment, but the internal workings and values of the organization itself.

The BJP and the Government of India have a fundamentally upper-caste, Hindu viewpoint (Jaffrelot 2015a; Jaffrelot 2015b; Jaffrelot 2013; Mishra 2014; Slater 2018; Khair 2015) that believes that “India is in essence a Hindu nation and that minorities, especially Muslims, may live in India only if they acknowledge this” (Dalrymple 2014). To the BJP, the filth they want to eliminate are Muslims, Dalits, and

⁶⁴ However, it is important to note that in the experiences of SKA (as discussed through interviews and observation) and, that it is not only Dalits who do the work of manual scavenging, but other marginalized people, such as migrant laborers. Even if they are not Dalits, through their work of manual scavenging, they become socially stigmatized and ostracized. Their work makes them discarded, and their social status also makes them a discarded people. However, historically, and dominantly, most of the people doing the work of

anyone they label as “anti-nationalist,” which includes everyone from NGOs to journalists. The increasing rates of violence against Dalits and minorities (Pradhan 2019; Human Rights Watch 2018; Gettleman and Raj 2018) since the election have indicated in part that point out that Dalits are themselves considered filth that the BJP would like to eliminate or cast out. Their vision of Indian culture is based in a fundamentalist Hindutva perspective that tries to ‘clean’ away foreign influences—at least this is what their public discourse states.⁶⁵ However, much of their casteist rhetoric tends to be at least somewhat concealed.

In their discussions of sanitation labor, the GOI often valorize people who do sanitation work, calling them “foot soldiers” of sanitation, as they did during a press event to launch the Swachh Survekshan (“Cleanliness survey”) on August 6th, 2016. At this event, the Minister of Urban Development Venkaiah Naidu bestowed awards on several municipal employees, including one who had ‘never missed a day’s work in 15 years.’ On July 31, 2016, the Swachh Bharat Urban account (@SwachhBharatGov) tweeted a photo of municipal employee women sweeping with the text, “Every morning, when you wake up to clean streets and surrounding [sic], thank those mortal angels! Let’s salute all the sanitation workers spread across the nation! They are the backbone of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.”

At a large religious festival called the Prayag Kumbh Mela, Modi was filmed washing the feet of several sanitation workers. In Indian tradition, one touches the feet of someone you respect. Washing feet, however, comes from Christian symbolism, as when Christ washed the feet of his apostles. This

⁶⁵ The BJP’s actual relationship with foreign influences is far more complex. As described in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, they have rescinded the foreign funding licenses of many NGOs and revoked the licenses to operate of INGOs like Greenpeace and the Ford Foundation. However, BJP politicians also have put into effect a law that enables political parties to receive donations from Indians living abroad and foreign companies. This law is retroactive, meaning that past donations cannot be scrutinized either. Ironically, the same law—the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act—is the same one that the government uses to harass NGOs as has legalized donations to political parties (Saberin 2018).

gesture is meant to demonstrate humility and respect. Modi then followed this photographed act by speaking of how the workers at the Mela had done such wonderful and amazing work to keep the place clean (deSouza 2019).

In his unreleased biography⁶⁶, Prime Minister Modi wrote that “I do not believe that they (Valmiks) have been doing this job just to sustain their livelihood. Had this been so, they would not have continued with this type of work generation after generation.”

At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their (Valmiks’) duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and the Gods; that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by Gods; and that this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries. This should have continued generation after generation. It is impossible to believe that their ancestors did not have the choice of adopting any other work or business (Shah 2007:n. qtd in).

The Prime Minister wrote that manual scavenging is a divinely ordained job, and that manual scavengers must have realized that this is a divine job and “spiritual activity,” or otherwise why would this caste community continue to do the work? The narrative that the work of a manual scavenger is noble originates with Gandhi, who wrote that the work of a manual scavenger is like that of a mother cleaning her child (Swachh Bharat, M.K. Gandhi and the Manual Scavengers 2017). In this narrative, Modi echoes the Gandhian notions that manual scavenging is spiritual work. He attributes the continuation of it not to oppressive structures, but to the choice of the manual scavenger community. The difficulties of sanitation work—the social stigma, the violence, the illnesses and deaths—are elided, subverted into a notion that they are serving Mother India.

⁶⁶ Modi wrote this biography and distributed it to a group of politicians. One shared it with a journalist friend, who then leaked excerpts to the public. The book was never released because of electoral codes of conduct (Shah 2007).

SKA often is actively combating these narratives in their own media appearances and speeches.

Bezwada Wilson's response to Modi's quote was scathing:

How can it be a spiritual experience to lift someone's excreta with your own hands? A PM, for that matter any human being, should not talk like this. He must understand that there are people who are coming out and burning their baskets. It is a caste-based occupation imposed on us. It is violence on us. Some people said make him do manual scavenging to make him understand what it was like. I said I don't wish it on Narendra Modi even because it is so cruel. I don't know if he is innocent or arrogant in making this statement but I don't want to ask him (Abhimanyu Singh 2016).

SKA does not accept the narrative that cleaning is heroic work and does not accept the narrative that sanitation is ennobling and that sanitation work is anything other than a 'violence' done to their community. Wilson's quote, too, points to both the fact that this oppression is a symptom of systemic oppression and that there are women who are actively resisting this life by burning baskets. This latter, in particular, contrasts with Sulabh's narratives about the community's more passive reception of this life. For SKA, the handling of shit cannot be described as *not* disgusting.

SKA fully and politically grapples with the notion of caste. They see caste as integral to the problems of the nation and to sanitation, and they resist any narratives that try to erase from or lessen caste issues in the conversation. They advocate for a secular, anti-caste perspective, an "annihilation" of caste, as articulated by Ambedkar.

SKA declares itself very strongly as an Ambedkarite organization. During marches or in the offices as a form of greeting, they often say "Jai Bhim," or "Hail Ambedkar." (Bhim is Ambedkar's first name.) Their meetings with the community often focus significantly with promoting Ambedkarian thought. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar advocated for the "annihilation" of caste and India being established

as a secular nation, divorced from Hinduism. Ambedkar's perspective has always been seen as more radical in the sense that he did not advocate for simply modifying existing systems or lessening their damage, but erasing those systems of hierarchy by which people are divided into types.

For SKA, caste is central to sanitation and the struggles. They often describe how 90% of the people doing sanitation work are Dalits, and even among Dalits, those who do sanitation work are stigmatized. They are a group that is organized around the notion of eradicating caste systems of hierarchy. They are unabashed in their engagement with it and make it a central topic of their public and private narratives.

Like SKA, Sulabh also engages very directly with caste. is a central part of their narrative and public image. According to all of their public materials and website, Sulabh's main mission is the "emancipation of manual scavengers." All of their other work, including the building of twin pit latrines, is in service to this end. Dr. Pathak's role in "ending Untouchability" and eliminating manual scavenging forms the cornerstone of Sulabh's reputation as a positive social force.

In 2003, Sulabh established manual scavenger rehabilitation centers called "Nai Disha" or "New Paradigm" (Timeline of Sulabh History n.d.). These centers are in Delhi and in the Rajasthani cities of Alwar and Tonk. At these centers, former dry latrine cleaners are given training in trades such as beauty work, weaving, embroidery, and cooking. These women are present in nearly every public-facing event, video, or publication. They feature prominently in media coverage.

Visually, the former scavengers are easy to spot at Sulabh and Sulabh-associated events. They are usually wearing blue saris, perhaps with sequins on them, or, in recent years, saffron-colored saris. At events, they may hand gifts to guests, perform a song or dance, or just stand in the background for photos. When Dr. Pathak travelled to Bangalore to do a TedX talk, he brought several of these women

with him.⁶⁷ When a VIP comes to visit the campus, Sulabh buses in some number, depending on the size of the event and the importance of the visitor. In 2008, Dr. Pathak brought them to New York to a UN conference, where they performed a fashion show. Visitors are offered the chance to visit Alwar, their largest manual scavenger rehabilitation and training center, 3 hours away from Delhi, where you will see women sew bags, get beauty training, or make foodstuffs. They appear in the *Hasna Mera Kaam* music video, sitting and clapping along to the music while sitting in a boat in Varanasi. Dr. Pathak has brought the women to holy places that are usually closed to Untouchables, from Hindu temples to the *ghats* (steps leading to a river) in Varanasi.

Sometimes, the women are asked to speak, particularly Usha Chaumar, who was declared president of the Sulabh Society. But usually, they are silent witnesses and testimonies to Dr. Pathak and his work. Dr. Pathak's work and focus on manual scavengers is a significant part of his image, of creating the idea that is a social reformer. Literature I collected from Sulabh has called him everything from a "great liberator" of the manual scavengers to a "Messiah of the Untouchables." This is the work which has probably garnered him the most praise in media and in the international community and lends moral authority to everything he does. Narratively, the work with manual scavengers elevates the whole organization. Sulabh is not merely an organization that builds toilets, but a social reform movement. By pushing the idea that their primary mission is to liberate manual scavengers, it ennobles the entire organization.

The idea though, is that Dr. Pathak, a Brahmin, has "liberated" these women. It is through *his* wisdom, beneficence, and actions that these women have been elevated from the work of manual scavenging and saved from Untouchability. In one Sulabh flier, he has "fulfilled the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi by restoring the human rights and dignity of the Untouchables and brought them into the

⁶⁷ For the video, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r24_2p9TKFw (Pathak 2017a).

mainstream of society on par with others.” In an article in *The Parliamentarian*, a magazine owned by Sulabh, Dr. Pathak is called a “guardian angel of the downtrodden.” He is the named character in this narrative, he is the protagonist whose actions drive the story of the liberation of these women forward. As described in the *Leadership* section of Chapter 3, the story of the liberation of the manual scavengers is that of a Brahmin who came to be interested in the Untouchables, and then, through his own acts and vision and inspiration from Gandhi, liberated the scavengers. Dr. Pathak invented the technology—the twin pit latrine—that enabled these women to stop manual scavenging. Dr. Pathak ideated and brought about events that demonstrated their social acceptability, such as dinner events where they ate with high ranking government officials; dining together is considered a massive taboo in terms of caste. He brought in pandits to teach the women Sanskrit prayers and verses, “converting them to Brahmins,” in the words of one of the women. In an offhand comment at a Sulabh media event, a local BJP official summarized the narrative that Sulabh is putting forth in their caste work: ‘Brahmins started Untouchability, and it is a Brahmin that is ending it.’

At the center of the narrative is the notion that upper class or upper caste individuals are bringing these people into the “social mainstream” or “socially upgrading” them. They are not achieving this through their own power or initiative; they are doing so because of Dr. Pathak and the guests and upper class and caste people who are guests at these events. In the cases of shit as a topic, shit as a substance, and the former manual scavengers, they have all been cleansed and purified through the blessing and infusion of those with political power (guests and Dr. Pathak), the power of technology (twin pit), and sacred symbols (Brahmanical ceremonies).

The idea that one can transform or elevate manual scavengers or shit is a challenge to the way in which purity/pollution hierarchies are usually constructed (Dumont 1981; Lynch 1969; Srinivas 1952; Srinivas 1996; Douglas 1966), but Dr. Pathak is not challenging the *idea* of the hierarchy. The hierarchy is maintained; the idea that there are polluting people and different castes is maintained. When the

former manual scavengers were liberated, the narrative propagated was not that caste does not matter and that they should not be considered to have a caste, but that a Brahmin and other powerful people have elevated their caste.

Publicly, these women have not transcended their identity; they do not blend into society, they do not even blend into Sulabh, as they are always wearing their sari uniforms that visually set them apart. They are not liberated to be independent, casteless human beings. Liberation is about no longer cleaning out dry latrines, but still being under the patronage of a Brahmin. While the women of the training center of Alwar are said to be economically liberated, these women are actually under the direct employ of Sulabh. Sulabh gives them a salary. The products they create ostensibly turn a profit, but only because Sulabh pays for the rent of the building, travel, transport, utilities, and the stipends of the women. And it is common to see that many of these products are sold and used in great part by Sulabh itself. Fundamentally, what Sulabh is pushing is not a casteless narrative, but one in which an upper caste individual, through his own beneficence, reaches down to “liberate” and “elevate” the Untouchables. The notion of being liberated or elevated here means to take on characteristics of upper caste individuals, to perform certain sacred rituals or to walk among certain elevated individuals. This belief that caste divisions need to be maintained in Indian society is not just a strategic public production, but actually reflects inner values.

In my discussions with him, Dr. Pathak has said that the caste system is inevitable and necessary. He has told a reporter that scavengers tell him that they are descended from Brahmins. He has also said this is true because scavengers are ‘very handsome and beautiful, unlike other lower castes. They have a very nice complexion.’ Complexion and fairness of skin is stereotypically associated with upper caste Indians. The problem is not high castes, he told me, the problem is that there are low castes. Inequality and disrespect of the low castes is the problem, not caste itself. When I asked him whether caste is

necessary at all, citing Ambedkar, he told me that he “endorses” Ambedkar, but without caste, “What other system is there to classify people?” he asked me.

This notion of empowerment, of liberation, like Gandhi himself, is consumable, acceptable to a broader political audience. Sulabh’s narrative may challenge the outward notions of caste—the injunctions against eating together, dry latrine cleaning, and such—but it is not fundamentally challenging the notion of caste. It does not question why caste exists. The women of Alwar and Tonk are liberated, but they are only liberated to the extent that they are now under the protection and power of another Brahmin. They are dependent upon him for social acceptance and money. Their voices, their narratives of their own struggles are elided by the grander narrative of Sulabh and Dr. Pathak.

In the Sulabh campus courtyard, there are three statues (**Error! Reference source not found.**): to one side is Ambedkar, so poorly rendered as to be barely recognizable as such, except for the fact he is holding a copy of what I assume is the Indian Constitution, which he wrote. In the center is a far more recognizable but anemic-looking Gandhi, with his trademark dhoti and walking stick. To his left is a nameless manual scavenger woman, carrying a metal tin on her head. She is nearly colorless except for a few splashes of red on her bangles, lips, nails and *tadka*, highlighting her bleak and unsettling expression. The tin is adorned with crudely painted X, which someone told me is to show that they do not want this anymore. Every holiday or event that they celebrate at the Sulabh office, Dr. Pathak and his guests or family members will garland and bow to these three statues. It is not possible to get the garland around the tin on her head, so the garlands dangle drunkenly off the tin.



Figure 28: Statues of Ambedkar, Gandhi, and a woman manual scavenger at Sulabh campus (Author photo).

The way that Sulabh defines manual scavenging as an organization is illustrated by the statue of the woman, the “traditional” mode of manual scavenging: the dry latrine cleaner, a group of mostly women who scrape out what are fundamentally shit holes with hand tools and carry the shit on their heads in a basket or tin. In the Introduction, I discussed in greater detail the different kinds of manual scavenging recognized by law: sweeping and scraping railway tracks, cleaning of many public restrooms, sewer cleaning, and drain cleaning. However, individuals at Sulabh in private conversations and the public discourse that the organization puts forth is that the only type of manual scavenging that they recognize as an organization and seek to redress is dry latrine cleaning. This narrowness of their definition is often shared in the sector, with many professionals still believing that manual scavenging only refers to dry latrine cleaning. In Sulabh, this has active ramifications in their treatment and concerns with people who work for them.

On a startlingly hot February day, Sulabh made a media spectacle of cleaning out a pond next to a *mandir*, or Hindu temple. The water was black and fetid, and the stench hung over it like something tangible. You could not see the bottom even though the water was no more than waist deep. Sulabh employees and school children swept around the pond. Dr. Pathak put on rain pants, jacket and galoshes and waded into the pond himself, surrounded by several similarly-clad employees. To the clicking of a hundred photos from media—both Sulabh’s photographers and external media—he used a long-handled net to scoop a layer of duckweed off of the top (Figure 29). After the photo opportunity, Dr. Pathak left the pond, showered, and changed, then returned to drink buttermilk with the local government officials.



Figure 29: Dr. Pathak wades into the water of the pond they are cleaning for a photo opportunity (Author photo).



Figure 30: Workers without protection continue the work after Dr. Pathak and the cameras leave (Author photo).

Other men continued the work of cleaning the fetid pond. Unlike the employees in the photographs, they waded through the black pond in nothing but t-shirts, shorts, and flip flops (Figure 30). I was sick with quenched rage, but I framed my question mildly. “Sir,” I asked Dr. Pathak, “I was wondering why some of the cleaners in the pond do not have protective equipment.”

“They’re habituated to the water,” he said.

At the time, I did not want to argue that point, so I took a different tack. “But they’re just wearing flip flops,” I said. “What if there is glass or something sharp?”

“You are 100% right,” he said. “Next time, they will have protective equipment.”

This idea that drain cleaners or sewer workers are somehow “used” to the waste or are at less biological risk than anyone else is common amongst the population overall, even among sanitation professionals. But it also speaks to a narrowness of Sulabh’s mission in regard to manual scavenging.

Absent from their sphere of concern, from their discussions or programmatic efforts are any other kinds of manual scavenging other than women cleaning out dry latrines. In part, this can be a reflection of their ideological origins: Sulabh claims to take inspiration from Gandhi, and Gandhi's concern was with dry latrine cleaners, not sewer workers (Roy 2017).

Part of this, however, at least, is political, or at least has political implications. Nearly all actors can agree that dry latrine cleaning is bad and needs to simply be eradicated. Dry latrines are inadequate in terms of sanitation and in terms of performing modernity, and they need to be destroyed and replaced. Manual scavenging of dry latrines is an easy, uncomplicated political target; the other types of scavenging that fall under the 2013 Act are far more controversial and far more widespread. They are far more difficult and expensive to address. The other types of manual scavenging are more likely to be the responsibility of municipalities, cities, and other powerful actors. To eliminate unsafe sewer and open drain cleaning requires a significant financial investment and often the restructuring of systems.

Sulabh has not taken up these other causes. Sulabh has not come out to advocate for sewer workers, and Dr. Pathak served as the cleanliness brand ambassador of the Ministry of Railways, which activists claim is one of the largest employers of manual scavengers in the country (Moyna 2015). In narrowing their gaze towards only dry latrine cleaners, they can get the benefit of appearing to be manual scavenger activists—the positive reputation as a beneficent organization taking on a uniquely Indian problem—without alienating potential allies or clients, such as the government, corporations, or the less political NGOs.

Sulabh also benefits from this relatively narrow definition financially and legally. As discussed in Chapter 3, Sulabh runs a significant cleaning service, engaging in cleaning and maintenance of large institutions such as government installations and hospitals. They have thousands of public toilets all over the country. They clean up railways and railway stations. By the 2013 legal definition of manual

scavenging, many of these activities can end up as legally manual scavenging; they are working closely with human waste without adequate protection.⁶⁸ Conversely, they can also be considered legally or ethically a form of oppressive labor, as many of the people who are employed in these situations are potentially from Dalit communities.⁶⁹ Sulabh has been taken to court repeatedly for violations of labor law, particularly in regard to a failure to pay minimum wage or provide any other kind of employment protections. (See, for example, Singh 2012).⁷⁰

Sulabh employs a great number of very good lawyers. Much of their legal defense in these cases consists of asserting that Sulabh is exempt from minimum wage and employment laws because they are a voluntary social service organization of charitable and philanthropic nature, working on a no profit, no loss basis. Therefore, it is neither an establishment nor an employer. It is further submitted that the persons associated with Sulabh International are not employees or workers, but are associate members of Sulabh International, rendering their voluntary social services for the upliftment of scavengers (Kait 2012).

Given the work conditions found in many of these places, if one was to use the legal definition of manual scavenging, Sulabh itself likely employs manual scavengers, according to the 2013 Act. But within the organization, Sulabh uses a much narrower definition of manual scavenging that enables them to maintain political and social capital of being an organization that is dedicated to emancipating them while potentially actually employing them.

⁶⁸ In my observations and discussions with informants, this seemed to be fairly common. However, there is no good data collected on this.

⁶⁹ There is no solid data on this, only anecdote, rumor and inference. Sulabh does not collect this data themselves, and they have expressed no interest in doing so. Others in the field or similar fields have expressed to me that this is the case based on what they have seen. One journalist suggested that Sulabh is simply “exchanging one kind of slavery for another.” It also seems likely to be the case given the experience of activist groups who have closer ties to Dalit communities, who find that sanitation work is dominated by Dalits. However, without hard data it is impossible to make a stronger case.

⁷⁰ The fact that they have been taken to court repeatedly was told to me by informants at the organization. News coverage of this is virtually nonexistent.

Sulabh's adherence to a narrow definition of manual scavenging combined with their political prominence and authority in the sector actually can overpower or erase other narratives and claims about the state of manual scavenging.

In 2005, Sulabh declared the Rajasthani towns of Alwar and Tonk to be manual scavenging free (Nai Disha n.d.). This was done with great fanfare and government acclaim in a showy event on World Toilet Day. Reading from prewritten speeches typed on white paper, former dry latrine cleaners stood in front of the assembly and read:

We, the Women of Alwar, make a solemn declaration that scavenging system for cleaning latrines has come to an end for good in this town. Now, neither any woman nor man is engaged in cleaning toilets in Alwar. Nobody is treating us as 'untouchables' any more. We have become part and parcel of the social mainstream. We hobnob, mix and dine with everybody without any caste distinction or discrimination. We celebrate all the traditional festivals, mingle with everyone at marriages without any bar. We visit temples to offer our prayers without any check or restriction (Jha 2009:12).

This quote is indicative not only of the claims they made at this particular event, but their subsequent narrative productions, media conversations, and events. The women are ostensibly the ones who are making the declaration, but they are being given a speech. In this speech, they are declaring that *no one* cleans toilets in Alwar, that manual scavenging as a form of labor is gone. But more importantly, they are saying that they are now "part and parcel of the social mainstream." They specifically cite many of the markers of social life that Dalits are traditionally excluded from—going to temples, offering prayer, and dining with others of a higher caste. The speech continues:

Our life is totally changed now. Even in our wildest dreams we could not imagine the dawn of a day when we would be able to move about with dignity and respect, holding our heads high.

Now we are witnessing the fulfillment of our cherished dreams. Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai! Dr. Ambedkar Ki Jai! Sulabh Andolan Ki Jai! Jai Hind! Jai Bharat! (Hail Gandhi! Hail Dr. Ambedkar! Hail Sulabh Mission! Hail India!) (Jha 2009:12).

In this part of the speech, they are describing that their life is “totally changed.” What is important to my point is the passive way the sentences are constructed and they themselves are constructed. They are not subjects with autonomous will who have caused change through their own actions, but people whose lives were changed by an outside force. Indeed, they profess that they could not have even *imagined* equality. The outside forces that have brought about this change are stated in the last part: Gandhi, Ambedkar and Sulabh.

It is doubtless true that the lives of these women have changed significantly. They are invited to prominent events, are greeted by celebrities and politicians. They travel the world. But it is unclear to what extent this change extends beyond public relations, whether these women encounter any change in small day-to-day interactions. To delve for that information would potentially put the women at risk of problems from Sulabh or, at the very least, put them in a space where I am asking them to counter the narratives that Sulabh is putting forth. Given the risk and the fact that it does not substantially shift my argument nor add to my greater research questions, I did not press. But what is clearer from news coverage, other writers (Roy 2017), and SKA’s experiences is that this liberation is only limited to those women who are under Dr. Pathak’s protection.

In this narrative, the former manual scavengers are passive recipients of Sulabh’s beneficence, mirroring the narratives discussed earlier. In this statement and event, however, are very political and social claims about the state not only of manual scavenging in these places, but the state of Untouchability. Sulabh publicly claims Alwar and Tonk are not only manual scavenging free, but also free

of the stigma associated with Untouchability. This narrative dominates; other actors in similar spaces do not have the same political and social clout to successfully counter this narrative.

According to SKA state conveners based in Alwar, there are no dry latrines in Alwar (since 2009, when Sulabh celebrated it), but manual scavenging—as legally defined—persists, particularly in the form of open drain cleaning. In 2007 or 2008, Rajasthan declared itself manual scavenging free. The SKA conveners could not figure out how this declaration was possible given their own experiences and catalogued instances. They filed a Right to Information Action request, asking the basis for the government's claim. The government said it was from an independent survey carried out by Sulabh, a 'reputed NGO,' who said that Rajasthan was manual scavenging free. Sulabh's assertions about manual scavenging and Untouchability, because of their authority as an organization and the fact they were telling a story that the government wanted to hear, overrides the narrative of other organizations. Sulabh benefits from using narrow definitions of liberation and manual scavenging at the expense of the causes they purport to fight for.

In WaterAid's public discourse, conversely, caste is treated as an element or aspect of sanitation. Unlike SKA and Sulabh, WaterAid's public discussions of caste are often confined to a sociological variable, a parameter of inequality, similar to how sanitation often does not reach those with disabilities or the very elderly. WaterAid also began to more seriously take up manual scavenging as an issue towards the end of my study period, and caste was acknowledged to be an important part of this. However, caste and the purity/pollution dynamic is not treated as a *central* organizing principle of sanitation in their public work.

This is doubtless intentional; to invoke caste as a central organizing principle in any given campaign is to risk losing the technical brand and to be seen as a radical, and thus WaterAid would risk their positionality with the government. Caste often emerges in politics (Jaffrelot 2015a; Jaffrelot 2013;

McCarthy 2016; Vaid 2014); thus invoking caste is considered political. With a government that is particularly sensitive to caste issues, to discuss caste as anything more than a technical variable can alienate the audiences that WaterAid seeks to influence, such as the government or actors that try to avoid any appearance of being political—World Bank, UNICEF, bilaterals, and corporations. They depend on these actors for funding, for alliance, for influencing and spreading their messages and work; to invoke caste too strongly may get them slotted as an “activist” organization—regarded as too political, too oppositional, obstructionist, and impractical.

Such political maneuvering is not surprising, and maps onto broader assumptions about how “foreign” NGOs should and do operate. However, as I assert at the beginning of this chapter, WaterAid is also an Indian NGO.

WaterAid’s technical framing is interestingly at odds with many of the private discussions at WaterAid, where issues of caste and Untouchability are often a central part in deciding programming or policy work. Email discussions about how to best address issues of inequality of Untouchability flicker across the internet, and lunchtime conversations about the current governmental Hindutva agenda are not uncommon. In their outward-facing work, they are not engaging with caste head-on; they are not actively advocating for revolutionary change or a radical abolishment of the caste system, but because so many individuals care about these issues, works that inform or introduce the severe inequalities of caste slide in. They have funded SKA. WaterAid commissioned a series of articles from Youth Ki Awaaz (“Voice of Youth”), a news outlet, that tackle issues of sanitation and caste, including manual scavenging and the inequality of access (#InDeepShit on Youth Ki Awaaz n.d.). In their research work, they break down metrics of success by caste, paying particular attention to the access of SC/ST groups. In their SBM assessment, they highlighted the fact that SCs/STs were less likely to have a toilet or have gotten a subsidy to build one (Raman et al. 2017). Their strategy of remaining a “critical friend” to the government and of being a convener prevents them from outwardly and forcefully engaging with the

issue, but the private beliefs of individuals within the organization still seek to shape the discourse to be more sensitive to these issues.

Their technical reputation and their technical rendering of these issues as a variable of inequality enables them to engage with this issue, as so many of their members want to, without losing their reputation or positionality in the ecology of organizations. By rendering caste into a technical variable which mimics governmental documents such as the census, they have avoided speaking in an “activist” register; they are not speaking as to radical inequality, they are simply breaking down statistics.

These arguments that the organizations make about caste in their public works are, first and foremost, all Indian arguments. They represent different ways of understanding and thinking through caste in a politicized context and in a context in which they are trying to sway a larger discourse.

Filth and culture

In discussing both shit and caste, I have discussed two different kinds of “filth” in Indian culture systems. Studies of filth and disgust have tended to be dominated by structuralist perspectives (Douglas 1966; Dumont 1981) who see the labelling of who or what as filthy as a function of largely static cultural and cognitive systems. Filth is “matter out of place”—substances that violate rules of structure or society. Filth is not absolute, but a product of context and perception (Douglas 1966). The origins of Untouchability in the ancient Hindu text the Manusmriti is an excellent illustration. While the four varnas come from the Divine Body of Brahma, Dalits or Untouchables did not come from that divine body (BBC 2017). The Untouchables are out of place, they are not within the standard order and definitions of humanity. Because dirt is considered that which is “out of place” or outside of order, that

which is dirty, filthy, or diseased can also be a function of power. Groups of people who are disempowered and considered undesirable often become filthy or filth, as in the above descriptions of people as waste.

These structuralist perspectives, however, are often apolitical and do not always encompass different kinds of dirt. Cohen discusses a similar concept to Douglas's, calling it "filth." One of the main defining points of what he calls filth is that it is "not me." Filth "represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjectivity, and material objects converge" (Cohen 2005:viii). He divides filth into two categories, *polluting* and *reusable*. That which is "polluting" is "filth proper," which is "wholly unregenerate, contaminating, even toxic, and demands to be rejected and denied." Reusable substances, on the other hand, can be productive, fecund, and fertile. If it is polluting—"filth proper"—it cannot be reused (Cohen 2005:x). Using a notion of filth that is defined as "not me" enables a more fluid exploration of the idea. While I have been speaking of it in terms of shit and caste, more broadly speaking, what do the different actors assert is filthy? What is filthy in India?

The BJP finds a lot of different things filthy. You can arguably define the BJP by what they want to cast out of the country. They believe in "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan"—a nation that speaks Hindi and is caste Hindu. This is how they define "us." The "not me" or "not us" that is filth includes Muslims, Dalits (who are seen as out-caste), and anyone or anything that is "anti-nationalist" by their definition. They also see a Hindustan that is a leader on the world stage. But to be so, they must move away from open defecation, from garbage in the streets, from shit in the rivers because of the way in which these things diminish their global image.

To SKA, shit and caste are "filth proper." These things are irredeemable and need to be cast out of society. And more vitally, the actual filth is the internal mindset which produces the radical inequities in Indian society:

Journalist: Why do you think manual scavenging is still continuing in India?

Bezawada Wilson: Because of the dirt in the minds of society and policy makers (Bhasha Singh 2016).

The ‘filth proper’ of Indian society is casteism and, to a lesser extent, patriarchy. In Cohen’s discussion of filth, he describes the way in which filth contaminates the self. Once you encounter it, you are contaminated by it. “In this way, filth challenges the very dichotomy between subject and object” (Cohen 2005:x). While SKA and its members reject casteism, while they see it as irredeemable filth, they have become contaminated by their encounters with it. They both challenge the caste system and, in their opposition to it, are contaminated and are a part of it.

Sulabh, conversely, sees both shit and Untouchability as waste that is *reusable*, in Cohen’s typology. Both shit and Untouchables are still considered a kind of filth, however. The frequent reminders that Dr. Pathak is a Brahmin and the women he works with are former manual scavengers is indicative of a perspective of filth—those women are “not me.” They are different. This is what the core of the caste system is, in many ways, as covered by many previous caste scholars of before (Omvedt 2006; Dumont 1981; Lynch 1969; Channa and Mencher 2013).

While Douglas may consider dirt to be a function of that which is outside of systems, for Sulabh, both shit and Untouchables are within their systems. Shit and Untouchables are, however, redeemable or reusable filth. This transformation and redemption happens through a similar process to what Srinivas describes as Sanskritization, in which mobility within the system is achieved through the adoption and infusion of the markers of higher castes or more auspicious things (Srinivas 1996). For caste, this was the benediction and beneficence of a Brahmin; of attending temple events; of reciting Sanskrit prayers. For shit, it is the association of the topic with art, technology, and history.

WaterAid's overall argument is that the ultimate filth is that people are dying of preventable diseases and that sanitation systems are broken. This argument does not equally apply to every program and utterance, but it is the argument that is the corollary to their underlying orientation of thinking about health. Broken sanitation systems that result in human suffering and particularly unnecessary death is the ultimate filth. The "matter out of place" are the unnecessary deaths and the broken sanitation systems. The cultural system that is being referenced is an international one, a culture of international development and standards—for all that it is in India.

In this dissertation, we see how different groups wrestle to choose what becomes "Indian culture" and what becomes most widely understood as filth. Filth is not "just" culturally produced through systems of belief and perception but is politically produced as well. When it is politically produced, it is not just politically produced by the tensions and struggles of the state versus a populace, or a colonizer versus colonized, but is produced by a range of different actors pushing different interpretations and meanings. The influence of those narratives are often based on the power and authority of the organizations making the argument.

SBM is such a strange and powerful movement because it is a fight against filth—and no one is against the elimination of filth. That is the definition of filth and dirt—it is something that must be expunged and gotten rid of. But who gets to define filth and by what means it is defined leads into a more complex and contested ground. These different actors each approach filth and what is filthy in India in fundamentally different ways. I have explained them using both Douglas's and Cohen's approaches. In utilizing both, I have sought to stitch together some sort of coherence in the patchwork understanding of the many different systems that describe what Indians find filthy and how the human universal of shit fits into these systems.

Anthropology of Global Health

A single gram of shit may contain of feces may contain up to 10,000,000 viruses, 1,000,000 bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts, and 100 parasite eggs (WaterAid India 2015). It can carry polio, cholera, norovirus, shigella, E. coli, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis E, rotavirus, dysentery, tape worms, and round worms. Only 60% of the world's population's feces can be considered "safely managed," meaning that the feces is safely contained and treated (WHO/UNICEF Joint Water Supply and Sanitation Monitoring Programme 2017). Sanitation—the practices around safely containing, managing, and treating that human fecal waste—is a vital global health measure in preventive health (Bartram and Cairncross 2010; Ngure et al. 2014; Coffey and Spears 2017). The sheer human health implications of sanitation and the safe and unsafe management of shit demands the attention of not only public health practitioners, but medical anthropologists as well.

WASH only emerged as a recognized subfield of global and public health in the 1980s. The 1980s was declared by the UN to be the International Decade of Water and Sanitation (UN 2015), and around the same time the acronym WASH was introduced to stand for water, sanitation, and hygiene as the trinity that prevents the transmission of fecal-oral diseases (see Chapter 3 for excerpts from my interview with the man who popularized this acronym).

This emerged around the same time as the school of thought known as Critical Medical Anthropology (CMA) rose as a school of thought or approach in medical anthropology, which turned the anthropological gaze towards Western biomedicine as an object of study itself. The anthropology of global health, in which the institutions and people who shape global health programs spaces, is a by-product of that school of thought. (See Introduction for more details.) This project is an example of the study of global health, of looking at the flows of powers and ideas and the ways in which global health

flows. This subfield is less concerned with impact of programs and more concerned, as development anthropologist David Mosse phrases it, the “implementation black box” of global health (Mosse 2005:5).

Sanitation and shit are unique topics in human experience and in terms of medicine and health, and the study of their politicization offers a different account of global health program and function. In this section I will first discuss shit and sanitation as concepts in global health, and how they are uneasily classified and understood. I then discuss what this means in terms of the current political moment of Clean India in relation to how actors can best achieve global health goals. Finally, I end with a list of concrete recommendations for global health practitioners who are endeavoring to achieve sanitation coverage.

What makes sanitation and shit unique in global health?

In this first section, I discuss shit and sanitation from the perspective of global health and how they are unique. Shit is a unique disease-causing substance, crossing conceptual boundaries and occupying multiple categories. Sanitation also crosses boundaries as a sign of development, an infrastructure, and a public health preventive. I discuss how to think about these concepts in the fields of health as well as discussing those meanings in the context of the Swachh Bharat Mission and the organizations of study.

How can we conceive of shit in the context of global health?

Shit is a strange substance in terms of global health because it is uneasily classified. Much of medical anthropology and sociology has examined specific infectious diseases (Closser 2010; Greenough 1995; Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2002; Farmer 2006), chronic diseases or conditions (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Brown 1993; Luhrmann 2000), or environmental toxins (Auyero and Swistun 2009; Bullard 2000; Spears 2014).

In this space of medical studies, shit is anomalous. It acts as both a vector and an environmental pollutant, carries illnesses that act both quickly and slowly, is both highly visible and invisible. As a vector, it spreads acute and horrible infectious diseases that have been burned into cultural memory. Children in iron lungs and a former president in a wheelchair, victims of polio. Dysentery felling armies. In the late 20th century, Kipling wrote a poem about the specter of cholera:

Oh, strike your camp an' go, the Bugle's callin',

The Rains are fallin' --

The dead are bushed an' stoned to keep 'em safe below.

The Band's a-doin' all she knows to cheer us;

The Chaplain's gone and prayed to Gawd to 'ear us --

To 'ear us --

O Lord, for it's a-killin' of us so!

From the perspective of and in the dialect of a British soldier in India, the jaunty rhyme scheme of the poem belies the fact that it is a song about people dying so quickly the survivors do not have time to bury the bodies (Kipling 1896). In 2010, the news was inundated with photos of Haitians lying prostrate and limp on beds, dying from cholera (Domonoske 2016).

But shit is also a vector for slower ways of being sick, of illness, and of death. It carries a myriad of bacteria and parasites that do not kill but make one sick or unable to work. For healthy individuals or wealthy individuals, they can treat this with a quick visit to the doctor. That is if they even get the illness at all. The middle- and upper-class Indian are largely protected from such diseases. They can afford flush toilets, water filtration, vaccinations, and copious amounts of water to wash away filth from their homes (Doron and Jeffrey 2018:3).

But daily, unnamed instances of diarrhea or illness are uncounted in both public health accounts and in social memory. Frequent instances of diarrhea compromise the ability of humans to absorb nutrition (Coffey and Spears 2017:116). The repeated ingestion of shit and the bacteria that it carries can also cause environmental enteropathy (formerly called tropical enteropathy), in which the repeated ingestion of fecal material from the environment leads to an inflamed, leaking, poorly absorbing intestine. This damage to the intestine is thought to be one of the biological mechanisms by which environmental fecal contamination affect rates of stunting (Coffey and Spears 2017; Humphrey 2009). Both of these mechanisms are used to explain India's very high rates of stunting. Spears and his team at r.i.c.e. (Research Institute for Compassionate Economics) have spent a significant amount of time and energy in correlating poor sanitation and childhood stunting in the Indian context (Spears, Ghosh, and Cumming 2013; Coffey and Spears 2017). Stunting and chronic malnutrition from these exposures to fecal pathogens have long-term implications for the well-being of children (Martorell 1989; Martorell 1999).

Enteropathy is difficult to measure in a population, as the tests for diagnosing the condition in an individual are expensive and fairly intensive (McKay et al. 2010), and tying stunting to sanitation is a difficult challenge because of the myriad of possibly confounding variables present in a population-level study. Stunting can be caused by many different factors, such as poor nutrition, maternal nutrition, birth spacing, adolescent pregnancy, suboptimal breastfeeding, household poverty, caregiver neglect, or a lack of stimulation in a child (WHO 2014).

In sharp contrast to infectious disease, these slow, often invisible ways that shit makes people less healthy point to the ways in which shit also acts as an environmental pollutant. Shit makes people sick by getting into the environment. It is in rivers, streams, soil, surfaces. In Mexico City, in the late 1980s, writers reported that sewage would become a dust that falls on the city like "snow" (Uhlir 1991). And with it, this shit carries the bacteria, viruses, parasites, and worms that make people unhealthy or

sick. It inhabits and contaminates the environment in much the same way that any more “traditional” environmental pollutant like chromium, arsenic, or lead.

As much of the work on environmental pollutants attests, environmental contaminants—when they are working as slow-acting toxins or poisons—are incredibly difficult to identify and diagnose within a population. This is particularly true when the health effects can be a from a myriad of etiologies, if they take decades to emerge, or if they impact a socially marginalized population that may not have access to healthcare (Brown 1992; Brown 2013; Bullard 2000; Friedman et al. 2001; Spears 2014). Understanding the health impact of shit and its spread on a human population requires an understanding of both acute and slow impacts. The slow impacts parallel the impacts of other environmental pollutants. As English professor Rob Nixon writes of the health and mortality effects of environmental problems, “The long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological that result from war’s toxic aftermaths or climate change—are underrepresented in strategic planning as well as in human memory” (Nixon 2013: 2). Thus the health impacts of shit are often severely underestimated, contributing to the inattention to this topic over the last 50 years of development.

Shit is also unique in that it is enmeshed in both discourses of biological contamination and ritual contamination. In the previous section, I discuss more sociocultural concepts of filth and dirt. But historian David Arnold tries to unite both ritual and environmental pollutions in his historical work on poison by using the notion of toxicity. He brings together different concepts and contexts of toxics, including homicidal, suicidal, environmental pollution, contamination, putrefaction, adulteration, and toxics (Arnold 2016:11). In his history of poisons in India, he argues that poison renders the private public: “poison cases provided a vital connection between private and public, exposing the intimate details of private lives to public scrutiny, censure and sensationalist reporting” (Arnold 2016:15). Contrasted with Cohen’s and Douglas’s more sociocultural concepts of filth or dirt, Arnold seeks to unify

the biologically and physically hazardous under one label. As described throughout this work, shit is an ultimate example of private being rendered public. And shit is a form of pollution or toxic that is hazardous in ritual, biological, and physical senses.

Shit, then, is unique in global health. It is both visible and invisible, a vector and an environmental pollutant, and as a toxic substance, crosses the range of different kinds of pollution and contamination. It is both private and public, particularly when it becomes an object of prominent political discourse.

How is sanitation unique in global health?

Within the field of global interventions, sanitation also is uneasily classified. It is in many ways usually understood as an infrastructural or development system, rather than a medical one (Follmann 2015; Nikhil Anand 2015; Desai, McFarlane, and Graham 2015; Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018; Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018). Global health interventions are usually discussed include primary care (Farmer 2001; Irwin et al. 2002), vaccines (Closser 2010; Greenough 1995), or specific interventions like bed nets (Curtis, Myamba, and Wilkes 1996).

Sanitation requires long-term, sustained engagement. People shit every day, and that shit must be managed. Historically, unlike health interventions that were primarily the purview of private practitioners or systems, sanitation systems have been implemented by governmental powers or colonial ones (Barnes 2005; Johnson 2006; Prashad 2001b; Warwick Anderson 2006; Mehta and Movik 2011). It requires direct intervention into daily lives and daily bodily practices. It is a preventive measure in terms of health, but it is a preventive that encompasses a massive range of diseases and contaminations. In terms of running sanitation systems, those infrastructures are largely detached from other health infrastructures, managed by different people and different institutions. While it is

acknowledged to have massive impacts on human health (McKeown 1978), anthropological studies of sanitation tend to be more focused on physical infrastructure (Alley, Maurya, and Das 2018; Nikhil Anand 2015) rather than sanitation as a critical part of maintaining population health.

In global health, sanitation generally does not accumulate as much attention and political momentum as campaigns that are predicated on primary care or infectious disease eradication. Sanitation professionals working at the time have told me in interviews that even though the 1980s was ostensibly the UN Decade of Water and Sanitation, there was actual little movement or progress on sanitation. As one professional told me in an interview, “Sanitation is like your corrupt brother-in-law. You can’t get rid of him, but you don’t want to introduce him to your friends.”⁷¹

Sanitation is not a politically advantageous or glamorous political topic to take a stance on. It is uneasily caught between being infrastructure and health intervention. It does not have the political cache of water, electricity, or roads, but it requires as much money and work. It is, as I would describe, an infrastructure of “away.” Individual assess whether sanitation is effective by whether it has transported something away from them, but “away” is contingent on the positionality of the individual. For many people, sanitation has worked if the shit is no longer in their house or their personal area; they do not assess whether it has been successfully treated or is necessarily safely contained. This latter part of the process requires a significant infrastructure, both physical and institutional, to ensure continuous, safe, effective treatment.

Many people also suggest that part of the reason that sanitation lacks the political cache of a comparable global health system like water is that it deals with the repulsive topic of shit (Mehta and Movik 2011; Black and Fawcett 2010). This narrative is incredibly common and often-repeated among professionals in the sector. But I would also argue that because of the very nature of sanitation

⁷¹ This quote was also quoted on 7 of this document.

infrastructure—in that it is continuous, complex, and only assessed by people as an infrastructure of “away”—contributes as much to its relative neglect than its disgustingness.

What are the different global health perspectives on shit and sanitation in the context of SBM?

In SBM and the accompanying discussions and assessments of it, shit and sanitation have both become massively public and political topics. To understand and answer the above question, requires, in part, widening our definition of who is and should be included in conversations of global health. As discussed in this work, shit has a range of meanings and intersects with a large scope of interests, from human rights to gender, political organizations to youth empowerment ones, entrepreneurs engaged in business to environmental advocates. All of these perspectives sway and shift the discourse around shit and sanitation, which has political implications for this massively important health topic.

No matter their directly stated or explicit relationship with health, the Government of India, WaterAid, Sulabh, and SKA all are important players in understanding the ways in which decisionmakers and the global health apparatus thinks about and works on this health issue. And, as discussed in previous sections, all of actors offer “Indian” points of view. Privileging WaterAid India’s voice because it is more directly engaged with health discourse is problematic. WaterAid’s voice is heard more loudly in health-oriented discourses because it echoes the health discourse language. They not only use the exact language of global health in terms of their emphasis on scientific narratives, but the presentation of themselves as an organization is in the same register as other INGOs—from the clean lines of the office to the carefully-branded brochures. Privileging the point of view of Sulabh because it appears more “authentically” Indian is also problematic. Sulabh uses language and images that resonate with a dominant mode of being “Indian” that disguises or excuses some of the power dynamics that lead to the country’s gaping inequalities. There is no single “Indian” perspective on shit and sanitation.

To understand global health discourse and global health problems requires widening perspectives to include all the actors. By seeking out different approaches and different ways of constructing narratives around sanitation and shit, one can seek out ways to create more balanced narratives moving forward. This gets at a fundamental question that global health often struggles with: how do you create a narrative (or campaign, or program) that is locally/culturally resonant, but also helps to push forward the sought-after public health goal?

As stated throughout this section, the different organizational actors are enmeshed in their own politics and their own goals, their own networks and ecologies of power. Those networks and entanglements produce different engagements with shit and sanitation.

The BJP's grouping of filth and its implications and undertones of "cleaning" India of a range of filthy things and people is a warning for people engaged with global health. Biotechnical definitions of filth cannot be endorsed without also bolstering more problematic narratives that are based around nationalism and intolerance. To support SBM means that actors are supporting the range of meanings that have become attached to the program, from the BJP's dominance to nationalist messages.

Sulabh sees the possibility of transformation in shit, but their organizational structures and priorities mean that they do not assess health impacts of their interventions. They build massive amounts of sanitation facilities, but do not seem to prioritize the well-being of the people who do that work. That means it is unclear whether some of their work causes harm to human health—whether from problematically built latrines or from exposing their workers to pathogens.

When SKA highlights health, it is usually in terms of the illnesses and deaths of sewage workers. But their engagement also highlights the importance of global health of not necessarily privileging biological perspectives on shit. To do so is to elide the social and psychological suffering that comes with working in this area.

WaterAid largely treats shit and sanitation as global health problems. But they are a very heterogenous organization, with different individuals coming into the organization with different sets of priorities and perspectives. In assembling a heterogenous team, we see an example of an actor who is fundamentally oriented around health to meaningfully engage with actors with different sets of priorities and values around the topic.

These perspectives are fragmented and somewhat contradictory. No single, coherent “Indian” narrative about shit, sanitation, or filth is produced. Scholars like Coffey and Spears and the institutions and researchers that follow them have a tendency to homogenize “Indian” attitudes towards sanitation and shit. In their largely influential work, Coffey and Spears suggest that India’s sanitation problem is so severe is because of Hindu notions of purity and pollution. In their narrative, people do not want to use toilets because they view them as ritually polluting (Coffey and Spears 2017). This argument echoes many dynamics from colonial era Delhi, in which, in the 1860s, the British argued that the “natives” would not like toilets because it was against “their” culture (Prashad 2001b:121).

The homogenizing narratives—whether they are modern or colonial—elide the ability of a community to contain multiple perspectives and for culture to shift, change and adapt to circumstances. Much of the discussions regarding the nature of filth and shit are based in the realm of the static and the ideational, still based mostly in Douglas’s structuralist arguments about dirt that do not necessarily accommodate change or politics.

Chakrabarti, in writing about the different meanings and aspects of the river Hooghly in colonial Calcutta, said of the modern era being shaped with such a myriad of perspectives that, “This is a modernity of multiplicities” (Chakrabarti 2015:182). He writes that the 19th century Indian scholar Rajendralal Mitra said that “the modern and the ancient river, the sewer and the Ganga, coexisted without violating each other” (Chakrabarti 2015:191). In Alley’s work, she outlines the multiple

perspectives on the river Ganga, examining the lived realities of assessing and navigating these multiple perspectives (Alley 2002). As we see from these works, multiple realities of water can and do coexist. In this work, we see multiple perspectives of shit coexisting. Understanding this is vital in moving forward global health discussions in meaningful ways.

Sulabh's narrative suggests an India in which cleanliness and sanitation and hygiene are norms, that through particular infusion of ritual cleanliness and auspicious substances sanitation, latrines, shit, and Untouchables can be accepted into the households and lives of people. However, their narrative requires that the hierarchy of pure and impure be accepted and utilized. SKA and WaterAid both reject those systems and hierarchies, showing another "Indian" way of thinking through those systems.

The point then, as we understand the ecologies and perspectives on sanitation and shit, is that, like with water, multiple lenses and perspectives coexist. The dominance of one or another is less a matter of the "Indianness" of the perspective and more of a matter of the power and positioning of the player advocating for it. Sulabh's perspective is so dominant in part because it aligns with those in power and because Sulabh is incredibly politically connected. WaterAid's perspective is present because the power of being an international player and the power of "science" and validity enables them to remain a constant in the field. SKA has its own power, but its power and authority come from being a representative of a marginalized group, thus ensuring their Indian secularism is continually marginalized.

To achieve global health goals of improved sanitation for all requires careful, conscientious and reflexive engagement with these different perspectives on human shit and sanitation. It requires remapping relations of power and influence in global health to include not only vertical donor-beneficiary relations, but horizontal relations and networks. These horizontal relations and networks are the space in which dominant narratives are produced regarding sanitation and shit and the "Indian" way

forward is debated. Achieving sanitation without risking harming groups of people requires re-mapping who is a global health player and examining the underlying narratives that those actors produce.

Recommendations for global health

What follows are a list of recommendations for people in particularly the NGO sector working on sanitation. These suggestions are meant to increase reflexivity of organizations, improve organizational efficacy, and to integrate human rights and equity perspectives into organizations. They build on some of the perspectives and arguments from this chapter to offer concrete suggestions and ideas.

Create alternative arenas for honest communications between NGOs.

Most NGOs and the people in them do not have clear ideas about what the other NGOs are doing and why, leading to confusion, poor planning, and missed opportunities.

All day conferences and reports are often difficult for busy professionals to engage with. Conferences, in particular, are often viewed as a waste of time for many professionals; in the attempt to perform for donors and governmental officials, NGOs often edit out vital information and end up performing propaganda. Consider small, informal meetings that occur more frequently, such as chai meetups or more compressed learning sharing. This latter can take the form of five-minute pitches explaining recent learnings. Other forms may be podcasts or YouTube videos.

Base all work in political realities.

Many NGOs, particularly WASH sector ones, deny that they engage with political realities. All NGOs are political, which is something that activist and grassroots ones are keenly in tune with. Explicitly talking

about these political realities—even just internally—is vital in maintaining partnerships and trust. Organizations that deny they are political are simply being unclear what their political stance actually is. Additionally, basing work in political realities forces NGOs to more realistically engage with the real situation. Sanitation is more than technology; much of it is based on working with the government or other actors.

Increase the scope of who is a sanitation actor and include them in conversations.

It is only fairly recently that manual scavenging groups have been asked to join the sanitation conversation, in spite of being vital parts of the sanitation chain. Ensure that your sphere of communication and work extends beyond just the classic WASH players and government to include voices that may not regularly be heard, such as manual scavenging groups, caste rights groups, gender empowerment organizations, and disability advocates.

Consider all of the different issues that overlap or parallel with your key issue. Talk to organizations that work on that other issue to ensure that you are not harming this issue.

This is closely related to the previous point. Sanitation intersects with gender, caste, poverty, urban planning, housing, education, healthcare, and nearly every other aspect of life. In any given project, map out the causes that your program touches on. Talk to people who work in this area as you move forward. Carefully consider cost-benefit ratios in terms of not only sanitation, but all other causes related to development and inequality. Develop monitoring and evaluation strategies that explicitly measure these other outcomes.

Include in programs a “metrics of damage,” in which not only metrics of success are taken, but also potential damage is measured.

For example, a sanitation program that is meant to improve coverage of toilets in an area may use a women’s group to promote this. Generally, toilet coverage is measured; however, you should also measure gender empowerment factors.

Understand your configuration of authority, authenticity and validity. Find partner organizations that can help you shore up those additional aspects.

SKA’s reputation is predicated on authority and authenticity. They are trying to collect numbers, but they do not have the reputation necessary for those numbers to have validity. Partnering with an organization that does have that element of reputation can help them accomplish the end goal of creating numbers that will be taken seriously in political arenas.

Assess secondary meanings and implications of all outward communications.

While the intent of a particular spectacle, article, report, or other outward communication may simply be to hammer in the notion that sanitation is a good thing, these communications can often carry secondary meanings or values. Many times, these communications can dehumanize particular groups of people or enforce structures of oppression, such as when promotions for toilets suggest that they are only intended for women. These secondary messages must be carefully considered before putting them out into the public space. Consider using external consultants for this work.

Consistency in messaging and values will make you taken more seriously in the long run, but potentially harm your ability to adapt to political climates.

SKA is consistent in their belief they are against caste and in their stances against sanitation work; everyone knows that this is their stance, and their reliability gives them a powerful position within the community. It also means they are less able to morph to adapt to a particular political climate and maintain relations with changing governments. Both strategies are valid but must be undertaken carefully.

Talk about caste and social vulnerabilities within the organization.

Organizations should reflect on how casteism affects their own offices, lives and practices. Is there caste stigma within the organization? How many people in the organization are from lower caste groups? Do people in programs engage in casteist practices, such as refusing to take food or drink with low caste individuals? Who does the organization and its partners hire to clean up sewage treatment plants, septic tanks or toilet pits that they've built? Are those people from Dalit or other vulnerable communities? What are the active steps taken at different levels that identify and promote equity and dignity in the office and the organization's programmatic work?

Talk about shit in the lives of the people who are doing development.

Defecation is not just the purview of the poor or the marginalized. Everyone shits. It is a lived and difficult reality for everyone. By creating a narrative that this is a problem of "others," it prevents honest communication and grappling with the problems. It perpetuates hierarchies about whose bodies need to be monitored and managed. It establishes an "us" versus "them" of who does bad sanitation.

Part of this change can be to change language. Saying that certain people “practice” open defecation makes open defecation sound like a strange cultural ritual. People generally don’t say that they “practice” closed defecation. Work to eliminate language and office practices that create Othering language and attitudes towards sanitation problems.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to delve into the complexities of shit, caste, sanitation, and filth through the lenses of politics, discard studies, and global health. I have not only explored the meanings of filth as represented through these different actors but embedded their arguments within broader perspectives and meanings on the topic. In these discussions, I have sought to get at fundamental questions about culture and the nature of that which is repulsive and polluting. I have discussed the perspectives of the different major actors of sanitation. I concluded with a list of concrete actions that sanitation actors should consider or implement in their work in order to ensure not only sanitation coverage, but more equitable approaches in doing so.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have described the political aspects of development from the perspective of NGOs working on sanitation during the SBM years—a highly loaded, politically difficult topic at a highly loaded and politically difficult time. In doing so, I have contributed to both the study of global health and discard studies while capturing the exuberance and anxieties of people working on sanitation at a particular moment in Indian history.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the field of NGOs that work on sanitation, creating a picture of the sector as a whole—how large it is, what it comprises of, and the pressures it is under. I articulated three unique ways to classify the different kinds: one based on the role of sanitation in the organization; one based on the frame of discourse in which they operate in; and one based on the public story or reputation they present in the sector. These typologies divide NGOs on not just their pragmatic elements but try to delve deeper into dividing and classifying them based on not only the public faces they present, but the underlying structures, systems, and values that motivate how they approach development and sanitation.

These typologies also focus on understanding NGOs not just by their actions or activities, but by their internal orientations and the way in which they establish their identity in the sanitation and development sector. These typologies expand the “development sector” beyond the state actors and INGOs that are usually studied to include other types of groups, like religious ones or groups that would usually be classified as civil society. While Mosse has written of the way in which “interpretive communities” of NGOs are formed around a single abstract topic (Mosse 2004), I highlight the ways in which the actors who circulate around the single topic of sanitation are fragmented, driven by different sets of values and orientations.

The third typology discusses how actors position themselves as having great authority, authenticity, and/or validity. This typology speaks to how not only organizations present themselves, but how they are perceived. Weber has argued that legitimacy is gleaned through charismatic authority, rational-bureaucratic authority, or traditional authority structures (as discussed in Chapter 1), forms of authority that primarily apply to those within the structure (Weber 1978). I speak to how legitimacy is established amongst those who are not within the order. This is an external-facing and public form of understanding how different organizations operate and interact. Authenticity, in particular, is a topic and idea from tourism studies (MacCannell 1973). By introducing it into development studies, I am highlighting the idea of development as a performance.

The next three chapters describe my three case studies in detail, focusing not only on the material realities of the organization, but the daily life of people at the organization and how the organization interacts with other actors in the sector. These interactions highlight how discourse is produced and how they are negotiating their roles in the network of actors. My three case studies are very different, and illustrate not only different strategies, but also how diverse NGOs and development can be.

Chapter 2 describes WaterAid, a somewhat 'classic' INGO. With slick logos, a corporatized routine, and a middle-class office, it represents the kind of development agency that many anthropologists of development study and critique as lacking reflexivity (Escobar 1991). But in the private transcripts of the office are many people who are reflexive, strategic, and realistic about the change they can hope to bring in the current climate (Mosse 2004; Closser 2010; Scott 1992).

I discuss how behind WaterAid's carefully engineered external image, there is a strategic heterogeneity of people and perspectives within the organization that is meant to help position them as conveners of all of the different actors. They are particularly concerned with their relationship with the

government, trying to maintain access to the government while being able to have the space to criticize. Much of their energy goes into maintaining this status as a “critical friend.” WaterAid is also dynamic, changing their position to meet needs and goals of the organization, which can result in other actors viewing them as inconsistent. Their international status and reputation based on validity, however, mean that they maintain a very positive and strong reputation that amplifies their discourses. While many people believe that WASH is only a means to achieve an end, what animates them fundamentally is a desire to create a world with equal, high quality sanitation. WaterAid is heterogenous, dynamic, and strategic in maintaining their role as a convener.

Chapter 3 describes Sulabh International Social Service Organization, a massive organization founded, led by, and dominated by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak. Sulabh is Dr. Pathak, and Dr. Pathak is Sulabh. Sulabh expends incredible resources in creating and maintaining a relationship as the Indian authority on sanitation, as being powerful and positive. They have chosen to closely ally with the current government and expend significant financial resources to demonstrate and perform this alliance. They focus on performing a role as being saviors of manual scavengers while taking advantage of marginalized people to help fund what operates as a massive business. They talk about equality while maintaining rigid hierarchies within the organization. But they are also powerful voices in pushing a story of sanitation.

Sulabh presents a different kind of actor in development than is often represented in the anthropology of global health literature. It is an international organization that is based in India. It gains authority and voice in the field of actors through performing a particular kind of authenticity. It is an NGO that is difficult to categorize and understand, blurring lines between charity and business.

SKA, described in Chapter 4, is a mirror image of Sulabh. While it is also an Indian organization that is led by a single charismatic leader, Bezwada Wilson, their values and the way they operate are

very different. SKA is only a sanitation organization by necessity; what they fundamentally are is a community and human rights organization that is forced to deal with sanitation because the community they fight for is forced to do so. They operate in a language of activism and rights and are largely uncompromising in their values, which filter throughout the organization and its daily life. In development literature, SKA would usually be called a civil society organization or a grassroots movement, but I have shown how they are active participants in the global health discourse. SKA also demonstrates an organization whose private and public transcripts are very close.

The simplest contribution that this dissertation contributes is to contribute to the growing ethnographic work on the lifeworlds of NGOs (Mosse 2011; Mosse 2013; Fechter and Hindman 2011; Stirrat 2008; Kontinen 2004) through thick description (Geertz 1973). This dissertation provides an ethnographic account of three different NGOs operating at a very political and charged time in India. It contributes to the ethnography of development by delving into the lifeworlds of the people at three different NGOs. One of the NGOs is more traditionally and generally accepted as a “development” actor, but SKA and Sulabh occupy more unique roles. If we accept sanitation as a topic within the realms of development, we must also accept SKA and Sulabh as development actors. This work is also unique in that I took a comparative approach, profiling three organizations that all are ostensibly working on the same topic. SKA and Sulabh both even have the same stated mission, and yet their daily and private practices are extremely different.

But what is perhaps more important is that I argue that to understand the NGO—to understand what they are and how they operate and impact the world—it is necessary to understand and unpack the relationships between themselves and other institutional actors—specifically the government, other NGOs, and the media. These relationships are produced by the social, political, and material realities of the organization that are kept private, but their public-facing parts are a vital part in forming the organizations’ identity. An NGO is not understood as an isolated entity, but in contrast to other actors.

In WaterAid's role as a "convener" of actors, we see a great deal of the work that Mosse describes in his paper "Is good policy unimplementable?" (2004). WaterAid is engaged in a constant process of translation, of negotiating between public and private transcripts (Scott 1992) and of composition—the act of rendering coherent a heterogeneous grouping of ideas and people (Latour 2000). The description of WaterAid provided in this dissertation provides a grounded and phenomenological (Stoller 2010; Stoller and Olkes 2013) account of these phenomena.

WaterAid, like the organizations that Mosse describes in his work, creates narratives and tries to render projects real (Mosse 2004). Their role as a convener is a function of positioning themselves as both an authority and as a source of validity. Their narratives are also couched in terms of their international identity and their international ideas. Sulabh and SKA, on the other hand, offer alternative accounts of how organizations present themselves, using authority and authenticity in very different ways. All of these notions of narration creation, of presenting the self, are public iterations of what are a complex series of private processes. They are both from internal policy and internal conversations and values, but like shit itself, once it leaves the organization, it becomes a public topic.

Chapter 5 focuses on comparing and contrasting the different organizations and how my work integrates with and responds to discard studies and the anthropology of global health. I tie the ethnographic chapters together by reviewing the comparative variables and highlighting not only how these organizations are different, but are similar to each other in key ways. Both SKA and Sulabh, for example, are led by charismatic leaders (Weber 1978), but the source of the charisma and the power structures around them differ. Both SKA and WaterAid rely on donations, but the ways in which donations affect their operations differ significantly. These comparisons gesture to one of the key points of this dissertation, which is to explicate and expound upon the variety of NGOs who can be said to be engaged with sanitation.

One of the main contributions of this dissertation is describing the ways in which organizations establish and maintain relationships with NGOs, the government, and the media. Both WaterAid and Sulabh have concerted media campaigns and people who manage the organization's media image, but to very different effects. SKA, in contrast, also has a strong media presence, but because of their identity as an organization, not through concerted media efforts. Both WaterAid and SKA have collaborative relationships with their partners, but Sulabh is only willing to work with other NGOs in the role of expert or example.

The NGOs' respective relationships with the government are key to understanding how the respective organizations operate. While SKA may appear only critical of the government, they strongly believe in the idea of government, and they often work with the government and through government mechanisms. However, they are also very strong in their language of accountability towards it. WaterAid is continually trying to balance criticism and support; and Sulabh simply views themselves as serving the government.

These comparisons of the operations and aspects of the three case study NGOs not only serve as examples of the variety of strategies and configurations that sanitation NGOs in India at this particular juncture use, but they serve as a kind of re-grounding in the ethnographic and material realities of the NGOs.

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of discard studies and the anthropology of global health. In the second part of chapter 5, I briefly review how Discard Studies is a rising subfield of social studies that is marked by a strong ethos of interdisciplinarity. In a field that is defined as the study of what people throw away, I discuss how both shit and sanitation are uneasily categorized and push boundaries in this study. Many of the previous studies that have looked at sanitation and hygiene systems have been put in place are historical (Chakrabarti 2015; Tolen 1991; Warwick Anderson 2006;

Arnold 1993), but this work offers a chance to engage with some of the same questions about power and the meaning of sanitation in a modern, politically charged context. Instead of focusing on government or colonial powers, I focus on NGOs, who are caught in between being a part of the citizenry and being a state actor yet are still engaged in sanitation questions.

Classic structuralist notions and definitions of “dirt” from Mary Douglas have dominated much of the studies of filth (1966). But such approaches are often removed from a political context and tend to homogenize and over-generalize for a particular culture. I suggest that understanding filth and disgust requires multiple lenses. I describe Cohen’s notion of “filth” as being divided into unregenerate vs. reusable (2005). From there, I articulate what each of the three NGOs can be said to find filthy using both Douglas and Cohen. This section also analyzes what the BJP may find filthy as well, bringing the voice and perspective of government more strongly into the discussion. Systems of filth and dirt are not only functions of cultural systems, but political ones as well. The different NGOs bring forward different ideas and narratives about shit and sanitation.

For WaterAid, sanitation is largely a technical problem with human aspects—caste must be filtered through the lens of science and variables in order to avoid being characterized as too far on the “activist” spectrum and thus alienating some of the actors who they are seeking to ally.

Sulabh has pushed a narrative of sanitation into the broader discourse, looking at how it is a part of being human. They are based within the hegemonic paradigm of caste, repeating narratives of how the Brahmin Dr. Pathak is saving manual scavengers. They also talk about shit can be transformed into something useful. In Sulabh’s narrative, filth exists and hierarchies exist, but what is revolutionary is that shit and filth can be transformed: shit can become fertilizer or energy, the negative associations with sanitation can be transformed into a powerful political vehicle for Dr. Pathak to amass great power, and manual scavengers can be converted to Brahmins.

SKA sees shit as filthy because it is the means by which their community has been oppressed. They do not want to see shit transformed because this transformation is often incomplete, resulting in people claiming that the shit is clean while still forcing people from Dalit communities to clean it. They do not see any part of caste as redeeming, but instead want to abolish the system entirely, instead choosing to organize society around principles of law, human rights, and secularism.

These organizations also have different perspectives on caste and Untouchability, which I frame here as “discarded people” (Desmond 1971). The manual scavengers and Untouchables have long been read as being a kind of discard, either in terms of being outside of the system (dirt, like in Mary Douglas’s structuralist frame; 1966) or as being defined as “not me” by those in power (as in filth, from Cohen; 2005). The government tries to valorize sanitation workers, while simultaneously pushing forth a rhetoric in which Dalits and Muslims are a national “dirt” or “filth.” SKA rejects the narrative of people as filth, instead asserting that casteist mindsets are the real filth. WaterAid tries to maintain a technical role by viewing caste in terms of filth. Sulabh asserts that these people, like shit, can be transformed.

While most of discard studies focuses on dirt and filth as physical and material objects, I examine it as a political and discursive one. Shit is a private issue, but when once it leaves the body it becomes a public issue (George 2009; Hawkins 2006). These organizations recognize the public nature of shit, and they are trying to change the public conversation around it. They are working on an issue with massive social and political implications, an issue with ties to some of India’s most strained and extreme social stratification. This dissertation demonstrates how three NGOs—who are all caught in the political, social, and material constraints of all NGOs—have chosen to create those narratives.

I also focus on the idea that the different actors described in this dissertation—the three NGOs and the government—all have different ideas of what filth is and what a modern, clean India should look like.

The third part of Chapter 5 reorients this discussion around global health and the anthropology of global health. I discuss shit and sanitation as unique topics in global health, comparing them to other preventive healthcare practices, pollutants, and disease vectors. I describe how shit is uneasy to classify in literature, acting as a vector for infectious diseases that are very visible (Hamlin 2009), as an environmental pollutant that causes slower and more invisible deaths (Nixon 2013), and as a poison (Arnold 2016). To theorize and understand shit as a substance in global health requires encompassing and understanding the range of shit's ways in which it acts upon health. Sanitation, conversely, fits uneasily into global health, as a preventive and infrastructural system. I also describe filth in the context of global health and SBM, rejecting homogenized, apolitical ideas of what filth is in India. For global health programs to be effective requires careful negotiation and understanding of the "modernity of multiplicities" that are present in relation to shit (Chakrabarti 2015).

This chapter ends with a list of recommendations for practitioners of global health about how they can more equitably and ethically engage with sanitation in the Indian context. These recommendations primarily focus on improving open communication, increasing space for reflexivity, and expanding who is considered an important voice in global health.

At this intersection of development and discard studies, however, what I am also capturing, through the lenses of these NGOs, is a broader struggle on the part of the Indian nation as it struggles to define for itself how it will move forward. SBM is a government initiative, but it is formed and shaped by the thousands of actors involved.

On the surface, SBM appears to be a government sanitation program with an incredible amount of public relations work invested in it. But SBM and the conversations that focus around it brings up far complex and deep questions about India and its future. What is shit and how can we think about it? What is filthy in India? Can it change? What is the place of caste? What do NGOs do? What does a

modern “clean” India look like? Who will make that happen? This dissertation grapples with how NGOs are answering those questions through campaigns related to sanitation. This is a dissertation about what happens when modernity of development grapples with the universality of shit and all of its meanings.

There are other stories to be told, other narratives to be constructed, other questions to be answered. The work on shit is nascent, confined largely to public health and policy. What I have done is integrate politics with a human aspect, to tell a story of development from the perspectives of people who are doing the development. In this dissertation, I offer a narrative about the political meanings of shit, where parties and politics and values and meanings are contested and fought. More work is needed in understanding how development works. More work is needed in understanding shit as a social, cultural and political substance.

This is a story about private acts. About shit. About squatting to shit, about being bent over double and the intimate feeling of the fluids streaming from your body. It is about playing political games. About conversations over who you are willing to accept money from. About corruption. About whispers and rumors and the contours of reputation. About arguments over what your organization means and what it wants to say and how it is going to accomplish what you want and *what* it is exactly you want. It is about the values that underlie the public statements and stories and spectacles, about hidden agendas and hidden bodies and hidden problems.

It is also a study of public stories. About giant glasses logos printed on the sides of buildings to watch you as you urinate on a wall. About numbers of the dying. About shit and sewage in streets and rivers and hands and mouths. About putting toilets on the front page of every social media feed. About slickly produced music videos that tell the story you want to tell and burning symbols in the streets,

about newspaper headlines and impassioned speeches delivered in parks and stately conferences with bottled water and air conditioning at carefully timed tea breaks.

This book itself is another public story about these private acts. Even as I construct a public story, even as I write a study that seeks to blur the boundaries between public and private, between that which is hidden and that which is highlighted, I too conceal and reveal. This document is my public story about the space, but there are private spaces, too, things that are hidden and concealed to protect myself, to protect others, to create a greater narrative. I have hidden true names, true identities. I have hidden myself, have hidden moments of visceral and raw feelings that have been smoothed over by the clean-cut conventions of academic writing.

This is a book about seeing and hiding. It is about glasses, whether they are the glasses of the SBM campaign, the glasses of historical Gandhi, the glasses of Ambedkar, the glasses of Dr. Pathak, Modi's, or Bezwada Wilson's. About what they see and what they do not. About all of these glasses looming over a political and discursive landscape. This is a book about who is watching. This is a book about what people are seeing. And this is a book about where we do and do not choose to look.

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Appendices

Sulabh songs

Sulabh anthem

Music and lyrics by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

Sulabh is the sun, Sulabh is the moon,
And all the stars are Sulabh.

Sulabh is earth; the earth is bountiful,
It has all the charming colours.

Here are all the creatures, birds and animals,
And with them are the lovely human beings.

The mother earth has spread its wings,
In full bloom are colourful flowers.

Mountains, forests, flowing rivers beckon us,
Let us move together, O dear ones from abroad!

Let us sing the song of love and bring joy to the world,
Let us thus erase the dividing walls of class and colour.

Keep the earth sparkling clean, light the lamp of beauty,
Let's edify the world with righteousness and humanism.

Keep clean, be helpful and happy,
Let us learn and spread this message.

Embrace everyone to make another world,
All come together to make the Sulabh world.

Sulabh prayer: A Hymn to Harmony

Music and lyrics by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world
 A happy co-existence, a harmonious order
 Where there is no place for sectarian walls
 Dividing us along religious, caste or gender
 Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.
 All religions in essence are same
 With virtue or righteousness as their base
 All living beings are made by God
 With soul as their core of existence
 Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.
 We all are sailing on same boat
 With one boatman charting our course
 Let's all be together like brothers
 And overcome obstacles in journey of our life
 Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.
 A world where every home is prosperous
 Every courtyard is lighted with a ray of hope
 Where everyone's dream comes true
 To bring boundless joy all around
 Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.
 Sulabh does not mean an easy way out
 It is an ideology of celebration of life
 Sulabh movement is a guide
 And has non-violence as its beacon-light
 Let's all come together and build a happy Sulabh world.

Laughter is my work (Hasna mera kaam)

Making people smile
 Changing your lifestyle (2)
 Smile with me
 Laugh with me
 Make the world happy—2
 Hahahaha

There's no need to expose yourself more--2
 Have the privacy that you wished for
 There is no risk to go outdoors
 Now there is no need to go outdoors
 No fear of animals or infections
 No risk of people or intrusions
 Sulabh Toilet at my home--2
 In the day or night, Sulabh gives me light—2

Making people smile
 Changing your lifestyle --2
 Smile with me
 Laugh with me
 Make the world happy--2
 Hahahaha

Come on let's go to our schools--2
 Keep it clean that's the only deal
 Use the bathroom as you feel--2
 Excuse me Sir, 5 minutes
 Excuse me Sir, 10 minutes
 Now I'm at peace
 Now we're released

Making people smile
 Changing your lifestyle (x2)
 Smile with me
 Laugh with me
 Make the world happy (x2)
 Hahahaha

Girls are now feel safe and respected (x2)
 Sanitary napkins keep them protected
 Use the pad and burn it away
 No need to worry every day

 Keep clean and healthy too
 Now Keep clean and healthy too
 Gandhi Modi made a vow
 Clean India with me now (x2)

Making people smile
 Changing your lifestyle (x2)
 Smile with me
 Laugh with me
 Make the world happy (x2)
 Hahahaha
 Bus or a railway station
 Market or a holy place
 Goa or the Taj Mahal
 Or the Jaipur Hawaa Mahal
 Anywhere you look about
 Sulabh provides without a doubt
 Safely store all of your things

Take your time without worrying
There's no need to look around
Use the bathroom safe and sound (x2)

Making people smile
Changing your lifestyle (x2)
Smile with me
Laugh with me
Make the world happy (x2)
Hahahaha

Sulabh helps make biogas (x2)
It fuels the stove
And lights your lamps
When it's cold it keeps you warm (x2)
Make power night or day
Take darkness far away (x2)
Water has the energy...
To fertilize your plants for free

Grow more and be happy
Recycled water from here can be
Put back in rivers without worries
Altogether we will rise
Help each other change our lives
Making people smile
Changing your lifestyle (x2)
Smile with me
Laugh with me
Make the world happy (x2)
Hahahaha