

Status of women Safai Karmacharis

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ABSTRACT

“For in India a man is not scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not” (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar).

A scavenger is wholly or partly engaged in manually removing night soil from dry latrines or manually handling the dead bodies of animals and humans. In India today, scavengers are now so-called sweepers due to the introduction of an organized framework of jobs that still carry out basic sanitary services in cities and towns. As per the caste hierarchy this Schedule caste placed at the bottom and treated as untouchable by other castes even other non-scavenging Schedule castes, they are deprived of all socio-economic privileges due to stigma discrimination, and lack of willingness of social welfare implementing agencies for this Dalit communities, mostly they living under chronic poverty, illiteracy, and with absence of enlightenment, though several program and policies framed by the government for them. This paper exclusively regards the status of women who are engaged in the scavenging occupation, the present paper tries to explore and analyse their socio-economic condition as well as how they are still far away from empowerment as nowadays women’s empowerment is a preliminary propaganda of the government.

Keywords: women, Scavengers, Caste, status.

Introduction:

The prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 defines manual scavengers more systematically. As per this act, Manual Scavengers means a person employed or engaged at the commencement of this act or at any time thereafter by an individual or local authority or an agency or a contractor for manually carrying, cleaning, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrine is disposed of, or on a railway track or in such other spaces or premises as the Central Government or State government may notify before the excreta fully decomposes in such manner as may be prescribed and the expression “manual scavenging “ shall be construed accordingly.

Two surveys have been conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment for the identification of Manual Scavengers during the years 2013 and 2018. As per these two surveys, 58098 were found. The survey of manual scavengers in 2018 was conducted by the National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) at the behest of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This survey, which found 87,913 manual scavengers in India, was only conducted in the statutory towns of 14 Indian states, in 2022 central government declared that there is no Manual scavengers exist in the country but the interesting thing is that there was 161 deaths were recorded in the last three years which occurred during septic tank and Sewerage cleaning (SKA) so the

act is overlapping itself as the so-called safari karmachari are treated manual scavengers or not? The sanitation workers of Safari Karmachari at present 5 million in India (Dalberg Associates² in 2018) are engaging in different cleaning work such as cleaning sewers, cleaning latrines, fecal sludge handling, railway cleaning, work in waste treatment plants, community and public toilet cleaning, school toilet cleaning, sweeping and drain cleaning, and domestic work. So the term Manual scavenger now changed to sanitation worker but practically they perform the same menial job as in the past so it's ambiguous to reach a concrete database of this profession. Out of 5 million sanitation workers engaged in different urban and local bodies 50 percent of women are in the urban setting and exclusively work as manual scavengers cleaning and carrying human excreta manually, every day.

Status of Women of Manual Scavengers in India

In India, around 1.3 million Dalit women engaged in Manual Scavenging (International Dalit Solidarity network) they are mostly victims of dual types of discrimination such as caste-based and gender-based, Women usually clean dry toilets, excrement from open defecation sites, gutters, and drains they are generally not called for cleaning sewerage and septic tank, post-delivery activists like cleaning of placenta, Most women crawl into open defecation pits to empty human waste into a basket which they then carry on their heads to dispose of. Throughout the country women scavengers were paid less in comparison to male for their scavenging work, women scavenger's life was just like hell they faced all types of harassment including sexual, mental, domestic violence, etc. throughout their life in both at their work place and within the family also. As low levels of education and strong caste-based discrimination forced them to continue the same occupation in the hereditary manner they were unable to adopt alternative livelihood options though, many flagship programmes are there for the empowerment of women by the government.

Review of Literature:

Kumar and Preet (2020) in their study of intersectional gender and manual scavenging find that of the 1.2 million Indians shackled by this practice, 95% to 98% are women

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) reported that around 1.3 million people in India, mostly women, are involved in manual scavenging. Reports suggest that 99% of those involved in manual scavenging are Dalits and among them, 95% are women.

Kadlak et al (2009) in their study about safai karmchari women in Maharashtra noted that women in sanitation work are often subjected to mental and sexual harassment, abusive words, and taunts from their male supervisors and male colleagues. A report by IDSN and Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan has also found rampant sexual harassment of female sanitation workers

Maria Joseph Louis. J (2018) Women at Work in Manual Scavenging: A Study from Legal Perspective: This article proposes the need for social transformation and strict implementation of law and policies to meet the constraints of the legal and Constitutional rights by which human dignity and respect may be restored for scavenging women. As per the report of PACS Protest Areas Civil Society one of the Indian biggest programme every day nearly 2 million people in India (87% are Dalit women and children). the study critically investigates the MS Act 2013 in a very microscopic manner, The researcher critically elaborates on the term hazardous cleaning – clean human excreta by using protective gear and tools such as gloves, shoes, and caps is not treated as manual scavenging.

Venkatesh. C.D (2014) Socioeconomic study of women scavengers with specific reference to Bruhath

Bangalore Mahuargor Palika (bbmp),Karnataka. The primary focus of this paper is to study the socioeconomic and health condition of women scavengers same time understanding different legal policies and frameworks of government for the rehabilitation of the community. As it is an empirical study interview and group discussion methods were used to collect the data, and the size of the sample was 50 households from different slums. it has been found that 31% of respondents were illiterate,31% attained a primary level of education,17.63% attained middle-level education and only 0.34% received technical education. The level of income was also very low only 15% of households earning more than 3000 monthly. As per the present database, most of the women and senior members of the family engaged in scavenging, they don't want to change their occupation due to lack of education and training.

The objective of the Study:

The primary objective of the study is to find out the status of women who are engaged in sanitation work in different urban local bodies, Hospitals, Railways, private offices, etc. concerning their socioeconomic status, their educational and health status, their legal entitlements and participation or inclusion in different women empowerment programme designed by the government exclusively for women empowerment.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in the Scavenging community Sweeper colony, under the jurisdiction of Cuttack municipality corporation ward number 10 92 households were there comprising a population of 365, all belonging to the Schedule caste and sub-caste Hadi.

Methodology

The study is empirical with qualitative by nature in this study, the data have been collected using both primary and secondary sources. The study was set in the Schedule caste scavenger Slum Gopal jew mathasahi,-harijan sahi of Cuttack City. Primary data has been collected through a structured interview schedule method. The total universe is 92 households with 365 populations and the sample size was 60 (Age 19-65) the purposive sample method was used to select the women respondents who have been engaged in the sanitation work of the city so called sweeper.

Distribution of the population

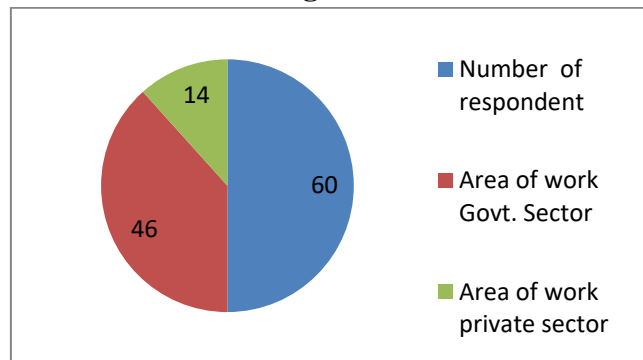
Table :1

Sex	Number	Age 19-50	51-65	0-18
Male	221	102	46	73
female	144	75	27	42
Total	365	177	60	115

Out of a total 102 numbers of women from the age group 19 to 65 of the concerned community 60 numbers were engaged in different sanitation works 50 and 10 respectively from the age group of 19 to 50 and 51 to 65 select as respondents.

Data analysis and outcome of the study:

Figure:1



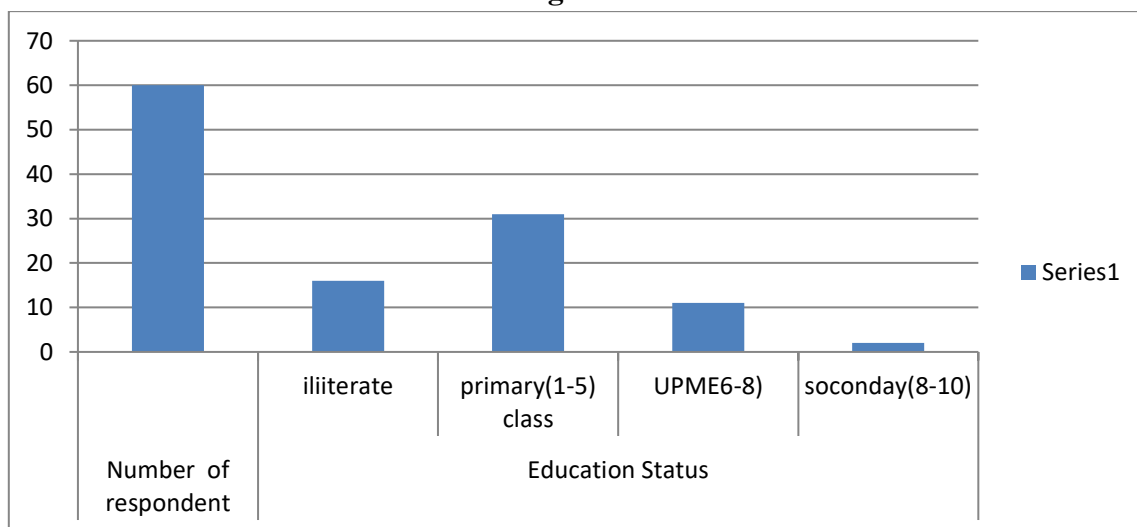
The above figures clearly show that 76% percent (46 number) women are engaged in the government sector such as in Cuttack municipality corporation, SCB Medical, and City Hospital, and 24percent (14) number engaged in the private sector such as private Bank, School, corporate offices etc. Their monthly income was just less than 10000 for both the categories of scavengers and same time 32 women engaged in contractual mode and 28 worked on a daily wage basis all the appointments were made through the third-party outsourcing process.

At the same time table: 2 and Figures gives clear information regarding the education status of the women scavengers

Table :2

Education Status				
	illiterate	Primary (1-5) class	UPME 6-8)	Secondary(8-10)
Number of respondents	16	31	11	2

Figure:2



In the above table, and Graph Clearly defined the low level of education status of the scavenger’s women only 2 women reached high school levels same time 16 were found as illiterate.

The illiteracy, untouchability, and patriarchal dominant society make the women more vulnerable in the scavenger community their social position is not more than that of slaves they are exploited regularly at

both personal and professional levels in all respects. from the analysis of data and review of literature, the following social status of a scavenger's women drawn are discussed below:

- The scavenger community is a male-dominated Hindu community where women have no rights over property and decision-making rights at the family level.
- They could not freely participate in community meetings and other programmes with male members.
- Same time education is like a dream for the women of this community same time women are treated as wealth-producing tools because most of the women are engaged in scavenging work after their marriage, they are even forced to join this menial work against their will by the in-laws. 86 percent of respondents joined scavenging after marriage and 100 percent of respondents were married.
- Women are discriminated against at a higher volume of discrimination in comparison to males in all respect in their day-to-day life such as they are not allowed to enter into the temple or participate in religious affairs with other women in the society, 85 percent of respondents reveal it during the study.
- They are not allowed to sit or share common utensils with other communities in different social ceremonies they have separate seating arrangements, which is painfully expressed by 90 percent of respondents.
- Same time general community people are not invited to join different social occasions as they are invited as cleaners only
- Many times they were forced to work some menial work like removing the dead bodies of animals, cleaning toilets, post-delivery activities ,etc. by general caste community people which was accepted by 78 percent of respondents.
- Domestic violence is a common part of every woman scavenger which is mostly not reported it revealed by 90 percent of respondents

Status of scavenger's women at working workplace with special reference to their health

- The scavenger's women were very ill-treated by the other staff of the office nobody even accepted cup of water from their hand as they were considered untouchable due to their polluted occupation,
- As it is a manual job they faced a very hardships situation even during their monthly periods time they could not get leave they had to work which was revealed by many respondents as this time they need to maintain more hygiene but they have to work such unhygienic type of work which leads more health issues. and they never allow maternal leave as they are contractual work in fear of losing their job they continue to work during the pregnancy period said Rima Dei, during the study,

Government programme for the empowerment of women and accessible by the Scavengers women

At present Mission Shakti an initiative of Government Odisha, committee women's empowerment through Self Help Group with special emphasis given to SC &ST, though this department provides several training and credit linkage facilities to the SHGs to become self-employed, but what about this SC community how they take benefits' form this flagship programit's yet subject to discuss? Due to lack of awareness, education, flexibilities this scavenger women could not take part in this SHG movement successfully during the study it has been found that one SHG group lady named Laxmi Naik who got finance through SHG and started her own tea Stall but due to caste based stigma discrimination no body accept tea from her hand she had to close the shop and again back to the scavenging profession , so it has been clearly reflect that without eradication of this profession other programme are just meaningless for this Dalit community especially women are not powered yet of this scavenging community so

empowerment just like a dream for them same time domestic violence is very common for these women and government has set up one stop Centre (SAKHI) for immediate support to all women and girl under the 18 year of age for any kind of violence but due to the illiteracy, lack of knowledge and awareness this scheme is just fun for the Dalit scavengers women they have no idea about the Protection of women from Domestic violence act 2005, SC and ST (prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, prohibition of employment as Manual scavenging and their rehabilitation act 2013 . So these acts and grievance redresses mechanisms are just useless for the voiceless Dalit women.

Conclusion and suggestion

From the above discussion and analysis of the data the worst picture has been drawn regarding the status of scavengers women are the most vulnerable and exploited categories of societies as they are self-independent they are earning but they have no other social and legal rights in the society they deprived of all privileges neither they have any rights in the family nor community and workplace they just like a toy which operates by others in the society, they faced all types of discrimination in their personal and professional life so it is an immediate action need to take an initiative of government and intellectual elite group for the liberation of these Dalit women for the rehabilitation and liberation Government and Civil society has to focus upon some area like:

- First of all, the government should focus on Dalit women's education by establishing community learning centres, specific girls' or women's schools, and colleges for Schedule caste. Without education, other reservation facilities in jobs or other areas are just worth less as they do not have basic qualifications to attain.
- Government has to strictly formulate separate policies and programmes for the development and empowerment of women in this Scavenging community
- The penalties should be harder in the existing MS ACT 2013 for its violation and should be properly monitored regularly.
- Community-level different mass sensitization programmes should be organised by different civil societies on the existing laws, and schemes for the benefit of manual scavenger women in a specific manner.

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