

**THE POLITICS OF CASTE AND THE PRODUCTION
OF SMELL: A STUDY OF THE LEATHER INDUSTRY
IN UTTAR PRADESH**

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the requirements for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I hereby do declare that the thesis titled 'The Politics of Caste and the Production of Smell: A Study of the Leather Industry in Uttar Pradesh' submitted by me at Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled 'The Politics of Caste and the Production of Smell: A Study of the Leather Industry in Uttar Pradesh' submitted by SHIVANI KAPOOR at Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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Acknowledgment

“The starting point of true literature is the man who shuts himself up in his room with his books. But once we shut ourselves away, we soon discover that we are not as alone as we thought. We are in the company of the words of those who came before us, of other people’s stories, other people’s books, other people’s words...” (Orhan Pamuk, My Father’s Suitcase).

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SELECT GLOSSARY

Aadat	Habit or practice
Acchut	Untouchable
Angrezi	English
Asubha	Inauspicious
Baboo(s)	Officer(s)/Manager(s)
Badbu	Stench
Basti(s)	Squatter settlement(s)
Begar	Unpaid manual labour
Beti	Daughter
Bhai	Brother
Burra	Senior
Chamarwada/Chamrauti	Spatially segregated place of residence for Chamars
Chamda	Leather, Hide of an Animal, Skin
Choona	Touch
Danav	Demon
Darshan	Glimpsing/Viewing especially the divine. Also connotes the discipline of philosophy
Datun(s)	Neem twig used for brushing
Dekhna	To view, To see
Dev	God
Ganda	Dirty
Gandha	Odour
Gau	Cow

Gau-mata	Cow as the mother
Gau-rakshini	Protectors of the cow
Ghee	Clarified butter
Godams	Warehouses
Gotra	Ancestry based divisions within castes
Halali	Flesh/Hide of slaughtered animals
Indriya	Senses, Sense Organs
Jati	Caste/Sub-caste
Jayanti	Anniversary
Jhoothan/Jhootha	Leftover
Joota	Shoe
Julus	Procession
Kaam	Work
Kaccha	Uncooked, Raw
Karigar	Craftsman
Khaal	Skin
Malik	Owner
Mandi	Wholesale market
Maweshi	Animals
Mistri	Master craftsmen
Mochi	Shoe-repairer
Mohalla	Colony
Murdhari	Flesh/Hide of dead animals
Nautch	Traditional dance-drama performance
Nazul	Administrative category denoting Government's land

Pacca/Pakana	Cooked/Cooking
Pargana	A small territorial unit of the district administration
Phatkan	Discarded items
Pucca	Permanent
Rakshasa	Demon
Sabha	Collectives or societies
Samitis	Committees
Sarangi	Stringed Musical Instrument
Shuddhi	Purification
Soongh/Soonghna	Smell/Smelling
Subha	Auspicious
Thugee	The social practice of stealing
Ustaad(s)	Master craftsmen
Utran	Old clothes

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.Tech	Bachelors of Technology
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CETP	Common Effluent Treatment Plant
CFTI	Central Footwear Training Institute
CLRI	Central Leather Research Institute
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code
FDDI	Footwear Design and Development Institute
GLI	Government Leather Institute
LCC	Leathersellers' Company's College
NAI	National Archives of India
NGT	National Green Tribunal
PETP	Primary Effluent Treatment Plant
PU	Polyurethane Leather
SP	Samajwadi Party
STS	State Technical Scholarships
STSc	State Technical Scholars
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPPCB	Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board
UPRA	Uttar Pradesh Regional Archives, Agra
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow

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INTRODUCTION

“...For although in a certain sense and for light-minded persons non-existent things can be more easily and irresponsibly represented in words than existing things, for the serious and conscientious historian it is just the reverse. Nothing is harder, yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. The very fact that serious and conscientious men treat them as existing things brings them a step closer to existence and to the possibility of being born” (Hesse, 1978, p. 1).

Odours are ephemeral, intangible and transient in nature, making them difficult, if not impossible to capture, retain and recreate. The effort of studying odours, analyzing them, and setting them down in concepts and words is marked by the difficulty of this transience. However, even the most transient of odours ultimately arises out of material bodies, spaces and objects, which in turn are situated in the matrices of power, hierarchies and contestations. The passing whiff of a perfumed body, the unbearably heavy stench of a fish market, the nostalgic smell of the clothes of a loved one, the nauseating stink of overflowing sewers, the discomfiting but assuring odours of disinfected hospital floors, the inviting aromas of a home-cooked meal, the noxious fumes of vehicular pollution and the strange anosmia experienced in deodorized offices and museums, all create knowledge by revealing, albeit temporarily, these matrices.

Because they are ephemeral, odours are easy to ignore and forget. And that provides odours with their political and affectual charge. Odours sneak upon us, seep through cracks, are invisible, and are impossible to capture, thus making them potent objects and sources of politics. It is also thus an act of politics, as Hermann Hesse suggests, ‘to speak of things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable’. This is especially true when studying discourses, like caste, which are steeped entirely in contestations over power, that

sometimes only the transient can provide knowledge and resources against this power. Gopal Guru (2012, p.203) argues that untouchability, as a consciousness and as a practice has slid so deep into the hierarchical minds that it no longer appears on the surfaces of society and politics. In order to understand caste, one thus needs to dig deep. While Guru (2012) uses this metaphor to argue for a methodological archaeology of untouchability, I argue that another way to understand caste would be to look for its odours. The politics of smells thus constitutes, in a significant manner, the politics of caste. The practice and experience of caste is smeared with the odours of these bodies, spaces and objects, which when smelled, reveal the intricate ways in which the powers of caste operate. This work is concerned in particular with the odours of the leatherworker, of the leather industry and most importantly of the object of leather.

Located between desire and disgust, leather is a fascinating object to study. On the one hand the object invokes desire, especially through its consumer goods afterlives. Genuine leather bags, handcrafted leather shoes and the supple touch of upholstery leather speak of luxury and decadence. There is also the niche but equally desirable realm of leather perfumes, leather whips and leather fetishes. Leather, thus represents not only high taste and refined aesthetics but is also synonymous with sensuousness, masculinity and a certain appeal to our remnant animality. This animality especially comes through the characteristic odours of these leather goods, which also stands in for their authenticity. On the other hand, it is also this animal provenance of leather which converts the desirable into an object of disgust. The production of leather, from the hides/skins of dead animals has been almost universally condemned as a disgusting and malodorous process¹.

¹ 'Hide' refers to the skin of large animals such as cows and buffalos. 'Skin' on the other hand refers to smaller animals such as sheep and goat. The leather industry in Uttar Pradesh largely deals with hides. Thus this work will refer to this raw material by and large as 'hide'. In places where there is a conceptual discussion of the process or of the body of the animal, hide/skin maybe used.

However in India this disgust gets a special affective and political charge due to the association of leather with the caste discourses. Because of the association of leather with dead hides/skins, leatherwork is considered to be a polluting process. This pollution is based in the discourse of caste which deems bodies, spaces and objects as pure, impure, defiling and purifying. The defiling process of converting impure dead hides to desirable leather was thus undertaken exclusively by the '*charm*kara' – the worker of skin (*charm*), who by the association with this work became an 'untouchable'. While the formalization of leatherwork into the leather industry during the mid to late nineteenth century in parts of Uttar Pradesh, facilitated the entry of other castes into administration and ownership positions, leatherwork per se still remains the domain of the Jatav Chamars and lower-caste, lower-class (Arzaal) Muslims in Uttar Pradesh². In this complex relationship between the luxurious object and its stinky production, between the untouchable producers and the touchable consumers and between the odour of hides and the sweet leather smell of our designer handbags, lies caste.

This thesis thus set out to examine the triptych of caste, leatherwork and odours in the leather industry in Uttar Pradesh, with the central concern being to explore the odours of caste, or to put it differently to understand what caste smells like? The initial impetus to examine the object of leather came from a close reading of Hindi Dalit autobiographical literature. In these lives, the power of caste appeared as a series of seemingly obscure and arcane injunctions which

² The term 'Chamar' has been considered as derogatory because of its use within the traditional understanding and vocabulary of caste. In some contexts however, the term has been resignified to connote a positive political charge. For instance the recent phenomenon of 'Chamar Pop' – a musical subculture amongst young Chamars in Punjab, posits 'Chamar' as a strong self-referential identity. On the other hand, in places like Agra, the term 'Jatav' is used freely for self-identification by the community, because of the history of continuous political assertions and social mobility. Thus wherever possible, the term 'Jatav' has been used instead of 'Chamar'. In other places the use of the term 'Chamar' in this work is cognizant of these complexities and debates, and has been used here in reference to and in consonance with the larger academic literature on the community.

regulated the everyday and also the larger trajectories of life. Thus Dalit homes were not allowed to have high walls, seven feet of distance between the untouchable and the touchable castes prevented pollution, Dalit women were not allowed to wear gold and silver jewellery and Dalit men could not ride on a horse in marriage processions. Questions about the operationalization of caste through these practices thus began to take shape and the ideas of purity, pollution and defilement began to emerge as concepts through which these seemingly arcane rituals could be understood.

Because a majority of these narratives came from the dominant Chamar community, leather almost appeared as another character in these life stories. And what a complex and compelling character it was. On the one hand, the Chamar community seemed to take pride in the skill of flaying, in its affective relationship with animals and in their dexterity at converting hides/skins into leather and into leather goods. Simultaneously it was also apparent that this skill and dexterity brings along with the stigma of untouchability and a nauseous repulsion on part of the upper caste communities. There was also a distancing from activities such as flaying, on the part of Chamars who had gained education and had moved away from the rural economies. The taint of leatherwork however remained, either as a spectral presence from the past or was contained in the act of return to the village, but mostly as the feeling of repulsion which the identity of a 'Chamar' invoked. Simultaneously, leather in itself continued to occupy a somewhat exalted status as an object of luxury and refinement.

It is in the halting nature of this exaltation, in the use of the word 'somewhat', that this work is located. Even the material, consumerist and affectual desire for leather could not overcome its 'polluted' status. Leather is thus kept out of temples; shoes are removed outside homes, and within homes outside the kitchen and feet in general are considered to be dirty. On the other hand, and as many Muslims and Dalit respondents never failed to mention in the field interviews, the Hindu god, Shiva, is depicted sitting on the tanned hide of a tiger.

“Who flayed and tanned this hide?” was thus a recurring question in these inquiries. And this continues to be an important question for the present work, bringing together the questions of caste, labour, pollution and leather.

Further, it was impossible to ignore the odours of leather emanating out of these Dalit life narratives. Leatherwork is not simply polluting, it is also stinky. These malodours merged into the bodies of the leatherworkers, reducing the physical and perceptual distance between the worker and the object of production, thus giving rise to the stink of Chamar bodies, and more importantly to the caste of the object of leather. An exploration of the leather industry confirmed the deeply intimate and sensual relationship between caste and odours, with almost every interview invariably throwing up the statement, “*Par yeh kaam bahut ganda hai, bahut smell aati hai.*” (This work is very dirty, it smells quite bad)³. The intense desire for the object of leather separates this work from related occupations like manual scavenging, which are also premised on untouchable labour and strong odours which give rise to repulsion and disgust. On the other hand, the supposedly polluted nature of leather, distinguishes the leather industry from other ‘stinky’ industries such as sugar, where the stink of molasses does not come to signify the caste status of the industry and its inhabitants. These revelations, thus, brought into analysis, the remaining third of triptych – odours, making this an enquiry into the sensory politics of caste produced through the object of leather.

In doing so, this work situates itself in and brings together two distinct fields of study – sensory studies and caste, in particular the related concepts of purity, pollution and hereditary occupations. Within the sensory discourse, the affectual experience of perceiving and understanding the world through our senses is understood not just as a biological process, but instead as a socially constructed phenomenon which operates in distinct social and cultural contexts. Odours are present all around us and have an influence on the way in which we inhabit

³ All translations from Hindi are mine, unless stated otherwise. Where ever possible, literary and interview quotes have been retained in the original language to preserve the idiom and affect.

space, create memories, judge people and places, and generally interact with our environment. The thesis extends this idea of the social construction of the senses to examine the politics of sensory perception, in particular the politics of odours and of the act of smelling. Thus here, 'production of smell' does not refer to the simplistic and mechanical production of odours alone. Production of smell signifies the complex socio-political and economic processes through which odours become the markers of caste and produces the politics of smell. The use of the term 'production' also seeks to take away from the ostensible naturalness of sensory phenomenon. The production of odours and their sensory affect is an act in politics. The production and categorization of odours is an act in politics and in socialization of the senses.

The carriers of smells – bodies and objects– are political actors constructed through their location in power/knowledge. The politics of odours derives from aesthetic, moral and social power which inheres in their description and classification. The power/knowledge to name an odour as good or bad, as disgusting or pleasant is ultimately an exercise in politics. Within the discourse of caste, the power of pollution makes the issue of odours more urgent. Why do certain odours become polluting? Can an odour 'pollute' ones caste status?

The work thus locates the question of odours in the discourses of caste and leatherwork, with the principal concern being to understand the phenomenology of caste produced through leatherwork. In this sense, the thesis is fundamentally located in the conversations between Gopal Guru and Sunder Sarrukai (2012) on the phenomenology of caste, experience and the body. In doing so, this work opens up the question of caste and untouchability to debates on the organisation of social and political power and the production of hierarchies through a sensorial ordering of spaces and bodies. It thus offers one possible intervention into understanding the politics of caste as the politics of naming, ordering and categorising.

It is this gap that the current work seeks to explore and contribute to by examining the production and operation of caste through the sensory experience

of odours and the act of smelling. Using the sense of smell, this work interrogates the method in which caste operationalizes through the sensory experience of the society. How certain bodies and objects become carriers of certain kinds of odours and how these intangible elements of the sensory experience carry the immense potential to pollute and to purify?

The work argues that in the context of the industrial production of leather, while visible pollution such as skins, blood and fat were sought to be contained to the body of the untouchable workers, it was the odours which escaped control and disciplining. The odours of leather production polluted everyone in the industry, and at times even entire cities. It was these foul odours which converted everyone into a 'leatherworker'. This conversion owes to the fact that the very object of leather was produced and more importantly maintained as an object of caste by the industry, society and by the state. While many kinds of arguments were made for the secularization of caste or the disappearance of caste in the public sphere, or on the factory floor, caste was allowed to sustain itself in objects such as leather and the dead bodies of animals. Thus as Valerian Rodrigues (2009, p. 120) argues, public space could never be physically or morally cleaned because it was regarded as the space for intermixing of castes. This intermixing, itself, was considered unclean.

The large and deep history of the anti-caste movements during the colonial rule, the social reform movements within caste communities and political and social arguments such as those made by Ambedkar, Periyar and Phule for the annihilation of caste, were subsumed under the question of nationalism. Within the resolution of the national question in 1947, all other pending issues such as caste and gender were also thought of as resolved⁴. Caste was now viewed as the remnants of a rural and feudal order which still held some power and significance in village economies and was studied in benign categories like the *jajmani* system or as un-modern practices such as untouchability which were waiting to wither away under the impact of development. Simultaneously legal

⁴ See Uma Chakravarty (2003) and Sharmila Rege (2013)

and policy measures were used to argue for a public sphere devoid of untouchability, and this was by default understood to be considered a public sphere without caste.

In 1955, the eminent sociologist and scholar of caste, M N Srinivas gave a lecture titled, '*Castes: Can They Exist in India of Tomorrow?*' The significance of the year was not lost on Srinivas, who spoke at length about the effect that the then newly passed Untouchability (Offenses) Act, 1955⁵ would have on caste relations in the country. Srinivas believed that it would be difficult to break the hold of 'prodigious institution' caste by law alone and one will have to strive for a larger societal change in order to tackle this problem. Education, especially amongst the Harijans could be the catalyst of this change as was evidenced by the increasing number of educated Harijans who were using the Act to fight caste (Srinivas, 1955, p. 1231). Further, Srinivas opines that with the industrialization of smaller cities and towns; improvement of infrastructure, such as drainage facilities in urban areas; and the mechanization of labour practices, the defiling nature of manual work will be replaced by love for manual work.

In 1979, Srinivas wrote another piece titled, '*Future of Indian Caste*', in which he argued that though caste, has survived in the urban context, its form is radically different from the traditional caste structures of the rural society. The main change has been the increasingly competition between caste groups over control of and access to natural and state resources⁶. With the success of electoral politics and land reforms in some areas, competitive caste groups have emerged in the urban areas which were beginning to wage anti-caste movements and

⁵ With the inauguration of the Constitution in 1950, untouchability had already been abolished under Article 17. Within a span of five years however it became clear that this constitutional provision would require legal backing to make it effective in the public sphere. The Untouchability (Offenses) Act, 1955 thus declared the practice of untouchability in public, a criminal offense. The Act was amended in the same year and its title was changed to Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

⁶In doing so Srinivas, critiques the thesis forwarded by Edward Leach (1971) that unlike the class system where the lower classes have to compete for the favors of the upper classes, in the caste structure of India the numerically higher upper-castes vie for the services of the relatively fewer lower-caste members.

movements for social mobility, thereby making caste boundaries fuzzy. Thus, Srinivas argued, while caste hierarchy is declining the use of the caste idiom is still widespread (Srinivas, 1979, p. 242). Finally in a talk delivered at the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore in 1999, Srinivas delivered an *'Obituary on Caste as a System'* (2003), arguing that institutions based on values of democracy and human rights, coupled with technological changes have brought about significant changes in the caste-based system of production at the local level⁷. This, according to Srinivas (2003), is the death knell of the caste system, which will "disappear in the near future".

Srinivas was by no means alone in observing not just changes in the structures of caste, but also proposing its ultimate end. Other sociologists such as Andre Beteille (1965) and T N Madan (1965), as well as political leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru also spoke about the declining significance of caste in the newly formed modern nation-state, especially in the urban areas. Beteille (1965; 1991) for instance argues that many areas of village life are becoming 'caste free' due to changes in land ownership and spread of education amongst the lower castes. In fact there has been a consistent trend to especially downplay what are called the 'ritual aspects' of caste, like emphasis on purity and pollution. Thus even when the existence of caste is acknowledged, it is viewed as a rapidly changing reality, which is not governed anymore by these rules. Dipankar Gupta (2012, p. xvi) argues that "what is easily visible to the naked eye today is that castes, high and low, are moving both up and down the hierarchy. Further, this hierarchy is not reckoned solely in ritual terms any longer, even if that has once been the case".

The decades following independence would however to prove that the obituary of caste was far from been written, and in fact it would adapt itself to not just modernity and democracy but to the nation-state in itself. The disappearance of

⁷This lecture appears in the form of an essay in the pages of *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) in 2001, with the explanation that since Srinivas passed away soon after delivering this lecture the paper was not published. Some thoughts are therefore not elaborated upon. Srinivas did not think that the paper was ready for publication. Here it appears as it was found.

caste in urban contexts is actually the flattening of the visual markers of caste alone. Surajpal Chauhan (2002, p. 32) writes about the time when he returns to his village from the city and on the way asks an old upper-caste man for water. On realizing that Chauhan is an untouchable the latter says,

“When those born of Bhangis and Chamars come back from the cities wearing new clean clothes, we cannot even identify whether they are Bhangi or not⁸.”

This work argues that while urban and modern contexts may provide this visual anonymity from the oppression of caste identities, it is other sensory markers, such as odours of the body, flavours of food and the accent of speech which give away caste. These odours were in fact the strongest in the citadels of modernity and industrialization like the leather industry.

These norms of purity and pollution in particular and the caste system in general were considered to be an anomaly in the post-independent India which located itself in the discourses of modernity, development and the secular nation-state (Kaviraj, 2008, p 16). Two crucial aspects of modernization and development in this nation-state were industrialization and spread of education in general and technical education in particular. These aspects will form the central theme of Chapters Four and Five in terms of their relevance for understanding caste.

By 1960s the Nehruvian consensus regarding the developmental and the secularization process had begun to breakdown. With the decline of the Congress system and the rise of the regional parties, the politics of caste also gained a new life, especially in urban areas. Rajni Kothari (1995) argues that sociologists and political scientists of this period often bemoaned the corruption of politics due to the intrusion of caste associations in the political and electoral process. This is also the period when caste groups within the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas were beginning to organize themselves in order to further specific community

⁸ *Bhangiya aur chamatte ke...seher mein jake naye-naye latta (kapde) pehen ke gaon mein aa jathain, kachu pato na chaltu ki jaye bhangi ke hain ki nay*

interests⁹. In Maharashtra, through the decade of the sixties and seventies, the Dalit Panthers had brought the discourse of caste into the center of the public, political and literary discourse and had challenged the Brahmanical notions inherent in these spaces¹⁰. The effects of several decades of the reservation policy were now apparent, with a ground-swell of Dalits now entering public educational institutions and workspaces, thereby forcing the public at large to confront the issue of caste discrimination and power.

Finally the understanding of caste as a waning entity came to be challenged significantly in 1991 in the aftermath of the implementation of OBC reservations in higher education and government jobs, following the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report. In the debates and the violence which ensued, the entire extent of the spread of caste based power became apparent. The implementation of OBC reservations also marked a significant rise in the incidents of atrocities against Dalits and also in the media and academic attention given to such events. A rising Dalit assertion against the discriminatory practices of caste was also being met by retaliation from the upper-castes, dominant castes and in some cases by the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in various parts of the country.

Caste based discrimination which does not take the form of physical violence, occurs subtly at the level of the everyday. Refusal to share food, eat from the same utensils, separate arrangement of drinking water for different castes, ridiculing caste status, distortion of names of the lower caste, physical segregation, refusal of entry to temples, schools and even roads are amongst the many forms of discrimination which the discourse of caste routinely employs. Making Dalits eat manure, faeces, drink urine, or be paraded naked also derives from the symbolic order in which lower castes were deemed to remain closer to dirt, filth and animals. These apparently symbolic uses of authority are deeply political in nature and contain within them the politics of affect and disgust. At

⁹ See Ghanshyam Shah (2002)

¹⁰ See Lata Murugar (1991), Arjun Dangle (1994)

the foundation of all these phenomenon lies the norms of purity and pollution, which are used to determine both, the transgression and the punishment. However we have understood events of violence in solely visual ways (Visvanathan, 2001).

On the other hand, the realms of the industry and economy were thought of as being free from this messiness of caste. For the nation-state these spaces represented the advance of science and technology, where caste was neither required nor desirable. In fact the advance of technology and industry was supposed to counteract the negative effects of caste, especially in the rural areas. The separation of caste, politics and economy into antithetical categories meant that the politics of economy and that of caste was not probed into. While, as Kothari (1995) predicted caste and politics benefitted from coming together, caste, economy and politics remained largely distinct. For the discourses of caste this meant that spaces like the factory were at least normatively thought of as devoid of caste and caste relationships, with the identity of the 'worker' surpassing the other ascribed identifications such as caste and religion. This perception also gained ground from the class based mobilization of workers and urban poor by the Left parties, which has a significant presence in the industrial spaces in the decades right after independence. Scholars like Nandini Gooptu (2001), Jonathan Parry (2001), Rajnarayan Chandravarkar (2002) and Chitra Joshi (2003) have provided rich accounts of the myriad ways in which caste continued to operate on these factory floors.

However the normative idea, that industrial spaces are either devoid of caste or at any rate are supposed to counteract caste, meant that the industry itself fashioned itself as a space where the caste identities of its employees and employers does not matter. More importantly this meant that the objects and commodities of industrial production had no association with caste and consequently did not have a caste. This notion was fundamentally against the way in which objects and commodities are perceived in the caste system, where

they are each ranked on a precise scale of purity and impurity. One of the biggest challenges to the castelessness of the industry comes from the object of leather.

Reviewing Caste, Leather and Senses

Caste is widely regarded as one of the defining principles of social, political and economic life in large parts of India. It is a rather complex discourse of categorization, value-ranking and a careful balance of norms and rules. The caste discourse derives its significance and power from the fact that it is an ascribed category – one is born into a caste and has very limited chances of either changing it or coming out of this ascription. Caste thus comes to provide a systemic framework for an individual and for a community and in a sense represents a total system. While on the one hand it governs the community and individual life at the level of ideology, on the other its complex and often nuanced web of rules and norms define the everyday life of people born into it. For those who benefit from this discourse, it thus represents a valuable system for management of labour, resources and status.

Within the academic discourse, caste has been variously understood as a system, as an arrangement of status groups, as a discourse and at times as a co-operative division of labour. Further caste has been discussed through its provenance in Hindu religious scriptures such as the Dharmashastras, or in Hindu socio-legal texts such as the Manusmriti. Caste has also been looked at from the vantage of affirmative action policies, reservations and identity politics. Some aspects of caste like untouchability, violence and discrimination have received more attention than the others. Perhaps the most important societal and academic understanding of caste has come through the anti-caste movements which have made forceful and rich arguments against inequality, discrimination and power hierarchies and in favour of an egalitarian and democratic socio-political ethic. A majority of the studies on caste have focused on the life-worlds and politics of

the untouchables and the lower castes. Only a few significant works have examined the society and politics of upper castes and the Brahmins.

Guru (2012, p. 200-1) argues that the study of untouchability has received lop-sided attention from various academic disciplines. While sociology and social anthropology have given it detailed attention, disciplines like political science only examine it marginally and “it faces a complete blackout in economics”, with the exception of Ambedkar’s economic interventions. This observation is significant because it gives us a clue regarding the way in which caste and untouchability have been framed in our understanding. In specific cases, relationship between caste and labour and economics, has also been studied in great detail but by and large studies in disciplines like commerce and business administration have stayed away from engaging with caste. This has implications for the way in which we understand caste within industrial spaces, such as the leather industry.

Accordingly there are various ways in which caste has been defined, although most definitions retain some of the basic characteristics – castes are endogamous; there are restrictions on the commensality between members of different castes; hierarchical grading of castes; the possibility of pollution caused by defiled objects and people; and a system of traditional and hierarchical occupations (Leach, 1971, pp. 2-3, Beteille 1965, p. 46, Ghurye 2008, pp. 1-30).

Leather is located in the matrix of pollution, desire and a discourse of hereditary occupations. The following discussion thus foregrounds the academic engagement with the concepts of purity and pollution and occupational segregation within the larger understanding of caste and these concepts form the theoretical framework of this work. Additionally these concepts, located as they are in material practices and objects of the caste discourse, also provide a phenomenologically rich ground for a sensory analysis of caste and its practices. Shah (2002, p. 7) argues that while there are differences and difficulties in the way in which caste is defined, there is a broad consensus on the ideology of the caste system. This ideology derives from the idea of homo hierarchicus and “the

caste system is thus governed by the concept of purity and pollution; by interpersonal relationship among individuals being dictated in terms of blood, food and occupation; and by rituals related to them being divided into pure and impure”.

This ideology of caste is based in the fundamental idea that some individuals and groups are lower and thus impure. Thus their touch, sight, sounds and odours contains the capacity to pollute those who are ranked higher. This pollution can arise from people and objects and also from certain phenomenon like death and child-birth. These ideas of purity and pollution span a vast range of everyday life and govern both the public and private spheres in matters of commensality, food habits and choices, sartorial practices, kinship and marriage, occupational choices, issues of hygiene and sanitation and even govern intimate spaces such as friendships and sexual relationships. In effect these rules of purity and pollution govern the ritual, physical and social distance to be maintained between two castes, whether in the form of individuals or communities.

Caste has been understood broadly through two conceptual frameworks. The first of these derives from Weber who considered caste to be a hierarchically arranged order of closed status groups (Gupta, 2015, p. 19). This structural understanding of caste derives from the idea of social stratification. On the other hand, the cultural understanding of caste, views it as a discourse derived from either religious sources or the dominant cultural context of a society. Ideas such as purity and pollution, segregation and occupational fixity find a place in this understanding and are attributed to the religious or scriptural ideology. Celestine Bougle and Louis Dumont are the most significant proponents of this approach. Due to its reliance on cultural and religious sources, this latter view also proposes caste to be a specific feature of the Hindu society. Leatherwork is closely associated with Muslims in India, mainly due to the community's predominance in the slaughtering trade. While scripturally Islam does not support the idea of caste based segregation, yet in India, Muslim societies have been known to practice caste. The relationship between Muslims, caste and

occupation will be discussed a little later in this section. For a theoretical understanding of the ideas of purity, pollution and occupational segregation, within caste, this work relies on the framework proposed by Bougle and Dumont. However, the argument does not rely entirely on the cultural view of caste, especially when caste within Muslim societies is discussed, since the existence of caste practices within these communities was apparent in the course of the fieldwork.

Bougle (1996, p. 9) lists three tendencies which characterize the spirit of caste – reciprocal repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization. Bougle argues that, “this spirit of caste gives rise to horror of misalliance, fear of impure contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated”. What distinguishes an individual or community from others in the caste organization is that it abstains from certain procedures, does not use certain materials and does not manufacture the same products. For instance he observes that amongst the leatherworkers, one caste makes shoe, another repairs them and yet another makes leather flasks (Bougle, 1996, p. 17). However within this system, the Brahmin can practice the maximum contingency due to her purity. For instance while Manu forbids the Brahmins to trade in liquor, perfumes, meat and wool, he permits them to engage in military service, agriculture, the care of herds and some other commercial enterprises when the need arises. Bougle (1996) argues that the peculiar position of the Brahmin comes from the fact that he is always above the law and thus by and large remain largely respected whatever professions they may come to occupy. For the non-Brahmin castes a change in occupation, carries a forfeit of status.

These insights become increasingly relevant as we examine the Brahmins who work in the leather industry, later in this work. It is argued that while their caste status provides them with greater contingency, and a lesser threat of pollution, yet it is this very status which makes their position in the leather industry extremely uncomfortable. This discomfort is crucial for us to understand the dynamics of caste in the leather industry.

Following Bougle, Dumont based the theoretical understanding of caste on the three sets of overlapping binaries – between the pure and impure, religious authority and secular authority and the Brahmin and the untouchable. The Brahmin is pure and is also the holder of religious authority. The Brahmin's purity stands in direct opposition to the impurity of the untouchable and this opposition provides the ideological basis for caste¹¹. In studying caste, Dumont's larger project was to present a comparative perspective between individualism and equality in Western societies, and collective inequality of the *homo hierarchicus* in the caste society in India. This inequality was based in religious authority, thus making religion the ideological basis of caste for Dumont, rather than political or societal power configurations. The most significant critiques of Dumont's position are based on this idea of caste as an ideology which derives from religion thereby making hierarchy an unproblematic concept within caste¹². This critique is well taken and this work instead argues for exploring not just the political authority of caste, but also its impact on the economic sphere.

However, it is Dumont's ideas on purity and pollution, largely based on Bougle, which are also important for the argument being made here. Dumont argues that the basis of separation between castes, especially from the untouchables lie in not just impurity, but in notions such as hygiene which are used as facades to talk about impurity. This impurity derives from the "nauseating smell of the skins that they are accustomed to treat" (Dumont, 1980, p. 47). This notion of permanent impurity, Dumont argues derives from the temporary impurity which the upper castes come to contract. This in turn creates a specialization of impure tasks which "leads to the attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people" (Dumont, 1980, p. 47).

Relying on McKim Marriot's argument that an activity which is practised as a profession maybe more polluting than when it is practiced within the household,

¹¹ The other basis for caste is the opposition between the secular authority of the Kshatriya, as the king and the religious authority of the Brahmin. For Dumont, it is important that although the Brahmin maintains a superior status in comparison to the ruler.

¹² See Stanley Tambiah's (1972) review of *Homo Hierarchicus*.

Dumont argues that the same reasoning can be applied to impure commodities whose creation is more polluting than their consumption, for instance the distinction between the status of toddy tappers and those who consume toddy (Dumont, 1980, p. 370).

Further in this system it is not just bodies but also objects which are ranked by their pure or polluted status. Dumont (1980, p. 49) argues that “objects are distinguished by the greater or lesser ease of their purification – a bronze vessel is merely cleaned, an earthenware one replaced – and their relative richness – silk is purer than cotton, gold than silver, than bronze, than copper”. Objects are not only polluted by contact but also by their utility, and also depending on the person who is using them (Dumont, 1980, p. 50). The impurity of the untouchable then is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahmin (Dumont, 1980, p. 54) as is witnessed in the complementarity of the impurity of the Chamar with the veneration of the cow” (Dumont, 1980, p. 136). This work takes this argument forward from its binary nature to in fact extend the notion of pollution to the intervening castes as well¹³. It is argued that the pollution of leather, comes to disrupt the status of all those who are involved in its production, including the Brahmins and the other upper-caste groups.

The research shows the extent to which norms of purity and pollution have been retained with society and in the industry. Within sociology the debate over purity and pollution has ended with this engagement with Dumont. The idea of hereditary and fixed occupations is also thought of as declining, especially with the move to the urban centres of industry. Within the leather industry this

¹³ R S Khare critiques Dumont’s framework for its inability to accommodate the empirical realities of the castes in between the Brahmin and the untouchable where greater mobility and status changed is involved. According to Madan also (2009, p. 42) Dumont thus sets out to construct an ideal type for caste and this has little bearing on the contemporary social reality. Madan also argues that amongst the Indian scholars on caste, Ketkar (1920) was the first to emphasise purity-pollution as the chief system on which the caste system rests and also distinguished caste gradation from socio-economic ranking. Madan asserts that Ketkar’s source was Manu (2009, p. 42). Gerald Berreman (2015) argued that Dumont gave too much emphasis to the authority of the Brahmin which does not align with local systems of hierarchies in many parts of India.

assumption was also challenged. Leatherwork continues to remain a hereditary profession amongst the 'impure' lower castes such as Chamars, Valmikis/Bhangis and Khatiks, amongst both Hindus and Muslims. Dumont is perhaps correct in drawing out a relationship between polluted objects, occupations and the permanent impurity of some castes. This work provides the material context to these ideas.

There are further debates as to whether concepts like purity and pollution have relevance in the modern urban contexts. Studies such as those of Deshpande (2000) and Thorat and Newman (2009) show a strong link between caste, occupational fixity and discrimination and will be brought into the analysis in Chapter Two. Beteille (1992, p. 40) however argues against this linkage between caste and occupation and calls it misrepresented. This is largely due to the disappearance of the jajmani system and the overwhelming predominance of what is seen as the modern market structure. Land reforms, industrial production of artisanal goods, affirmative action policies and increasing educational opportunities are seen as the factors responsible for loosening of the link between caste and occupation (Bayly, 1999, Beteille, 1992).

Contrary to these ideas, this work argues that the object of leather and the bodies of the leatherworkers brings together these aspects of fixed occupation and threat of pollution in a major fashion. The object of leather brings these ideas back into focus and opens up the category of untouchability, leatherworker and disgust. More importantly the chapter argues that it is this affectual quality of leather, the disgust and the desire that it causes the threat of pollution, that it becomes an object of caste.

The idea of hereditary occupational segregation may not hold much relevance in the present political economic setup. However it is at in the hard cases of occupational segregation that we have to look at in order to tease out the complexity of the situation. Caste has rather infamously retained its hold over occupations such as manual scavenging, sewage work and other cleaning activities even within the municipal or governmental structures. Leatherwork

presents another test case where the hold of caste has retained through various narrative ploys like hereditary skill, '*aadat*' (habit or practice) and customary right. These aspects of caste will be detailed throughout the work and will be specifically looked at in Chapter Five. However these aspects of caste become clearer once we begin looking for hereditary networks of caste in the upper and middle castes as well. Business and trade has largely been organised along caste lines and in fact caste works itself into not just the choice of occupation but also in networks and resources mobilized in order to sustain these businesses. The structure of Harish Damodaran's (2008) book itself is a testimony to the deeply caste based nature of trade in India. Even within the leather industry, ownership of factories and tanneries is largely organized on the basis of caste communities, amongst both Hindus and Muslims.

At a broad level, two criteria seem to apply in grading the nature of occupation. Firstly, and perhaps more importantly, some socially acceptable notion of purity or impurity, cleanliness or uncleanness, in terms of which the contents of an occupation, including materials handled, can be measured. Secondly, proximity of the occupation in a physical sense to the (Bhatty, 1973, p. 93) upper castes. Explaining the operation of occupational hierarchy within Muslim communities, Bhatty explains that Nats who skin dead animals and make drums find a place close to the bottom of the scale while Julahas and Darzis are at the top end. Dhobis, who must wash soiled clothes, are closer to the Nats than to the Julahas. Mirasis, on the other hand, have a rank next only to the Julaha mainly because of their proximity to the Ashraf (higher caste). They are singers and their women dance to provide entertainment. This precise function is also performed by the Nats, and their women also dance to entertain, but while the Mirasis sing and dance only for the Ashrafs, the Nats do it for public at large (Bhatty, 1973, p. 94).

Bhatty's observation about the occupational hierarchy of castes within the Islamic context is relevant for this work mainly because it provides an insight into the way in which caste norms have been adapted to a cultural and religious context which does not support caste scripturally. It is an important context for

this work given the predominance of Muslims in slaughtering as well as the tanning industry at the level of ownership and also as workers. It was often pointed out in the field interviews by the upper caste Hindu respondents that Muslims are used to the sights and odours of meat and blood due to their gustatory habits and participation in religious rituals like ritual slaughter, even in domestic spaces. This argument goes very close to the argument of Chamars being habituated to the malodours of hides and does not refer to caste and community groupings within Muslims themselves. This needs to be interrogated and will be discussed in Chapter Three. However, in order to open up the question of caste and sense, especially in the context of the affectual politics of animal bodies, it is important to understand the Muslim context in terms of caste and occupations.

There are largely two genealogies which Muslims in India subscribe to in order to explain their historical context. Muslim groups such as the Ashrafs (which includes the Sayyads, Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans), draw their lineage directly from Prophet Muhammed and in terms of geography from Arabia¹⁴ (Goodfriend, 1983, pp. 125-126). The sense of superiority derived from this foreign ancestry is an important criterion of social stratification among Muslims in India (Dumont, 1970). The non-Ashraf castes are all alleged to be converts from Hinduism and are thus considered to be lower than the Ashrafs¹⁵.

¹⁴Among the Ashraf castes too there is a division for the purposes of marriage alliance. The first two, that is, the Sayyads and the Sheikhs inter-marry, while Mughals and Pathans inter-marry, but marriages between Sayyads or Sheikhs and Pathans or Mughals are not socially acceptable. However, there is commensality between all the four Ashraf castes. There is no commensality between any of the four Ashraf castes and the non-Ashraf castes, while among the non-Ashraf castes rules of commensality and marriage are governed by the norms of cleanliness or uncleanness of different occupations (Bhatty, 1973, pp. 92-93).

¹⁵ Speaking specifically about a Muslim dominated village in the Oudh region of Uttar Pradesh, about eight miles from Bara Banki, Bhatty lists out a hierarchical ordering of eighteen non-Ashraf occupational castes – Julahas (weavers), Mirasis (singers), Darzis (tailors), Halwais (sweetmakers), Manihars (bangle-sellers), Nais (barbers), Bakar Kasabs (butchers dealing in mutton only), Kasab (butchers dealing in mutton and beef and also in hides and skins), Behnas (cotton traders), Behen-Kasabs (a mixed caste, with butchers and cotton traders), Telis (oil presser), Kabariyas (vegetable sellers), Gujats (dairy men), Kasgars (potters), Dhobis (Washermen), Fakirs (landless labourers who also watch graveyards and beg for food), Nats

Islamic scholars find the use of the term caste for Muslim social groups distasteful, as they claim Islam is an egalitarian religion. It is pointed out that there were revelations to Prophet Mohammed that birth did not count for anything and that religious zeal was the prime criterion for honour (Bhatty, 1996, p. 245). Despite such Koranic instructions, there are no records to suggest that the egalitarian ideal was ever practiced in any Muslim society (Bhatty, 1996, p. 246). When Islam spread beyond Arabia, the Bedouins regarded themselves superior to the new converts. The dating of conversion to determine social status is still prevalent in India, where recent converts to Islam, referred to as *Nau-Muslims* (New Muslims), are treated as belonging to a lower social status by Muslims of a longer standing (Bhatty, 1996, p. 246).

Charles Lindholm also suggests that despite doctrinaire pronouncements of equality, Islamic history shows much evidence of ranking. The Quraish tribe from whom the present day Qureshi community claims ancestry, claim to be the highest of all the Arab tribes (Lindholm, 1995, pp. 453-454). The Quraish provided meat on the jihad battlefields and claim to have entered India with the invading Mughals and Pathans) (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 129). It is interesting to note for our purposes that while they enjoyed a higher status precisely due to their involvement in the meat trade in Arabia, in India it is precisely this occupational category which makes them the subject of ridicule and stereotyping (Ahmad, 2012). This changed status derives primarily from the difference in the way in which meat is viewed in the two contexts. Chapter Three will discuss the slaughtering trade and the position of Muslims in it in detail. It is generally agreed that caste among Muslims in India owes itself directly to Hindu influences, but it has been reinforced by the justification offered for the idea of birth and descent as criteria of status in Islamic law (Ahmad, 1978, p. 15, Lindholm, 1995, p. 454).

(acrobats) and Banjaras (gypsies). These relate closely to the occupational hierarchy found in the Hindu caste system as well and thus can be considered to be broadly indicative of caste divisions within the larger Muslim societies elsewhere.

Muslim communities in India also organize themselves on the basis of *biraderis*¹⁶. These *biradaris* usually claim descent from some prominent Islamic figures and hold the ideas of *nasl*, *ek khandan*, or *asli* (purity of blood and bone) to be important (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 121). These *biradaris* could overlap with other systems of division like occupations and caste¹⁷.

The prevalence of divisions based on occupations within Muslim communities is important for this work as it brings together the various communities involved in the leather trade into a broadly common framework of purity and pollution. Viewed from the vantage point of a Hindu classification of pure and impure, the Muslim communities associated with leather and with slaughtering activities, also appear to be a problematic category. This relationship is however more layered and will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

This work locates itself in the region of Uttar Pradesh, which is one of the major centers of leatherwork, second only to Tamil Nadu. However, the industry in UP has not been studied extensively, as has been the case for Tamil Nadu. Further, even aside from the studies on industrial contexts, the relationship between

¹⁶ Hamza Alavi, speaking of West Punjab in Pakistan, provides a different view on caste within Muslim communities by looking at the formation of a *biradari*. Alavi (1995, p. 1) places *biradari* as the basic unit of social organization in rural West Punjab. There are two types of *biraderis* – *biradari* as lineage endogamy and *biradari* as clan (exogamous patrilineal gots or gotras) (Alavi, 1995, pp. 1-2). Further the term, ‘*zat*’ in this particular case did not indicate a position within any ranked social order and there was no holistic hierarchical social order to which all *zats* could be said to belong or be classified. Nor were there any rules, rituals or ceremonies through which any status ranking with other *zats* could be manifested. The essential elements of ‘caste’ were missing (Alavi, 1995, p. 10)

¹⁷ For instance, the *jootewalla biradari* is said to have originated out of the Bhatyaras of Mughal India. The Bhatyara *biradari* are cooks and claim descent from the second Caliph who managed a *serai* (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 121). One group of Bhatyaras made shoes for travellers staying in the *serais*. Through a pattern of higher marriages than other Bhatyaras, over time, the shoemaking Bhatyaras raised their status, separated, and became a new endogamous group, the *Jootewallas* (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 122). The *jootewallas* claim Siddiqui status of descent from Caliph and are quite wealthy (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 124). This is also exemplified by the emergence of the new caste of Abbasis out of the *Bhisti biradari* of Delhi. The *Bhisti* community are watercarriers who carry leather bags filled with water. Some of these earned enough money to enter the waste collection business. The *Kabariwallas* became quite successful in the used auto parts business in Jama Masjid in Delhi and also gained status and changed their *biradari* name to Abbasi (Goodfriend, 1983, p. 122).

caste and leatherwork in UP has been even less studied, even though the state has been an important center for caste politics and anti-caste movements. Apart from having the largest population of Dalits anywhere in the country (Sivakumar, 2013), UP is also, one of the most important states for observing Dalit politics due to the presence of political parties like the BSP. Despite these favorable political circumstances, however, UP has also registered the highest number of crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country for many years now¹⁸. Academic attention to UP, in terms of caste politics has been largely restricted to the post-Congress Dalit mobilization under the aegis of BSP, especially in the electoral fray. On the other hand, significant pieces of Dalit literature have also come out of this region, some of which form a basis of this work.

Sudha Pai (2002) examines the politics of BSP and its engagement with the question of democracy and caste politics. She argues that the party has moved away significantly from its anti-upper caste positions as it makes advances in the electoral fold, thereby leaving unfinished the promise of a democratic revolution. Christopher Jaffrelot (2003) argues that the mobilization of lower-castes has happened quite late in UP as compared to states like Maharashtra. Vivek Kumar (2006) counters this claim and provides an extensive account of BSP and its movement in UP.

Badri Narayan (2011) have sought to rework these claims and present a different reading of the history of Dalit movement and politics in UP where he argues for the emergence of a Dalit counter-public in the region through small moments of political assertion, like the Nara-Maweshi movement, and through

¹⁸ A total of 11,143 cases were reported under this Act in 2009. U.P. has reported 2,554 cases accounting for 22.9% of the total cases in the country followed by Bihar (22.7%). It is alleged that Mayawati had stopped the application of this Act in 1997 under the pretext of checking its misuse. Further she directed the police to apply this Act in murder and rape cases only and that too after medical examination and preliminary enquiry. All other atrocity cases were ordered to be registered under normal laws i.e. Indian Penal Code and other Acts. Although this order was withdrawn in 2003 but the practice continues unabated (Darapuri, 2011).

the circulation of locally produced texts and chapbooks which inculcated an anti-caste consciousness amongst the Dalit groups.

The most significant work on the relationship between leather and caste come from Owen Lynch (1968) who has made a detailed study of the Jatavs in Agra City by looking at the leatherwork industry, and tracing the trajectory of this socially mobile group among the Chamars from the early part of the twentieth century, till about the mass conversions that occurred in UP, following Ambedkar in 1956. Ramnarayan Rawat (2011) examines the construction of the Chamar identity in UP during the colonial period. Rawat argues that the production of 'Chamar criminality' has been an important trope through which the community can be understood. Further, and significant for this work, Rawat argues that contrary to the colonial assertion Chamars have never exclusively been leatherworkers. These arguments will be taken up in the chapters that follow. Manuela Ciotti (2010) presents a fascinating ethnography of a Chamar weaving community in Eastern UP. Ciotti argues that this community has been located in a variegated sense of modernity, especially through education and technological skills.

Modernity has thus been characterized by two contradictory processes - first, the Chamar had to borrow some features, techniques, and distinctions which the Indian middle classes had produced in their encounter with the colonial civilizing mission in the 19th century. The second intervention came in the 20th century with the Chamar's negation of high-caste ideals and practices. These contradictions, Ciotti (2010) proposes, led to the formation of retro-modernity amongst the Chamars.

There also exist early anthropological work on Chamars such as Bernard Cohn (2001) who has described the changing status of Chamars by looking at the village of Madhopur in UP. Cohn observed that there have been movements for self-purification among the Chamars here and many of them have accepted the *Shiv Narayan* sect. Gooptu (2001) links up the issues of migration, urban poverty, and caste to look at the city of Kanpur through its leather trade and the

involvement of Chamars in it. In the process, she also traces the growth of the *Adi-Hindu* movement among those who migrated to towns. Extensive work on the city of Kanpur has been done by Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp (2007), where she looks at *Bhakti* sects like *Shiv Narayan Panth* and the *Kabir Panth* and traces their interaction with Buddhism. Khare (1984) in his work on the Lucknow Chamars looks at the ways in which the 'untouchable' identity is formed through various processes and mainly looks at idea of asceticism, as seen through Swami Acchutanand, in these identity formations. Recent work by Guru (2016) on the aesthetics of touch and skin makes a fascinating analysis of the relationship between the sense of touch, pollution and caste making the leather cricket ball the center of his analysis. Guru argues that while the ball brings fame and repute, the body of the leatherworker who produces this ball is deemed untouchable. Guru thus argues that Dalit skin thus becomes the marker of untouchability.

The preceding discussion on caste foregrounds the ideas of purity and pollution and hereditary occupations. This was primarily done for two reasons. First, it is through these two aspects of caste that the affectual relationship between bodies, objects and animals is made apparent in the context of caste. Since the ideas of purity and pollution invoke affect unlike another aspect of caste, they are important in order to understand the sensorial life of caste, especially in the context of leather. This brings us to the second reason. Discussing hereditary occupations and norms of purity and pollution allow the object of leather to be foregrounded. It is through this object and its relationship to the animal and human bodies that the sensorial nature of caste is revealed. In most discussions around caste, it appears as an identity, or as an electoral category or as a system of classification. However, it is when the phenomenological and experiential dimensions of caste are discussed that the affective and emotive charge of caste comes through. Discussions on anti-caste discrimination, untouchability and violence are instances when the experiential and phenomenological dimensions of caste come into discussion.

The object of leather brings along with it the olfactory dimension of caste. Caste may not be readily visible in all circumstances, especially in contexts such as industries. In fact the search for caste always as a visible category may take away from crucial dimensions of the experience of caste. In the leather industry caste can be smelled. There could be other instances and objects of caste which foreground other sensations. However for this work the sensuousness of caste derives from the odours of leatherwork.

Sensory Studies

“Once the encompassing grip of ‘the science of signs’...is broken, we are brought – perhaps with a gasp of surprise or a recoil of disgust – into the realm of the body and the senses” (Howes, 2005, p. 1). The study of the senses and their relationship to the society now constitutes a separate field called sensory studies. One of the defining notions of sensory studies has been to understand the way in which we perceive and interact with our worlds through our senses. Terming this as ‘the sensual revolution’, David Howes (2005, pp. 1-2) argues that the advent of sensory studies is a reaction to the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1960s, which placed the ‘text’ and the ‘sign’ as its analytical categories. The linguistic turn allowed the idea of the ‘text’ to be opened up to include the world and its actions. “...the book was replaced by a meal, a dance, or a whole way of life” (Howes, 2005, p. 1). The sensory revolution replaces this text with the physical and material body and its senses. Michael Serres, one of the pioneering scholars of the senses, thus describes the “language-bound body as a desensualized robot, moving stiffly, unable to taste or smell, preferring to dine on a printed menu than eat an actual meal” (quoted in Howes, 2005, p. 2).

While scholars such as George Simmel (1997) have done pioneering work on the sociology of odours but other than him the subject has largely been ignored. Sensory studies, or a sensual turn in scholarship is partly a reaction against the

incorporeality of conventional academic writing (Howes, 2003, p. xii). The body being the location of the five or more senses, the study of sensory perception was initially limited to psychologists and neurobiologists. With changes in the understanding of the body itself, especially due to feminist theorizations of the body as a social construction and as a performance, by the 1980s, the field of sensory studies also moved out of the confines of medical sciences and into a cultural and social exploration of sensory phenomenon. How we see, hear, smell, touch and taste the world around us was now understood as being deeply mediated by our socio-economic and cultural locations.

Senses have been an important subject of study for anthropologists through the twentieth century. Anthropologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a fascination with the physical and sensory characteristics of the populations they studied (Howes, 2003, p. 4). It was not until the 1930s that the question of how sensory differences may be social and cultural in nature started to receive much serious attention in anthropology. Anthropologists began exploring the associations between sensory practices and social values across a range of fields¹⁹. When perusing the literature or going to the field, anthropologists expected and actively sought out evidence of “savage sensuality” that would support this identification of non-European with the realm of the body and senses (Howes, 2003, p. 4).

After World War I there was a decline in interest in exploring the sensorium in anthropology. The study of the senses was disadvantaged by its close association with the categorization of racial types. Such sensory phenomena as fragrances, flavors, and textures were furthermore deemed to be rather frivolous subjects for study. Attention to these sensory domains seemed to denote a sensationalist interest in exotica on the part of the ethnographer (Howes, 2003, p. 6). The senses were not entirely eliminated as a field for anthropological inquiry, but

¹⁹ For instance in 1935 Margaret Mead argued that the pronounced tactility of the Arapesh of Papua New Guinea was not a result of their “primitive” nature or their physical environment, but was directly related to their social values and practices. Mead was also responsible for developing the concept of “kinaesthetic learning” as distinct from verbal learning in the course of her research on Balinese character formation (Howes, 2003, p. 10-11).

their range was narrowed down to two: sight and hearing. This narrowing was due in part to the assumption that sight and hearing are the least subjective of the senses and therefore the most suitable for scientific investigation.

The sub discipline known as the 'anthropology of the senses' (Howes, 2003, p. 10) only develops around the 1980-1990s basing itself on earlier traditions of scholarship around the body and practices of embodiment. This shift was beginning to reflect in seminal works like Michael Serres, *'Le Cinq Sens'* (1985), Alain Corbin's, *'The Foul and the Fragrant'* which came out in 1986, Paul Stoller, *'The Taste of Ethnographic Things'* (1987), Howes and Constance Classen's, *'The Varieties of Sensory Experience'* in 1991, Nadia Seremetakis *'The Memory of the Senses'* (1994) and Stoller's *'Sensuous Scholarship'* in 1997. The publication of Classen's seminal essay, *'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses'* published in 1997 is seen as the definitive indication of this shift. Sensory studies has thus been understood through various terms – sociology of the senses (Simmel, 1907), anthropology of the senses (Howes, 1991), sensuous scholarship (Stoller, 1997), sensoriality of the film (Marks, 2000) and a cultural history of the senses (Classen, 1993), among others. Corbin (1986, p.6) thus argues that while there was an understanding of the philosophy of the senses for much longer, "the senses increasingly became analytical tools, sensitive gauges for the degree of pleasantness or unpleasantness of the physical environment".

Initially the project of sensory studies was located in the idea of cross-cultural comparisons, especially between the Western and non-Western cultures and viewed the senses in a hierarchically arranged series. Scholars such as Constance Classen and David Howes have argued that large parts of the Western civilizations have been structured and studied with an ocular bias. It was also with this optical predominance in mind that even the non-Western civilizations were thus studied and approached either during colonialism or under anthropological enquires. Thus, say a phenomenon such as race was primarily understood to be a visual classification and was defined on the basis of skin colour alone. On the other hand, significant cultural and social contexts of these

civilizations, which were based on senses other than vision were either ignored or misunderstood. Further, they also argue that not just intellectual discourses but even societal practices have been adapted to predominantly suit vision. People have simply stopped to or forgotten how to smell, hear or taste their environments.

This view, while foundational for the field, has also come under criticism from scholars such as Sarah Pink (2009) and Tim Ingold (2000) who argue that the comparative and hierarchical model of understanding the senses, takes away from actually understanding how the senses are lived and experienced (Pink, 2009, p. 12). Further it is argued that in this approach senses merely become vehicles for understanding other cultural phenomenon, rather than sensory perception itself. Thus sensory anthropology should attempt to study the interweaving sensorial experiences and the ways in which this constructs the worlds of people, rather than examining the sensorial experiences of entire cultures (Ingold, 2000, pp. 156, 285-286). These critiques of the comparative and hierarchical idea of the senses are important for this work, which argues that the way to understanding caste as a sensorial phenomenon cannot be captured either through a hierarchy of senses or through the vision-non vision binary.

Studying sensory phenomenon in the social sciences produces a methodological challenge. Sensory perceptions especially odours are too ephemeral to be contained in descriptions and to be subjected to analytical rigour. However certain foundational works in the social and cultural study of olfaction provide us with some methodologies. Corbin's 'The Foul and the Fragrant' examines the changing perceptions about odours in the French social imagination around the time of the French Revolution (1789-1799). Corbin argues that the, "Foul-smelling rubbish appears to threaten the social order, whereas the reassuring victory of the hygienic and the fragrant promises to buttress its stability" (Corbin, 1986, p. 5). Using this insight Corbin provides odours with the material foundations of regimes of hygiene, of cleansing and ordering of city spaces and finally locates the olfactory order of the time in the rise of 'individual'.

Since then the question of space and the senses, especially in terms of ordering cities and industrial spaces has been taken up by many scholars such as Bruce Curtis (2008), Christopher Otter (2004) and Matthew Gandy (1999)²⁰. These approaches have been central for this work in terms of understanding the industrial spaces of leather production and their configuration of sensory regimes. Remarkably different from this approach, James McHugh's '*Sandalwood and Carrion*' (2012) locates the intangible odours in religious texts of South Asia. This rigorous textual analysis has been important for this work in order to understand odours away from the Eurocentric literature. Further, it also provides one with methodological tools for reading sensory histories between the lines.

Methodology and Research Design

This research largely locates itself in the method of sensory ethnography. "...Ethnography refers to a range of qualitative research practices...(which) include participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, and a range of other participatory research techniques that are often developed and adapted in context and as appropriate to the needs and possibilities afforded by specific research projects" (Pink, 2009, p. 8). In ethnography there has been a shift from the classic "holism" paradigm to increasingly fragmentation, where "particular kinds of data become celebrated in the process" (Pink, 2009, p. 8). Sensory ethnography moves away from this binary understanding to situate ethnography as a "reflexive and experiential process" of creating knowledge (Pink, 2009, p. 8). Ethnography thus becomes a "process of creating and representing knowledge that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality...but experiences of reality that are as

²⁰ Curtis examines the question of odours and sanitary regimes in 19th century England. Otter looks at the role of technology in ordering the senses around the abattoirs of nineteenth century London. Gandy writes on the Haussmanian period of large scale sensory reordering of Paris post revolution, in particular looking at the sewage systems.

loyal as possible to the contexts, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced” (Pink, 2009, p. 8).

Stoller (1997, p. xv) arguing for a notion of “sensuous scholarship”, makes a rather provocative appeal for “an attempt to reawaken profoundly the scholar's body by demonstrating how the fusion of the intelligible and the sensible can be applied to scholarly practices and representations”. This work is one such attempt at producing a sliver of sensuous scholarship concerning the object of leather and the field of caste. This is however, easier said than done.

Apart from the difficulty of negotiating one's own position in the field, which we will come to a little later in this discussion, locating the senses in the political, economic and the social requires a conceptual shift in reading, writing and research methods. Regina Bendix (quoted in Pink, 2009, p. 8) thus suggests that to research sensory perception requires methods which grasps knowledge “which is not spoken of at all and thus inaccessible to ethnographic observation or interview”. This observation was crucial for the methodological framing of this work. Thus while largely relying on interviews and conversations, I also had to read for affectual and emotive signs and suggestions, such as mock retching, the involuntary covering of the nose with the hand, the contorting of the face in disgust and the conscious and unconscious placement of distances between selves and objects.

However, as the research progressed it also became clear that the sensuousness of leather and of caste need not be forced into interviews and conversations. The sensuousness is evident, at least for the people who are located in the industry, and most of them thus began their narratives with the stench of leather. Pink (2008, pp. 44-47), thus rightly observes that it is impossible to be prepared for sensory ethnography – sensuousness is forced onto the researcher by the field and by the object of study. The object of leather, thus forced the sensuousness of odours onto this research.

The research covers a period beginning from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, which is the period of formal, organised leather production in India. Fieldwork was conducted in the hide markets, tanneries, factories, leather boutiques and showrooms in the cities of Agra, Kanpur, Unnao and Noida in Uttar Pradesh. Kanpur, which comes up as a cantonment city and as a center for leather production after the mutiny of 1857, is now considered to be the tanning hub of the industry. In the last two decades many of these tanneries have moved to the neighbouring Unnao district. Agra on the other hand specializes in shoe manufacturing, being the largest manufacturing market in the country.

During the course of this work detailed interviews were conducted at 12 tanneries in Kanpur and Unnao and 15 factories in Kanpur, Agra and Noida. Extensive tours of these spaces were conducted often accompanied by the administrative staff or the owners. At each of these places efforts were made to talk to all levels of employees – workers, supervisors, managers and owners. Additionally workers were also interviewed at their places of residence like Ambedkar Nagar in Kanpur and Sayyed Para and Mantola in Agra. Since these places also serve as sites for domestic and informal production of leather and leather goods, leatherwork outside the formal industrial spaces was also studied in a small measure. Interviews were conducted with hide merchants in Nai Sadak and Chamanganj in Kanpur and leather designers and merchandizers in Delhi and Noida. Lastly, students and faculty of leather technology institutes in India and from leather technology departments of Northhampton University and the Leathersellers Company's College at London were interviewed along with an analysis of their course structures.

For the colonial period, the research relied on archival materials mainly from the Departments of Commerce and Industry and Education in the National Archives, Delhi and the UP state archives in Lucknow and Agra. Some landmark Supreme Court judgements around the question of environmental pollution caused by

tanneries through the decades of the 1990s and 2000s have also been examined in order to locate the question of senses and caste in law.

Following methodological suggestions made by Pink (2008) and Stoller (1997) concerning the location of the 'body of the scholar' in a research which is sensuous in nature, it is important for this work to locate myself and my odours in the field that I was attempting to understand. This exercise is made even more urgent because one of the subjects under study is caste. Caste identities come laden with power, meanings and the burden of our histories and those of others. Thus not only do my odours and my sense of smell affect this research, but more importantly, it is my location in the field of caste, and the way in which it has produced my senses, that impacts this work.

Large parts of this industry are predominantly male spaces and it was rare to find, either female owners or workers. As such I was frequently questioned by my respondents on the suitability of this research for me. In turn this also helped open up questions about gender and industrial spaces which form a part of Chapter Four. In terms of caste, many of the respondents who are owners and managers and I belonged to the supposedly upper caste group of Khatri/Kshatriyas²¹. In an industry which is extremely closed, suspicious of outsiders and run mostly by family held units, this caste similarity helped in establishing initial contact and context. The similar caste context also came up during uncomfortable discussions on the disgust and unease with leatherwork, when the upper-caste respondents expected me to empathize with their affectual reactions. This sense of discursivity in the operation of sensory perception has been taken up in Chapter Three in order to locate senses as a collectively produced phenomenon rather than an objective reality.

The fact that I do not belong to a "business family" also seemed to be important. Most owners thought that it is important to be an "insider" in order to understand this business. This has implications for understanding the hereditary

²¹ Historically many Khatri who fled from Pakistan during partition entered the leather industry in Uttar Pradesh after resettlement.

and caste nature of business skills and their conceptions of the 'insider'. These aspects have been taken up in Chapter Five in order to understand the relationship between caste and technical and entrepreneurial skills. Religion played a fairly interesting role in this process since the industry has a large number of Muslim owners and employees. Within the industry participating in ritual sacrifice, consuming meat and working with animal bodies are seen as causal processes. Many Hindu respondents reported this as the reason for their lack of control over the Qureshi dominated tanning industry and this has been discussed in Chapter Two. Consequently, I was also regularly asked about my dietary preferences and the fact that I do not eat meat surprised many and was cause of much amusement.

However my identities also foreclosed me from accessing the workers context in great depth since all workers were male and from either the Jatav Chamars or Muslims communities. In conversations with them hardly any reference was made to caste, unless I asked specific questions. When these questions were not answered directly different kinds of markers are used to establish caste positions. Many workers also expressed concern that the tannery owners may not be telling me the complete truth about work conditions in these spaces but also expressed their inability to take me to their tanneries by themselves.

In order to make up for these biases I have relied on other sources like Dalit literature, interviews with a couple of Jatavs workers who now own factories and interactions with a few from the community who became dealers and agents. A relatively larger gap however still remains in my understanding of these communities. However, this work is not about Dalit, lower caste or Schedule Caste untouchability alone and examines the way in which the sensory knowledges and sensory inhabitations of caste itself are constitutive of the industry, thereby making the untouchability and the desirability of leather a product of every one's caste.

The work however, faces some important limitations. Firstly, leatherwork as an activity has a significant presence outside the formal industry as well. Women

who perform informal home based labour with leather scrap and shavings and *mochis* who sit on roadsides and repair shoes, but who were earlier a part of the rural political economy of leather are the two major absences of this work due to the focus on the industrial space. Second, an important aspect which the work has not been able to consider is the consumption of leather goods by the public at large. This would have brought in the interesting dimension of understanding how the desire for leather is perceived across caste, religious and class sensoriums. Thirdly, the large national and multinational leather goods manufacturers, like Hidesign and Bata have not been a part of this work. This was largely due to the fact that a lot of these operate outside the geographical region which was under study. As an agenda for further research it would be interesting to study the networks and affects of caste in these organizations which operate on a much larger and more formal scale than the factories and tanneries under discussion in this work.

The structure of this thesis is organized like the production process of leather goods themselves. The object of our enquiry changes at each of these sites – from dead skin to, chrome tanned leather, to a limited edition handbag to an industrial training manual. This allows us to map out the distinct affects of caste and religion on the object of leather at each stage. The thesis starts with the body of the live animal and maps the journey of the disembodiment of this body through slaughter and flaying. The analysis then picks up on the hide of the dead animal and follows it through the tannery where it is converted into leather and then to the factory where leather is converted into consumable goods. In the end we examine the regime of technical and technological education in leatherwork, that is, we examine the production of knowledge about leather. The work thus proceeds from the object and the body to an epistemology around these entities.

Chapter One lays the ground for understanding the politics of odours by locating the object of leather in the intersecting fields of caste and the senses. The discussion in this chapter first locates the sensuousness of caste through literary and experiential evidence on caste. Next the chapter discusses the politics of

odours, situating the political affect and urgency of examining the phenomena of smells and of caste. The rest of the chapter then examines odours and the sensory method, using three broad perspectives – the discourse of the anthropology of odours, put forward by scholars such as Howes (2003) and Classen et al (1994); the historical evidence on odours from the works of Corbin (1986) and McHugh (2012) in the contexts of France and India respectively; and lastly the chapter discusses the phenomenology of castes and odours in the Indian context by examining the debates on the senses within select Indian philosophical traditions and the debates on the phenomenology of the experience of caste. It is largely argued in this chapter that the sensuousness of caste has to be understood through its multisensory nature and not through hierarchical and binary models as proposed in the discourse on the anthropology of the senses. In this understanding the ‘lower’ sense of smell was linked to animality, passions and desire as against the sense of sight which was seen as reflective of distance, rationality and objectivity. Within the Indian traditions, smell is considered to be a contact sense since one comes in touch with the odorous particles (McHugh, 2012, p. 6). Controlling and disciplining odours and odorous bodies has thus been the defining logic of the caste system. Caste not only produces certain odours, like that of raw leather, as disgusting and defiling, but it also permanently marks specific bodies with these odours. This allows us to make an argument about the power of odours in caste.

Chapter Two introduces the leather industry in Uttar Pradesh and elaborates on the relationship between the object of leather and caste. First, leather is located within a discussion on caste and modernity. Industrialization and modernity was supposed to ‘solve’ the problem of caste but instead it is argued, that caste and untouchable labour form the foundations of the leather industry. The chapter then discusses the history of leatherwork in England by examining the changes in production and technology which gave rise to the idea of modern leather production. This had profound impacts on the way in which the industry was organized in India. The rest of the chapter discusses caste and religious matrices

within the leather industry in Kanpur and Agra. This discussion then prepares a ground for the next three chapters.

Chapter Three examines the sites of the private and commercial slaughterhouses and informal networks of flaying which produce hides for the industry. The chapter, organized around the ideas of the animal, animality and death, examines the figures of the slaughterer and the flayer. Both these figures perceived to be closer to animal like sensoriums are crucial for the conversion of animal to leather. It is argued that the act of slaughtering establishes domination over the animal and allows consumption, away from the care economy of cattle rearing. The flayer on the other hand converts the undesirable dead cattle into a profitable good. Both these bodies retain the pollution of death and thus the object of leather takes a step closer towards desirability. The chapter locates these two figures in Cow Protection Movements of the 1870s and debates over meat consumption. The chapter especially focuses on the sensory experiences of upper-caste, especially Brahmin selectors and purchasers of hides and argues that it is actually through the discomfort of these figures that the full import of the question of caste, animality and senses can be understood.

Chapter Four follows these hides into the tanneries where they are converted into leather and then moves onto the factories where leather is converted into consumer goods. It is argued that the perceived difference in the sensoriscapes of the tannery and the factory is constituted by the complex ways in which caste has ordered bodies and spaces in the industrial cosmology. The chapter also examines the question of caste, senses and environmental law by discussing a different sort of 'pollution' caused by the tanneries.

Chapter Five examines the epistemological basis of the industry by looking at the regime of technical and vocational training in leather technology. It is argued that the regime of technical education in leatherwork produced two kinds of techno-industrial subjects. First, the leather technician, well versed in English, advanced science and the knowledge of leather technology but who was also unwilling to actually do practical work. This refusal could be accommodated

because of the availability of the second kind of subject – the ‘untouchable’ leatherworker/artisan turned worker, whose knowledge was deemed unsuitable, and yet whose labour and experience was critical to the actual production of leather. This division of leatherwork between the technician and the worker was central in the creation of the modern leather industry away from the anxieties about caste, pollution and contamination. However an education in leather is more a matter of the senses, than of technology.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF ODOURS: CASTE, LEATHER AND THE SENSES

Introduction

In April 2012, while beginning to have initial conversations on the politics of caste in Uttar Pradesh (UP), I happened to meet Kiran Tripathi²², a university professor from Agra, whose family has close personal and professional ties with the ruling Samajwadi party (SP) in the state. Kiran's father, who owns multiple business ventures such as cement and gas agencies, has been a long-time supporter and campaigner for SP. Kiran had thus been witness to the politics of the party from close quarters but has herself stayed away from party politics, choosing to align more strongly with her professional identity. At the time of this conversation, it had been a few weeks since the results of the state assembly elections had been declared where SP had come to power with an absolute majority, displacing the incumbent Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). This election thus dominated most of our conversation. Describing the electoral campaign in great detail, at one point, Kiran dropped her voice significantly, leaned in and revealed that SP workers reportedly told the Jatav supporters of the BSP, "*agar hum power mein aa gaye, to tumhe soongh soongh kar marenge*" (If we come to power, we will sniff you out). While this statement could not be confirmed through other sources, the historical and political context, public discourse and conjectural evidence from the state strongly confirm the validity of this assertion. This statement succinctly brings together the triptych that frames this work – caste, leatherwork and the politics of odours.

'*Soongh soongh kar marenge*' is not simply a threat to physical violence. In fact the affectual quality of the threat contained in the invocation of odours, exceeds the known political and social categories to reveal the deeply sensual politics of

²² All names have been changed, except in cases where the person is a public figure. However, in the changed names, caste identities have been retained.

caste. The potency of the act of sniffing out almost compels us to ask, what is it that we are trying to smell? The object of smell, in this case the body of the Jatav, is no ordinary body. It is a body which smells in excess of and in distinction from other bodies, thus making possible the act of sniffing out. This excess and difference is located in the object of leather.

Jatavs, a sub caste within the larger caste group of Chamars have been classified in the traditional caste scheme primarily as the untouchable 'leatherworkers'. In the rural economy, the Chamars were thus responsible for 'polluting' tasks such as disposal of cattle carcass and as a consequence also used to skin the carcass, tan it to produce leather and make leather items such as shoes and water bags. Chamar women also used to function as midwives and were responsible for childbirth and the disposal of the afterbirth and the placenta. However, with leather becoming a profitable commodity, especially under colonial trade, Jatav Chamars were amongst the first communities to migrate to cities and be employed in industries in towns such as Kanpur (Gooptu, 2001, pp. 6, 29-31).

Some members of the community also became owners of small leather enterprises in the decades of 1930s and 1940s. Being an upwardly mobile and relatively well-off community, Jatavs were thus able to take advantage of not just colonial modernity but also of the post-Independence welfare and affirmative action schemes, making them a dominant caste amongst the Dalits in UP. Under the influence of social reform movements and as a result of upward mobility, large parts of the community have now given up leatherwork and midwifery and have moved on to other occupations. However it is also empirically evident that a majority of the workers in leather tanneries and factories continue to be from the Jatavs and other Chamar communities.

BSP is considered to be a party dominated by the Jatavs, a dominant sub-caste amongst the Chamars, primarily in Western UP²³. Both the major leaders of the

²³ Jaffrelot (1998, p. 35, as cited in Pai, 2002, p. 2) argues that since the mid-1990s the BSP has no longer been described as an 'exclusively Dalit Party'. Pai (2002, p. 2, citing Pradeep Kumar, 1999, p. 824) explains this by arguing that the Party's decision to form an alliance with the Congress in

party, Kanshiram and Mayawati belong to the Jatav community and have publically identified themselves as Chamars. In the initial phase of her political career, Mayawati famously positioned herself as '*Chamar ki beti*' (Daughter of a Chamar), (Gundimeda, 2014), making a powerful statement, but also simultaneously alienating other Dalit groups who were anyways bearing the brunt of Chamar dominance over education, trade and political opportunities. The political assertiveness of this '*chamar ki beti*', also irked the dominant upper castes who has been holding the reigns of state politics till now.

The large support base of the party and also its rank and file is significantly constituted by Jatavs. It was due to their secure socio-economic position that Jatavs were able to enter the political fray and support formations like the BSP²⁴. The Jatav dominance of the party has had a dual significance for its politics. The strong advent of a lower caste party, which could also bring to power UP's first Dalit Chief Minister, disrupted many political equations in the state²⁵. This has

the 1996 Assembly election and two coalition governments with the BJP invited criticism and has been characterized as 'technocratic rationality' i.e., after establishing its monopoly over Dalit votes – specially of the Jatavs and Pasis – it is trying to gain the support of the upper castes. This is because it has realized that its interests in the countryside clash directly with the backwards – represented by the SP – but not with the upper castes – represented by the BJP – due to the structural changes in the nature of land ownership, following land reforms

²⁴ Pai (2002, p. 8) argues that the formation of the BSP coincided with a slight structural shift in the economy from agriculture towards industry for the first time since Independence – a process which provided Dalits the economic potential to assert against upper-caste domination. The terrible poverty and absolute dependence on landowners and old patron-client relationships disappeared in parts of eastern UP, the spread of Green Revolution in the early 1980s into rice, and not merely wheat as in the 1960s and 1970s, increased investment in agriculture and consequent employment, urbanization which increased non-land employment opportunities, spread of education, governmental welfare programs and the spread of the electoral process, ultimately aided the coming up of BSP (Pai, 2002, p. 8). BSP thus has its roots in a lower middle class trade union organization of government employees – the Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), formed by Kanshi Ram in 1976. Due to this the BSP leadership and supporters came from the educated and economically better-off Jatav-Chamars and to a lesser extent from Pasis who benefitted from reservations, and only a small number from the poorer Balmikis, Musahars and Khatiks. However since the end of the 1990s the party has greatly expanded its base, with a large number of poorer Dalits coming into the electoral process and also forming the base of the party along with the educated, better off core (Pai, 2002, pp. 12-13).

²⁵Pai (2002, p. 1) argues that the emergence of the BSP has been one of the most significant developments in the society and polity of UP since the early 1980s. Ilaiah (quoted in Pai, 2002, p.

also brought significant social, political and symbolic power to the already dominant Jatav sub-group²⁶. On the other hand, non-Jatav Dalit groups, including other Chamar sub-castes have claimed that they have been left out of the developmental and political processes, due to the Jatav bias of the party²⁷.

In spite of the political, social and economic dominance, in public and popular memory, the 'Chamar' identity is still associated with the filthy and disgusting nature of their traditional occupations. The threat of '*Soongh soongh kar mareng*' is thus a partly inspired by retributive violence and partly by the sensorial and affectual qualities of the object - *chamda* or leather that signifies, and rubs off on the social and biological bodies of the Chamars. That those of the Chamar caste, whether or not they perform leatherwork, can be sniffed out is an important revelation for this work and it is argued that it is the odours of leather, whether actual or perceived, which mark out the Chamars from the rest.

Foregrounding the leatherworker, this chapter deals with the politics of smell, with the social and political production of odours, and above all examines the interplay between the politics of odours and caste. It is argued that the foundational basis for the practice and play of caste lies in a complex system of sensorial ordering of spaces and bodies. It is this ordering which sustains the functioning of caste as a system of hierarchies which allows a marking and categorization of bodies into systems of value and worth and which ultimately provides the political and affectual charge to the category of caste. This chapter argues that this provides the phenomenological basis, the groundwork on which

1) hailed it as a revolutionary movement, whose goal was to break the caste system and introduce social transformation.

²⁶Pai (2002, p. 18) argues that despite forming coalition with the BJP in 1995 and 1997 and with the Congress in 1996, its popularity as a Dalit party has not declined, particularly due to Mayawati becoming the Chief Minister. This has been seen as a move towards state capture by the Dalits and consequently today, especially for Jatavs, voting is a matter of social prestige.

²⁷ Pai (2002, p. 209) describes a meeting of the Balmikis under the Dalit Mukti Morcha, held in the wake of the Shergarhi incident of March, 1994, where Jatavs were criticized as the oppressors of the poorer sections of the community and it was argued that reservations should now be only for the non Jatavs. The BSP was also described as a 'Chamar' Party, unconcerned with the rural poor.

events such as atrocities, discriminations and even the anti-caste movements base themselves.

In the following sections, we will first locate the sensuousness of caste in its experience and practice. The second section discusses the existing literature on caste, foregrounding two aspects of purity and pollution and hereditary occupations. It is argued that it is through these practices that the sensuousness of caste is produced and sustained. The third section examines the politics of odours, locating this in the larger study of the senses within the Indian and Western European contexts, thereby arguing for a methodology to study the politics of odours and their relationship with caste.

1. The Sensuousness of Caste – Repulsion and Power

In his autobiography, *'Apne Apne Pinjare'*, Mohandas Naimishray, a Dalit writer belonging to the Chamar caste, describes the city of Meerut in UP, in the following words:

"Many localities in the city would exude distinct odours throughout the day. The Muslim neighbourhoods were rife with the fiery smell of kababs. Mornings in the Hindu localities brought the odours of jalebi and kachori, while the evenings would be filled with the smells of balushyahi and imarti. But our areas would be bare and lifeless, flattened of all sensuousness. But then there was that overpowering stench which would hang thickly over the area. Every house was filled to the brims with leather and pieces of wet leather would be hanging to dry in the courtyards. This heavy malodourous air would give away the fact that this was a chamarwada" (Naimishray, 2009, p. 11-12).

Caste is primarily a sensual phenomenon. The sensorial ordering of bodies, spaces and objects according to the norms of purity and the threats of pollution is the predominant mode in which caste is practiced and experienced. It is primarily through our senses of smell, touch, sight, sound and taste that we engage with this complex discourse of rules, norms and boundaries. And like any other form of ordering, the sensorial ordering of purity and pollution is also an exercise in politics. While the sense organs are considered to be the subject matter of biology, the ordering of senses and of sensory perception is on the other hand a political act which is embedded in the power structures of our societies. The way, in which we make sense of these societies, the way in which we perceive and experience bodies and objects is determined through these structures of power. An intermixing of the politics of caste and of the senses produces the bodies, spaces and objects which constitute the discourse of caste, and provide caste with its flavours, textures and odours.

As Naimishray's description illustrates, it is also through our senses that we determine the contours of the desirable and the disgusting in our caste societies. In fact, it is the sensory politics of caste which allows us to categorize experiences, objects and people as desirable and disgusting. These categorizations are not merely aesthetic judgments, nor are they simply emotive or affectual reactions. Quite the contrary, the processes of naming and classification are deeply embedded in a politics of power and hierarchy – a politics that the sensorial ordering of caste employs with a great force.

It can be further argued that the sensory politics of caste is heavily multisensorial or intersensorial in nature. The discourse of caste employs all the senses and all manner of sensory perception in order to institute its norms and rules, thereby producing a complex and sophisticated system of sensory power. This is in contrast to other parallel systems of power, such as race, which have

been predominantly understood as a visual category till very recently²⁸. Mark Smith's (2008) work is important for the way in which he realigns the understanding of race politics from the visual to the olfactory, arguing that apart from vision, it was smell, which was significantly employed in order to produce the body of the slave as inferior and disgusting. For Smith, the non-visual perception of race becomes all the more important after the end of the regime of segregation and with increasing inter-mixing of races, socially and sexually. It had simply become impossible to solely rely on vision to determine race and senses such as smell thus gain in importance²⁹ (Smith, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Caste however, has never been understood or practiced as a purely visual phenomenon. There was an attempt to assign race-like visual markers to caste in colonial anthropology which resulted in a regime of body measurements and comparisons of nasal and cephalic indices³⁰. Ghurye (2008, p.117) discussing the

²⁸ Sensory scholars like Howes (2003) and Classen (1994) have argued that Western civilizations are primarily ocular centric, as against non-Western civilizations which employ other senses to understand their environments. While this is a complex argument and will be taken up in detail later in the chapter, for now it could be argued that the predominantly visual understanding of race could be a result of this ocular bias.

²⁹ Smith (2008, p. 5) argues that for the slaveholders, blacks smell, feel and sound different and inferior. Sensory differences such as thicker skin were also employed in order to justify the labour practices such as picking cotton since the supple, thick black skin was thought of as ideal for this activity. As a corollary to this Corbin (1986, p. 14) also argues that the sanitarian discourse of eighteenth century Europe also placed a high symbolic value on white and transparent skin as this was thought of as facilitating exchange of air between the body and outside. In this discourse, the exchange of air was crucial to maintaining bodily balance and eliminating impurities.

³⁰ There have been various rich debates on the relationship between race and caste. Jotirao Phule (circa 1827 -1890) is considered to be one of the first thinkers who used the racial origins of castes to explain the dominance of the Arya-Bhat over the Shudratishudra. Ambedkar opposes this idea and argues that the distinction between Hindus and Untouchables in its original form before the advent of Untouchability, was distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien Tribes. It is these Broken men, as Buddhists, who subsequently came to be treated as Untouchables. The other source of untouchability for Ambedkar is the continuance of beef-eating by the Broken men after others had given up (Rodrigues, 2014, p.114-5). These debates were revived at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held at Durban in 2001. The conference led to a rich debate within caste scholars and anti-caste activists on whether caste should be seen as a variant of race. Due to the official Indian governmental position on keeping international attention out of the issues of caste, ultimately the proposal was defeated. For a detailed analysis of the Durban debate

anthropometric data collected by Herbert Risley writes, "...the Brahmin of U.P. has a cephalic index of 73.29, while his cephalic length and cephalic breadth are 187.56 and 137.42 respectively. The Kurmi on the other hand with a cephalic index of 73.25 has the cephalic length of 184.05 and the cephalic breadth of 135.13...the Kayasth of U.P. with the cephalic index of 72.48 has the cephalic length of 186.62 and the cephalic breadth of 135.42³¹."

Considering this data Ghurye (2008, p.117) concludes that the method used by Risley could not provide decisive results about caste as such and remains confined to detailing the various physical types in India³². In fact it is primarily because a visual identification of caste is difficult, if not impossible, by observing the physical body alone, that that visual and non-visual sensory markers of caste status need to be enforced by the use of power³³. These sensory markers then come to signify pure and impure states of being. Further, in a cunning move the sensory imprints of caste are also extended from the physical body to the objects and attributes associated with this body. Clothes, food, language and occupation thus become the bearers of pure and impure states. To complete this move, these

see the Seminar issue 508, December, 2001, which includes essays on the debate by Gopal Guru, Dipankar Gupta and D L Sheth.

³¹Ghurye (2008, pp.114-115) argues that the sociological method to explain caste by elucidating the genesis and growth of the institution begins with the works of Denzil Ibbetson and J C Nesfield. Both of them argue that caste is mainly occupational in origin and Nesfield, further denied any racial basis of caste. This led Herbert Risley to use the anthropometric methods to decide the question of the racial basis of caste. Risley thus carried out extensive measurements on caste groups in North India and published the results in a two volume, '*Anthropometric Data from Bengal*' in 1891. This data was also used in his subsequent publications, '*Tribes and Castes of Bengal*' and '*The People of India*'.

³²Ghurye (2008, pp. 115-117) discusses two problems with this anthropometric work. First, what shall be the unit, geographic or political area or a people, on which measurements will be taken and compared? This was resolved by taking one caste as a unit and comparing it with another. However, Ghurye also concedes that the data showed that neither Brahmins nor Chamars among themselves have a uniform physical type. Further Ghurye observes that Risley did not provide the standard deviation which would be helpful in making comparisons and also critiques the methodology for choosing samples, like the marked absence of a number of Dravidian castes.

³³I am borrowing this observation from an intervention made by Prathama Banerjee, where she asked, "Whether the caste of a naked body can be identified?", during a discussion on the relationship between caste and the body at the Workshop on Contemporary Marginalities: History, Knowledge, Theory at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) on March 12, 2015.

objects and attributes become coterminous with these caste bodies, they flow into each other, giving rise to permanent and temporary states of purity and pollution.

Consider for instance the following description of sensory identification of different caste bodies (2009, p. 29),

“The priest would look at our clothes, bare feet, uncombed hair, and would judge our caste. On the other hand, he would be wearing absolutely white starched clothes, his wooden sandals would click on the ground when he walked and he would always be chanting the god’s name³⁴ (Naimishray, 2009, p. 29).”

It is the difference between temporary and permanent that engenders the hierarchy of the caste discourse. While temporary pollution can be remedied with purifying substances such as water, incense and temple bells, permanent pollution converts the body into a disgusting and repulsive “walking carrion” (Guru, 2012, p. 207). Guru (2012, pp. 206-207) argues that due to this sense of pollution, caste violates its own principle of *panchamabhute* – the idea that all bodies are composed of the same five elements, air, fire, earth, water and space. All organic bodies are thus united at the ontological level in their capacity to pollute the sacred or the perfect through impurities such as sweat, excreta, urine, mucus and gases which are the source of foul smells and unpleasant feelings. All bodies are thus dirty, in the moral and the material sense. Caste however produces in some bodies, objects and spaces, an exceptional and permanent capacity to pollute.

³⁴ *...hamare kapde dekhta, nange paon, bikhre baal aur in sabke beech weh hamari jati ki pechchan jhat se dhundhleta...pujari khub safed burak kapde pehenta tha. Weh dhoti bandhta tha. Upar safed kurta, pairon mein khadau. Jab weh chalta tha to khat khat awaj hoti thi. Uske muh se jai shriram jai shriram nikalta tha”*

The idea of caste thus becomes possible through practices such as untouchability and denial of bodily and moral integrity to those who are considered lower than oneself through restrictions on access to material and moral resources. The power of caste derives from the denial of coevalness and similar status to all caste groups. Thus those who are considered to be ritually lower are also supposed to physically appear inferior. The untouchable bodies in specific must forcefully appear dirty and emit foul odours in order to permanently remain less human than those above them. The intermixing of the sensoriums of different castes, especially in unmarked public spaces produces the fear of smelling odours of others bodies, of tasting unknown flavours and of touching polluted, sweaty skins.

Caste thus operates through strict restrictions on the sharing of food and water between different castes, physical segregation of the untouchable castes in terms of spatiality and temporality, restrictions against sharing common resources such as ponds, wells, roads and grazing grounds. Untouchables are forced to tie a broom around their waist so as to erase their footprints as they walk, wear a spittoon around one's neck so that contact with her spit cannot pollute others, announce one's entry into public streets using bells, since even the sound of her voice could cause pollution³⁵, at times position themselves so as their shadow does not fall on public roads or on others and lie prostrate when Brahmins pass them, forcing untouchables to live in houses with low walls, or single stories, sometimes even specifying the material of construction, restrictions on wearing jewellery made out of gold and silver, wearing clean clothes, owning property, carrying umbrellas, wearing shoes, sitting on chairs, riding horses especially in marriage processions and covering upper body parts especially for women. Lower caste individuals are also forced to perform what are perceived as dirty

³⁵ Guru (2012, p. 210-211) argues that the sound of the untouchable is capable of causing pollution. Thus in some contexts, the high-pitched sounds of untouchables were banned during times of sacred rituals. Further, Sarrukai (2012) argues that words can cause contact with the body. Thus words were taken away from the untouchables and replaced with sounds.

and malodourous tasks such as scavenging, cleaning and carcass-removal, and midwifery.

One of the biggest sources of pollution within this order is the body itself – both human and animal. Discharges from the body such as excreta, menstrual blood, afterbirth, semen, pus, exhaled air, sputum, spit, sweat and hair are all considered to be impure as such but can also cause pollution in others. Certain parts of the body are considered more impure than the other – the most impure being the feet since they touch the ground and come in contact with soil. This is also the reason why Brahmins are not allowed to till soil within the caste discourse. People who come in contact with these substances are also then deemed to be impure and polluting. Midwives, who deal with afterbirth, and manual scavengers who clean excreta, traditionally belonged to the Chamar and Bhangi/Valmiki communities and are considered to be permanently polluted. On the other hand, bodies of other castes would only be temporarily impure after excretion or giving birth. Similarly men and women of all castes would be temporarily considered impure after sexual intercourse due to contact with semen³⁶. Disease and death also cause temporary or permanent pollution depending on the caste of those involved. Death in the family would a cause temporary polluted status amongst the *sapindas*, but castes such as Doms who cremate dead bodies are considered to be amongst the worst polluted. Barbers who cut hair, which is a polluted substance, nonetheless have a complicated status within caste. Bhatta (1996, p. 250) argues that in the case of service castes like barbers and Mirasins, who function as singers to upper caste patrons, their

³⁶ Some substances such as semen, cow urine and cow dung have a complicated status within the caste discourse. Semen is temporarily polluting but is also considered to be a life-force. This is similar to the notions around semen in Western cultures. Not only was semen considered to be the model for all other humors but also the odours of semen (*aura seminalis*) was considered to be reinvigorating (Corbin, 1986, p. 35). In the sixth century CE Sanskrit text, *Brhatsamhita*, semen of kings is described to be smelling of flowers, of the wealthy as honey or flesh, and of the sacrifice as alcoholic liquor (McHugh, 2012, p. 81). On the other hand, the sacrality of the cow provides a sacral status to its urine and dung as well, while urine and excreta in general will be considered to be highly polluting in nature.

intimate access to upper caste homes and proximity to upper caste bodies, makes their status less polluting.

In certain contexts animal bodies can also be polluting, although the relationship of animals with caste is much more complex. For instance, the Manusmriti dictates,

“Neither a chandala, nor a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, or an impotent man should be watching the priests dine. The pigs destroy the offerings by sniffing them, the cock by the flapping of his wings, the dog by letting his gaze fall upon them, and a low caste person by his very touch” (Manu, 2000, p. 68).

Consequently keepers of animals, like Khatiks, or those who are occupationally close to animals such as Chamars and Musahars are also considered to be dirty and impure. On the other hand animals such as cows have an exalted status in this hierarchy and products of the cow such as milk and ghee derived from its milk are one of the purest substances within the caste discourse. The special status of the cow also makes it an interesting case for studying ideas of purity and pollution. While excreta are in general considered to be a highly polluting substance, the urine and dung of the cow are in fact substances which are the remedies for instances of caste pollution and are thus purifying substances. On the other end of the spectrum lies the body of the dead cow. In this system death seems to override the purity of the cow also and the dead cow immediately becomes an object of repulsion. If, however, the cow is killed or slaughtered, the person doing this also becomes impure. Thus the impure status of Muslims, in particular of the butcher communities also arises from this charge of cow-slaughter. Products derived from the dead cow such as meat, leather, gelatine, bones and fat are also highly polluting and repulsive object. Chapter Three will elaborate on the historical status of the cow and its relationship with caste in a greater detail.

Given the above it can be argued that the experience of caste is largely determined by repulsion and disgust, rather than desire. This repulsion and distancing can be observed not just between higher and lower castes but also within individuals in the same caste groups, and at times even within a singular caste household. Texts like Manusmriti prescribe particularly stringent rules of conduct for the Brahmins. Take for instance the complex norms of purity and pollution that a Brahmin household is subjected to, where even the touch of the Brahmin wife can be polluting for the male Brahmin when he is engaged in ritual worship or when he is eating³⁷. In certain contexts his own body could also be contaminating for the Brahmin, in addition to external sources of pollution. For instance the Manusmriti lays down the following rules to be followed during the recitation of Vedas,

“The recitation of Vedas cannot happen under the following circumstances – destructive storm, eclipse, when there is a stench, when there is a corpse , in the vicinity of a servant, when there is wailing, while expelling urine or excrement, when there is food in one’s mouth, at a ceremony for the dead, and as long as the smell and food-stains of the ceremony for the dead cling to the priest’s body, when one has eaten flesh, or the food of a woman who has just

³⁷In fact the Brahmin who is consuming the food must also be pure, which implies that he must be bathed and have a bare torso. He should eat alone, or in a small group in a pure ‘*chauka*’ (square) in the kitchen or a part of the house which is free from intruders, such as outsiders of a lower caste, animals, people from his own house who are not purified, or at times even his own shadow. Such an intrusion would make the food unfit for consumption (Dumont, 1980, p.138-9). In fact quoting Risley, Bougle also refers to the saying that, “For twelve Rajputs, thirteen cooks” and “For three Kanauja Brahmins, you need thirty hearths (Bougle, 1968, p. 25). The Manusmriti also presents an elaborate schema for rules for maintaining purity of the self within the household purity. For instance contact with menstruating women, in terms of sexual intercourse or even her touch would be polluting for a Brahman man. Chapter Four, Verse 40-44 of the Manusmriti, lays down the following rules for a Brahman householder, “[40] Even if he is out of his mind (with desire) he should not have sex with a woman who is menstruating; he should not even lie down in the same bed as her. [41] A man who has sex with a woman awash in menstrual blood loses his wisdom, brilliant energy, strength, eyesight, and long life. [42] By shunning her when she is awash in menstrual blood he increases his wisdom, brilliant energy, strength, eyesight, and long life. [43] He should not eat with his wife, nor watch her when she eats, sneezes, yawns or sits down to relax. [44] A priest who desires brilliant energy should not look at a woman putting on her eye make-up, rubbing oil on herself, undressed or giving birth” (Manu, 2000, p. 78).

given birth, when jackals howl, when dogs donkeys or camels cry, when wearing garments he wore during sexual union, when one is wounded, when one has just eaten, or not digested, or vomited his food” (Manu, 2008, p. 84-86).

Distancing thus one of the fundamental modes in which caste operates and this distance is based in repulsion and disgust. Sensory markers of bodies and objects in this caste discourse then function to provide the contours for this distancing and disgust. Further since this dirt and odours can be transmitted to other ‘cleaner’ bodies, the threat of pollution also has to be managed. Caste thus is not just a highly sensory phenomenon, but its practice and experience is also a complex exercise of sensory management of bodies and spaces so as to maintain hierarchy and inequality.

Ambedkar, in his writings on untouchability, makes a strong case for the relationship between caste, untouchability and repulsion³⁸. Ambedkar argues that, “Untouchability is an outward expression of the inner repulsion which a Hindu feels towards a certain person... Wherever there is repulsion there is untouchability” (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 243). This sense of repulsion finds its manifestation as a series of rules regarding maintaining purity and aversion of pollution. Ambedkar further argues that while most societies in the world have notions of purity and pollution, the way in which these ideas have been systematized in India is starkly different and this difference arises due to the

³⁸In his Introduction to ‘The Essential Writings of B R Ambedkar’, Rodrigues notes that “Ambedkar’s engagement with Untouchability as a researcher, an intellectual and activist, is much more nuanced, hesitant but intimate compared to his viewpoint on caste, where he is prepared to offer stronger judgments and proffer solutions. However, with untouchability, there is often a failure of words. Grief is mixed with anger (Rodrigues, 2014, p.27). This observation is interesting and hints at Ambedkar’s affectual engagement with the question of untouchability, which comes from a deep and intimate personal struggle with the same. In terms of methodology, it is perhaps this kind of engagement, away from the rational and objective understanding of social reality, which brings out the sensual nature of both, the social context and the scholarly engagement with it. Dalit autobiographies in particular and Dalit writing in general has thus been able to create this affective turn in the engagement with caste. Stoller (1997) calls this kind of writing and engagement as ‘sensuous scholarship’.

hereditary and permanent nature of both purity and pollution which comes to attach itself to certain individuals and groups.

Taking this cue from Ambedkar, the next section will locate this repulsion and distancing of caste in the larger debate of sensory studies, both in the Indian and the Western contexts. This will allow us to prepare the ground for understanding leather as a sensory object and further argue for understanding caste through the sensuousness of leather.

2. The Politics of Odours

There is a particularly telling episode in Anand Patwardhan's film, '*Jai Bhim Comrade*' where he reports on the annual celebration of Ambedkar's death anniversary in Mumbai. A large numbers of Dalits from all over Maharashtra congregate for three days in a public park. When asked about the event, several upper caste individuals who either live near the park or use it for recreational purposes report that they leave the city during those days as the noise and chaos is unbearable. One particular individual reports that he is rather repulsed by the way in which "these" people occupy the park and make it filthy by urinating and throwing rubbish. "It smells terrible", he proclaims. When asked by the interviewer, whether the urine of upper castes smells like roses, the man just smiles.

Odours are a powerful phenomenon. Odours and our capacity to sense through smell are physical, bodily phenomenon but these phenomenon are also laden with cultural meanings and symbols of power (Howes, 2003, p. xi). Odours, whether real or perceived, are regarded as indicative of internal physiological and moral states. Foul smells are evil, while goodness smells pleasant. Aromatic substances, like perfumes are applied on the external body but they have a profound effect on internal affective states. A pleasant smelling perfume or the

smell of fresh bread can immediately invoke favourable effects. But at the same time foul body odours, or the smell of stale food, can convey a sense of pollution and contamination. Odours are thus an “internal-external” phenomenon (McHugh, 2012 , p. 3). Odours thus produce knowledge about bodies, spaces and objects by mapping an aesthetic classification onto moral and emotional states.

The particularly “hircine odour” of Black bodies which justified their animal status (Smith, 2012, p. 38, Largey and Watson, 1972, p. 1028), the “foul and reeking smell” of the lower and working classes which is indicative of their poverty (Classen et al, 1994, p. 161), the peculiar odours of Jews which betrays mistrust (Largey and Watson, 1972, p. 1022) and of course the universally condemned odour of women which entices and corrupts (Corbin, 1986, p. 74-6), have all been powerful motivations and tropes in the history of segregation and discrimination. On the other hand pleasant smelling bodies and spaces are considered to be more trustworthy and desirable (Corbin, 1986, p. 72, Howes, 2005, p.10).

Corbin argues “Abhorrence of smells produces its own form of social power. Foul smelling rubbish appears to threaten the social order, whereas the reassuring victory of the hygienic and the fragrant promises to buttress its stability” (Corbin, 1986, p. 5). Thus while malodour has frequently been associated with filth and deodourization or pleasant odours with efficiency and order these are not merely arguments arising from hygienic and sanitarian concerns. The aesthetic judgement of odours is intimately related to social status, race, gender and class. This is evident from the fact that the perfumed lower class, lower caste or subaltern body is equally suspect. In these cases the use of perfumes is seen as an effort to mask or hide the bad odours emanating out of the body. Thus if the body did not stink, it would not require a perfume (Largey and Watson, 1972, p. 1028). Odours, even in the private are thus a public phenomenon since they reveal and expose. They also do not remain confined to the source, body or object from which they are being emitted. Consequently odours sneak up on us, it is difficult to contain or control their spread and affect. Unlike the other senses,

we cannot shut off our sense of smell. It thus becomes important to control and discipline the spread of odours themselves. The extremely subversive nature of odours is what makes their affect relevant for politics. It is worthwhile to remember that while the odour of Jews was intolerable to the dominant discourse of power, it was also primarily the stench of burning flesh from the concentration camps which gave the first information about the Holocaust (Classen et al, 1994, p. 172-75). It is this power of odours which make them enticing and polluting at the same time.

Odours can be classified into three broad categories. First, are the natural odours of human, animal and plant bodies which provide a distinct olfactory identity to its bearers. The smell of fragrant plants such as jasmine, lavender and rose is not only pleasant and desirable but also provides a distinct identity to the plant, through which it can be discerned from a distance, without visual contact. Similarly human bodies also have distinctive odours which are used for identification and also create a sense of intimacy and bonding between parents and a child, or between sexual partners³⁹. Further human bodies produce a variety of odours through the discharge of waste products, sweating, seminal discharge, breaking wind, belching, discharge of menstrual blood and hormonal changes. In the eighteenth century understanding of Western medical sciences, the body was thought to be composed of various humors, the breakdown of which caused bodily breakdown and discharge odours.

The odours of animals have a much more complex relationship with human beings and their environment. The odours of an animal which stays in close contact, like a pet, can be tolerated in domestic environments, and may even invoke familiarity. In the rural and agrarian context, the odours of animals, manure and even meat and blood could be considered to be an integral part of

³⁹ In an interesting exploration of odours, Naimishray (2009, p. 115) writes about meeting the girl he was attracted to while she is making dung cakes. As he reaches out to hold her hand which is smeared with cow dung, Naimishray finds the smell of dung mixed with that of her body extremely intoxicating and attractive. Even though he does not speak to the girl again, this sense memory stays with him.

the sensescape. Corbin (1986, pp. 115-117) argues that around the middle of the nineteenth century in France fear of the rising mounds of excreta were complicated by the utilitarian impetus to reuse refuse and excreta as fertilizers. The systematic and continuous collection of refuse also provided employment for the poor and increased the general feeling of cleanliness. The odours of animality are also linked to masculinity and virility. Corbin (1986, p. 37) notes that in eighteenth century Europe, “strong smelling effluvia were a sign of intense animalization and evidence of the vigour of the individual and the race. Consequently, the cure for any ailment arising from insufficient animalization was sought in stables containing young animals”. On the other hand, animals and their odours can also be considered offending and as a nuisance. In fact the sense of smell in humans has widely been regarded as an animalistic sense, closer to emotion than reason (Corbin, 1986, p. 6).

The second category of odours is those which do not emanate from bodies, but affect them nonetheless. Perfume, soap, detergent, talcum powder, oil, scented cosmetics, incense, room fresheners, disinfectants, spices, food odours, tobacco, cigarettes all have strong odorous qualities which interact and impact our living environments and bodies.

The third category is perhaps the most important for this work – deodourization or a state of odourlessness. Many of the above mentioned odorants, such as detergents, deodorants and soaps are used not just for altering the physical odours of bodies and spaces but also for deodourization. Deodourization of bodies and of societies has been a richly debated phenomenon within sensory studies. Theorists of senses such as Classens et al (1994) have argued that under the influence of modernity Western societies have increasingly deodorized their bodies and public and private environments. Odours, even pleasant ones like perfumes, are reserved for select occasions, while home environments are largely odour neutral. Since strong odours came to be associated with dirt and disorder, even the public spaces were thus increasingly cleansed of odours under the regimes of hygiene and sanitation. It is important to underscore here that the

aesthetic judgment on odours, that is, what is a good or bad odour, has been a historically shifting and contingent category. Odours thus acquire different significations over time and in different contexts.

While the binary between Western and non-Western civilizations may have been overemphasised in these formulations, this idea of deodourization is actually relevant, in parts, for the social and political contexts that we are examining in this work. The industrial space, though not physically deodorized, by even a wide margin, still attempts to invest heavily, in the idea of social and political deodourization. Because of this delinking of the industrial with the social and the political, industrial odours do not seem to invoke the same symbolic meanings as odours in other domains do. This idea of deodourization, especially of the social and political variety, is important for this work, and in the subsequent chapters, we will gradually peel the layers of this idea, using the odorous industrial object of leather, in order to reveal the sensuousness of the industrial. Within this sensuousness, it is argued, lies caste.

However before we examine the sensuousness of the leather industry, in the following sections, we will first locate the idea of odours and of smelling in three distinct social science and sensory methodologies in order to lay the groundwork for understanding odours in the leather industry in the following chapters.

3. Three Perspectives on Odours

This section locates the politics of odours in three broad methodological positions. First, is the anthropology of the senses or the sensory anthropology discourse which has been proposed by scholars of the senses such as Howes and Classen. Their ideas on studying the senses and the society have been challenged most significantly by scholars such as Pink, Ingold and Kelvin E Y Low. The second perspective on odours comes from examining the small ideas of history in extended historical arcs. Corbin, studying odours in pre and post Revolution

France, and McHugh examining odours and the perfume trade in medieval South Asia, provide the *longue durée* perspective on odours. Lastly, Guru and Sarrukai provide the basis for a sensory reading of caste by proposing a phenomenological reading of caste and its experience. In particular their debate over the sense of touch is important for this work. This section will briefly examine these positions and then lay out the methodological focus on the present work, using a matrix of these approaches.

3.1 Anthropology of the Senses

The nineteenth century, natural historian, Lorenz Oken proposed the following descending order of human civilizations - the European “eye-man”, followed by the Asian “ear-man”, the Native American “nose-man”, the Australian “tongue-man”, and, at the bottom, the African “skin-man” (Howes, 2003, p. 5). Over the course of history, these neat classifications and pairing were to be changed, reworked and critiqued. However, the fundamental idea of the hierarchy of human civilizations and the senses still retains much of its force. For the sense of smell, this hierarchy gives rise to two interrelated ideas. First, the sense of smell has not been considered very crucial for modern human perception. Along with the other lower senses, such as touch and taste, smell has been “underrepresented and under-theorized in contemporary scholarship” (Howes, 2003, p. xii). Second, the sense of smell and consequently, odours, has been thought of as closer to animals than to humans. Odours come to signify lust, desire, depravity and lack of control. These ways of understanding odours, primarily define them in opposition to vision and to some extent, in relation to sound. In this paradigm modern human perception and societies are considered to be organized by the visual and the aural.

In order to understand the predominance of vision, one can take examples from our everyday lives. Facial recognition based on sight is one of our most

fundamental modes of human interaction and has historically been systematized over other sensory forms of recognition. Built environments such as living spaces, offices, public infrastructure are all largely organized according to sight. A tactile or auditory addition to these spaces is perceived as supplementary to their primarily visual nature. For instance, tactile flooring in buildings and aural support in phones, Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) and computers is a result of consistent and persuasive debates and critique by the disability discourse⁴⁰. Thus even within the understanding of disability, the loss of vision is represents a greater crisis than the loss of any other sensory ability. Anosmia or the loss of the ability to smell is seldom regarded as a serious disability. In the medical discourse also the sense of smell is associated with our ability to taste, and thus the loss of the ability to smell, whether permanently or temporarily (such as during viral infections like common cold) does not constitute a debilitating condition.

Technological advancements have in general have also aided and enhanced the human power of sight. The visual field has been expanded with the aid of technologies of observation such as telescope, microscope and television (Howes, 2003, p. xii). Vision is aided by light, and thus light, natural and artificial, has become one of the organizing principles of human life. Otter (2008) discusses the impact of the increasing social use of electricity in nineteenth century Britain. The earlier generation of gas lamps were rapidly discarded with the advent of electrical lamp because of complaints of hampered visibility due to the lamp fog. Clarifying technologies, which facilitated the spread of light, and thus aided far-fetched vision thus began to take hold. Howes argues that this dominance is primarily due to the association of sight with both scientific rationalism and capitalist display (Howes, 2003, p. xii). Science and technology has thus been quite instrumental in shaping our sensory perception.

⁴⁰ For a deeper understanding of disability and sensory perception see Oliver Sacks (in Howes, 2005, pp. 25-42). For an exploration of the sensuous nature of spaces such as museums, particularly movement against the 'white cube' (an idea which propagates clean, modern and non- sensuous built environments) towards a deeper olfactory engagement see Jim Drobnick (in Howes, 2005, pp. 265-280).

Howes and Classen thus argue that Western societies and their sensory perception are based on a predominance of vision. While on the one hand, this leads to deodorization of these societies, on the other it hampers our understanding of smelling and of odours in themselves. Thus they argue that we do not have either the vocabulary or the conceptual framework through which odours can be discussed (Classen et al, 1994, p. 3). The anthropology of the senses discourse, taking this insight, thus makes non-Western societies, its object of study in order to provide odours and the other non-visual senses their place in history and society. Scholars such as McHugh (2012, p. 65) have opposed this view, arguing that this way of thinking about odours itself is indicative of a primitive and orientalist attitude which places vision and aurality closer to speech, and thus to rationality and reason⁴¹. Howes and Classen thus operate via the same hierarchical notion of the senses that they seek to challenge.

The predominance of vision is backed by rich philosophical discussion on human sensory perception within Western knowledge systems. The opposition to the idea of the human came from that of the animal and thus it was important for human civilizations to make clear distinctions between these two categories. The regimes of Western Enlightenment and the resultant modernity became the glorious period for this non-animal like human who was dictated by reason, rationality and objectivity, rather than desires and passions. Animal like senses of smell and taste, deemed to be “closer to madness and savagery” fell through the cracks of this modernity and were “silenced” (Classen et al, 1994, pp. 3-4).

Also fell through the cracks, humans who were not “fully human-like”, such as children, mentally and physically disabled, elderly in terms of their bio-social abilities, and a vast range of peoples and groups who were considered mad, irrational, passionate or sub-human, in other words, ‘animal-like’. Since humans were the first species to have an upright spine and bipedal posture their vision

⁴¹ McHugh (2012, pp. 64-65) argues that both sight and smell in fact depend on “ostensive description”, that is one has to use other colours or other odours to describe one’s experiences. And this type of communication relies on a shared universe of understanding where it makes sense to say that something smells like oranges, or that one is wearing yellow, since both the smell of orange or the colour yellow by themselves means nothing.

extended beyond the horizon and became more advanced than any other species (Corbin, 1986, p. 6). The sense of olfaction was closer to four-legged animals who, in the absence of vision over the horizon would sniff the ground. This does not mean that olfaction was completely absent from human perception. Rather, because odours are ephemeral and intangible, olfactory sensations were also thought of as transient and fickle. Odours could never provide a persistent stimulus of thought. Thus the development of the sense of smell seems to be inversely related to the development of intelligence (Corbin, 1986, p. 6). Women, witches, blacks, savages and colonial natives thus were considered to not just be heavily odorous (or malodorous) but also as having a predominant sense of smell.

In the discourse of Western philosophy, the predominance of the sense of sight begins with Plato. The Platonic idea of Forms derives from the visual ability of human beings to not just 'see' the close at hand, tangible objects but also to perceive the distant and intangible Forms of these objects. Human vision in some senses could then transcend the materiality and 'see' what only exists as ideas. In the Part VII of *Republic*, Plato (2003, p. 232) likens the Form of the Good to the Sun. Of all the senses, it is only sight which needs light to become operative. Plato (2003, p. 233) thus argues that "of all the sense-organs the eye is the most sunlike". For Plato (2003, p. 234),

"When the mind's eye is fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality, it understands and knows them, and its possession of intelligence is evident; but when it is fixed on the twilight world of change and decay, it can only form opinions, its vision is confused and its opinions shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence."

By linking sight to the Sun and in turn comparing these to the knowledge, truth and the Form of Good, Plato sets the tone for a particular kind of philosophy to take root. These philosophical ideas premise themselves on visible evidence and on 'seeing' truth. Sight thus becomes the source of truth, knowledge and the

good. These Platonic ideas further entrench the importance of light, which, “causes the processes of generation, growth and nourishment” (Plato, 2003, p. 234), for the purposes of truth and knowledge. The obverse of light, in this discourse is not simply darkness, but more significantly, the absence of light connotes decay. This identification of darkness and absence of light with inferiority, filth and physical and moral decay came to its full force in the racial discourse and in the sanitarian discourses which linked darkness, whether of the body or of the environment with inferiority, laziness and criminality. More importantly, a lack of vision was thus understood to be a lack of knowledge⁴². Animals and the animal-like, who lacked this sharp transcendent vision in favour of the strong sense of smell were also not the bearers of knowledge and reason. Under the discourse of Cartesian mind-body duality, this association is entrenched further. While sight and to some extent hearing, as the windows to knowledge, get associated with the mind, the rest of the senses, especially touch and smell are perceived to be closer to the bodily desires and passions.

John Locke takes up the Platonic ideas to argue on the contrary that the mind is a ‘*tabula rasa*’, a blank slate on which the world makes an impression, primarily through the sensory perception. Locke proposed that all knowledge comes from sensory experience and consequent reflection on that experience – in other words, one has to observe truth to know the truth. In fact Locke (1992) begins, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, with the following lines,

“Since it is the understanding⁴³ that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them, it is certainly a subject...worth our labours to inquire into. The understandings, like the eye, whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance and make it its own object. But whatever be the difficulties that lie in the way of this

⁴²Consider the ways in which we connect vision to knowledge, affect and aesthetics in our present language use. ‘She has a vision for the future’, ‘She is not very far-sighted’, ‘Seeing is believing’, ‘It feels dark and gloomy’, ‘Dark days are ahead’ and ‘She lit up the room with her presence’.

⁴³Emphasis is author’s own

inquiry, whatever it be that keeps us so much in the dark to ourselves, sure I am that all the light we can let in upon our own minds...in directing our thoughts in the search of other things” (Locke, 1992, p.1).

The recurrent linking of the metaphors of dark-light to ignorance-knowledge is important. Although Locke opposes the Platonic idea of forms, yet he further forges the relationship of sight to knowledge. In fact, this could be regarded as the basis of understanding senses as the ‘windows to the world’. In this understanding, the external world makes an impact on the mind, through the senses. Objects located in the world outside of the body, thus influence the senses in a unidirectional manner, producing objective and non-contingent knowledge. In giving primacy to sense experience, Locke lays down the foundations of British empiricism which allow the body – the sight of the senses to enter the realm of knowledge⁴⁴.

Immanuel Kant while agreed largely with Hume’s assertion on sense perception also went on to challenge the empiricists’ ideas on knowledge. For Kant all knowledge could not be sense experience based –some knowledge arises *apriori* through a critique of pure reason. With this move, Kant raises suspicion about the status of sense perception in specific and the body at large. The *apriori* generation of knowledge, like Descartes, again emphasises that the mind can work without the senses. Under Kant and the ensuing Western European Enlightenment discourses, the senses take a back seat in the generation of knowledge⁴⁵. Although Kant disregarded sense knowledge, yet Kant also believed that among the senses, sight holds primacy as far as rational knowledge

⁴⁴ Yet this engagement with the body remains starkly different from other understandings of sensory perception such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the Affect theorists who draw their philosophical lineages from Aristotle and Spinoza instead of Plato.

⁴⁵ J.S. Mill tries to find a middle ground between these extremes by proposing that there are parts of knowledge which are ‘unknowable’ by direct sense experience and thus one may have to combine sense experience with other kinds of knowledge. All knowledge and the sense experience that it is based on, is strictly subjective for Mill and not *apriori* like in Kant. These ideas combined with the utilitarian calculation of pain and pleasure should have meant that Mill becomes an important figure in understanding the senses. However, much of Mills views on these matters have not been very coherent (Low, 2005).

systems are concerned. He does not even discuss the sense of smell in his analysis of aesthetics (Low, 2005, p. 399).

The opposition to the Kantian discourse finds its philosophical foundations in the writings of Aristotle. Though the source of knowledge in Aristotle still remains reason, this reason is slightly tempered - reason serves to unify and interpret sense perceptions, to convert them into thought. Thus, Aristotle lays down the foundations for a philosophical exploration of the relationship between the senses, the body and the world. In *De Anima* Aristotle prioritises touch over all other sensations since the skin is the largest organ in the body. The importance of Aristotle's analysis however lies in his effort to understand the senses in relationship to the soul. Senses for him are not just windows to the world, but are 'nutritive' elements to the soul.

Aristotle believes that it is not clear what sort of a thing smell is, since human beings do not have as accurate a sense of smell as animals. Man only perceives the extremes of the painful and the pleasant odours (Aristotle, 1986, p. 180). This is interesting for because while on the one hand the sense of smell is seen as representative of animality and thus not very desirable, on the other its loss or diminished acuity is lamented. For Aristotle, in man the sense of smell is closer to the sense of touch, making smell, a contact sense. This understanding of smell as a contact sense is closer to the way in which smell is understood in certain systems of sensory perception from the Indian subcontinent. This is discussed in detail, later in the chapter and also forms a central idea of this work.

These philosophical ideas find resonance in the organization of space, bodies and objects in contexts like that of France and England during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This is a period of major upheaval in parts of Europe with cities having to manage widespread poverty, dirt, squalor, disease and above all having to deal with large sections of population which was homeless and unemployed. Sanitary reforms, infrastructural restructuring like the Haussmann projects in France and the disciplining and organization of errant bodies through laws and public policy became the major themes for Europe of this time. In effect

all of these were also projects of sensory management. With the colonial expanse, these European ideas were not only used to civilize the native and her body but in fact the colonies were used as experimenting fields for much of these sensory interventions.

These experiments rapidly did away with the multisensoriality of these societies and employed largely an approach based on vision. “Smells may be disruptive and elusive; touches, interactive and personal” but sight allowed discernment, insertion of distance and judgement⁴⁶ (Howes, 2003, p. 7). A mastery of sight was a proof of intellectual superiority especially when the colonized cultures seemed to have non-visual schemes of sensorial organization (Howes, 2003, p. 4).

Using anthropological methods to understand and generate knowledge about the colony and the natives, only those sensory phenomena were considered, which could be recorded by the existing technologies were sight and sound. Cameras and phonographs were thus used to collect anthropological data and this data, “purely visual and auditory”, was thought to “register cultural expressions in a direct, unmediated, objective fashion”. Thus what got recorded and replicated as knowledge was a “world devoid of scents, savours, temperatures, and textures” (Howes, 2003, pp. 6-7). The anthropological subjects were thus reified into museum or laboratory like displays (Howes, 2003, p. 7).

These arguments made by the sensory anthropologists have a resounding relevance in understanding the status and the politics of odours particularly in the way in which they explain the dominance of vision and the utilization of this vision in framing the native, the subaltern and the colonized. The philosophical trajectory that this perspective traces is also important for making sense of the way in which sensory perception, built environments and affectual politics of

⁴⁶ For example, the tactile qualities of a weaving, which may be of immense importance to the culture concerned, are excluded when the work is analysed in terms of its visual aesthetics and reproduced as a photograph or drawing. The visual image is retained and may be tremendously powerful in itself, but all the invisible threads that tie it to a larger cultural tapestry of textures and scents and sounds are snipped off. The example may also be given of Navajo sand painting, which for the Navajo involves essential elements of touch and movement, but for Westerners is customarily transformed into and appreciated as a static work of visual art (Howes, 2003, p. 8).

bodies and objects is produced and replicated. These insights are significant for this work. However, there are some fundamental ways in which the sensory politics of caste differs with the schema proposed by Howes and Classen. The most significant of these differences lies in the fact that the discourses of caste did not prioritize or hierarchize the senses in order to produce its power. In fact the cunning of caste lies in producing a complex and determinate sensorial system, which leaves little to chance. While contingencies are allowed, especially to those higher in the order, sensory and moral judgements of those who are lower are absolute and inescapable. A hierarchy of sensory perception allows movement and exchange. Thus Howes and Classen can propose a sensorial exchange between a visual and non-visual analysis of non-Western societies. For them, this exchange will also produce a change in power equations, by disrupting the visual power of the dominant. For caste, this exchange is not possible and thus the power of caste stays.

The complex sensorial nature of caste is evident in anthropological descriptions provided by the British, which while making the native a visual category, still cannot dismiss the olfactory. It is thus argued that in the colonial perspective while caste was made legible through visibility, the olfactory affects of caste overflowed this vision and produced their own odoriferous knowledge, such as leatherwork and objects such as leather.

A different kind of scholarly engagement with odour has come with the work of Alain Corbin, who presents a historical analysis of the sense of smell in France around the time of the revolution. While agreeing with the assertion that odours have been ignored in history and science, Corbin actually proceeds to excavate a rich account of the hold that odours had on the social imagination of France from the seventeenth century onwards. It is necessary to provide a somewhat detailed account of this history of olfaction in order to challenge the perception that odours were forgotten, especially in the Western discourse. Following Corbin, McHugh provides a similar history of odours in medieval South Asia by reading religious texts for traces of smells. Since this work argues that odours constitute

a major epistemological and political resource for understanding notions of hierarchy and power within the discourse of caste, these exercises of excavating and locating odours are important for this work, rather than those of hierarchizing and forgetting.

3.2 A Sense of History

Odours have been important for matters of everyday life in the fields of medicine, trade, cooking and advertising. Scholars of odours such as McHugh (2012) and Low (2010) also emphasise the importance of odours in everyday life of people, where neither odours nor their powers have been ignored in lived experience. Recent interventions by sense scholars such as Robert Desjaralis (2003) and Joseph Hankins (2013, 2014) have also brought forth the rich engagement of everyday life sensorial life in the leather industry in Japan and in the lives of Yolmo Buddhists in Nepal respectively.

Corbin argues that it is precisely because the sense of smell is an animal sense that it is also the sense of self preservation. The nose warns us, locates hidden dangers and alerts us to the environment around us. Changes in pneumatic chemistry and the discovery of miasmas, germs and microbes accentuated this discretionary capacity of the sense of smell (Corbin, 1986, p. 7). Corbin in fact argues that in seventeenth century France, the sense of smell was considered to be the paramount sensation due to the proximity of nose to the brain. Thus, Corbin argues that in contrast to the claims generally made, “the sense of smell appears to grow with the development of intelligence” (Corbin, 1986, p. 7). Till about the middle of the nineteenth century, much of the European sensorial engagement with spaces and bodies was influenced by the miasma theory, which was later replaced by Louis Pasteur’s Germ Theory. Before 1750, air was considered to be an elementary fluid and not a combination of chemicals. Advances in pneumatic chemistry along with the works of Stephen Hales,

Priestley and Lavoisier changed this idea about air and was crucial in characterising air as something which can be polluting. Hales work on plant physiology showed that leaves could draw some of their nourishment through taking in air. This crucial discovery meant that air was not only composed of several other elements but also that it could enter the bodies of living beings (Corbin 1986, p. 11).

Further it was also discovered that living bodies gave off air under decomposition. Air thus could interact with the human body in multiple ways such as through the skin, the pulmonary organs and through direct ingestion. With the discovery of the physical properties of air, such as weight and pressure, it was further established that equilibrium needs to be maintained by expelling the air which was being ingested. This was thought to be done through belching, breaking wind and exhalation. Further these emanations were thought to remain permanently suspended in the surrounding air, making them a threat to the well-being of others (Corbin, 1986, p. 13). Fresh air was thus considered to not only be good for the body but was also claimed as a natural right. However, the link between purity and decomposition was to be determined later (Corbin, 1986, p. 13).

Since air was now thought of as a part of the human body, its physical properties like temperature and humidity were also thought of as impacting the body. For instance, heat rarefied the air and thus slackened and elongated the bodily fibers, making the body feel weak. Humidity was thought of having the same effect. Cold air has the inverse effect of compressing the fibers and condensing the fluids thereby increasing the vigour of the individual⁴⁷ (Corbin, 1986, p. 12). This explains to a large extent the idea prevalent amongst the colonizers that the heat

⁴⁷ Movement of air caused breakdown of internal cohesion in the body. Fetidity, heat and humidity were seen as the main reasons for movement of air within the body since they loosened the fibres and released the aqueous parts of organic matter as pus, gangrene, syphilis, scurvy and fevers. Further these emanations could penetrate the bodies of other organisms as well thus forming a great threat (Corbin, 1986, pp. 16-17).

and humidity of the Indian climate not only made the natives lazy but could also have similar effects on British bodies. Adequate care of their own bodies and its surrounding environment thus became an important preoccupation of the British administrators and also determined their efforts at reorganizing the native body and its space (Collingham, 2001).

Air was also threatening because it acted as a passive carrier for foreign particles, which could then enter the body and influence it (Corbin, 1986, p. 12). This understanding largely derived from the earlier discussed idea of senses as 'windows to the world', where the body existed in a separation from the environment around it. However, it was separated merely through a porous and fragile envelope, the skin, thus making the body increasingly susceptible to the hostile environment around⁴⁸. The regime of personal hygiene was thus based on establishing the correct equilibrium between the outside and the inside, between the tainted and fresh air (Corbin, 1986, p. 13).

Before 1760 the sense of smell was not closely associated with air. The physical properties of the atmosphere were measure using touch and the theoretical discourse of miasmas and emanations were used to determine the threat caused by putrid air. Between 1760 -1783, with the discovery of the chemical composition of air, efforts were scaled up to measure and analyse precisely, all the constituents of this air, since this proportion determined quality (Corbin, 1986, p. 15)⁴⁹. The sense of smell became important to establish putrefaction and decay of the air of human bodies and its environment. From here on until Pasteur's theory was recognised, the sense of smell was to constitute what Corbin calls as 'olfactory vigilance' – a careful odour based detection of airs, viruses, miasmas and poisons (Corbin, 1986, pp. 14-15).

⁴⁸ Corbin terms this as 'aerist thought' regarding hygiene and well-being, which was "based entirely on distrust of changes in the climate, sudden thaws, bursts of mild wet weather or downpours" (Corbin, 1986, p. 14).

⁴⁹ Scientists thus collected, decanted and preserved 'airs' or gases in order to study their effect on the human body. Priestley successfully measured respiration and the exchange between oxygen (vital air) and carbon dioxide (fixed air). Subsequently Ingenhousz gave a precise elaboration of photosynthesis which revealed that plants gave out this vital air in abundance. Thus the beneficial aspects of being near nature were validated by science (Corbin, 1986, p.15).

The benefits of being close to nature and of fresh air, also spurred an interest in the obverse – the threat of living in confined, crowded urban spaces. The most significant feature of this life was the constant decay and decomposition of living organisms which produced putrid miasmas (Corbin, 1986, pp. 16-17). Further, since blood, which provided cohesion to the organic substances in the body, was considered balsamic or oily, it was also oily substances which were thought of as antiseptics which prevented decomposition, thereby restoring order. This relationship between aromatics and order was to mirror the Hippocratic idea of controlling plague through odours (Corbin, 1986, p. 17). Odours could thus mark out disease and disorganisation and also provide the cure.

Attention now shifted to the sources of putrid emanations and to efforts of reducing the seepage of air through these sources. The biggest source of emanations was the earth itself and its propensity to absorb the emanations from the environment surrounding it. Agriculture which had an intimate connection with soil was thus deemed as a dangerous activity and with this the purity of the countryside and of nature was also cast under suspicion. In the urban landscape, cracks in concretized pavements, faults in wall plastering or simply any uncovered urban area could produce putrid miasmas. Cesspools, refuse dumps, graveyards, prisons, ships at sea, and hospitals all were now regarded as reservoirs of harmful and foul smelling miasmas. Since the plaster and mortar walls on these buildings could absorb and trap harmful miasmas emanating from the inmates, prisons and hospitals became permanent sources of harmful airs (Corbin, 1986, pp. 22-23).

Anything which seemed putrid or had a foul smell, such as butcher's meat, was now suspect of having a dangerous miasma (Corbin, 1986, p. 21). Death, in fact, "called for the highest degree of olfactory vigilance" since it caused the loosening of bodily elements to the highest degree. Even proximity to death was considered dangerous. Thus battlefields, hospitals and slaughterhouses stood out as the most noxious sources of olfactory pollution. Slaughterhouses and their carcasses provided "an amalgam of stench" (Corbin, 1986, pp. 29-31). It is

necessary to quote Corbin's (1986, p. 31) description of the noxiousness of slaughterhouses at some length.

"In butcher's narrow courtyards odours of dung, fresh refuse, and organic remains combined with foul-smelling gases escaping from intestines. Blood trickled out in the open air, ran down streets, coated the paving stones with brownish glazes, and decomposed in the gaps. Because blood transmitted 'fixed air, it was the most eminently putrescent of animal remains. The malodorous vapours that impregnated roadways and traders' stalls were some of the deadliest and the most revolting; they make the whole body susceptible to putridity. Often the stifling odour of melting tallow added to this foul-smelling potpourri".

This association between death, malodour and the threat of contamination is replicated in the Indian sensory discourse as well. This is discussed later in the chapter and also forms an important idea for understanding the relationship between death, caste, and repulsion in Chapter Three. This association between what one does, such as slaughter and flaying and how one smells, is an important insight for framing this work. Corbin (1986, p. 40) quotes Jean-Joseph de Brieude, a French doctor to show the relationship between odours and work,

"Who could not tell a cesspool cleaner, candlemaker, butcher etc., solely by the sense of smell...? A certain quantity of those volatile particles which penetrate the workers is expelled from their bodies almost intact, along with their humours, with which they probably partly combine...the odour that results is the very sign of the health of these workers". Brieude diagnosed disease among several tanners solely from the fact that they had lost the odour of their trade."

Corbin writes that the smell of workshops was considered to be dangerous only if it smelt bad, otherwise bodies at work did not signify danger. Hence stench and noxiousness were held to coincide almost exactly. Only work that forced the

labourer to live with fermentation, putrefaction or subterranean vapours involved serious dangers. Quantrymen, oilmen, well-sinkers, ropemakers (foul smelling hemp), candlemakers (animal fats), the fetid airs from leather was a threat to shoemakers and curriers, laundresses, bathers and attendants at public baths, fullers who used excrement, horsehair workers, scavengers who traded in animal remains (Corbin, 1986, pp. 53-54).

By this time the stench of workshops and worker's bodies was still not linked to poverty, living condition, race or social class. Being a worker did not automatically employ stench and it was up to the worker, like anyone else to protect themselves from the fetid surroundings. By the nineteenth century however, a distinction would be made between the deodourized bourgeoisie and the foul-smelling masses, irrespective of occupations and physical states (Corbin, 1986, pp. 54-55).

The nineteenth century also heralds the rise of the individual in Western Europe and Corbin argues that the privatization of odours was the first mark of this discourse of individualism (Corbin, 1986, p. 61). The regime of social hygiene brought about a distrust of anything with a strong odour. For the first time in Europe, the stench of excrement began to invoke a strong threat of contamination. Favoured aromatics like musk fell out of affection⁵⁰. The animal origin of musk, combined with the fact that stables and sheepfolds smelled of musk, and if human excreta was fermented it would acquire a musky odour, made a strong case for its disuse (Corbin, 1986, p. 67). In elite households this is

⁵⁰ A remedy to strong odours was traditionally found in aromatic substances like lavender, musk, vinegar, camphor and civet. Aromatics were known for their therapeutic and hedonistic properties. The nose's proximity to the brain was attributed to the efficacy of aromatic substances in curing diseases (Corbin, 1986, p. 61). In periods of epidemics people used aromatics to protect themselves. Corbin describes a practice during epidemics, "*A sponge soaked in vinegar or a lemon studded with cloves or an odoriferous ball will be carried in the hand and sniffed from time to time. For people who are not in a position to afford odoriferous balls or perfume-pans, the best authors recommend sachets of rue, Melissa, marjoram, mint, sage, rosemary, orange blossom, basil, thyme, serpolet, lavender, bay leaves, orange and lemon bark, and quince rind; they recommend that these always be present in apartments at time of plague*" (Corbin, 1986, pp. 63-64).

also the time when lavatories are installed with water pipes and doors and bedrooms are separated from the rest of the house, instituting a regime of separation between public and private odours. Lavoisier's chemistry of air provided precise ideas on ventilation, along with advances in sanitary technologies. The deodourization of the public however was a massive task which was almost impossible to achieve.

There was a shift in perception from the threat produced by organic odours to those produced by "social emanations", especially after the Revolution which had produced a fear of the non-elite masses (Corbin, 1986, p. 47). Not just diseased bodies but any mass of bodies became to be seen as a sign of dangerous miasmas especially in the urban areas where the cleansing effects of pure wind and air were absent. Further, poverty, unemployment and criminality were now linked to a stinking disposition.

In terms of an olfactory sensescape, the colony and the metropolis were close, both in terms of spatiality and temporality. The discourses on the ordering of public space and bodies which were developed in the metropolis were at times employed earlier in the colony as an experiment, sometimes within a matter of a couple of years. European ideas on odours, sanitation and organization of bodies and spaces were to profoundly influence the way in which the colonizers perceived the colonies through all the senses.

3.2.1 Mixing of Senses

According to Collingham (2001), there were two distinct phases of the British rule in India as far as the experience of bodies is concerned. The first of these spans the early part of the nineteenth century when the British East India Company officer styled himself like the "flamboyant, effeminate and wealthy" nabob, open to Indian influences (Collingham, 2001, p. 3). In the latter half of the

century this figure changed to that of the 'sahib', "a sober, bureaucratic representative of the Crown" (Collingham, 2001, p. 3).

Collingham (2001, p. 3) argues that this shift from an open to a closed and regimented body appears to reflect the emergence, between 1600 and 1900, of the modern European bourgeoisie body. During this period the body was thought of as "open and in flux with its environment" and the skin was thought of as porous rather than as an "enveloping shell, separating the internal and external worlds". By the nineteenth century the body came to be "visualized as a closed entity which needed to be preserved intact, separate from the environment" (Collingham, 2001, pp. 3-4). Among the bourgeoisie the body was separated from the environment by relocating bodily practices to the private (Collingham, 2001, pp. 3-4).

Simultaneously, within changes in the British political economy, due to the rise of middle-class liberalism which resulted in a shift towards "utilitarianism, evangelism and free trade, and shifts in medical thinking in Britain resulted in the arrival of new middle-class code of morals and manners in India which did not have a considerable attitude towards Indian culture and institutions, as had guided orientalism" (Collingham, 2001, pp. 50-51). The colony thus became a space which was not just different but that difference also had to be reformed (Collingham, 2001, p. 51). "From 1820s, the foundations for education in the medium of the English language were laid, reform of the judicial system was in progress and measures against practices such as *thuggee*, infanticide, human sacrifice and *suttee* were put into place" (Collingham, 2001, pp. 51-52).

This also had an impact on the British bodies in the colony. The British officer was now to be seen as embodying British superiority (Collingham, 2001, p. 52) and the figure of the *burra* sahib was to characterize the British qualities of energy, probity and manliness. As a result the interactions between the British and the Indians came under strict regulation and even declined⁵¹. The British

⁵¹ For instance, in a classic case of aesthetic judgement, relying on the difference of senses between the coloniser and the colonized, a British officer's reported on a nautch performance in

refusal to adapt to Indian ways meant that caste came to regulate much of the interactions between the British and the Indians. Sharing food was one major area of contention, especially with the presence of beef on the British table. British were considered to be outcastes by the Hindus and thus could potentially cause pollution. The British refusal to incorporate Indian ideas of purity and pollution, led to rumours ranging from the Enfield rifle's cartridges which led to the Mutiny of 1857 to the more mundane ones like polluting flour with bone dust (Collingham, 2001, pp. 56-57). Muslims were also beginning to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the British consumption of pork and alcohol (Collingham, 2001, p. 55). Indians also complained of the declining language skills of the British officers since the only language they learnt was from the servants, which was deemed unsuitable for polite conversation (Collingham, 2001, pp. 56-57).

On part of the British, cultural and political superiority was to be mapped on the inferior body of Indian. Collingham (2001, p. 57) writes that

“A calculated insult was the failure to offer a chair to an Indian gentleman waiting to visit a British official. In the colonial context the chair was invested with emotional value...as a visible sign of civilization...The India posture of repose, reclining on cushions, sitting or squatting on the floor as well as the habit of sitting cross-legged on a chair was regarded as a signifier of the Indian barbaric state...For the same reasons many Anglo-Indians were reluctant to accept that Indians who adopted the attire of the British, and in particular British boots or shoes, should be granted the right to keep them on in the presence of a British official.”

The inter-mixing of the European and Indian ideas of comportment, bodily, sartorial and gustatory habits was thus a contested ground. It is well-known by now that public space in large colonial cities such as Delhi and Kanpur were patterned according to the colonizer's imagination especially after the mutiny of

1843, as follows, *“Returned exceedingly disgusted – without any beauty or elegance the motions of the dancers were so exceedingly disgusting...that the baboos sit night after night reflects no credit upon their sense and shows how utterly destitute they are of any usual or proper ideals and feelings...but the sensual”* Collingham (2001, p. 54).

1857 which seemed to have brought forth a deep anxiety over control of bodies and spaces. In this schema the native physical and social body was often constructed as dirty, diseased and disordered. Chapter Two will take this section forward in order to map out the relationship between these sensorial systems, caste and urban space in the leather towns of Agra and Kanpur. The present discussion will now take a step back and in the next subsection, briefly examine the sensorial and olfactory orders of the subcontinent, especially as they existed before the arrival of the British. It is in these ideas that one comes across the traces of an olfactory ordering of caste. While the following discussion relies on medieval religious texts, it is argued that in the absence of a contemporary analysis of the sensuousness of caste, the epistemological order that they created provides helpful contours for delineating a framework for this work.

3.3 Visible Odours in South Asia

A sixteenth century text from Kerala, called *Matangalila* – The Play of Elephants, written by a certain Nilakantha provides detailed classification of elephants in terms of *sattva* (essence), *dev-danav* (god and demon) and of course in terms of varna. The *dev* type of elephant is charming, smells of a *kumuda* lotus, sandalwood and orange. He has a beaming face, forever possesses the eagerness of youth and is worthy of respect. The *raksasa* elephant has the stench of a crow⁵², monkey, donkey, camel, cat or excrement, kills other elephants, is violent at night, desires sour food, flesh and blood and is ungrateful. The Brahmin elephant is pure, smells as honey, milk, ghee or mango blossom, is fond of Vedic recitations, is friendly to all elephants, and is peaceful, fond of bathing and has a

⁵² Both *Matangalila* and *Susrutsamhita* mention that crows are considered to be impure and strikingly bad smelling because they consume rotting flesh. However, McHugh argues that it is unlikely that many people would have actually smelt a crow, or would do so on a regular basis (McHugh 2012, p. 89). McHugh's point is well taken. However I would like to propose further that the foul odour of the crow could be derivative from its flesh eating status, thus making a case for the visual basis of odours. The crow should smell bad based on what it appears to be eating.

virtuous mind. The Kshatriya elephant smells like sandalwood and *ghee*, is fearless in battle and heroic with weapons. The Vaisya elephant smells of rice, sesame, *malati* jasmine, endures distress, eats butchered meat, angers quickly but calms down soon and is fond of the kind word. The Sudra elephant is thrilled by leftovers, smells sour, acidic, or of goats and crabs, is angry, corruptible, miserable and ungrateful (McHugh, 2012, pp. 82-85).

It is evident that odours were intricately involved in the social and political matrix of the time. Caste, or in this case, varna classification becomes a medium through which not only animals are classified and understood but through which ephemeral odours are provided a grounding in material politics. Odours thus formed a part of everyday knowledge systems, rather than being confined to specialized knowledge about perfumes or food. Deriving his methodology from Corbin, McHugh (2012, p. ix) argues that, “in medieval India, as in pre-modern Europe and North America...not only was the environment more odorous but also educated people appeared to have been far more interested and articulate about smells than we are”. Aromatics, perfumes, incense, flowers and oils were extensively used in everyday practices such as detecting and curing illness, cooking, praying and for pleasure. These aromatics also had an intimate relationship to moral and religious codes. Odours were generally classified as good, bad and neutral. McHugh (2012, p. 5) writes, “A good perfume, scholars explained, should be like a well-run kingdom, with the correct balance of allies (mild materials), neutrals, and enemies (pungent materials).”

Fragrances and stinks were thus a common model for describing other values, be they aesthetic, ethical, or related to matters of ritual purity and auspiciousness. Evil people and places like hell, suffering, diseases, death, poverty all had a foul smell (McHugh, 2012, p. 5), while the good was fragrant. For instance, the extremely fetid nature of the human body is described in Buddhist texts such as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. On the other hand, while the Buddhist monks are not allowed the use of aromatics (possibly due to the relationship of odours with desire and decadence), the fragrant sandalwood is regarded as a substitute for

the body of the Buddha (McHugh, 2012 , pp. 5-6). The Manusmriti puts similar injunctions on the Brahmins in the following verses -

“The knower of Vedas must avoid honey, meat, perfume, garlands, spices, women, anything that has gone sour, and violence to creatures that have the breath of life, anointing body with oil, putting make-up on eyes, wearing shoes, carrying umbrella, desire, anger, greed, dancing and singing, carrying musical instruments” (Manu, 2008, p. 35).

There is an intimate relationship between fragrance and luxury while asceticism requires giving up these worldly pleasures. Thus while learned people, ascetics, and those who are good, could be fragrant in themselves, thus representing pure inner states, the application of external fragrant objects is considered a sign of wastefulness and pompousness. Further, as discussed earlier for the European discourses, personal odours conveyed knowledge about one’s moral states. Further in the Indian traditions, one’s odour could be indicative of one’s “karmic past and innate nature⁵³” (McHugh, 2012 , p. 6).

The relationship between odour, innate nature and past life is the foundational idea on which the sensuousness of caste locates itself. Om Prakash Valmiki (2009, p. 13), a Dalit writer, narrates his childhood experience,

“...If I wore clean clothes to school, my classmates would tease me for being an untouchable and wearing clean clothes. Then if I wore dirty, old clothes, they would again taunt me for being born of an untouchable, and smelling bad⁵⁴”.

⁵³The Buddhist *Dhammapada* states, “The smell of flowers does not go against the wind, nor that of sandalwood, tagara, or mallikā jasmine, But the smell of good people goes against the wind: the good man diffuses scent to all directions” (McHugh, 2012, p. 74). On the other hand, Guru (2012, p. 209-10) notes that air in itself is not contaminating, but is only so when it carries germs, microbes or other pollutants with it. However, even this air acquires a notion of hierarchy when Dalit *bastis* are located on the eastern sides of the village, since wind normally flows from the west to the east. This prevents polluted wind from the east to enter the upper caste settlements in the western side.

⁵⁴ “...saaf sutre kapde pehenkar kaksha mein jao to saath ke ladke kehte, abe chuhre ka, naye kapde pehen kar aya hai. Maelle – purane kapde pehen kar school jao to kahte, abe chuhre ka, dur hat, badbu aa rahi hai”

Appearing to smell bad is thus considered to be a permanent condition for the untouchables and this malodour has to do with 'being born of an untouchable'. This stink is thus not only considered to be innate but also hereditary and is not supposed to change even with a change in occupations, social status or even identities. This understanding of odours is thus stands in a stark contrast to the way in which Corbin described the relationship between odours and occupations. It is this fixity of odours in caste which provides the affective and political charge to occupations such as leatherwork.

In the Indian context thus, odours are strongly associated with purity and impurity and with the qualities of the object from which these odours are being emitted. It could then be argued that odours smelt different to people in different contexts depending on their relationship and position in the matrix of purity and pollution (McHugh, 2012, p. 63). However in textual authority, especially within Hinduism, odours have a fundamental aesthetic quality independent of our judgment (McHugh, 2012, p. 64). McHugh (2012, pp. 65-66) argues that this difference in the textual and experiential dimension of odours arises from the fact that in the former, largely only two evaluative criteria of good and bad were employed. On the other hand, the experiential dimension of odours required a much richer and explanatory framework which thus expanded to include descriptions of odours in terms of other substances like, cow's urine or fresh butter. This means that the description and value attribution for odours arises out of a shared vocabulary and system of knowledge, where it makes sense to say that something smells like a *kumuda* lotus⁵⁵.

⁵⁵For instance, the Arthashastra, a text on statecraft, describes the contents of the ideal royal treasury as follows – “*Satana sandalwood is red and smells of earth. Gosirsaka (ox head) sandalwood is dark copper and smells of fish. Haricandana (green sandalwood) is the colour of a parrot feather and smells of mango, as is Tarnasa (sandalwood). Grameruka (sandalwood) is red, red-black, and smells of goat urine. Daivasabheya (sandalwood) is red and smells of padama lotus...*” (McHugh, 2012, p. 66). It is interesting to note that an odorous substance like sandalwood is being described through other odours, not all of which are pleasant at least to the modern olfactory sensoria. However, McHugh (2012, p. 66) argues that it is not necessary that all aromatics smelled pleasant, and in fact “smelling like goat's urine” may have some other property or symbolism which may make this substance relevant or even precious.

Further, given the association of the quality of smell with the source of the odour, the simple binary classification of good and bad may not hold. For instance, given the religious and symbolic importance of the cow in Hinduism, something which smells like cow-urine, may not be used as a perfume, but could be considered pure or valuable in a different aesthetic consideration (McHugh, 2012, p. 67). On the other hand, a pleasant smell may not always be desirable. McHugh (2012, p. 72) examines the medical treatise *Carakasamhita*, to argue that here the scent of a dying man is in fact described as that of a bloomed flower, indicating the nearing of the end. “He is said to be bloomed, in whose body, bathed or not bathed, there are alternately auspicious (*subha*) and inauspicious (*asubha*) smells, with no cause. For instance: sandalwood, costus⁵⁶, *tagara*⁵⁷, aloeswood, honey, a garland, urine and excrement and dead corpses”. Thus the terms indicate not just pleasant or unpleasant but also relate to auspiciousness (McHugh, 2012, p. 73). On the other hand, foul-smelling substances can also be used as fumigants to repel the effects of disease causing demons, especially on children. While demons are the source of foul odours, their olfactory sense perception is considered to be the same as humans, and thus they find bad smells repellent as well (McHugh, 2012, p. 77).

⁵⁶ *Kustha* or costus root, also known as *pachak* is the root of *Saussurea lappa*, a plant that grows in the Himalayas. It has a goaty and animalic smell and is used in perfumes and incenses in South Asia. In the Vedic sources costus and *guggulu* are the most notable aromatic materials apart from odorous materials such as *ghee*. In *Atharvaveda* costus is mentioned as a cure for fever (*takman*). In fact, unlike *guggulu* which is considered to be derived from the body of the divine, costus is considered to be divine himself since he is said to be thrice-born from various divinities. Costus has also been used as an aromatic in Europe since the classical times (McHugh, 2012, pp. 67-68). It is interesting to note the use of the pronoun ‘he’ for an aromatic substance, almost attributing a human form to it. This does not seem to be the case in the Western idea of aromatics.

⁵⁷ *Tagara* is probably the root of some fragrant Indian valerian species or the root of Indian rosebay and was highly valued. It is also possible that several fragrant species of plants and dried products were all called *tagara*. It is mentioned for instance in a Svetambara Jain Prakrit text called *Viyahapannati/Vyakhyaprajnapti/Bhagavai*, where it states that “if someone moves a vessel of perfume, one does not smell the vessel or the perfume but only the fragrant particles (*poggala*)” (McHugh, 2012, p. 74). *Tagara* is also mentioned in the Buddhist *Dhammapada* as an excellent source of fragrance.

One last aspect, regarding the dissemination of odours, needs to be discussed for its relevance to the question of the purity and pollution of caste. In these traditions, smell is considered to be a contact sense. Smells are detected through close contact with other people and objects, or from one object to another. In early and medieval South Asia the latter process was called *vasana* and was used in perfuming to denote the diffusion of odours from the fragrant object into another one. Odours could thus be recorded and travel across time and space. Interestingly, these smells are not like the visual representations of the original image but are actual particles of the original odorant (McHugh, 2012, pp. 6-7). Thus for instance, smelling the flowers meant for offering to the gods means polluting the flower, or robbing it of its essence (Zotter, 2014).

One could then argue that smelling dead hides or the bodies of tannery workers means touching the untouchable. Smelling certain materials like corpses can produce ritual pollution and given the diffusive nature of smell, the stinks of impurity were harder to control and therefore avoid (McHugh, 2012, p.6). Odours however require the intermediate medium of wind to be carried. Wind is closely associated with the sense of touch and thus odour particles carried by wind were decidedly non-aetherial. (McHugh, 2012, p.6). This argument is in consonance with Aristotle's understanding of smell as a contact-sense.

To complicate this argument further, McHugh argues that in the South Asian traditions, perfumes are not just odorous but also tactile and visual, for instance the large, white mark of camphor that almost covers the face of Venkatesvara, a god at Tirumala is not just fragrant but this fragrance can be seen and felt (McHugh, 2012, p. 90). Thus in phenomenon, such as *darshan* of the divine, which seem vision dominant from a Western perspective, the understanding of vision itself is modified and made multisensory.

In a similar vein, William Sax (2014, p. 112) writes about his experience in the Garwal region where nearly all his respondents claim to have 'seen' ghosts. On reflection Sax concludes that while they say '*bhoot dekhna*', when they turn to describe the episode it is always multisensory in nature – noises at night, pebbles

thrown on the roof, feeling cold winds, sensing a malevolent presence of a spirit, feeling a ghost sitting on their chests, changes in animal behavior, feeling touched. Sax concludes that he had missed the ghosts because he was trying to 'see' them (Sax, 2014, p. 118). The intersensoriality of caste has been discussed before and the idea of smell as tactile and as visual is important for the larger argument of this work. This is will discussed in some more in the next section.

3.3.1 A Phenomenology of Caste and Odours

The Indian discourses on the senses (*indriya*⁵⁸) have some fundamental differences from the Western ideas on the sensory⁵⁹. One of the most influential Indian ideas for our purposes is the belief in the sensuality and perceptive capacities of all matter – animate and inanimate. Thus plants, animals, stones, rivers, mountains, idols, gods and demons, all are thought of as having sensory capacities. This fundamentally challenges the Western idea of 'senses as windows to the world'. In some Indian philosophical and everyday discourses on the other hand, sensory perception is a dialogical process and the sensual qualities of objects can also affect the sense organs (Sarrukai, 2014, p. 301).

Further, the idea of contact is not understood simply in terms of touch. We have already discussed how vision and odours can be understood to be contact senses

⁵⁸ The word *indriya* means capacity or power. Further Sarrukai (2014, p. 300) writes that it derives from the word, *indra*, which means the self. Perception thus means the existence of the self itself.

⁵⁹ A major difference lies in the number and nature of the sense organs. Some Indian discourses such as Samkhya philosophy challenge the "Aristotelian pentarchy of senses", and begin to propose up to eleven senses or sensory organs to include five senses of cognition (*buddhindriya*) – ear, skin, eyes, tongue and nose, five senses of action (*karmendriya*) – speech, hands, feet, anus, genitals and the mind (*manas*) (Malinar, 2014, pp. 34-7). The senses can be used to obtain knowledge (*pramana*) and are also obstacles to the same. They give rise to specific types of engagement with the world such as sensitivity (*vedana*) or desire (*kama*) (Malinar, 2014, p. 34). In Nyaya philosophy attributes the origins and qualities of each of the senses to the basic elements, such as taste-water, sight-light, smell-earth, touch-air, sound-sky. Sarrukai argues that this could be understood as giving rise to the materiality of senses (Sarrukai, 2014, pp. 300-1).

in these discourses. Across the many Indian traditions of the sensory, sense organs are not identified with their location on the body. For instance, eye is not merely the physical eye and other sensory perceptions may be employed in 'seeing'. Thus the experience of the flower is an experience of all the senses, even if one simply smells it (Sarrukai, 2014, p. 301-2). In addition, Buddhist philosophy argues that all sense organs perceive without contact, Jaina philosophy believes that all sense perception, except vision, is through contact whereas Nyaya and Samkhya believe all senses are contact senses (Sarrukai, 2014, p. 302). It can then be argued that broadly in the Indian traditions, despite differences there is some sort of unity of sensory experience as well as a discursive sensory relationship with animate and inanimate objects.

A brief look at the way in which Manusmriti explains the genesis of the sense organs, illustrates this argument further.

“At the end of that day and night, he (Brahma) awakens from his sleep; and when he has woken up, he brings forth the mind, which is both existent and non-existent. The mind, driven by the desire to create, transmutes the creation. From the mind is born ether, whose distinctive quality is said to be sound. From ether, as it is being transmuted, is born wind – powerful, pure, and bearing all odours – whose distinctive quality is thought to be touch. From the wind, as it is being transmuted, is produced light – shining, brilliant, and dispelling darkness – whose distinctive quality, tradition says, is visible appearance. From light, as it is being transmuted comes water, with taste as its distinctive quality and from water, earth with smell as its distinctive quality. That is how this creation was at the beginning” (McHugh, 2012, p.50).

Thus while the western discourse understands vision as the sense of distance, in the Indian discourses, vision, smell, sounds and taste all constitute intimate contact (Michaels and Wulf, 2014, pp. 7-8). Given that external objects have a sensuous capacity to affect and alter internal states, contact, thought of in this way creates the possibility of a highly sensuous engagement with the world

around us. At the same time, in contexts defined by strict norms of purity and pollution, this increases the possibility of pollution manifold. Thus shadows, sounds, voices and odours all contain the capacity to alter inner states and cause pollute.

Deriving from this, it is then possible to argue for a phenomenological experience of caste based on sensory perception. Guru and Sarukkai's (2012) debate on the phenomenology of caste provides the groundwork for such an argument. Focusing on untouchability as the basis of the caste experience, Sarukkai argues for the primacy of touch in constructing a phenomenology of caste. Sarukkai (2012, p. 164) argues that in the idea of contact (*samyoga*) there lies reciprocity – two bodies in contact with each other are in a symmetric relationship with each other. This is because the moment of contact is the moment of the eradication of distance between the two objects. On the other hand, touch (*sparsa*) is based on the idea of the “ineradicable” medium between the two objects. Touch is thus more than simply contact⁶⁰. In the context of caste, thus understanding touching the untouchable as contact with the untouchable is thus not tenable. It is the intervening medium which gives rise to the idea of untouchability of the Brahmin, which is then transferred to the so called untouchables.

Engaging with these arguments, Guru (2012, p. 205) provides a detailed phenomenological reading of the sense of repulsion and disgust conveyed through the elements of earth, fire, water and sound which denies the fundamental equality contained in the idea of *panchamahute*. Guru argues that there is a possibility to democratize the idea of touch, through consciously establishing equality. On the other hand, Guru argues that the transference of untouchability to the untouchable may create a moral problem. In reality, the untouchable is forced to become the repository of the impurities of the Brahmin.

⁶⁰ Sarukkai located the difference between touch and contact in Indian philosophical systems but also in the ideas on touch proposed by Aristotle. Aristotle is convinced that touch does not eradicate the difference between the subject and the object. This allows him to replace the distance-contact binary with that of far-near which operates as phenomenological experiences from the point of view of the subject.

While, they talk about the sense of touch, Guru and Sarrukai, bring about an important focus on the body and its sensory perception in discussing the experience of caste. This discussion gives us important markers for arguing for a phenomenology of caste, based on other senses, such as odours. Thus it is their methodological argument which is important for this work.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the assertion that caste is a sensuous phenomenon which is invested in the politics of the senses. Further it was argued that caste is a multisensory idea, in that it employs all manner of sensory perception in order to constitute its social and political habitus. These ideas were then located in the larger field of sensory studies in general, and within the politics of odours and smelling in particular. The politics of odours has relevance for this work, because the object under study, leather, is marked and constituted by its various odours. While this odorous nature of leather is universal, it was then argued that when this object is placed in the matrix of caste hierarchies and power, the odours of leather acquire a powerful affective and political charge, since they come to permanently mark bodies and spaces with pollution. The discussion then presented three methodological perspectives through which something as intangible as odours can be analyzed and understood. Finally, the discussion concluded that while all these perspectives contribute significantly to our understanding of the relationship between caste and odours, for the purposes of our argument, a multisensory notion of caste will be argued for, as against a hierarchy of senses perspective or even a comparison between visual and non-visual senses. Thus, for this work, smell is understood not simply as the act of smelling physical odours, but it is argued that odours themselves are located on a multisensorial or intersensorial field, where odours can be felt, heard, seen and tasted. Further, and more importantly, smells can exist and also be smelt without

the existence of physical odours. These perceived odours form the foundations of which caste resides.

McHugh (2012, p. 22) argues that the theories on odours were never a central preoccupation for the Indian schools of philosophy, though they were interested in the nature of the world and the possibilities of its perception. Perception gave rise to knowledge and thus odours and smelling formed a part of this knowledge production and at times odours were themselves knowledge. Taking forward McHugh's assertion, I argue that with the interaction with the colonial and European sense knowledge systems, these complicated ideas on the senses flattened out to some extent. This is in consonance with the larger erasure and marginalization of knowledge systems in the colony. However, I argue that because of the intimate connection between sensory perception and caste, through the ideas of purity and pollution, some of these sense-knowledges remained preserved in everyday habits, popular practices, and in larger sense memories. Colonialism and the ensuing post-colonial order attempted to replicate the sensorial ordering of public spaces and bodies and objects in these spaces according to the discourses of hierarchy of senses, privileging vision. And this succeeded to some extent. However, the powerful sense memory of caste, not only hedged in the project of dealing with caste in the public, but it also ensured that through the practices of its bodies and objects, the sensoriality of caste reproduced and flourished. This sensoriality overflowed onto the public and the governmental ideas of caste.

Thus the work argues that in studying the relationship between castes and odours, the hierarchy between vision and non-vision senses does not work. In fact it is because the modern state, law and public policy consider caste as primarily visual, caste is allowed to exist and replicate itself through other sensorial modes. This sensoriality overflows as the odours of caste in the domains of violence, exclusion and power, thus allowing the threat of '*soongh soongh kar mareng*'. Thus the work argues that different sensorial modalities need to be employed to understand this complex nature and practice of caste.

For the object of leather, this modality is olfactory and here caste needs to be smelled. This act of smelling caste fundamentally changes the nature of caste interactions and our understanding of the way in which norms of purity and pollution function. Lastly, since in this context a hierarchy of senses or a predominance of one or two senses is difficult to argue for, the odours of caste have to also be understood as multisensory in nature.

This explains the predicament which objects such as leather produce for the caste bodies and societies. If it was a question of simple odour of leather then deodourization of factory spaces, as well as of the final consumer product would take care of the threat of pollution. This is attempted in the modern industrial discourse around leather. However, the odour of leather actually derives from all its other sensorial qualities including its animal provenance, making it impossible to deodorize. The following chapters will build on this argument.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CASTE OF LEATHER: BODIES, SPACES, OBJECTS

Introduction

Leather is a powerful object, an object created in equal measure by desire and disgust, by filth and by beauty. The connoisseurs of leather often claim to be able to judge the authenticity of this object by its texture and odour. And indeed many claim, that once they get used to leather, everything else pales in comparison. Simultaneously there is nothing as repugnant, as disgusting as the process of the production of this object. The funereal stench of the tanneries, the sight of animal fat lined soaking pits and the pungent chemical like odour of the shoe and garment factories all come together to invoke repulsion and irritation. Those prized genuine leather handbags and shoes also stink when they are new, or when they get wet thus spoiling or at least partially pausing the desire for the object for a moment⁶¹.

Underlying this distancing and repulsion are the affects produced by caste. The desire on the other hand is an affect of masking caste, of forgetting even if momentarily, the animal origins and the supposedly disgusting production process of the object. This chapter examines the complex object of leather - the centrepiece of this work. The chapter locates leather in the matrix of social, economic and political relationships that it produces and in which it is immersed. It is argued that not only is leather produced through its immersion in the field of caste, but also and more importantly that the object of leather *has* caste. This caste is produced much before the supposedly untouchable leatherworker even

⁶¹There is a qualitative difference between the odours of leather shoes, bags and garments. This will be discussed in detail later in this chapter and also in Chapter Four when the production of these objects is discussed.

enters the production process, and stays after the worker has exited. The affects and forms of this caste and the repulsion and desire which it produces changes at every stage. The following chapters will elaborate on this phenomenon. This chapter on the other hand will open up and complicate leather itself. Secondly, the chapter will introduce the category of the 'leatherworker' and argue that because of the way in which objects within the caste discourse come to embody purity and pollution, the idea of the 'leatherworker' is more complex than has been previously understood. The production of leather is a contested domain in India because of its association with untouchability. Leatherwork is considered to be a '*ganda kaam*' (dirty work). The complexity of leather arises from the manner in which ostensibly 'polluted' artisans and workers, using 'dirty' raw materials, nevertheless produce a highly valued commodity, with little, or at best transient hints of pollution.

This chapter is organised in four sections. We begin with a discussion on the question of caste and modernity locating this in the idea of the industry. The second section, introduces the contemporary leather industry and its organization and structure. In the same section we also cover the processes involved in making leather and leather products. The third section deals with the history and evolution of the leather trade in the English guild systems. This provides an important context in which to understand the organization and nature of the colonial leather industry in India. This historical background also introduces the question of technology in leatherwork and thus provides a framework for Chapter Five. In the fourth section we examine the conditions of leatherwork in India, focusing on the two leather towns of Kanpur and Agra. This will include a discussion of the various social and political movements around the question of caste which had intimate links with the leather industry and its inhabitants. This sets up the stage for the next three chapters which are a detailed discussion of the leather industry as gleaned from the fieldwork conducted for this research.

1. Caste, Modernity and Industry

In the previous chapter we argued that there have been various approaches through which senses and sensory perception has been understood in India and in some of the Western discourses. The Western discourses have understood senses in terms of a hierarchy which produced occulocentric societies, especially under the conditions of modernity which were dependent on distance and objectivity. Through anthropology, trade relationships and colonialism, when these societies encountered the non-Western worlds, this occulocentricism was disrupted due to the presence of other sensorial modes of perceiving and engaging with the world⁶².

On the other hand, sensory historians like Corbin have argued for reading senses against the grain of dominant perception and have provided rich olfactory accounts of France at the turn of the modern period. Corbin's methodology traces the dominance and the decline of olfactory knowledge to argue that odours constituted an important part of the Western civilizations as well, until ocular systems come to dominant these spaces and imaginations. The Western and non-Western binary is thus not such a simple argument. Modernity however continues to remain an important boundary condition in determining the relative importance of vision, even for Corbin.

⁶² See for instance the second part of Howes, *Engaging the Senses* (2003) which examines the sensory formations of two regions of Papua New Guinea – Massim and the Middle Sepik River regions where the odours and sounds of the dark rainforests present different ways of sensing the world. Chapter Seven of the same book examines the old anthropological problem of the relevance of Freud for the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia from the point of view of their sensory perception. Howes argues that in this culture objects are invested with sensory values apart from their materialistic use values. On the other hand, Seremetakis (1994) examines her own culture and society in the Greek islands to talk about the ways in which they used to sense the environment before Greece became a part of the political-economy of the European Union. She thus provides a method to look at the changes in perception with changes in the society. In a fascinating comparative account of the difference in sensorial perception between Thai and non-Thai (mainly Western tourists) clients in massage salons in Thailand, Junko Iida (2010), provides the vantage point to examine the ways in which human bodies are shaped and produced by our societal sensory formations.

Caste and modernity have had a complicated relationship in our societies. Modernity arrived here in various phases and through various channels, such as colonialism. It also had varying impacts on the politics and identity formations within different groups and communities. On the one hand, scholars like Uma Chakravarty (2003) and Sanjay Joshi (quoted in Rege, 2013, pp. 58-59) argue that for upper caste men, modernity meant not just an exposure to western education and knowledge of English but also led to the imposition of distance between themselves and on one hand, the feudal upper classes and on the other, from the lower classes and castes. However, even for these 'modern' educated men, caste did not disappear, but simply became the preserve of the inner, the spiritual and the domestic (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 6). These upper-caste men would participate in caste within the household, on the bodies of women and other subalterns, and/or through the defence of their cultural resources against the colonial onslaught. Caste was thus privatized and confined to the realm of the traditional, as against the secular-modern nation. Pandian (2002) critiquing the public-private binary between the political and the spiritual, as proposed by Partha Chatterjee argues that the modern was understood only through the upper-caste ethic and caste became the burden of only the lower-castes.

This understanding of the relationship between caste, modernity and the domestic is important for this work in two ways. First, this neat division between the modern public and the caste dominated private is disrupted by the presence of the leather industry – a modern public enterprise based on untouchable labour. Secondly, and deriving from the first, I argue that the overwhelming visual architecture of these divisions does not pay attention to the multisensoriality of caste, in this particular case to the odours of caste, which cross the boundary between the public and the private and also between the bodies of various castes. In the visual understanding caste 'appears' in the private and the traditional through eating habits, clothes, habits of hygiene and spatial divisions⁶³. On the other hand, the modern public is produced by the 'unmarked'

⁶³ For instance see Pandian (2002), who suggests several strategies for 'decoding' caste in contexts, such as upper—caste households and autobiographies, where it seems to be invisible.

universal individuals, who contribute to the 'disappearance' of caste. It is precisely because caste disappears in the public that one needs to employ other senses in order to protect oneself from its pollution. It is precisely the (in)visibility of caste which gives rise to the fear of contamination and results in the disgust and repulsion inherent to our public interactions. This visual understanding of caste is disrupted in the leather industry when its upper caste and particularly Brahmin inhabitants carry back the odours of the modern with them into their domestic spheres.

Rodrigues (2009, p. 117-118) has also argued that the domestic is far from being a pure space unmarked by caste since it is constantly disrupted by various interlopers in temporary and permanent states of pollution. Similarly the seemingly unmarked public is actually constituted by the intimate intermixing of castes, thus necessitating purification of bodies on the return to the domestic. Taking forward this argument, the work proposes that the odours of the leather industry are in fact produced through the interaction of caste with the modern. By claiming to (in)visibilize caste, the modern actually accentuates the odours of leatherwork, and thus marks out the leatherworking bodies in outstanding ways.

In another formulation, modernity with its individual ethic stood in a stark contrast to the communitarian condition of the caste society. This individualism became the precondition for a specific form of egalitarianism to develop in the context of caste. At least in theory, individuals and communities could now detach themselves from the oppressive community contexts and chart personal and professional trajectories which were not possible in contexts deeply determined by caste. This specific kind of interaction of the modern with the society and polity in India thus produced individuals like Ambedkar, Tarabai Shinde and Ramabai Pandit, who could then argue for an anti-caste position based on a strong denial of the inherent inequalities of the caste system. A little down the line, electoral democracy and the deepening of this democratic idiom

He thus reads caste into several of these domestic practices of individuals who otherwise appear modern and unmarked in the public.

into the society prepared the way for the creation of a public sphere in which caste discrimination and identities should not have a place. At the same time this democratic idiom allowed the entry of the untouchable castes into the public sphere like never before⁶⁴. Guru (2000, p. 123) argues that for Dalits, modernity, both colonial and constitutional, has meant the triumph of the language of rights over the language of caste based obligations thus providing a firm basis for their struggle for dignity and self-respect. This condition then provides a ground for the dalit pursuit of modernity.

However, this relationship with modernity comes at a huge cost for the lower castes since it implies a break with their communal relationships, which are perceived as non-modern (Guru, 2000, p. 126, Pandian, 2002). The other cost is that the inclusion of the Dalits in the modern project was largely based on their polluted status, especially in the capitalist market (Guru, 2000, p. 124). This as Pandian (2002) argues happens because the modern was understood as upper-caste and as Brahminical. Lower-castes and subalterns thus had to disrupt this modern condition to even engage in the public spheres.

In terms of leatherwork and its engagement with caste, this chequered modern condition represented two broad trends. The first is the intervention of technology. Technology influenced the public sphere in important ways. It allowed the establishment of large-scale factories in urban areas which in turn propelled rural to urban migration. For lower caste and untouchable groups in the villages, especially those which possessed specific skills like leatherwork, weaving, pottery and ironwork, the city now afforded multiple opportunities of employment and a relatively anonymous existence. This however, also created a paradox. Modern and urban employment opportunities were still nonetheless based on skills, like leatherwork, which were embedded within the hereditary occupational schema of the caste system. However, Dalits only had a conditional access to this “bourgeoisie modernity”, since they were still confined to

⁶⁴ For instance, the strong reactions that the Poona Pact invokes amongst upwardly mobile groups such as Jatavs in Agra, is evidence to the power of the promise that this new public sphere held.

“traditional” occupations and to systems of purity-pollution which got replicated inside factories, mills and offices (Guru, 2000, p. 124). The Dalit claim to modernity was thus not recognised either by the society or the state and both modernity and capitalism failed to produce new spaces of emancipation for the Dalits (Guru, 2000, p. 125).

For instance, Chitra Joshi notes that the predominance of Chamars in tannery, curriery and saddlery continues through the 1940s even as migrants from upper castes displaced Chamar workers from other industries such as textiles⁶⁵ (Joshi, 2003, pp. 79-81). The small number of upper-castes did the relatively clean jobs like storing and packing finished shoes. In the vegetable tanneries, non-Chamars workers handled chemicals but refused to handle the hides⁶⁶ (Joshi, 2003, p. 240).

A technological intervention into society also modified the way in which activities were considered to be dirty or polluting. The replacement of manual work by machines was crucial to this change. Machines began to be understood as barriers between the polluted materials and objects and the body of the person doing the work, thereby challenging a crucial feature of caste, where contact with polluted materials caused pollution. This inaugurated the figure of the ‘worker’ – a universal, anonymous category, which did not connote a caste identity, as was evident in the earlier nomenclatures such as *mochi* and *julaha*. While it cannot be argued that caste disappeared from the industrial setup, the modern space of the

⁶⁵ Joshi (2003, pp. 79-82) reports that by 1930s and 40s a large number of Chamars also worked in the cotton mills. Many of these Chamars were *gangaparis*, i.e. they travelled from across the Ganga to come to Kanpur every day. Otherwise there were many Chamar settlements in the city as well especially around the Cawnpore Magazine. The caste composition of the workforce became diverse during this period due to the Depression and post-Depression influx of rural migrants. Brahmans and Rajputs also began joining the workforce, mainly in the textile mills.

⁶⁶ Threats of pollution existed even in ‘cleaner’ trades like textiles and weaving. Joshi (2003, p. 240) reports that the taboo against *jootha* (food or materials touched or eaten by someone else) was difficult to shake especially when one was working with a large number of Muslims and Koris. “The job required sucking the yarn into the shuttle each time a weft bobbin had to be replaced, which was unthinkable for most Hindu workers. A story suggested that an upper-caste worker nicknamed ‘Vichari Maharaj’ carried his own little pipe which he fixed onto the shuttle each time he had to suck the yarn, refusing to touch the polluted yarn with his lips” (Joshi, 2003, pp. 240-241).

industry allowed the untouchable workers to adopt the identity of the 'worker' in spaces within and outside the industry. This anonymity was crucial. However this mechanical intervention did not manage to influence the way in which extremely polluting tasks such as tanning and scavenging were perceived and conducted. This will be taken up in detail in Chapter Four.

Aditya Nigam (2000) in a complex rendering of this relationship between secular-modern and caste, argues that Dalit politics has continuously challenged these binary classifications between secular and communal and nationalism and colonial. For Nigam, tradition was always already present in colonial modernity, which did not in any way represent a break from the traditional. Western education, rather than ritual purity thus became the medium through which Brahmins came to occupy the modern state, thereby converting the modern-secular sphere into one which retains caste albeit in forms such as merit, efficiency and hygiene.

This chapter takes this observation as a point to departure to argue that it was not that Western educated Brahmins ignored the aspects of purity and pollution but rather their access to education, markets and development was conditioned by their relationship with purity. It is further argued in Chapter Five that this also happens because of the way in which education itself was configured by the colonial and postcolonial state. Thus as Nigam argues in the same essay, tradition was always a part of the colonial and post-colonial modern. It is necessary to make this slightly tangential move in order to locate the experiences of untouchable castes such as Jatavs who were recipients of colonial modernity and education quite early on within the nationalist discourse. Yet they are unable to hold on to this modern advantage, especially within the industrial domain, where their education and social mobility is trumped by both - their polluted status and the purity of the upper-caste individual's status. In fact, as Guru (2000) argues, within the leather industry, their pollution becomes the fundamental basis for their presence in the modern in the first place.

The academic literature on the relationship between the industry and caste reflects the complexity of the situation. Some literature has studied cases similar to leatherwork, where caste positions helped in consolidating trade positions. Gail Omvedt (quoted in Panini, 1996) argues that colonialism had a complex effect – Brahmins gained because of the educational opportunities, the Kshatriya lost while the lower castes and Dalits joined the ranks of a mobile, exploited proletariat. Bailey (quoted in Panini, 1996) shows how in the tribal villages in Orissa, distillers were able to benefit from opportunities under the British rule, make profits and buy land from the Kshatriyas, who were the original landowners. Similarly the Ramgarhias in Punjab were able to upgrade their skills and exploit the opportunities opened up by the British railway network (Panini, 1996, pp. 37-38).

In the case of entrepreneurs as well, evidence suggests the active use of caste and kinship networks. Brahmins and certain castes of scribes were the first to take advantage of the educational opportunities opened up by the British rule because their traditional association with learning gave them the initial cultural advantage. Similarly, several members of the Marwari community could be employed in British agency houses and reap the advantages of an expanding trade network in the colonial era because of the early training they received in marketing and financial management by virtue of their caste membership (Panini, 1996, p. 39).

On the other hand Shah (2002, p. 9) observes that the traditional rules for purity and social status have been eroded in the past five decades due to greater penetration of the market economy, 'modern' administration and expanded communication networks. Shah argues that while notions of hierarchy remain ritual status and social status are becoming separate issues. Industrialization and a penetration of the market economy in rural areas have affected the traditional occupations of several castes. In 1957, F G Bailey observed that in the villages of Orissa people had given up their traditional occupations. A similar observation was made by Kathleen Gough in Tamil Nadu in the 1950s (Shah, 2002, p. 16).

Works like that of Joshi (2003) on the industrial workers in Kanpur, Nandini Gooptu's (2001) writings on the complex world of the urban poor and industrial workers in Uttar Pradesh, and Chandravarkar's (1994) elegant rendering of the mill workers struggles in Bombay, are indicative of the entrenched ways in which caste has adapted to modernity and to industrialization. Some of this work will be used extensively in this chapter. An earlier generation of anthropological work on industrial societies such as R D Lambert's (1963), *Workers, Factories and Social Change in India* which studied factories in Pune, N R Sheth's (1968) *The Social Framework of an Indian Factory* and Mark Holmstrom's (1976, 1985) study of Bangalore, show that upper and middle castes and artisan castes dominate the supervisory skills and skilled worker category whereas the unskilled workers are drawn mainly from the lower castes. Lynch's (1969), *The Politics of Untouchability* also invests the industrial with questions of caste and class in significant ways by looking at the Jatavs in the shoe-industry in Agra. This again will be used extensively in this work.

Lastly, modernity, especially colonial modernity, also brought with it regimes of the visual. It can be assumed that for most of the colonial administration, caste was a confounding phenomenon. The multiplicity of rules, codes, groups and sub-groups which followed no clear patterns of logic and certitude made administration and policy making especially difficult. Making the situation worse, was the way in which caste and religious identities provoked extended and spectacular spells of violence and confusion. Melas, processions, occasions such as Eid and Moharram, created serious anxiety in the colonial administration especially after the Mutiny of 1857⁶⁷. The British administration thus instituted complex regimes of disciplining and controlling bodies and spaces. However it would be naïve to argue that the Indian conditions presented an exceptional situation for the British in terms of chaos and confusion.

⁶⁷ Joshi (2003) provides accounts for the ways in which workers bodies in industrial cities were treated as a threat in terms of contamination, indiscipline and immorality. Much of these threats were perceived to be communal and caste based in nature.

Poverty, squalor, unemployment, control over itinerant communities, beggary and the dirty public spaces were the issues dominating the British public sphere as well. Collingham (2001, pp. 63-65) argues that the middle ranking British officials in India actually belonged to the lower and middle non land owning classes in England. The specific kind of morality which came with the position is actually responsible for much of the debate on the Indian public conditions. In fact the chapter argues that in terms of these issues, India and England were temporally and spatially quite close. While caste was missing from the English context, it was actually understood rather closely and accurately by the British by employing their learning from dealing with class and race on the one hand, and by engaging dominant systems of local knowledge in India. The practice of caste which till now relied on everyday negotiations were thus codified and obscure texts such as the Manusmriti was installed as the authoritative texts of caste (Dirks, 2008). Caste was already legible in the societal discourses before the period of colonialism. Now, by making caste a part of modern within the colonial law, administration and public policy, this legibility was given a new and more vicious lease of life. Much of this was a visual life of caste.

Abe Dubois (quoted in Ambedkar, 2014, pp. 255-256) writes, about the Pariahs of the Madras Presidency as follows,

"What chiefly disgusts other natives is the revolting nature of the food which the Pariahs eat. Attracted by the smell, they will collect in crowds round any carrion and contend for the spoil with the dogs, jackals, crows and other carnivorous animals. They then divide the semi-putrid flesh and carry it away to their huts, where they devour it, often without rice or anything else to disguise the flavour. That the animal should have died of disease is of no consequence to them, and they sometimes secretly poison cows or buffaloes so that they may subsequently feast on the foul, putrefying remains. The carcasses of animal's that die in a village belong by right to the thoti or scavenger, who sells the flesh at a very low price to the other Pariahs in the neighbourhood. When it is impossible to consume in one day the stock of meat

thus obtained, they dry the remainder in the sun, and keep it in their huts until they run short of their food. There are few Pariah houses where one does not see festoons of these horrible fragments hanging up; and though the Pariahs themselves do not seem to be affected by the smell, travellers passing near their village quickly perceive it and can tell at once the caste of the people living there...."

Vision has to be understood as an analytical rather than a physical category here. It is not as if caste simply became more visible in physical terms. Castes became a part of geographic and population surveys, extensive descriptions of life conditions, eating habits, clothes and customs were recorded, which created an image of the life of caste. Names and surnames were fixed along with attributes, behaviour and dispensations, all along lines of caste. This was further accompanied by photographs which created a visual archive of how different castes should look like. We had discussed in the previous chapter how colonial ethnographers like Risley attempted to understand caste in visual terms such as facial and cranial measurements. An important way in which Chamar leatherworkers were understood in this discourse was through the "discovery" of arsenic on their bodies⁶⁸. This discovery was enough to cement the idea that Chamars are culpable of killing other's cattle for hides (Bhattacharya, 2013, Rawat, 2011).

Anthropology departments in England provided some of the first official accounts of the colonies and of the bodies of the native. Later the colonial administration also employed anthropologists to produce standard ethnographies of people, tribes and castes in terms familiar to the British administrators. Anthropology, while relying on other sensory descriptions has

⁶⁸ Rawat (2011, pg. 6) writes that in an 1854 report, Campbell invoked the traditional "system under which the Chamars become possessed of the bodies and skins of the dead animals" to explain the crime of cattle poisoning, stating that "the latter perform certain services for the cultivators, and receive the bodies of all of the animals belonging to their own particular cultivators which die. Campbell concluded that after poisoning the cattle, Chamars "obtain possession of the body in virtue of a prescriptive right of the nature of a contract that is well established."

nonetheless functioned as a visual exercise. The “naked savage natives” (Stevens, 2003, p. 125) were photographed, viewed, judged, drawn and even spoken about in visual terms. Seeing became a form of evidence in a knowledge system where meeting the ‘other’ was a “discovery” rather than a “contact or encounter” (Stevens, 2003, p. 125). Touch was in fact considered to be the most dangerous of all senses because it was thought to spread contagious disease like pox and bubonic plague in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe (Healy, 2003, p. 22). Skin was thought of as a fragile and porous affording little protection against diseases and miasmas (Healy, 2003, p. 22). At this time in Europe the body was also being increasingly understood in visual ways. With the widespread acceptance of Pasteur’s Germ Theory, the fear of disease causing entities which could not be seen increased. Consequently advances in technologies such as the microscope and advances in anatomy and surgery allowed a visual access to the body in unprecedented ways. Medical science underwent fundamental changes with this emphasis on the visual.

The colonisers and the anthropologists stayed cleared of all this messiness and relied on vision to create distance. This distance was important because the ‘other’ had to be located vis-a-vis a carefully constructed ‘human’ and self of the Western idea. This had been done previously in Western thought regarding the animal, and thus even the ‘other’ came to be located close to the animal. Hayden White (quoted in Stevens, 2003, p. 127) argues that the European discovery of the ‘New World’ brought forth a new “race of wild men”, which cast a question on the idea of “humanity” as a whole⁶⁹.

A visual display of difference was thus necessary. In Europe, this is the time of the institutionalization of museums based on visual archiving of bodies and

⁶⁹ Stevens (2003, pp. 128-129) points out that there exists a long European tradition of “encountering Others” before the Columbian period in America which led to an anticipation of these bodies. Herodotus, Pliny and Solinus wrote of giants, Anthropophagi and acephalous creatures. These accounts had been circulated in the popular publics especially during recovery and translation of texts during the Renaissance. Christianity provided further evidence of the suspect nature of the Other. Blackness was thus seen as “divine disfavour”. Finally Aristotle’s idea that just as the body is inferior to the soul and animals are to men, those inferior to others are like slaves.

artefacts. Entire cultures were thus museumized and desensorialized (Seremetakis, 1994, pp 34-36). Display and observation of these cultures and bodies was an important part of this exercise. On the much larger canvas of colonialism, 'different' looking human bodies were caged, transported and put on display for the metropolitan audiences as a legitimation of the civilizing mission. The colonial enterprise was thus largely a visual exercise of establishing difference and distance.

The positivist belief in science and technology made them efficient tools to understand and control the chaotic and disorganized rural and urban spaces. The desire to see the human body and to see the city thus overlapped. If the human body could be probed and prodded for diseases, so could the city. The metaphor of the body, especially the medicalized body was thus increasingly applied to space and to bodies in this imagination. Diseased cities gave rise to diseased individuals and vice-versa. Visual poverty, squalor and masses of filthy, unemployed people, both in the metropolis and in the colony thus became a serious problem.

Modernity, colonial intervention and the already existing hierarchies of caste thus went into producing what we understand as the modern leather industry. Some of these themes will come back into the discussion in the following sections and chapters. For now it is important to reiterate that we must attempt to understand the object of leather, as well as leather objects around us, such as shoes and bags, as products of this complex discourse of modernity, caste, contamination and desire. It is precisely because objects represent these complexities, that it is important to take them apart and engage with them away from their use values. It is tempting to believe that these are simply consumer or industrial products, just as it is tempting to believe that our lives, public and private are unmarked by the messiness of caste, religion and such. It is also easy to assume that even though we consume these objects, we do not consume caste or religion. Caste does not appear easily on the surface of their objects just as it does not appear on the surface of our bodies and societies. It is however, through

objects such as leather that caste enters our bodies and our spaces, through which we consume caste⁷⁰. The next sections provide a political-economic description of the leather industry, before moving onto a socio-historic description of the industry and its people.

2. The Leather Industry in India: Processes and Products

Leatherwork in India was largely organized on the lines of small cottage industries located within the rural political-economy. Based on this ideas, leather continued to be considered a small and medium industry, in spite of the existence of large factories and tanneries from the colonial period. From 1967 to 2003, the leather industry was classified as a Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and thus functioned as a small scale industry⁷¹. According to Assocham India (2015) report, at present Indian leather industry consists of 42000 small-scale industry (SSI) units, which account for 75 per cent of the total production. Due to this the industry faced many challenges especially in terms of industrialization and growth especially since Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is not allowed in this sector. However despite its limited size, even then the industry contributed significantly to domestic and foreign exchange earnings of the country. From 2003 onward, however the industry has expanded significantly in terms of output and the size of units. Figures for the financial year 2014-15 suggest that the annual turnover of the industry stands at 10-12 billion USD (Assocham India, 2015) out of which exports alone account for 6.5

⁷⁰ I am borrowing this idea of consuming caste from Aniket Jaaware's essay, '*Eating the Dalit and Eating with the Dalit*' (1998). Further, Guru (2012, p. 203) argues that the condition of modernity has forced untouchability, both as a practice and as a consciousness, to slide deeper down into the hierarchical mind, unlike in the feudal past where it appeared on the surface. Untouchability thus plays out in much more subtle forms than before. It has to hide behind modern meanings and identities and thus the older methods of sociological and anthropological descriptions will not be sufficient to locate this untouchability. What is required is the methodology of archaeology.

⁷¹ A small scale industrial unit is one where the investment in plant and machinery does not exceed Rs. 10 million.

billion USD. The estimated market size of the industry is pegged at 250 billion USD (Rs 25,000 crore). The industry employs close to 20-25 lakh people (2-2.5 million) out of which 30 per cent are women. It has also consistently been among the top ten foreign exchange earners for the country.

According to the Council of Leather Exports (CLE), currently India is the second largest producer of footwear and leather goods in the world with an annual production capacity of 2065 million pair footwear and 16 million pieces of leather goods. Out of these about 1950 million pair, about 95% of the production capacity, are utilized in the domestic market. Footwear form about 45% of the leather exports from India. The country is also the third largest exporter of leather goods in the world, and fifth largest exporter of leather accessories. The European Union is the biggest importer of leather and leather goods from India, currently holding 57% of the market share annually. Within EU, Germany (12.32%) and UK (11.57%) stand as the highest importers. This is closely followed by the USA at 11% market share. India also contributes to 10% of the world's leather production, producing 2 billion square feet of leather annually. Tamil Nadu accounts for about 40% of India's exports and has about 60% of tanning capacity. While a sizeable percentage of goat and sheep skins are processed in Tamil Nadu, a predominant share of the heavy hides such as of cow and buffalo are processed in Kolkata and Kanpur respectively. These two cities have also made major forays into the upholstery leather market because they deal with the bigger hides. The main production centres for leather and leather products are Chennai, Ambur, Ranipet, Vaniyambadi, Trichy, Dindigul in West Bengal; Kanpur, Noida and Agra in UP; Jalandhar in Punjab; Bangalore in Karnataka; Hyderabad in AP; Ambala, Gurgaon, Panchkula and Karnal in Haryana, Mumbai in Maharashtra and Delhi. West Bengal and Kerala are the biggest suppliers of raw material for tanning and manufacturing units.

The industry has a very strong institutional set up. The Council for Leather Exports (CLE) which comes under the Ministry of Industries and Commerce is the main body which controls policies on export related matters. The Central

Leather Research Institute (CLRI) under Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Ministry of Science and Technology is the primary institute for research on leather technology and has been influential in introducing new products and policies in the industry. Besides these there are non-governmental, industry based organizations which take care of the varied interest groups. These include, All India Skin Hide Tanners Merchants Association (AISHTMA), Indian Finished Leather Manufacturers and Exporters Association (IFLMEA), Uttar Pradesh Leather Industries Association (UPLIA), Kolkata Leather Complex Tanners Association (CLCTA) and Agra Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (AFMEC) to name a few.

There have been some programs of government support for the industry. The National Leather Development Programme (NLDP), which ran from 1992-98, assisted by UNDP, aimed at integrated development of the industry. The Small Industries Development and Employment Programme, was executed between 1998 and 2002, focusing on building sustainable linkages between organised and unorganised leather sectors.

A crucial turn in the Indian leather industry came with the implementation of the recommendation of the Seetharamaiah Committee in 1973, which suggested ban on the export of raw and semi-tanned leather and facilitated the export of finished leather⁷². This resulted in leather exports growing substantially over the decades. Large firms are now permitted to enter the sector, provided that they export a minimum of 95% of their production of finished leather. The government also permits the import of modern technology, machines and chemicals. It has also initiated schemes to provide financial support to promote the modernization of tanneries.

⁷²The Seetharamaiah Committee was appointed to look into the problem of export earnings from leather. The recommendations were however disastrous for the small hide dealers and tanners since they did not possess the technology and capital to produce high-value products. While the government introduced the curbs to semi-finished exports, it did not do much to invest the export earnings into technological innovation of the sector, which ultimately harmed the industry (Anonymous, *A Partial Finish*, 1975).

2.1 Making Leather

Leather production largely consists of three main processes –

1. Beamhouse Operations : Here salt, dirt and hair are removed from the skins/hides, over a period of 6 hours to two days, through the following steps

a) The first step is desalting and soaking the hides to remove the salt which was used to preserve the hides. This process could use up to 20 cubic meter of water per tonne of hide. The waste water resulting from this process is laden with salt, hide surface impurities, dirt and globular protein substances.

b) The second step is unhairing and liming which is done by treating soaked hides in a bath containing sodium sulphide/hydrosulphide and lime. The pollutants produced at this stage are suspended solids, sulphides and nitrogenous materials.

c) The third step in the beamhouse operations is deliming and bating, in which the hides are processed in a bath of ammonium salt and proteolytic enzymes (bating) which produces residues of calcium salts, sulphides and degraded proteins.

2. Tanning: Once the hides are so treated they are ready to be tanned by using chemical agents, like hexavalent chromium, or Chrome-6, to convert them into leather. Known as chrome tanning, this process was developed around the mid-1800s in Europe and was brought to Calcutta in India by 1900. Today it is one of the predominant ways in which leather is tanned around the world, as it has radically reduced the time required for leather to be produced as compared to other traditional methods like vegetable tanning. This process relied on tannin, an acidic chemical compound found in barks of trees like oak, fir, babool and khair.

3. Wet Finishing – This includes neutralization, retanning, dyeing and fat liquoring. The pollutants from the process include chrome, salt, dyestuff residues, fat liquoring agents and vegetable tannins.
4. Finishing - Where leather is given desired properties. The main pollutants produced during finishing are suspended solids and chrome.

2.2 Making Shoes

All shoes have a similar basic structure - with two parts, a lower and upper. The lower consists of the sole⁷³. The outer sole is the material that is in direct contact with the ground and this can be made out of rubber, leather or synthetic materials, and sometimes a combination of material is used. The innersole (or midsole) is attached to the top part of the outer sole. It helps in the attachment of upper to lower, and provides additional cushioning. Most shoes are manufactured using a last⁷⁴—a general model of a foot. Lasts were originally carved out of wood, but today they are plastic or metal. Lasts provide a working structure by which the shoe is made. The remainder of the shoe above the innersole is called the upper. Its main function is to hold the lower onto the foot. The most functional material for an upper is leather. It not only allows the foot to “breathe” by allowing hot air around the foot to escape, but it conforms to the size and shape of the foot. The upper can include many other parts, depending on the shoe style, including laces, and a tongue which protects the top of the foot. A counter is the heel area and may include a stiffener for added support. A collar is a soft, thicker ring around the shoe opening common in sports shoes, as are linings, which provide added comfort. Shanks are used for added support when there is a heel, raising the back of the foot higher than the front. It’s usually made from metal, plastic, or wood and supports the space on the bottom of the shoe between the heel and toes, keeping it from collapsing.

⁷³ Sole, comes from the Latin, solea, meaning soil or ground.

⁷⁴ The term comes from Old English, laest, which means barefoot.

3. 'English' Leather: Guilds, Machines and Chemicals in Britain

It is important for the purposes of this work to understand the organization of the leather industry in England since it is through the colonial intervention that leatherwork is set up as a formal industry in India. The British political economy, as well as its foreign trade and relations within and outside Europe come to influence the way in which this industry is set up in India. We have already discussed to some extent the ways in which British and Indian sensory, political and affective ideas engaged with each other. The next three sections will add a political-economic understanding to this earlier discussion.

In the primarily agrarian economy of sixteenth and seventeenth century England, farm products were the main raw materials for the industries. The woolen textile industry was thus important not only for domestic produce but also for the purposes of export. Leather was probably only next to wool and the importance of the trade is evident from the number of legislations on this subject during the Tudor and Stuart periods. The Leather Act of 1563, the Statute of Artificers and the Cloth Act of 1552, are considered to be the foundations of the Tudor industrial policy (Clarkson, 1966, p. 25).

Around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Britain leatherwork was organized through distinct but mutually intervening guilds such as the Tanners, Cordwainers, Curriers, Cobblers, Pattern Makers Shoemakers and the Leathersellers. Curriers used to. Tanners used to. Cordwainers used to⁷⁵. There are evidences of intense hostilities between these guilds through the Tudor,

⁷⁵ "The Moors are credited with developing a remarkable technique of producing artistic leather products, especially in goat-skin. After their conquest of Spain in the eight century , this skill developed even more and Cordova became a center for a peculiar kind of leather, known in England as 'cordovan', 'cordvan' or 'cordwain'" (Waterer,1946, p. 30).

Stuart and the Elizabethan periods on the use of materials and access to markets⁷⁶.

The division of the trade between leather manufacture, i.e. tanning and leather goods manufacture finds its basis in the way that the trade was organized in England, especially based on the guild model (Church, 1971, p. 543). The industry was mostly organized as small units owned by families or in partnerships till about the middle of the nineteenth century when reorganization began to happen. Raw hides and skins usually came from the farmer or the butcher, and provided additional sourced of income. Tanning and shoe-making were thus done alongside farming and the products such as boots, saddles and horse collars were utilized in the local economy. However the larger markets for hides and also for leather goods were to be found in the urban economies, due to the high consumption of meat⁷⁷. London had a large number of leathersellers and

⁷⁶ In an Act of 1309 tanners were forbidden to be shoemakers or shoemakers tanners. In 1395 because of the hostility between Cordwainers and Cobblers it is laid down in a Royal decree that “no person who meddles with old shoes shall meddle with new shoes to sell.” In 1397 there was a renewal of legislation prohibiting the combining of the trades of tanner and shoemaker. In 1409, the Mayor laid down that Cobblers should do “the clouting of old boots and shoes with new leather upon the old soles before and behind.” But he ordained that “if it shall happen that any person desires to have his old boots or bootles resoled or vamped and soled, the same, if it can be done, shall pertain at all times to the said workers called Cordwainers to do it”. In 1485 another enactment forbade tanners to curry and curriers to tan. In 1503 there was a legislation to stop mutual encroachment by curriers and cordwainers; and nine years later curriers were given rights of search which they could apply to tanners and alien cordwainers. Rules were laid down that no Cordwainer should work in Bazan leather (basein, basil, dressed sheepskin) under penalty of half a mark, and that no Bazanarius should work in Cordovan leather under similar penalty. A Cordwainer who made soles for boots of tanned leather could continue to do so, and both the Cordwainer and the Bazanarius might use cow hides, but the Cordwainer was forbidden to use calf hide. Restrictions on the area in which trading was permitted were designed to prevent the sale of shoes by those who either could not or would not join the Cordwainers’ Company and who later formed the Cobblers’ Guild. The rivalry between the London Cordwainers and Curriers resulted in five Acts of the Tudor parliament between 1548 and 1558. Each wanted the right to sell leather and give out work to the poorer members of both crafts these divisions were the differences between the guilds in London and those outside it (Waterer, 1946, pp. 80-84).

⁷⁷ The introduction of railways in the mid-nineteenth century made cities like London the great importers of meat from far-away places in the country, raising consumption levels to unprecedented levels. Two kinds of supplies would take place – dead meat which would largely come to London and live cattle for slaughter, which could also go to other large towns like Birmingham and Manchester. The ability to send dead meat depended on the ability of the town

glovers and places like Bermondsey specialized in tan yards. In places like Bristol and Chester, a glove-making economy was thriving, mainly from the import of hides from Ireland and also the local supply. Norwich, otherwise a prominent textile town was also famous for its leather shoes.

Large firms were beginning to appear in Leeds and in London, where several different kinds of leathers were being tanned simultaneously⁷⁸. One reason for the existence of smaller units in the industry was the “natural” differences of heavy and light hides, levels of putrefaction and the minor differences in tanning procedures. The larger units could work on these different skins/hides simultaneously and make the process more uniform. The other reason for smaller units was the scattered supply of oak bark, which did not allow a cluster of units to function at the same place. Oak bark, an expensive raw material was used as tanning agent in Britain till about the mid-eighteenth century and in fact is responsible in large part for the way in which the industry took shape in Britain and also its relationship to colonies like India.

Leicester, Northampton and Leeds, all with a flourishing agrarian economy, were also some of the major tanning and shoe production centers⁷⁹. In Norwich, a leatherseller, named James Smith introduced the idea of standard sizing and around 1792 began providing boots ready made in various sizes (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 5) . The first kind of machinery was introduced in 1810 during the Napoleonic Wars, by inventor and engineer Marc Isambard

to consume the by-products of the cattle such as offals, bones and hides. Thus significant leather towns such as Norwich, Leeds and Northampton sent large amounts of dead meat to places like London (Perren, 1975, pp. 389-90).

⁷⁸ In 1874, the *Leather Trades Review* presented a four-fold classification of tanners in Britain – the old fashioned country tanner, who was fast disappearing, the wealthy London tanner, the heavy sole leather tanners in west and north-west England and the Yorkshire tanners who specialized in heavy leathers for machine belts and light leathers for textile machine rollers (Church, 1971, p. 551).

⁷⁹ Northampton, rich in pastures, cattle and oak was an ideal place for a nascent tanning and shoemaking trade⁷⁹. By 1401, the Guild of Shoemakers had been established and an important trade center began to develop here. However accounts suggest that throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries residents of Northampton consistently complained to the local authorities about the threat to public health caused by tanners and leather-dressers who were accused of polluting the waters and leaving carcasses in full public view (Clarkson, 1966, p. 34).

Brunel, who employed wounded war soldiers to cut uppers with a press and rivet soles with a machine that he had invented. Military production of boots thus reached an unprecedented scale. However after the war, the industry suffered huge losses and many traders moved to London, Stafford and Norwich⁸⁰. The trade in Northampton revived with the coming of the sewing-machine in the middle of the nineteenth century. Initially however from 1857-1859, there was a strike against the machine by operatives, resulting in a large scale migration of workers, especially to Leicester.

Male factory workers refused to touch shoes on which the machines had been used, due to fear of loss of jobs with the resulting mechanization. Since women had been adept at using these machines, for home-based stitching, this strike led to the large scale employment of women in the industry and subsequently mechanization took off. The Blake sole sewer was introduced in 1859, Goodyear machines in 1872 and other such innovations began laying the foundations of the modern factory system (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 4). The full imperative of mechanization was however not appreciated until the British market was swamped by machine made shoes from America. Meanwhile, Thomas Crick in Leicester revived Brunel's rivet machine which had been destroyed in the wars. By 1853, Crick's son, John Throne, has patented a method of inside riveting of soles. Uppers and insoles were now being riveted together, then turned and the sole attached, thereby inaugurating the modern process of shoe making (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 1).

Much of the trade was in the hands of men known as garrett masters, who did the clicking and pressing in their own factories. Uppers were then taken home by women to be closed and when finished, came back to the factory to be fitted with bottom stuff and passed out again for lasting, by men who also worked in their

⁸⁰ There are evidences of these activities being carried out in Norwich as far back as the thirteenth century. Commercial importance, however, does not seem to have conferred any great degree of social standing on those who plied the craft of shoemaking, for we are told that in 1463, when a shoemaker was chosen for the Commons Council, there were serious arguments as to whether a man of his calling was disqualified from taking the oath (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 5).

homes. Sewing was the next stage of production, sometimes carried out by machinery in the factory and at other times sent out. Next heels were attached and channels hammered down in the factory, and then the boots passed out of the factory for the final finishing also done by outworkers. That system did not pass out of use until as late as 1898 (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 6). Mechanization, however, was changing the industry in fundamental ways.

The first fallout of mechanization was the decline of outworking, or the “basket system”, where boots were taken out of the factory for finishing in baskets. Next, with the mechanization of closing of uppers, women who used to work from home lost their jobs. Effectively shoes were now made ‘inside’ the factory. Shops in which shoes were sold, but not made, began to appear, and to supply their needs there developed not only shoe factories which had direct contact with the public, but factors whose business it was to buy shoes from makers and pass them on to retailers. By 1887 the trade was splitting into two sections. The bespoke shoemakers were moving from the City to the West End, and the manufacturers were congregating in the East End in the neighborhoods of Hackney, Bethnal, Green, Shoreditch and Stepney (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d., p. 13).

At the same time around 1870s London, the location of great tannery firms like Bevingtons, Hepburns and Barrows, began to decline as a tanning center. Much of the trade had begun to shift to Liverpool by the 1850s, which became a center for heavy leather tanning. The growing demand for leather in England had necessitated the import of hides from South America and the Liverpool port charged lesser taxes and brokerage than London. Other factors like rising rent was also driving the production cost up in London. Tanneries, especially for heavy leathers required large spaces and an enormous amount of water supply, both of which London was unable to provide in the nineteenth century (Church, 1971, p. 551). Leeds also benefited from its closeness to the Liverpool port and developed as a big center for leather trade during this period.

This was also a period of great urban change in London and public opinion was largely against noxious trades like tanning and slaughtering. Curtis (2008) argues that during the nineteenth century, there was a dramatic shift in the social sensitivity to the odours of substances like garbage and shit and these odours begin to be aligned with states of morality and health. Looking at the late nineteenth century in London, Otter (2004) also argues that the influence of the Haussmanian sanitary and urban reforms in Paris had reached London by this time, leading to the efforts like the slaughterhouse reforms from 1840-1900. With the efforts to remove offending odours, there was also a move to make London visually sharper and clear. Thus the foggy ambiance of gas-lights was being replaced with electric lamps. Along with the visual medicalization of the body, technologies such as electricity were thus further increasing the visual spectrum of the human eye. The intolerance to odour and the enhancement of vision were thus simultaneous processes⁸¹.

The structure and organization of the leather industry had changed by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Clarkson (1966, p. 39) and Church (1971, p. 543) suggests that the leather industry declines in importance around the time of the Industrial Revolution since it did not particularly benefit from mechanization up until the Napoleonic Wars. Also the Revolution brought about increased production other materials like rubber and glass which substituted leather. By 1923, the last known tanneries in important centers like Stafford had shut down and the town had moved entirely to shoe-making.

The tanning industry has also historically resisted mechanization in England, United States and India⁸². Two reasons are usually given. First, since hides are a natural product, each requires a different handling and processing, making mechanization a complex process. Secondly, tanning methods have not changed

⁸¹ See Gandy (1999) for an account of the Haussmann reforms in Paris, where sewers were considered to be the “dark underground world of crime and poverty”. Similar changes were also occurring elsewhere in the Empire. See Trabsky (2014) for an analysis of the institutionalization of the public abattoirs in Victoria, Australia in the nineteenth century. Here abattoirs were termed as “malodorous eyesores” and “olfactory blemishes on the horizon of a modern city”.

⁸² See Bhattacharya (2013).

much over the years and it remains a fairly time consuming process. In the beginning of the nineteenth century in England, the entire process of conversion of hides into leather could take up to twelve months for the heaviest kinds of leather since the process was entirely organic and natural. After the Napoleonic Wars, advances in chemistry made the process faster. Imported barks, with high tannin content such as valonia, sumach and divi-divi substituted the scarce and expensive oak, which till now contributed to a large part of the production costs. Large amounts of Mylabalans and divi-divi barks were imported from India, especially during the war periods leading to a sharp decline in India's exports to other countries.

The use of these tannins in covered vats had reduced the time to about four months for lighter hides. This changed the capital intensive nature of the industry and resulted in a faster and higher turn-over rate, since machines could have been now utilized more and become available faster. Mechanization thus became economically viable (Church, 1971, pp. 549-550). However, due to delayed and slow mechanization by the beginning of the twentieth century, England had become a net importer of leather, in contrast to Germany and United States which were large exporting entities. Thus began the period of intense competition with America (Church, 1971, p. 553).

A trend of heavy imports had begun by the 1870s with India exporting raw kips – hides of the smaller cattle – to be tanned in Britain in order to cheaply substitute calf leather uppers in lower quality footwear⁸³. Around 1900, the world prices in raw hides and skins reached unprecedented levels, and the worst-hit was the local flayer and tanner, who lost propriety control over the hides on the one hand, and could not compete with government contractors and agents in bidding for hides in the open market, on the other. Local networks of production broke down with the invention of a huge commercial value for what was till now a polluted nuisance which needed to be dealt with. As a result, cattle, owners

⁸³ See Bhattacharya (2013)

instead of paying to get the carcasses removed, started demanding money for the value that hides/skins carries (Sinha, 1986, p. 1062).

America on the other hand, specializing in heavy skins tanned with hemlock, which contained twice as much tannin as oak, thus lowering the costs significantly. These hides were in great demand in the market for low quality footwear in England by the end of the nineteenth century (Church, 1971, p. 553). Amongst the various factors such as presence of large firms and great mechanization which were helping the American tanning industry, one of the reasons significant for this work is the difference in the training of the managers in the two countries⁸⁴. England was beginning to realize that it had a “shortage of skilled, educated foremen and supervisory staff⁸⁵” (Church, 1971, p. 558).

By the 1890s, the English manufacturers had begun to follow American methods of producing lighter and cheaper footwear which relied on cheaper leather. Up until then, in spite of trade losses, the heavy and expensive oak tanned leather was regarded to be superior to the “coloured rather than tanned”, “reddish hued leather” from America (Church, 1971, p. 559). Also by now the other tanning agents like chestnut and Mylabalans had been discovered which brought down the costs significantly.

However in the area of heavy tanned leather England was doing much better. The growing importance of chemistry in the field, and the specialization of leather chemistry was responsible for making significant changes in the tanning process, in particular the development of mineral tanning, by 1880, which today we commonly call chrome tanning (Church, 1971, p. 560). Heavy sole leather

⁸⁴ For a detailed economic analysis of the trade in England and America, see Church (1971).

⁸⁵ Church (1971, p. 558) quotes the opinion of an Englishman who was conversant with the industry in the US, as follows, “In America it is not thought necessary to be a thoroughly practical man. He should understand the theory he should know what he wants and whether the work is coming through properly, what ... and how it is being put into the leather: above all he should be a good organizer”. This explains to a large extent the investment that England puts in the regime of technical and scientific education of the class of managers and supervisors. Initially, at least this education was to supplement the general and literary education that they would ordinarily receive. The emphasis on practical training would come in later. Chapter Five discusses these developments in greater detail.

was also not constricted by fashion considerations and was thus easier to change and experiment with. The implications for this regime of science and technology in the industry will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Chrome tanned leather has many advantages over vegetable tanned one, significantly in its flexibility, durability and processing time. The process is also less labour intensive and requires much more “scientific input”. Britain however was slow to take up chrome tanned leather due to various apprehensions such as comfort and structural problems like patenting of the American technology. However the First World War greatly increased the demand for chrome-tanned leather and transformed the industry.

4. ‘English Joota’ and ‘Desi Chamda’: Caste and Leatherwork in Uttar Pradesh

Given the caste based division of labour, in the largely agrarian and cattle based villages there were always individuals and communities, such as those of the Chamars, who used to perform the tasks of flaying, tanning and shoemaking⁸⁶. More often than not the same person could perform all these tasks. In large part it was the concentration of the processes in the same person that led to the perception of the work as ‘dirty’. These communities would live and work at the same place, which would also be where hides/skins were stored. Thus arose the proverbial “filthy quarters” (Crooke 1974, p.190) of the Chamars. Sociologists have analysed this system of work under the idea of the *jajmani* system. It was mostly the flayer who was employed by the patron, usually a large landlord, who

⁸⁶ Tanning was usually done by a sub-caste of the Chamars known as ‘*rangia*’ (dyer). Shoe manufacturers on the other hand were called, ‘*mochis*’ who considered themselves to be higher than the *rangia*. Traditional shoemakers like *mochis*, have done marginally better in the new industrial environment since they got employment in the factories. *Mochis* who used to do repair work, have however been worse off since shoe repair as an activity is also declining. After the invention of chrome tanning, and the changing rural political economy, where modern shoes have made an appearance along with the fact that farming equipment is no longer made of leather, the work of *rangias*, who used to be small-level vegetable tanners has largely declined.

had a significant amount of cattle. The disposal of dead cattle was thus the customary function performed by the flayer, who in return would keep the skin/hide for herself, converting them into shoes, bags, buckets, drums and other tools required in the agrarian economy. Surplus hides and leather goods would find their way into the urban markets where demand was of course higher. Additionally these castes would also perform other *begar* agrarian and manual labour in the household of the *jajman*. Chamar women on the other hand would assist in childbirth and post-partum recovery, again due to the polluted nature of these activities within the Hindu caste order⁸⁷.

The Chamar caste has been the subjects of extensive academic and administrative enquiry through the colonial and post-colonial periods, leading to the idea of a 'traditional leatherworker'. W. Crooke's, *The Tribes and Castes of North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, published in 1896 contains descriptions of the Chamar community. In 1903, H.G. Walton brought out, *A Monograph on the Tanning and Working in Leather*. In 1920 G.W. Briggs published an anthropological account of the Chamars, which is considered to be an authoritative text on the community⁸⁸. Briggs (2004, p.11) writes, "The tanners of leather, the preparers of skins, the manufacturers of leather articles, and the maker of shoes...are...included under the general term Chamar." Crooke (1974, p.169) also observed, "their name is derived from *charam-kara*, a 'worker in leather'...Originally he seems to have been an impressed labourer (*begar*) who

⁸⁷ The Chamar groups may have had some more rights such as small plots of lands, timber to make houses, and access to grazing lands. At times they would also receive small payments for the production of leather equipment (Sinha, 1986, p. 1062).

⁸⁸The sub-castes of the Chamar are very numerous, 1156 being returned in 1891. Among all the sections of the Chamars of the United Provinces, two great sub-castes predominate -the Jatiya and the Jaiswar. The former is found almost entirely in the north and west of the Provinces, in the Meerut, Agra and Rohilkhand Divisions and the latter are found in the Allahabad, Benaras, Gorakhpur, and Fyzabad Divisions. The Jatiya, with many well-to-do individuals claims to be the highest of all the sub-castes of Chamars (Briggs, 2004, p. 21). The Jatiya, or Jatua...is a field-labourer, a cultivator, a dealer in hides, and a maker of shoes. Some of the cultivating sections of this sub-caste do not make leather, and do not allow their women to practice midwifery (Briggs, 2004, p. 22). The Jaiswars also make claims to superiority based on their refusal to engage in defiling occupations (Briggs, 2004, p. 21). The present day Jatavs are the Jatiyas of Briggs account.

was made to hold the plough for his master, and received in return...the skins and bodies of the animals that died...he is still the field-slave, the grass-cutter, and the carrion-eater of the Indian village”.

Describing the community, Briggs writes,

“He (Chamar) occupies an utterly degraded position in the village life, and he is regarded with loathing and disgust by the higher castes. His quarters (chamrauti, chamarwara) abound in all kinds of abominable filth. His foul mode of living is proverbial...the very touch of a Chamar renders it necessary for a good Hindu to bathe with all his clothes on. The Chamar’s very name connects him with the carcasses of cattle...he also eats (that) flesh” (Briggs, 2004, p.20).

Crooke (1974, p.190) echoes similar sentiments when he writes,

“He (Chamar) will eat cattle which die a natural death, and numerous cases have occurred where Chamars have poisoned cattle for the sake of the hides and flesh. He keeps herds of pigs, and the Chamrauti or Chamar quarter in a Hindu village is generally a synonym for a place abounding in all kinds of abominable filth where a clean Hindu seldom unless for urgent necessity, cares to intrude”.

The mythical accounts of the origins of Chamars also reiterate the relationship of the caste with animal carcasses and hides. Lynch (1969, p. 29) recounts one such account as recorded by Crooke, in which when a group of five Brahmin brothers were on a walk, they came upon the carcass of a dead cow. One of them stopped and pulled the carcass off the road. Consequently he was excommunicated by the other brothers and his descendants were consigned the task of retrieving

carcasses⁸⁹. This trope is interesting and opens up the possibility of ‘becoming a Chamar’ by handling polluted materials. We will return to this trope in the chapters ahead when we discuss the experiences of the upper-castes who work with leather. For now, it can be argued that the association between death, animal body and the Chamar had been worked out well, making the category of the ‘leatherworker’ definite and well-defined. Empirical reality however, was not this clearly demarcated.

Rawat (2011, p. 6) argues that both in historical and anthropological terms, Dalit castes have been solely defined in terms of their relationship with a supposedly impure occupation. However, “the longstanding Chamar presence within agriculture, not just as landless labourers but also as tenants and owners of land in Uttar Pradesh, troubles the popular image of this group as primarily leatherworkers⁹⁰” (Rawat, 2011, p. 5). Rawat suggests that it is because of their connection with agriculture and land that the Chamars have been able to establish their own educational institutions, political organizations and do well electorally. However the occupational stereotypes have provided justification for the continued exploitation, oppression and abuse of Chamars and other untouchable castes (Rawat, 2011, p. 5). Ciotti’s (2010) work provides an alternative history of Chamars as a weaving community in some parts of Eastern UP. On the other hand, Pai (2002, p. 39) argues that most leaders of the Uttar Pradesh Schedule Caste Federation (UPSCF) and the Republican Party of India

⁸⁹ Khare (1984, p. 43) has argued that mythical accounts of origin of the lower-castes mostly contain the trope of a glorious past which was corrupted due to either some self-action or a larger conspiracy by others. The claiming of a higher past is crucial in order to be able to argue for social mobility in the present.

⁹⁰ Rawat (2011, p.55) writes that according to the Uttar Pradesh census of 1911, only 130,233 Chamar workers out of 3,467,317 (4 per cent) were engaged in their ‘traditional’ occupation of leatherwork, while 1,373,184 (40 per cent) were identified as cultivators, including both *maurusi* (occupancy) and *ghair-maurusi* (non-occupancy) tenants. Another 1,355,387 (40 per cent) were identified as agricultural labourers. According to the 1881 Uttar Pradesh census, Chamars constituted 14 per cent of the total Hindu population, followed by Brahmans with 12 per cent and Ahirs with 9 per cent. This meant that such a large population could not survive merely on their traditional occupation. The colonial state was thus forced to come to terms with the fact that Chamars were an integral part of the agricultural community (Rawat, 2011, p. 56-57).

(RPI) like B.P. Maurya were sons of leather merchants, who could get higher education due to the prosperity provided by the trade.

Rawat (2011, p. 109-16) also proposes that the association of Chamars with leatherwork led to the establishment of the leather industry in cities like this Agra and Kanpur, which had a large concentration of Chamars and not in the port towns, which had been the trend until then. Pai (2002, p. 39) and Gooptu (2001, p.4) however, argue that the large concentration of Chamars in these cantonment cities could be a result of the British military's employment of *mochis* and leatherworkers, much before the factories came up.

Rawat's argument about occupational stereotypes is well taken. Even today Chamars continue to be engaged in various occupations, including land. However the obverse is also true – almost all workers in the leather industry are Chamars. Instead, by locating caste in the object of leather, rather than solely in the body of the Chamar, I argue first, that occupational stereotyping of the Chamar as the leatherworker was preceded by the fixing of leather as a polluted object, an object framed by caste. Secondly, in the context of the modern leather industry then the object of leather causes not just the Chamars to be polluted, but in fact puts everyone's purity at suspicion. The upper caste owners and managers are also haunted by this polluted status of their occupations, though there is a qualitative difference between the pollution of the upper and the lower castes. The work thus argues that the category of the leatherworker needs to be re-examined, not just to reconfigure the Chamar, but also to include the other castes who now occupy the leather industry. This argument will be worked out in the subsequent chapters using evidence from the field. The next two sections, trace the complicated history of the conversion of 'untouchable' leatherwork into the modern leather industry. In doing so we also trace how the idea of the leatherworker shifts and becomes layered, due to political economic changes, within the Chamar communities and also within the larger societies in which these communities were located.

4.1 City of Leather: Kanpur and the Leather Industry

The formalization of leatherwork in India happens largely around the middle of the nineteenth century, in particular due to increased presence of the armed forces after the Mutiny and increased demand of leather in the British Empire due to wars and military campaigns. In 1778 the Company's troops first moved to Kanpur and settled in twelve villages stretching from old Kanpur in the west to Jajmau in the east. With the spread of the cantonment (Campoo Kanpur), old Kanpur (Kanpur *kona*, Kanpur Corner), began to be overshadowed. By 1803 it was the largest upcountry cantonment in India and substantial military presence was required in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to protect against the Marathas (Joshi, 2003, p. 23). Up to the mid-nineteenth century Kanpur was still a cantonment town with the civil areas hemmed in on three sides (Joshi, 2003, pp. 27-28). This changed after 1857 since need was felt to increase the boundaries of the civil authorities. These changes were fraught with conflicts since the military authorities wanted to "preserve the purity of the cantonment, untainted by the polluting city" (Joshi, 2003, p. 28). This was the beginning of industrial Kanpur.

Artisanal and laboring population had already come to Kanpur by the 1840s, much before large scale industries were set up. These groups, including leatherworkers and butchers, had come into Kanpur from the neighbouring rural areas due to the famines in the 1830s (Joshi, 2003, p. 15). Leather was one of the products which was being produced locally before the setup of large scale factories to meet the military demand for carriage, harness and saddlery. These products along with cured meat were exported out of Kanpur to all over India (Joshi, 2003, p. 17). By 1840s demand for leather was high and it was believed that European horses were poisoned for leather (Joshi, 2003, p. 21). We have discussed earlier, the colonial fear of poisoning which led to the argument for Chamar criminality.

Maren Bellwinkel- Schempp (2007, p. 2177) writes of Kanpur,

“Kanpur was famous for its raw hide market, which mainly supplied Europe with hides...From all over Uttar Pradesh the Chamars migrated to Kanpur, the kureel from the adjacent districts, the ahirvar from Bundelkhand, the dhusiya and the jaisvara from eastern Uttar Pradesh... In Kanpur town they became ‘tanners’ – as the British translated their name Chamar – what most of them had never been in the village.⁹¹”

Administrative changes ensued and fourteen parganas around Kanpur were consolidated into a district of Kanpur by the mid-nineteenth century. While earlier Kanpur had been a part of the Jajmau tehsil, by the turn of the nineteenth century Jajmau was a moribund town in Kanpur tehsil⁹². The first factories came up on the riverfront, which was earlier occupied by the military (Joshi, 2003, p. 32). The need for leather led the industry to be revived a decade after the Mutiny. Leather production was modernized in 1860s and European soldiers who were familiar with tanyards in England were employed to improve the tanning methods. Babul trees and raw hides were available locally and Kanpur’s saddlery and harness was considered to be of a very high quality (Joshi, 2003, p. 35). We have already discussed that this was also the period of the change in the leather industry in Britain with the shift from guilds to factory based production.

In order to procure locally made and cheap boots, saddlery and harness, the British set up the Government Harness and Saddlery Factory in Kanpur in 1867 by Captain J Stewart, near the army pontoon bridge on the Ganga. Tanners for

⁹¹About ten kilometers northwest of the cantonment lies the old *khaal mandi* at Nai Sadak. Hides and skins from all over UP, are still collected in *godams* here in large numbers. Now however the trade route is changing and tannery agents ensure that hides go directly to the tanneries which have commissioned them. Nai Sadak also has a busy slaughtering business especially in the areas adjoining Bakarganj.

⁹² By 1870s, banking families had begun making large investments in land in Kanpur. Railways accelerated the process of change and old centers of trade like Mirzapur, Fategarh and Lucknow were declining causing trade in Kanpur to grow (Joshi, 2003, p. 22). Kanpur was already connected by metaled roads to Bundelkhand, Lucknow and Rae Bareilly before 1850s. The East Indian Railway linking Kanpur with Calcutta, and the Oudh and Rohilkhand with Lucknow gave Kanpur an edge over other North Indian towns. Also old river trade routes in Kalpi and Farukhabad were now over. By 1870s Kanpur had become one of the most important center of trade in the North West Provinces (Joshi, 2003, p. 22).

this factory were trained under the 'Madras Scheme' in the 1860s (Sinha, 1986, p. 1062). After retirement Stewart set up the Stewart Tannery and Leather Equipment Factory in Agra, with Pandit Dar. The Afghan Wars and the First World War greatly increased production in the Harness and Saddlery Factory. Kanpur also began to function as a storehouse for goods to be supplied to British army stationed overseas (Joshi, 2003, p. 48). In 1880, William Cooper and George Allen started manufacturing shoes and boots for the army, thus inaugurating the prominent career of the Cooper Allen Company in leatherwork⁹³ (Joshi, 2003, p. 35).

In 1892 the North West Tannery was set up and the production of the famous 'flex shoes' began. In 1904, they were taken over by Cooper Allen. In 1900 Van Der Wains, an entrepreneur who had earlier bought out the Stewart Tannery in Agra opened the Wains Tannery and Leather Equipment Factory in the Juhi area. By 1903 however, following competition it was taken over by Cooper Allen. W B Shewan, an employee at Cooper Allen and then Wains, then started his own 'Jajmau Tannery'. Shewan's leather soon became famous as, '*Soon sahib ka chamda*'. This tannery still exists under the name of 'Shewan Group' and now they have branched out into manufacture as well⁹⁴.

In the period of the Depression post the First World War, some British enterprises in Kanpur got together to form the British India Corporation (BIC) in 1920. Amongst the prominent industries which were a part of BIC were – Northwest Tannery, Elgin Mills, Cawnpore Woolen Mills (Lal Imli), Cawnpore Cotton Mills and Cooper Allen. BIC fell apart and by 1969 North West Tannery and Cooper Allen were purchased by the Government of India for a token amount of Re 1 and renamed them Tannery and Footwear Corporation (TEFCO).

⁹³ Cooper Allen and Company was initially involved in the cotton trade and subsequently displaced indigenous control in important ways (Joshi, 2003, p. 19).

⁹⁴ Interview with a tannery owner in Jajmau, Kanpur, October, 2014.

TEFCO went on to become of the biggest employers and producers in Kanpur, until it was shut down in the 1990s⁹⁵.

The city of Kanpur was influenced by the presence of such an extensive industry and working class populations in significant ways. The indigenous merchant community was divided on the lines of religion between the Muslim merchants and tannery owners and the Marwari-Bania traders. Muslim traders alleged that the Hindu controlled municipality was biased against them, due to their involvement in the leather trade. This lack of support to the leather industry was noticed by the European entrepreneurs as well. Joshi cites a letter written to the District Magistrate by the Cooper Allen managers attributing the high octroi on babul bark to the “very pronounced contempt and dislike for anything connected with the manufacture of leather” on the high caste Hindus who controlled the Municipality (Joshi, 2003, p. 43).

Caste also played a major role in the ordering of the city. While there were British reports of Brahmin, ‘Chhatris’ and Chamars working “cheek by jowl”, maintains that lines of purity and pollution were adhered to in the workplace (Joshi, 2003, p. 82). For instance, Chamar workers were not a part of the mixed households consisting of single men from the same village or larger area. Food was cooked separately and rarely shared (Joshi, 2003, pp. 106-7). In terms of residence there were two main kinds of division – between Hindus and Muslims and amongst various castes within the Hindus. Muslims resided in areas like Butcherkhana, Anwarganj and Patkapore. In some *hatas* were mixed castes lived, rooms which faced outwards instead of inside towards the courtyard which was usually the case, were given to the lower-castes (Joshi, 2003, p. 238). Though considerations of rent and space forced workers to live together, yet they tried to retain community lines. For instance in the 1930s and 40s, higher caste workers would be reluctant to go to Allenganj where the Chamar workers stayed (Joshi, 2003, p. 239).

⁹⁵ Interview with a tannery owner in Jajmau, Kanpur, October, 2014.

On the other hand, attempts were made to reorganize and sanitize the city on the lines of European cities of the nineteenth century. The city was now divided between the “city proper” and the “civil station”. The civil station had the Mall, bungalows, theatres and parks, while the city proper consisted of crowded *mohallas*, local bazaars and *hatas*, which were now seen as synonymous with slums in the administrative and managerial discourses (Joshi, 2003, p. 51). The lower class settlements “were seen as blots, sources of danger and disfigurement” (Joshi, 2003, p. 52). A municipal regulation passed in 1905 banned the construction of industrial works near the Mall⁹⁶ (Joshi, 2003, p. 51).

Joshi argues that the overwhelming concern for the authorities was not so much hygiene, since proposals to make arrangement for drainage or constructing alternative worker’s housing were ruled out. It was actually the presence of the lower class within the Civil Lines which was the major problem. “The presence of working-class tainted space lowered its social value and letting power” (Joshi, 2003, p. 53). For instance, European property speculators emphasized that the construction of a settlement for workers of Cooper Allen and Company would adversely affect the market for the bungalows that they constructed: “Few people would care to live on the Nawabganj road in such close proximity to a noisy and at best of times, dirty habitations of lower-caste natives” (Joshi, 2003, p. 53). At the same time they were also wary of over segregation of the classes and believed in the merits of the good effects of staying near plebian populations (Joshi, 2003, p. 55).

Differences were made between the Europeans as well. It was thought that Europeans employed in the factories and working with the natives, and earning between Rs. 300 to Rs. 800 a month would find it easier to live near the lower

⁹⁶ In Kanpur, workers’ *bastis* (settlements) came up in areas like Gwaltoli, Parmat and Khalasi lines, which were near to the riverfront where first the cantonment and then the mills existed. Settled on *nazul* lands near the mills, the workers would pay a small fixed rent to the municipality. Subsequently when the industries started shifting towards the south of the city, enclosed compounds or *hatas* with 10-12 tenements each came up. There was no sanitation facilities available here and water used for washing and bathing would collect in pits outside the *hata* and putrefy.

class inhabitations than those drawing over Rs. 2000 a month: “They are accustomed to noise, dirt and other unpleasant accompaniments inseparable from native labour” (Joshi, 2003, p. 54). On the other hand, as fear about plagues and contamination became commonplace, elite Indians began wanting a living space in the bungalow area with the whites. The cholera epidemic of 1890, the plague outbreak of 1900 and the spread of riots, made the connection between crowds, dirt, disease and chaos, clear in many minds. As we have discussed in the last chapter, these ideas regarding miasmas and lower class masses had already been in the public discourse in Europe. Similar descriptions of putrid miasmas odorous effluvia and excrement flowing out in the open in the cities were being made of industrial towns like Kanpur. Of further concern was the supply of labour to the mills in case of further epidemics. Some irregular measures were thus also being taken to improve the living conditions of the workers. But all plans to destroy the *hatas*, or to move the workers to newer locations came to naught under pressure from workers themselves and due to lack of space. On the other hand, the great challenge even within the Civil Lines and cantonment areas was the regularization of sanitation and drainage facilities, especially amongst the military authorities⁹⁷.

Dirt and disease, both of the moral and physical kind, now had visible markers such as dirty mohallas and crowded *hatas*. This explains the currency of the oft repeated phrase “invisibilizing the working populations or poverty”. Many of these markers came from the discourses of the medicalized body, and also treated the city as one. In the managerial discourse however, while the “city symbolized physical degeneration, the factory represented health and vitality. The air in the factory was sweet, wholesome and pure. What could be purer than the air in Kanpur factories, one manager suggests”, comparing the factories with the ones in crowded Bombay. The closeness to Ganga provided this fresh air and Ganga acquired purificatory powers even in the eyes of an English manager of a leather factory. Time spent inside the factory was thus supposed to be better for

⁹⁷ For a detailed account and descriptions of these measures see Joshi (2003, pp. 55-61).

the workers than that spent in their filthy homes. Diseases were caught in bazaars and at homes, not in factories (Joshi, 2003, pp. 125-6).

These descriptions of colonial Kanpur provide a rich background in which to study the present day city. In the interviews conducted during this research, Kanpur would often be recalled as a 'dirty' city, due to its industrial nature. Tanneries contribute to this perception significantly. The odours of the tanneries almost mark out a territorial area for themselves, beginning around the time one takes the turn from the cantonment towards Jajmau and staying with us till the Kanpur-Unnao Highway. The odours return closer to the industrial area in Unnao, which is the location for a cluster of large tanneries. In the popular imagination of the city, this stench is pervasive, perhaps even more than its geographic spread. In recent times however, this odour has been somewhat subdued, and we will return to this discussion in Chapter Four. For now, we will return to a historical account of the leather industry in Agra.

4.2 Of Jatavs and 'Punjabis': Leather Industry in Agra

As of today, the phrase, 'leather industry in Agra', is considered to be quite a misnomer. Industry experts will be quick to point out that there is no leather industry in Agra⁹⁸. What exists here it is in fact the 'footwear industry'. The forging of this difference is crucial to this work and we shall return to it in Chapter Four. For now, it is sufficient to mention that in the industry parlance, 'leather industry' exclusively means tanning or '*chamda banane ka kaam*'. On the other hand, Agra has the 'footwear industry', '*joota ka kaam*'.

Owen Lynch (1969, p. 21) writes that historically, Agra is first mentioned during its invasion by Sultan Ibrahim Ghaznavi in about 1080 A.D. The city came into

⁹⁸ Apart from monumental histories, not many historical accounts of Agra are available, particularly pertaining to its industry and the caste movement. Most of the description here relies on either Lynch (1969) or oral accounts collected during interviews in the city.

prominence only in 1504, when Sikandar Lodi moved the capital of his kingdom from Delhi to Agra (Lynch, 1969, p. 20). In 1526, after Babur won the battle of Panipat, Agra came under the Mughal Empire. In the last decades of the 16th century, Akbar moved the city from the left bank of the river Yamuna, to the right, where it stands today. In 1658, under the reign of Aurangzeb, the capital of the Mughal Empire moved to Delhi. Since the decline of the Mughals, the city moves back and forth among the Marathas, the Jats and the Mughals. Shoes, of country tanned leather, made in indigenous style, were reportedly made in Agra before the British came⁹⁹. The sizes of these shoes were not determined according in to fixed feet sizes but were measured in terms of the thickness of fingers and were also priced accordingly. The elite also used footwear prepared from velvet cloth, richly embroidered with silk and gold thread. These embroidered shoes, under the name Salim Shahi, were the speciality of the cottage industries of Delhi and Agra.

In 1803, the British forces capture Agra and in 1835 make it the capital of the North-Western Provinces. In 1834 it was separated from the Bengal Presidency and converted into Agra Presidency till 1836 when it was merged again into the Bengal Presidency (Srivastava, 1979). In 1868 when the capital was shifted to Allahabad and Agra was reduced to the status of District Headquarters (Lynch, 1969, p. 21). Except for the Munity of 1857, which for the most part skirted Agra, the city did not witness many spectacular events. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the city received moderate amounts of colonial attention and the usual markers of colonial development began to come up. The Agra College was started in 1823 and was affiliated to the Calcutta University in 1860. The St Peters School was set up in 1846, and the St John's College in 1850 by the Protestant Church Mission (Srivastava, 1979). This was followed soon by the Agra University and the Thomason Hospital and medical school. Railway stations, a telegraph office, and ginning and spinning mills were all subsequently

⁹⁹ Before the advent of formal industries, leather used to be tanned in villages in very simple ways using organic barks. This leather was not 'cooked' as much as the leather we are use now, was brittle, prone to deterioration and had a reddish brown hue.

established (Lynch, 1969, p. 21). In terms of the industry, Agra received great attention during the first Industrial Exhibition, which was held there in 1867 (Lynch, 1969, p. 21).

The industry began to expand, near the end of the nineteenth century. The cottage shoe industry began along with a small iron industry, oil pressing mills and pulse mills. However Lynch suggest that Agra was never truly an 'industrial' city, if 'industrial' is defined as the use of large scale power and machines (Lynch, 1969, pp. 21-22). The city eventually became an important cantonment town and during the Second World War also became an influential air force base, which is in use even today (Lynch, 1969, p. 22).

Due to the establishment of the cantonment, the British demand for shoes and shoe-repair was high. The existing English shoemakers began training the local shoemakers in the art of making the 'English' shoe. These shoes were made with cloth uppers and soles of country tanned leather and cost around twelve annas per pair. Some of these trained local shoemakers, when discharged from service started to make the *angrezi joota* in their homes, which subsequently became very popular in the market and began to be contrasted with the '*kacche chamde ka joota*', the country made shoe discussed earlier. Different localities of Agra specialized in different types of English shoes. Some of these localities, such as Chakki Pat, Shahganj, Burhan Sayyad, Naubasta and Mandi Sayyed Khan still produce a large number of shoes for the domestic market in small units run by families. Shoe manufacturing became a major trade only in the beginning of the twentieth century with increasing demands due to the First World War. By the Second World War, shoes made in Agra were being exported to many countries.

Around the 1890s, Pandit M K Dar set up a tannery and shoe factory complex, the 'Stuart Factory'– named after Colonel Stuart, the manager of the Government Harness and Saddlery Factory at Kanpur, near Tajganj. He employed a German chemistry expert and even made arrangements for the technical education of prospective students. One of these students, Wazir Khan, moved to Kanpur to learn about the new machinery coming into manufacturing and later returned to

Agra to set up the Wazir Khan Factory. Stuart Factory soon shifted to Dar's residence in Chhili Int Ghatia, but soon shut down. After this Sayyed Musa Raza, a prominent shoe factor, set up a machined shoe unit in Shahganj and began supplying to Bengal, Bihar, and eastern UP. Meanwhile, chrome tanning had begun in the tanneries in Calcutta and Kanpur, which benefited the shoe traders in Agra due to the lower cost of leather. By the beginning of the twentieth century, prominent names like Khadim Ali Khan, Faiyaz Ali Khan, Dhani Ram Bhalla and Mistri Hardeva were the doyens of the industry in Agra. Some of these firms still exist.

Khadam Ali Khan and Faiyaz Ali Khan set up 'K V and Company', in Kaserat Bazaar, Tajganj, for the sale of shoes from Delhi and some varieties of English shoes from Bombay, especially for the English officers residing in the cantonment. Soon they began employing *mistris* to cater to the bespoke business in the city, which turned into a factory within the year due to high demand. Khadam Ali Khan imported books and manuals on shoemaking and patterns, wooden and iron lasts from England and obtained machine catalogues from the United Shoe Machinery Company, leading to the first significantly mechanized factory in the city, only a little after the arrival of mechanized units in Britain. This became an important production point during the First World War. At about the same time, Mistri Hardeva and Sirajuddin entered into a partnership and set up Good Luck and Company, specializing in making English shoes by hand.

Due to the success of these two firms, many skilled workers and entrepreneurs came to Agra, resulting in the setup of prominent firms like, the Dawar Shoe Factory, China Footwear Factory, Amdon Shoe Factory, Alexander Shoe Factory, Poland Shoe Factory, Maharaja Shoe Factory, Kohinoor Factory, Araq Factory and the Burma Shoe Factory. Dhani Ram Bhalla, a resident of Lahore took up an agency of Cooper Allen providing an international exposure to the industry. However, only some of these were mechanized and footwear largely remained a manual trade in Agra. Khadam Ali Khan also organized an association of shoe factors and persuaded them to set up a central market for shoes, resulting in the

present centre for shoe trade in the city in Hing ki Mandi¹⁰⁰. In 1937 a Shoe Worker's Union was established but it failed to take off. In 1941, the Agra Shoe Manufacturers' Association was formed. In 1945, again a union was formed which tried to bargain for remission of advances made to workers during World War II but this failed too, especially since the Partition affected the industry greatly¹⁰¹ (Lynch, 1969, p. 54).

About 10-12 small and medium tanneries came up in Agra after independence. The Mahajan Tannery, Wasan Tannery, Agra Tannery and Park Tannery were the prominent ones. Hazi Mohammad Isaaq, the owner of Park Industries had migrated from Bangladesh around the early 1980s and he established a tannery which became one of the biggest in the city. Kedarnath Wasan and Amar Nath Wasan, migrants from Sialkot, started the Agra Tannery. Later they split up and Kedarnath Wasan started the Wasan tannery. After the tanneries shut down in Agra, the Wasans have move to shoe-making becoming one of the biggest manufacturers in the city.

The first substantial order for footwear was received from Soviet Union in 1956 through the State Trading Corporation (STS) and this started a period of prosperity in the industry till the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991¹⁰². By this time, the industry was also facing a series of environmental litigations, which ultimately resulted in the closure of the tanneries in the city. This will be discussed in Chapter Four. The shoe industry also went through a tough before through the 1990s, due to low levels of mechanization, changing international markets and demands which they could not meet and lack of clear policy

¹⁰⁰ Anecdotes suggest that during the Mughal rule traders carrying *hing* (Asafoetida) from Afghanistan used to come to Hing in Mandi in Agra. Since their horses needed rest and recuperation after the long journey, several cobblers began frequenting the market in order to repair and make horse shoes for these traders. Subsequently, the *hing* trade declined but the market remained famous for its concentration of cobblers and leatherworkers.

¹⁰¹ Within the tanning industry, especially in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, Bhattacharya (2013) reports a series of protests and modes of struggle by the workers against the management through the early part of the twentieth century, on issues such as duration of work, dreadful work conditions and better wages. Similar mobilizations are not witnessed in UP.

¹⁰² Peter Knorringa (1999) argues that through the 1990s there was a sharp decline in the employment of workers.

initiatives from the government. It was only by beginning of 2000, when the industry is deregulated and denotified as a small scale industry that production picks up.

Apart from these large firms, shoe production mainly happened in small informal units scattered throughout the city¹⁰³. Lynch (1969, p. 40) describes how the market used to work in the decades right after independence. Shoe manufacturing used to happen on piece basis and markets were the places to gather new orders or to sell one's wares. In market spaces like Hing ki Mandi, dealers would occupy small designated spaces for a small fee and display their wares to prospective buyers. Lynch notes that four types of people would come to these markets – first were the producers who are either owners or craftsmen. Factory owners were further of two types – *naamewale* (contractors) and *daliawale* (basket men). Contractors would operate for the commission merchants or the factors. When a factor had a retailer who places an order for shoes, he would give the work to contractors. The contractor would organize a group of workers to make those shoes. The *daliawale* would produce the shoes without an order, bring them to the market and auction them to the commission merchant who bids the highest. The second type was the commission merchant or factor who is the middleman who buys from the producers and sells to the retailers. The third was the retailer (*vyapari*), who buys shoes from the stalls of the commission merchants. Last is the raw material supplier (*malwala*). Shoes produced by the larger organized units are generally sold directly to retailers by agents (Lynch, 1969, p. 47).

Until partition, Jatavs were the owners and producers of these smaller units, while Muslims were the contractors (*arhati*), distributors and sellers of raw materials, though some of them also owned units and were skilled craftsmen as

¹⁰³ A common refrain in the interviews was that “*Agra mein to har ghar mein joota banta tha*”, (Every house in Agra used to be a shoe unit).

well¹⁰⁴. This provided the Jatavs with some amount of economic independence and security (Lynch, 1969, pp. 35-6). Some of these Jatav '*bade aadmi*' (big men) were able to build houses and even own land in the urban areas while a majority of the community worked as *karigar* (craftsmen) in the industry (Lynch, 1969, p. 35). One of the most significant effects of the wealth and rising status was the creation a generation of Jatav men who were educated in either the Christian mission schools or those of the Arya Samaj. Consequently, various educational and organizational efforts started within the Jatav community¹⁰⁵.

These markets and trade were greatly reduced by the partition due to the exodus of Muslims (Lynch, 1969, pp. 35-6). Hindu refugees from Pakistan, colloquially referred to as 'Punjabis', took the place of the Muslim middlemen. The Punjabis were largely a trading community which possessed capital and acumen. They were thus able to buy at auction the stalls in the market vacated by the Muslims and set to work there (Lynch, 1969, p. 37). The Punjabis brought many changes in the shoe market which has today come to define the industry. These changes were ultimately detrimental to the Jatavs. First, they introduced the 'chit' or the 'slip' system of credit in the market, which replaced a cash economy¹⁰⁶. This

¹⁰⁴ There are divisions within the Jatav workers as well. Knorringa's (1999, p. 311) study in the Agra footwear industry revealed that the shoe producing Jatavs do not mix with the *chappal* (sandal) producing Jatavs.

¹⁰⁵ The Mission school in Hasanganj in Lucknow and St John's College in Agra produced many leaders such as Babu Ramcharanji and Khemchand Bohare respectively. In Agra, Manikchand Jatavaveer, Puranchand, Pyarelal Kureel and others started libraries, Ravidas temples, schools and hostels for the depressed classes, which helped an entire generation to gain education and improve their socio-economic conditions. Manikchand, who started his career as a teacher in Arya Samaj schools, formed the Jatav Mahasabha, along with Bohare and Yadavendu at Agra in 1912 and left the Arya Samaj in 1917. In 1917 the *Jatav Vir Mahasabha* came into being under Prabhutanand Vyas and Pandit Sunderlal Sagar (Pai, 2002: 45), followed by the *Jatav Pracharak Mandal* in 1924. (Lynch, 1969, p.69). The All-India Nishad Sabha was founded by Ramcharanji in 1920; the Lucknow Bharatiya Depressed Classes League formed in 1935 by Dharam Prakash of which Babu Jagjivan Ram was the General Secretary. The *Jatav Swyam Sevak Mandal* was founded in Agra by Manikchand in 1935. Many newspapers and periodicals were also started, the prominent among them being – Nishad Samachar published by Baby Ramcharanji, Visvamitra by Ramnarayan Yadavendu, Jivan by Manikchand, Adhikar and Manav Kalyan by Dharam Prakash. All of these came out in 1940s and 1950s.

¹⁰⁶ The artisans pay for raw materials in cash, while traders while buying footwear from these artisans give them a slip (*parchi*) which can be cashed in the next three months, by which time the shoes would have reached the retail market.

meant that for the Jatavs the flow of cash was stalled, suspicion of transactions and dealings now ran deep in the market, and they lost the control over transactions in the market which gave them security and independence.

Second, the Punjabis, who had already become factors, gradually came to acquire factories and become owners. The Jatavs who had till now enjoyed some autonomy over the trade again lost out to this change in ownership and the setup of formal industries where they were now simply workers¹⁰⁷. These changes also meant profound changes in status. Jatavs in Agra had carefully employed the association of their caste with leatherwork in order to substantiate their hold over the shoe industry. Lynch proposes that for Jatavs to take over the role of the distributor would have been tougher because of the 'untouchable' status (Lynch, 1969, p. 39).

In Agra, in a small socio-religious community called the Radhasoamis, interesting experiments with leatherwork were happening. The Radhasoamis, a community based on the principles of manual labour, environmental sustainability and a caste-less society. The Radhasoamis draw their membership from a variety of upper-caste and upper class groups¹⁰⁸. In the 1930s the Radhasoamis set up two tanneries for the manufacture of chrome leather – one on its campus in Dayalbagh and the other in Tajganj for the manufacture of bark tanned and sole leather and which used to run entirely on fallen hides. In 1968 the community had two factories at their colony, Dayalbagh– Dayalbagh Leather Goods Factory, which specializes in light and heavy footwear, and the other is known as Everyday Footwear Factory, which manufactures shoes by hand.

¹⁰⁷ Lynch writes about an interesting tradition of *gurus* in the shoe trade in Agra, which now seems to have been lost, except in small pockets in Dalit colonies. Lynch (1969, pp. 47-48) writes that young boys in their teenage would attach themselves to a guru or a teacher who could have been a contractor or a worker in some factory. The boy would help the guru in his piece work while being taught some skills of the trade. On Dusshera every year old pupils would return to their gurus with gifts of cloth, betel leaf, nut and *batasha* (sweet). Alongside there is a *mistri*, a master craftsman who has mastered all the techniques of shoemaking (Lynch, 1969, p. 48).

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed history and analysis of the Radhasoamis see Marks Jurgensmayer (1995).

4.3 Caste and Religion in Kanpur and Agra

There were four important movements amongst the Chamars in Kanpur and Agra, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which debated their ostensibly polluted caste status and the conditions of their employment as leatherworkers. Congress tried to involve workers from the Chamar, Kureel, Kori and other untouchable castes from the 1920s onward. In 1924 the Kanpur Hindu Sabha organized an Arya Swaraj Sabha, which set up schools in *achut mohallas*. The Hindu Sabha also set up libraries for Dalit children in Patkapur and Sadar Bazaar. Various organizations worked on the implicit assumption that these communities are unclean and thus distributed soap and *datuns* in the *achut mohallas*. The initial impetus to community self-reform comes from the Arya Samaj. The Samaj argues that untouchables were a part of the larger Hindu community and could be incorporated into the fold, after a process of *shuddhi*, purification. Taking on this idea of purification, several Chamar groups in these two cities started programs for better hygiene and sanitation. Simultaneously their association with polluted activities like leatherwork, midwifery and carcass removal also came under self-criticism and many Jatav and Chamar panchayats vowed to give up these activities.

In Kanpur, two Bhakti sects were gaining prominence as early as the 1870s. The first of these, Shiv Narayan Panth, mainly attracted Khatiks, who were vegetable vendors, bristle manufacturers and building contractors. Only the relatively richer contractor sub-caste was the follower of the Shiv Narayan Panth. Dhusiyas, cobblers and Jaisvaras who worked in the textile industries also joined this Panth¹⁰⁹ (Bellwinkel-Schempp, 2007, p. 2177). Kabir Panth had its adherents among the Kureels and Koris. Kureels are a Chamar sub-caste and in Kanpur,

¹⁰⁹ Briggs classifies dhusiyas and Jaisvars as sub-castes of Chamars. (Briggs, 1920, pp. 25, 30).

they were associated with leather manufacturing, industry, or trade. Koris were Hindu weavers and 'untouchables' as well.¹¹⁰

The Kabir Panthis followed strict rules of purity and pollution. Commensality and endogamy within the *panth* were preferred. The commandments of honesty, faithfulness, cleanliness, education and a self-reliant income were of great importance. They were vegetarians, forbade the intake of any intoxicants, and followed the doctrine of '*ahimsa*' (Bellwinkel- Schempp, 2007, p. 2178). Around 1900s, Sant Ravidas became increasingly popular in Kanpur and a number of Chamars started calling themselves *Raidasis*, which was a way to escape the insult in the name, 'Chamar'.

The disavowal of traditional occupations was however not so simple in practice. Though the link to traditional occupations helped these groups secure employment it also recreated the caste hierarchies in the urban centres as it prevented occupational mobility (Gooptu, 2001, pp. 5-6) and alternative avenues of employment were virtually non-existent. Educational opportunities were also missing for this group and thus the option for government jobs was closed. Occupational distinctions were coupled with spatial segregation in terms of the 'untouchables' residential settlement patterns. The 'untouchables' had lived on the village periphery; in towns, they similarly had no access to the residential areas of higher castes. This remains a feature of urban settlement till the present. Lynch refers to similar processes of rural to urban migration and occupancies of urban peripheries in Agra. Leatherwork thus continued to be one of the major urban occupations for mainly Jatavs. Simultaneously, critiques of the Arya Samaj idea of purification also started coming up. A significant alternative was provided by Ramcharan Kureel who had organised the Kureels in the 1920s. Kureel attributed the lower status of Chamars not to leatherwork but to the fact that skilled labour is not recognized in a caste society. He argued that while artisanal products made by the lower castes were widely used, people still did not want to

¹¹⁰ Briggs however, classifies both Koris and Kurils as sub-castes of Chamara (Briggs, 1920: 24-25). Joshi (2003) confirms that Koris were weavers.

touch the artisans themselves. Lynch mythology here. Unlike these other Chamar mythologies, Ramcharan glorified leatherwork. In his idea, all those who did manual work were Chamars, including Soviet leaders like Stalin and British Prime Minister Lloyd George (Joshi, 2003, p.251).

A major voice of opposition came from within the Arya Samaj itself. One of their recruits from the Chamar caste, 'Pandit Hariharananda" left the Samaj in order to form the Adi Hindu Mahasabha in 1925 which became one of the most serious opponents to the Samaj's idea of *shuddhi*¹¹¹. The Mahasabha adopted Ravidas as their icon and claimed the idea of the autochthonous origins of untouchables, who were defeated by the Aryans¹¹². His closest followers were the educated Dalits predominantly those in professions like contractors, shoe manufacturers, hide merchants and bristle manufacturers (Bellwinkel-Schempp, 2007, p. 2179). The Ravidas Chamar panchayats in Kanpur as well as various *Shivnarayani* and *Kabirpanthi* groups extended their support to the *Adi Hindu Sabha*. At the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad in 1928-29 a Mahotsav consisting of all *Adi Hindu panths* was organized (Gooptu, 2001, p. 159). Acchutanand also introduced the Ravidas *julus*

¹¹¹ Acchutanand was born, as Hiralal, in 1879 in a village called Umari in Mainpuri district in what is now called Uttar Pradesh. The family soon moved to a military cantonment where he received initial informal education. By the age of fourteen Hiralal was in the company of ascetics and had learned to read and write some Urdu and English in the cantonment (Singh, 2009). Hiralal joined the Arya Samaj at the age of 27 in 1905 and he changed his name to, 'Pandit Hariharanand'. One of his primary duties within the Samaj was to reconvert people to Hinduism. However, leading to differences with their ideology, Hariharanand left the Arya Samaj in 1917. Acchutananda explained his name by observing that the word *a chhuta* meant the one who is in a state of purity, defying conventional understanding of the term as untouchable. In fact, the word *sacchuta* for him meant the 'impure' (Khare, 1984, p. 83-84).

¹¹² Acchutanand instead proposed the autochthonous theory to explain the state of 'untouchables'. He claimed that the 'untouchables' were the highly civilized and peaceful original inhabitants of India who used to rule the country. They were subjugated and enslaved through the Aryan conquest. Khare has called this 'autochthonous radicalism' (Khare, 1984, p. 82). The Adi-Hindu movement was situated very well within the larger parameters of the Adi- Dharm and Adi-Andhra movements, which made similar claims of being the prior, rightful native, who was conquered and subjugated. Ambedkar's idea of the origin of 'untouchables' and of Dalits being different from the Hindus also follows a similar logic. These ideas met an internal opposition in the Jatav-Chamar's claim of being Kshatriya.

on Ravidas' *jayanti*. This procession was the first public arena activity of the Dalits in Kanpur (Bellwinkel– Schempp, 2007, p. 2178).

Under the influence of the Mahasabha, Ravidas Chamar panchayats of Kanpur and Lucknow resolved not to handle dead animals. The 1924-25 annual report of the Benaras Municipal Board states that the number of Chamars performing 'customary' sweeping and scavenging in households had declined dramatically, while there was a corresponding increase in the number of sweepers employed by the municipality. The Kanpur Mehtar *panchayat* refused to collect the customary *jhoothan*, *utran*, and *phatkan* from their patrons. Other caste panchayats denied holding of pilgrimages, observing expensive religious feasts, especially for Brahmin priests and elaborate observance of religious ceremonies. In addition, there were appeals to shun alcohol and adopt vegetarianism. However, the Sabha's effort to promote inter-dining among say the Chamars and the mehtars and acceptance *kaccha* food was not met with much enthusiasm. Gooptu notes however, that nowhere did the Adi-Hindu ideology give a radical critique of caste system itself, nor did it attack the binaries like purity-pollution and higher-lower status (Gooptu, 2001, pp. 161-163). By the 1930s, these activities of the Sabha had declined and the leaders of the Adi-Hindus began to realize that political participation and representation in institutions is necessary, being partly influenced by Ambedkar's acceptance that social justice can only be received by being a part of the representative institutions¹¹³.

The Jatavs in Agra on the other hand had a completely different political and social trajectory. As a result of economic prosperity and political linkages, the Jatavs in Agra and neighbouring areas started to claim Kshatriya status¹¹⁴. Two

¹¹³ In 1928, during the visit of the Indian Statutory Commission under Sir John Simon, when the Congress called for a complete boycott of the Commission, the Adi-Hindu leaders in fact proposed to present the Commission with a Charter of their demands for separate electorates and to highlight their problems. When the Simon Commission arrived in Lucknow on November 28, 1928, the local Adi Hindu Sabha staged a street play and held a demonstration at the Charbagh Railway station to present the demands of the 'untouchables'.

¹¹⁴ They used the *Lomash Ramayana* and the writings like *Gyan Samudra* (1887) by Swami Atma Ram, to claim that the Jatav *vansh* is traced from the *gotra* of Shiva and thus they are legitimately Kshatriya (Lynch, 1969, p.68). It was then suggested that the Jatavs were survivors of the ancient

effluent Jatav men, Seth Sita Ram and Seth Man Singh, organized the Jatav Committee of Agra City, which convened a panchayat of Jatavs from all over the Agra City, and it resolved to forbid the eating of beef and buffalo (Lynch, 1969, p.68). In 1939, the *Jatav Yuvak Mandal* proposed the adoption of Vedic or Arya Samajist rituals in order to support their claim to the Kshatriya status, in effect directly targeting the Mahasabha¹¹⁵ (Lynch, 1969, p. 80-1).

However, a demand for an upward movement to the Kshatriya caste clashed directly with the status of Jatavs as leatherworkers. This occupational status in the first place had provided them with the finances and social capital to even iterate their demand. Caught in this paradox, by the 1930s the Jatavs in Agra had started a campaign to be included as a caste separate from the Chamars in the census. This however was not accepted. After the formation of the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in Agra in 1944-45, the the *Jatav Mahasabha* in Agra, the Chamar *Mahasabha* in Kanpur, the *Adi-Hindu Mahasabha* in Allahabad merged into the SCF. The Jatavs thus now began demanding reservations in government jobs based on their lower-caste status. In the 1946 Legislative Assembly elections for the reserve seats, the Jatavs split into those who wanted to support the Congress and those who wanted to remain with the SCF (Pai, 2003, p. 54).

In 1956, following Ambedkar, most Jatavs converted to Buddhism. This was followed by the formation of the Republican Party of Agra in 1958, as a branch of the All-India Republican Party and as the successor of the SCF¹¹⁶. Kanpur

war between Brahman Parshuram and the Kshatriyas whom he wanted to eradicate. Consequently, the Jatavs disguised themselves as shoemakers in order to escape Parshuram (Lynch, 1969, p. 69). The Jatavs also included identical *gotras* and such Kshatriya-like ceremonies as shooting cannon at weddings and the use of the bow and arrow at the birth-ritual (Lynch, 1969, p. 74-75).

¹¹⁵ Lynch (1969, p.76) also reports that Swami Acchutanand may have been driven out of Agra by the leaders of the Jatav-Kshatriya movement because of his radical doctrines like his advocacy of inter-caste marriage among lower-castes, which went against the Jatav demand for separate caste status. Academic works on the Jatav-Chamar distinctions and their social distancing is largely lacking. However, a short story by Suraj Badiya, is indicative in this respect. '*Gufayein*' published in *Dalit Asmita*, Oct-Dec, 2010, Vol 1, suggests that inter-marriage between Jatavs and Chamars maybe a social taboo on both sides.

¹¹⁶ The Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed in 1956 again by a small class of educated and urban Dalit leaders as a successor to the UPSCF. The RPI undertook many protest movements in

witnessed the movement to Buddhism, slightly later. The primary reasons were that during the 1950s and 1960s there was industrial expansion in Kanpur, coupled with social mobility among the second-generation of educated Dalits. Many of those who had been members and supporters of the *Adi Hindu Sabha* first joined the SCF and became members of the RPI later (Bellwinkel-Schempp, 2007, p. 2179)¹¹⁷. By the end of 1960s, the RPI had divided into several small groups some of which merged with the Congress (Pai, 2002, p. 76-78) thus effectively ending an autonomous Dalit political movement. It would only be in the 1980-90s with the rise of the BAMCEF and the BSP that Jatavs in Agra and Chamars elsewhere in UP would become significant political actors.

There were other influences on the Chamars in the post-independence period. Narayan (2011) talks about the Nara-Maweshi movement, which took place sporadically, between 1955 and 1985, in five districts of UP – Allahabad, Varanasi, Mirzapur, Sant Ravidas Nagar (formerly Bhadohi) and Kaushambi. It was mainly led by Chamars, who were determined to leave their ‘traditional’ occupations – namely cutting the ‘*nara*’ – the umbilical cord, which is mainly done by Chamar women and picking up of dead cattle – *maweshi*, which was done by the men of the same caste. The narratives from some villages show how the non-Chamar Dalit castes joined forces with the upper and middle castes to force the Chamars to continue their ‘traditional occupation’ (Narayan, 2011, p. 47-8). These contested accounts seem rather flattened out now. In several interviews, I asked the Dalit respondents about this interesting phase of the

the mid-60s against failure of the government to distribute wasteland. Other issues like the implementation of the Minimum Wages Act 1948, improvement of urban slums and state control of food-grains. However, electorally the part remained a marginal success, with a maximum of 10 seats and about 4 per cent of the votes in 1962 and 1967 elections, which dropped to 2 seats in 1969 and 3.5 per cent of the votes. The social base of the party largely remained restricted to Chamars, among the Dalits in UP.

¹¹⁷ Perhaps, it is relevant to mention here that, Pai (2002) refers to how this phase of the movement in United Provinces was largely reformist, rather than being radically anti-caste. Further, these movements were limited to the urban-based, educated, depressed classes in the towns of United Provinces, like the Jatav, Chamars, and Kurils. Mobilization in the rural areas did not happen until the late colonial period. However, Pai notes that a significant exception was the spontaneous and rural-based anti-begari movement of 1946 and 1948 in which depressed classes participated in the eastern districts of the Province.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The younger generation is mostly not aware of this rich history except in rare cases. This generation was raised in relative prosperity and some members of this group even got a chance to achieve higher education in universities abroad. Many have also moved out of leatherwork. The older generation recalls of this period through the stories heard from their parents. Some older respondents were part of formations like the RPI but have given up now. Larger national politics has stepped in to take the place of these local, community based political groupings. Parties like the BSP now homogenously represent the complex terrains of lower caste politics in the state.

Outside the factories, caste panchayats have influence over the Jatavs but this does not seem to have much relevance for their work lives. The great movements of upward mobility led by the Jatavs in the region through the 1930s were in part responsible for their present characterization as industrial workers. But this mobility was not acknowledged within these industries, and Jatavs by and large remained leatherworkers even in the factories.

On the one hand, the field of leatherwork has changed drastically from the conditions described in this chapter. Large scale multinational production and retail have come into the industry, creating the impression of a modern enterprise where caste and religion does not seem to hold much sway. Foreign brands have also come into the market, further giving the impression of a consumer industry which is fast changing. With the intervention of China in the footwear market, the economies of scale have changed completely in favour of polyurethane (PU) or the colloquially known 'foam', which has replaced leather in the domestic markets. This has been an attractive alternative to expensive leather, which is no longer a viable raw material in the low-cost domestic market, where fashion trends change quickly and durability is no longer a prerequisite. The demand for genuine leather is also quite high, especially in the export markets and the niche upper-class buying segments domestically. The change in the material used for making shoes has had important impacts on the workers impression of their work. This will be discussed in Chapter Four. The government

has also shown renewed interest in ‘modernizing’ the industry, and a series of ‘Leather Parks’ are supposed to come up during the Twelfth Plan Period. One such proposed park in Agra has stubbornly refused to take off. Proposed by the UP State Industrial Development Corporation (UPSIDC), the park was supposed to function as a unified hub for small and mid-scale leather garments, footwear and accessory production. Although land has been identified for the same near Kiraoli on the Agra-Jaipur Highway, the project has come up against many hurdles, starting from land acquisition to the reluctance of the industry to shift so far away from the city centres. On the other hand, leatherwork has not changed at all if we look at the tanning industry where even when multinational intervention has happened, the work continues to attract prejudices and biases.

Conclusion

Since the leather industry is an extremely closed and guarded space, suspicious of any ‘outsiders’, during field interviews, I would frequently employ the snowballing method for determining potential interviewees¹¹⁸. My current respondents would thus provide the potential respondents with a short introduction about the researcher and also her work. This would often happen in front of me, over a telephonic or personal conversation. An interesting pattern began to emerge in these rounds of introduction. This research was mostly characterized by the inhabitants of the leather industry, in the following words,

“Aapse, yeh job hi poochen aap bata dena. Waise inhe zyada technical information nahin chahiye. Bas kuch social issues par baat karni hai.” (She does not require much technical details about the industry but rather wants to talk about its social aspects).

¹¹⁸ Snowballing sampling is a method of non-probably sampling where existing subjects are asked to provide access to potential subjects.

This allocation of caste to the realm of the social is an extremely cunning move. Even a cursory glance at leather technology books and industrial training manuals will confirm how surgically the 'social' has been removed from these discourses. Along with the social, the uncomfortable realities of caste and religious discrimination have also thus been made invisible. Equally frequent, was the assertion, especially amongst the owners, that there is no caste or religious nature to the industry. The predominance of Jatav and Muslim workers was almost always attributed to their exceptional skill at leatherwork. Consequently, most informants, including workers and supervisors also maintained, "*Ab to yeh kaam sab kaam kar rahe hain*" (Now everyone works in this industry). These statements are extremely important for understanding the complex way in which caste operates within the industry.

It is not as if, the industry is not aware of its own fault lines, beneath the veneer of the carefully constructed distinction between the social and the industrial or the economic. It was through one of these interviews in Kanpur, that I came across Avinash Parekh, a Brahmin hide dealer, whose engagement with the industry provides a counter-narrative to the neat separation of caste from the industry. From about the eighties, Parekh was involved in the chemical business and used to import chemicals for the leather industry. Parekh tells me that this was an exciting business since the European Union and other importing countries are specific about the manufacturing process and norms would change regularly. Parekh would have to keep abreast with the latest technology and ensure an uninterrupted supply to his client tanneries in Kanpur and Unnao. Through this he also made contacts in the industry, especially amongst the Muslim tannery owners and hide dealers. It was through these relationships that he decided to get into the business of importing hides to India.

Large shoe and garment export houses frequently work with imported hides which are of a better quality and larger surface area. Parekh began consulting within his business associates as to the feasibility of this venture. Parekh says, "My associates – both Hindu and Muslim just could not understand why I, a

Brahmin, would willingly leave such a clean and scientific profession to do this dirty work related to hides?”. Opposition also came from within the family, where his parents and wife refused to support him in this process. Parekh understood that the change in his business would make it difficult for his family to move around in their social circles. Ultimately he went ahead with the import business but had to constantly adjust to his ‘changed status’, amongst colleagues and acquaintances. However business was not easy to manage either. Hides usually arrive at the Mumbai port and have to be unloaded from the ships, loaded into trucks and then transported to Kanpur. Parekh informs that none of the dockyard workers, or truck drivers would be willing to be engaged in this process. Even the trade unions were unable to interfere in this regard. Today, after almost a decade in the hide trade Parekh has managed to keep on his payrolls a dedicated group of workers and drivers who work at a premium.

While the construction of a market and modern production techniques was able to produce a demand for leather, desire was still a difficult enterprise. In order to make leather desirable in the Indian context, the mark of caste pollution had to be effaced completely. Even with the entry of co-caste individuals into the industry, the larger perception of leather and the leather industry continues to be ‘*yeh ganda kaam hai*’ (This is dirty work). Modernity and industrialization thus created a sanitized industrial discourse based on a secular and casteless rendering of public space and ethics. However, the object of leather was never secularizing, sanitized or detached from its caste provenance. Thus there exists now, a modern and scientific industrial discourse around a highly sensual and caste-marked object, which exudes the odours of caste, dispelling industry’s claim of deodourization.

We started the chapter with a discussion on the question of caste and modernity, especially in the context of a modern industrial discourse which is based on untouchable labour. We discussed how the variegated nature of modernity and its attributes such as industrialization, urbanization, education, social mobility and (in)visibility of caste have been understood within the academic and

experiential dimensions of caste. It is the veneer of this modernity which today allows the industry to claim that there is no caste or even religion in its constitution. However, narratives like that of Parekh complicate this position, to show the traces of caste in the industry. Parekh's narrative also brings to the fore the complicated relationship of the modern to the domestic, to the familial and the affective. The question of the domesticity of odours will be taken up again in Chapter Four.

The historical narratives which followed in the subsequent sections provided a context to this modernity. It provided rich histories and conflicting narratives to the object of leather. And finally, it created an industry around this object, which simultaneously depends on and denies its polluted nature and provenance. The historical trajectories of the Jatavs and Chamars brought forth the impossibility of distancing with this object. On the other hand, we saw how the lure of leather brings in non-Untouchable communities such as the Punjabis into the business. Thus we began with the traditional idea of the Chamar as the 'leatherworker', and towards the end of the chapter we witness an expansion of the category, to include members of the upper-castes who while not touching leather, nonetheless produce it, own it and sell it. However, I argue that they also have to smell leather and it is this odour of leather which pushes them towards the boundaries of their caste status and close to being a leatherworker, as well. In Chapter Four we will discuss their habitus with leather in greater detail and also build on the idea of the 'leatherworker'.

We also caught glimpses of the Muslim interaction with the industry, though not in much detail since this remains an under-researched area. However in Chapter Three and Four, we will delve deeper into the Muslim interaction with leather through ethnographic interviews conducted in the industry. The chapter is concluded with a brief insight into the question of caste and industry in order to prepare the ground for the next three chapters which examines this industry in detail. This insight is necessary for two reasons. First, we must locate both industry and caste in existing academic literature to trace the contours of this

question which will provide a framing for the subsequent discussion. Second, and more importantly, we must argue for the return of sensuousness to the industrial, to the economic. For it is through the sensual that caste manifests in the industry.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SENSE OF THE ANIMAL: SLAUGHTER AND FLAYING

In May, 2016, as shoppers in Bangkok, Thailand, walked into a popular mall and into what seemed like any regular high-end leather goods retail outlet, they were in for a surprise. Some of them found blood on their hands and feet after trying on gloves and shoes, while other opened leather handbags to find them lined with flesh and blood. The biggest shock was to come inside a crocodile leather hand bag, which had a beating heart filling its main cavity. The retail outlet was actually the part of an elaborate campaign by People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in order to draw attention to the cruelty perpetuated towards animals in the process of making leather (Cherrington, 2016).

It is very rarely that leather is thought of as skin, as a part of an animal body. The distancing of leather from its animal provenance is crucial to its life as a commercial product. The consumer goods industry portrays leather in very specific ways such as it being “natural”, or “organic” as against the synthetic polyurethane (PU) leather substitutes. The animal origins of leather are mostly never emphasised explicitly. Even textbooks on shoemaking typically begin with the process of obtaining the best cuts from tanned skins/hides. The animal is singularly missing from these references. Outside these formal texts, it is in the margins of conversations that the animal comes up. A tannery owner in Unnao told me, “*Ultimately leather is skin. Like our skin, it has hair, pores and textures. And like our skin, it also breathes.*¹¹⁹”

Environmentalists and animal rights activists have often created discomfort by foregrounding and making apparent the animal origins of leather¹²⁰. The

¹¹⁹ Interview with a tannery owner in Kanpur, October, 2014.

¹²⁰ Over the years many animal rights activists have smeared themselves in fake blood in public spaces in order to depict the cruelty caused to animals due to meat consumption and use of animal skins. See <http://www.thelocal.es/20151207/in-pics-protesters-strip-for-blood-soaked-anti-leather-demo>. (Accessed on 9 March, 2016.) Recently, in September, 2015, protesters staged

invocation of life – blood and beating heart – stands in strong contrast to death which marks the beginning of the origins of leather. With this event of death, the animal is thought of as ceasing too. The industry manuals on leathermaking thus usually started with the image and description of the flayed skin, rather than the animal itself. However, despite this distancing, the chapter argues that the animal has a powerful presence in the industry.

The animal exists as the fine lines, as the grain of leather, it exists as that authentic texture which means that no two pieces can be the same, and it exists in that characteristic odour of leather which marks it out as authentic. During an interview with the manager of a shoe factory in Kanpur, he points me out to a pile of light brown tanned leather, waiting to be cut into appropriate shapes. “Can you tell me whether they are genuine or fake?” he asks. I touch the surface and can feel the grain of the skin under my fingers. As I look across the large spread of the hide, I can see discolouration, patches of different shades. I turn the hide around to check the margins for traces of animal fibres which remain even after the tanning is complete. Through many rounds of field interviews, I had been told that these are the signs of genuine leather. Finally I bent down to catch a sniff of that familiar burnt, musky odour of finished leather. But I am not sure whether the odour is arising from this particular skin or from the factory in general which is filled with tanned leathers. I tell that manager that it is genuine. A big smile breaks out on his face as he tells me that this is a fake, freshly imported from China. China, having previously flood the market with low-cost PU footwear and ‘foam’ leather, is now introducing fake leather with the fine lines, discolouration and even odour of genuine leather, the manager informs me.

It is the animal body which brings together the fake and the genuine into an imitative dialogue with each other. The animal provenance of leather causes discomfort and it also creates desire. This chapter is about the animal of the

an ‘Open Slaughterhouse’ in Paris where fake blood smeared naked bodies were sprawled around public spaces, and some of them even hanging upside down, in a gesture symbolic of animal carcasses hanging in slaughterhouses. See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3250315/Bloody-protest-against-animal-holocaust-Campaigners-want-meat-BANNED-cover-fake-gore-sprawl-Paris-square.html> (Accessed on 9 March, 2016).

leather industry and examines two crucial processes/tropes through which the animal ends and leather begins - slaughter and flaying. I say, processes/tropes, because slaughtering and flaying are as much material and physical processes as they are powerful symbols of domination and dismemberment. In 2014, Harvard's Houghton Library confirmed that a book in its collection, *'Des Destinees de L'ame'* by Arsene Houssaye was bound in human skin. Known as anthropodermic bibliopeggy, the process of binding books with human skin was common practice till about the nineteenth century and forms a part of the larger phenomenon of tanning human skin. Books were bound in human skin for a variety of reasons. Anatomy texts could be bound in the skin of cadavers which had been dissected, people could request favourite books to be bound in their skin after their death, often judicial proceedings or confessions of criminals were bound in the skin of the convicted person. Flaying, of course was a common punishment till very late. What is the difference between binding a book with human skin as against the widely practiced binding by sheep or goat skin? The difference lies in the imposition of dominance of the human over animal and over lesser humans.

There have been great debates in philosophy and history over the separation of the animal and the human. This human anxiety of not just conquering nature, but also maintaining a rigid separation between itself and nature, including the animal, forms a dominant trope of understanding the human subject. One rather effective way in which this has been done is through the acts of consumption which establish the human superiority over the natural and the animal worlds. Slaughtering is perhaps the most common way in which this dominance is asserted every day in countless instances.

The predominance of the animal or the animal-like poses a constant threat to the precarious idea of being human. Thus there has always existed, in history, 'an animal like other', dominance over who is necessary for the sustenance of the idea of the human. Women, adivasis, untouchables, Blacks, the mad and the

disabled have at different points been assigned an animal like nature. “Women are the forbidden taste, the mysterious smell, the dangerous touch”, writes Classen (1998, p. 1). She goes on further to quote from an eighteenth century source on slavery, where the author, Edward Long, claims that, “Africans’ faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less their commerce with the other sexes; in these acts they are as libidinous and shameless as monkeys” (Classen, 1998, p. 67). We have previously discussed the relationship between hierarchy of senses and animality. Thus those closer to the animal were also thought of as having an animal-like sensorium – an enhanced ability to smell, feel and taste. We have also discussed how various animal odours were understood within the different historical and philosophical contexts. Not all animal odours and affects were necessarily undesirable and some even produced purity and pleasure. However, two large trends impact that way in which we understand the human-animal relationship for this work. The first of these is the way in which modernity and the consequent ordering of urban spaces and bodies happens. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, cities were increasingly being organized according to sanitarian ideas, leading to a separation between the animal and the human worlds. Further, the animal-like was also being tolerated to a lesser degree.

For instance, we discussed in Chapter One how the attitudes around musk changed in France around this time. It was not only that animals and animal-like existences were dirty and odorous, but the very idea of being human and human perception was also shifting. Rationality, individualism and distance were the hallmarks of this shift in the human and consequently the animal and the animal-like, which stood for desire, irrationality and closeness was also to be regulated strictly. The ensuing discussion on slaughterhouse regulations will build on this argument.

The second idea which was simultaneously in operation, in northern India was building up the sacrality of one particular animal – the cow. The affective and the emotive charge around the question of the cow had a complicated relationship to

the human-animal question. Within sections of the Hindu population, the question of separation of the cow from their habitus was a difficult one. The cow was not just an animal presence, but was in fact a manifestation of the divine. Controlling, disciplining and ordering the divine was, and still is, a most contentious task for the state. However, one of the biggest threats to the cow came from the Muslim slaughterer, and thus the state's control of slaughterhouses, sale of meat and also its consumption suited the larger political desires of some sections of the Hindus. This gives rise to a complex situation for the community, which is caught between the desire for regulation and that of maintaining divinity. A further complication is added with the presence of large Dalit populations who also slaughter animals, eat their flesh and work with their skins, bones and hooves. Leather, a waste product of the slaughtering industry, is thus caught in the affectual overflow of this complex debate over the animal.

Following this framework, this chapter is organized around the two registers of life and death, arguing that proximity with the live animal and that with the dead creates different kinds of affects for human bodies and perceptions. The chapter begins by examining the debates around the live cow and then moves on to discuss the death of the animal through slaughter and flaying, bringing into analysis, the slaughterer and the Chamar, the flayer. The slaughter coming from the Muslim communities and the Khatik slaughterers are the producer of the raw material for leather. Working in formal and informal slaughter houses they first kill the animal for producing meat and the hide/skin is sent away to tanneries. Butchering thus establishes the first act of domination over the animal, away from the care economy of cattle rearing. And this disruption of the affective relationship with the animal is crucial for the production and consumption of leather¹²¹.

¹²¹ Here I do not mean that the butcher is not involved in an affective economy around the animal. In fact there are instances where butchering old and sick animals has been regarded as an act of care. See Devika (2015).

As discussed earlier, the traditional leatherworking Chamar sometimes performed all the tasks from flaying to production of shoes. With changes in rural political economy as well as employment of many Chamars in leather factories and other places, these functions split up. Alongside, many Chamar families gave up these defiling occupations due to decisions taken by respective caste panchayats. As a result, operations such as flaying are now increasingly being done by castes lower than the Chamar. The case of one such flayer will be discussed in detail in this chapter. However there are many Chamars who continue with these occupations, in the absence of other employment opportunities.

There exists a hierarchy amongst the slaughterer and the flayer as well. *Murdhari* – flesh and skin from animals which are fallen – that is, have died from natural causes are considered to be of a lower quality than those which come from slaughtering – called *halali*. While considered of a lower quality, *murdhari* skin is still processed quite routinely in the leather industry. Looked at in one way, every slaughterer is also a flayer – animals will be skinned after slaughtering in any regular abattoir operation. Traditional flayers however, are not always slaughterers, since they deal with dead animals. The flayer does not get to establish a relationship of dominance over the live animal body. Death takes away the possibility of establishing distance and the carcass flayer and remover almost becomes one with the carcass. Thus flayers are marked with a pollution of a very different kind as compared to the slaughterers.

Rizwan Qureshi, a hide dealer in Halim market in the Chamanganj locality of Kanpur says, “*Chamde ki haisiyat ban gayi hai*”¹²², (The status of leather has increased). According to Rizwan, since meat consumption has increased greatly in the last fifteen years or so, it has boosted the supply of *halali* hides, improving the hide business vastly. Consequently, the quality of leather in the market has also improved vastly, due to better quality hides. One can immediately identify

¹²² Interview conducted in Kanpur, January, 2015

how the skin has been obtained – *murdhari* is removed as an entire skin from the head and is thus bigger, while in *halali* the neck cut is different. “*Halali chamda apne aap bolta hai*” (Leather obtained from live slaughter is immediately distinguished as superior), asserts Rizwan. Fallen skins are riddled with various defects especially arising from the fact that the dead animal must have been dragged to be disposed of.

Death is perhaps on the most universal polluting substances in our societies. The adequate and quick disposal of dead bodies – human and animal alike has been the preoccupation of many religious and societal codes and norms. While killing of animals has invoked strong passions, the disposal of a dead animal, is considered to be much more degrading. The disposal of the dead body has traditionally fallen in the hands of the Doms and Chandals (in the case of humans) and the Chamars and Bhangis (in the case of animals), who also additionally perform the skinning and salting procedures. The pollution of the dead body seems to reside permanently in these bodies – it cannot be washed away or purified as a house after death, or as the bodies of mourners taking part in the funereal rituals. Slaughtering and flaying, located between a living animal and the object of leather, are thus also operations which are considered the most dirty, offensive and as a nuisance¹²³. It is in these spaces that the pollution of caste is the most visible and odoriferous.

1. The Odours of the Sacred and the Dead

India has one of the largest bovine¹²⁴ populations in the world which adds significantly to the economy of the country especially for its agrarian

¹²³ I am using this term in the sense in which Awadhendra Sharan (2014) uses it to define trades like slaughtering which were termed as a ‘nuisance’ under the colonial administrative regime.

¹²⁴ The word ‘bovine’ comes from the Latin ‘*bos*’ and ‘*bovinus*’ which means ‘ox’. In the biological classification system the, family ‘Bovidae’ and the subfamily ‘Bovinae’, consists of domestic cattle

population¹²⁵. According to the 2012 Livestock Census, India has 190.9 million cattle and 108.7 million buffalo which accounts for roughly 300 million bovine population including yaks and *mithuns* (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 3). In Uttar Pradesh the cattle population stands at 19.5 million and the buffalo at 30.6 million (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 105).

India is also one of the largest producers of milk in the world with a production of 137.7 million tonnes in the year 2013-14¹²⁶ (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 4). On an average in 2013-14, the exotic/cross breed cows produced 6.78 kg of milk per day, while the indigenous cow stood at 2.50 kg per day and the buffalo produced 4.91 kg milk each day (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 5). Milk production stood at 102.6 million tonnes at the end of the Tenth Plan (2006-07) and rose to 127.9 million tonnes at the end of the Eleventh Plan (2011-12). Milk production during 2012-13 and 2013-14 is 132.4 million tonnes and 137.7 million tonnes respectively with an annual growth rate of 3.54% and 3.97% respectively¹²⁷ (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 4).

(including cow, bull and ox) and buffalos (including species such as water buffalo, Wild Asian water buffalo and African buffalo). The term 'cattle' denotes the species *Bos Taurus* which includes the adult calf bearing female 'cow', the adult female before having a calf 'heifer', the adult male 'bull' and the castrated male 'ox' which is primarily used for draught purposes. Young ones of both sexes are called calves. The *mithun* and the yak are also included under Bovinae.

¹²⁵ According to NSSO 66th Round Survey (July 2009 – June 2010), total number of workers in farming of animals is 20.5 million as per usual status (principal status plus subsidiaries status irrespective their principal activity status). Farmers of marginal, small and semi-medium operational holdings (area less than 4 ha) own about 87.7% of the livestock (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 3)

¹²⁶ This includes milk produced by cattle, buffalo, goats and sheep.

¹²⁷ Milk production in absolute terms has seen a consistent increase since 1980-81, though the yearly rate of increase has varied across the years, with the period of the Sixth Plan (1980-81 to 1985-86) registering the sharpest annual increase of 7.85%, with an absolute increase of 12.4 million tonnes over five years. The annual growth rate fell to 4.50% during the Seventh Plan period (1985-86 to 1990-91) though the milk production increased by about 10 million tonnes in absolute terms over the five years (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 4).

Meat production has also registered a consistent absolute increase over the years. It stood at 2.3 million tonnes at the end of Tenth Five Year Plan (2006-07) and rose to 5.5 million tonnes at the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2011-12). Meat production in the beginning of Twelfth Plan (2012-13) was 5.9 million tonnes which has been further increased to 6.2 million tonnes in 2013-14. The highest spike (21.74% per year) in meat production was seen between 2005-06 and 2010-11 with a consistent downfall since then, resting at 5.08% annual growth in 2013-14 (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, 2014-15, p. 6). The average yield of meat per animal in 2013-14 was 104.27 kg for cattle and 119.59 kg for buffalo. Beef, as the 'common man's diet', is significantly the cheapest meat product available in the country (Chigateri, 2008, p.17). The Food Balance Sheet for India in 2005 indicates that in terms of tonnage, 'bovine' meat is the most highly-produced and -consumed meat product after fish (Chigateri, 2008, p. 17).

In terms of the Indian leather production, the most important resource is the buffalo. Buffalo is found in relatively large numbers in the Indian subcontinent and consequently, India and Bangladesh specialize in buffalo leather, which is of a tough and durable variety. India is the largest exporter of buffalo leather in the world. The share of the Indian cow is significantly less in the industry due to two major reasons. First, cow population and quality is significantly higher in the United States and parts of South America, which are also the world leaders in the production of the soft and supple cow leather. Second, the Indian cow is significantly shorter in size and does not mostly fit the international size requirements¹²⁸.

In terms of the political discourse on the other hand, the cow is a much more potent and powerful symbol being associated with the Hindu nation since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially in north India (Gupta, 2001, p. 4295). Cattle have significant symbolic value, being a part of several

¹²⁸ Interview with Puran Dawar, President of the Agra Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Chamber, Agra, June, 2014.

religious and mythological discourses especially within the Hindu social and religious cosmologies¹²⁹. While the cow thus holds symbolic value for the Brahmin, for other caste groups, like the Yadavs¹³⁰, milch cattle is primarily a source of material wealth. They have also utilised the symbolism around the cow to forge a religious-communitarian identity, especially around the figure of the cow-herd god, Krishn. Cattle, in general are also important for prominent land owning communities like the Jats and for the pastoralist groups. The value of cattle lies in its productive and symbolic capacity. Within cattle, however, the cow is especially significant due to its perceived sacrality and its relationship with the politics of the Hindu communal self-fashioning.

The figure of the '*gau-mata*', the cow as the mother, was employed quite rigorously to foster a sense of Hindu community and nation through the Cow Protection Movement, the *gau-rakshini* sabhas and through the identification of the nation as the *gau-mata*. The politics of the cow resulted in deeply antagonistic relations between not just the Hindus and the Muslims but also, and significant for this work, between Hindus and Dalits like the Chamar groups in the United Provinces¹³¹.

¹²⁹ Apart from its symbolic value, cattle also hold economic worth throughout the world. The term 'cattle' in fact comes from the Anglo-Norman '*catel*', which is a derivation from the Medieval Latin '*capitale*', which means 'the principle sum of money or capital'. *Capitale* is derived from the Latin, '*caput*' which means 'head'. 'Cattle' thus meant movable personal property such as livestock, as against immovable property like land which was bought and sold along with the roaming wild animals and smaller animals such as chickens. The word 'cattle' is also a variant of '*chattel*', also a unit of personal property. The earlier Old English used the term '*feoh*', meaning 'cattle property', from which we derive the word 'fee'. The word 'cow' comes from the Anglo-Saxon, '*cū*' (plural '*cȳ*'), from the Common Indo-European '*g^wōus*', meaning 'a bovine animal'. The plural *cȳ* became *ki* or *kie* in Middle English giving '*kine*' – an archaic English usage. A close parallel is the Persian '*gāv*' and the Sanskrit '*go*'.

¹³⁰ For a detailed analysis on the sociality and politics of the Yadavs, see Lucia Michelluti (2004)

¹³¹ The Cow Protection Movement has been analyzed in detail by various scholars. Gupta (2001) looks at the way in which the nation was associated with feminine symbols of Bharat Mata, *Matri Bhatia* (Mother-tongue) and *gau-mata* by the nationalist movement in the twentieth century. Sharddha Chigateri (2008) on the other hand examines the implications of the sacrality of the cow for the Dalit groups in the country. Peter Robb (1986) provides an analysis of the politics around the cow, with regard to the British intervention in the social and political scenario in India. Anand Yang (1980) focuses on the instances of 'cow related' killings of the nineteenth century in the context of the complicated dynamics between the Arya Samaj, the Hindu and the

One of the most significant political interventions in this regard has been made by Ambedkar, who complicates the debate on meat consumption by mapping it onto caste. In his 1948 text, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* Ambedkar argues that while “no Hindu community, however low, will touch cow’s flesh”, the untouchable communities have always had a relationship with the dead cow. Some eat her flesh remove the skin, some manufacture articles out of her skins and bones. Within the Hindu community, Ambedkar argues there are three categories of people – the *Shakahari* (vegetarian) Brahmins and the *Mansahari* (who eat flesh) divided into those who eat flesh but not beef (non- Brahmins) and those who eat beef (Untouchables). Thus the Touchables whether they are vegetarians or flesh-eaters are united in their objection to eating cow’s flesh¹³². Ambedkar finds evidence in verse L. 12-13 of the Veda Vyas Smriti, as quoted in Kane’s History of Dharma Shashtra (Vol II, Part I, p 71).

Interrogating this taboo against cow flesh, Ambedkar argues that it is not vegetarianism but the selective “nausea” against cow flesh and the sacrality of the cow, which is troubling and needs to be explained. Till a certain point in history, Hindus, including the Brahmins used to consume both meat and beef. Citing the Vedas, Sutras and the Manusmriti and relying on historical evidence Ambedkar argues that cow sacrifice and beef eating formed a crucial part of Hindu rituals like *yajnas*¹³³. Brahmins were not only beef-eaters but they were

Muslim communities. Placing the concept of the ‘sacred symbol’ at the center of her analysis, Sandria Frietag (1980), looks at the use of these symbols, amongst them cows, for the construction of the Hindu community through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Surinder Jodhka and Murli Dhar examine the relationship between the politics around the cow and caste in the context of the Jhajjar killings in Haryana in 2002.

¹³² Ambedkar writes, “The *Charmakars* (Cobbler), the *Bhatta* (Soldier), the *Bhilla*, the *Rajaka* (washerman), the *Puskara*, the *Nata* (actor), the *Vrata*, the *Meda*, the *Chandala*, the *Dasa*, the *Swapaka*, and the *Kokila* – these are known as *Antyajas* as well as others who eat cow’s flesh”.

¹³³ Ambedkar argues, “That the Aryans of the Rig Veda did kill cows for purposes of food and ate beef is abundantly clear from the Rig Veda itself. In Rig Veda (X. 86.14) Indra says: “They cook for one 15 plus twenty oxen.” The Rig Veda (X. 91.14) says that for Agni were sacrificed horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams. The Taittiriya Brahmana lays down that a dwarf ox is to be chosen for sacrifice to Vishnu, a drooping horned bull with a blaze on the forehead to Indra, a black cow to Pushan; a red cow to Rudra. Cows were also killed when guests arrived at home and this was

also butchers, asserts Ambedkar¹³⁴. Ambedkar's arguments reinforce the strong relationship between polluted objects, derogatory occupations and the status of permanently defiled bodies. More importantly they go onto demonstrate how the caste system invests objects with material and symbolic meanings which then come to have important implications for the bodies immersed in this system. This mapping of the values of pure and impure upon gustatory and occupational practices acquires a special charge due to the power matrix of the caste system. It is this matrix which spills over to the production of the object of leather as well.

In a broad historical sweep, D.N. Jha examines the evidence against "the myth of the holy cow" and argues that the sanctity of the cow has been wrongly traced back to the Vedas. Jha writes that "some sections of Indian society trace the concept of the sacred cow to the very period when it was sacrificed and its flesh was eaten" (Jha, 2015, p. 18).

The Indo-Aryan or Vedic Aryan civilization which migrated to India around the middle of the second millennium BC was largely characterised by nomadic pastoralism, incipient agriculture and religious rituals of animal sacrifice (Simoons, 1981, p. 122, Jha, 2015, pp. 27-28). Cattle were the most valued possession and the chief form of wealth of the early Aryans and were thus also considered to be a valuable sacrifice to the gods (Lodrick, 2005, p. 66), (Jha, 2015, p. 28). Jha opines that there could have been serious injunctions against

so prevalent that guests came to be called 'Go-ghana', killer of the cow. To avoid this slaughter of the cows the Ashvalayana Grahya Sutra (I. 24.25) suggests that the cow should be let loose when the guest comes so as to escape the rule of etiquette." The evidence seems to suggest that there was a general acceptance over the cow as a resource – economic or otherwise, which prevented its reckless killing, or at least limited it to dwarf or barren cows. The evidence of the *yajnas* is far more convincing in terms of a complete disregard for animal life. Thus one could argue that there existed a debate, a continuum of practices around the body of cattle which differed according to contexts. This is in a stark contrast to the kind of monist discourses being constructed around the sacrality of the cow in contemporary debates, where the sacrality of the cow is self-evident.

¹³⁴ Ambedkar (1948) argues that beef was a costly food item and thus the non-Brahmins could only have it on certain occasions. However the situation was different for the Brahmin since "in a period ridden with ritualism there was hardly a day on which there was no cow sacrifice to which the Brahmin was invited by some non-Brahmin. For the Brahmin every day was a beef steak day."

the killing of a cow belonging to the Brahmin. But other than that at least in the Vedic period the cow was neither sacred nor unslayable (Jha, 2015, p. 38).

Cow's milk and milk products were used widely in religious rituals and were regarded for their purificatory potential. For instance cow dung was smeared on the sacrificial altar and along with ghee was known for its ability to purify humans and objects. A similar status was granted to cow's urine. The land on which cows walked was thought to have been purified (Jha, 2015, p. 130). We have discussed previously in Chapter One, how the odours of cow and cow products, such as urine, ghee and dung were also invested with ritual and symbolic values. McHugh (2012, p. 86) also argues that unlike the gods, who are ritually associated with floral odours, the olfactory association of Brahmins is usually with food smells, in particular sacrificial foods derived from the cow, such as ghee and milk, or other animal products such as honey. These products are considered ritually pure in spite of flesh and blood from the same animals being impure¹³⁵. The same object or body then, in this case the cow, can thus be the source of both pure and impure products. The difference lies in the provenance and use-value of these products. While blood and flesh arise out of death, milk and ghee from the live cow are invested with nutritive capacities. Given the close association of the Brahmin and the cow, it could be then argued that the purity of the Brahmin derives from and is also contingent on the body of the cow.

Relying on *the Rgveda*, Jha (2015, p. 29-33) also points out that the flesh of the ox was not only cooked frequently but was also regularly offered to gods in ritual sacrifice, for guests and in various domestic rituals¹³⁶ (Simoons, 1981, p. 122).

¹³⁵ It is also to be noted that in both Buddhism and Hinduism while plants are a major source of pleasant smells, the stinking and ritually impure ones, such as urine and excrement come from animals, other than pure and good smelling dairy products (McHugh, 2012, p. 75, p. 89).

¹³⁶ At one place Indra states, 'they cook for me fifteen plus twenty oxen' (Rgveda, X.86.14ab, quoted in Jha, 2015, pp 29); At other places he is said to have eaten the flesh of bulls (Rgveda, X.28.3c, quoted in Jha, 2015, pp 29), of hundred buffalos (Rgveda, VI.17.11b, quoted in Jha, 2015, pp 29) or 300 buffalos roasted by Agni (Rgveda, V.29.7ab, quoted in Jha, 2015, pp 29) or a thousand buffalos (Rgveda, VIII.12.8ab, quoted in Jha, 2015, pp 29). The killing of kine to honour guests seems to have been prevalent from earlier times. The Rgveda (X.68.3) mentions the word

For instance the *Grhyasutras* attest to the use of the hide of the bull or the cow in domestic rituals like *simantonnayana* (the parting of the hair of the woman upwards) ceremony performed in the fourth month of pregnancy and the *upanayana* (investiture ceremony preceding the beginning of one's studenthood) (Jha, 2015, p. 34). Cattle slaughter was also intimately connected with the rituals of the dead. One of the several Rgvedic passages relating to cremation refers to the use of the skin and the thick fat of the cow to cover the dead body, and the *Atharvaveda* speaks of a bull being burnt along with the dead to ride with in the next world (Jha, 2015, p. 34).

Manusmriti, a text of a later period also does not issue an absolute condemnation of animal and cow slaughter. In fact the Manusmriti is ambiguous regarding the absolute sacrality of the cow in itself. Manu states that food smelt by a cow has to be purified by putting earth on it. Further according to Yajnavalkya, the mouths of goats and horses are pure but that of a cow is not (Jha, 2015, p. 132). This idea of corruption of substances by smelling also finds resonance elsewhere. The prohibition against the offering of flowers that have been previously smelt (*aghratapuspa*) is a standard one in Hindu rituals. The sniffing at offering materials is deemed to be a ritual flaw. A flower that has been sniffed at is equated with a flower that has already been offered (Zotter, 2014, p. 189). On the other hand, *prasada*, offering made to the gods which is redistributed to the worshippers is technically the "leftover" food but the consumption of which signifies submission, respect or even intimacy with a higher being. Similar practices are observed between the bride and bridegroom in marriage ceremonies, between a student and teacher in traditional pedagogic settings and between a mother and child (Zotter, 2014, p. 190). In a different context, Nadia Seremetakis (1994, pp. 26-29) has also written about the exchange of saliva between a grandmother and a child through partaking food. Seremetakis argues that this is not mere commensality but actually a sensory bonding over generations.

atithinir, which has been interpreted as 'cows fit for guests'. Panini therefore uses the term *goghna* for a guest. The cow was also killed on festive occasions like marriage (Jha, 2015, p. 33).

Sharing of sensoria has thus been a contested field, especially when it happens outside the bounds of intimate and compassionate relationships. The forced consumption of *jhoothan*, or left-over food by Dalit communities in India points to the power associated with food practices¹³⁷. Further food which has been touched, seen or prepared by lower-castes is also marked out as impure within the caste discourse. The human-animal relationship presents even more difficulties especially considering the fact that the nature and the boundaries of this relationship have changed vastly. For instance Alison Vogelaar (2012) argues that with the rural and the urban becoming starkly segregated, there is an increasing discomfort with interacting with the sources of food. Animals and fields both have become rare sites in modern city spaces and apart from a recreational or touristy interest, both these actually invoke discomfort and repulsion in humans. With the availability of processed and packaged meats, there has been a sensorial distancing from the process of producing meats, and more importantly from the animal itself. We have already discussed in Chapter One, how after the mid-nineteenth century, soil and earth came to be regarded as absolutely contaminating. Similar attitudes to the polluting powers of soil are observed in the caste discourse as well. The affective economy around animals has also transformed to limited and controlled interactions with animals, such as domestic pets, especially in urban contexts.

This complex Hindu cosmology around the animal, changes due to Buddhism's challenge to Vedic Hinduism. Although Buddhism advocated compassion towards all living beings, the pragmatics of living in a meat consuming society forced the Buddhist monks to consume meat whenever it was given to them as *bhiksha* (offering). Buddha himself is known to have placed no special condition against meat eating¹³⁸. Buddhism however did present a strong critique of Vedic

¹³⁷ See Omprakash Valmiki's (2009) autobiography *Jhoothan* for a detailed account of this practice and its critique.

¹³⁸ Within Buddhism the tenet of right action in the context of animal-human relationship meant 'abstinence from conscious destruction of any sentient being from human to smallest animalcule' (Jha, 2015, p. 62). Despite this doctrinal stand, slaughtering of animals was still practiced at a wide scale during this time. Buddha is reported to have told the physician Jivaka that he forbade

ritualism, including that of animal sacrifice. Being caught on the decline, Vedic Hinduism thus had to assert its superiority vis-à-vis the Buddhists.

This, according to Ambedkar, was done through a twin revolution of first giving up cow flesh and then turning completely vegetarian, accompanied by worshipping the cow. These gustatory and ritualistic choices marked the Brahmins different from the Buddhists, and the difference was then asserted as superiority¹³⁹. Buddhists refused to adopt Hindu practices and continued to consume flesh of the dead cow, since it was cheap and readily available in an agrarian society. Relegated to the margins of the society, these Buddhists were, in Ambedkar's formulation, those who we today call the Untouchables¹⁴⁰.

Consuming the flesh of the dead cattle thus became the marker for untouchability. It is important here to mark the difference between the flesh of slaughtered cattle and that of a dead one. Slaughtering cattle and other animals for ritualistic purposes and also for consumption still continues amongst many

the eating of meat only when there was evidence of one's eyes or ears as grounds for suspicion that the animal was slain for one's express use and that no meat should be consumed without enquiry as to its provenance – unseen, unheard and unsuspected meat became 'the three pure kinds of flesh' in Buddhist tradition (Jha, 2015, p. 64). This is a rather interesting observation as far as the politics of the senses is concerned. For instance a later section in this chapter will examine the discomfort of the public at 'seeing' and 'hearing' animals which were about to be slaughtered. This discomfort is qualitatively very distinct from the Buddhist idea on 'pure flesh' but both employ the senses to make a moral and ethical judgment about food, and through food about the larger moral status of the society. .

¹³⁹The superiority of a non-meat consuming position can be explained through the changes in the political economy with settled agriculture becoming the predominant mode of agrarian production. See Simoons (1981) for a detailed analysis of the breakup of the earlier nomadic order in favour of a more material civilization in which cattle was considered extremely valuable. Cattle were thus converted into property and were considered as wealth for this society. A Vedic Hindu culture of excessive cattle sacrifice would thus stand out in this context. The Buddhist doctrinal advocacy of compassion towards animals would also thus be a far more attractive option. Alongside there was also an advent of Jainism which unlike Buddhism, refused to follow a pragmatic path and adhered to the strictest form of non-violence towards all living beings. This would have created further ethical and moral issues for a civilizational order based on animal sacrifice. See Jha (2015), Simoons (1981).

¹⁴⁰ Ambedkar also attributes their marginalization to the fact that these Buddhists refused to give up their itinerant ways in what was clearly a settled society by then.

Hindu communities, including some Brahmin groups as well¹⁴¹. On the other hand, this change to vegetarianism and advocacy of the sacrality of the cow, prepared the way for the idea of ahimsa to take root within the Hindu discourse¹⁴².

By the time of the Mughal reign in India, the sacrality of the cow was well established. While the Mughal rulers and their policies largely condemned cow slaughter, the predominant culture favoured beef eating and ritual slaughter especially during festivals such as Bakr Id. Within a charged communal atmosphere, the Mughal period was thus held responsible for the introduction of

¹⁴¹ For instance, R S Khare (1966, p. 229-30) presents the case of the Katyayan gotra amongst the Kanya-Kubja Brahmins, who are meat-eating. Occupying a ritually very high status, the gotra attributes its meat-eating habits to its adherence to the Shakta cult of worship. Amongst the other Brahmin groups this is regarded as an adherence to their '*kul-dharma*' (sacred duty or practice of their community) and thus does not evoke ostracism. However the way in which Khare frames the problem of meat-eating Brahmins is problematic. He basically asks, 'How did these Brahmins come to adopt meat-eating?'. Rather, given extensive evidence that Brahmins and all other Hindu groups were meat-eating, it would be more relevant ask how this group comes to retain the practice, rather than adopt it? Perhaps then a more interesting historical account based in the Shakta tradition could be constructed and used to explain the evolution of non-meat eating practices.

¹⁴² Although ahimsa is first mentioned in a Hindu text at the end of the Vedic period (the Chandogya Upanishad is variously dated to the eight to sixth centuries B.C.), it reached its full development in the Buddhist and Jain religions. Ahimsa became central to the teachings of Mahavira (599-527 B.C.) and many contemporary Jain customs and practices are rooted in this philosophy. These include vegetarianism, the wearing of masks by monks to prevent the accidental inhalation of insects, avoidance of even certain plants by monks in the name of non-injury, and shunning occupations such as agriculture that might involve the inadvertent destruction of insects. The maintenance of animal homes (*pinjrapols*) where stray, sick and injured animals, and even insects, are given shelter in the name of ahimsa is an integral part of the Jain cultural tradition. The ahimsa philosophy was embraced by Buddhism when Ashoka (ca. 269-232 B.C.) converted to Buddhism and adopted it as the imperial state religion. The tenets of Buddhism were proclaimed throughout the empire, and ahimsa became the law. Many of Ashoka's proclamations were engraved on stone pillars throughout the empire, and two, Rock Edict I and Pillar Edict V, specifically prohibit the slaughter of animals. Significantly perhaps, the long lists of protected animals identified in these edicts make no specific mention of the cow. Another edict, Rock Edict II, indicates that provision was made for the medical treatment of animals and one authority argues that animal hospitals (*pinjrapols*) date from this time. (Lodrick, 2005, pp. 69-70).

beef eating and animal sacrifice into India¹⁴³. Butchers and slaughterhouses became the most visible and odorous proofs of this religious and moral violation.

While the politics around the cow has started during the Mughal period, it was only in the late nineteenth century that the cow became a tool of mass political mobilization (Jha, 2015, p. 18). The movement for cow protection began with the Sikh Kuka or Namdhari sect in Punjab around 1870 and later strengthened by the foundation of the first Gau-rakshini Sabha in 1882 by Dayananda Saraswati (Jha, 2015, p. 19). In the light of debates on the identity of the nation, the cow protection movement constructed the Muslim as its other, particularly targeting the Muslim practice of ritual slaughter and the gustatory preference for meat including beef. The hardening of the position on cow resulted in a series of communal riots in the 1880s and 1890s¹⁴⁴. Of particular significance was the 1888 order of the North-Western Province High Court which “decreed that a cow is not a sacred object” (Jha, 2015, p. 19).

There were several large trends in the cow protection movements which are important for this work. The first of these is the mapping of the religious discourse around the cow onto the body of the nation. In the context of the nationalist movement against British colonialism, the cow along with the figure of the Bharat Mata, were imagined as the nation itself. The cow was now sacred to the cause of the nation and its slaughter and consumption was posited as a crime against the nation.

Gupta (2001, p. 4295), quoting Peter van der Veer has noted that the linking of Hindu love for the cow and to her protection had deep roots in Brahmanical rituals. In these, the body of the cow itself was invested with the divine and she herself became a proto-nation (Gupta, 2001, p. 4295). The Hindu men of this nation who had grown weak from lack of milk and ghee thus needed their mother (Gupta, 2001: 4296). This new space of the cow-nation embodied a

¹⁴³ See Simoons (1981), Gupta (2001), Freitag (1980).

¹⁴⁴ The prominent ones of these are – Azamgarh district 1893; Ayodhya 1912-13; Shahabas 1917; See Jha (2015), Gupta (2001), Freitag (1980).

Hindu cosmology, with the sacred inscribed onto her body (Gupta, 2001, p. 4295).

Several pictures of the cow depicted as the nation were circulated and exhibited at many meetings. One depicted a cow in the act of being slaughtered by three Muslim butchers, and was headed 'The present state' (Gupta, 2001, p. 4295-96). In another one, the Hindu goddess Ashtabhujā Devi was depicted riding a lion and furiously attacking two butchers who had just decapitated a cow¹⁴⁵ (Gupta, 2001, p. 4296). At the same time, the appeals for the protection of the cow were addressed by and to Hindu men, largely of upper castes, and later extending to intermediate castes, especially the Yadavs¹⁴⁶ (Gupta, 2001, p. 4296).

Freitag points out how in different places, alternatively the Muslim and the Chamar were the antagonists of the Cow Protection Movement. For instance in Gorarkhpur where it was advised against antagonising higher class Muslims, the target became the Chamars "the cow killer", who brought the cow for sacrifice in the Muslim household (Freitag, 1980, p. 622). The construction of Chamar criminality based on the possession of arsenic was already discussed in Chapter Two. It is also important to make a difference between ritual sacrifice in higher class and caste Muslim households and slaughter by butchers, mostly coming from lower class and caste communities.

This brings us to the second relevance of the debates around the cow. The depictions of the figure of the cow, stood in contrast to the revulsion and disgust caused by the body of the dead cow. Even those who held the cow to be sacred

¹⁴⁵ One handbill, printed at Kashi, and later banned, appealed to Hindu brothers, and stated that if they really wanted to protect their Gau Mata from '*gaubhakshak*' Muslim '*mlecchas*', then they must take an oath today before god that they would buy no desired item from Muslim shops. A similar handbill was titled '*Message from Mother-Cow: For the Protection of the Cow, Buy Every Item from Hindus Alone*'. Both the handbills stated that they should not only be read, but narrated to others. In most of the villages of Faizabad, letters were circulated claiming that an '*akashvani*' had warned not to give charity to Muslims, not to sell cattle to them and to have no dealings with them. This movement can be seen as a point of convergence, where an emotional appeal and economic logic combined (Gupta, 2001, p. 4296).

¹⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion on the figure of Krishna see Jha (2015), Simoons (1981), Michelutti (2004).

did not wish to engage with this dead body. The task fell onto the “untouchable” communities who got deeply embedded in the political economy around this dead body.

The production of leather, especially outside of formal industrial domains centrally concerned this corpse. Attempting to address the charge of leatherwork being “dirty” or “foul”, during several interviews workers and industrialists would distinguish between leather from “fallen” animals and that from slaughtered animals. The industry they claimed, largely relied on the latter, and was thus “clean”. Distancing from the caste pollution caused by contact with dead bodies does not actually take the industry very far from a “foul” provenance. The slaughtering of cattle for production of leather and consumption of meat was considered no less of a problem than dealing with dead animals.

Colonial authorities were generally cautious while intervening in the former, especially after the revolt of 1857. The issue of beef consumption presented an even more difficult position for the British administrators. The use of beef as food was not entirely restricted to the Muslims alone. Christian and lower caste communities, several Hindu groups and the British themselves consumed beef and relied on the local butchers for its supply. In a fascinating analysis of the British body in colonial India, Collingham (2001) analyses intersections of the British and Indian gustatory and culinary practices.

In order to make their authority more legitimate for the masses and the native elites, some sections of the British ruling classes took to a Brahmanical code of conduct. Vegetarianism was the immediate outcome of such a self-fashioning. A vegetarian diet was also seen as necessary to maintain a healthy body in such a hot and humid environment. According to Collingham (2001, p. 26), “the openness of medical writers to Indian practices thus tended to be limited to those aspects of Hindu doctrine which accorded with British ideas of a moderate regimen”. Further, Collingham (2001, p. 26) also places this trend in the context of the declining Mughal influence amongst the clerical and administrative

communities in North India, which was then replaced by Brahmanical practices of vegetarianism and simple foods.

However the majority sections of the Anglo-Indian population still did not favour vegetarianism and resisted the medical attempts to Indianize their bodily constitutions (Collingham, 2001, p.27). In fact this meant that inter-dining between the Anglo-Indians and the Indian elites, especially the high caste Hindus was a fraught affair, especially on the question of consumption of beef (Collingham, 2001, p. 28). Collingham also reports the presence of beefsteak clubs, 'reminiscent of the beefsteak clubs of eighteenth century England', in places like Meerut around 1834. On the other hand there was also the presence of the Muslim and Rajput elites, for whom consumption of meat was in fact a mandatory practice. Food preferences, thus observes Collingham, were not simply a matter of flavour but also of discernment. Food was a means of claiming membership of polite society (Collingham, 2001, p. 28-29).

Through the nineteenth century, vegetarianism was a growing trend in Britain as well, based on arguments against animal cruelty. Alongside there was a growing opinion against slaughterhouses which were seen as filthy and unhygienic. The hot, humid tropical environment of India forced the British to reconsider their diet for reasons of health. The miasmatic theory of disease further strengthened the fear of falling sick in what appeared to the British to be a dirty and chaotic place. Dietary changes to vegetarianism were often proposed and also followed as a remedy (Collingham, 2001, pp. 26-27) . However beef and meat consumption remained largely popular. Collingham also reports that amongst the upper caste Hindu subjects, the British were often seen as polluted and morally inferior due to their consumption of meat and alcohol (Collingham, 2001, p. 55). The equations of power were thus instituted in complex ways through food and consumption.

One of the most vociferous advocates against slaughter was Gandhi, and later his disciple Vinoba Bhave. While relying on the Hindu majoritarian notion of the sacrality of the cow, Gandhi also brought in the economic logic to argue for the

protection of the cow. This now familiar argument broadly states that given the largely agrarian nature of the country, cow is a valuable drought and milch resource. Further since a large section of the population was perceived to be vegetarian, it was argued that milk from the cow is a viable source of protein. In the context of an anti-colonial movement, the physical strength of its polity reflected acutely on its moral status as well. The cow thus became indispensable for the self of the nation in Gandhi's estimation.

Such was the case that Gandhi lamented the shift of attention to buffalo and its milk by the population at large. He suggests that one cannot "save" both the cow and buffalo from being slaughtered and thus should stop the domestication of the buffalo in order to concentrate fully on the cow (Gandhi, 1956, p. 16). Gandhi went on to also argue that leather made out of fallen animals should be considered to be more 'pure' at least by the Hindus (Gandhi, 1956, p. 14). He takes notice of the Brahmanical argument against fallen leather, and instead proposes that he would not have an objection in wearing shoes (*murdhari joota*) made out of fallen leather and would in fact even enter the house and eat food wearing these shoes (Gandhi, 1956, p. 20).

This argument is quite relevant in the context of Gandhi's complicated relationship with caste and untouchability. Gandhi's larger project on the cow bases itself on the inherent value and desirability of the cow in the political economy. Gandhi however chooses to overlook the question of caste which is inherent to the production and consumption of leather. He argues that the cow is profitable even in death and by promoting the consumption of its products such as hide and bones one could make the domestication of cow more desirable. Gandhi further states that while we condemn *Harijans* who consume fallen meat, with the proper utilization of the dead cow for leather, fertilizers and bones, *Harijans* will no longer need (emphasis mine) to consume fallen meat (Gandhi, 1956, p. 20).

On the other hand, Ambedkar (2015, pp. 256-257) argues,

“No one would prefer carrion to flesh meat if it is available. If the Untouchables have been living on carrion it is not because they like it. They eat carrion, because there is nothing else on which they can live. This will be clear to anyone who realises that on account of untouchability they have no way left to earn a living. All professions have been closed to them. There is no land on the produce of which they can live. There is no trade, which they can engage in. Their main stay is therefore the food they collect from the villagers and the carrion, which is left to them. Without carrion they would literally die of starvation. It is therefore clear that the fault does not lie with the Untouchables. If the Untouchables eat carrion it is because the Hindus have left no honourable way of earning a living open to them. To the second question the answer is equally clear. If the Untouchables skin and carry the dead animals of the Hindus, it is because the Untouchables have no choice. They are forced to do it. They would be penalised if they refused to do it. The penalty is legal. In some provinces the refusal to do this dirty work is a breach of contract. In other provinces it is a criminal offence involving fines¹⁴⁷.”

¹⁴⁷Ambedkar provides details regarding these laws. In Provinces like the United Provinces, refusal to do scavenging by sweeper is made an offence. The United Provinces Municipalities Act II of 1916 contains the following provisions: Section 201(1).—“Should a sweeper who has a customary right to do the house-scavenging of a house of building (hereinafter called the customary sweeper) fail to perform such scavenging in a proper way, the occupier of the house or building or the board may complain to a Magistrate. (2) “The Magistrate receiving such complaint shall hold an inquiry and should it appear to him that the customary sweeper has failed to perform the house-scavenging of the house or building in a proper way or at a reasonable intervals, he may impose upon such a sweeper a fine which may extend to ten rupees, and upon a second or any later conviction in regard to the same house or building, may also direct, the right of the customary sweeper to do the house scavenging the house or building to be forfeited and thereupon such right shall be forfeited. Exactly similar provision is to be found in Section 165 of the Punjab Municipalities Act of 1911. The Punjab Act is an advance over the U. P. Act, in as much as it provides for punishment of a sweeper who is not customary sweeper but a contract-sweeper. The Punjab Act adds: (3) Should any sweeper (other than a customary sweeper), who is under a contract to do house-scavenging of a house or a building, discontinue to do such house-scavenging without fourteen days' notice to his employer or without reasonable cause, he shall on conviction be punishable with a fine which may extend to Rs. Ten. Every order of forfeiture under Section 165 shall be subject to an appeal to the next superior court, but shall not be otherwise open to appeal.”

In arguing for the profitability of even a dead cow, Gandhi ignores the discourses of caste which makes the cattle carcass undesirable in the first place. "*Harijans*" do not "need" to consume fallen meat because there is no other use of the carcass. And effective economic utilization of the carcass will not address the question of the stigma of consuming this carcass. Interestingly it was only much later, around 1960s that Dalit groups are able to posit animal carcass as a "resource" in the public debate over its disposal. This argument will be taken up in the following sections. For Gandhi however, the question of the status of cow was largely determined by his view of caste and untouchability itself, which in his view did not require a fundamental disruption of the Hindu social and ritual structure. Within this understanding of the Hindu caste system, not just fallen leather, but leather itself was considered "polluted" because of its animal provenance.

The Gandhian economic and religious discourse on the animal body, continued into the post-independence period. His views found a great resonance in the Constituent Assembly debates where the economic importance of the cow was given priority over its religious significance and the protection of cow came to be instituted as one of the Directive Principles under Article 48. In a fascinating analysis of these debates Chigateri (2008) argues that some Muslim members of the Assembly had in fact argued for prioritising the religious significance of the cow for Hindus. This they argued would establish quite clearly the state position and would allow a better negotiation with the Muslim communities over the necessity of slaughtering the cow in ritual sacrifice. However this was not to be due to a combination of factors which included the larger consensus in favour of secularism and the threat of inciting communal tensions following partition.

Outside the constitutional framework, several political parties and groups continued to organize public opinion around the issue of not just cow protection but also a ban on cow slaughter. The UP government had enacted a full ban on cow slaughter in 1955. In 1966 there was a massive demonstration for these demands outside the Parliament organised by several right wing Hindutva

groups. In 1979, Acharya Vinoba Bhave went on a hunger strike demanding the prohibition of cow slaughter throughout the country asserting that apart from religious reasons, slaughter of cows is affecting the milk supply of the country. In 2003, the Indian parliament passed an Act to ban cow slaughter and set up *goshalas* (cow shelters) for old and sick cows. This was done under the laws preventing cruelty to animals which meant that the Act will be applicable to all states, making cow slaughter a cognizable and non-bailable offense. With exceptions, state laws already existed but allow for slaughter of old cattle. This act changed this situation.

In 2015, the state governments in Maharashtra and Haryana made eating and possessing beef a punishable offense – which meant that going ahead from the earlier Act, now oxen and bullocks could also not be slaughtered. There have been a series of implications of this politics over the body of the cow. The leather and the meat industry are reported to have suffered huge losses due to the non-availability of hides and skins as well as slaughtered animals. Apart from this economic loss, a greater trend has been the growing criminalization of Muslims and Dalit who are routinely “suspected” of either slaughtering cows or consuming beef¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁸ The lynching of five Dalit men in Jhajjar district, Haryana, in August 2003, for the mistaken impression that cow slaughter was being committed openly, and the stripping naked of two Muslim cattle traders in South Canara district in March 2005 by Right-wing Hindu groups for the alleged illegal transport of cattle, attest not just to the highly-charged symbolism around the cow, but also to the discrimination that attends communities that do not accept the dominant ethic against cow slaughter (Chigateri, 2008, p.15). In 2001 a book entitled *The Myth of the Holy Cow* written by D.N. Jha was banned because it sought to equate Vedic India with beef consumption. Around the same time the erstwhile BJP-led central government sought to erase the history of Hindu Indian beef-eating practices from the syllabus of the National Council of Educational Research and Training. Then, in the run-up to the general elections of 2004, the majority BJP-led central government sponsored a Prevention of Cruelty to Cows Bill based on a report of the National Commission on Cattle in 2002 which not only endorsed a comprehensive ban on the slaughter of the cow and its progeny, but also recommended that persons who contravened the legal prohibitions on cow slaughter be tried under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) of 2002. Although the Bill was later retracted owing to a lack of consensus on the issue and widespread opposition to it, the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh subsequently pushed ahead with its own draconian legislation—the Madhya Pradesh Cow Slaughter Ban Ordinance of

The body of the animal and that of the nation are thus locked in an affective contestation which brings together caste and religion together with the anxieties over the moral and physical status of the body of the nation. Slaughterhouses and butchers also became the objects of these contestations, both in terms of law and policy, as well as popular perceptions. There came into being an entire range of regulations and municipal bye-laws around the activity of slaughtering and the space of the slaughterhouse. It is through these laws and perceptions that leatherwork also comes to be regulated.

Archival records show large scale municipal action against slaughterhouses in the Agra District. One such case concerns a butcher called Torabuddin who in 1899 finds himself as the unsuspecting target of these measures. Torabuddin's case is indicative of the way in which slaughter was sought to be controlled and made sense of.

2. Regulating Death: Slaughtering the Animal

The last three months of 1899 were a busy time for the District and the Municipal administration in Agra. The administration seems to have taken a renewed cognizance of the thriving slaughtering trade, outside the municipal limits of the city. Slaughtering was thus on its way to becoming a 'nuisance', offensive to the larger public sensibilities in the outskirts of Agra. This process was certainly not new. Sharan (2014) reports similar events taking place in Delhi from 1845, Calcutta in the 1860s, Berlin in 1870s and London in 1890s. Slaughtering and sale of meat, especially beef had been a contested issue even before the British intervention into the matter¹⁴⁹. By this time Agra was already

January 2004—with the official argument that 'Manu Smriti ranks the slaughterer of cow as a predator and prescribes hard punishment for him' (Chigateri, 2008, p.16).

¹⁴⁹ Sharan (2014, p. 76) reports, that in 1852 during Eid Bahadur Shah ordered that goats be sacrificed instead of cows. In 1853 Thomas Metcalfe allowed cow slaughter on religious

beginning to come up as a centre for leather goods manufacture and thus a large slaughtering industry could provide the crucial for the raw material supply in the city. An examination of the way in which slaughter and animal bodies were being ordered and disciplined, allows us a tangential entry into understanding the ordering of the leather industry as well. It also allows one to widen the scope of the nuisance argument to other trades and practices, such as leatherwork.

From police and general administration accounts of the latter half of the nineteenth century, one can glean that by 1899, ritual slaughter on occasions such as Eid, was already under the purview of the colonial administration. In fact the British were quite vary of these incidents of violence which were occurring quite routinely amongst the Hindus and Muslims. The memories of 1857 had still not faded and for the British administration the revolt, had had serious implications regarding their intervention into the social and religious fabric of the Indian society. There seems to be an obvious fear of the revolt reoccurring especially due to some decision of the colonial government itself¹⁵⁰.

Torabuddin, son of Sheikh Sadi, a relatively small time slaughterer on the outskirts of Agra, came into governmental existence when on 22 July 1899 he applied for permission to the local administration, to be allowed to slaughter cattle within the confines of a dry meat factory at Shahganj in Agra¹⁵¹. Shahganj

occasions in Delhi and just before the revolt in 1857, slaughter was allowed by Muslim butchers in Hindu localities. Bahadur Shah was reportedly unhappy with these decisions.

¹⁵⁰ Sharan (2014, p. 74-81) argues that during the colonial period, the two issues of ritual slaughter on occasions such as Eid, and slaughter for consumption, got increasingly mixed up. Not only slaughter but also the sale, peddling, sale of meat and the disposal of waste material were all intensely debated issues, for both the colonial state and the native elites. The Act IV of 1872 mandated that the slaughter of kine and sale of beef can only take place as per government regulations. Two major concerns were at stake – the question of health and hygiene, which was similar to the issues being debated in Europe; and the concern for the sentiments of the Hindu population. In places like Delhi, the sale of beef was allowed to be conducted in the open. By 1889, places where slaughter could take place were being strictly defined and most of these places were outside the city limits. Slaughter of kine on religious occasions such as Bakr Eid could happen only for a limited time inside the city. Further the sale and parading of cattle for slaughter was also prohibited within city limits. The introduction of licenses had further mandated regular checks, sanitary management and stricter municipal interference.

¹⁵¹ Burmah Dry Meat Trade, No. 12, UPSRA, Agra

falls within municipal limits and thus the administration was apprehensive of cattle being flocked within the city for this purpose. However, recognising the private right to slaughter they allowed Torabuddin to do so, provided he meets the health and sanitary requirements laid down for slaughterhouses. Torabuddin is asked to pay for the services of a Medical Officer and have his premises inspected. On 27 July, the Civil Surgeon reports to the Magistrate of Agra, that no provision for a *pucca* floor or for examination of cattle before slaughter has been made at the said place in Shahganj. The report further states that

“There is a very offensive odour within the enclosure owing to the pits close to the sheds where the carcasses of cattle have been partially buried. All burying of bones should have been done outside the slaughterhouse enclosure in an open piece of ground.”

Torabuddin is however given the permission to slaughter provided he corrects these offensive conditions. However, within the municipal administration this report opens a can of worms. Citing the nuisance provision under the Criminal Procedure Code, many officers were of the opinion that the police cannot control such a trade, and in fact slaughterhouses must be brought within the control of the municipality and the health department. As a consequence the Medical Officer is asked to prepare a set of regulation for both slaughterhouses and meat drying places.

Meanwhile a Sanitary Officer prepares a report on the flourishing Burmah Dry Meat trade in the city and finds out that Torabuddin along with many other butchers is engaged in this trade of exporting dried beef jerkey to Burmah (present day Myanmar). It would be interesting to read this account at length.

“The first of these owned by Inaibu, a butcher in Dholikar, is a large court, about half a mile beyond Bhogipura, on the right hand of the road to Fatehpur Sikri. The work was being carried on in a cleanly manner with the exception of the disposal of the carcasses of the slaughtered animals. These should be buried daily and buried deep. When I visited the place there were

two large heaps of bones on the ground and the pits where the carcasses has been buried had not been covered over. Consequently there was a most offensive stench, which besides causing discomfort to travellers, on the road, is a source of danger to the public health. These butchers kill a large number of cattle daily and I am given to understand that the business brings in large profits. If orders are issued insisting on the carcasses and refuse being buried daily and at a sufficient depth to prevent the smell of decomposing flesh filling the air, it will of course put the owners to expense but they can well afford it and after all I don't see that much solicitude need to be felt for people that carry on an offensive trade at the expense of their neighbours"¹⁵²...The above remarks apply equally to the second place which is also on the right hand of the road to Fatehpur Sikri. This too is a court surrounded by a wall but much smaller than Inaibu's place. The owner is a butcher, Ghose Muhammad of Dholikar. It is however only about 100 yards beyond the West end of Bhogipura and the inhabitants complained bitterly of the stench from the place and begged that it might be closed. As we have not sufficient control over these places to ensure that the trade is carried on under sound sanitary conditions, I think it would be advisable to prohibit it being done close to habitations. I therefore recommend the place being closed...The third place for drying meat is about one mile to the west of Shah Ganje and about five hundred yards off the Sikandara Road. The owner is butcher, Torabuddin who recently got permission from the Joint Mag to slaughter his own cattle. The condition that the place was in was more than unsatisfactory – large heaps of decomposing carcasses, offal and refuse were scattered about both in the courtyard itself and outside it where the burying pits were. In the corner lay several carcasses of freshly slaughtered animals lying in and surrounded by a sea of blood and kichar. Some ten buffaloes were tied up within the enclosure

¹⁵² McHugh refers to a passage from a pre Common Era, Pali Buddhist text *Dhammasangani* which refers to the odour of raw flesh as *Amagandha*. McHugh traces the term 'ama' to another Pali term, 'amasusana' meaning a cremation ground. Further in Pali *Suttanipata*, there is a text known as 'Amagandhasutta' in which *amagandha* is equated with a variety of bad deeds. *Vissagandha*, putrid odour is another term he mentions, where Pali borrows from the Sanskrit *visra* which means 'a smell like raw flesh' (McHugh, 2012 , p. 41)

and the slaughtering performed in front of and within a few feet of living animals. Apart from the utter absence of any attempt of carrying on the business in a cleanly manner, the inhumanity of this proceeding is apparent. I trust that immediate steps can be taken to stop this”.

This report complicates the matter regarding Torabuddin’s application and a full inspection is carried out for these three places in the October of 1899, resulting in the invocation of the CrPC against these butchers. Further orders are made to separate the Burmah dried meat trade from the local slaughtering business – the former can go on without the municipal laws but the latter has to come under municipal limits and laws. As a result of these measures, a large slaughterhouse in Dholi Khar is shut down and a large number of butchers, including Torabuddin receive punitive notices. In December 1899, a system of licensing is introduced in order to control the ever expanding slaughtering trade. Links are also made between the wastes of the slaughterhouses and the trade in hides and bones. Realising that the problem exists at a much larger level than just a few local slaughter houses in Agra, the municipal authorities try creating a new sanitised slaughterhouse, within municipal limits, for the local meat production. But in November 1899, various Hindu groups protested against the chosen site and the plan is abandoned. Finally in April 1900, a report on the conditions of the Burmah Meat Trade mentions that Torabuddin’s premises have been shut since January 1900. The Burmah Meat Trade continues to flourish.

While Torabuddin, the individual remains the subject of governmental attention, only for a few brief months between 1899 and 1900, his narrative actually highlights the way in which trades and professions were made permanently legible and visible for the administration allowing for a closer monitoring, especially sensorial, of the city and its inhabitants. Torabuddin’s narrative thus represents the culmination in a long series of events around the status of the body of the animal in urban contexts and the morality around its consumption. It also heralds the medicalization of not just the animal body but also of the urban

spaces, which would now increasingly be understood in terms of diseases, contamination and surgical correctives.

Animal bodies, along with their flesh, blood and refuse, came to be considered a threat and in the Indian context, the threat was not just that of the contamination of the physical body but that of the moral and spiritual body of the nation as well. For the Hindus who believed in the sacrality of the cow, this matter was even more complex. As discussed earlier, the physical body of the cow came to stand in as a metaphor for the nation and for the community. The colonial emphasis on the regulation of this body was thus a direct challenge to the Hindu social body. Thus the regulation of cattle fairs, *gau-melas* and the general disgust regarding the free movement of cattle in the city spaces, incited some sections of the Hindu community. On the other hand, these sections relied on this very colonial administration in order to regulate or completely ban the slaughter of kine and the consumption of beef, against the Muslim, Dalit and Christian community's right to slaughter and consumption. The animal body thus came to occupy many affectual locations simultaneously.

The visibility of animals, flesh and blood was crucial to these narratives. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, the visibility of the poor and of dirt gave rise to the imaginations of disease and contamination. In a similar move, the mere sight of the animal body within the urban spaces gave rise to fears of disease and contamination and not just of the physical kind. As is evident from the Sanitary Officers report that the sight of slaughter created discomfort not just for humans but it was also traumatic for the live cattle. A visual separation thus had to be maintained between the slaughterhouse and the public spaces and within the slaughterhouse between the dead and live cattle. It was also proposed that meat be covered when it is peddled through the city, least that it offends the sensibilities of the Hindus (Sharan, 2014, p. 89). Interestingly, the remedy for the control of slaughterhouses also lay in visibility. Sharan, quoting Otter (2004, p. 73) argues that "making slaughter public meant opening it to municipal vision, at the same time concealing it from the eyes of polite society".

The odours of the slaughterhouses, indicative of their status as dirty spaces, also become visible and legible for the authorities through these reports and accounts. However once they were made legible, it was impossible to make these odours invisible quite in the same way as the sight of meat and slaughter had been regulated. While modern and sanitized slaughterhouses, such as the one at Ghazipur, in Delhi, took effective care that the public is not witness to the act of slaughter, even the fortified structure could not contain the odours of flesh. During interviews with hide dealers and tannery owners the issue of the modernization of the Ghazipur slaughterhouse came up frequently, mainly due to the way in which the relocation has disrupted the flow between the slaughter house, hide market and the tanneries¹⁵³. Many of these accounts suggest that even though the new premises looks clean visually, the thickness of the odours has not reduced and it is possible to identify the building solely from its smells. Odours thus come to stand in for the alleged contamination caused by meat and slaughterhouses.

Slaughterhouses and abattoirs have not been the subject of much inquiry in academic or in policy terms in India¹⁵⁴. The slaughtering business has largely been surrounded by suspicion and prejudice. While this is true of slaughtering industries around the world, in India slaughterhouses get enveloped in particular emotive charge because of larger debates around meat consumption,

¹⁵³ For a detailed account of the Ghazipur slaughterhouse relocation see Sharan (2006, 2012) and Ahmad (2013).

¹⁵⁴ Generally, the privately owned individual units are called slaughterhouses, while large publically owned units are called abattoirs. Otter (2004, p. 49) writes “From mid-century, the public abattoir was promoted as the solution to the problem of insanitary, uncivilized private slaughterhouses. Dating from 1806, the term “abattoir” came to refer to a large, centralized, municipal space devoted to slaughter and its attendant industries. In 1873, the Lancet declared that “it cannot be doubted for a moment that the use of public abattoirs, as compared with private slaughterhouses, is advantageous in many respects, notably as regards cleanliness, space and supervision”. In the context of India, Ahmad (2013) examines the social and political relocation of the Idgah abattoir in Delhi; Sharan (2014) locates the slaughterhouses in colonial and postcolonial Delhi in the larger context of environmental concerns; Paul Robbins (1999) presents a commodity chain analysis of meat production in India.

religion and attitudes towards animals¹⁵⁵. It is estimated that, compared to 3,600 legal slaughterhouses in the country, there are 32,000 unlicensed ones (Chigateri, 2008, p. 17). The three largest private slaughterhouse chains in India, Al-Kabeer, Indargo and Frigorifico Allana have multiple units across the country, with the latter having units in Kanpur and Agra as well. Reports suggest that Uttar Pradesh accounts for a 44% share in meat exports from the country and most of it is beef. Much of this slaughtering happens in ‘illegal’ slaughterhouses spread across various small cities and towns.

In January, 2016 the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued notices to illegal slaughterhouses being run in Aligarh, Bulandshahr and Ghaziabad on grounds of environmental damage to the Ganga and Yamuna. Aligarh has also been at the helm of contestations between the public, municipal authorities and the meat traders over the reported eleven legal and fifty-one illegal slaughterhouses operating in the city. People have complained about the “air heavy with the stink of rotting flesh”, which has been attributed to the lack of “pollution control norms” in these units (Aghal, 2014)¹⁵⁶.

Dinesh Sharma, a BJP member of a local ward, wrote to the mayor, alleging that,

"This is one way of pushing residents to the limit of suicide. That is the next thing I can think of. We have tried all peaceful methods, we have been writing to the mayor and the administration. We have not been able to sleep in peace because of the stink, and this is setting off depression and other illnesses."
(Aghal, 2014)

¹⁵⁵ For an account of the politics around the slaughterhouses and abattoirs in other countries, see Otter (2004) who examines the debates around a public abattoir in England in the late nineteenth century; Trabsky's (2014) account of abattoirs in colonial Victoria in Australia again around the late nineteenth century; Hankins (2013, 2014) for accounts of the Burakumin in Japan's meat processing and tanning industries.

¹⁵⁶ “Under the norms, all slaughter houses must be equipped with an effluent treatment plant to treat liquid waste, a bio-digester to treat gas, and a rendering plant to make solid waste non-polluting. Even the slaughter houses equipped with these plants often do not use them, compounding the pollution problem and making the whole business a stinky affair” (Aghal, 2014) See Classen et al (1994, p. 172) for a detailed discussion on Right to ‘freedom to smell’, or whether our olfactory environment can be censored with impunity by those who prefer to keep their stinks hidden.

The affective and corporeal charge of odours is apparent here and this affective charge spills over to the object of leather as well. Many in the leather industry fashion themselves as 'waste managers' of the slaughtering industry. After all, they claim, skins/hides are nothing but the waste product resulting from the production of meat. In fact the leather industry receives much more than just raw material from the slaughtering business. The politics over animal bodies which is located so densely in the slaughtering business also spills over to the leather industry.

These issues which surround the slaughtering industry are embedded in the contested terrain of public space, sensory politics and politics of caste and religion. The rise of animal rights activism and conservancy movements around the question of animals are symptomatic of the uneasy relationship of the animal to the human in the current context. Vogelaar (2012) for instance argues that much of this unease arises out of "seeing" the transition from production to consumption. Increasingly we are imagining spaces where one avoids or in any case, controls sensory contact with the spaces of production such as slaughterhouses, farms and factories. Both the animal and its death are masked in these spaces of consumption.

The inauguration of public abattoirs which were governed by municipal laws and regular sanitary inspection was thus proposed as the obvious solution, giving rise to the binary between the private, filthy slaughterhouses and the supposedly clean and modern public abattoirs. However what remains constant through these processes is the imagination of the figure of the 'butcher' as unclean, brutal and savage, and the imagination of the activity of butchering as 'lowly' and 'immoral' even when it is undertaken in sanitized conditions (Ahmad, 2013).

Butchers simultaneously occupy three registers of identity – occupation, religion and caste. In Uttar Pradesh, as in most other parts of north India, the business of slaughtering is controlled by two communities – the Qureshi Muslims, listed as Pasmanda (backward) Muslims and the Khatiks who come under the Scheduled Caste list in Uttar Pradesh. Some artisanal and service communities may have

been pushed towards conversion to Islam because they were considered impure by the high caste Hindus. For instance, dyers who used urine in the process of dyeing and butchers who handled blood and flesh were more likely to be singled out for this treatment. As discussed earlier, the Qureshis are an endogamous *biradri* primarily engaged in slaughtering sheeps, goats and bovines and selling their meat. Ahmad argues that the term 'Qureshi' was adopted by the community around the 1911 census in a move of social mobility. The community has also stayed away from what they consider the pejorative term, '*qasai*' (Ahmad, 2013, p. 122).

Negotiating the Qureshi stronghold over the business has reportedly been difficult for fresh entrepreneurs and established business houses alike. The presence of Hindus in this business is negligible, though they may own stakes in the large and commercial slaughterhouses¹⁵⁷. Respondents in Kanpur assert that slaughtering in the city is almost an exclusively Muslim dominated business, except 'an Arora man from Punjab, who has recently opened a huge slaughterhouse in Unnao'. Large companies like the Tata and Reliance Groups tried getting into the tanning end of the business to support their leather goods manufacturing, but were unable to break into the Qureshi stronghold of the skin market. While this fact could not be verified, it could be possible that much of the slaughtering in Uttar Pradesh is controlled by the Qureshis, some of whom have also branched out into establishing their own tanneries.

This hereditary connection is a recurring metaphor in this work, and will be explored at length in Chapter Five, when we examine the politics of training in leatherwork. In this industry 'hereditary' is solely decided by one's caste and religious identity. Within the industry Muslims are perceived as 'naturally' adept to handling meat and skins/hides given their participation in ritual slaughter and consumption of meat. In fact during the interviews when I asked why is this connection so obvious, I was often met with laughter and incredulous stares both

¹⁵⁷ Many news reports claim that Hindus own a large part of the meat trading in India. In 2016, Justice Sacchar also commented to the same effect. However in the absence of conclusive numbers on the slaughtering trade it is difficult to substantiate this claim.

from the Muslims and Hindus. In the next chapter we shall elaborate on how similar reactions are given when questioning the predominance of Chamars in tanning and leatherwork. The next section examines the relationship between flaying, the animal body and the untouchable groups.

3. Cleaning Death : Flaying the Animal

The procurement and circulation of *murdhari* is a fairly interesting process. Most people agree that skinning of *murdhari* is a highly complex and skilled process. As with most other skills in this industry, dexterity at flaying is also considered to be hereditary, in specific to the Chamars. However, with a large number of Chamar families leaving this work under the influence of panchayats or social reform movements, there now exist, groups within this caste who have left this work and those who continue¹⁵⁸.

Urban areas like Kanpur and Agra have a huge population of stray animals, of which stray cattle forms a large section. On the other hand, in adjoining rural areas like Kanpur Dehat¹⁵⁹ and the villages of the Agra District adjoining the Agra City, cattle is domesticated in equally large numbers. The disposal of cattle carcasses has been a point of much discussion in these spaces. Disposal of cattle carcasses has been organised through *thekas* (contracts) taken out by the Nagar Mahapalika in the urban areas and the gram panchayats in the rural areas. These *thekas* are bid for by the interested parties who then pass on the job of disposal of carcass and flaying to individuals from either the Chamar, *mehtars* or the *kol*

¹⁵⁸The subsequent generations of the 'non-continuing' Chamars also lost the customary rights over animal carcasses since the existing *thekas* or rights were divided amongst the 'active' families, making a return to leatherwork impossible (Sinha, 1986, p. 1063). This is significant since, the collection and retrieval of hides can now also be a profitable activity under the contractor system. A little later in this section we will bring into discussion one such narrative where collection of hides has led to communal and economic mobility.

¹⁵⁹ Kanpur District used to be one administrative unit till 23 April, 1981, when it was divided into Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat. In 2010 Kanpur Dehat was named Ramabai Nagar, but subsequently it was again changed to Kanpur Dehat. (Arora, 2014)

community, depending on the local contexts¹⁶⁰. Once the skin has been obtained, and a sufficient number (a minimum of 5-10) have been collected, they are transported to the nearest *mandi* (wholesale market). These *khaal mandis* exist almost every 100-200 kilometres in Uttar Pradesh and the largest of them is in Hapur. Once the skins are sold in these local *mandis*, they may be transported to Hapur, where they are sorted and segregated according to type and quality, and then transported in large trucks to cities like Kanpur where tanneries consume these skins in large numbers.

Or agents of tanneries could themselves scout the local *mandis*, buy skins in bulk and take them to the respective tanneries. In Agra, in a village called Nagla¹⁶¹ Akkhe, situated just on the outskirts of the city on the way to Fatehpur Sikri¹⁶², a family of cattle owners informs that here the job of flaying and carcass disposal is taken on by the Bhangi of the village, who is employed by the local contractor who has won the government contract. When I ask whether this person is actually a Bhangi by caste, they are quick to point out that they do not know for sure, but whoever does this work is called Bhangi in a generic fashion.

There could be a sociological fact in this claim. In many villages especially in Eastern UP, Chamars have been giving up their traditional roles, like flaying and midwifery and these jobs have been passed onto castes lower than them such as the Bhangis and the Doms. Thus the use of the term 'Bhangi' may refer to a generic indication of being of any caste lower than the Chamars, or may in fact refer to the specific caste of Bhangis, who in fact are the sweepers or manual scavengers in most contexts. Most of the municipality sweepers and workers also

¹⁶⁰In Kanpur, carcass removal and flaying has spread across many groups such as the Bhangis, Muslims and Jeliad. At the same time, in areas like Gorakhpur, which has the prominent Chowri-Chaura hide market, flayers are still Chamars. In Meerut flaying is dominated by doms and some adivasi groups, which work on a piece-rate or through block level contracts, which could be between seventy thousand to one lakh a year and Muslims and dominant Chamars are usually the contractors (Sinha, 1986, p. 1063).

¹⁶¹ The word 'Nagla' is a local term for Nai Abadi settlements, which were particularly lower class in nature.

¹⁶²This is the area where slaughterhouses were relocated to in the early 1900s, as witnessed in Torabuddin's narrative.

come from this caste. In the urban context, the municipality, operating again through *thekas*, gets the carcasses picked up by various lower caste workers, especially from the Bhangi community. In Kanpur, this arrangement gets complicated further.

Baldev Singh, the founder of the Mritya Pashu Nishtaran Seva Samiti, in Kanpur, throws light on the interesting presence of a group called '*Jallads*' in the city's municipal ranks. This Samiti is one of the several such bodies in Kanpur which puts in tenders for the disposal of carcasses with the municipal corporation. These *samitis* or leather flayers cooperatives have been contested arenas in UP. Large scale policy changes in the 1970s in the leather industry impacted the processes of flaying and tanning. With the emphasis shifting to the export of high value products, the export of raw hides and skins was banned in 1973. The government then setup leather corporations in order to regulate hide collection and flaying activities. This brought in the zilla parishads (District Councils), which were anyways empowered under the Kshetria Samiti Act, to regulate 'offensive trades' through licensing and fee structures. Thus the processes of flaying, tanning, extracting bones, horns and offals of the animal, all came under the zilla parishad and hides became a profitable commodity, away from the public health concerns of a 'nuisance' trade. Under this arrangement, the traditional rights of the flayer to the commodity of hide moved to the contractor, but the defiling work remained with the flayer. This did not remain uncontested and a series of complicated court cases on the rights over hide ensued¹⁶³ (Pathak,

¹⁶³ The first of these cases was *Jagat Dhavi v Zilla Parishad*, (AIR 1975), where the Allahabad High Court struck down zilla parishads authority to regulate offensive trades if they violated the rights of livelihood for a community or if it creates a monopoly through devices such as auctions. In an earlier Supreme Court case of 1969, (*State of Maharashtra v Mumbai Upnagar Gramudyog Sangh*, (SCR 352), the court maintained that the municipal corporation can exercise control over carcass disposal if it concerns the matter of public health. The Bombay Municipal Corporation laws required the owner of a dead animal to remove it (either herself or through the corporation or an agent) with a payment of Rs. 20. The dead animal thus becomes the property of the corporation, who could then contract out the carcass utilization thus depriving the flayers of their livelihood. Pathak argues (1997, p. A 137-38) that by the 1980s the nature of the Supreme Court had changed, as indicative in the Bombay pavement dwellers case and the Court was now imposing duties on the state. Thus in 1981, the Supreme Court ordered the state governments to eliminate

1997). Under the orders of the Supreme Court, the state governments began forming cooperatives with 'genuine flayers', which would now be the sole recipients of hide collection and flaying licences in a block. While many groups of flayers could form cooperatives, many dummy ones were also floated by contractors from outside these communities. Many of these were Brahmins and Thakurs from the villages who were engaged in a wage labour relationship with flayers in the cooperative once the contract was won (Pathak, 1997, p. A 139).

Singh claims that all the carcass disposers in Kanpur come from the Kol community and in the official records of the administration they are listed as 'Jallads'. Singh claims that this is a peculiarity of Kanpur and since it has now become an official term in the Nagar Nigam's parlance, they now want the *thekas* in other districts to also be given to the Kol community, under the same name. "Yeh kaam kala sona hai" (This work, maybe dirty but it pays), Baldev opines.

The history of the Kols is somewhat variegated. According to Crooke (2012), the Kol or Baiswar are one of the Dravidian tribes of the Vindhyas who ranks with the Bhil, Gond, or Oraon, and stands higher than the menials of the plains. Crooke does not mention their traditional professions. Ghurye (2008) categorizes the Kols as the so-called aboriginal tribe along with Gonds and Bhars. Meera (2013) argues that there could be some relationship between the Kols and the Koli or Kori – the Hindu weavers, as against the Muslim julaha. Quoting W. Crooke's 1896 text she claims that the term Kori is derived from the Kol caste, Koris being the ones who wear 'kora' (unbleached) cloth or work with coarse cloth. Another kind of discourse on the Kols, mirroring Crooke's ideas closely claim that they are one of the indigenous tribal communities, who have not been recognised as such by the Uttar Pradesh Government (Rawat, 2012). Rawat claims that the neighbouring Madhya Pradesh recognises them as adivasis and thus gives them their share of forest rights.

middlemen in hide collection and set up cooperatives. For a detailed analysis of these cases see (Pathak, 1997).

Baldev Singh does not seem to refer to any of these lineages. In fact he suggests that it is only the Kol community, or the *Jallads* who can in fact handle this kind of work. “*Dil ke mazboot hon to yeh kaam kar sakte hain*”, (One needs a strong disposition to do this work) he asserts¹⁶⁴. Everywhere else, Bhangis or *swacchkars* do the skinning except in Kanpur, where this is the work of the *Jallads*.

According to Baldev opines that in the colonial times, when the British required a hangman, someone from the Kol community volunteered and he became famous as a *jallad*, with this photograph appearing in the newspapers as well. Since they anyways used to work with dead animals, the work of a hangman was not very difficult. In the public perception the name '*jallad*' was also close to skinning animals. The name thus stuck. Soon, *jallads* began to be given the work of post mortem as well in government hospitals¹⁶⁵. Thus it seems like that the Kols in Kanpur, or at least the parts of the community who are identified as *jallads* are analogous to the Bhangi community elsewhere in the state. Baldev says that there was no specific name for the community before the British requirement of the hangman. Later when in the census taking and other governmental operations, when asked, members of our community said that we are *jallads*.

This is where it becomes interesting. Baldev claims that '*jallad*' is not a caste term, it is an administrative term – tenders for disposal of dead animals are also not caste specific. But anyone who wins them will be called a *jallad*. In the villages however, the tenders are only for the Schedule Castes. Mostly Chamars win the tenders but Muslims end up doing the job for them – “*naam chal raha hai par kaam nahin hai*” (The Chamars work only in name, while the actual work is done by Muslims). This does not work out with the *swwachkars* – it is only recently that the occupation was opened up for everyone, but only then only some communities apply for the job.

¹⁶⁴ Personal interview conducted in Kanpur, January 2015.

¹⁶⁵ This account links up to the practice of employing Bhangis or municipal sweepers in the post mortem sections of government and private hospitals even today

Baldev, himself belongs to the Kol community and is also a *Jallad*. Both his father and he are graduates, and our conversation is sprinkled with references to Ambedkar and civil and political rights movements in India. He stresses on getting education, even if it means doing stigmatising work on the side to survive. Expanding the category of '*jallad*' to other states will of course increase the stigma, but will also allow the community to earn money and upgrade their status in life, just like the Chamars did. The next generation can then study without having to do this degrading work. Towards the end of our conversation he starts talking about the Muslims – "*Muslims to is mein ghus kar kaam kar lete hain, hum to phir bhi door se karte hain*" (Muslims are so intimately involved with this work, both physically and symbolically, we still keep a distance).

The samiti was made about forty years back. In the villages, the animal can be skinned (*chhil lete hain*) where it has died. In cities, of course there is no such provision. The Nagar Nigam only takes care of the stray animals (*aawara pashu*), not the dairy animals. The dairies in fact pay money to the *jallads* for disposal of the dead animals. Both the Nagar Nigam and the Samiti then sell the skins in hide markets (*khaal mandis*) like, Pechbagh in Nai Sadak in Kanpur. *Thekedaars* (contractors) operating in these mandis, who are also called stockists, are then further divided into those who do '*chote ka kaam*' and those who do '*bade ka*' – for small and large skins respectively. '*Bade ka*' is also a common term for beef or buff meat in the slaughtering trade, while mutton is often also called '*chhota*'. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, mandis such as the one in Pechbagh are under threat now, since trucks of skins coming from outside Kanpur are no longer unloaded here. Instead, tannery agents ensure that they are taken directly to the tanneries¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁶ Bharat Dogra (1986, p. 152) reported the functioning of this system of contracts in a village near Saharanpur where a large leather workshop was started by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 1972 with the purpose of encouraging tanning in rural areas. Dogra's findings reveal that leatherwork was actually coming down. While a part of the problem was the perception that this is dirty work, a large part of the problem of declining leatherwork stemmed from the fact that after Chamars started giving up on the work of flaying and tanning, the gap was

Baldev feels that the intervention of technology has definitely reduced the stigma of the job. There has also been an increase in awareness, for instance, people take baths before going home. Earlier, even if they could afford people would continue to wear dirty clothes. *“Aap hamare ghar ayengi to bata nahin payengi ki hum yeh kaam karte hain. Ab to samiti wale bhi crorepati ban gaye hain”* (Our domestic lives show no indication that we do this work. Many of us are actually earning well and have a high standard of living).

Baldev feels that this skill is learned through the family and community. In fact there should be training institutes where flaying is taught. At this point he also says that other members of his community could not have talked to me like this since they do not know the words like *sansthan* (institution) and *tachniqi* (technical).

The issue of technical training is raised frequently in the industry. While this will be taken up in detail in Chapter Five, it is important to mention here, that for Baldev technological intervention brings in a crucial distancing from what is perceived to be polluting work. The view is quite popular in the industry. However there exist occupations in leather production which are located in liminal zones as far as caste and religion are concerned. It is here that the politics of technology comes to the fore, and its ability to distance or morph pollution is tested. Selectors and purchasers of leather provide the linkage between the hide markets, slaughterhouses, tanneries and factories. With the availability of technical training in leatherwork a significant number of “upper caste” men have

filled by contractors from other communities who began purchasing the rights over dead animals in district level auctions, organized by the government. Thus while local flayers lost their claim over hides, the local tanner and shoemaker lost their regular supply of skins and leather respectively. The contractors on the other hand, began supplying raw hides to hide exporters and large tanneries. The KVIC got control over carcasses from the Directorate of Industries around the mid-1980s, when the Supreme Court got involved in complicated legal battles over the rights to the carcass. KVIC now had to register carcass utilization cooperatives, as well as provide technical training to these cooperatives (Pathak, 1997, p. A 138).

entered into the industry and today operate as these selectors and purchasers, amongst other occupations. These individuals, some of them Brahmins, disrupt the Chamar-Muslim narrative which has been operative till now. For the first time in the production chain of leather we witness the entry of Brahmins and “upper castes” in significant numbers and more importantly in direct contact with the animal body. Distancing is difficult to sustain in this context, and it is here that the limits of caste and religion are explored.

4. Choosing Death: On to the Tannery

In May, 2013 while interviewing leather designers in Noida, the owner of a niche leather boutique, introduces me to her tailor ‘master’, Chandar, who specializes in making leather bags. As I introduce myself and the research, Chandar barely looks up from a small collection of about ten handcrafted bags lying on the table in front of him. As the head tailor for a concern which only makes bespoke handbags, Chandar is careful to inspect each bag thoroughly for any minor defect or design flaw. He himself crafts an entire bag only rarely when old customers demand a special design or when a special order comes in. I wait for him to finish the inspection, as I and some younger tailors watch him so about his work. For the younger tailors this is a time for training as well as for assessment of their work. Once he is finished, Chandar carefully assigns fresh work to these apprentices, giving suggestions on their techniques and then takes me aside to his own work station and agrees to talk, but about Tangra, Kolkata’s leather cluster, rather than his work in Noida, which is in his estimation is not exciting enough. “*Yahan woh baat nahin hai, na woh kaam hai, jo wahan hota tha*” (Noida as a city is not comparable to Kolkata, nor does the work present the same challenge and skill), he says.

While he has been working in this niche leather boutique for the last eight to ten years, much of his earlier life was spent in Tangra, a leather production cluster,

in Kolkata. Chandar, belongs to a family of leather tailors who have been a part of the bag manufacturing industry in the city. He also grew up around the area, and has vivid recollections of the way small, informal tanneries used to function in the area. However what Chandar recalls with the most fascination is the people who used to come into these small, congested lanes to buy leather. Most of these would be upper-caste owners of either larger tanneries or export houses, who would be looking for cheap but good quality leather which was being tanned in the area. Chandar tells me with a smile on his face, "*Chooachoot ki baat to yeh hai ki, aaj se kuch saal pehle tak, maalik log jab chamda khareedne aate the to use chaat chaat kar dekhte the, ki chamde se namak nikal gaya hai ya nahin. Humne apni aakhon se dekha hai in logon ko, par jab basti ke bahar milte hain to humein dekhkar muh bana lete hain*" (As far as the untouchability of leather is concerned most of it is hypocrisy. Till a few years back, when upper caste entrepreneurs used to come to buy leather, they would taste it to check for excess salt. I have seen these people lick leather with my own eyes. But when they would meet us outside Tangra, the disgust would be apparent on their faces)¹⁶⁷.

The taste of leather, its odour as one raises it near one's nose to lick it, the remnants of salt on one's body after the visit to a tannery, are all ways in which leather marks the senses. Writing about an entirely different context, Seremetakis (1994) talks about the notion of sensory commensality – "the exchange of sensory memories and emotion and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling...The history of the senses in modernity can be understood as the progressive effacement of commensality..."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Remnant of salt on tanned or semi-tanned leather would mean that the tanning process has not been performed well and the leather can develop cracks or defects later on.

¹⁶⁸ Seremetakis (1994) is actually talking about a Greek practice where the grandmother would soften bread with her own saliva by placing it in her mouth and chewing it, before passing it onto the grandchild, in order to help the child chew. For Seremetakis, this action does not provoke disgust but is actually an important moment of bonding between two generations. In this sensory commensality, the child is in fact nourished in a non-gustatory fashion by the exchange of sense memories through saliva.

The relationships of caste are based on the very negation of this commensality. Chandar's account on the other hand, subverts caste but forging an exchange of sense memories between the animal, the tanner and the buyer leading to an intermingling of their bodies and their castes. Chandar's laughter, amidst what was a serious, professional demeanour, gives away the force of this intermingling.

Throughout the rest of this research I tried placing Chandar's narrative in some historical facts or details about this practice, but no one seemed to be forthcoming. Until in 2015, the human resource manager of a large export house in Unnao, insisted that I talk to their purchaser, Amit Tripathi.

Export houses and large factories, usually employ individuals in the capacity of selectors and purchasers whose are responsible for scouting the local tanneries and hide markets in order to locate good quality hides and finished leather. The selection of hides or finished leather is the most crucial part of the production process since the quality of the final product depends on the quality of this raw material. The hide has to be touched, felt and keenly observed for defects and fine lines. A selector usually operates on the field and spends his day in multiple tanneries and offices of hide dealers. The purchaser has several selectors working under him, and is usually confined to his office, but is responsible for the ultimate selection of hides and leather for the tannery. As discussed earlier sometimes these could be independent agents, who form the link between hide dealers and tanneries. However export houses usually employ people trained in leather technology for this work. Amit Tripathi, a Brahmin, is one such purchaser.

An FDDI graduate in footwear production and designing, Amit initially worked with a couple of sports shoe manufacturers in the design and merchandising departments. Amit's elder brother passed out from the Government Leather Institute in Kanpur in the early 1990s and thus encouraged Amit also to join the

industry. When he got a job with this firm, Amit was not sure of which department he would be placed in, and assumed that it would be merchandising since he had prior experience. However he was given the responsibility of the purchasing department. He recalls the first few months on the job as being harrowing and miserable. Amit comes from a family of orthodox Brahmins who follow strict dietary restrictions and norms of purity and pollution. His brother stays away from the family in a different city and thus did not experience the kind of contempt that Amit did from within the household. After several hours of conversations, Amit admits that his wife and mother do not even talk to him until he has had a bath. Even then there is immense pressure to change jobs or at least look for a “cleaner” option within leatherwork.

When I ask how he feels about his own work, and how he negotiates this everyday predicament, Amit reveals several interesting strategies. “*Mai khud cow leather nahin choota hun. Buff choona padta hai. Kaam hai, karna padta hai. Cow hua to dekh liya, buff hua to choo liya*” (I never touch cow leather, but because we deal so much in buffalo leather I have to touch it. It is after all my work. So I examine cow hides visually and only touch the buffalo hides)¹⁶⁹, says Amit. Cow hides are mostly imported in the wet blue form, from Italy, Pakistan, Denmark and Germany. The quality is so good that one does not need to select the hides, Amit clarifies later. Given that he believes that the cow is sacred to Hindus, Amit is also an advocate of shifting the entire industry to PU leather.

On the other hand, Amit is also invested in the desire for leather. He argues, “*Mai kaam ke baad seedhe mandir nahin ja sakta. Jab wet blue bhi uthate hain, ya bike pe kaccha chamda jate hue dekhte hain to grihna hoti hai par leather jacket par 15000 ka tag dekh kar use kareedne ka mann bhi karta hai. Cope to karna padta hai, jaise family mein death ke baad bhi to cope up karte hain. Waise hi yeh kaam death ki tarah laga hai, par cope to karna padta hai*” (I cannot go to a temple after work without having a bath. Even when I touch semi-finished leather, or see hides loaded on the back of a motorcycle on the city streets, I feel disgusted. But

¹⁶⁹ Interview conducted in Unnao, January, 2015.

then when I see a high value leather jacket, I also feel like possessing it. Ultimately one has to cope with this death like feeling, like one copes with a death in the family).

A couple of days later I meet one of Amit's selectors – Sanjay Chaturvedi. Sanjay, also a Brahmin, seems to have a different relationship with his job. Incidentally his job also demands him to be much more sensorial than his supervisor, Amit. Sanjay spends most of his work time in intimate contact with raw hides. I go along with Sanjay to one of his tannery visits in the Jajmau region in Kanpur. Sanjay surveys the hides with a cursory glance – 'checking for defects', he says. The first test is thus visual. The hides that he likes visually are then set aside for a more thorough examination. Sanjay now starts caressing the hides, his fingers deftly checking for feel of the skin – "the grain", as the experts call it. The grain, he explains to me, is the skin pore. The texture of the grain and their location on the skin are an identification of which animal the skin has come from. At this point he touches his own arm, and asks me to feel the pores on my own arm as well.

"Leather is essentially skin, it also breathes, changes textures, and it is alive", Sanjay reiterates what I have heard many times now. This tactile sensing of the skins opens up for him a virtual biography of the animal. The hair pores are very close in the cow, far away in the buffalo. On the other hand, the cow's tissue fibres (*rehsh*) are very soft and fine, the buffalo fibres are coarser. Thinner, softer tissue fibres are preferred because they have better bonding during chemical processes. But one has to be careful to check the side of the skin for the quality of the tissue. Meanwhile, Sanjay has expertly eliminated some skins for their lower quality and the presence of defects – pox marks, tics, injury marks from thorns and bushes and *koshikaon aur nason ke nishaan* (vein and nerve marks which are usually present in malnourished animals. Malnourishment means that the hide will also not be of a good quality. This also helps identify whether the hide is coming from a stray animal or a domesticated one). The feel of the skin is important, as everything is not visual, some scars and defects

maybe hidden. Further different parts of the skin need to be felt differently and for different purposes¹⁷⁰.

At this point he goes on to draw me a diagram of the various parts of the skin and points them out of the actual hide, urging me to feel the difference in texture. The skin of the butt is the firmest and that of the neck is the most loose, belly is somewhere in between. Finally as he come to the final selection of hides, Sanjay tells me, "*Smell kariye ise...khaal ki mehek har process ke saath badalti rehti hai. Selection mein soongh kar nahin dekhna padta hai, par mehek se hi pata chal jata hai ki khaal kaun si processing stage par hai*", (Smell the hide. Although I do not have to smell it for selection, but during tanning the odour of the hide tells you at which stage of the process the hide has reached).

Sanjay, trained in leather technology from GLI, Kanpur, feels that he should have done a footwear course. But now that he is in the selection part of the trade, he does feel proud of his experience. "My bosses cannot identify leather at all", he claims. "*Ek-do saal lagta hai, ki kya kaam kar rahe hain, phir aadat ho jati hai*" (You feel disgusted for about a couple of years, but then you get used to it), he adds.

Caste habitus and the fashioning of the caste self are certainly not homogenous practices. The differences between the experiences of Sanjay and Amit, both Brahmins, indicates the way in which educational qualifications, familial settings and class locations intervene in the production of the experiences of caste. Their experiences also bring out a common affectual plane of disgust and

¹⁷⁰Defects in the skin of the animal can potentially make the leather unusable. In 1917, a note is circulated to the governments of Madras and Bombay, proposing a prohibition of branding of cattle, which makes the hide defective for military and civilian purposes (Note on Branding of Hides and the extent to which the leather supplies of the country are affected by this practice, by Mr Henderson, No 554, January 1917, NAI). The note proposes that if the practice of branding cannot be stopped due to religious or other reasons then at least it can be restricted to a small one on the neck or shoulder of the cattle rather than covering a large part of the body itself (Note forwarded by The Wheat Commissioner for India, AC McWatters to Hon Mr PR Cadell, Chief Secretary to the Govt of Bombay and Hon Mr Davidson Chief Secretary Govt of Madras on 18 Jan in Note on Branding of Hides and the extent to which the leather supplies of the country are affected by this practice, by Mr Henderson, No 554, January 1917, NAI).

apprehensions which mark the contact of the upper caste self with polluted objects in specific ways.

Academic works like McKim Marriott (1990) and R S Khare (1966) have tried to understand the dynamics of the Brahmin life-world. Some of these works seem to suggest that these worlds are constructed around a strict axis of purity and pollution. However, Amit and Sanjay complicate this idea of purity and pollution, not because they chose the profession, but more significantly because they continue to persist in a context that perpetuates an immense disjuncture between the life world of their ascribed caste and the phenomenological everyday that they have to negotiate. Usually these Brahmins claim claimed that they are here by mistake, or due to faulty advice by an acquaintance. However this explanation based on chance is not adequate since they do not explain the staying.

Mostly one can go through life without even realizing the disciplining nature of the lived experiences of caste. How and what we eat, how urgent is the need to take baths and cleanse spaces, what we think is beautiful and what is disgusting, how much bodily contact we prefer with others – these unnoticed practices which provide a texture to our everyday phenomena are also deeply linked to the life-worlds which our castes provide us. Sometimes though this belief can be disrupted - either through an event which breaks down known ideas of the self, for instance people refusing to ferry a young Ambedkar on their cart, leading to his realization of being an ‘untouchable’, or by an interrogation of the self through education or agitation. A third event which may force discordance between the experiences of oneself and one’s caste is ritual pollution. The threat of ritual pollution lies in the attendant of loss of caste - losing caste does not imply going down the caste hierarchy, but rather a move out of the caste system altogether¹⁷¹.

¹⁷¹ An example here would be the explanations for the origin of the Chamar, or the threat of losing caste by travelling abroad or eating polluted food.

I propose that this unhinging is quite close to the experience of the Brahmin who touches and smells leather as a part of his every day phenomenological world. While the modern space of the leather industry could create opportunities for educated and technologically qualified upper-castes, it could not provide the phenomenological conditions in which an unmarked modernity could operate. In an industrial space which was actually constituted by the modern, the odours of leather would persist but not cause such disruptions of the self. We will return to these Brahmins in the next two chapters as well, as we examine their roles in the other parts of this industry and through these experiences attempt to complicate the figure of the both the Brahmin and the leatherworker.

Conclusion

The chapter began with the slaughterer and the flayer as two figures located in the matrix of leather and leatherwork. Towards the end, we introduced the selector and the purchaser, who bring together the leather industry with the slaughterhouses and hide markets. The chapter also revolved around the ideas of life and death, as categories which provide important thresholds for pollution and contamination. While death signifies the beginning of occupations for some like Baldev, for others like Amit, work itself was compared to death. This idea of death strongly foreshadows the live animal body, on the politics of which we spent a considerable time in this chapter.

Ultimately this chapter concerned itself with the animal, not just the physical body of the animal but also the affects that it creates in the production of leather. At times we also came across traces of the animal-like, for instance in the untouchable who becomes one with the carcass that she is flaying. We also came across excesses, spill overs from the animal which stands out and invests itself in the object of leather. While the animal seems to cease with flaying and slaughter,

it will nonetheless continue to be a string presence, conceptually and materially in the following chapters as well.

Leatherwork based on a close proximity between the animal and the human, manages to create conditions which fall in excess of what is usually expected of commercial enterprises. Beyond the export figures and quarterly estimates there lies the intimate contact with the animal, which seems to serve as a constant reminder of one's own precarious humanness. The drawing of this boundary between the animal and the human is an everyday task for this industry. For the Brahmin, this fear of the animal is exaggerated by the impossibility of consumption and digestion. No wonder then that Aniket Jaaware (1998) asserts with such a force that for the upper castes, eating the Dalit by way of consuming Dalit literature is possible but eating with the Dalit poses the ultimate threat. The more non animal the object, the easier it becomes to consume – like Dalit literature, like those yellow grains of gelatine which also come from animal bodies.

We also need to make a difference between simply consuming meat and also additionally participating in slaughter – ritual or otherwise. Participation, even if symbolic, in slaughtering is crucial if one is to consume the animal. The Brahmin does not assert superiority but rather avoids the animal¹⁷². This seems to work as long as he is also not participating in slaughter. But for Brahmins like Amit and Sanjay, their daily trips to slaughterhouses and tanneries, nonetheless makes them uneasy participants in the daily business of slaughtering. Distance from the animal, couched as love and respect, now seems redundant.

The object of leather is invested in by all these affects. The celebrated Quresh of Arabia, who finds herself caught in a complex web of occupational and caste

¹⁷² Derrida (1991) refers to this as the establishment of man's privileged position through the sacrifice and devouring of animals. Much as we need to mimic the other, to be the other in order to keep the other away, we also need to consume the other, digest something which is entirely alien. But this act of digestion will remain incomplete without asserting superiority over what is to be sacrificed.

hierarchies in India, invests the leather with an aura of cruelty and immorality. The Chamar, Bhangi, Kol or Jallad, connoted death and putrefaction and invests leather with power and disgust simultaneously. The power of leather comes from the act of flaying, the act of domination. However, the flayer herself configures this power very differently. For her, power does not lie in the desire for domination over the animal and animal like. The power of the flayer lies in the knowledge of the animal, in the ability to laugh at the upper caste entrepreneur licking the hides and in the power to convert hides into '*kala sona*'. The Brahmins of the industry invest leather with discomfort, complicating its desire, and its relationship to caste. It is through the politics of these affects that leather must be understood in order to bring to the fore the sensuousness of caste.

From here on the skin will be turned into leather, retaining some of its defining characteristics such as fine lines, distinguishing marks and odours. The rest of the body, now transformed into carcass, will also be dismembered and form the beginning of many object journeys such as gelatine from bones, meat from the flesh and animal feed from the hooves, ears and tail. These processes produce a delicately balanced sensory spectrum which attempts to retain the "natural" while effacing the animal.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM SKIN TO SHOES – THE TANNERY AND THE FACTORY

Introduction

Hides and skins from all over UP, collected in small and large numbers, through block level *thekas* and slaughterhouses reach the tanneries in Kanpur for conversion into leather. From here the tanned leather will make its way to factories in Kanpur, Unnao and other locations throughout India to be converted into leather goods such as shoes, bags and garments. Tanneries and factories form two distinct, but related parts of the leather industry. However during field interviews it became increasingly clear that the 'leather industry' connotes only the tanneries, while the factories style themselves as the 'leather goods businesses'. This difference forms the basis of the chapter, and it is through this difference that the object of leather is produced. It is also this difference which contains within it the affects of caste, of repulsion and disgust. The difference in the sensoryscapes, both produced and perceived, of the leather tannery and the leather goods factory gives away the caste prejudices and the untouchable that lies at the core of this industry. In simple words, while the tannery is almost synonymous as a noxious dirty trade, the factory is attempting to fashion itself an identity away from these noxious odours and sights, by claiming to be a different sensoryscape, a different affect altogether. Underlying this seemingly simple difference is a complex political discourse which concerns the imagination of bodies and spaces within the industrial cosmology. As spaces of production, the leather tannery and the factory bring together a variety of sensory objects and subjects. The animal body which was so pervasive in the slaughterhouses and abattoirs and in the hands of flayers, is now somewhat disembodied. The hide/skin now separated from the body, constitutes an object which has its own sensorial qualities and its own politics.

As the hide/skin moves along the production chain and is converted into leather inside a tannery, it also progressively moves away from its animal provenance in terms of optics, textures and its odours. The intermittent stage of wet blue leather in particular feels and appears nothing like the animal body from which it originally came from. Finished leather retains some of the animal textures in terms of the fine skin lines, pores and sometimes hair. However having gone through the process of being 'cooked', '*chamda pakana*' in a combination of various chemicals, the tough texture, the burnt brown colour and the distinctive odour of leather retains only the requisite amount of animal¹⁷³. Even the hint of any excess animality involves the risk of invoking disgust, especially in leather which has to either be worn as garments or used in upholstery. "A very strong odour of leather will not be tolerated in close contact with the body of the

¹⁷³ The term '*chamda pakana*' (cooking leather) or '*paka chamda*' (cooked leather) is used frequently across the industry to denote the process of converting hide into leather, especially the processes in the wet sections of the tannery. This is strongly evocative of the rules of purity and pollution which govern food practices within the caste discourses. Ghurye (1969) provides a five-fold division of caste based on the restrictions on commensality. The basic difference lies between *kaccha*, food cooked in water and *pacca*, food which has been cooked in ghee. *Kaccha* food can only be accepted from fellow caste people or from one's Brahmin guru (Ghurye, 1969). *Pacca* food can be accepted from some classes below one's caste. Thus from the point of view of the Brahmin the commensal division lies as – the twice-born castes, the castes from which the twice-born can take *pakka* food, castes from which the twice-born can take no food but can take water, castes from which even water cannot be taken and finally castes whose very touch is defiling to anyone in the caste order. Fire and pure substances such as ghee, thus have purifying properties, just as leather is considered to be polluting. There are further connotations to the idea of making pure by cooking. In the Indian context, while the smell of earth (*bhumigandha*) has a special place in religious and social texts like Atharvaveda, where it appears as a pleasant aromatic substance (McHugh, 2012, p. 69), on the other hand, the materials of earth, such as stones have none. Vaisesika philosophy explains this by arguing that stones are made through fire (*paka*), which takes away their odour. On the other hand, Vatsyayana proposes a third type of odour – odourless odour to explain this property of stones (McHugh, 2012, pp. 34-35). In another formulation Guru (2012, p. 208-9) argues that according to Manu, while fire is a source of purification for the upper castes, women and the lower castes have to undergo, '*Agni Parikha*', trial by fire. He further argues that the history of caste riots show how fire has been used to destroy untouchables and their homes. In an interesting subversion of this power of fire, Guru argues, Ambedkar sets the Manusmriti on fire at Chavad in March 1927. While the upper castes use fire to create a division, Guru argues, that Ambedkar destroys this division using the same element.

consumer. We have to be very careful in this regard so as to not cause any bad feelings,” opines, Iqbal, the owner of a large tannery in Unnao.

Iqbal deals in the export of finished leather and in his experience the inhibitions against strong odours is particularly prevalent in the Europeans context, where built environments preclude any contact with “nature”. We have discussed a similar kind of distancing when examining the human-animal relationship in the last chapter. Odour has often been associated with memory and particular odours are often thought of as triggering certain sense-memories. Strong odours have also been linked to animality. While this animality seems to work in favour of positive fragrances like musk and leather perfumes, the same may not be true of clothing and furniture. In her study of disgust, Mary Douglas observes that objects which are “out of their context” may often invoke disgust. For instance, while food on a plate may invoke pleasurable sensations, bits of the same food stuck on someone’s beard or face may cause immediate revulsion. The scent of leather and its animality also then has to be contextualized.

There is a distinct sensorium at play as far as footwear is concerned since the affect produced by shoes and by clothes for the human body is also different. Feet have had a rather curious relationship to the body in terms of cleanliness and order. On the one hand, touching the feet of elders or teachers is considered an auspicious act. Washing the feet of those of a higher status, including gods is also considered to be a mark of respect and acceptance of authority. Feet are thus involved in a matrix of power and hierarchies. When placed in the context of a caste, class or gender hierarchy, feet become objects of contestation. Since they come in contact with the ground (with all its attendant dirt, filth and foreign objects), in many contexts feet are considered to be inferior, or are subject to differential standards of hygiene, aesthetics and sensory management. “Lower castes” are said to have originated from the feet of Brahma, bad tasting food is said to “taste like feet”, people take off their shoes before entering homes,

temples, kitchens and even before standing on a stage¹⁷⁴. Shoes with a strong leather odour may thus be more tolerated than garments and bags, due to their proximity with feet. This also perhaps why, shoe manufacturers in Agra find the epithet '*jootewala*, shoemaker' or '*mochi*' increasingly demeaning. This will be discussed again the section on the factory.

For instance a number of online blogs and fashion advice forums constantly engage with "How to remove the smell of leather" especially from bags¹⁷⁵. Let us examine a representative question which voices the anxiety over a strong smell. Writing for a travel blog Jason Kessler recounts his experience of buying a leather bag from a souk in Morocco. On returning home to the United States Kessler realizes that he has in fact purchased a "stinky leather bag from overseas". Kessler attributes this stink to the fact that "that the leather had been tanned in the budget Moroccan way, which is to say that it sat in a vat of pigeon poop for quite some time to soften it. Great for the texture, terrible for the smell" (Kessler, 2015).

Kessler's account is fairly interesting for the purposes of understanding the sensory nature of leather. Kessler makes a fine distinction between texture and smell of leather both of which are attributed to the traditional ways of leather tanning which is being practices in Morocco. While the same process produces a desirable texture, the odour that it produces is more offensive. The stink of this leather bag, in Kessler's account arises as much out of the tanning process, as due to the fact of the way in which leather has been processed and the place from where it is coming from. It is this relationship between space, senses and the

¹⁷⁴ According to Manusmriti contact with earth or soil is thought of as polluting. Guru (2012, pp. 207-8) argues that in Manu's schema, earth is the diving line between the pure and the impure.

¹⁷⁵ For a representative sample of such complaints, see - <http://www.wikihow.com/Remove-Smell-from-an-Old-Leather-Bag> (Last accessed on 25 March, 2016), <http://www.thriftyfun.com/Removing-Odor-from-Camel-Leather.html> (Last accessed on 25 March, 2016), <http://flyanddine.boardingarea.com/tips-for-cleaning-that-stinky-leather-bag-from-overseas/> (Last accessed on 25 March, 2016) and https://www.reddit.com/r/LifeProTips/comments/2sa4zy/lpt_request_my_leather_bag_stinks_like_camel/ (Last accessed on 25 March, 2016).

object which this chapter seeks to explore by opening up the spaces of the tannery and the factory.

In terms of a sensory analysis the tannery and the factory are distinct spaces in terms of their odours, sights and textures. As discussed earlier, inside these industrial spaces it is often difficult to 'see' caste immediately. While many owners admit readily that most of their workers are Jatavs, it does not mean that the caste specific nature of this work is also acknowledged with equal ease. More importantly, it does not necessarily lead to a discussion on the caste of others like the owners and the managers.

However, once we open up the industry itself, this veneer begins to fall and the site of this fall is the tannery. Denial of caste is almost an impossible condition in the tannery. The smellscape of the tannery stands in contrast to the sensory scape of the factory. While it is an acknowledged fact that the stink of the tannery is unbearable, the factory if this thought of as sanitized. In the previous chapters we have discussed the relationship between odours, modernization and industries. While they do not smell like the tanneries, factories are not deodourized spaces.

Foregrounding this difference, the chapter is largely divided into three sections. The first and the third sections examine the space of the tannery and the factory. Within these two sections, we look at the different locations in these two spaces and through that trace the life of the object of leather. This section of the chapter is largely based on interviews and site visits of tanneries and factories in Agra, Kanpur and Unnao. The second section brings together the tanneries and the factories into the legal-environmental discourse around leather production and makes an argument for a sensual reading of environment and law. While this section also derives from site visits and interviews in the above mentioned three cities, the bulk of this section is based on Supreme Court judgments on the issue of the environmental pollution caused by tanneries.

1. The Odours of the Leather Tannery

In the course of this research I undertook extensive 'tours' of about ten tanneries with either the tannery supervisor or the owner. In each of these cases the wet section part of these tours were hurried, devoid of touch and was characterised by a certain glossing of facts and processes. The first times I was invited to touch the material was after the wet blue stage. "*Choo kar dekhiye ise, ab yeh pak chuka hai, yeh saalon tak aisa hi preserved rahega*" (Touch it and feel the texture. Now that the leather has been cooked it will stay in this state for years) – I was told at almost every tannery and the person with me would lift it with his hands and encourage me to hold the other end.

The significance of this gesture of 'touch' would be lost on me, had it not been for a group of women in a village on the outskirts of Agra. In the summer of 2014, as I was trying to map the work lives of the shoe factory workers in Agra, some of them asked me to come home to meet others in the shoe production network – the cattle owners, the carcass removers and the government *thekedaars*. The site of one such visit – Nagla Akkhe on the Sikandra-Bodla Road in Agra was particularly interesting. This village located in the shadow of many big shoe factories and also the Central Footwear Technology Institute (CFTI), proved to be a large catchment area for these factories to recruit workers from. Many of these workers or their families themselves own a small number of cattle – which along with land is a prime capital for these families. Those who do not own cattle are much lower in the social hierarchy.

It was in one such cattle owning house, around late afternoon that the women were busy bathing their buffaloes. The milk collector would come just before sunset and before that the buffaloes need to be bathed, milked and then fed. This is a time of furious activity – everything has to be coordinated and timed

perfectly, keeping in mind the moods of the animals. This is also a chance to train the younger members of the family – to accustom the buffaloes to their touch¹⁷⁶.

Watching over one such evening ritual from a distance, I was suddenly called to be a part of it by a bunch of amused women – “*Bhains ko choo kar nahin dekhogi to chamde par kaam kaise karogi*” (If you do not touch the buffalo, how will you understand leather?), one of them quipped. And she guided my hand over the back and belly of the animal. “*Samajh aaya?*”, she said, “*iski chamdi mulayam hai, yeh zyada doodh degi. Moti chamdi ka chamda accha banta hai*” (The ones with softer, thinner skin will give more milk, as compared to the thicker skinned buffalos which will be better for leather).

These two invitations to touch are quite different in nature. The latter is more intimate, the animal is known and it is an invitation to touch and know the life of this animal. This is a touch which leads to knowledge production. This knowledge is then transferred through the carcass removers, the flayers and those who inhabit the wet sections of the tannery – they intimately ‘know’ the skin, they know how it behaves under the touch of their hand, they recognize the skin by its hair and its wounds.

The former attempt at touching is marked by another kind of knowledge – the knowledge that the skin has undergone a purificatory ritual. This ‘skin’ has been cleansed beyond recognition. Seen in isolation, this wet blue is as far from skin or leather as one could possibly imagine. Yet this stage is the inauguration of what we commercially call ‘leather’. The skin has now ceased to exist as a material artefact. However the sensorial affects of this skin, especially its odours continue to pervade the industry and its inhabitants.

¹⁷⁶ See J Devika (2015) for a rich description of the human-animal interactions within such familial contexts.

The suburb of Jajmau situated in the Kanpur Cantonment Area, almost on the banks of Ganga and close to the Kanpur-Unnao-Lucknow highway, is the location of a dense cluster of small and medium leather tanneries which provide finished leather for the bulk of the domestic leather market in India. Most of these are located in small lanes and enclaves branching off the main Jajmau road which passes through the prominent Lal Bangla market. The workers also live in the same area, a little away from the main tannery cluster, in areas like Hashmi Road and Ambedkar Colony.

Most of the smaller units operate on a system of 'job-work' which means that they produce leather in distinct batches for different sets of clients. These clients could be small leather goods factories supplying in the domestic market, or could even be larger tanneries which are outsourcing their work, especially when demand is high or when bespoke leather is required. The operations and the strength of the work force in these smaller tanneries thus depend on the amount of 'job-work' orders received in a particular month. The market demand in tanned leather fluctuates greatly depending on weather, fashion trends and availability of animals. For instance the rainy season with its high humidity brings a lull in the leather market because skins/hides do not dry up quickly. On the other hand, a new fashion trend in the European markets spike the demand for niche products like 'hair-on' – hides with the animal hair intact, and this make impact production cost and labour required in smaller units in Jajmau.

As a result these units do not invest heavily in machinery and in infrastructure. They employ informal semi-skilled labour depending on the demand, and they work under a small number of contractual staff of 'technicians', '*ustaads*' who over the years have mastered the tanning process. Working conditions are poor, with little or no safety equipment provided for the workers. These units are mostly owned by Muslim families from Kanpur and it is not uncommon for the owners themselves to participate in the production process at times.

As against this, the medium sized tanneries in Jajmau function on a more organized basis. Again owned by Muslim families, these tanneries employ a larger contractual workforce which is relatively more permanent in nature. These operate on the basis of long-standing contracts with export houses and domestic factories and the scale of production is much larger. Owners in these tanneries usually maintain a distance from the actual work of tanning. In the last two decades, the largest tanneries like Park, Cooper Allen, Super House and Prachi have already moved to the neighboring Unnao District due to the cramped and confined nature of facilities in Jajmau. The Unnao units operate like any large scale heavily mechanized tanneries elsewhere in the world. The workforce for these units comes from villages in Unnao itself and when the tanneries moved from Jajmau, they left their workers behind since most of them could not afford to make the move. The owners of these tanneries however moved from their earlier residences from places like Defense Colony in Jajmau to plush complexes in Unnao. Jajmau and Unnao, marked by their differential class natures are thus locked in a competing setup. This will be elaborated upon a little later in the chapter.

In the last chapter, we concluded with the process of leatherwork, with hides being unloaded from trucks inside tanneries. This section picks up on the hunchback men carrying hides on their backs slowly make their way up to the tannery storehouse. Mostly it is the workers from the tanneries who participate in the unloading of trucks. Sometimes the security guards at the gates also lend a hand. Often these guards are not from the lower castes and come from the OBC and upper caste agrarian sections from nearby villages. During some interviews, the owners and managers of tanneries pointed out the participation of these guards in unloading the hides, as examples of the involvement of non-untouchable castes in the work. This fact however contradicted with the versions of the same process provided by the workers and the managers, both of whom claimed that non-untouchable guards may do subsidiary work like opening the truck and directing the people carrying the hides to the storehouse, which the

owners maybe construing as taking part in the process. Non-untouchable guards at the factory gates can take part in unloading finished leather, and some workers claimed that in large firms which have both a tannery and a factory, the owners may not be aware of the subtle distinctions being made in these two different acts of unloading.

At the larger firms, guards are usually supplied through security agencies, which have strict codes of conducts and definition of duties. These guards do not participate in unloading, irrespective of their caste status largely because the contractual and rotating nature of their posting makes them outsiders to the tannery habitus. On the other hand, in smaller firms guards can be fairly permanent and long-standing employees. A conversation with some of these guards in the Jajmau are confirmed what the workers and managers were claiming. These guards confirmed that even guards coming from the Jatav and Khatik communities, and lower-caste Muslims would not touch the rawhides. For those who come from untouchable communities, the profession of a security guard brings much “respect” and anonymity in the urban contexts. Their willingness to unload hides will be indicative of their untouchable status, something which absolutely cannot be risked. In a similar vein, faculty members in leather technology institutes, especially where lower skilled technicians are trained, claimed informally that there has been a significant drop in the number of Jatavs joining leatherwork and shoe-making courses, preferring to get an education in other “respectable” subjects. This brings out an interesting aspect of the polluting aspect of leather. Even a perceived contact with raw hides is sufficient to call into question one’s caste status. There is thus a possibility of one being “thought of” as a leatherworker, or as untouchable without belong to the community. The pollution of leather thus has a powerful life of its own.

Writing about a similar context in Japan, Hankins (2014) reports a fascinating case of the stigma of leatherwork and its spatial manifestations. Several areas in cities like Tokyo are known derogatorily as leatherworking areas even though the activity ceased to happen here several decades ago, due to changes in the

residential and industrial patterns in the city. Several residents of these areas who have no knowledge of the tainted histories of these spaces often discover to their surprise that social relationships like marriage proposals get rejected due to their locational identity as a possible descendent of a leatherworker. Leather thus leaves its olfactory identity not simply on bodies but also spaces and histories. The guards of the tanneries are not willing to risk this odoriferous taint.

Hides/skins are stored in tanneries according to their quality and the animal that they come from. Supply of hides greatly increases around festivals such as Eid when a large number of animals are slaughtered. This is also the time when higher quality hides come into the market, since prized and well-fed animals are slaughtered in large numbers. Detached from the animal body, the life of these hides/skins is now determined by their propensity to rot. Most of these come pre-salted from the hide market, which takes care of the rot to a large extent. However, these hides/skins have to be utilized quickly and efficiently since under any condition they cannot be preserved for long. During the tannery visits, I would often be asked if I want to actually 'see' the storerooms. The metaphor of sight struck me as interesting since these storerooms have a strong and distinct olfactory identity which marks them out even within the largely odoriferous tannery space. The visual imagination of these spaces has been hinted at earlier and will be discussed towards the end of this chapter again. However, there were also those instances when passing in front of the storehouses, the owners and managers would turn to me and ask, "Can you smell anything? We try to keep everything very clean here". While a more efficient arrangement of tanneries and the tanning process has been suggested by many, the fact remains that dead and deteriorating hides/skins will produce a stench. It is the meaning attributed to this stench that is significant for this work. Thus even the formulation of the question – "Can you smell anything?" gives away the anxiety of perceived pollution inherent to leatherwork. From the storehouse to the end of the wet sections of the tannery, the rotting stench of these hides will also function as the olfactory boundary of the pollution of raw leather.

The wet blue section of the tannery gets its name from the end product that it produces – wet blue leather, a product distinctive to the chrome tanning process which produces a distinctive bluish hue. Wet blue looks unlike both the hide and finished leather and can be preserved in this state for extended periods of time, unlike the deteriorating nature of raw hides. Wet blue thus represents the end of the polluted stage of leatherwork, where bereft of its organic excesses like fat, flesh, blood and hair, the hide/skin reaches a state of relative permanence.

Tanning consists of operations in four stages: beam house or pre tanning operations, tan yard, post-tanning and finishing operations. The division into these broad sets of operations exists for both vegetable as well as chemical (or chrome) tanning. Vegetable tanning is the traditional tanning method which uses plant dyes like *amla*, *babool* or Mylobylans bark. It is of two types, i.e., bag tanning and pit tanning. In bag tanning, the carcass is sewn together into a bag and then tanned by filling the bag with the tannin solution and hanging it up for several days to absorb the solution. In pit tanning the hide is soaked in pits and tanned with the same vegetable substance. This leather is reddish in colour and used for special products like saddlery, sports goods, and for shoe soles. Vegetable tanning is a highly labour intensive process and takes significantly longer than chrome tanning – about three weeks. East India leather, or E.I. leather produced in Chennai, is one form of vegetable tanned leather that has managed to sustain a high international repute especially in the present times of ecological sensitivity.

Ramesh Chand, a heel fixer at a shoe factory in Agra, recalls this older process from his childhood in a village near Agra. Ramesh remembers most vividly the pigmented red hands (*range haanth*) of the tanners which would mark them out as '*rangia* Chamars'. "It was very difficult to get them married, even within the larger Chamar community, as the red hands would immediately give away their caste and profession", says Ramesh. With the spatial and professional diversification of flaying, tanning and shoe making processes the taint of leatherwork also dispersed, allowing the factory workers and owners to claim

that they belong to a clean profession as against the “dirty” tanneries. The taint of the red hands is a powerful metaphor to understand the way in which caste pollution marks these bodies. Red hands is not just a visual indicator of caste but given the complex ways in which vision has been understood, especially in the sensorial discourses of the subcontinent, red hands also bring up the sense memories of the stench of the tanning process.

In a similar vein, Dumont (1980, p. 370) narrates the evidence of a toddy tapper from the Tinnevely District of Madras, who claims that his disgrace lies in the calluses produced on parts of his body by the chafing caused due to climbing palm trees. Caste and the pollution of professions, thus manifests as sensory markers on the bodies and spaces. The *range haanth* disappeared to a large extent with the introduction of chrome tanning, introduced in Calcutta around 1901. Tanning with chemicals also brought with it a veneer of scientificity to the process, which has been previously discussed in the context of England and the US in Chapter Two. This issue will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five.

The process of tanning begins with the beam house operations where hide/skins are limed by soaking in a lime solution to remove the hair from the outer side as well as to make the inner flesh side bouncy. The hide/skins are then delimed by soaking in sulphuric acid in pits to remove lime. Hides/skins are then fleshed manually using large knives, in order to remove the fat, remaining hair and skin from the hides. Then the hides are processed through chrome in order to produce ‘wet blue’. The wet section processes, considered to be the most polluted, smelly and dirty part of the work are done exclusively by Jatavs and members of other Chamar groups. Wet section workers never cross over to the dry section – neither can their skills be transferred, nor can they be physically relocated there. This is perhaps one of the defining unwritten principals of workspace organization inside the tannery. Iqbal, the tannery owner, admits that workers have refused to work in the wet section of the tannery, but also that he never thought of it as an issue of caste. He has observed that when workers are

arbitrarily placed in the wet sections they may not turn up for work the next day. “Not even Muslims want to work in the wet sections”, opines Iqbal.

Mahesh works in the wet section of a Jajmau tannery. I meet him at his residence in Ambedkar Nagar, after a long day of work. For about two years now he has been responsible for the fleshing and knifing operations. When asked about his work, Mahesh’s first instinct was to show it to me, but he expressed his inability to take me to his workplace since he is just a contractual employee. Mahesh then proceeded to describe his work as follows,

“In bade drumon (drums) mein khalon ko ghumaya jata hai ek-do din tak. Choonna (lime) lagate hain, phir nikalte hain. Phir khaal hamare paas aati hai. Choonna lagane se maans dheela pad jata hai, nikalna aasan ho jata hai. Bahut mehnat lagti hai is kaam mein, har koi nahin kar sakta. Khaal itni bhari hoti hai ki use theek se uthna, rakhna bhi seekhna padta hai. Maans nikalne ke baad khaal to pakaya jata hai jisse woh chamda ban jati hai. Shuru mein to hum rumaal baandh kar yeh kaam karte the. Pehle ke kuch hafte to khana bhi nahin khaya gaya. Phir aadat ho gayi.”.

(Hides are rotated in large drums for one or two days during which they are limed. Liming loosens the flesh and makes it easier to remove. Knifing is strenuous and skilled work, which everyone cannot do. These hides are extremely heavy and the first training usually involves learning how to pick them up and handle them correctly. After fleshing the hides are cooked to make leather. Earlier I used to tie a handkerchief around my nose while doing this work. Even then I could not eat anything for weeks. Now I am used to it.)

Like many other workers who were interviewed, Mahesh also refused to talk about his specific caste, but insisted on the governmental term ‘Scheduled Caste’ or the caste-communal identity of ‘Jatav’. Mahesh was brought to this tannery by one of his uncles who has also been working here for more than a decade and initially did not have any formal or informal training. As he describes the work is

not just gruelling but also requires skill and precision. The tannery management however denies that the lack of training opportunity hampers the tannery business in any way. Workers, the management asserts, come 'pre-trained' because they all do the same work while growing up in their villages.

Mahesh remembers his father talking about the '*jaat panchayat*' (caste panchayat) which happened in his village several years back under whose order the Jatavs gave up tanning in the village. Mahesh however notes, that almost everyone continues to do the same work but now in tanneries in urban centres. Back in the village, Mahesh does not reveal that he works in the wet section of the tannery for reasons of ridicule. "*Wahan to bas itna kehne se chal jata hai ki factory mein kaam karte hain*" (In the village, I just have to say that I work in a factory, without going into the specifics), he explains. The factory then stands as a substitute for all that is sanitized and modern, supposedly devoid of the pollution of caste. Tanneries have not been able to gain this status of being a "factory" due to the nature of the material that they deal with. Workers like Mahesh, thus do not become full workers, contained by their caste and the odours that inhabits their bodies.

Prayag Sharma, "Sharmaji", a Brahmin by caste and the wet section supervisor of a large tannery on the outskirts of Kanpur was quite amused when I asked him about his experience in a tannery, particularly focusing on his caste status. Distance, established through the sense of sight – 'overseeing' and 'supervision' marked his narrative. "*Hum kabhi apne aap kuch uthate-rakhte nahin hain, yeh supervision ka kaam nahin hai. Hamara kaam hai dekhna ki sab theek ho raha hai, chemicals sahi dale ja rahe hain, worker ko koi problem to nahin hai*" (I do not touch or handle anything myself. I work as a supervisor, whose work is to see, not touch. So I supervise whether chemicals are being used properly and whether the process is being followed), he says. It was this distancing which allows Sharma to participate in a profession which is fundamentally violates his caste status. Sharma elaborates about his life in the tannery,

“I have been working here for twenty years. Har roz, without fail, mai din mein do baar nahta hun sardi ho ya garmi. Kya karein, pocket mein rakhe rumaal tak se badbu aati hai. Khaal utarne se wet blue banana tak hamari zimmedari hai. Yeh sabse ganda kaam hai”.

(Whether it is winters or summers, for twenty years I have been having baths twice a day. This is very necessary since even the handkerchief kept in my pocket smells of the tannery since I am responsible for the wet blue section, which is the dirtiest part of the business.)

What is the difference between the sensory experience of Mahesh, Sharma and the selectors and purchasers from the previous chapter? All of them express disgust at the foul odours of the tannery, and they are all exposed to the sensescape of the tannery in more or less similar ways. The difference lies in the way in which these different occupational and caste positions have been constructed within the industrial discourse in particular and the socio-political discourse at large. These discourses allow Sharma to establish distance via optics since his very role lies in ‘seeing’ order into the tannery space. His “upper caste” status further allows him to inhabit this role without the ostensible threat of pollution. The selectors and purchasers feel more at discomfort since they are not afforded the luxury of optical distance. The very nature of their work demand touch, an intimate contact with the hides/skins. Their position on the ‘field’ as compared to the ‘office spaces’ that the supervisors command also puts them at a disadvantage as far as status is concerned. Mahesh can resort to neither his caste status, nor his position in the occupational hierarchy. However the odours of the tannery disrupt these discourses and opens up caste and sensory discourses. All of them have to deal with the persistence of the tannery odours on their bodies and their objects such as handkerchiefs.

However it would be wrong to assume that the tannery has a uniform or homogenous sensoryscape. The dry section of the tannery where wet blue

becomes leather marks itself off from the wet section in crucial ways. The absence of odours is the most important sensory markers of this difference. The tannery premises as a whole are enveloped in an odour of burnt flesh which can be smelled from several kilometres away even before the tannery has come into sight. In popular sense memory then the Kanpur-Unnao highway is marked with disgusting odours of tanneries and also the sugar factories. Sugar production is also an extremely malodorous industrial process due to its use of molasses which exists in a fermented state. This fermented product also forms the bulk of the sewage discharge from the sugar factories, making the odours very public. Sugar manufacture is one of the biggest industries in the sugarcane rich state of UP and the sugarcane farmers lobby is also a significant agrarian force in the state. During interviews in the tanneries, the stench of molasses would be frequently brought up by the tannery owners as the counterpoint to the complaints against the leather industry. Sugar however does not carry the affective charge of caste pollution as leather does and even though it can smell foul this odour does not connote pollution much in the same way as the odour of leather does. The dry section of the tannery, located within the odourscape of the tannery itself, also marks itself away from this odour.

The dry sections are largely mechanized and include processes like dyeing, tanning with the desired agents, stretched, splitting and finishing. Much of these processes are mechanized and do not involve an intimate contact with the raw materials. In any case by now, the wet blue is supposed to be free from all the organic as well as perceived impurities – “*chamda pak chuka hota hai*” (The leather has been cooked).

Mehboob has been working in the splitting section of a tannery in Jajmau for the past twenty years. Over time he has been positioned in almost all of the dry section processes and is perceived by his peers and also his owners as somewhat of an expert in the chemistry of leather processing. His description of the tannery process, quoted at some length here, shows that relationship.

“Khaal aati hai to use bade bade chaku se chilai karke fat ko saaf kiya jata hai. Phir drum mein daal kar, wash karte hain formaldehyde aur liquor ammonia mein aur Ph strip se acidity check karte rehte hain. Phir deliming karte hain, matlab sare chemicals dho dete hain. Iske baad leather ko white leather kehte hain. Phir leather ko chemicals mein pakaya jata hai. Is dauran, hum ek chota leather ka tudka kaat kar use ek aur chemical strip par laga kar dekhte hain – agar strip hari ho gayi to matlab leather tayyar hai, agar yellow ho gayi to abhi aur pakana hai. Pakne ke baad leather ko sukhne dete hain aur ab ise gaddar kehte hain. Phir setting machine mein dalte hain, hum ise churi ka belan kehte hain. Is machine mein khaal ke reshe khinch jate hain aur sare wrinkles nikal jate hain. Phir buffing hoti hai, mulekha machine bolte hain. Isse leather soft ho jata hai. Phir garam belan wali machine se leather ko nikala jata hai to usmein shine aa jati hai. Last mein trimming – chatai – hoti hai. Agar leather par design chahiye, jaise magardana (crocodile pattern) to plating machine bhi chala sakte hain.”

(Hides are cleaned of fat using large knives then washed in an acidic medium. Deliming removes all these chemicals and the leather is now called white leather. Then the hide is again put through various chemicals, to cook it. We continuously keep checking the Ph at this stage. Leather obtained after this is dried and is now called *gaddar*. This is then put through setting machines (*churi ka belan*) where the fibres in the skin are stretched to the desired length and wrinkles are removed. Leather is then buffed to give it a shine and to soften it in a machine called *mulekha*. In the end leather is trimmed (*chatai*) and patterns are applied through the plating machine).

Mehboob’s vocabulary heavy on technicalities and lower on the affective register signifies his status within the work space as well as in the social registers outside work. Another tannery worker, Islam, who is also regarded as an ‘*ustaad*’ amongst the workers and management speaks in similar terms about his work. A visit to his

home in Ambedkar Nagar however complicates this picture of distancing achieved through technical modalities.

Islam, popularly known as Islam *bhai*, has been working at a large tannery in Jajmau for three decades now. I was introduced to him by the owner on one of the tannery tours as someone who knows intimately the technical process and the history of the industry. Since Islam was busy at work at that time, he asked me to meet him at his residence in the nearby Ambedkar Nagar later that evening. I reached a little before the scheduled time and was asked to come in and sit with the family while Islam returns from work. His wife, Sayeeda, who had been updated about my research by Islam, was more than willing to spend some time talking to me. "*Hum bhi to chamde ka kaam karte the*" (Even I used to do leatherwork), she begins. Sayeeda belongs to the large group of women from tannery workers families who work with the '*katran*', the leather shavings and scrap pieces of leather collected from the tanneries. Her son, Aslam, is hanging in the background as we talk, and at an opportune moment she whispers to me that he does not like anyone talking about the tannery work now. Aslam was able to complete his graduation and now works as a sales representative in a private firm in Kanpur. Sayeeda subsequently quit working with leather after her son's employment.

Aslam's father, Islam, on the other hand found great pride in his work as a technician in the dry section of the tannery. His age and experience have elevated him to the level of an '*ustaad*'. The tannery supervisors and even the owner look up to him for expertise and his nuanced understanding of 'chemical processes' in the tannery. Informally he is responsible for 'training' the new entrants in the tannery, and also in deciding the placement of workers in the different sections depending on their skills. For the management, Islam is their eyes and nose on the tannery. Islam is aware of the importance of the knowledge that he possesses. He keeps reiterating that though he has never been to college yet he knows enough about chemistry to sustain his work, maybe even better than chemistry graduates who are employed by the tanneries as 'experts'.

Workers like Islam and Mehboob are important bearers of knowledge within the industry. It is however this expertise which is considered tainted with the odour of caste unlike the knowledge of the 'experts'. Aslam perhaps does not wish to mark his father as a bearer of a polluted skill. For him, his father is not so much as an expert in chemistry, as a smelly body which returns every night, with the tannery smeared on his self – a cruel reminder of their status as a tanners.

Several groups of wet section workers suggested that when they come back home their children run away from them because of the smell emanating from their bodies. Sometimes this can be corrected somewhat with a rigorous bath and some larger tanneries provide bath spaces for their workers. Some other workers have been using a separate set of clothes to be worn inside the tannery in an effort to contain the foul odours inside the tannery space.

Other accounts suggest that the problem maybe more deep seated than to be solved by these measures. In Unnao, a group of wet section workers who were just getting off their shift mentioned that though they will now take a bath before heading home, yet they will be chased by dogs all the way back. Other workers confirmed that in their colonies, if one sees dogs chase someone without a reason, then it is confirmed that the person works in a tannery. Aslam is probably the child of these experiences and his cleaner sales job justifiably allows him to move beyond these odourous existences. But for Islam these odours also bring a sense of pride and belonging.

For the owners, leather smells like money and thus they are willing to put up with the foul odours. Several informants reported that though the tannery smells bad, the fact also is that they make money out of it, and after a while one stops noticing the smell. Sitting in the plush home of Iqbal and his wife, Zeba, in Unnao it is hard to imagine that just beyond the doors of this house, there existed a tannery. How is it like to live so close to your work, I ask the young couple? The answers are quick and well-rehearsed – it is convenient, one does not have to bother about traffic, it is greener than the city and one is always already home. Zeba opines, "It does not smell all the time, only when the wind blows in a certain

direction". Later, as we were eating, overlooking a lush green lawn in the front of the house, Zeba catches me staring out of the window. "You know, I cannot throw dinner parties in that lawn there. You never know when it will start smelling", she says¹⁷⁷.

In fact, while the entire premises smelt of charred skin, inside the house, the charred odour was replaced by that of room fresheners, smells of food, of disinfectants used in cleaning and the occasional whiff of perfumes, talcum and fresh flowers. However, one only had to open the main door of the house to get a whiff of the rest of the premises. 'Getting used to the smell' is a common statement in the industry across caste, class and professional divides. Odours which are acceptable in the workplace, such as those of the tannery, may not be so inside a domestic setting. During the great sanitary reforms in cities like London and Paris, efforts were being made to fix the boundaries of both, private and public odours. Thus on the one hand, sources of public odours like slaughterhouses and curriers were displaced to the outskirts of cities. At the same time a careful management of hygiene and body odours began and the odours of the lavatory and the bedroom were sought to be restricted to these spaces. An intermixing of odours is thus a problem. This distinction is also foregrounded in the lives of workers.

While leatherwork continues to be one of the major sources of employment for those from the Chamar community, many have also distanced themselves from this work, at least at a visible, tangible level such as working from home. Women of these families continue to however work with leather shavings (*katran*). Male members on the other hand, if not working exclusively at home, fashion themselves as 'factory workers'. "*Koi nahin puchta hai ki kya kaam hota hai factory mein, woh to bas worker hain*" (No one asks about the specific work my

¹⁷⁷ It is interesting how the metaphor of eating, cooking, saliva has come up again and again while we talk about smell and odours. One is reminded of the use of the metaphor of 'eating' by Jaaware (1998), and Derrida (1991).

husband does. It is enough to say that he is employed in a factory), Islam's wife told me.

In an interesting flip, the home becomes a 'public' space, which is visible to the neighbours, to the visiting relatives, and to the larger memory map of the city and its population. These locations are then identified as 'lower caste colonies', the Dalit bastis or the Muslim localities, where the smelly dirty leather work happens. Factories on the other hand become closed private spaces where the identity of the 'worker' and the processes of labour mask any public odours. This work, hidden from the prying eyes, and enveloped in the garb of productivity, becomes acceptable and odourless. The battles of caste are thus fought in the very public homes, which is where one cannot be seen as doing 'dirty work'. The factory offers an escape from the stigma of home based work, even for the men. Tannery workers on the other hand are marked by the odour of their workspaces and thus not working in a tannery at all is a big improvement over being a tannery worker.

Before moving on to the sensoryscape of the factory, we need to consider the environmental critique of the leather industry in general and tanneries in particular. Tanneries and tannery workers are marked by pollutions of many different kinds. The next section maps environmental pollution on the pollution caused to the caste body by objects such as leather.

2. 'Polluting Odours': Caste, Environmental Law and Leather

On June 13, 2015, a delegation of tannery owners from the Jajmau area of Kanpur rejected the Uttar Pradesh (U.P) government's directive to contribute in setting up a zero discharge treatment plant which would lessen the amount of tannery effluent being dumped in to the river Ganga (TNN, 2015). Since February of the

same year, the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) had disconnected the electricity and water supply to 98 of 400 tanneries in Jajmau, on account of action taken by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) (TNN, 2015). Production has still not resumed in these units¹⁷⁸. On the very day of this meeting, in a small tannery in Jajmau, three people, including the tannery owner's son, a contractor and a worker, died due to asphyxiation after falling in a tannery tank. In response a senior administrative officer of the state government announced that they will check whether the tannery is compliant with environmental norms (Siddiqui, 2015).

Both these events are fairly unremarkable from the perspective of industry insiders. Tannery deaths and a deadlock in negotiations between the tannery management and the government on the issue of pollution have become a quotidian reality for large parts of the industry. However, for the purposes of this work, these events represent three important trends in the context of the leather industry in India. First, is the rather intractable three decade old battle between the tanneries and the state over the issue of environmental pollution which has made the industry appear irresponsible and obstinate and the state as incompetent.¹⁷⁹ Second, is the way in which, in the state discourse, a tannery death is presented as a failure to follow environmental norms at the cost of interrogating deep seated inequalities on which the industry stands. Third, and

¹⁷⁸ According to later reports, following the recommendations of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the NGT has proposed to study the feasibility of setting up a Zero Discharge Liquid (ZDL) for tanneries in Jajmau. The Tanneries; Association has already rejected the proposal stating that the ZDL installed in Tamil Nadu has failed and now the industries there are heading towards a CETP (TNN, 2016). Meanwhile the Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI) has announced that it has developed a waterless tanning technology for leather processing which will eliminate the need for using harmful chromium and sulphate salts for the tanning process and bring down the water requirement by 90-95%.

¹⁷⁹ There are various industries and occupations which have been stuck in similar situations. Most notable is the practice of manual scavenging which has simply refused to be abated in spite of a series of legislations and social awareness programs. This case has many similarities with the issue of pollution caused by tanneries and these will become clearer in the following sections of the paper. Apart from this there is the issue of polluting industries in general which range from issues such as the Coca Cola factory in Palchimada to the removal of polluting industries from Delhi. The leather industry in India, especially the tanning units present a slightly different case, in terms of the limited scale and geographical spread of the industry.

most importantly, is the way in which both these events are turned banal and quotidian.

Foregrounding the sensorium of the tannery, this section unpacks the idea of 'environment' by reading it against the grain of the deeply hierarchical notions of caste and religious identity which operate within the production of leather. It is argued that these conditions of the industry arise from a complex interaction of environmental law, industrial policy, caste and religious identities and above all a specific idea of sensory politics which gives shape to our industrial and societal spaces. The work further argues that these elisions are in fact conscious manoeuvres on part of the legal-environmental framework which allows the imagination of a specific sensorial imagination of the 'environment' which allows the inequalities of caste and religion to slip through the cracks. The proverbial stench of the industry is not merely due to the "decomposition of protein wastes". By doing this, the essay attempts to take the environmental discourse away from solely a scientific and technical understanding and brings back sensuousness and affect into the industrial discourse.

The production of leather in most parts of the world has largely been a problematic process and criticisms have come from various quarters. There has been a consistent critique of the production and use of leather from animal rights groups and from those who align with vegetarian and vegan lifestyles. Leather production especially in developing countries like India and Bangladesh has also been targeted for child labour practices and for non-compliance to industrial safety standards, especially inside tanneries where workers have been known to work in dangerous chemical laden environments without safety gears. But one of the most significant issues with leather production globally has been the polluting nature of leather tanneries and the impact that this has on nearby water bodies and ground soil.

Environmental law is silent on the desirability of leather as a consumer product and confines itself to a critique of the production process. Within this critique also, the legal-environmental discourse has been evasive on questions of caste

and religion and employs the registers of 'environmental degradation' to the leather industry just like any other industrial process. The environmental discourse has thus come to characterize much that is incorrect about the industry. Images of the mounds of salted raw hides/skins piled up in filthy premises, bare skinned workers almost fully immersed in lime soaking pits and pieces of flesh being scrapped off animal skins with rudimentary equipment have come to stand in as the symbolic images of leather production. These images simply do not remain visual entities and have come to acquire a particular haptic quality to them, which makes one almost feel the filth and the raw flesh as if it persists on one's skin. But it is actually the stench of these images which makes their haptic quality more urgent, more disgusting¹⁸⁰. The odour of tanneries almost functions as a universal signifier of their sensorial and political status and is a widely accepted and noted fact.

The stink of the body and of physical spaces has often been characterised as an indicator of internal moral states¹⁸¹. Foul smelling people and places are thus also deemed to be inherently disgusting, untrustworthy and undesirable. Tanneries in particular and the leather trade in general have also been framed in the discourse of "nuisance" and "noxious practices" by the colonial and postcolonial discourses (Sharan, 2014, Ahmad, 2013).

2.1 The Tanneries Cases

Life in Agra invariably comes to organize itself around two distinct but ubiquitous presences - the Taj Mahal and the leather industry. The destinies of both these industries were intricately linked in 1996 when in a landmark judgment (*M.C. Mehta v Union of India*, 1996) to prevent the "yellowing" of the

¹⁸⁰ For an account of the haptic nature of visual images, see Laura Marks (2000) where she argues that visuals be utilized to depict other sensory perceptions such as taste and smell primarily through the memory of these sensations which images invoke.

¹⁸¹ See Corbin (1986), Curtis (2008), Gandy (1999) and Smith (2006)

Taj due to sulphur dioxide¹⁸² pollution, the Supreme Court ordered the removal of 212 polluting industries from the Taj Trapezium Zone (henceforth TTZ). Another 299 industries were asked to setup pollution controls (Shankar, 1993). Most of these units were iron foundries and engineering works. Four of the largest tanneries in Agra – Wasan and Co, Mahajan Tannery, Agra Tannery and Park Leather Industries also featured in the list. Tanneries do not cause air pollution however they do emit extremely foul odours. In the absence of any independent study on the tanneries in Agra, the judgment assumes the fact of their “polluting” nature as evident and orders to shut them down¹⁸³.

The 1996 judgment was the last order in a long series of court cases starting in 1983 when a 10,400 sq. km area around the Taj Mahal was declared as the TTZ. No polluting activity was to be allowed in this area. In 1981 two thermal power plants in Agra were shut down by court orders. In 1984, M C Mehta filed a case against the Mathura Refinery alleging that fumes from the refinery are polluting the Taj. The Allahabad High Court judgment of 1993 had also talked about the closure of polluting units in Agra.

Agra, unlike Kanpur was never a large cluster for tanning, being more famous for footwear production. Still, there existed about 10-12 small and medium tanneries which provided tanned leather to export houses and domestic manufacturers in the city. Also in operation are small, informal tanneries in practically every household in the Dalit colonies like Khatikpara and Dhandhupura. These household units combined the entire operation from flaying to shoe-making in one place, employing family members and catering mainly to the local markets. Male members from these units also double up as

¹⁸² The Agra judgement prefers the NEERI report over the Vardarajan Committee report which attributed rising Sulphur dioxide levels to vehicular and diesel generator pollution.

¹⁸³ Recent studies by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) have claimed that the Agra judgment was not just hurried but also erroneous. While a decade later, sulphur dioxide levels have not reduced in the city, the Taj continues to “appear to be yellow”. Studies provide various reasons ranging from the chemicals used by the ASI to repair monuments to the refractal index of light which causes the pristine translucent marble to always “appear yellow”.

factory workers in the domestic and export factories in the city. Some of these are still in operation, though they face police and administrative action on a daily basis.

By 2000, with the collapse of the four big tanners, the remaining small and medium tanneries had also withered away especially after being harassed by the UPPCB¹⁸⁴. Within the industrial circles in Agra, 'the 1996 order' is something which is rarely discussed without bitterness and resentment amongst both workers and owners. While the industry in Agra would never recover from this order, the tanning industry would completely disappear from the city. The legal action on Agra tanneries came in the aftermath of similar lawsuits on large tannery hubs in Kanpur, Tamil Nadu and Kolkata.

It was only after 1986, when lawyer and activist M C Mehta started filing a series of court cases on polluting industries in general and tanneries in particular that pollution control became a major administrative and industrial issue. These judgments made it compulsory for tanneries to be attached to CETPs if they already did not have an ETP on their premises. As a result in 1986 itself, the Director General of Technical Development constituted a committee under the Development Council for Leather and Leather Goods in 1986 to prepare a plan for setting up CETPs for tanning industry. The Committee recommended setting up 70 CETPs in 14 states at a cost of Rs 530 million. Next, the Leather Technology Mission was launched in 1995 with the aim of improving the environmental performance of the industry through the development and diffusion of cost effective environmentally friendly technologies. The Mission, which was completed in 1999, implemented about 170 projects at 62 locations in 16 states. The Mission is claimed to have resulted in the demonstration of cleaner tanning technologies in over 200 tanneries and microprocessor based controlled wet operations in six tanneries. It also designed and commissioned 6 CETPs for tanneries clusters in South India. In 2000, the government has initiated a programme providing subsidy to encourage the leather industry to modernize its

¹⁸⁴ Interview's conducted with erstwhile tannery owners in Agra, March, 2015.

production facilities. The subsidy has been used by industry to modernize finishing facilities. Very little investment has been made to modernizing the beamhouse operations and tanning process, which are the main cause of pollution in the tanning industry.

Environmental problems actually start with the way in which informal recovery of carcasses is made and the way in which hides are salted and transported to tanneries, which leads to a high salt content and low quality of hides which then require more water and chemicals to be processed. Due to the high water requirement most tanneries are located near river basins, for example in the Ganga Basin in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, Palar Basin in North Arcot and Cauvery Basin in Erode and Thiruchirapalli districts of Tamil Nadu. In the absence of sewage infrastructure and effluent treatment plants in most cities, industrial and domestic sewage is simply allowed to flow into the nearby rivers, without any treatment.

The tanneries in India are reported to consume between 30-to 40 litres of water per kilo of finished leather. In addition to the large consumption of water and material, tanneries in India discharge an estimated 30,000 million litres of effluent per year. This effluent is harmful to the soil and water bodies into which it is released. The high amount of salt contained in the effluent can increase soil salinity, reduce fertility and damage farming. Tanneries also produce a large amount of solid organic waste. Of these pollutants hexavalent chromium, or chrome-6, a carcinogenic, has been found to be the most harmful.

There are many environmentally friendly chemicals and processes which can be incorporated in the production of leather. These include reuse and proper use of water, decreasing the amount of salt used for preservation, or processing green (fresh) hides, using machines for desalting, ammonia free deliming, and most importantly recycling chrome or using technologies for higher exhaustion of chrome so that lesser chrome is released into the waste water. The water consumption can be brought down to 15 litre/kg by the use of more efficient process management and reuse of water. But the cost of water in many places

such as Kanpur is very low. Consequently, the tanneries have little incentive to save water¹⁸⁵. Chrome recovery technology and reverse osmosis technology are now being pushed by the government. However, both of these are still not economically viable for the smaller units.

Compliance to environmental norms has been very difficult to establish in the industry. The most important reason cited for this is the prohibitively large cost of infrastructural development and maintenance if environmental norms have to be complied by especially for smaller and medium firms. Four options are available for tanners for pollution control – closure, relocation, ETP and participation in a CETP. Closure and relocation have a high financial and social cost and is usually not desirable. ETP is a costly but effective option for large units, especially if they are located in isolation. Otherwise for the bulk of the industry, CETP seems to be a good option as they function on a collaborative basis, thereby dividing the cost of operation, land and technical expertise.

For effluence management most tanneries in Jajmau depend on the mostly defunct CETP installed through cooperation between the owners and the Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) some kilometers away near the banks of the Ganga. Very few of them have installed individual PETP, which is now mandatory through court orders. The large tanneries have individual ETPs (Effluent Treatment Plants) in addition to a CETP designated for Unnao.

As of now in Kanpur there exists three CETPs which cater to the tanneries – one in Jajmau, Kanpur which has an operational capacity of 36 MLD (Million Liters Daily) and the second in Unnao with a capacity of 41 MLD. Both of these also handle the sewage production of their cities in addition to the industries. Kanpur city alone produces around 330-500 MLD of sewage daily out of which Jajmau contributes around 40-50 MLD. The Banthar Leather Park in Unnao, which has a capacity of 4.5 MLD is the third and is exclusively for the tanneries. A major

¹⁸⁵ The situation is different in Tamil Nadu, where water scarcity is a big problem. Faced with the shortage of water, some of these tanneries have brought down their water consumption to as low as 7-8 lit/kg.¹⁸⁵ This is largely achieved through better process management, without significant investment in equipment.

problem is the under reportage of the amount of clean ground water extracted by the tanneries. Since effluent flow has to match the amount of water extracted most tanneries pump out water and pump in effluence illegally directly into the ground¹⁸⁶. Also most of these ETPs operate in towns and cities which do not have a regular power supply, rendering these units useless.

The biggest hurdle in the operation of CETPs is coordination and cooperation required between the various stakeholders especially the competing industrial units and the government. For instance in Kanpur, one recurring issue has been the ownership of tannery sewage. According to tannery owners in Jajmau, while the effluent is in their premises, it is their responsibility. But once it flows into the sewage system of the city on its way to the CETP, it becomes the problem of the government.

At the level of perception, the Unnao units appear to be fairly clean and sanitized in comparison to the noxious odours and heaps of animal carcasses and bones which meet the senses in Jajmau. In the affective memory of these cities, Unnao does not invoke the same repulsion and disgust that the mention of Jajmau does although tanneries anywhere smell roughly the same. One possible reason could be the designation of the Unnao and Banthar cluster of tanneries as “industrial areas”, as compared to Jajmau which is now surrounded by residential colonies. In terms of environmental pollution however Unnao fairs no better than Jajmau. It also has the added burden of having elected Sakshi Maharaj as its Member of Parliament. Sakshi Maharaj, along with the Minister of Water Resources and Ganga Rejuvenation, Uma Bharti has been on the forefront of the campaigns against river water pollution caused by the tanneries. Unnao merely appears to be smelling better than Jajmau.

In 1985, a prominent environmental lawyer Mahesh Chandra Mehta filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against the tanneries in Jajmau, alleging that their waste water discharge was causing great damage to Ganga (Divan, 1995, p. 1557). There could be several reasons for this historical timing. There has been

¹⁸⁶Interviews conducted in Jajmau and Unnao in 2014 and 2015.

an increased environmental awareness as well as litigation following the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and the Brundtland Commission Report on Environment and development in 1987 which laid out the significant 'Polluter Pays' principle.

M.C. Mehta and Justice Kuldip Singh who features in all of the cases in discussion had a reputation for pursuing environmental action through strong litigation rather than waiting for administrative orders (Divan, 1995, p. 1557). Through the 1980s and 1990s, Singh and Mehta, ran the 'Ganga Court', where every Friday, Justice Singh would hear cases brought about by PILs filed by Mehta and pronounce summary judgments against hundreds of industries at the same time (Divan, 1995, p.1557). Similar procedures were followed in *M.C. Mehta v Union of India and Ors*, 1987, (1988 AIR, 1988 SCR (2) 530) also known as the Kanpur Tanneries Case. The background for this case was the inauguration of the first phase of the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) in 1985 by the Rajiv Gandhi government.

The main thrust of the Ganga court was to substitute the ineffective administrative directives issued by the Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) with judicial orders, the disobedience of which invites contempt of court action and penalties (Divan, 1995, p.1557). The Kanpur tanneries case was followed by the 'Calcutta Tanneries Case' - *M.C. Mehta v Union of India and Ors*, 1996, then the Agra case, *M.C. Mehta v Union Of India and Ors*, 1996 and finally the Vellore Citizen's Welfare Forum v Union of India, 1996. For the purposes of this section I will pick up and follow one specific idea within these vast judgments.

In the Kanpur judgment Justice Singh and Justice E S Venkatramaiah ordered 23 tanneries in Jajmau to install PETPs by March 1988 or face closure. The judgment written by Justice Venkatramaiah stated that¹⁸⁷,

¹⁸⁷ The same bench delivered the judgement on the second part of the Kanpur case, dealing with the water pollution caused by other industries and the role of the Kanpur municipal authorities, on 12 January, 1988 (*M.C. Mehta v Union of India*, 1988 AIR 1115, 1988 SCR (2) 530). This judgment stays away from any affectual references to the purity of 'Ma Ganga'.

“Aryan civilization grew around...the banks of the river Ganga...It is a popular belief that the river Ganga is the purifier of all...Steps have, therefore, to be taken for the purpose of protecting the cleanliness of the stream in the river Ganga...Several major pilgrim centers have existed on its banks for centuries and millions of people come to bathe in the river during religious festivals, especially in the Kumbhs of Haridwar and Allahabad...”

The supplementary note by Justice Singh captures the real importance of the river. Justice Singh writes,

“The river Ganga is one of the greatest rivers of the world... It is called...river of the Gods... purifier of all sins and 'Ganga Ma'... To millions of Hindus, it is the most sacred, most venerated river on earth...To be cremated on its banks, or to die there, and to have one's ashes cast on its waters, is the wish of every Hindu...To my mind, it is the sacred duty of all those who reside or carry on business around the river Ganga to ensure the purity of Ganga.”

In the Vellore case which also revolves around the pollution of rivers Palar and Goodar¹⁸⁸, Justice Singh, Justice Faizanuddin and Justice K Venkataswami, only emphasise the importance of the ecological balance of the river systems. In the Agra judgment the river Yamuna is singularly missing from the legal argument. Even last week, Yamuna had to make do with a measly fine in order to accommodate the display of “national culture and pride”. “Ganga Ma” is clearly a special river whose purity stands in a dirty contrast to the tannery effluents being poured into the river.

The affective charge of the situation lays across two registers – first, the quality of the river itself which makes the case of pollution more urgent and second, is

¹⁸⁸ In terms of environmental action against tanneries, Tamil Nadu has a slightly different trajectory since much of the initiative against tanneries has been a result of collective citizen action rather than solely led by legal measures. There is also a difference in the patterns of ownership of tanneries since large units are owned by powerful politicians and large business groups, unlike the individual ownership in Kanpur.

the quality of the pollutant. By making available the Hindu sacrality of Ganga to the legal discourse the judgement constructs the desire for a particular sensoryscape which is not just visually clean and deodourized but should also be spiritually and morally cleansing. This is difficult to establish given the affective quality of the pollutants being dumped into the river, namely animal and human carcasses, blood, fat and hair – some of the most defiling substances in the Hindu caste order. It is also difficult to address the issue of immersion of human remains in the river given its religious significance to the Hindus. The Ganga has thus been a veritable battleground for the politics of religion, caste and the nation to play out on, much like the cartographic and symbolic imagination of India as Bharat Mata. Mukul Sharma argues that there has been a shift from secular environmentalism to one which is imbued with religiously emotive and sectarian issues leading to the intermeshing of identity, power and nature (Sharma, 2012, p. 9). The next section will take forward this observation to argue that the conversion of the Ganga into a legal entity mirrors this affectual shift.

2.2 State, Industry and Environment

In 2014, at a victory rally post the declaration of the general election results, the then Prime Minister designate, Narendra Modi claimed quite evocatively, “Maa Ganga is screaming for help. She is saying I hope one of my sons gets me out of this filth” (Rowlatt, 2016). This statement brings together the many different ways to understand the affective registers of Ganga in the politics of the nation-state. The environmental discourse provides one such affective field for the symbolism of Ganga to play out.

Environmental issues began to gain attention in India around the 1970s with the movements around the issues of large dams and conservations of forests coming into prominence. Amongst these the Silent Valley Movement, agitations against the Tehri Dam and the Chipko movement became landmarks in the battle to

preserve the environment. However, thinking about the environment, outside such organized efforts has a much deeper and broader history in the Indian society, especially in philosophical, religious and spiritual terms.

Political leaders and thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi for instance were proponents of a sophisticated systemic environmental thought which was in tune with the conditions of the Indian society. Gandhi is known to have propagated the ideas of need based consumption, self- sustainable production and a reverence for the environment and its resources deriving largely from Hindu spiritual and religious practices. Sharan (2014, p. 28) quotes from Gandhi's essay 'Insanitation in Hardvar' published in 'Young India', on 31 October, 1929, to illustrate his thinking on the environment,

"Whilst I realized the grandeur of the holy Ganga and the holier Himalayas, I saw little to inspire me in what man was doing in this holy place. To my great grief I discovered insanitation both moral and physical...Thoughtless ignorant men and women use for natural functions the sacred banks of the rivers where they are supposed to sit in quiet contemplation and find God. They violate religion, science and laws of sanitation."

Environmental consciousness thus came ensconced in religious and spiritual symbols and metaphors. Other environmentalists and environmental movements like Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Bishnois, and even eco – feminists like Vandana Shiva employ the sacred and the symbolic in their framing of the environmental question. Sharma quotes an anonymous RSS pamphlet '*Desh ki Chinta* (Concern for the Nation), published from Delhi in 1988 which says, "The genesis of the Chipko movement is not only in the ecological or economic background but in religious belief...The religious basis of the movement is evident in the fact that it is inspired and guided by women" (Sharma, 2012, p. 12).

This may actually have been an interesting move in order to reach out to the large masses of people who interact with the environment on an everyday basis.

This also derives from a broader Hindu idea of worshipping nature and the *nirgun* idea of a formless god who could reside in all animate and inanimate beings. Rivers, mountains, animals, trees are thus all valuable in their own right. Sharan (2014, p. 29) thus argues that pollution of water carried a double meaning – its loss of holiness and its contamination with disease causing pollutants.

On the other hand, the colonial and post-colonial state's approach on the question of the environment has largely been understood as secular and scientific in nature. However, the actual situation may have been more complex than this. For instance, Jawaharlal Nehru who is usually credited with the infusion of this scientific and rational spirit in Indian democracy was also convinced about the sacredness of the Ganga and its symbolic importance for the Hindus¹⁸⁹. This sacred and symbolic vocabulary was also ostensibly missing from the legal statutes and governmental legislations around the issue of the environment.

Environmental statutes in India derive their authority from Article 51A of the Fundamental Duties of the citizen, in which Clause (g) laid down the duty "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures" and from Article 48A of the Directive Principles of State Policy which says, "The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country". Among the first legislations on the question of the environment were the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1980, which became the basis on countering pollution, especially in the industrial domain. The Water Act allowed for the setting up of central and state pollution control boards. The UP Water Pollution Prevention and Control Board was thus constituted in 1975 and was renamed as UPPCB in 1982. These Boards have been the crucial interface between the

¹⁸⁹ In his will and testament Nehru is reported to have written, "The Ganga, especially, is the river of India, beloved of all her people, around which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and defeats..." (Quoted in 'Save Ganga', p. 1 written by Sundaral Bahuguna, cited in Sharma (2012, p. 128).

industry and the government, and have also frequently come under charges of corruption and inefficiency. The Environment (Protection) Act which came out in 1986 was one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation on the issue. The National Green Tribunal was set up in 2011 as a judicial body to adjudicate on issues of the environment.

The Ganga Action Plan (GAP), launched by the Rajiv Gandhi government ran in two phases from 1985-1993 and from 1993 to 2000. It was formally withdrawn in 2000 and was largely evaluated as being a failure in terms of making an impact on the condition of the river. The National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) was established by the Central Government in 2009 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 with funding from the World Bank. It declared Ganga to be the “National River” of India and the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMGA), a registered society under the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation was set up as the implementation wing of the NGRBA. In 2014, after coming to power in the Centre, the NDA government revived the interest in Ganga and announced a new ‘Namami Gange’ project under the NMGA. Under these new schemes the government has promised a significant improvement in the condition of the river by 2020. As a result the NGT in collaboration with the Ministry has stepped up its actions against all polluting industrial units along the river stretch, in particular the tanneries.

There are a variety of non-state civil society actors which are also active in the conservation of Ganga which are located in a historical relationship between the state, religion and the river Ganga. In 1905, the ‘Ganga Mahasabha’ was founded by Madan Mohan Malviya with the aim of preserving the sacrality and purity of the river. In 1916, the Mahasabha was able to sign the Agreement of 1916, with the British government which recognized that the uninterrupted flow of the river is the right of Hindu believers. The event is celebrated till today as the ‘Aviral Ganga Samjhauta Divas’. In 2013, the Mahasabha, with RSS Pracharak K N Govindacharya as one of its leaders, proposed a draft National River Ganga

(Conservation and Management) Act which mentions prohibited activities that includes discharge of untreated or treated sewage or industrial effluents, burned solid wastes (not including ritual cremations), slaughtering wastes and mining, which disturb the *aviral* (uninterrupted) and *nirmal* (pure) flow of Ganga. The drafting committee was headed by Malviya's grandson, Justice (Retd) Giridhar Malviya and members on the committee included noted environmentalist G D Agrawal, lawyer and environmental activist M. C. Mehta and a former chairman of the CPCB, Paritosh Tyagi, among others.

Individuals like G D Agrawal and M C Mehta are significant to the arguments being made here since they provide the crucial linkage between the discourses of the state, religion and the environment and their interlocutory presence in all these areas provides continuity to these seemingly antagonistic discourses. Agrawal, also known as Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, is a civil engineer trained at the Roorkee Engineering College (later converted to IIT, Roorkee) and also holds a doctorate in environmental engineering from the University of Berkeley. He was the first member secretary of the CPCB and also the Head of Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at IIT, Kanpur. In July 2011 he became a *sanyasi* and announced his withdrawal from worldly pursuits while retaining his commitment to saving the Ganga. Between 2008 and 2013 Agrawal has sat on four fasts in order to stop mining in the Ganga basin and to stop the construction of the Loharinag Pala Hydro Power Project which was eventually scrapped by the government. Agrawal is widely regarded as a prominent and influential voice within the environmental discourse. In an essay written on the critique of the Loharinag Pala Project, Agrawal (n.d.) writes,

“The main problem of scientists, engineers, planners, economists the so-called “educated”, and of recent Indian Governments is that they wish to first treat and then make Gangaji like any other river. They want to apply all the common criteria, the same standards, the same objectives, the same EIA guidelines the same economic planning to Gangaji as to some nondescript stream... They have never considered it necessary to explore and understand

the basis of the Indian faith and reverence for Gangaji. Their real aim and intention is to insult denounce and destroy all that is unique to India's land, it's culture and it's people...to me the effort to equate or consider Gangaji to any other river is an attack by the modern scientific/economic culture on the traditional Indian culture, faith and ethos and has to be fought... We shall not let Gangaji be treated like an ordinary river and harnessed for irrigation city water-supply, hydro-electricity, pisciculture etc. or be fouled with waste discharges...A special code for reverently using Gangaji has to be evolved."

Agrawal's writing is particularly interesting for the way in which he employs the metaphor of the holy mother/river to refer to a specific religious-territorial idea of the Hindu nation. Sharma (2012, p. 13-20) argues that within the overlapping of the Hindu religious discourse with that of environmentalism the river is re-envisioned as a political, moral and emotional idea which needs to be protected from pollution in the sense of outsider influences¹⁹⁰. These outsiders could be the foreigner, the migrant or modernity and Western civilization themselves. Taking this argument forward, I argue that one of the most serious polluting influences on the river Ganga, apart from the Muslim, actually comes from within the caste discourse in terms of the insider who functions as the outsider – the untouchable.

The emphasis on purification and cleanliness bring the two discourses together. Tanneries stand out in terms of their capacity to pollute and the Muslim and Chamar inhabitants of these tanneries stand out as others of the environmental

¹⁹⁰ The relationship between environmentalism and political activism has been looked at in the West, mainly in the context of Fascism. Scholars have pointed out that right-wing organizations in Europe and the United States have often taken a Green perspective onto their platform. They have also shown that biological explanations and ecological justifications have frequently been used to support fascism: many neo-Nazis for instance, replicate Hitler's vegetarianism, as well as 'back to land' movements and bio-dynamic farming. Other have reflected on similar dangers in present-day Green politics within the West, where traditional ecological conservatism can easily shade into right-wing irrationalism or extreme romanticism. The key element in such instances include the use of biological metaphors, a stress on the 'organic community' and the individual's need to merge with it, a Laurentian glorification of ritual, intuition, and the mystical, and a distrust of the rational. These elements can be found in writings which promote deep ecology and are linked to eco fascism (Sharma, 2012, p. 10).

discourse. Environmental law cannot distance itself from the always-already presence of polluted bodies in the industry. The body of the industry stinks, because the bodies in the industry are perceived as stinking. The forced closure of tanneries in Agra for “air pollution” indicates the assumed polluted nature of tanneries. On the other hand leather goods production units where one sees a larger concentration of Hindu ownership as well as workforce do not constitute either environmental or sensorial threats and thus can produce the desirable leather.

One needs to differentiate between the waste coming out of the tannery and the tannery space itself – something which environmental law has avoided. Foul smelling rubbish appears to threaten the social order, whereas the reassuring victory of the hygienic and the fragrant promises to buttress its stability (Corbin, 1986:5). The individual, the community, the trade and the space within the leather industry are thus intrinsically linked in a sensory relationship and a complex sensory ordering of spaces and bodies is engendered through the discourses of caste.

This is best illustrated by the practices of shutting or scaling down tannery production in Jajmau during the Hindu month of Magh (roughly corresponding to January-February) in order to control the amount of effluents released in view of the Magh and Kumbh melas which are held during this time. Although business suffers greatly, the Muslim tannery owners see it as a ‘gesture of goodwill’ in order to maintain peace in the area. Workers reported that since they rely on daily or weekly wages, Magh is a particularly harsh month for them¹⁹¹. Reports suggest that during the Mahakumbh of 2013, about 55,000 tannery workers were on the verge of starvation due to the Magh ban. Local authorities asked the tanneries to pay them the wages but since the tanneries are shut, owners did not comply. The Magh closure illustrates pitting the employment of a few against the religion of many and couching this binary in

¹⁹¹ See <http://www.milligazette.com/news/6358-closure-of-tanneries-may-put-55000-workers-on-the-verge-of-starvation>. (Last accessed, 30 March, 2016)

environmental terms. The Kanpur judgement takes a similar view when it opines that, “a tannery which cannot set up a primary treatment plant, cannot be permitted to... be in existence for the adverse effect on the public at large... it will outweigh any inconvenience that may be caused to the management and the labour employed by it on account of its closure.”

Even during ‘secular time’, tannery owners take measures against the obviously non-Hindu nature of their work. While larger tanneries almost always have “reputed Hindus from the city” on their board of directors, even the smaller tanneries keep some of their influential “high” Hindu contacts ready for “emergencies”. “Whether it is negotiating with government offices, or handling the police and pollution control departments, it is always better to have Hindus on the frontline. *“Accha impression padta hai”* (It creates a respectable impression), says the owner of a large tannery in Unnao¹⁹².

The persistence of environmental irregularities even after three decades of litigation must give us a clue as to the failure of environmental law. Owners of tanneries are reluctant to mechanize and modernize tannery operations because of the ready availability of lower caste labour who are forced to work in suboptimal conditions. Even when mechanical and infrastructural improvements are introduced, they map onto existing caste hierarchies. The stench of tanneries is not only that of ‘solid proteins’ but is the stench of caste. Caste is not seen in the tanneries, it is smelt – on bodies, on clothes, seeped into hair and skin pores it inhabits the public through these bodies. Curtis (2008:19) rightly argues that the odour of things expresses the order of things. The politics of the senses is the way in which public spaces are produced, perceived and experienced. It is through a sensory reordering of these spaces that spaces such as the tanneries are made legible for law and public policy. Environmental law is thus forging a particular politics of the senses which is determining the pollutant and also what is to be purified. In this logic leather will thus continue to be a polluting industry

¹⁹² Interview conducted in Unnao in January 2015.

since law is attempting to address this stink without taking into account caste in itself.

For the people in the tanneries, who are acutely aware of this stench, its management is setup as an exchange between disgust and desire. A tannery owner in Kanpur perhaps provided the apt ending for this narrative when he told me, “After the closure of textile mills it is the leather industry which is supporting the entire industrial set-up of Kanpur. So what if it smells bad? Money has no stench.¹⁹³”

In the next section, we examine the leather goods factory and its claims of being free from the stench of leather.

3. The Odourless Leather Factory

“Suppose I am travelling on a train, and someone asks me, what do you do? I can say two things – *Mai jooto banata hun*, (I make shoes) or *meri jooto ki factory hai*, (I own a shoe factory). While both statements mean the same thing, they signify two very different status positions in society,” says Chandan Mirchandani, who owns a large shoe export house in Agra. “I do not want to be known as someone who makes shoes with his hands, even though shoes are my sustenance,” he continued. It was Chandan’s father who first got into the army boots manufacturing business around the 1980s, after retiring from the Army some years earlier. Contracts were easy to get through his contacts but he knew nothing about the business or the technique of making shoes. He struggled through the process and finally emerged quite successful in the trade. By the time Chandan took over the business, the industry had undergone a sea change. Post the loss making decade of the 1990s, the footwear industry had come out with renewed vigor and posited to expand into the Western European market.

¹⁹³ Interview conducted in Unnao, January, 2015

Chandan wanted to be a part of this narrative and he moved out of army boots to exporting women's footwear. Today he runs a franchise of a reputed international brand. The distinction that Chandan is articulating is crucial to understand the leather industry. Footwear manufacturers not only do not want to associate themselves with the tanners, but also do not want to be perceived as those who 'make shoes'. Like in the tanneries, those who make shoes are the Jatavs and lower caste Muslims.

Agra has a large cluster of footwear manufacturing units catering both to export and domestic markets. Largely three types of units now exist – large organized factories which cater mostly to the export markets, small cottage units which deal with the domestic demand and the informal domestic units¹⁹⁴. The large factories are mostly located in the Sikandra Industrial Area, especially since the tougher implementation of EU norms against residential production. Some units still operate from residential colonies, largely due to the 'non-polluting' and non-mechanical nature of footwear production. However, as laws become stricter, many of these owners are also looking to move out to the industrial areas. In the organized units, workers are employed on a piece-rate basis and the number of workers may increase or decrease based the order received. Recruitment usually happens through *thekedars*, contractors, who usually bring in people from nearby villages and surrounding semi-urban areas. Much of this recruitment thus follows caste grouping. Recruitment also follows caste and community lines because work in the factory can be allocated via the master artisan (*mistri*) who is also free to recruit temporary or contractual workers (Knorringa, 1999, p. 319).

The cottage units still operate in the older shoe markets like Hing ki Mandi and Tikonia Bazaar, which also double up as retail spaces. These vibrant markets are an intricate production network in themselves with shops for shoe components,

¹⁹⁴ Lynch (1969) and Knorringa (1996) have classified the Agra units as – organized units, cottage units (*nama wale*) and home run units (*dalia wale*). The basket system (*dalia wale*), which was also referred to in Chapter Two, does not operate on a significant scale now, though production in the home units is still quite high.

scrap leather, chemicals and packing boxes apart from offices of shoe production companies and workshop units. Several famous shoe firms started out from Hing ki Mandi and in spite of moving to larger and better spaces many of them still retain their small spaces here. Three other markets have now come up – National Shoe Market, New Shoe Market and Subhash Shoe Market.

The hundreds of informal, household units exist in Jatav and Muslim dominated areas such as Tajganj, Naalband, Sayyed Para and Mantola. In the social imagination and memory of Agra, these are also the spaces which are dirty, not fit for residential purposes and absolute locations of communal tensions and curfews. There is also a steady flow of male workers between and the upscale shoe factories – a significant part of the workforce works in both locations. However, the division between production for export and for domestic consumption divides these units sharply from the large factories. It is usual for these workers to carry back leftover leather or shavings (*katran*) which provides the household material to work with. Although, it is now considered to be illegal, tanning still takes place in many of these home units. The domestic family run units sometimes also employ people from outside for skills that they do not possess themselves, especially in critical tasks such as cutting (Knorringa, 1999, p. 315). The shoes that they produced usually reach the domestic markets through a network of agents and suppliers. Women form a large part of this home-based workforce, especially amongst those working with *katran*.

In the absence of a formal supply of tanned leather, tanneries in Agra, the city usually gets its finished leather from Kanpur and far away Chennai. Sometimes they may employ agents who scout for high quality leather in these tanneries to be procured for the factories. The larger factories, catering to the export market mostly import their leather, or it is provided by the firms which they export the shoes to. On the surface then their links with the tanneries are thus tenuous and distant.

Many leather goods manufacturers in Kanpur on the other hand own tanneries as well or in any case occupy the same social and industrial spaces as the tanneries.

As mentioned earlier, this leads to a peculiar situation where many factory owners in Agra insisted that they were not a part of the “leather industry”. Within this footwear industry, those who choose to work with PU, especially in the domestic sector distance themselves completely from being part of the leather industry since they do not use leather as a raw material at all.

From the 1980s onwards, the Punjabi entrepreneurs started setting up conveyor belt systems in their factories. They were receiving a large number of standard size and pattern orders which this style of manufacturing supported and productivity increased. This also allowed them to utilize semi-skilled and unskilled workers who could be put on the floor with a short training. Training of workers happens through an informal system of apprenticeship with senior workers on the factory floor or through those who work in domestic units¹⁹⁵. Many owners justified the move by claiming that the Jatav workers were unreliable and undisciplined. However, for the skilled Jatav worker this meant a sharp decline in creativity and control over the production process.

The work process in the factory begins with the cutting of tanned leather sheets into required sizes and shapes to make the various components of the shoe uppers. Next these upper segments are stitched together in a process called closing. The uppers are then fitted on lasts which provide the shape of the shoe, after which the sole is pasted onto the upper and the last are removed. The final stage includes finishing, polishing and packaging. It is possible to complete this entire process by hand, which makes footwear a handicraft industry. However, mechanization is now quite common especially in the larger units, which also increases productivity greatly.

¹⁹⁵ Knorringa (1999, p. 312) provides details of this system where most artisans specialize in one skill, while learning to make entire shoes. Thus they have one principle guru, who himself could be a factory employee and specializes in one skill. Master craftsmen however know all aspects of shoemaking including designing. This high degree of specialization also exists when young artisans are trained through the extended family networks, since most factory workers work in specialized division of labour settings. On the other hand, learning through gurus who work in the domestic units, means that one would know all aspects of shoemaking but the quality of the training will not be as high as that through the factory worker guru.

In November 2013, I was trying to interview an old factory worker, an expert in lasting, from a reputed shoe factory in Agra where he had been working for the past ten years or so. Over the course of the conversation Vijay Chand kept reiterating the fact that their factory has 'German machines'. Curious, as to what these machines signify to Vijay, I tried to ask if he had access to similar machines in the factories that he had worked before this. Vijay's response was enough to put into perspective the ways in which caste permeates the factory floor. "*Aap samjhin nahin,*" he told me, "*mai to yeh keh raha hun ki factory mein machine hoti hain, haath se kaam nahin karna padta. To koi yeh nahin keh sakta ki ganda kaam karte hain*" (You did not understand. What I meant was that in all factories workers use machines instead of working by hand. No one can thus ridicule them for doing 'dirty' work).

Like Ramesh, the heel fixer from the earlier section, Vijay also recalls the reddened hands of those who made shoes in his village. German machines and the use of rubber gloves keep his hands unmarked of both pigmentation and of caste. These two narratives not only give us a vantage point into the modalities of caste within the industry but more importantly they complicate how we have understood the hierarchy of manual and mental work. In the case of Jatav workers in the leather factories manual work also carries the additional stigma of caste. Machines provide a crucial interface between the polluting material of leather and the body of the workers. Similarly the advent of PU has lent itself to similar arguments.

During interviews workers would often point to my shoes and argue that since they are not leather there is no pollution attached to them. The other barrier to ritual pollution within the industry seems to be formal technical training, which many of these workers do not receive. But for most workers "training" happens at home, where as youngsters they assist their parents in making low quality footwear for the domestic market. These "pre-trained" workers are also highly sought after by the industrialists who then do not have to spend time and money on training. In the process the industry retains its strong association with caste

based labour. In spite of this, both workers and owners, largely maintain that it is not just the Jatavs or Muslims who are working in this industry. “*Yahan to sab kaam kar rahe hain*”, (Everyone (*sab*) works here), is a refrain which became common through the many rounds of interviews. In contrast, no one says this in the tanneries, where the odour is pervasive. Everyone knows the odours that they go home with.

From the early years of the 20th century till roughly three decades after independence, one still finds debates on the nature of the labour force in this industry, the status of raw materials used in the leather and textile industries and its relationship with caste and religion¹⁹⁶. The shift to this figure of the ‘*sab*’ seems to be a later move, coupled with mechanization and increasing exports as well as a general decline in the trade union movement. In its place has arisen the ubiquitous identity of the ‘shoe factory worker.’

The idea of ‘*sab*’ actually has different inflections for the various inhabitants of the factory. For Vijay, it is a bid at the anonymity which the identity of the ‘worker’ gets him. Away from the village of ‘*range haath*’, Vijay now sees himself as a resident of Agra, an export hub with links with Europe. The identity of the city and of its industry gets transposed on to Vijay as well. For the owners a reiteration of ‘*sab*’ is even more necessary so as to include themselves into this ‘erstwhile’ polluted industry. It is not coincidental that almost no one wants to talk about the takeover of units during partition. What is also hidden in the process is that most of these factories also had rather humble beginnings. The first generation which came in after partition did not really have an industry to take over. Shoe manufacturing in Agra then meant small home manufacturing units, which would sell samples of their wares outside their own homes. The first batch of ‘Punjabi’ entrepreneurs would scout these narrow lanes, buy samples and then take them throughout the country to find buyers. Then they would return to the same sights of home production units to place and collect their

¹⁹⁶ See Guru (1994) for an exploration of the mobilization of tannery workers in Dharavi by the Communist Party in Dharavi, Mumbai during the 1960s.

orders. The quality of raw materials also had to be negotiated, and frequently these entrepreneurs would have to scout for skins and hides themselves, feel them and ensure quality. Production, managerial and capitalist interventions were then in very close quarters, with the entrepreneurs having to smell, touch and feel the shoes and the raw materials.

This is a far cry from factory set ups today, where the owners that I interview hardly ever need to leave their cabins. Hardly anyone of them has visited a tannery, and smart young men from leather institutes man their factory floors. Their children, unlike those of Vijay, are keen to join the business. On their desks they have samples of lasts and shoe uppers, some finished leather pieces, which they readily hand out in answer to any questions. One of them even claimed that Agra never had tanneries, at any point in history. '*Sab*' then refers to those in the industry who do not have to touch and smell leather.

The apparent deodourization of the factory space makes their claim seem more legitimate. While tracing their difference from the tanneries the fact that factory "do not smell so bad" came up quite regularly. The absence of a strong odour marks out the social and moral superiority of the space. In this context deodourization can mean the removal of "foul" odours and not necessarily the removal of all odours. Deodourization can also replace the foul odours with more pleasing ones, or odours which are neutral. Corbin (1986) has written about the relationship between removal of odours and the creation of a higher moral and spatial order. It would seem that the factory owners are making similar arguments which seek to emphasize the absence of the animal, of caste and of other polluting presences through the absence of odours in the leather factory.

Factory spaces however do have a distinct odour, which may not be that of flesh and blood but they are not deodourized either. These spaces are enveloped in thick, pungent odours of glue and sole binding chemicals. When I mentioned these odours to the workers and floor managers they began to recall the first few weeks in the industry when these sharp odours would induce severe headaches in many of them. But these odours are qualitatively different from the ones of the

tannery. The odour of chemicals is neither polluting nor are considered 'dirty' as is the case with the more organic and bodily odours of the tanneries and slaughterhouses. The latter odours are not just foul and disgusting, but they signify a lower status. The odours of a factory thus do not invoke the same affect, especially when they travel outside the industrial spaces along with the bodies and clothes of the workers¹⁹⁷.

Conclusion

The leather industry has fashioned itself largely on a scientific discourse, away from the 'organic' nature of the product that it deals with. This is especially true of the non-tanning segments of the industry where any contact with the 'organic' has been conveniently done away with – tanneries have been shifted away from industry clusters to separate units, usually near slaughterhouses, some towns have abolished tanneries all together, and manufacturing units and its employees claim to have no relationship to the tanneries. This fashioning has been able to establish skin and leather as two separate ontological entities – skin which is organic, which rots and thus smells, and leather, which is a highly valuable consumer product, which, when it smells, smells quite sweet. Leather is thus made to produce an affect so distinct from skin and from the body that we also begin to believe that it is odourless. This transition from a rotting skin to beautiful tan leather is assisted through a variety of discourses which reiterate and legitimize the non odourous nature of the product.

¹⁹⁷ For the purposes of understanding the relationship between space and odours, Classen et al (1994, p. 170) argue that urban space can be divided into three categories - the industrial, the public, and the private or personal. The industrial is the area which is excluded from the general public and thus "permanently bad or repugnant smells" are tolerated in these spaces. Thus, they argue, "To the inhabitants of a mill town, for instance, the sulphurous reek of a pulp and paper mill might well mean money and progress. Furthermore the inhabitants will probably have become habituated to the smell because of its constancy and will not therefore have any pronounced awareness of it". The smell is tolerable for those who are accustomed to it and have a profit to make out of these malodourous businesses (Classen et al, 1994, p.171).

The factory has become the parlour-museum of the 19th and 20th century – desensualized and permitting a purely visual existence. Corbin (1986) and Seremetakis (1994) thus claim that vision itself was desensualized in these spaces. The factory-tannery tours, I was given, day after day were symbolic of this desensualization. Most of the above mentioned remarks were indeed at the fringes of these visits, in small fragments, in rare moments when guards were let down or sometimes they slipped out. The visuality of these spaces, covers up caste, sensuousness betrays it. This betrayal comes to the fore most forcefully in the idea of the '*jootewala*' - a common derogatory epithet for the owners of the factories in Agra. For those on the outside of the industry, '*jootewala*', connoting disgust and ridicule, becomes an effective strategy to counter the dominant upper class status of the factory owners. The affective charge being that in spite of being well to do, they are still '*jootewala*'. Thus even though the factory owners claim the non-existence of caste, it is their conversion into the '*jootewala*' that gives away the affect of caste inherent in leatherwork.

The denial of caste simply cannot happen in a tannery, where everyone goes home in an odoriferous condition. It was clear in the interviews that both the Jatav worker and the Brahmin supervisor are affected by the stench of leather tanneries in similar ways, yet the supervisor does not lead an entirely malodour existence. Many of them reported that their families object to the nature of their work and that their children do not come near them when they return home. Yet they also report that taking a bath, sometimes two, corrects the situation. Further families forget the stench when money comes home. In a large tannery in Unnao, some workers reported that the management has installed showers for them to take baths before going home. When I asked if that has made any difference, one of them laughed and said, "*Usse kuch fark nahin padta. Ghar wapas jao to phir bhi kutte peeche bhagte hain*" (Baths do not help. When we go back home, dogs still run after us, having smelt the flesh and blood on our bodies).

The cooking of leather (*chamda pakana*) is an interesting metaphor in this regard. This invokes another associated phenomenon of death, where burning or cremation of the body signifies the end of the immediate pollution caused by death and the beginning of the process of regaining the status of purity for the *sapindas*. Thus there seems to be something about the process of cooking, of a relationship with fire, which purifies or at any extent lessens pollution. However, it is outside the tannery, in the domestic spaces of homes and between friends, when one returns to the banal of cooking 'food' that the day's work of cooking animal remains becomes extraordinary and begins to stand out – especially if what you think you eat is radically different from what you just cooked at work. It brings to fore, ideas of consumption which have not been thought through and which begins makes one's relationship to the well-established idea of consumption through eating rather uncomfortable. The stench of the tannery which one carries back in the handkerchief, then become painful reminders of unresolved consumption. One is reminded of Levi-Strauss's (2008) 'culinary triangle' which incorporated not only the raw and the cooked, but also the rotting. And rotting is inextricably linked to leather.

CHAPTER FIVE

CASTE, KNOWLEDGE AND SENSES: A STINKY EPISTEMOLOGY OF LEATHERWORK

Introduction

On June 6, 1901 Jagdish Chandra Bose, a noted physicist turned botanist presented a paper at the Royal Society of London on the physical chemistry of plants. The paper was reportedly shelved in the Society archives without receiving much attention. Bose then sought an extension to his overseas stay in order to vindicate his stand. This request was denied by the India Office at London. Finally with the intervention of the Secretary of State for India, he was allowed to stay back and use the laboratory of the Royal Society to do his research. In February, 1902, Bose presented his findings to the Linnean Society to undisputed acceptance (Kumar, 1996, p. 204).

A few years later in 1909, a relatively unknown young man, Mohammad Nawabuddin from Amritsar, Punjab seemed to be having no such difficulties with either the India Office or the British scientific community. A State Technical Scholar (henceforth, STSc), who had been sent to the Leathersellers' Companies' College (henceforth LCC) in Bermondsey, London, by the Government of India, to study leather technology, Nawabuddin belonged to the select group of young men who were handpicked by the state each year to study industrial and technical subjects in England and other parts of Western Europe. Thus a virtual nobody in the field of science somehow had a better experience navigating the European scientific and technological institutional spaces than a trained scientist well versed in the modalities of Western science.

Bose belonged to a Brahmo family and his father was a deputy magistrate in the colonial administration in Bengal. Bose also belonged to fairly elite academic circles in the Calcutta Presidency, having studied advanced physics and botany at St Xavier's College in the University of Calcutta and then at the University of Cambridge. In 1885, he was appointed as Professor of physics at Presidency College, also in Calcutta. Nawabuddin had no such claims. Educated at the Government High School in Amritsar and having a four year practical experience of the leather industry, Nawabuddin applied for the colonial government's State Technical Scholarships (henceforth STS) after reading an advertisement for the same in the Punjab Government Gazetteer. In the records of this scholarship program, Nawabuddin is described as a Khatik by caste and "belonging to a well-to-do-family of hereditary tanners and dyers."¹⁹⁸

Within the caste hierarchy, Hindu Khatiks are considered to be an untouchable caste due to their traditional occupation of piggery and the related brush and bristles trade. As discussed in Chapter Two, those amongst them who converted to Islam nonetheless continued to be called as 'Khatiks' and came to be engaged in the business of slaughtering smaller animals such as goats, colloquially called, '*chhote ka kaam*', in contrast to the hugely influential and dominant Qureshis who are engaged in '*bade ka kaam*' – the slaughter of bigger animals such as cattle. Anecdotal evidence from the field suggested there have been well to do Muslim families who are engaged in the hide and slaughtering trade and it is possible that Nawabuddin belonged to one such family. Still his career trajectory seems remarkable for his time and social position.

Nawabuddin successfully completed the two year degree in Heavy Leather Tanning and Applied Chemistry at LCC and went on to claim another year of the STSc to pursue a degree in Leather Tanning and Leather Dyeing from the City and Guilds Institute, London. Further he completed several rounds of practical training in tanning in the German cities of Frankfurt, Offenbach and Worms.

¹⁹⁸Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p. 106.

Lastly, Nawabuddin managed to spend two months in America where he is known to have visited over a dozen leather factories in Philadelphia, Boston and Newark, reportedly establishing industrial contacts with these firms. The last known record of Nawabuddin reports that he had joined as a member of the firm of Shamshuddin – Nawabuddin Leather Manufacturers and Hide Dealers in Amritsar¹⁹⁹.

This rather counter-intuitive difference in experiences between Bose and Nawabuddin seems to arise from the different kinds of scientific enterprises that they were engaged in. This difference which seemingly overturned caste and class hierarchies and allowed an untouchable subaltern to rise in professional and economic ranks is located in a complex narrative of knowledge, caste and industrial production.

Bose, a scientist from the colony, was engaging with and challenging the discourse of pure sciences within the schema of Western science. At this juncture of the twentieth century, Western science was caught up in simultaneously establishing the universality of its rational principals and also paradoxically arguing that this science can only happen within the confines of Europe (Raina, 1996). Bose's experiments located in the colony were disproving at least the latter claim. Naturally then he was an unwelcome figure at the Royal Society. Nawabuddin on the other hand chose to specialize in leather technology, thus buying into and legitimizing the British attempt at introducing practical science and technology into the colony in order to aid the industrial development of the empire. This enterprise of technical education created many 'technical experts' like Nawabuddin, who came from 'well-to-do background'²⁰⁰; had university degrees in science and who displayed a skill for 'practical' work²⁰¹. These handpicked individuals heralded the institutionalization of 'traditional'

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 107.

²⁰⁰ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p. 106.

²⁰¹ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, pp 16-18

industries²⁰² such as leatherwork by bringing these traditional crafts into the realm of Western European science and industrial rationality. In fact within this colonial discourse of technical education, Nawabuddin had a clear edge not only over Bose but also many of his peers in the STS as well. Nawabuddin had “tanner’s blood in him²⁰³”.

Attempting to locate the affect of caste on the regime of technical education in leatherwork, this chapter centrally deals with “tanner’s blood”. The idea of “tanner’s blood” brings together caste hierarchies of the Indian context and the colonial emphasis on practical and scientific industrial education, to produce the figure of the ‘hereditary tanner’ conversant in advanced science and technology. This figure also reflects the modernization of the caste principle of hereditary occupations and fits within the current discourse of providing vocational and practical training to the lower and middle classes in order to increase employability and skill.

This figure also proved to be a red herring for the leather industry and not many Nawabuddins were found because of the way, in which technical education was imagined, both by the native elites and the colonial state. The chapter argues that this idea of technical education, which played into the discourse of caste, rather than challenging it, produced two kinds of techno-industrial subjects. The first of these was the leather technician or the ‘tanner’, well versed in English, advanced science and the knowledge of leather technology but who was also unwilling to actually do practical work. This refusal could be accommodated in this techno-industrial regime because of the availability of the second kind of subject – the ‘untouchable’ leatherworker/artisan turned worker, whose knowledge was deemed unsuitable, and yet whose labour and experience was critical to the actual production of leather. While this division of leatherwork between the

²⁰² See Tirthankar Roy (2004) for a detailed account of the colonial engagement with “traditional” trades like leatherwork, glasswork and metalwork. Roy argues that these traditional industries contributed significantly to the economy of the Empire and in turn many of these trades were converted into full scale industries.

²⁰³ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, pp 17-18

technician and the worker was central in the creation of the modern leather industry, yet it proved incapable of sustaining the façade of the industry also being sanitized and caste-less. The split between knowing and doing contains within it deep seated anxieties about caste, pollution and contamination. This chapter attempts to engage with these anxieties by examining the cracks, in this technical-industrial discourse, through which the odours of leatherwork slip in reminding the industry of the existence of caste.

An education in leather is more a matter of the senses, than of technology. The production of leather is a highly sensuous process which involves the coming together of the bodies of the human and the animal; it involves the intimate interaction of human skin with machines and with chemicals; it is a process of production which lingers on the body of its workers long after the tannery gates have shut. Most of all it is the stench of this production process that has almost become proverbial. In fact most workers and supervisors will narrate at least one anecdote of a fainting spell or a bout of vomit and nausea in their first few days in the tannery. Technical education has resolutely refused to understand this affect. While leather provides employment and economic security, in exchange it exposes one to ridicule and humiliation, irrespective of caste status. This, the chapter argues, is the result of a discourse of technical education which while claiming to introduce science and technology into a 'traditional craft', actually participates in perpetuating caste hierarchies, rather than challenging them.

The odourless technical pedagogy could not subvert the fact that the production of leather stinks. And this stench of leather has to do as much with its organic nature and propensity to rot, as it has to do with the sensory politics of caste. Technological education in leather which as an idea sought to provide technical, scientific and practical knowledge to leather to everyone, in practice did not account for the odours of leatherwork. The pollution of these odours force a separation between 'doing' and 'knowing' thus splitting leatherwork along sensory lines, just like the spatial division of castes in a city or the divisions between a tannery and a factory.

The chapter begins laying out a broad overview of leather education in India, with some key insights from field interviews in order to animate the details of these institutions. In the next section, we trace the contours of 'technical education' through debates in England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which had a profound effect on the way education is organized in colonial India. In the following section, we examine the debates on technical education in India in general and focus specifically on the debates around leatherwork, in order to understand the modes in which the politics of caste and senses plays out in the field of industrial education. In doing so, the chapter will bring into discussion the debates on the figure of the artisan and her/his relationship with manual work as contrasted with the idea of 'industrial work'.

Caste, in particular occupational and labour segregation, forms the foundational and analytical category for this argument. The chapter relies on archival records of the colonial period from Department of Education and Department of Commerce and Industry, as well as existing academic literature on technical educational regimes in England and India. Field interviews and observations along with industry generated reports form the material for the postcolonial period. Since the archival evidence hardly delves into the experience of these scholars and technicians it is difficult to know what actually went into these classrooms and in these industrial spaces. On the other hand evidence from the field interviews contained explicit phenomenological accounts of learning how to do leatherwork. Through these accounts it becomes clear that technical education has been unable to engage with the sensuous qualities of leatherwork due to the overemphasis on scientific and technical knowledge. This rather anaesthetic fashioning of technical education and training of leatherwork in India is the foundational idea behind this chapter. By robbing science of sensuousness and by establishing a distinct field of the industrial, even politics was kept out of the industrial. The chapter thus explores the epistemological basis for understanding the sensuousness of the object of leather.

1. Technical Education in Leatherwork – An Overview

The leather industry, as has been stated earlier, is one of India's largest foreign exchange earners apart from being a fairly large domestic industry as well. Consequently it has been a lucrative, albeit an uncomfortable, employment option through the colonial and postcolonial times, barring a slump in the decade of the 1990s. With increasing emphasis on vocational and technological education and demands of niche specializations, a degree in leather technology is fairly in demand, but only in sanitized areas like fashion technology and merchandizing.

Leatherwork has a complex relationship with technology, science and mechanization. On the one hand there has been consistent innovation in the field of chemical technology for tanning. Even when barks of trees such as *Babool* and *Mylobylans* were used for vegetable tanning, there used to be constant adjustment and improvement in the chemistry of these processes especially with regional changes in water quality and the quality of hides available. The leatherworker used to be adept at these innovations and calibrations. With the advent of chrome tanning the knowledge of chemistry overshadowed this organic and experiential knowledge and gave rise to the figure of the 'tanner' who was schooled in advanced chemistry and who would now direct and instruct the tannery workers on the use of these chemicals. In the tanning industry today, this expertise in leather chemistry is a highly valued branch of knowledge, especially due to the strict scrutiny under the European Union pollution and quality control norms.

On the other hand, the wet sections of the tannery have stayed away from major technological changes in terms of machinery and infrastructure. The continued reluctance to mechanize gruelling manual labour practices such as knifing and cleaning operations has to do with the assured availability of untouchable labour. These workers are supposed to have a pre-knowledge of these operations by the

virtue of their caste status, or are supposed to pick them up on the job through an informal system of apprenticeship as a helper to a senior worker. The tannery manager or supervisor, armed with degrees in leather technology, hardly participate in these processes.

The dry sections of the tannery are generally mechanized, especially in larger tanneries. Thus semi-skilled labour is frequently required here and this is also arranged through the informal apprenticeship and recruitment systems. The dry sections are also seen as far less polluting in terms of caste because it exclusively deals with tanned leather and not raw hides. The leather goods factories operate on a combination of hand based work and machines. In both these cases workers are again supposed to learn their skills either through familial networks or on the factory floor. A degree in footwear technology equips one to have a working knowledge of the process and be employed as a factory manager. The dry tannery sections and the factories thus have a much larger presence of non-untouchable workers because of the perceived absence of pollution here. Mechanization and the threat of pollution thus seemed to be locked in an inverse relationship.

However, in specialized goods manufacturing, like saddlery, the production work is entirely hand based and is regarded as the preserve of certain familial or community training alone, particularly amongst the Muslims. Very few options for a degree in saddlery are available in India. In a rather interesting conversation with the Saddlery Department at one of the largest leather goods manufacturers in India, Mirza Exports, I learned that the manager of the section, Sachin Sachdeva, was soon to leave for two-week training in saddlery at a factory in Germany. "I have never really seen a saddle", quips Sachin, rather quixotically since as I glance around the glass partitioned cabin, all that is visible is hundreds of workers busy making saddles in the room outside. There is a finished saddle lying on Sachin's table as we speak.

On elaborating his remark, Sachin argues that he does not think that he has seen anything till he has laid his hands on it, worked with it and taken it apart. At Germany he will learn to do all this and then can come back and instruct his workers. When I point out that his workers are already making saddles as we speak, Sachin begins to show me brochures of the intended training which will improve on the existing methods of saddlery. "While these workers learned how to make saddles at home because they were born into saddlery families, the skills I will impart them will enhance their capacities, make them more precise and scientific," concludes Sachin. Sachin is himself a bit of an outsider in the industry, having no special training in any aspect of leatherwork himself. A graduate in commerce and a Masters in Business Administration, Sachin had been working in the sales departments of various firms when he was picked up as a manager for Mirza's Saddlery Division. The training in Germany is thus a part of his initiation into the trade. When I ask him if he thinks that just as saddlery, management skills are also hereditary, he breaks into a laugh. In Sachin's opinion skills like management, medicine and engineering require much greater degree of knowledge, precision and training than skills like shoemaking. In fact he argues that it would be quite dangerous if the children of a doctor think that they can learn medicine at home without formal training. Saddlery and shoemaking on the other hand is something that children start assisting their parents in quite early and since it does not require much knowledge, it is easy to master.

The conversation with Sachin actually opened up many difficult and complex questions about the nature of skill, work and knowledge. On the one hand he equates 'seeing' a thing with touching it, fiddling with it and practically engaging with it. This has an important implication for understanding ocular practices such as supervision and management. If they are understood as tactile and sensorial rather than simply overseeing, then we have the possibility to argue for a different idea of work, as against the manual and intellectual division alone. This however, was not the way in which many others in the industry would characterise their work. It is also to be seen whether Sachin would retain this tactile sense of vision in a tannery or a slaughterhouse. Secondly, Sachin makes

important comments regarding the nature of knowledge and training required in activities like manual labour and management. His views reflect the dominant societal understanding of these issues. Important for our discussion here is the way in which Sachin seems to be able to make a movement from managerial to technical skills, without much additional training. I argue that this is because he will probably never have to make a saddle, just supervise the production of one. In effect he will still be managing technical skills. It is argued that it is the creation of a scientific and managerial layer over and above the worker and her product which thus make caste invisible for the end users and makes the work more “respectable” for the inhabitants of the industry.

At present in India, institutes such as The Harcourt Butler Technological Institute (HBTI), Kanpur; University Engineering College, Kolkata and Anna University, Chennai offer a Bachelors of Technology (B.Tech) Degree in Leather Technology, which is the equivalent of an engineering degree. The Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI) in Chennai is largely a research institute and contributes to industrial policy on leather production and export.

Dayalbagh Educational Institution (D.E.I) in Agra offers three levels of courses in leatherwork. The D.E.I Leather Working School has been offering a certificate course in shoe-making since 1930. The Technical College offers a Diploma Course in Leather Technology with a specialization in footwear. In 2014, the Faculty of Engineering started a B.Tech in Footwear Technology. This is perhaps the first of its kind of degree in footwear technology.

The Central Footwear Training Institute (CFTI) in Agra was set up in 1963 under the Ministry of Industry’s Small Industries Development Organization, with financial assistance from Ford Foundation. In 1993 under the National Leather Development Program and funding from United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Institute was modernized at a large scale. At present it offers short term courses in footwear designing and manufacturing, which has attracted some workers due to its low cost and educational qualifications required. Some footwear firms have also tied up with CFTI to provide training to

their workers. It also offers yearly certificate and diploma courses in footwear technology. Interviews suggested that it is mainly the lower middle class youth which enrolls in these courses due to the lack of infrastructure and technical expertise. However the critique of this program was quick to come up in these interviews. Workers who had attended these sessions in Noida claimed that they already knew everything that was being taught, but they stayed anyways because *“aaj kal sab certificate mangte hain”* (Everyone asks for a certificate nowadays). The next section deals with the production of this regime of ‘certificates’ which not only certifies qualification but in the case of leather, also ones caste.

The two Government Leather Institutes in Agra and Kanpur also cater to a similar student base. In terms of facilities the GLIs are actually worst off. GLI, Agra was setup in 1962. It offered a Diploma in Leather Technology and in Footwear and Leather Goods Technology. In 2009, a Diploma in Saddlery Technology and Export Management was also started. During interviews at this institute, it became clear that the Leather Technology course was not doing very well since the institute’s tannery has been defunct for several years now following irregular water supply and complaints of foul smell from the nearby residents. Nishant Suri, a faculty in the department of chemistry at the Institute showed me around with some of his students. This was the last day of the session on an extremely cold December afternoon and thus there was a little time on our hands. Suri, a Khatri by caste had studied leather chemistry at Kanpur and had no links to the leather business. He was interested in science and found his way to specializing in leather due to better employment prospects. Suri feels that it is much better to teach in an institute rather than work at a tannery, since it is more “respectable”. When I ask him to elaborate on what he means by respectability, Suri dithers a bit and then continues, “See now everyone is doing this work, so it is ok, but due to its past image leatherwork is seen as dirty work, which only some groups do.”

Further pointing out to the large structure of the old tannery, Suri asserts that one of the reasons that the tannery fell into disuse due to its location near private residences that complained about the bad odours coming out of this place²⁰⁴. “Odours are not that big a problem, but it is the same thing as I was telling you – the work is considered to be disrespectful”, concludes Suri. The institute now runs a ‘mini tannery’ in which students are shown the basic steps of the tanning. Conversations with students further revealed that they hardly get to practice tanning mainly because of the lack of availability of skins/hides. It is not simply that these are difficult to procure given that tanning now only happens informally in the city. While taking a walk around the now defunct tannery, when they were at an earshot from their faculty, some students confided that teachers mostly did not encourage the practice of tanning since it is a dirty and messy process. Usually a representative skin is tanned to demonstrate the process and then several students can work on one or two skins collectively. “*Sir zyada batate nahin hain, na hi choote hain yeh sab. Humein jo bhi aata hai tannery manager hi sikhate hain*” (Our teacher does not teach us much, nor does he like to touch many of these things. Instead the tannery manager is a better teacher), said one of the students and the others agreed. Almost as if on cue, Suri asks me to see some of the skins which were being tanned by his class. I walked over to the inside of the tannery to see a large and fine iron mesh on which a couple of small skins had been stretched out to dry and to increase in length. Suri then asks one of the students to take out the skin and show it to me. “Do you want to touch it?” asked Suri, without showing any indications of doing it himself.

While one could be reading too much into a simple gesture, this pattern corroborates with accounts heard in other institutes, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Faculty members from the upper castes consistently demonstrated unease and even repulsion at the work. It was also interesting to observe the way in which leatherwork is being couched in moral

²⁰⁴ It is interesting to note the GLI Agra is in fact situated in the Nunhai Industrial Estate, close to the Taj Expressway Link Road. However, when I checked to look around the building, it was clear that it has some residential houses in its vicinity.

terms of respect and disrespect. Suri's admission of that fact that it is this idea of disrespect which weighs heavier than the physical odours is significant. We will return to this moral weight of odours in the last section of the chapter.

Students, who come from middle-class or business owning families, usually prefer to study at the Footwear Design and Development Institute (FDDI) located in Noida amongst many other places. Additionally many tannery and factory owners, especially of the last two generations also regularly enrol themselves at the Leathersellers' Company's College, Bermondsey and Leeds University to get advanced degrees in leather technology and tannery management. It is clear that there is a greater demand for courses in footwear technology rather than tanning. The reasons for this which have to do with the perceived pollution of leather have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

Apart from these technical courses, the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) offers a professional degree in leather design. The course involves visit to tanneries in Chennai and field and study trips to other sections of the industry. Leather designing is a lucrative field especially in the leather garments and bags sector. Shoes, which earlier used to be made on set pattern, are also now high on design elements. Nidhi Dubey, a graduate from this program now runs her own design studio for bags in Noida. Talking to her about whether learning leather designing was any different from the other courses, Nidhi recalls that the two biggest problems were negotiating with family and actually visiting a tannery. "I come from a staunch Brahmin family from Kanpur. So they have seen the conditions of the tanneries there and were appalled when I told them that I will have to visit one of these. Our field trip went to Ambur in Chennai, and it was actually unbearable to even stand in the area for two minutes", she says with a mimic gag reflex motion. Nidhi has not since visited a tannery and her work does not require her to do so either.

It is important to think about Nidhi's disgust for the very material that she works with, and the distance which she is forced to put between her work and herself. Some aspects of this were discussed at the end of the previous chapter when we

examined the lives of some other Brahmins who were engaged in the purchase departments of tanneries, making them closer to leather than Nidhi. While the previous discussion invoked the social and caste lives of these Brahmins, this chapter will locate their discomfort in the epistemological contours of the object of leather. The next two sections, will thus argue that the source of upper caste discomfort and the disgust with untouchable bodies lies not just in the way in which leather is produced but also in how the object has been conceived and perceived of, i.e. in the epistemology of leather.

2. Technical Education in England

By the early 1800s the debate on education had reached a complex level in England with the distinction being made between general and technical education on the one hand, and a growing distaste with classical and literary education on the other. The capitalist factory system which by the end of the seventeenth century has replaced the earlier guild systems, found it unprofitable to invest in the individual training and education of the workers (Peters, 1963, pp. 142-3). Simultaneously, the introduction of machines in industrial production increased the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour which could be taught to operate these machines with some minimal technical instruction (Peters, 1963, p. 143). This was in huge contrast from the skilled artisanal labour produced through apprenticeship in the guild system where long periods of practical training would go into producing skilled craftsmen²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁵ A J Peters lays down four meanings of technical education in England. First, technical education was understood as the education of artisans, mainly through craft apprenticeship. This idea was contained in the Elizabethan Statute of 1563 and continued till the end of the seventeenth century. These catered to mainly poor boys. The richer sections of the society used to be taught either by private tutors or in grammar schools and this education was of a literary nature (Peters, 1963, p. 142). In the nineteenth century technical education was understood to be general education for industrial and commercial purposes. The third kind of technical education targeted children with certain aptitudes. This was based on the idea of “innate ability”

We have seen in the earlier chapter how the field of leatherwork changes under these influences, with the replacement of craftsmen such as the currier, tanner and shoemaker with the ubiquitous 'factory worker'. Already by the end of the seventeenth century, schools of Industry had come up, mostly to provide industrial instruction to 'poor and pauper boys' in order to make them more productive and employable²⁰⁶. A particular kind of industrial work, with emphasise on working with hands was earmarked for these individuals. It was thought that this work has little to do with thinking or knowledge production as such.

For instance Peters argues that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Schools of Industry were geared towards training "children of the poor and especially those on Poor Relief", in semi-skilled labour such as cobbling, sewing, tailoring and spinning, lacemaking and baking along with basic education in the 3Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic²⁰⁷ (Peters, 1963, p. 143).

Around 1820 the adult factory workers begin demanding an education in science and eventually hundreds of Mechanics' Institutes come up during this period (Peters, 1963, p. 144). Along with this, increasingly arguments were being made, in the British Parliament and in various industrial fora for the inclusion of practical and scientific training and education in order to bolster the apparently failing industries in England. By the mid nineteenth century thus, technical education was being seen as a necessary part of the general education for all. Musgrave (1966, pp. 179-80) however point to an interesting trend in this latter

of the individual. The last, refers to the idea of a technological society where everyone needs some amount of technical education either as a part of general education or by making scientific principles as the basis of social production itself.

²⁰⁶ Peters (1963, p. 143) notes that " by 1775 'apprentice children' were being driven in cartloads from the workhouses to the water mills, where they minded machinery for 72 hours a week or more. Apprenticeship had turned into forced labour, and it has been said that the industrial revolution was built on the slavery of infants".

²⁰⁷By the beginning of the nineteenth century the 3Rs had become integral to factory legislation. The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802 required all employers of apprentices to provide them with part-time daily instruction in the three Rs, according to their 'age and abilities', during working hours, in at least the first four years of a seven-year apprenticeship (Peters, 1963, p. 143).

demand for scientific education. He notes that business leaders and industrialists in the Parliamentary committees argued that this scientific education should concentrate on the theoretical knowledge of technical training, leaving the actual practice to the workshop or the factory floor. The reason for this largely lay in the laissez-faire ideology which considered teaching of specific trade skills as interference in the industry, especially when done in state run institutions. Another important aspect of this theoretical emphasis was the need to train managers who were trained in general and liberal education along with a basic idea of technical subjects.

This crisis of industrial productivity arose in the throes of a plateauing impact of the Industrial Revolution in England on the one hand, and due to the imagination of a competitive international economy on the other²⁰⁸. The British industrial prowess which was on full display in the famous 1851 Exhibition of manufacturers seemed to be waning by the Paris International Exhibition of 1867, where it became increasingly apparent to the British authorities that 'foreign industry' was fast catching up (Musgrave, 1966, p. 174). The government appointed a Select Committee under Sir Bernhard Samuelson to investigate the matter and in 1869 the committee noted that it was important to "realize that technical education was an aid to greater efficiency" (Musgrave, 1966, p. 175).

Consequently in the same year the Iron and Steel Institute was founded. The reports of the Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction came out in 1870.

²⁰⁸ Margaret Gowing (Gowing, 1977, pp. 71-72) for instance argues that the year 1870 represents a break in the industrial history of England. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 had far reaching consequences and was followed by the unification of Germany. Italy was also unified in 1870. Japan had thrown off feudalism and The United States had just emerged from the Civil War. Simultaneously a new stage of industrialization was beginning, dependent upon mass production and science-based technology. Innovations in steel, electricity and chemicals, based on the scientific advances of the previous hundred years, heralded vast economic potentialities. Through these key industries science began to affect the whole economy. From about 1870 science, previously peripheral to technology and industry, became central to them. Britain was still the leading industrial nation and produced nearly a third of the world's manufactures. This was also a period of reform for the working classes with the introduction of voting rights, legalization of trade unions; open competition for the Civil Service and the first Act for publicly provided elementary schools.

Margaret Gowing (1977, pp. 72-73) suggests that both the Samuelson Committee and the Royal Commission reports had similar broad recommendations. The important amongst them are – first, they did not distinguish greatly between ‘scientific’ and ‘technical’ and proposed that industrial education of artisans and scientific research are part of the same spectrum. Second, they emphasised more on the aspects of economy, efficiency and production, rather than original scientific research. And lastly, these reports also talked about the cultural and intellectual benefits of scientific education.

The initial demand to eliminate illiteracy in industrial workers by the means of primary education was replaced by the need for a more scientific education due to the introduction of ‘extremely elaborate machinery²⁰⁹’ around the mid-1800s (Musgrave, 1966, pp. 177-8). Manufacturers also began demanding more practical classes and these were made available from the 1880s. The courses at the City and Guild College, London, also established in the 1880s grew in number and the London polytechnics began their trade courses. Under the Technical Instruction Act, 1889 it became possible for technical subjects to come under the Department of Science and Art. Finally the initiation of the First World War in 1914 sealed the argument in favour of the importance of technical education and industrial development for the Empire (Musgrave, 1966, p. 175). The economic depression of the interwar years, did not allow for much emphasis on technical education or industrial development (Musgrave, 1966, p. 176). After the First World War, the London Trades School and the provincial Junior Technical Schools also expanded their scope and reach (Musgrave, 1966, p. 178). Eventually this leads to the spread of technical education to higher education

²⁰⁹ Musgrave (1966) quotes the following from an Economist report of 7 November, 1868, pp 1273, “In 1868 The Economist wrote of the extremely elaborate machinery coming into industrial use as ‘the strongest possible evidence in favour of a good scientific education for the artisan even before he enters the workshop.’”

especially with the demand for “education of the prospective captains of industry²¹⁰” (Musgrave, 1966, p. 179).

It is important to note that there was not much interest in the technical and vocational education of the upper and middle classes in England. Taught in a system of grammar schools and in departments of classical learning in universities, these classes mostly pursued literary and general education. Science, when it was taught was also largely theoretical in nature. On the other hand, a demand for scientific education from the working classes was largely discouraged in favour of training of a more vocational and practical nature rather than an instruction in the pure sciences.

In the field of leather, The British industry realized the importance of science and technology by the 1870s. In 1877, H R Proctor read a paper on the ‘Scientific Research and its Relation to Tanning’ at the Tanners’ Society of Great Britain. In the same meeting it also announced a prize for an essay which dealt with the problems of tanning by using chemical research (Church, 1971, p. 561). Earlier in 1850s in Germany, Prof F L Knapp had demonstrated the success of mineral tanning. In 1877 he produced a chrome tanned leather. In 1880, chemist Dr. Christian Heinzerling patented a similar process in the US with a different combination of chemicals. Finally in 1884, American chemist Augustus Schulz patented the two-bath chrome tanning process which heralded the beginning of the chrome tanning industry (Church, 1971, p. 561).

Schools of research and technology were established in Germany in 1873 and 1889 which had begun researching on “a scientific approach to leather production”. In England, the Leather Industries Department at Yorkshire College, Leeds has begun research in leather by 1891 (Church, 1971, pp. 561-62). In 1897 Prof. Proctor, Gordon Parker, and Alfred Seymour Jones together formed the

²¹⁰ Musgrave (1966) quotes the B. of E. Report of 1901, II, pp 285-6, which refers to a H.M.I (Northern Division) quote from a newspaper which goes as follows, “The most pressing problem now, even in the interests of the rank and file of industry, is the education of the prospective captains of industry.”

International Association of Leather Trades Chemists, and produced a journal, *Collegium*, whose main preoccupation for research was tannin analysis.' In 1909 the Tanners' Federation appointed a trade chemist located in Liverpool to advise federation members, while the organ of the federation, *The Tanners' Yearbook*, provided British tanners with statistical and scientific information concerning the chemistry, technology, and economy of modern leather manufacturing.

J. J. Flitch, one of the pioneers of the chrome-tanning industry and founder of the Leeds Leather Industry Department, in 1891 expressed the view that "the scientific method is invading the leather industry and will be increasingly important from now on" (cited in Church, 1971). Analysis of the students attending the department during its first five years shows that more than one-half were sons or relatives of those already in the trade. However it did not have industry representation on board, neither did it have a model tannery, unlike counterparts in Vienna and Germany. The industry thus stayed away from these schools. These ideas proved to be of crucial significance in the British understanding of the industrial and educational politics of colonies like India. Here the cultural and intellectual benefits of scientific education were sought to be imparted to people, mainly through vocational education and not through pure science, which was still seen as the preserve of the colonizer (Church, 1971).

Writing about the politics of scientific exchanges between the colony and the metropolis in twentieth century India, Dhruv Raina argues that in the former, scientific knowledge emerges in the context of social organization produced by colonialism (Raina, 1996, p. 163). It can thus be argued that the discourse of technical education in India falls under this idea of 'colonial science'²¹¹ where the

²¹¹ The term 'colonial science' is being used here in the sense in which Dhruv Raina employs it in order to explain the center-periphery model of science characterized by the interactions between the scientists in Europe and those on the outside. Raina argues that in the context of colonialism this center-periphery model creates 'colonial science' when 'colonialism produces forms of social organization which in turn set the coordinates for the production of scientific knowledge in colonies'. Raina borrows the idea of 'colonial science' from George Basalla's, "The Spread of Western Science" published in *Science* (5 May, 1967), pp.6 11-614. See (Raina, 1996, p. 163)

metropolis is constructed as the fount of knowledge and has a relationship of patronage to the colony. Raina however also makes an argument for configuring this patronage as a more complex system rather than simply a one-way process. Technical scholars like Nawabuddin could then be understood through this complex dialogical exchange.

In a similar vein to Raina, Deepak Kumar also argues that the colonial system of knowledge production and exchange was not a simple exchange. Rather, mid nineteenth century Indian scientific thought was characterized by a remarkable capacity to amalgamate western science with indigenous traditions. As such, Kumar argues that, “Western science was not seen as an alien import” (Kumar, 1996, p. 202). This interesting insight actually goes onto tell us something crucial about the nature of the industrial discourse in the colonial period. While there was ample resistance to these ideas, especially within the context of the national movement, there was equally a public opinion in favour of partaking in this growing discourse of technology fueled development. While initially this may have taken the form of ‘*mistrification*’ or ‘*factorification*’ of the Indian industrial-scientific discourse²¹², eventually this interaction between colonial science, Indian social contexts and indigenous systems of knowledge production and circulation did engender complex and even competing forms of politics.

This chapter takes forward this logic to argue that not only did colonial science arise in the context of the social forms of organization engendered by colonialism, but that British scientific knowledge also came into India with its own set of value systems and biases which were produced in the peculiar political economy of the guild system and industrial revolution in England. This has been discussed in Chapter Two. Further, in India, the British understanding of industry and technical education also encounters very complex ideas of

²¹² Deepak Kumar (1996, p. 207-8) argues that although Indians were in support of industrialization but due to the nationalistic fervour of the anti-colonial movement, there were also voices which demanded that only a particular kind of nationalist industrialization be supported. Kumar borrows the terms ‘*mistrification*’ and ‘*factorification*’ from economist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

science and technology on the one hand and of caste, religion and tradition on the other – ideas that were not solely produced through colonial forms of social organization alone. The hierarchies of caste for instance were already well worked into systems of knowledge production and transfer in large parts of the subcontinent. This critical perspective provided by an understanding of the discourses of caste is largely absent from these studies of colonial science and educational dynamics. By bringing into discussion, the discourse of technical education in leatherwork, the following sections intend to precisely address this gap.

3. Technical Education in India – The Colonial Debates

“I must express my and my countrymen’s heartfelt thanks for the new opening and career which you are trying to provide for our children. In fact the new classes in your college have attracted so much attention in the United Provinces that students of good ability and high standing are all coming in numbers and enquiring whether they can have a place in your college...There is plenty of capital and trading skill, but is simply the education in these directions which is wanting.”²¹³

The author of the above sentiment was apparently a “well-known businessman of Meerut²¹⁴” who had been asked by the Principal of the Engineering College at Roorkee, to nominate five people for a technical course at the college. Such a

²¹³ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos. 66-72, NAI, p.23

²¹⁴ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.23

practice was commonplace in the early decades of the twentieth century in colonial India, in order to foster closer ties between technical educational institutes and the industry. The businessman reportedly sent back thirty-seven names along with this gratuitous praise for the efforts of the colonial government in imparting scientific and practical training to Indians. The enthusiasm of this businessman for these efforts is a small indication of the acute desire felt by some sections of the Indian society to partake in the growing techno-scientific industrial discourse. This is also indicative of the fact that the colonial schema to create foremen and managers for the expansion of the colonial industrial machinery was not without its native supporters.

Technological and engineering education was especially in demand, both from the point of view of the British and the Indians. Since 1880 there was a demand for technical education amongst Indian elites. In 1887 the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute was set up in Bombay through private efforts. In 1904, the Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education of Indian was started in Calcutta. The National Fund and Industrial Association of Madras and the Indian Industrial Development Scheme of Bombay were also started with the objective of promoting technical knowledge. The leaders of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal started a college of engineering and technology at Jadavpur in 1907 which offered diplomas in mechanical and chemical engineering. Gandhi who was also critical of the lack of manual work in education started the Wardha scheme with a curriculum built around manual and productive work (Basu, 1982, p. 13). When Curzon tried to scuttle J. N. Tata's plan for an Indian University of Research, the native press was unanimous in its condemnation (Kumar, 1996, p. 207). These ideas became more concrete during the Swadeshi movement of 1905 when people began demanding "exact science and technology" and "industrialization and material advancement²¹⁵" (Kumar, 1996, p. 208).

²¹⁵ Kumar (1996, p. 208-9) argues that the nationalists began to make the same argument of epistemological superiority that the colonizers had earlier resorted to. Hindu contributions to "exact, positive and material culture" were held on parity with the Greek contributions. "Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj believed that science vindicated Vedic Knowledge.

The requirement for trained technicians was also one of the most urgent concerns of the colonial administration from the mid nineteenth century onwards. The British state had come to realize that the key to industrial development in the colonies as well as the metropolis lay in the advancement of technical education of its population. The Engineering College at Roorkee, later renamed the Thomason College, started on January 1, 1848 was one of the flagship institutions created to satisfy this need. Set up to aid the construction of the Ganga Barrage by providing trained technical workmen to support the British engineers the college soon became foundational in the regime of technical education in India.

While the native elites saw industrial technology as the marker of scientific progress and advanced development for an otherwise fettered colony, the British were interested in creating a middle rank workforce of supervisors, managers and foremen who would man the colonizing industrial machinery. Thus several existing 'traditional skills' or 'crafts', like weaving, metalwork, manufacture of brassware, sugar manufacture, perfumery, dyeing and printing and glassmaking, which were now deemed important for industrial production were selected for being converted into technical disciplines²¹⁶. Leatherwork was a slightly late but important entrant in this group especially due to its significance for the export markets and the colonial war machinery. It is only by the first decade of the 1900s that science graduates began to be encouraged to take up the advanced degree of leather technology in colleges in the United Kingdom initially and subsequently in the newly instituted technological institutes in places like Madras and Cawnpore.

Rabindra Nath Tagore called government 'an applied science ... it is like a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal, and on that account completely effective'. And 'power' appeared to him as 'a scientific product made in the political laboratory of the Nation'.

²¹⁶ Tirthankar Roy (2004, p. 35) argues that many traditional crafts, especially leatherwork were industrialized through commercialization in the colonial period. Commercialization means a shift away from local production to long distance trade and the creation of institutions and infrastructure to aid the same.

Leatherwork also produced many difficulties for this regime of industrial education mainly due to its intimate relationship with caste. This will be discussed in detail in the next section. However for now it will be sufficient to go back to the words of the aforementioned businessman in order to flag off this complexity in rather succinct terms. In this project of creating scientific and technical education the colonial state was soon to realize, especially in the realm of leather technology that “good ability and a high standing” were rarely to be found in the same person. Standing in as a euphemism for caste and class positions, the epithet of ‘a high standing’ was still more familiar to this state due to its own experiences with technical education in England. However, it was in the realm of ‘good ability’ that the colonial state encountered a fundamental fallacy – the measure of ability in India also depended on one’s caste status and in the field of leatherwork, ‘good ability’ meant something entirely different.

The beginnings of the colonial debate on education can be traced back to the debates on the Company Act of 1792 in the British Parliament. There were several opinions on the structuring of education in India, due to the requirement of low ranking officers and translators who could assist in colonial governance. Also at stake were good relations with the elites in the society, who, as we argued in the beginning of this section, were also keen to gain from the English education system. Different kinds of influences were coming together in the British political scenario at this time among them were the Evangelicals, the Liberals and the Utilitarians. The Evangelicals argued that the “darkness” of the Hindu society should be dispelled through an instruction in the English language, science and Christianity. On the other hand while liberals like Macaulay were convinced of the superiority of western education, for the Utilitarians like James Mill, a regeneration of the Indian society was to happen through legislative and administrative reform²¹⁷ (Basu, 1982, p. 2). Education would aid in this process.

²¹⁷ In 1817, James Mill published his *History of British India*, which analysed the problems of the Indian society. In 1819 Mill was appointed Assistant Examiner in the East India Company and was influential at the India House. Mill was emphatic in critiquing the earlier policy to support oriental education, which was “obscure and worthless knowledge”. The Utilitarian influence was

However these ideas did not gain traction for the next twenty years (Sangwan, 1990, p. 81).

At this time education in India was largely organized on communitarian lines, with schools rooted in rich and deep indigenous knowledge systems and traditions (Basu, 1982, p.1). Colonial administrators such as Warren Hastings who wanted to retain this indigenous systems of education, attempted to introduce institutions of formal learning which would further this cause. In 1781, Hastings had founded the Calcutta Madarasa to provide Islamic education and in 1792 Jonathan Duncan, the Resident at Benaras, established the Benaras Sanskrit College (Basu, 1982, p. 1). The Calcutta Madrassa and the Hindu Sanskrit College in Benaras were opened with the view of providing qualified law officers for the judicial functions in the colony (Sangwan, 1990, p. 82). Around the same time the Commissioner of Deccan, Mountstuart Elphinstone, established a college for Hindu learning at Poona. In Delhi schools were set up for instruction of children in Persian (Basu, 1982, p.1).

However, the colonial requirement for trained surveyors who could undertake the nascent mapping and construction activities for the empire forced a deliberation on the question of technical education for the native population. A mathematical school for Europeans to be trained in topographical surveys was already in operation at Fort William since 1780. The first survey school started in 1794 in Guindy, Madras. With the recognition of education as a state subject, the “introduction and promotion of the knowledge of sciences” finds a place in the Charter Act of 1813 (Sangwan, 1990, p. 82). The oriental general education system was sufficient and no need was felt for setting up separate classes for science. Changes begin to happen after 1834 when Lord Macaulay is appointed the President of the Committee of Public Instruction. Along with William Bentick the then Governor General of India, Macaulay laid the foundations of European scientific and literary education in India.

further strengthened by the appointment of John Stuart Mill as Assistant Clerk in the Examiner's Office at India House in 1823.

At this time in England, education was not a responsibility of the state and unlike other European governments England provided no financial assistance for education. Also the Company was not interested in involving itself with social and religious matters (Basu, 1982, p. 3). The political and economic scenario however began changing by the first decades of the 1800s. The Company was now relying more on the Government for funds and was thus open to their demands. It also wanted to cut down on expenses by employing Indians at lower pays (Basu, 1982, p. 3, p. 6). Meanwhile the influential and rich Indians, along with the private efforts of some English individuals, began setting up their own institutions which would impart western knowledge. Increasing opportunities in trade and industry had spurred the demand for Western education amongst this group since this would open up employment opportunities. Indigenous education was thus fast losing value²¹⁸.

The debate between these two systems of education continued well into the 1830s, when in the Minute of February, 1835, Macaulay, the President of the General Committee on Public Instruction, dismissed the vernacular languages as “poor and rude”, and in between the oriental languages and English, chose the latter on grounds of utility and inherent merit. Thus by the reducing the question of systems of education to medium of instruction, Macaulay effectively marginalized entire systems of knowledge which were not in English. His ruling further collated science and technology (the prominent elements in Western education, apart from English), with the English language, thus making redundant the indigenous concepts of science in vernacular and oriental languages.

English thus replaced Persian as the official and court language in 1837. In 1844, Lord Hardinge announced that Indian who had received English education would

²¹⁸ Raja Ram Mohun Roy for instance strongly opposed the setting up of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. The students of the college also petitioned on the uselessness of their education (Basu, 1982, p. 5).

get preference in all government appointments. In 1854, the Government decided to start universities, of course amidst apprehensions against a highly educated native population²¹⁹. The Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were all setup in 1857 along with Education Departments in the provinces. Like in England, concerns were raised as to the content and nature of this education, which was considered to be too heavy in languages and humanities.

Over the next few years several attempts were made to start classes for Indians in order to train “educated classes to be managers, overseers, foremen and investigators”²²⁰ to assist European engineers. The Thomason College at Roorkee, the Cawnpore Technological Institute, Cawnpore and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore were thus all products of this period. Roorkee was supposed to have engineering of all classes, mathematics, chemistry and physics, while Cawnpore was to have chemical technology to begin with, and textile manufacturing later. The entrance qualification was to be the B.Sc degree and higher work only was to be carried out. Industrial schools were to be opened at Cawnpore, Hathras and Agra amongst other places to teach subjects such as fitting, turning, moulding, carpentry, pattern making, electrical wiring, plumbing, and various kinds of smithy, along with practical mathematics, English and drawing. There was also to be a school of design at Lucknow and weaving, carpentry and leather at other locations²²¹. This was also the period of the inauguration of the Department of Public Works in the colonial administration and great projects of engineering like dams, roads and highways was beginning to be undertaken. The question of industrial development and technical education was thus intrinsically linked up in the colonial imaginary. However, there was little consensus about what the nature and content of this education should be like.

²¹⁹ According to Basu (1982, p. 8) this mainly happens due to pressure from influential missionaries in the government.

²²⁰ Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI. From the Government of United Provinces, No 785, Dated 7th September, 1907, Pp 1

²²¹ Ibid, pp 1-2

As far back as the 1880s²²², there existed a larger move against the “strong literary tendencies of the Educational department and the Universities²²³”, in keeping with similar debates in England. Technical education had to be kept away from these influences and placed closer to either the industry itself or at the very least, the Department of Industries should be made responsible for controlling the content and teaching of technical education, rather than the department of Education²²⁴. Underlying these ideas was the assumption that ‘practical training’ is the bedrock of industrial enterprise and the literary bent of university systems did not quite encourage this kind of practical engagement²²⁵. This view is not entirely uncontested. In 1886, the then Secretary of the Home Department, Sir Anthony MacDonnell wrote an extensive memorandum to the Government of India, in which he categorically states that,

²²² At the Industrial Conference in Nainital in 1907, the then Lieutenant-Governor opined that, “The question of technical and industrial education has been before the Government and the public for twenty years...A quarter of a century ago the Education Commission, under whose examination the question of technical education did not come, criticized the general system of education as being directed too much towards proficiency in literary knowledge alone. They proposed a bifurcation of the curriculum in high schools, one course leading to the University and the other designed to fit boys for commercial pursuits...”. Quoted from Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, pp 50

²²³ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, pp 23

²²⁴ Industrial Development and Technical Education in the United Provinces, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI. From the Government of United Provinces, No 785, Dated 7th September, 1907, pp 1

²²⁵ Sir John Hewett (the then Lieutenant-Governor) is reported having said that “to hand technical education over to the educational department would throttle it at its birth” – Quoted from Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.23

“...technical instruction must not be considered as something apart and separate from ordinary general education. On the contrary, it should be regarded as a development of such general education. The scheme of general education should therefore be so arranged as, without any break of continuity, to lead up to the instruction which we call “technical”²²⁶”.

Opinions such as MacDonnell’s were however progressively sidelined in favour of a separate sphere of technical education aimed at teaching industrial subjects. Sir Edward Buck’s report ‘Practical and Technical Education’ in 1901, recommended the separation of general and technical education and creation of a separate department for the former. In his opinion, “literary, scientific and disciplinary instruction should be divided by a sharp line from industrial and trade instruction.”²²⁷

This regime of education came under scrutiny especially after the Mutiny of 1857 and rising nationalism by the turn of the nineteenth century. Education, especially in universities was seen as the major cause of political unrest. As a result in 1901, Lord Curzon decided to formulate a new educational policy, resulting in the Shimla Conference of 1901. The Indian Universities Act of 1904 sought to curtail the scope and expanse of the universities and was strongly opposed by Indians, especially a strong core of English educated people who had managed to reach positions of influence. Combined with private efforts and those of organizations like the Arya Samaj, schools and colleges imparting western education kept growing.

²²⁶ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.50

²²⁷ Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI. From the Government of United Provinces, No 785, Dated 7th September, 1907, p.1

From the British point of view technical education in the colony became important only from the beginning of the twentieth century with the realization of England's weak position industrially. The First World War further accentuated the situation. The Shimla Conference of 1901 was important in this regard. It was here that the implication of MacDonnell's and Sir Edward Buck's reports on the state of technical education in the country was taken seriously. The Nainital conference of the United Provinces government further recommended the setting up of a technological institute for the state at Cawnpore, along with a school of design, two industrial schools, a weaving institute, a carpentry school and the introduction of practical work in general education.

The definition of technical education adopted at the Simla Conference in 1901 was that "technical education consists of (a) the study of the scientific methods and principles underlying the practice of handicraft, industry, or profession; and (b) the application of those methods and principles to the practice of the handicraft, industry, or profession in question. The first is the primary or technological aspect of the subject, the second is its subsequent and practical application²²⁸. The 1913 policy resolution of the Education Department makes this schema rather clear - The Indian Institute of Science which provides for research, the application of new processes and the production of thoroughly trained managers, should be developed as a complete faculty of pure and applied science; the larger provincial institutions should provide instructions in practical methods of management and supervision in conjunction with local industries, and the lesser industrial schools, minor weaving institutions, the artisan classes and trade schools generally, should be permanently directed towards such industries²²⁹.

²²⁸ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.49

²²⁹ Resolution, Educational Policy of the Government of India, dated 21st February, 1913, File no - 301, Department of Education, NAI

It was proposed to discard the text-books and regular courses of education department and the bulk of instructions to be practical but with enough knowledge of practical English and mathematics²³⁰. The technical schools²³¹ proper were required primarily for the training of the “superior mechanic” as well as the skilled artisan such as “the fitter who will know with understanding what the factory *mistri* now knows empirically²³².”

This approach led to two sets of problems – first, the intended beneficiaries of higher technical education, while excelling in theoretical subjects began to consistently shy away from ‘practical work’. The report of the Nainital Conference of 1907 poses the question of how to “predispose boys to industrial work, or break down prejudice...against manual labour²³³”. The conference goes on to propose that, “some system of manual training should be introduced into the general school course with the object of educating both the eye and the hand...²³⁴”.

This was easier said than done because what the archival record does not mention is that this “prejudice against manual labour” is actually a threat of losing caste status by engaging in menial manual work. By first splitting

²³⁰ Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI. From the Government of United Provinces, No 785, Dated 7th September, 1907, p.2

²³¹ Technical schools included both schools for mechanical work, such as those at Lucknow and Gorakhpur, and schools for teaching an art or craft, such as the Carpentry school at Bareilly and the Weaving schools at Benaras.

²³² Letter from A.W. Pim, Secretary to the Government of United Provinces, No 1354, dated 29th August, 1914, from Scheme for the development of technical education in the United Provinces. Scheme for a technological institute at Cawnpore. Proposed recruitment of a Principal for the institute, Department of Education, Education-A, Nos 19-21, December 1914, NAI, p.15.

²³³ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.26

²³⁴ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p. 26

education into the pure sciences and technical education and then further separating the education of the artisans from that of the technicians, the colonial state had effectively assigned a lower caste status to technical and artisanal instruction. This fit in perfectly with the already existing division of labour between 'knowing' and 'doing' which forms the basis of the caste system. In this context, Bose was the ideal figure, the all-knowing scientist whose knowledge was visual, more rational and thus more desirable. Howes and Classen have argued that in cultures impacted with Western European enlightenment, vision is often prioritized as the more rational sense. This discerning and distancing sense of sight is also seen as one of the foundations of the discourse of Western science with its demands for experimental proofs and evidence. An education of the 'hand' on the other hand involved an idea of physical and intimate contact, which was deemed to be more animal like in nature. In the interaction between colonial science and Indian systems of knowledge production, this colonial sensory model suited the already existing fear of caste pollution by contact with degraded substances and bodies rather well. An education of the 'hand' had little chance of gaining traction with the upper castes, if an option for pure science was to present itself.

In fact such was the pollution of leather, that even the pure science of leather technology was soon deemed to be polluted. A senior scientist at CLRI, who also holds a B.Tech degree leather technology, claims that the best thing to happen in his career is the move away from a tannery in Agra to a research profile at CLRI where he can stay away from the stench of leather. But he still feels unsatisfied. *"Abhi bhi lagta hai ki yeh ganda kaam hai, literate logon ka kaam nahin hai"* (Even now it feels that this is dirty work, which should not be done by the literate), he states. The colonial state was soon to realize that the perception of '*ganda kaam*' was largely here to stay and as the scientist points out, no amount of literacy could stamp out this contamination.

In a letter written to the Government of the United Provinces, L M Jacob (add designation), observes that,

“It is very rare to find good engineers among the natives of India. Their memories are so marvelous that they will master the text-books for purposes of examinations but in practice they fail because they leave many duties to the artificer of the country as derogatory to their dignity. The carpenter, blacksmith, and mason mistris of India are often exceedingly clever and under proper guidance are capable of doing first rate work and the reason why they so often fail is because they are left to their own devices.”²³⁵

Jacob’s astute observation leads us to the second problem of this regime of technical education – the failure of the state in leaving the *mistris* to their own devices²³⁶. By collating the situation of the artificer in India, to that of the poor and the pauper in England and thereby proposing a similar system of vocational education for these classes, the colonial state further entrenched the caste nature of doing practical work.

Left out of the scheme of general and literary education, and finding scholarships only for vocational training of “poor boys who belong to industrial castes²³⁷”, the lower classes were forced to continue in their traditional caste occupations. By

²³⁵ Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI. From the Government of United Provinces, No 785, Dated 7th September, 1907, p.13.

²³⁶ I D Elliott (add designation) writes “I think government has to bribe men to come to a course of training which government knows to be good for them and which they have not the sense to appreciate for themselves.” This idea that artisans do not understand what is good for them is reminiscent of the way on which orphan, poor and pauper children were configured in the state imagination in England. Thus similar schemes are sought to be set up for artisans in India as well. 443/1919, Industries, Question of expanding the present system of scholarships in technical institutions.

²³⁷ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.40

this period, these traditional occupations like leatherwork were well on their way to becoming colonial industries and thereby provided employment opportunities in factories in cities, which was largely seen as a better option than working in a rural setup. Large numbers from lower caste groups thus were converted into lower caste factory workers. The idea of 'industrial castes' also gave rise to the category of "sons of artisans" whose vocational education was subsidised and who were thus condemned to train in the profession of their parents²³⁸.

Efforts were made for some sort of primary education of these workers in the early decades of the twentieth century in the form of "night schools or special classes²³⁹" which would instruct them in the 3Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic. The Cooper Allen and Company in Kanpur is reported to have run a half-time school for its workers, under the supervision of the Education Department, where they were given "vernacular instruction of the ordinary lower primary type, but with a special bearing on the actual factory work"²⁴⁰. In effect the colonial state ended up ignoring the experiential and innovational knowledge which the artisan possessed and instead attempted to unsuccessfully educate her/him in half-baked technical skills with a smattering of English. Further artisanal skill and experience, which was anyways marked by caste, was now further institutionalized in a manner which would make it unpalatable for the upper castes and classes to partake in thereby sealing the connection between artisanal skill, manual work and a lower caste status.

²³⁸ In 1913 the question of scholarships and stipends to artisans and sons of artisans is taken up seriously. Fees were not charged in the Benaras Weaving Institute, Leather Working School and Needlework School, the reason for this probably being that a poor class of students attend these schools. In all the other places, scholarships were provided for (Nos 443/1919, Industries, 1913, NAI)

²³⁹ Letter from F E Taylor, Secretary to Government, United Provinces to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 7th September, 1907, Industrial Development and technical education in the United Provinces, No 785, Education A, Home Department, April 1908, Nos 66-72, NAI, p.52

²⁴⁰ Letter from A.W. Pim, Secretary to the Government of United Provinces, No 1354, dated 29th August, 1914, from Scheme for the development of technical education in the United Provinces (Scheme for a technological institute at Cawnpore. Proposed recruitment of a Principal for the institute, Department of Education, Education-A, Nos 19-21, December 1914, NAI, p.16).

This arrangement persists till date in leather technology departments. Upper caste graduates of these institutions, from the period of 1970s and 1980s, often reported in interviews that they were the only Brahmin or Rajput student in these classes. Reportedly since the 1990s, the concentration of OBC and Muslim students has steadily increased in these classrooms and some faculty members from GLI, Kanpur also claimed that “Schedule Castes like Jatavs, are now staying away from learning leatherwork due to the widespread stigma.²⁴¹” In the absence of caste-wise data on enrollment in these institutes it was not possible to confirm these claims and they remain at the level of anecdotal evidence. However scholars like Badri Narayan have also reported a steady decline in the numbers of Chamars who wish to engage in traditional occupations like skinning and midwifery since the 1960s due to many factors like social mobility, rise in economic status and as a result of reformation movements.

By the beginning of the second decade of the 1900s, cracks were beginning to show in this scheme of technical and scientific education. In debating the merits of setting up a Technological Institute at Cawnpore, on the lines of the Thomason Engineering college at Roorkee, it is noted that, “It is only by taking off his coat and working through all the grades of his business that a man becomes efficient head of a practical industrial enterprise; it will never be by a three years’ course at Roorkee²⁴². The need for technicians to be practically trained was thus being felt in an acute fashion. This was compounded by similar troubles emanating from the prestigious STSc scheme as well.

In a comprehensive review of the scheme in 1913 the problem of practical work is taken up in a serious fashion. A major change was sought in the kind of young men who were being selected for these technical scholarships since the general feedback from colleges in England seemed to be that these Indian men were

²⁴¹ Interview conducted in Kanpur, October 2014

²⁴² Resolution, No. 1163/XVIII-415, 27 August, 1913, “Observations made by the Board of Education on the Scheme for the development of a Technological Institute at Cawnpore”, Nos 87-92, September, 1913, pp.6-7

unwilling to participate in practical work, remain as mere onlookers or in any case were not suitable trained for it²⁴³. It is in this review that the idea of “tanner’s blood” is proposed when Dr Peters from the LCC opines that he would prefer a candidate with tanner’s blood in him, referring to Nawabuddin, over others who seemed to have no connection to the tanning industry²⁴⁴.

Already in 1910 opinions had been expressed regarding the viability of teaching trades to people who have no particular connection with any particular trade. In a letter written by Dr M W Travers to the Secretary of the Government of the United Provinces, Industries Department, Gilian, dated 4th March, 1910, he argues that, ‘it is useless to take a clerk’s son to give him an Indian University training and then to hope that any course of study on earth will make a works manager or a technological expert of him. Tradition and education combine to make him a failure’²⁴⁵. As a result of coming together of these arguments the selection technical scholars became a more stringent exercise. Emphasis was now to be paid on not just the candidate’s pedigree but also to his hereditary connection to the trade – “he should have as has been figuratively described to us, ‘tanning in the blood’.”²⁴⁶ One of the major problems with the approach was of course that ‘tanning in the blood’ is not a figurative discourse within the caste society in India.

Not interested in challenging this caste influenced division of labour, the colonial administration was thus somewhat caught in its own logic. On the one hand, artisan who fit the bill of hereditary connection and skill for practical work , seemed unwilling to come to school, on the other hand, upper caste and class members who were in technical classes were reluctant to get their hands dirty –

²⁴³ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p.16-18

²⁴⁴ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p.17-18

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p 19

²⁴⁶ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p. 54

figuratively and actually. The colonial state was soon to realize that Nawabuddin was a rare exception.

Within the leather industry this dilemma was solved within the span of the same century. Training of workers, and of artisans was given up completely and 'traditional' skill generation was allowed to take its own caste dominated course. Communities of caste were to now function as training centres for skill generation in the industry. In the production of leather the splitting up of the industrial domain into antagonistic discourses of the artisanal and the technological further deepened the caste divide on which the industry was based. In its insistence that traditional artisans and technological experts are fundamentally different people, who are fit to do different things, and thus require differential training, the colonial state and the discourse of caste equally managed to cover up this foundational caste character of the industry.

This then is the inauguration of the modern leather industry, which even now continues to try very hard to distance itself from its polluted pasts and claim the non- existence of caste within its domains. For instance, the website of the Central Footwear Training Institute (CFTI) Agra states,

"In this era of rapid technological developments, footwear making is not just an art or craft but is a specialized technological field."

'*Not just an art or craft*' gives away more than one would imagine since there is nothing too derogatory about being an art or craft as such. The problem of course lies in the fact that leatherwork is an 'untouchable' craft, now apparently being 'redeemed' through technology. Corresponding to this divide between artisanal and technological, is the one between skilled and managerial, between traditional and modern, between ritual and economic and ultimately between caste and the industry itself. This split between caste and industry forms the foundational logic for the leather industry and in doing so it attempts to create

an illusion of the economy and the industry as realms that are free of the messiness of caste.

Keeping this assertion in consideration, the next section will first delve a little deeper into the contours of technical education in leatherwork and then proceed to examine the effects of this educational regime on the present industrial configurations. This will be done mainly by looking at the life histories of members of the industry collected through archival and ethnographic research.

4. Technical Education in Leather

The policy of STS first took shape at the Simla Conference of 1901 with the view of training Indians in higher technical education, so as to make them employable in the nascent industrial setup in the country. The scheme came into operation in 1904, and till 1912, out of the 66 scholars who were selected five were trained in leather technology – three were sent to LCC and two to University of Leeds²⁴⁷.

A careful scan of the scholarship records, which consist of marksheets, testimonials as well as personal histories of these men, produces a prototype of the young man who went to study leather to London. Invariably these were men, in their early 20s, having just finished masters in either Chemistry or General Science from some prestigious Indian University. Almost always they had glorious testimonials from the English professors of chemistry teaching at these Indian universities and sometimes also had some prospect of employment in a tannery on their return – either through family ownership of a tannery or at least access to one through social ranks. From the discussion in the previous section, it is clear that this would be considered as an additional qualification for getting the scholarship.

²⁴⁷ Report of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for India to enquire into the system of State Technical Scholarships, File no 322, 1913, Industries, UPSA, Lucknow, p.9

These scholarships created the figure of the 'tanner', which still holds currency in the industry today. This tanner, away from the 'traditional tanner' who was an untouchable, was a chemistry expert, who 'understood' the process of tanning, and who was supposed to design, run and supervise tanneries. As a result, the pioneering tanneries and factories in Kanpur and Agra were set up by upper caste Hindus and upper caste Pathan Muslims – Pandit M K Dar's Stuart Factory, Wazir Khan Factory set up by Wazir Khan, Khadam Ali Khan and Faiyaz Ali Khan's K V and Company, Dhani Ram Bhalla's first agency of Cooper Allen are some of the landmark firms in Agra for instance.

Jogesh Chandra Mukherjee, a 23 year old man from Benaras, was one such technical scholar trained in leather technology from 1916. Mukherjee had completed a four year degree from the Apprentice Department of the Civil Engineering College at Sibpur in Bengal from 1902 -1907. This qualified him for employment in the PWD as an Upper Subordinate or Foreman mechanic. He had knowledge of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Mechanical engineering. Mukherjee had also completed the requisite preliminary training in tanning and was working at the Agra Tannery when he applied for the scholarship. Here he had claimed to pick up the nuances of vegetable and Chrome tanning based on modern science and as well of Indian methods. His father, Babu Bama Charan Mukherjee, was in government service and the family owned several houses in Benaras which were leased. The archival records do not mention the details of Mukherjee's experience of working in the Agra tannery. But from the experiences of men currently working in tanneries in Agra and Kanpur discussed in Chapter Three, it is possible to imagine a representative case. After a successful stint in LCC, Mukherjee would have expected to rise in the ranks as a tanner or a manager of the tannery.

The details of his life at the LCC can be imagined in a relatively easier fashion. In England in 1886 the Leather Trades School was founded as collaboration between the London Boot and Shoe Manufacturer's Association, the Cordwainers' Company, the Leathersellers Company, and the City and Guilds of

London Institute. In 1889 classes in trade technical subjects were held on three nights a week. In 1895 the Leathersellers' Company, along with the London County Council and the Borough Polytechnics Institute at Herold's Institute Bermondsey established The Leathersellers' Company's Technical College for giving instructions in the art of the manufacture of leather. This ceased their association with the Leather Trade School and it was reorganized as the Cordwainers' Technical College (British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd, n.d.). In October 1909 the LCC underwent a major up gradation and acquired a general laboratory, a bacteriological laboratory, a special room for microscopy and micro-photography, and a large museum of tanning samples and skins from around the world. Two large experimental tanneries -fitted with dye trays, paddles and tumblers, machines for scouring, glazing, rolling, and currying any kind of leather and a curriers' shop for the practical demonstration of currying were also built. The curriculum consisted of a two years' course, suitably divided into three sections to suit either heavy leather or light leather tanners, or those who only dress and finish tanned leather (The Leathersellers' Company's Technical College, 1910). The Department at Leeds starts in 1890 in consultation with leather tanners, Leeds Association of Leather Trade and later the Court of the Worshipful Company of Skinners and had a comparable setup to LCC (The Leathersellers' Company's Technical College, 1910).

Mukherjee must have been at the forefront of technological innovation and there is no doubt that his previous training would have come in handy. There are no records of his employment prospects after coming back to India although he had been promised re-employment at the Agra tannery. Going by the difficulty that is faced by many such scholars who come back, in getting employed, it can be inferred that this scheme of technical innovation was not doing very well. There were, at that time only two government tanneries – at Madras and Kanpur and thus there were not many employment opportunities. Private firms, though many in number were not bound to employ these scholars. Those who had not gained previous practical training in India were usually not very conversant with

these conditions and as a result did not prove to be very capable. There was reportedly a large difference between what was taught at these universities and the conditions that Indian tanneries were operating in. The situation has not changed much since then. Young men from tannery and factory owning families from Agra and Kanpur still regularly go for courses at Leeds, LCC and the Northampton Technological Institute.

In Unnao, a busy industrial suburb of Kanpur, a young man called Anees Sajid, Director in one of the largest tanneries in the area and a graduate of the North Hampton School of Technology, tells me that the training in tannery management that he received there is an invaluable addition to his knowledge since he did not want to simply inherit a family run business. Rather he wants to understand it, and run it professionally. Anees is not alone in having this opinion. Almost everyone of this generation of entrepreneurs has at some point been trained abroad. In fact Anees points out that North Hampton almost felt like a mini Kanpur, as everyone he knew, including some of his cousins were all studying either leather technology or tannery management there.

Anees is the third generation of a family of *qasais*, on both sides of his family. His paternal grandfather was a slaughterer, in Sadar Bazar in Delhi, and later started exporting goat hides, around the early to mid-parts of 1900s. His son Sajid came to Kanpur to set up a tannery, which is now being run by Sajid's son, Anees. Both Sajid and Anees are quite proud of their *qasai* roots and claim that this is one of the reasons why they are so successful in the field. In a manner of speaking they would have been the apt successors to Nawabuddin. It is interesting that Anees' generation in the family has felt the need for technical education as an addendum to this generational knowledge accumulated through informal and familial knowledge economies. Mukherjee on the other hand, having no such resources, relies on practical training and up gradation of skills in order to move up in the professional hierarchy. One can thus conclude that management and ownership of leather production units then definitely seems to benefit from some amount of

training, and other forms of knowledge like the ones Anees has access to are an added advantage.

Muslims in the industry – both at the level of owners and employees often adopt this position in claiming an innate familiarity with the animal body and its affects due to participation in ritual slaughter and meat consumption. This was discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. A young Muslim entrant in the tanning business in Unnao, while talking about the difficulties he faced in setting up the business, pauses to stress upon the fact that infrastructural and financial troubles are still more palatable compared to what the fresh MBA graduates not attuned to the odours of the industry face when they join. *“Business apni hi knowledge se chalta hai, MBA kare ladke to yahan tik hi nahin pate hain. Maine hi kitno ko behosh hote hue dekha hai”* (You need ‘innate knowledge’ for business, degrees do not really help. I have seen many advanced degree holders faint in the tannery) he says with a smile. It is significant that he characterizes social habitus as *‘apni hi knowledge, (innate knowledge)²⁴⁸*. It was perhaps this knowledge that the colonial state tried to harness in arguing for ‘tanner’s blood’. But with the division of education between artisanal and technical, this habitus was lost. As a result both skill and habitus got ghettoized in caste and religious terms, while rendering the leather technology degrees affectless.

For the worker on the other hand her/his location in the Chamar/Jatav or the Muslim community is seen to stand in place of any kind of formal training. In fact some of the ‘untrained’ workers are quite coveted by entrepreneurs because of the skill and craft especially in specialized areas like saddle making, which it is claimed can only be learned through the family and not in any school. It is also only these workers who fact the mark of untouchability within the industry. Thus without the added technical knowledge, Anees’ intergenerational knowledge would have to be put on the same plane as that of the untouchable workers. Technology and technical education is crucial in creating this distance

²⁴⁸ Interview conducted in Unnao in January, 2015.

from the pollution of leatherwork. Hence while the worker will never be included in this knowledge economy, Anees cannot do without it.

By the second decade of the 1900s, there are demands for setting up schools and polytechnics for leather education in India itself to facilitate the production of skilled and qualified workforce which cannot be accommodated in England. This also included a discussion on the training of the artisanal classes. The first of these kinds of institutes come up in Madras in the form of a Leather Training Institute. Subsequently aided leather working schools are set up all over states like Uttar Pradesh and Madras²⁴⁹.

These schools thus formed the last rung of the knowledge economies of leather and sought to fill a crucial gap in training of the lower classes in conjunction with the educational schemes of the government mentioned earlier. By integrating these schools with university departments in England through faculty and equipment, the architecture of technical education in leather began to be completed. In fact many scholars who were looking for employment on return from England were asked to join as faculty members in these local institutes. Alongside this local scholarship began to be disbursed by the provincial governments to aid people to study in these institutes.

²⁴⁹Some of them include Municipal Leather Working School in Allahabad, Barabanki, and Varanasi, Anjuman Islamiya Khalil Industrial School, Bareilly, Shia Yatimkhana Leather Working School, Lucknow and Kanpur and the Cooperative Leather Working School in Dayalbagh, Agra are set up all over. In 1921, the grand Harcourt Butler Technological Institute (HBTI), Kanpur is set up. Leather Working Schools were also established in Dhaka, Karachi, Lahore, Rangoon and Singapore. An illustration of the nature and evolution of these kinds of institutes can be gleaned from the history of the Government Leather Institute (GLI), Kanpur, as illustrated on its website. GLI was initially established as Government Leather Working School in 1916, with Pandit Deena Nath Razdan, who had also petitioned for the setup of this school, as its first headmaster. In 1932, Captain Laxmi Narayan Srivastava, a product of the North Hampton College of Technology and the State's Official Leather Specialist, took over as principal. In 1938 Kishan Lal Muer joined as Vice principal and was also appointed as the State's Technical Surveyor of Leather, ultimately becoming the principal in 1941. Muer is seen as the great innovator for this school He started, a National Leather Working Certificate Course in mechanized footwear production, Post Matriculate Leather Working Course, Diploma in Leather Technology Course and High School (Technical) Course and established a pediscopic (foot X ray) department along with an Effective Production Centre.

Mohammed Nasarulla availed of one such scholarship to study tanning in 1909 at the Madras Institute, where chrome tanning was introduced for the first time in India²⁵⁰. In the hope of successfully completing the course, Nasarullah invested some amount of money in collaboration with others in a tannery at Gorakhpur in 1908²⁵¹. Eventually he also manages to get trained at Ahmad Bros, Hide Merchants at Nai Sarak in Cawnpore. However things begin to fall apart when the board of the Gorakhpur tannery refused to employ him on grounds of his weak qualifications. Instead they wanted an “England returned tanner”. Since Nasarullah does not have money to get trained in England he applies for the STS in 1909 and his application gets rejected since he is already fairly trained.²⁵² Nasarulla’s case brings into sharp focus the highly arbitrary and contingent nature of this system of education depending as it was on the sheer judgment of a few colonial officers. In the process personal contacts and resource networks became increasingly important in order to gain an entry into this techno-industrial order. It is not difficult to conclude who would have access to such networks.

In 1916, post the extensive review of the STS a preliminary training in leatherwork at the Government Harness and Saddlery Factory at Kanpur, and assurance of the ability and willingness to participate in manual work become preconditions. The notification for the scholarship in Bombay Presidency clearly states,

“This training which will be given in the will be of a thoroughly practical nature and candidates must clearly understand that the scholar selected will not be a mere onlooker, but will have to work as an ordinary

²⁵⁰ ‘Training of UP students in the Govt Chrome tanning factory at Madras’.Nos.72/1909, UPSA, Lucknow

²⁵¹ He also writes about the difficulties in opening such a factory at a place like Gorakhpur where the public and Hindus in particular are so much against the leather trade.

²⁵² ‘Training of UP students in the Govt Chrome tanning factory at Madras’.Nos.72/1909, UPSA, Lucknow

workman of the factory alongside other workmen in each process of the manufacture of leather.”

Further the candidate must be willing to “undergo hard physical work was an added condition²⁵³”. Mahadeo Balkrishna Hudlikar, from Bombay was nominated for that year’s tanning and leather manufacture scholarship after he had completed the preliminary training. Hudlikar had a B.Sc degree but no previous experience in the manufacture of leather. His file mentions that although he does not seem to have any hereditary connection with the leather industry, he appears suitable otherwise²⁵⁴. He had worked as an apprentice on the machinery of two factories for about two years –on engines in the Deccan Paper Mills and on the boilers at the Maharashtra Metal Factory²⁵⁵. His father, Balkrishna Madhavrao Hudlikar, now retired, served in several Native States and under the British Government as a clerk in the Census Office. On his return Hudlikar proposes that a certain Professor Kanitkar of Fergusson College will use his influence with certain capitalists or Chiefs to start a factory²⁵⁶. In the absence of such credentials members of lower caste groups who could have claimed at least a hereditary status do not get to do so. Owen Lynch and Peter Knorringa while discussing the shoe trade in Agra have also discussed the importance of caste and kinship networks in fostering business ties in the market and they have noted that Jatavs often very unable to access these resources. However, trade liberalization of the 1990s brought in significant changes in the market structure in the leather industry. While specifically the industry underwent a huge slump due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, one its major clients, in general the

²⁵³ Notification by the Govt of Bombay inviting applications for a state technical scholarship in tanning and leather manufacture, Dept of Education, March 1916 Part B, Nos 42.

²⁵⁴ Notes, “Selection of certain gentlemen for the State Technical scholarships available during the year 1916”, Nos 18-48, Education A, October, 1916, NAI, p 4

²⁵⁵ Letter to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for India from The Department of Education, 4 August, 1916, “Selection of certain gentlemen for the State Technical scholarships available during the year 1916”, Education-A, Nos 18-48, October, 1916, NAI, p 49

²⁵⁶ Letter from P.W. Monie, Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Educational Department to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, 10 April, 1916, “Selection of certain gentlemen for the State Technical scholarships available during the year 1916”, Education-A, Nos 18-48, October, 1916, NAI, pp 29-31.

opening of the markets, flushed the industry with unprecedented sources of capital.

Some Dalit individuals have been able to thus capture some of this market capital rather successfully. Devki Nandan Son, owner of a large shoe manufacturing business in Agra is one of these celebrated figures. In a personal interview²⁵⁷ Son narrates a remarkable story about training in leather. Son's father was a leatherworker at a factory in Agra and as is usually practiced, used to also make cheap local shoes at home. Son recalls that he would watch his father work on the anvil with a hammer and needle while sitting on the floor. Since his father wanted Son to concentrate on his studies, Son would attempt to replicate his father's move when the latter was away. Thus he picked up the craft of shoemaking. After finishing school he joined CFTI in order to learn shoe technology and realised that he already knows it all. All he did not know was the technical names of equipment and processes but the actual work remained the same. Son's narrative opens up the question of caste and labour in very effective ways. What should be the nature of training in a caste marked industry such as leather? A tannery worker in Kanpur told me that this industry requires someone who is "*Kadha hua, na ki padha hua*" (Someone who has been molded by doing work rather than someone with degrees). It is then important to ask, what is lost in the present structure of training available. The next section takes up this question in the context of interviews conducted with faculty members and students of three leather institutes in Uttar Pradesh.

5. Producing Leather, Forgetting Caste

The project of technical education in leather ran well into postcolonial India. The Central Leather Research Institute comes up in Chennai in 1948 with the stated objective, on its website, that the, "The missing link was addition of technology to

²⁵⁷ Interview conducted in June, 2015 at Agra

the manufacturing base of Indian leather sector... It is one matter to design and develop technologies but entirely another to reach viable technologies in a traditional sector like leather.”

Even with the constitutional debate on the existence of caste in matters of public life and the subsequent legislations which abolish untouchability, the debate within the leather industry does not change much. Instead now the industry eager to participate in the newly independent national economy sought to sever all links with its ‘untouchable’ past. CLRI was not alone in morphing a caste based skill as ‘traditional craft’ – something which could not be sustained in the rapidly modernizing industrial setup²⁵⁸.

In 1957, after the Seetaramaiah Committee recommendations the government sought to expand the scope of the Government Institute of Leather Technology at Madras, which was initially established in 1915. The Institute was only offering a certificate and a diploma course in Leather Goods manufacturing and Leather Technology respectively. The plan now was to include a research component and start higher degrees in leather technology²⁵⁹. The link between industry and education was also sealed with various institutes, asking for advanced technical degrees a vast industrial experience for the posts in these institutes²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁸ Dr B N Das, the leather expert and chemical technologist gave a report to the Government of India stating that there is a tremendous potential of raw leather in India. In 1952 he made a proposal to the West Bengal government to set up the Central Leather Research Institute under the CSIR and also a technical college attached to this. Apparently, the government laughed it off as ‘funny subject’, stating that next one will demand training in fishing and baking. People did not realise at that time that leather making is a subject of chemistry. Madras accepted the proposal and Das was subsequently made its first director (Interview with the Director, CLRI, Kanpur in January, 2015).

²⁵⁹ F no – F.6-28/56-T4 1956, Education Dept, Branch T-4 Development of Government Institute of Leather Technology, Washermanpet, Madras. Ministry of Education to Govt School of Leather Technology, Madras

²⁶⁰ The qualifications of are highly technical in nature. A degree or a diploma in leather technology is the universal requirement, coupled with about 2-5 years of practical work experience in the industry either in a tannery or in a footwear factory. For the post of the Assistants, in fact the diploma holders have to have more practical experience than the degree holders. Further the advisory committee of the institute has to have not less than 50% members from the industry. (From 23 Dec 1957, Health Education and Local Administration Dept, Letter

Almost all faculty members of three leather schools I visited in Kanpur and Agra, were Brahmins. The precariousness of their position is interesting – teaching, usually considered to be a respectable profession, and traditionally the preserve of Brahmins, has now acquired a polluted status for most of them. The usual trajectory for these people would include either a diploma or a Bachelor degree in Leather Technology, followed by a managerial position in tanneries and factories. Some of them give up the ‘drudgery’ of the industry to return to teaching in their own alma mater.

Sanjay Chaturvedi, a Brahmin selector in Kanpur recalls his experience of leather school.

“Most people would absent themselves during the cleaning and tanning week. In the laboratory, we had to wash and flesh the skins using a big knife and a tub of water. It is just like washing clothes, but with flesh, blood and fat on it. Many people would ask for gloves, but Shukla sir, our instructor was very strict and no gloves or masks would be provided. In fact those who were absent that day would be asked to do this whole process the next day. Many people would feel dizzy and vomit but no one would be spared. In fact during the entrance process, the faculty would warn us about this day and ask us to take an informed decision. Many Brahmin students would quit midway.²⁶¹”

An interview with Avinash Shukla, the above mentioned faculty member of the Government Leather School, Kanpur and also a Brahmin, confirmed the above description. Shukla left his managerial position in a tannery to find a more ‘decent’ place in teaching. However he did not anticipate the troubles of teaching tanning to unwilling upper caste students, who alternatively look up to this co-caste faculty member for support and also look down on him in disgust.

no – 42520 E7/56-1-Education, From V Kannaiyan, Deputy Secy to Govt, Madras, To – The Secy to the Govt of India, Ministry of Education)

²⁶¹ Personal interview conducted in Kanpur, January, 2015

“This humiliating process is repeated every year”, says Shukla. “The students keep asking us, how do you do it every day? What do we tell them, they do not understand the hardships of life?”²⁶²

The threat of caste pollution found a match in the economic security that the leather industry provided especially in the decades between 1950 and 1990. Many upper caste respondents shared that their families put up a strong opposition to them joining these leather technology courses. “*Brahmin ka ladke yeh kaam nahin karega*”, (A Brahmin’s son will not do this work), was a statement one got to hear repeatedly in these life histories. There are common stories of wives refusing to sit next to their husbands when they come back from the tanneries, of parents refusing to eat food with their sons and of children running away from the stench of their father’s bodies. Eventually however most of these families come around, especially when the pay cheques have been good. That “money does not smell bad”, came up in almost all of these interviews.

Equally common is the practice of taking a bath immediately after one comes back home. Ritualized bathing and the use of water to purify oneself of the contamination caused by contact with public spaces which allow for intermixing of castes, has been extensively discussed in the literature on caste practices.²⁶³ However in the case of these respondents bathing takes on an additional signification since the contamination is neither entirely tangible, so as to be washed off nor entirely perceptual, so as to be thought as being cast away. They are in fact trying to rid themselves of an odour which sticks to the skin and leave, if ever, only temporarily, only to cling on again on the next workday. Guru (2012, p. 208) has talked about the impossibility of ‘cleaning’ lower caste bodies because of a rather permanent state of pollution which characterizes them. These upper caste bodies working in the leather industry go through similar, if not the same experience. A technical degree makes it slightly easier to explain this peculiar caste position. Many respondents who have B.Tech degrees in Leather

²⁶² Personal interview conducted in Kanpur, January, 2015.

²⁶³ See Gopal Guru (2012)

Technology reported that often they get away by saying that they are ‘engineers’, without going into the details of their work profiles. There were also those who got into leather technology because they did not qualify for other branches of engineering. Faculty members at HBTI reported that every year many leather technology students either shift courses or get into MBAs after the completion of the degree and never actually make it to the industry.

In a strange suspension of choice and autonomy which usually characterizes discussions around careers, many upper-caste managers and supervisors in tanneries, as well as faculty members of leather training departments reported that they did not really know what they were getting into. Mostly a common narrative pattern is followed in terms of having either a friend, or an elder brother or cousin, who was doing well in the industry and thus lured them to join in without sharing the sensory experience of the industry. Another operative assumption is that one gets used to the discomfort after a while, “*aadat ho jati hai*” (We get used to it).

This discomfort is to be expected, coming as they are, from traditions of training which are flattened of affect. In these classrooms, where training should have otherwise have been extremely tactile and sensuous, instead the occasional episode of vomiting seems to be the only affective indication of a caste status; and which is also retained as a prominent sense memory in most accounts of time spent in these institutes. Some of them pick up this sensuousness on the field. Sanjay, the selector we met in Chapter Three, is one of them. He always insisted on meeting me in a tannery, constantly asked me to touch the skins, to feel the fine lines and thorn marks under my hand. He asked me smell my shoes and then smell the hides, when I asked him how to tell pure leather from the fake.

Thus two distinct kinds of epistemological modalities are simultaneously in operation within the leather industry. First, is the ostensibly ‘innate’,

'generational' knowledge of leather, a certain familiarity with its scents and textures which cannot, it seems, be taught in techno-industrial classrooms. It is also not in the project of the industrial discourse to evolve methods to impart this knowledge. This knowledge, couched in descriptions such as 'skill', '*hunar*' 'the artisan's son', or the idea of '*khoon mein hota hai*', 'the tanner's blood'. The facade of these categories hides within it deep anxieties about caste status and the threat of pollution. In the context of leatherwork, *hunar* thus becomes the repository of pollution and disgust. By containing this *hunar* to only certain bodies, the odours of caste are reproduced within the object of leather. This containment then gives rise to the second kind of epistemology of leather – the techno-industrial discourse of management and merchandizing, which free from contamination of both the object and the worker, now inaugurates the grand project of the desire of leather. Within this project the odour of leather smells sweet, devoid of a threat of pollution.

This is not a project of modernity which creates deodourized bodies and environments as Howes claims. Technology is used rather skilfully to obfuscate caste and untouchability, to make them illegible and invisible when the need arises. Knowledge production and labour are organized as two distinct caste activities. This duality between management and labour was required, if the industry was to flourish. In the process, they made way for the entry of upper caste entrepreneurs as well as technological experts and managers into the industry. To some extent this also took care of the perception that this is work suitable only for the lower castes. The creation of this layer of untainted elites also created a barrier of sorts between the labour and raw material which is polluted and the commodity which is desirable. Leather could now be enjoyed without, as the proverb has it, getting their hands dirty.

Imagine this modern industry like an inverted pyramid hinged on its smelly untouchable point – the labour of the untouchable worker. On top this is a burgeoning edifice of the industry with its designers, merchandisers, technicians, supervisors and owners. It is the existence of this polluted non- technical

expertise which allows for a qualified touch and a controlled olfactory experience on part of the owners and supervisors. In the process the entire epistemological and sensory burden of the polluted work falls on the workers.

One of the most important methods to bring sensuousness back to the industrial would be to take cognizance of, and to unmark the systems of 'non-technical' knowledges preserved and produced by the Chamars as untouchable. The smell of the raw skin/hide, the salty texture of the cured skins, the colour of tannins which never leaves the hands, the stench of the rotting horns, hooves and tails which cannot be converted into leather, are all essential in knowing how to produce leather. Not only are these knowledges absent from technical curriculum on leather technology but it is also not considered important to have these workers as a part of these institutes thereby constituting a denial of an entire system of knowledge. One also needs to examine the ways in which the texture of these industrial and classroom spaces is created through an interaction of animal, machine and human worlds. This understanding of pedagogy as an organic, sensuous interface is crucial to our understanding of the lived affective worlds of caste.

The leather technology classroom is one such space where the affect of caste clashes with the demands of a deodourized and sanitized technical education. In these classrooms, unlike in ordinary classrooms, caste does not only exist as names, criterion of reservations and measures of touchability. In fact caste forms the very subject matter of leather technology classrooms albeit without any mention of the same since the very production of leather rests on 'untouchable' labour. There needs to be a much deeper interrogation of this idea especially in educational spaces where these issues are being discussed under facades of science and technology, without any of the attendant affectual qualities which mark these objects and people. In effect one needs to examine the caste contours of a seemingly non affectual entity like technology.

Conclusion

In the political economic discourse after independence, education was seen an important factor in the argument for development and industrialization of a particular kind. Education was also supposed to modernize what was regarded as a 'traditional society' and inaugurate a secular, caste-free public sphere. This idea did not go uncontested and there were deep apprehensions regarding the ability of education alone to transcend complex issues such as caste, class and gender²⁶⁴. The experiences of the pre-colonial and colonial periods were indicative of the fact that access to education has been severely mitigated by one's social and economic location. This was found to be the case not only in the rural areas and even in the urban areas access to education was not found to be uniform across caste, class and gender divides²⁶⁵. This situation has improved slightly with the wider implementation of the reservations policy especially post the Mandal committee recommendations were implemented. Alongside, post liberalization there has been a steady increase in the numbers and kinds of educational institutions available especially for the aspirational middle and lower-middle classes. The faith in the emancipatory capacities of education is still unwavering.

Technical and vocational training has been widely considered by the government as one of the ways in which skill and access gap can be remedied. This type of education is aimed at providing low cost, skilled based training to those who cannot access higher scientific and engineering education due to various factors like cost, time and social constraints. An entire regime of polytechnics, vocational training colleges and Indian Training Institutes (ITIs) thus sprung up. Effectively this set up a hierarchy between pure and higher science which was majorly being accessed by the upper and middle classes and the upper castes, and vocational and technical training which was sometimes the only option available for the

²⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion see Despande (2006) and Demerath, Jodhka et al (2006).

lower classes, a majority of whom were also lower caste. This division also coincides with the split between intellectual and manual and work.

This has two important consequences for this work. First, the manual and practical nature of technical work has a strong basis in the way in which we understand division and nature of labour within the caste discourse. Working with hands, interacting with dirt and objects and materials of various sorts are activities which have a distinct lower caste nature. Much of this labour is considered to be untouchable. Leatherwork, apart from carrying its own connotations of pollution is also largely manual in nature. The implications for sitting on the floor and working with ones hands especially while making shoes was discussed in detail in Chapter Four. The epithet '*jootewala*' which many factory owners vehemently objected to, actually mirrors this stance of being close to the ground and working with hands, like the *mochi* does.

While this difference between manual work and ownership is evident in almost every industrial enterprise, in the case of leatherwork this acquires a special charge because of the pollution that the object of leather carries even for the owners. The affective charge of this object has been difficult to transcend. In large part this is due to the split in the epistemology of leather itself. While higher educational courses in leatherwork like a Bachelors of Technology degree teach both the theoretical and the practical aspects of leatherwork, these students are eventually groomed as engineers or experts, who are not expected to actually do leatherwork in factories and tanneries. This bias is almost in built into the educational system, because parallel with an engineering degree in leatherwork, there also exist a certificate and a diploma course teaching precisely the same skills, but to a group of students located on a very different social and economic matrix. This allows some people to know and others to know and work.

Related to this is the second implication of this schema of technical education. The manual and the intellectual split within leatherwork is also a sensory split. Lissa Roberts (2005) proposes the idea of 'sensuous technology', the idea that

human bodies are phenomenologically involved in the production of technology, rather than being objective, distant presences. Examining the discipline of chemistry Roberts (2005, p. 106, p. 108) argues that it was only in the late eighteenth century that human sensory perception began to be calibrated using complex scientific apparatus, making chemistry into an 'exact' science. This was especially the case after the advent of Lavoisier's chemistry. We had examined the effect that Lavoisier's experiments with air had on our understanding of miasmas and circulation of bodily substances. The practice of precise measurements instituted by Lavoisier, inserted machine between nature and the human body, thereby displacing the sensuousness of both (Roberts, 2005, p. 108). As against this till the mid-eighteenth century chemists relied on the five senses in order to gain natural knowledge. On the other hand, maths and physics were regarded as disciplines which have obliterated the heterogeneous knowledge of the natural (Roberts, 2005, p. 107).

In the case of leatherwork sensuousness connoted malodours and disgust. This sensuousness was not forgotten by the mechanical intervention but instead was displaced to the body of the untouchable workers, while a scientific and precise epistemology was attributed to an expertise in leather chemistry. It was not as if this scientific and precise science was completely affectless and desensitized. Rather, this science employed only particular senses like vision – the ability to learn by observation and through understanding. Thus the process of conversion of a "craft" into an "export oriented industry" was complete. The major implication of this move was that the knowledge paradigms and the bodies of the workers, or the artisans were not just declared malodorous and undesirable but more importantly, were deemed not to be knowledge at all. Of course knowledge here is understood as an ocular scientific and rational enterprise. What the workers possessed on the other hand was an irrational, malodorous skill, which is as Roberts argues, cannot be replicated with precision or universalized in neat terms (Roberts, 2005, p. 107). Knowledge is thus only that which does not stink, the rest is skill and labour. The movement between craft and technical, between trained and organic, between art and industry is thus a tenuous one. Odours are

quite mischievous in nature and they seep in, they transgress, escape disciplining and thus make it impossible to have an odourless epistemology of leather.

CONCLUSION

This work situated the object of leather as its centrepiece and the relationship between the sensoriality of this object and caste as its principle concern. In the specific case of leather, it has been argued that odours provide the sensory vantage point from which the entire multisensory architecture of caste could be mapped. The work thus makes a significant shift in terms of understanding caste by investigating the caste of this object. It has been noted that it is because the caste of leather has been sustained and reproduced through technological, industrial and state apparatuses that leatherwork and the leatherworker continue to smell bad. The odours of the object of leather have been mapped through a series of five different spaces – slaughterhouse, flaying quarter, tannery, factory and technological institutions – which together constitute the social and political life of the object of leather. The work traced the beginnings of leather in its animal provenance and then proceeded to establish a complex relationship of the object with animality through slaughter and flaying. I have demonstrated that animality and its relationship with death is an important conceptual framework in which leather has to be understood.

The analysis then moved to the spaces of the tannery and the factory, arguing that in the perceived difference in the odourscape of these two spaces reside the affects of caste. While the factory, which deals with finished and cooked (*paka chamda*), can argue for a sanitized, odourless existence due to the perceived lack of pollution, the tanneries which are lined with fat, blood and hair of hides, do not have that option. Caste thus can be smelt in tanneries. The analysis also disrupts this supposed anaesthesia of the factory, by arguing that while the odours of raw hides maybe missing from these contexts, the stigma of being a '*jootewalla*' gives away the affect of caste underlying the factory. In the last section of the work, we have examined the regime of technical knowledge around leather and it is argued that due to the way in which the object of leather has been understood in this epistemology, odours become and sustain

themselves as the odours of caste. The work thus contributes to the very recent and yet to be explored field of caste and the senses.

This work started out with the intention to explore the production of untouchability through the odours of leather within the industrial setup. Within academic literature and on the field two initial observations came forth – first that all workers in leatherwork are from the untouchable castes and second, which claimed that the first observation was an older reality and now leatherwork is no longer considered a polluted occupation. Both these contradictory assertions were actually validated during this research. The present leather industry is both with and without untouchability. Many parts of the industry, especially the more ‘visible’ sections, such as the retail stores, leather boutiques and glossy advertisements contain no mention of the untouchable labour behind these goods. The odours of leather in these spaces produce desire and facilitate consumption. However it is in the ‘invisible’ but intensely odorous contexts such as slaughterhouses, flaying operations and tanneries that the untouchable labour becomes apparent. The work has argued that in these spaces, caste has to be smelt on the bodies, on clothes and on the object itself. The odours of leather in these spaces produce disgust and repulsion. The transformation of the affect of leather from disgust to desire is crucial for the sustenance of the material life of the object and is produced by the visual removal of untouchability and untouchable labour in the spaces of consumption.

On the other hand, when we start looking for caste within the industry, matters begin to become complex. This conceptual shift from untouchability to caste was an important one for this work. And this shift has been perpetuated by the constant denial of the caste based nature of leatherwork by some of the upper-caste inhabitants of the industry, even while they informed that all workers are either Jatav or Muslim. Further, the obliviousness to the contradiction in this statement, on the part of the upper-caste respondents, made it imperative to bring in the category of caste, rather than focus on untouchability alone. The

untouchability of the workers has been explained in these contexts, like discussed above, by their association with a polluted object. However, the dissociation of untouchability with caste concealed the ways in which this untouchable labour and polluted object have impacted the caste status and habitus of the upper-caste members of the industry. The primary affect of this impact is odorous. While they have denied the existence of caste in the industry, in the interstices of the conversation, they would mention the affect that the odours of pollution and untouchability produced. It was in these descriptions that caste became visible, not just in the industrial space but the overflow of odours from the industrial to the wider public and to the domestic, further revealed matrices of caste underlying these contexts. This shift then has allowed us to open up to the upper-caste inhabitants of the industry and to the way in which they experience and understand their own caste locations.

It is here that the work makes its most significant contribution to the field – in examining the affects of caste, and not just untouchability, produced through the polluted object of leather. This conceptual shift has been produced through a focus on the odours of leatherwork which transcend physical and metaphysical boundaries to impact ‘everyone’. A visual analysis of the industry space produces a difference between the bodies and spaces of the workers, owners and supervisors which then sustains leatherwork as an activity associated with the ‘leatherworker’. Further, odours foregrounded the affects of disgust, repulsion and desire, which, in a political-economic analysis would have been confined to the background descriptions.

The olfactory analysis in this work argued instead that since this difference is lessened, if not completely merged under the intangible and diffuse nature of odours, the odours of leatherwork affect ‘everyone’ and everyone’s caste. The idea that *‘ab is industry mein sab kaam karte hain’* (Now everyone works in the industry), came through the field itself and became one of the most important categories for framing this work. I thus argue that because of the odorous nature of the object of leather, and further because these odours are thought of as

connoting contamination and pollution, 'everyone' who comes in contact with these odours, becomes somewhat a 'leatherworker'.

These different kinds of leatherworkers may exist in differing states of pollution, some maybe relatively more temporary than the others, but the object of leather, destabilizes these selves, bodies and spaces to produce fuzzy caste identities and habitus. Thus while Rawat (2011) argues that not all Chamars were leatherworkers, I instead propose that one needs to open up and make the category of the 'leatherworker' itself more layered and nuanced. This will be one crucial step towards acknowledging and negotiating the polluted status of the object of leather.

Through the work it has been argued that it is not just the Brahmins and other upper caste inhabitants of the industry who are destabilized by the odours of leather. Claiming this would actually be a move, where the odours and pollution of leather become responsibility of only those who are supposedly untouchables. Instead, through individuals like Baldev, who claims that flaying is '*kala sona*', and the scores of workers who asked me to touch my shoes and then argue for contamination caused by leather, and finally through Chandar's powerful narrative of '*chamda chatna*' (licking leather), I have demonstrated that the complexities of the object of leather, its location between desire and disgust, has produced an equally complex politics of the object, which has allowed a negotiation of untouchability itself, thereby once again making caste selves and spaces fuzzy.

In the course of this work, and due to the complex politics of caste and leather, odours themselves came to be defined as more than just olfactory. It was argued that one simply does not smell odours, but one also touches, tastes, feels and hears them. It was largely the multisensory nature of caste and of its practice which produced this argument. This move to the multisensoriality of odours allows us to take forward this argument in two ways. First, this challenges the hierarchy of odours, where a sensory analysis has often come to mean the dislocation of one sense by another. It is also often argued that this means a shift

in modes of power as well, especially if the sense which is being displaced is vision. Through this work, I argue that this displacement of power cannot work in the extremely sophisticated and complete system that caste is. There is no sense, which takes the priority of power over the other in the discourse of caste. Thus by understanding sensory phenomenon as an intermixing of perceptions, powers and affects, one can also understand and resist the powers of caste in an equally sophisticated manner. Secondly, the move to the multisensoriality of odours can also then complicate the debate on the politics of vision, arguing for a tactile visual power or a vision which smells. This new kind of vision can then once again provide ways in which one can evaluate and reorganize space, bodies and objects.

The question is not how raw hide, blood or finished leather is smelled objectively by the different inhabitants of the industry. Nor it is how these objects themselves smell like. It can be argued that the act of smelling is a subjective and historically and culturally specific act and thus these universal arguments are hard to make. However, a stronger political move will be to ask, what do these odours mean for understanding our worlds? This means to look at the phenomenon of perception underlying the epiphenomenon of describing and categorizing odours. A perception of odours, an engagement with their meanings rather than their aesthetics, then allows us to explore how the phenomena of odours produces caste and untouchability, and also produces knowledge about how different castes are supposed to smell. Herein lays the politics of odours – in producing bodies, objects and knowledges.

The discussion of smell and odours brings back caste to squarely challenge the sanitized discourse of the industry. It brings us back to the body – not just the body of the untouchable worker, but the body of the owner, the supervisor, the Brahmin watchman to the body of the factory space and to the body of the animal. It brings back the organic underlining the political and it exposes a political which smells. To conclude, the thesis largely examines the sensorial life of leather and leatherworkers by reading it against the grain of caste and odours.

Works on the senses are quite fond of quoting George Orwell's (1972) famous line that, "the real secret of class distinctions can be summed up in four frightful words – The lower classes smell." In the case of the leather industry, everyone smells but only a few are perceived to be malodorous. It can thus be claimed that in this case the real secret of odours lies in caste.

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