

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 315

Episode Title: Wal-Mart Goes To Washington

Description: Newly obtained videotape takes viewers behind the corporate curtain at the largest corporation in the world, Wal-Mart. And thousands of Dalit women in India are forced into a life sentence of sexual servitude by religious custom.

TEASE:

BILL HOGAN, CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

It's unvarnished. It's unscripted. Its employees speaking very naturally about this is how the game is played.

NORM LEZY, FORMER WAL-MART LOBBYIST
(Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston, 2001)

What happens when we contribute to a candidate, we get what's called access. We get a chance to go in and talk, whether it's a senator or a congressman or a congresswoman, and educate them on the issues, the things that are important to you, to me and to this company of ours.

SMITA NARULA, NYU

There is a very strong process of dehumanization that has to take place to cease to see them as individuals, as human beings and as somehow lesser human.

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS, TONIGHT, ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

WAL-MART GOES TO WASHINGTON:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING FROM NEW YORK. OUR FIRST STORY TONIGHT IS ABOUT WAL-MART, AND IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH LOW PRICES. IT'S ABOUT HOW A BIG TIME INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN CORPORATION SPENDS MILLIONS TO GAIN INFLUENCE IN WASHINGTON. AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE COMPANIES LIKE WAL-MART DON'T REALLY LIKE TO TALK ABOUT HOW THEY GET THINGS DONE IN WASHINGTON MUCH LESS SEE THEIR WORK PLAYED OUT ON TELEVISION. BUT THANKS TO NEWLY AVAILABLE VIDEO

TAPES, THESE PARTS THEY NEVER EXPECTED THE PUBLIC TO SEE, YOU ARE ABOUT TO GET A PEAK BEHIND THE CURTAIN OF WAL-MART FOR A RARE LOOK AT EXECUTIVES OF THE BIGGEST CORPORATION IN THE WORLD WHO ARE BEING VERY CANDID FOR THE CAMERA.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS A WAL-MART CORPORATE MEETING... BUT WITH AN AGENDA THAT GOES FAR BEYOND SALES TARGETS AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION. WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE AND HEAR ON THESE NEWLY-OBTAINED VIDEOTAPES IS A GLIMPSE OF HOW CORPORATE AMERICA NEEDS TO PAY MONEY...LOTS OF MONEY... TO HAVE INFLUENCE IN WASHINGTON. EXECUTIVES OF WAL-MART, ONE OF THE RICHEST CORPORATIONS IN THE WORLD, ARE PASSING THE HAT...LOOKING FOR MONEY FROM STORE MANAGERS FOR WAL-MART'S PAC—ITS POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE.

NORM LEZY, FORMER WAL-MART LOBBYIST
(Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston, 2001)

Let me be frank, in this day and age if you don't have a good political action committee operation to support candidates, you really can't do much in Washington.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S AUGUST 2001...HOUSTON, TEXAS...AND THIS IS A REGULAR MEETING OF WAL-MART MANAGERS. BUT INSTEAD OF THE USUAL COMPANY PEP TALK, --NORM LEZY -- WAL-MART'S CHIEF LOBBYIST AT THE TIME, IS MAKING A SALES PITCH FOR POLITICAL DONATIONS.

LEZY (Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston, 2001)

How does it work? The law allows you and me to contribute to the PAC, the PAC committee decides who we should give this money too, who we should support and by the way we do both Democrats and Republicans. And the way we do it is quite simple. We try to find members who think like we do. Pro business, pro Wal-mart who'll vote the right way on issues to allow us to do the right things as we carry on our business each and every day.

BILL HOGAN, CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

This, to me, was remarkable in that you'd never have a chance to see this kind of material in any other context. I can't think of anything like this in existence.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BILL HOGAN IS WITH THE NON-PARTISAN, CENTER FOR PUBLIC

INTEGRITY. WHEN HE HEARD THERE WERE TAPES OF WAL-MART'S INTERNAL MEETINGS...HE WAS STUNNED.

DAN RATHER

In a broad general way what's the value of these tapes?

HOGAN

Well there's so many of them over so many years. They give you a unique, or almost unique, window into the workings and attitudes of this corporation. How else could one ever get that as an average person or even as a journalist?

LEZY (Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston, 2001)

What happens when we contribute to a candidate, we get what's called access. We get a chance to go in and talk, whether it's a senator or a congressman or a congresswoman, and educate 'em on the issues, the things that are important to you, to me and to this company of ours.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MANAGERS WERE LEZY'S TARGET AUDIENCE BECAUSE CORPORATIONS LIKE WAL-MART CANNOT BY LAW GIVE MONEY TO PACS ... AND THERE'S NOTHING ILLEGAL ABOUT ASKING FOR MONEY THIS WAY. WHAT IS UNUSUAL IS THAT YOU GET TO SEE AND HEAR THESE CANDID EXPLANATIONS OF HOW WAL-MART AND WASHINGTON DO BUSINESS TOGETHER. THE REASON YOU'RE SEEING THESE TAPES IS NOT COURTESY OF WAL- MART. FLAGLER PRODUCTIONS—THE COMPANY THAT WAS HIRED TO PRODUCE AND VIDEOTAPE WAL-MART MEETINGS FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS-- WAS SUDDENLY DISMISSED IN 2006. THE PRODUCTION COMPANY HAD AMASSED AN ENORMOUS VIDEO LIBRARY THAT CHRONICLES THE GROWTH OF WHAT IS NOW THE LARGEST CORPORATION IN THE WORLD. SURPRISINGLY WAL-MART HAD NO WRITTEN CONTRACT WITH FLAGLER BUT IT DID OFFER TO BUY THE ARCHIVE. WHEN FLAGLER ASKED FOR ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS... WAL-MART COUNTERED WITH FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND. UNABLE TO REACH AN AGREEMENT...FLAGLER PUT THE TAPES ON THE MARKET. NOW, FLAGLER'S ARCHIVE HAS TURNED INTO A TREASURE TROVE FOR LAWYERS, INVESTIGATORS, AND REPORTERS LOOKING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT WAL-MART'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

LEZY (Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston Texas, 2001)

Well what do we do with the money? Let me give you just one quick example. A few weeks ago Eric and I hosted a breakfast with one of the key senators. We invited five or

six companies that share the same basic business values that we do and for a PAC contribution we sat and had an audience with this senator, eight of us, for an hour and a half. We covered every issue that's important to us and important to you. And let me tell ah you just get that quality time and that's the way it works.

HOGAN

It's unvarnished. It's just that's what it is. It's unscripted. Its employees speaking very naturally about this is, again, this is how the game is played.

RATHER

And why should we care about this?

HOGAN

How many times have we heard lawmakers deny that money given to my campaign does not get you a meeting with me? Well we find in the videos, at least from Wal-Mart's perspective, that's exactly what the money does. It gets them a 90 minute meeting with a US senator.

RATHER

Substantial access. Not just a, "Hello, have your picture taken, Goodbye."

HOGAN

No, this is-- face time, 90 minutes of it and for busy US senator, 90 minutes is a heck of a lot of time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN 2001... WAL-MART'S PAC WAS OPERATING ON A FAIRLY SMALL BUDGET BY WASHINGTON STANDARDS... SO NORM LEZY AND HIS FELLOW LOBBYIST ERIC WINBORN WANTED THE MANAGERS TO KNOW JUST HOW THE SYSTEM REALLY WORKS WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING LAWS... AND WHICH LAWS WAL-MART AND ITS POLITICAL MONEY HAD A HAND IN RE-WRITING.

ERIC WINBORN, FORMER WAL-MART LOBBYIST
(Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston Texas, 2001)

Now we were fortunate because of our PAC, we were able to meet with over a hundred members of Congress face to face and tell them that what we want is affordable health care. We aren't looking to sue more people. And fortunately Congress heard our message and when Congress actually when the House and Senate passed the Patient Bill of Rights bills a few weeks ago they're specific provisions covering Wal-Mart that ah would limit

our liability. And companies kill for the opportunity to have that happen. And so it was because of your efforts in part out there with the PAC that gave us the access to these members and they heard our message.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE PATIENTS BILL OF RIGHTS LEGISLATION DIED IN 2002. BUT THERE WERE MANY OTHER ISSUES DRIVING WAL-MART'S NEED FOR POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

HOGAN

Virtually every big piece of legislation is gonna affect Wal-Mart. Right? You name a subject. Any kind of employee benefits. Pensions. Big one, healthcare. And I think the question really is what legislation doesn't affect why-- it's not finding-- what legislation does, it's kind of the reverse of that. It-- you would be hard pressed to find a piece of legislation for a company that big that doesn't affect it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN 2000 WAL-MART'S PAC CONTRIBUTED LESS THAN HALF A MILLION DOLLARS TO FEDERAL CANDIDATES -- PEANUTS COMPARED TO THE TENS OF MILLIONS IN MANY OTHER PACS--- SO WAL-MART EXECUTIVES ASKED FOR MORE.

TOM COUGHLIN, FORMER WAL-MART VICE-CHAIRMAN
(Wal-Mart Managers Meeting, Houston, 2001)

Our PAC is um not a very impressive PAC from the stand point of how many dollars are in it. And as a result it's somewhat limiting in what they can do to represent us on the issues that are very very important to you on a day to day basis.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT THIS 2001 MEETING SENIOR EXECUTIVES INCLUDING WAL-MART'S THEN VICE-CHAIRMAN TOM COUGHLIN, WANTED THE MANAGERS TO KNOW THAT WAL-MART'S PAC WAS RUNNING BEHIND IN THE FUND-RAISING RACE. COUGHLIN, A FRIEND AND PROTÉGÉ OF COMPANY FOUNDER SAM WALTON, BECAME THE SECOND HIGHEST RANKING EXECUTIVE AT WAL-MART WITH A MILLION DOLLAR SALARY. HE RESIGNED IN 2005 AND WAS LATER CONVICTED OF EMBEZZLING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN GIFT CARDS, CASH AND MERCHANDISE. BUT BACK IN 2001 WHAT COUGHLIN WAS ABOUT TO ANNOUNCE WAS A NEW WAY TO BOOST WAL-MART PAC'S FUNDING ... MONEY WHICH -BY LAW--COULD ONLY COME FROM INDIVIDUALS.

COUGHLIN
(Wal-Mart Managers meeting, Houston, 2001)

Wal-Mart is not, by federal law, allowed to contribute to the Wal-Mart PAC. You are, I am, but Wal-Mart's not.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

UNDER THE NEW PLAN FOR EVERY DOLLAR A SALARIED MANAGER GAVE TO THE POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE...WAL-MART WOULD GIVE TWO DOLLARS TO A SEPARATE IN-HOUSE TRUST CALLED THE ASSOCIATES IN CRITICAL NEED FUND. ACCORDING TO DOCUMENTS FILED BY WAL-MART...THAT FUND IS SET UP TO -QUOTE- PROVIDE MONETARY SUPPORT FOR ASSOCIATES OR THEIR DEPENDENTS DURING MEDICAL OR EXTREME HARDSHIPS. IN 2006 THE FUND GAVE AWAY MORE THAN SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS TO MORE THAN NINE THOUSAND EMPLOYEES...MOST OF IT IN GRANTS OF \$1000 OR LESS. CONNECTING PAC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CRITICAL NEED FUND WAS A BRAND NEW MONEY-RAISING IDEA THAT WAL-MART EXECUTIVES PRESSED ON THE SALARIED MANAGERS OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

JAY ALLEN, FORMER WAL-MART SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
(Wal-Mart Managers meeting, Houston 2001)

If you give, just to pick a number, 1,000 dollars to the to the Wal-Mart PAC, it allows us to take care of our business in Washington but the Wal-Mart foundation will match that 1,000 dollars to that Associate Critical Need Trust. So you take a 1,000 dollars make it 2,000 dollars and you do two things you take - help us take care of our own, help us take care of our people.

COUGHLIN, (Wal-Mart Managers meeting, Houston, 2001)

They've come up with a very clever way where we can kill two birds with one stone. And in the process, you would be doing first what's right with our associates, and most critical, and secondly be giving these fine people here the opportunity to do things that very very much influences how Wal-Mart's seen and what Wal-Mart uh has to say on legislation that uh often times does not go in our favor.

RATHER

What does that mean when Wal-Mart says to employees, "Giving this back is a clever way to kill two birds with one stone"?

HOGAN

Get new rivers of money flowing into the Political Action Committee. Because, again,

Wal-Mart can't give it direct-- Wal-Mart Stores Inc. can't give this money to the Political Action Committee. Employees have to do it voluntarily. And, to give those who do, those who play the game the way the upper most management of Wal-Mart wants the game played, to give them a benefit by making them look like really generous donors to this Associates in Need Program.

BETSY REITHEMEYER, FORMER WAL-MART VICE PRESIDENT
(Wal-Mart Managers meeting, 2004, Dallas)

There is a way that you can double your money. Wal-Mart determines our contribution to the trust by what salaried members of management contribute to WAL-PAC, our Political Action Committee.

HOGAN

The rationale that we have here is, at its core, dishonest. It's if you give money to the Political Action Committee which, on the outside, is gonna look completely voluntary, Wal-Mart is gonna take the amount, double the amount and give it to an employee welfare fund, this Associates in Need Program, with your name on it. So it will look to the rank and file employees as if these executives are really generous. To me, it's dishonest because it's not their money.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EXPERTS ON POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES TOLD US THERE IS NOTHING ILLEGAL ABOUT CORPORATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHARITIES IN RETURN FOR INDIVIDUAL MANAGER'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PACS. IN THE TAPES, WAL-MART EXECUTIVES MAKE NO SECRET OF THE FACT THAT IT WAS THE PAC THAT NEEDED MONEY.... EVEN WARNING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-TRUST ATTACK ON FELLOW BUSINESS GIANT MICROSOFT MIGHT HAPPEN TO WAL-MART IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE FUNDS TO WOO WASHINGTON POLITICIANS.

REITHEMEYER, (Wal-Mart Managers meeting, 2004, Dallas)

Your Political Action Committee is basically the cover charge for us to participate in the process in Washington. It is your voice in government. Many of the things that we face today as a company are the result of unions, special interest groups already being at the table. Because we always believed that if we took care of our associates and our customers, the government would leave us alone. Well, Microsoft found out that wasn't going to happen and we're finding that out as well.

HOGAN

Well, really, in shorthand, it was that Microsoft, really, for many years, didn't bother to do much lobbying in Washington. And that's what that reference in the Wal-Mart tape is.

Ignore Washington at your peril I think is what the message is.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH MORE THAN ONE MILLION EMPLOYEES...AND REVENUES OF ELEVEN BILLION—YES-BILLION-- DOLLARS A YEAR ... WAL-MART IS AN AMERICAN BUSINESS LEGEND THAT BEGAN ONLY FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO. FOUNDER SAM WALTON BELIEVED NO WAL-MART DOLLARS SHOULD BE SPENT ON ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE BUSINESS...CUSTOMERS CAME FIRST AND COSTS WERE KEPT LOW...SO WAL-MART USUALLY AVOIDED WASHINGTON POLITICS.

DAVID NASSAR, WAL-MART WATCH

There's nothing wrong with giving money to candidates. That's the way our system works right now. The issue here is the inconsistency between what Wal-Mart is doing with its PAC dollars and the image that it's presenting to the American public.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DAVID NASSAR IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WAL-MART WATCH...THAT'S A GROUP FUNDED BY ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST UNIONS—THE SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL—WHICH HAS HAD NO SUCCESS ORGANIZING WAL-MART'S WORKERS.

NASSAR

Wal-Mart started as a small company, a small family culture and an insular culture. And as it grew, it faced the challenge to try to extend that family circle out to include all the employees who work for it all across the world. They failed at that. And their response to that failure has been to spend millions of dollars on PACS here in Washington, on lobbyists, and on public relations teams all across the world to try to improve their image.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NASSAR SEES THE EXECUTIVES ON THE VIDEOTAPES TAKING CREDIT FOR GOOD WORKS WHEN HE SAYS THEY'RE REALLY RAISING MONEY FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE.

NASSAR

Wal-Mart wants people to believe that it is a family company that takes care of its employees right down to the lowest-wage employee working as a store clerk. What this video shows us is that really, the company is more interested in investing in policies which are not in the long-term interests of those low-wage employees, but are in the long-term interests of the Walton family which is worth more than \$100 billion, by

the way, and the executives in Bentonville. That's what's wrong.

COUGHLIN

(Wal-mart managers meeting Houston, 2001)

But I think the great thing here is: One, we can do something that's perfectly legal and puts us in the ball game to compete. And we can do something great for our associates at the same time.

HOGAN

If a company goes to its employees and they say, "You give-- \$1,000 to the PAC and we'll add \$1,000 to your check in the next payroll per-- "that's flatly illegal. And there are a lot of companies have gotten in trouble on that one. This is not that. This looks like the loophole that somebody figured out. How do we get around that thing? And the-- the-- this is their version of an answer to that. I don't think this passes the smell test, really. And I think that's why it's a secret. That's why-- these videotapes explain this practice for the first time. And nobody outside Wal-Mart had a clear picture of this going on, I don't think.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WAL-MART WOULD NOT COMMENT ON CAMERA BUT DID CONFIRM THAT IT CONTINUES TO MAKE TWO-FOR-ONE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ITS EMPLOYEE TRUST FUND IN RETURN FOR PAC CONTRIBUTIONS. THE COMPANY ALSO SENT US A STATEMENT THAT SAYS IN PART "...WE BELIEVE WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND EDUCATE DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICAN LEGISLATORS ALIKE ON WHAT WE ARE DOING AS A COMPANY." AND WAL-MART HAD THIS WRITTEN COMMENT ABOUT THE VIDEOTAPES FROM FLAGLER PRODUCTIONS: "NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE DID NOT PAY FLAGLER PRODUCTIONS TO TAPE INTERNAL MEETINGS WITH THIS AFTERMARKET IN MIND. IT'S DEFINITELY AN UNUSUAL BUSINESS MODEL ON THEIR END, AND WE CAN'T IMAGINE TOO MANY OTHER CLIENTS WILL BE EAGER TO PAY FOR THIS SERVICE." WHAT THE IN-HOUSE VIDEOS REVEAL IS THAT WAL-MART KNEW THAT NO MATTER HOW BIG IT WAS IN SALES AND SIZE ... IT WAS BEING OUT SPENT IN THE POLITICAL MARKETPLACE --WHERE IT BELIEVED IT COULDN'T AFFORD TO LOSE.

RATHER

If this is, as you've described it, a window into how our democracy works, how it really works, then what's the most important thing it tells us?

HOGAN

I think it tells us that our democracy isn't working the way it should. Maybe it's working the way most people think it works, maybe it's working the way the most cynical among us think it works. But it's not working the way-- it's not the civics book way government's supposed to work. Can you imagine a Wal-Mart executive, outside of these forums, just saying this kind of stuff publicly? I don't think that would play very well.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE WAL-MART VIDEOS ARE NOW LIKELY TO CONTINUE PLAYING OUT... THOUSANDS OF HOURS OF AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE MONEY THAT DRAWS CORPORATE AMERICA AND POLITICAL AMERICA TOGETHER BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

LEZY, (Wal-Mart managers meeting, Houston, 2001)

There are 4,000 registered PACS who are competing for Congress's attention; we're just one of them. And we really need uh we need your help to-to get involved. But basically just keep doing all the good things you're doing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WAL-MART AND WASHINGTON. COMING UP NEXT, WE TAKE YOU TO THE DARK SIDE OF INDIA. WHERE WE INVESTIGATE WOMEN WHO ARE UNTOUCHABLE IN NAME ONLY.

DALIT WOMEN:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

INDIA PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING THE WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY. BUT TONIGHT WE TAKE YOU TO ITS HIDDEN SIDE....A SIDE NOT SELDEM IF EVER SEEN BY BUSINESSMEN AND TOURISTS WHO FLOCK TO WHAT'S BEING HERALDED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S NEXT GREAT SUPERPOWERS. BECAUSE IN THE SHADOWS OF THIS PROSPERITY 167 MILLION PEOPLE – THE EQUIVALENT OF HALF THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES – ARE ROUTINELY BEING RAPED, ABUSED, EVEN MURDERED.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS A COUNTRY WHERE WEALTH AND POVERTY LIVE SIDE BY SIDE AND A CENTURIES-OLD SOCIAL HIERARCHY CONFLICTS WITH A MODERN DEMOCRACY. AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THIS SOCIETY THERE IS A CLASS OF PEOPLE, MORE THAN 10 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION, WHO LIVE A LIFE THAT SEEMS INCONCEIVABLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. THEY ARE

CALLED THE DALITS AND THEY KNOW ONLY ONE SIDE OF INDIA. THEY USED TO BE CALLED “UNTOUCHABLES” BUT THAT'S NOW CONSIDERED DEROGATORY. WHILE THEIR NAME HAS CHANGED, THEIR LOT IN LIFE HAS NOT. THEY ARE DENIED A FULL EDUCATION, THEY ARE ROUTINELY PHYSICALLY AND SEXUALLY ABUSED AND THEY WORK THE DIRTIEST AND MOST MENIAL JOBS, JOBS NO ONE ELSE WILL DO.

VENKATAMMA, MANUAL SCAVENGER (TRANSLATED FROM MARATHI)

I clean the dirty toilets with my hands... The job itself is bad, I feel miserable...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND DALIT WOMEN, BEING THE LOWEST OF THE LOW, HAVE IT WORST OF ALL. VENKATAMMA EARNS LESS THAN A DOLLAR A DAY CLEANING UP TRASH AND HUMAN FECES WITH HER BARE HANDS. THE JOB IS CALLED MANUAL SCAVENGING. SHE THINKS SHE'S IN HER FORTIES, BUT SHE DOESN'T REALLY KNOW HER AGE.

VENKATAMMA (TRANSLATED FROM MARATHI)

I have no dreams at all. I never dream for myself.

SMITA NARULA, NYU

Dalit women sit at the bottom of the class hierarchy, the gender hierarchy, and the caste hierarchy. And all those forms of subjugation come together.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE DALITS DON'T HAVE MANY CHAMPIONS, ESPECIALLY IN THE WESTERN WORLD. BUT THERE IS ONE WOMAN, OF INDIAN DESCENT, WHO IS WORKING TIRELESSLY TO CHANGE THAT. SMITA NARULA RUNS THE CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND GLOBAL JUSTICE AT THE NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF LAW. SHE TRAVELS TO INDIA REGULARLY AND A DECADE AGO WROTE THE BOOK *BROKEN PEOPLE*.

RATHER

You prefer not to use the word "Untouchables". Why?

NARULA

Because-- it's a pejorative term, and because it is a term that implies with it a-- a lower, or inferior status, to the person that's named an Untouchable. It's important not to use the term "Untouchable", but it's important, also, to recognize that, even if we don't use the

term, that untouchability-- the practice of untouchability is alive and well in India today.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NARULA SAYS THAT IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE DEGRADATION DALIT'S FACE, YOU CAN START WITH THE JOB OF MANUAL SCAVENGING.

NARULA

They are not given masks. They are not given gloves. They are basically given a tin pan and a broom to do the job. And they're forced to do it. And nobody else will give them other jobs to do.

VENKATAMMA (TRANSLATED FROM MARATHI)

Everyone hates me because of what I am. Even my sons don't want to talk to me... it is unbearable... I am an illiterate, never learnt anything... Since our ancestors did these jobs, we continue to do the same. We have no other option.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED ONE MILLION MANUAL SCAVENGERS WORKING IN VILLAGES WITH PRIMITIVE PLUMBING, IF ANY. THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT OUTLAWED THIS DEGRADING JOB – AT LEAST OFFICIALLY.

NARULA

Ironically, the same government that outlaws manual scavenging is also the same government that hires the most manual scavengers in the country.

RATHER

Well now, how can that be?

NARULA

How can it be? That's just the paradox in which India operates. There are so many differences between the Rule of law, and the rule of caste, and the rule of society. And these kinds of paradoxes-- are just part and parcel of the system

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE DISCRIMINATION IS BOTH OBVIOUS AND SUBTLE, INFECTING ALL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY. TAKE A LOOK AT THIS - ON THIS RURAL BUS TRIP, IN A SCENE REMINISCENT OF JIM CROW LAWS, ESWARAI AH, RISES TO GIVE UP HIS SEAT. HE IS A CLERICAL WORKER FROM SOUTHEAST INDIA,

AND A DALIT. HE SAYS THIS KIND OF BEHAVIOR IS EXPECTED.

M. ESWARAI AH, DALIT MAN (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

When the crowd comes, we have to stand or else they will say, “Look how proud the guy is, he, Dalit, is sitting when we, upper caste, have to stand”. So we are forced to vacate seats out of shame.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ESWARAI AH TOOK THE BUS TO A TEA SHOP IN A NEIGHBORING VILLAGE. HE WANTED TO SHOW US ANOTHER SUBTLE FORM OF DISCRIMINATION. WHEN HE ORDERS TEA, HE GETS A SPECIAL GLASS CUP, WHILE THE HIGHER-QUALITY STAINLESS STEEL ONES ARE SAVED FOR HIGHER CASTE CUSTOMERS. IT IS DISCRIMINATION LIKE THIS AND JOBS LIKE MANUAL SCAVENGING THAT KEEP DALITS FIRMLY IN PLACE AT THE LOWEST RUNG OF SOCIETY.

RATHER

Many Americans' view of modern India-- the India of today-- is an India on the move, economically, culturally, but perhaps particularly economically.

NARULA

India has aggressively embraced the liberalization theory of economic management, and the trickle down theory of economic growth. But for majority of Dalits in the country, the fruits of that growth cannot permeate the caste ceiling. India is many countries in one, even within the same—village, or street, or city. It is true that India is a booming economic power house. It is true that India is a land that has given birth to a number of human rights traditions. It is also true that there are a number of human rights abuses that take place on a daily basis, within that same country. It is also true that even as it climbs, economically more powerful, that more and more people are being left out of that economic growth.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR OVER THREE THOUSAND YEARS INDIA’S RIGID CASTE SYSTEM CREATED A BRUTAL SOCIAL ORDER. THE SYSTEM WAS ABOLISHED--AT LEAST ON PAPER--BY THE 1950 CONSTITUTION THAT GAVE BIRTH TO MODERN INDIA. BUT CASTE OFTEN STILL DETERMINES A PERSON’S JOB, EDUCATION LEVEL AND WHOM THEY MARRY. BENEATH EVEN THE LOWEST CASTE – OUTSIDE THE CASTE SYSTEM – ARE THE DALITS - OUTCASTS, LITERALLY, CONSIDERED BELOW THE REST OF HUMAN SOCIETY.

RATHER

It occurs to me to ask how do you tell-- it's not a matter of dark skin color-- darker than others.

NARULA

Ones-- last name is often a caste name, and gives one-- one's caste away. Where one lives will automatically give away one's caste status. Often, the way one dresses-- maybe even the way that one communicates might give it away-- but they might use language that's more deferential. But the single most telling attribute is one's name.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HERE DALITS PUMP WATER FROM THEIR OWN WELL. INDIAN LAW SAYS ANYONE IS PERMITTED TO PUMP WATER FROM PUBLIC WELLS. BUT UPPER CASTES FREQUENTLY FORBID DALITS FROM PUBLIC WELLS BECAUSE THEY ARGUE THAT THE MERE PRESENCE OF DALITS WILL POLLUTE THE WATER SUPPLY. AND DALIT CHILDREN ARE OFTEN SEGREGATED AND MADE TO SIT IN THE BACK OF THE CLASSROOM BY UPPER CASTE TEACHERS. A UNITED NATIONS INVESTIGATOR REPORTED THAT SOME INDIAN TEACHERS SAID DALIT PUPILS "CANNOT LEARN UNLESS THEY ARE BEATEN." AND THIS ABUSE EXTENDS TO THE VERY PEOPLE WHO ARE CHARGED WITH PROTECTING THE DALITS, THE POLICE. ACCORDING TO INDIA'S OWN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION THE POLICE THEMSELVES ARE THE BIGGEST VIOLATORS OF DALIT RIGHTS - RAPE AND ABUSE BY POLICE OFFICERS ARE WIDESPREAD.

NARULA

I often ask myself what "rule of law" means in India, and what "democracy" means in India. If you are a Dalit, then you can know that, if you go to the police station-- many police stations don't even allow Dalits to enter - so, already that's-- that's a barrier to--

RATHER

You mean, you can't even go t-- in the police station?

NARULA

How are you going to have justice for individuals, or have laws that work, when the police don't even want you to come in? And then, there are instances that I have documented and investigated in which-- when Dalits do get to enter the police station, the crime is not registered. Or worse, they twice become the victims of abuse, because then the police abuse them through torture-- or, if it's women, through rape. This is why the Rule of law in India lives in the shadow of the rules of caste.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DALITS ARE BEGINNING TO RISE UP - PROTESTING IN BIG AND SMALL WAYS – FROM LARGE DEMONSTRATIONS TO A SIMPLE REFUSAL TO SIT IN THE BACK OF THE CLASSROOM. BUT THEIR REVOLTS ARE OFTEN MET WITH HARSH RESISTANCE.

NARULA

If you open the Indian newspapers, which I track everyday, everyday you will see a headline about Dalit atrocities-- every, single day across the country. And not atrocities that are about name-calling, or somebody's feelings being hurt, but atrocities in the form of gang rapes, in the form of lynching, in the form of arson-- all in reaction to the shaking up of the social status quo that Dalits are now trying to do in India today.

NIKHIL SOLRE, DALIT ACTIVIST

These kind of incidents should not go unpunished. Otherwise democracy is merely on the books.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NIKHIL SOLRE IS ONE DALIT WHO REFUSES TO ACCEPT THE STATUS QUO. HE WORKS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS TO BRING ATTENTION TO CRIMES AGAINST DALITS. ONE RECENT ATROCITY WAS PARTICULARLY HORRIFIC. AND WE WARN YOU THE IMAGES ARE DISTURBING. IN THE FALL OF 2006, A DALIT FAMILY WAS SLAUGHTERED IN COLD BLOOD BY AN ANGRY MOB. WHAT SET THEM OFF WAS THE MOTHER WENT TO THE POLICE TO TESTIFY IN SUPPORT OF A RELATIVE--WHO WAS ALSO DALIT.

SOLRE

They went to her home and they took them out, everybody. They raped the-- raped the daughter in front of everybody. They then did-- asked brother to come in and rape on his sister. And he say, "No, I can't do this." Then, all of a sudden, they he got-- shot in his head. So then the mother was killed. She was (UNINTEL) killed with the sticks and the cycle chains.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUTSIDE PRESSURE FORCED LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BRING THIS CASE TO TRIAL. BUT WHILE CRIMES LIKE THIS SOMETIMES COMMAND ATTENTION, THROUGHOUT INDIA THERE IS ANOTHER HARROWING EXPLOITATION OF DALIT WOMEN THAT IS SO WOVEN INTO THE SOCIAL FABRIC THAT IT'S

ACCEPTED WITH LITTLE OUTRAGE. WE TRAVEL TO A SMALL VILLAGE IN SOUTHEAST INDIA WHERE THE OPPRESSION IS AS HEAVY AS THE HUMIDITY. HERE THE HORRORS FOR THE DALIT WOMEN GO FAR BEYOND JUST ECONOMIC ONES. THIS IS WHERE THE MATHAMMAS LIVE. IT'S A COMPLICATED WORD – MATHAMMA - WITH A BRUTALLY SIMPLE FATE – A FATE THAT OFTEN BEGINS LIKE THIS. THIS CEREMONY MAY LOOK LIKE A LIVELY DISPLAY OF LOCAL CULTURE, BUT WHAT'S GOING ON HERE IS DEADLY SERIOUS. AT FESTIVALS LIKE THIS ONE – IN THE NAME OF HINDU CULTURE AND RITUAL – THE LIFE OF A DALIT GIRL CAN CHANGE IN AN INSTANT. IT STARTS LIKE THIS – A GIRL PUT IN A TRANCE BY LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS, IS SAID TO EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF THE VILLAGE DEITY. SOMETIMES SHE WILL SELECT A DALIT GIRL TO CEREMONIOUSLY MARRY THAT DEITY AND WHAT FOLLOWS IS A LIFETIME OF HORROR. THE CHOSEN GIRL WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MARRY ANYONE ELSE. SHE WILL BECOME A MATHAMMA - A SEX SLAVE - COMMITTED TO HER COMMUNITY FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE. AND EVEN WORSE, DALIT PARENTS SOMETIMES OFFER THEIR OWN GIRLS UP AS MATHAMAS AS A KIND OF SACRIFICE TO THE VILLAGE GOD. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED WITH NAGURAMMA.

NAGURAMMA (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

It is difficult... I feel bad that my parents did this to me... It is difficult without a husband, but I don't have a choice now...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE'S 26 YEARS OLD, HAS THREE CHILDREN, AND NO HOPE FOR HER FUTURE. SHE'S BOUND TO A TRADITION THAT LETS MEN OF ANY CASTE – HIGH OR LOW – HAVE SEX WITH HER WHENEVER THEY PLEASE. SOMETIMES THE MEN PAY HER, BUT HER INCOME IS MEAGER. THOUGH MATHAMMAS MAY BE UNTOUCHABLE BY DAY THEY ARE ANYTHING BUT AT NIGHT.

NAGURAMMA (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

I sometimes avoid sleeping with the men by telling them that I' am unwell, some may listen and understand, but some just don't care... they still do what they have to do...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PROFESSOR NARULA ALSO STUDIES THE MATHAMMA SYSTEM.

NARULA

So, here's the ritualization of this practice. She is married to-- kind of a religious

institution that then makes her available, sexually, for upper caste men-- who rape her, and-- and rape her as part of-- as a cultural practice, and seeing it as-- as bringing good blessings to do so.

RATHER

So, would you describe this as prostitution? Is that the way it's seen there?

NARULA

I would describe it as forced prostitution. Yes. It is seen as a-- as a cultural-- ritualized ceremony that is part of one of many traditions, in which Dalits get the short end of the stick of the traditions.

RATHER

So these women, then, are available, so to speak to members of the temple-- high ranking members of the temple?

NARULA

Including members of the temple, but also upper caste men in the area-- in-- including married men.

RATHER

But if you're a married man, you wouldn't want to have anything to do with a Dalit-- that so-called Untouchable, would you?

NARULA

It's ironic, isn't it?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN IN A BOOMING, MODERN INDIA, YOUNG GIRLS ARE OFTEN SACRIFICED BECAUSE THE VILLAGERS BELIEVE IT WILL KEEP THEM IN GOOD FORTUNES. SO THEY OFFER GIRLS TO THE GODDESS THE SAME WAY THEY OFFER HER FLOWER GARLANDS AND COCONUTS.

NIRMALA

In this system if they dedicate that girl to god, like coconut, god will bless us; god will treat us in a very comfortable way. So they have that belief.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GRACE NIRMALA IS A DALIT ACTIVIST. SHE WORKS IN VILLAGES LIKE THIS TO BREAK A VICIOUS CYCLE SHE SAYS IS BASED ON SUPERSTITION. RELIGION, NIRMALA TELLS HER FELLOW DALITS, SHOULD NOT BE A PERMISSION SLIP FOR EXPLOITATION.

NIRMALA

They are on the religious name they are exploiting Dalits. On the religious name, they are exploiting our women.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NIRMALA FOCUSES ON THIS RITUAL AND TRIES TO POINT OUT ITS INHERENT INJUSTICE - SUPERSTITION IN A COUNTRY THAT PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING MODERN. WHY, SHE QUESTIONS, DOES THE WOMAN SUPPOSEDLY IN A TRANCE ONLY CHOOSE DALIT GIRLS TO GIVE THEIR BODIES TO THE SERVICE OF THE DEITY?

NIRMALA

She cannot ask the upper caste. I question to why all the time from the Dalit community why can't she ask the upper caste girl? So I told her the trance is not a character, that is acting, that is hypnotized. In the trance that is not a god is in her. We won't believe. Suppose if god is in her body, god will treat everybody equal. God will ask everybody, not only in the Dalit community.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE TOLD US THAT DALITS BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY ARE BORN INTO THIS CASTE THEY MUST SIMPLY ACCEPT THEIR DUTY TO SERVE OTHERS. BUT NOW...

NIRMALA

Slowly, slowly, slowly many after many interventions our people now they are thinking where we are, how we are, why we are treated like this?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ONCE THE MATHAMMAS ARE CHOSEN THEY MUST TRAVEL TO THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES AND PERFORM DANCES LIKE THIS ONE FOR THE MEN. THE MEN THEN SELECT THE WOMEN THEY WANT TO SLEEP WITH. SOMETIMES THE MATHAMMAS ARE AWAY FROM HOME FOR DAYS AT A TIME, HAVING SEX WITH VARIOUS MEN. NAGURAMMA, LIKE THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF OTHER MATHAMMAS IN HUNDREDS OF VILLAGES ACROSS INDIA, IS REQUIRED BY CUSTOM TO HAVE SEX WITH ANYONE WHO ASKS

FOR IT.

NAGURAMMA (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

I do have to sleep with the Priests of the temples if they chose to... it could be the Priest or anybody else... A “Matamma” has to serve everyone irrespective of whether or not they pay.... Sometimes they pay if we insist. Usually there is not enough time for elaborate sex as there are more than 2 or 3 men waiting for their turn... It is always a “quick job” for each one...this goes on till late in the night and only then I’ am allowed to go to sleep...I know that all the men who enjoy sex with me will never be around to look after me when I’ am alone or sick...I will have to be and will be recognized as a “Matamma” for the rest of my life... I cannot get married or change my profession. All I do know is that my life is ruined and I cannot do anything about it...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NAGURAMMA SAYS SHE KNOWS IT'S TOO LATE FOR HER. HER LIFE'S FATE IS ALREADY DETERMINED. BUT ANOTHER YOUNG MATHAMA STILL HOLDS OUT HOPE SHE CAN CHANGE HER FATE. VARA LAXMI IS JUST SIXTEEN YEARS OLD. BUT SHE FEARS HER DREAMS WILL BE CRUSHED WHEN SHE TURNS EIGHTEEN – THAT IS WHEN, SHE TOLD US, MEN IN HER VILLAGE WILL APPROACH HER FOR SEX. ORIGINALLY, HER OLDER SISTER WAS A MATHAMA, BUT SHE FLED AND THAT WAS WHEN VARA LAXMI'S FATE WAS SEALED.

VARA LAXMI (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

I had dreams of my own, I did not want to be in this profession, but after my elder sister left, I was forced to become a “Matamma”. I wanted to have my own freedom too. I wanted to do something worthwhile in my life. But I condemn this life and whatever I have to do with it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

VARA LAXMI’S MOTHER BECAME ILL SHORTLY AFTER THE OLDER SISTER RAN AWAY. VILLAGERS SAID THE ILLNESS WAS A PUNISHMENT FROM THE LOCAL GODDESS. TO APPEASE THE ANGRY DEITY, VARA LAXMI'S MOTHER OFFERED HER REMAINING DAUGHTER UP AS A MATHAMA.

VARA LAXMI (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

They look at me with disgust!! The people hate to see me.... They say that I’ am a “Matamma” and what good could I ever do to this society.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

VARA LAXMI SAYS SHE WAS TAUNTED AT SCHOOL FOR BEING A MATHAMMA BUT SHE STILL WANTED TO STUDY. SHE WAS DEVESTATED WHEN HER MOTHER'S ILLNESS WORSENERD AND SHE WAS FORCED TO QUIT SCHOOL. BUT SHE REFUSES TO QUIT ON HER HOPES FOR LIFE.

VARALAXMI (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

I am not afraid of the goddess. I want to come out of the system even if the goddess is going to get angry. I want to study and become an engineer and be proud of becoming one with my own capabilities. I want to help poor people like myself and not live in false hopes and with suppressions.

NARULA

Dalit women and girls are subject to really-- unimaginable forms of gender-based and sexual violence, simply by virtue of the fact that they are Dalit. And here's a real contradiction-- a paradox of the system of untouchability is that, even as it's practiced in forms of marriage, dining-- occupation, living-- when it comes to sexual violence, somehow untouchability flies out the window.

RATHER

Let me get this straight. I was under the impression that, if you are the Dalit class-- what used to be called quote "Untouchables"-- that nobody would touch you.

NARULA

Well, I think what I'm saying is that sexual violence is part of the untouchability system. Untouchability is a system that is meant to ensure, and prop up, economic and social subjugation. So, those who are interested in keeping it in play will use any tool in their toolbox to make sure that it continues to happen.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NEXT, WHEN WE RETURN - A SIGN OF CHANGE IN THIS VILLAGE - ONE MOTHER TRIES TO STOP THE CYCLE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION STARTING WITH HER DAUGHTER. HER STORY AND OTHER SIGNS OF HOPE FOR DALITS COMING UP.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S AFTER SCHOOL, AND YOUNG DALIT CHILDREN FLOCK TO OUR CAMERAS, SINGING A SONG ABOUT DREAMS, DREAMS FOR FERTILE FARMLAND AND PRIDE IN INDIA. IT'S A SWEET SONG FOR A HOPEFUL

FUTURE – HOPE THAT ONE DAY THEY WILL NOT FACE THE SAME FATE AS THE GIRLS THAT CAME BEFORE THEM. IT IS A CHANGE THAT WILL HAVE TO START ONE VOICE AT A TIME. DOWN THE DIRT ROAD FROM THIS HAPPY SCENE, ESWRAMMA, A MOTHER OF FIVE, PREPARES DINNER FOR HER FAMILY. SHE HAS SPENT HER ENTIRE ADULT LIFE AS A MATHAMMA. AND SHE SAYS SHE DOESN'T KNOW THE IDENTITY OF THE FATHERS OF ANY OF HER CHILDREN. THERE'VE BEEN TOO MANY MEN TO KEEP TRACK. SHE'S DETERMINED THOUGH THAT HER DAUGHTER'S LIFE WILL BE DIFFERENT. BUT HER DAUGHTER RAJESWARI ALREADY BEARS THE SCARS OF HER MOTHER'S LIFE. SHE SAYS SHE REMEMBERS HER MOTHER LEAVING HER HOME ALONE WHEN THE MOTHER HAD TO TRAVEL TO NEIGHBORING VILLAGES TO OFFER HERSELF UP FOR SEX.

RAJESWARI, MATHAMMA'S DAUGHTER (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

When I was a kid, I was afraid that they might make a "Matamma" out of me... they left a girl of my age to be a "Matamma"... That's when I realized that they might do the same to me. I asked my mother if I would be left to be a "Matamma" too... but she said that though she had to be a "Matamma" because of her parents, she would not do the same to her children and that she would send us to school instead...

ESWRAMMA, MATHAMMA & MOTHER (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

My daughter should not make the same mistakes that I did... I want her to get married and be happy and be able to earn her money. I want to be proud of her. I want people to know that she has a better life than her mother.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THAT'S A FEELING ESWRAMMA HAS PASSED DOWN TO HER DAUGHTER.

RAJESWARI (TRANSLATED FROM TELEGU)

Sometimes, I wish I wasn't "Matamma's" daughter... Everybody points a finger at us... They all ask questions about our lives... People are extremely mean to us... They ask me questions like... "Do you know what a "Matamma" is/does? "Does your mom dance?" ... "Do you watch her dance?" ... ".... They poke me with such questions all the time.... They hurt me all the time... I cannot answer their questions... I could only cry.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RAJESWARI IS ONE WOMAN IN ONE VILLAGE SIGNALING A FAINT SIGN OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. BUT OUTSIDE HER VILLAGE THOUSANDS OF OTHER DALITS ARE PROVING THAT AGAINST ALL ODDS, OVERCOMING

THE OBSTACLES OF BEING BORN DALIT IS POSSIBLE. DALIT ACTIVIST NIKHIL SOLRE IS A DALIT HIMSELF. HE WAS ABLE TO GET A COLLEGE EDUCATION BECAUSE OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM. AND HE SAYS ONE OF HIS MISSIONS IS TO INJECT SELF CONFIDENCE INTO THE DALIT PEOPLE.

SOLRE

Sixty years of affirmative action in India has helped Dalit community very much. And-- you can see then in various public offices, you can see their standard of living raised a little bit. The man sitting in front of you, Nikhil, is beneficiary of this affirmative action that makes (UNINTEL). Because it has given me a platform where I can interact with the people by in large.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NIKHIL SAYS THAT ABOUT A QUARTER OF SLOTS IN PUBLIC COLLEGES AND GOVERNMENT JOBS ARE RESERVED FOR DALITS. AND HE HAS TRIED TO ENCOURAGE DALITS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AS WELL. THESE ARE THE OFFICES FOR TEMP SOLUTIONS – A TEMP AGENCY THAT FINDS JOBS FOR DALITS LIKE PRATIBHA KAMBLE. SHE HAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO TRY TO IMPROVE HER LIFE, AND WE TRAVELED WITH HER TO HER HOMETOWN TO SEE HOW FAR SHE HAS COME. THE GIRLS HERE ARE NOT SUBJECTED TO THE HORRORS OF THE MATHAMMA SYSTEM – BUT THEIR OPPORTUNITIES ARE STILL LIMITED.

PRATIBHA KAMBLE

And this is a very poor-- slums. That's how-- you call it? A slums area. Okay. In this area mostly people educated to 8th – 10th class – not above that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT PRATIBHA IS THE SHINING EXCEPTION. SHE HAS AN EDUCATION. SHE TALKED HER WAY OUT OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE AND PUT HERSELF THROUGH COLLEGE INSTEAD.

KAMBLE

These my age girls, all my age girls. All girls-- are married. I am one of the girls, I'm not married. And I-- educated post-graduate. And this is-- my-- biggest achievement.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE'S EARNED A MASTERS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK. NOW SHE'S WORKING WITH NIKHIL TO FIND A JOB – IN A PLACE SHE NEVER DREAMED

POSSIBLE – THE UNITED STATES - ALL PART OF A SPECIAL PROGRAM TO BRING DALIT COLLEGE GRADUATES TO THE U.S. TO EXPAND THEIR HORIZONS.

PRATIBHA

This is a very surprise things for me and my families because my all relatives not getting very educated. So, this good opportunity for me and my family's (UNINTEL) went to US. This is all dreams for-- whole families, my whole families.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PRATIBHA HOPES THAT IF SHE MAKES IT TO THE U.S. SHE WILL SET AN EXAMPLE FOR HER YOUNGER SISTER AND THE OTHER DALIT GIRLS IN HER VILLAGE.

SOLRE

She will become a role models for-- others. But on emotional side, she may face some culture shock going there. She may have some traumas, initial-- in initial days. But somewhere she has to start.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PROFESSOR SMITA NARULA SAYS WHILE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR SOME DALITS, MOST DALITS CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE.

NARULA

It cannot be refuted that the majority of Dalits in India today continue to be treated as Untouchables. That fact, in and of itself—whether it was happening to ten people, ten million people, or in this case 167 million people, should be enough for people to sit up, and take notice, and support Dalits, and other Indians within India, who are working very hard to eradicate this system and to do something about it. I think that the more engagement and the more eyes that are open the better.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND EYES ARE SLOWLY BEGINNING TO OPEN. IN DECEMBER 2006 AT A CONFERENCE IN NEW DEHLI THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA SAID SOMETHING THAT MANY DALITS AND THEIR ADVOCATES THOUGHT THEY WOULD NEVER HEAR.

RATHER

He said and I want to quote this-- "Dalits have faced a unique discrimination in our society that is fundamentally different from the problems of minority groups, in general. The only parallel to the practice of, quote, 'untouchability' was apartheid in South Africa. Untouchability is not just social discrimination. It is a blot on humanity", end of quotation.

NARULA

The first thing to say is that it was a significant, and historic, moment when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said those exact words. Because it was the first time that a sitting Indian leader had openly made this kind of very powerful international comparison to apartheid-- something that Indian activists in-- within the country have been saying all along.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

LAST YEAR PROFESSOR NARULA TESTIFIED TO A US CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ABOUT THE DALIT PLIGHT. AS A RESULT, THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSED A RESOLUTION LAST JULY, RECOGNIZING THE ABUSES AGAINST DALITS IN INDIA AND CALLING ON THE US TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING PROBLEM OF UNTOUCHABILITY. IT IS STILL AWAITING ACTION FROM THE SENATE.

NARULA

How is it that this can possibly exist today: I think it's the same answer to how is it that-- we have genocide taking place in Darfur today? How is it that we, until 1994, had apartheid in South Africa, and still continue to have economic apartheid in that country? There is a very strong process of dehumanization that has to take place in the mind of a society, of a people, against-- another group of people to cease to see them as individuals, as human beings. And that kind of dehumanization-- that kind of second-class citizen status has been going on for thousands of years. It's going to take a lot to change that system. And a constitution that came around only 58 years ago isn't going to overnight do the trick.

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IN 1931 INDIA'S MOST FAMOUS VOICE OF CONSCIENCE - MAHATMA GANDHI SAID "I WOULD FAR RATHER THAT HINDUISM DIED THAN THAT UNTOUCHABILITY LIVED." GANDHI NEVER LIVED TO SEE UNTOUCHABILITY OFFICIALLY OUTLAWED BUT AS YOU SAW TONIGHT THE PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABILITY IS STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE... YET A SMALL SIGN OF HOPE CAME JUST RECENTLY WHEN THE INDIAN SUPREME COURT UPHELD ITS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM AFTER MONTHS OF

PROTESTS BY UPPER CASTES. FOR HDNET, FROM NEW YORK, DAN RATHER
REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.