

“SOCIO ECONOMIC AND HEALTH STATUS OF WOMEN POURAKARMIKAS (SCAVENGERS) IN KARNATAKA – A GENDER PROSPECTIVE”

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Abstract: The present study will be focused on women scavengers in Bangalore and their health and economic conditions. The study is pertained to the Bangalore Urban district in the state of Karnataka, India. The significance of this study is to focus on the women scavengers who are exposed to the most virulent forms of viral and bacterial infections that affect their skin, eyes, and limbs, respiratory and gastrointestinal systems especially in the urban parts of Bangalore. Hence the study is based to rehabilitate the women scavengers and study their economic study. Objective of the studies are mainly understand the Economic and Health status and of the women scavengers and Legal frame work of the Government of Karnataka in bringing different policies and programmes and other affirmative action's of the city municipal in the process of rehabilitation of the women scavengers. Researcher use the Methodology followed in the present study will be mainly focused on field work and collection of primary data through interview scheduled. And researcher taken randomly fifty samples from BBMP. Major findings of the study are most of the respondents suffering from TB, skin allergy, eyes, and limbs, respiratory, back pain, majority of the people economic status are below poverty line (BPL). Finally the researcher given suggestion and conclusion, all the findings explained in the full paper.

Keywords: Health, Socio-economic, women scavengers, legal rights, suggestions.

Introduction: Scavenging is cleaning of roads, garbage, toilets including dry latrines that do not have water. Historically, when one looks at the scavenging community in India, it is observed that through generations, this inhuman work is done exclusively by the Dalits across the country. The community involved in scavenging is known by different names like Mehtar, Bhangi, Doms etc in different parts of the country. Whatever names they are known by, they belong to the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy and are forced to do menial work.

Scavenging is a very old practice in India. There is evidence that every house in the Harappan civilization of 2500 BC had toilets with provision of water which were linked by drains covered with burnt clay bricks. Manholes and chambers were part of the drainage system to facilitate operations and maintenance. But with the decline of the Indus Valley civilization, the science of sanitary engineering suffered a setback. Later, the Samhitas mention the fifteen duties assigned to slaves and one of it was the disposal of human excreta. The upper caste Hindus who treated Dalits as outcastes and slaves found it convenient to force manual scavenging on them.

The Community: Scavenging is undertaken by a particular community known as Doms. While tracing the history of this community, it is found that there is very little of the written history. Following the oral tradition, the Doms from Ranchi trace back their history to the times of Pandavas. It is said that when the Pandavas won the Mahabharata yudha (war), they decided to perform a yagna (fire worship). They invited everyone from their kingdom for this yagna. However, they forgot to invite Saint Sopan, who was from the dom community.

Women face similar kind of treatment of being abused and treated as untouchables. They even find it difficult to get medical treatment. They are paid low wages. They invariably end up with more workload than men, as they need to earn and perform the domestic chores as well. Other problems they face are of dowry and difficulties in arranging marriages. Incidents of domestic violence and harassment by other men of the community are high. Alcoholism and gambling of Dom men are often cited as reasons for domestic violence. Drinking, gambling and drug addiction (to a certain extent) is common among the community. Apart from men, a few women admit to drinking as they feel very dirty after doing the work.

Meaning and Definitions: According to Roy Burman (1961) in the old published literature, the word Chuhra has been used for the sweepers of the plains of India. Chuhra seems to be a community from which a number of other low castes have sprung up. According to Hutton (19) “The Chuhra has been held to be remnant of an aboriginal tribe, but in point of fact his physical type differs but little from that of other inhabitants” He further said that “when he turns sikh becomes a Mazhabi and ... When he turns muslim he becomes a Musalli.” In urban sophisticated circles they go with other names. Among all these names Bhangi is more common.

Other side of Scavengers: It is true that throughout the history scavengers and their sub-caste occupied low social status but on certain occasions because of the scare and indispensable roles, they occupied high social status. History is full of such examples. According to Russel and Hiralal (p. 232) during an eclipse the sweepers reap a good harvest; for it is believed that Rahu, the demon who devours the sun and

Moon and thus causes an eclipse, was either a sweeper or the deity of the sweepers, and alms given to them at this time will appease him and cause him to let the luminaries go. Or, according to another account, the sun and the moon are in Rahu's debt, and he comes and duns them, and thus there is the eclipse, and the alms given to sweepers are a means of paying the debt.

Census of India (1961: 3) also found that "Because of the monopolistic nature of the work, the Bhangi is frequently in an advantageous position in his dealings with the jajmans. He can threaten to leave the jajman to sell his right of serving the jajm. In the village community it is considered very derogatory for a jajman to be the subject of such a sale. In case of dispute between a Bhangi and his jajman the word Bechana (sale) is enough to unnerve the latter and make him accept the claims of the Bhangi."

Occupation: It is beyond the scope of this work to trace the nature of relationship between the scavengers and their occupation during the ancient India. However, due to variety of reasons, since logn Bhangis have been in the scavenging activities. But this is a broad generalization. This is because there are different sub-castes of the Bhangis and all of them were not involved in Scavenging. Describing about the scavengers and their occupation in Punjab,

According to Enthoven (1975) most Bhangis, both men and women, are scavengers and night soil carriers. They also sweep the roads, winnowing the dust in the hope of finding fragments of gold and silver, make baskets and other bamboo work and bury dead animals, some serve as trackers, messengers and letter carriers. They also serve as night watchmen, towncriers, drummers, trumpeters and hangmen. A few Bhangis cultivate in addition to their regular work. In North Gujarat, except the dragging away of dead cattle, all menial village work falls on the Bhangia. Besides sweeping the roads and carrying away all dead animals, except cattle the Bhangia watches the road, arranges for supplies and points out boundaries. In municipal towns as scavengers men earn Rs. 8 to Rs. 20 a month and women Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. The winding sheet or cloth that covers the deceased is given to the Bhangia. In the case of the rich this covering is a worked shawl worth Rs. 50 to Rs. 100. The Bhangia also gets the pot in which fire has been carried before the corpse when, as is not uncommonly the case with the rich, the pot is made of metal.

Social Status: It is difficult to make distinction between social and economic conditions of the scavengers in historical perspective. It is also difficult to argue that their social status was low because they were poor or vice-versa. But it is beyond doubt that in the Varna and Jati hierarchy their position was almost at the bottom. Because of their placement at the bottom in the hierarchy they performed those activities

which command almost no social prestige. In other words, it may be said that because they were in the less valued occupation, therefore, they acquired low social status. Further it had its negative impact on their economic, political and educational development.

But as stated earlier, the scavengers were divided and sub-divided into different sub-castes. All these caste groups were involved in different hierarchically arranged occupations. As a result, different groups and categories of scavengers had different status. But the common point was that in the hierarchy of total occupation in the traditional varna system their place was almost at the bottom. This argument may be substantiated with the findings of various empirical observations.

Government, NGO's and Scavengers: Scavenging has been in Indian society since ancient times. There has been specific mention about scavengers in almost all writings on India's caste system. Picking up night-soil, leather work, removing dead cattle and a few other lowly jobs like this was considered inferior and so were the people doing them. This kind of work was also performed by a certain sub-caste Shudras or rather were obliged to perform. Due to the nature of their work they were regarded as untouchables and thus were segregated from the reach of other respectable and so called touchable people. They had to live separately and so called touchable people. They had to live separately in clusters outside the town or extreme part of the villages. They were subjected to various forms of discriminations and disabilities. Thus, they continued to remain socially downtrodden and economically backward. In general, their existential reality can be described as:

- a) Scavengers constitute a group treated as impure and ritual avoided ;
- b) They are backward and oppressed because they have been assigned the lowest status in society;
- c) Minimal social contact has kept them at a distance from the society;
- d) Because of their degradation they have been compelled to accept discrimination as a part of their fate;
- e) Most scavengers are illiterate and thus, educationally backward;
- f) Scavengers are economically backward too as they are engaged in own paying jobs and male members indulge in bad habits like smoking, drinking and gambling;
- g) Due to their economic and educational backwardness, they have also not been able to take advantage of the privileges meant for the welfare of the dispossessed;
- h) This profession as initially never hereditary but over a period of time it has become hereditary;

Article 17 of Indian constitution abolished "Untouchability" and its practice in any form. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Further in this Article 16 (4). "Nothing in these articles shall prevent the state from making any provision for the advancement of any socially and educational backward cases of citizen or for the scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes." Critically speaking, these articles were the first step to abolish scavenging and to make provisions and law in favor of scavengers.

In order to translate spirit of democracy into action from the point of view of well being of scavengers from time to time, government of India and various state governments constituted various committees. Also, many social reformers took initiative in his direction. Few of these efforts are mentioned below;

Barue Committee (1949): This committee was set up by Government of Bombay under the chairmanship of Sri V.N.Barve. It primarily dealt with scavengers in Gujrat. This report suggested different measures to improve their wages, working and living conditions. The report of this committee was published in 1952.

Backward Classes Commission (1953): This commission was set up by Government of India. It suggested mechanical cleaning of latrines with provision of sewers, trainee etc. by local authorities. It emphasized on hygiene, training and provision of better housing and infrastructure facilities for scavengers. It was also emphasized that this will improve their living standard and absorption in the society.

Protection of Civil Rights Act. (1955): This act was initiated by passing legislation and formed basis for implementation of various schemes for upliftment and development of such people in terms of housing, education etc.

National Commission on Labor (1968): This committee studied the working service conditions of sweepers and scavengers for the enforcement of Minimum wages Act and recommended state governments for its implementation. This commission also pointed out that past work was to improve the working and timing condition of scavengers and not the core problem of converting dry latrines into pour-flush latrines in any systematic manner. It also recommended social upliftment of scavengers through education.

Action Plan by Government: After considering various recommendations of committees a centrally sponsored scheme was introduced during Third and Fourth Five year Plans. In Sixth Five year Plan, Ministry of Home Affairs emphasized that unless practice of head carrying of night-soil and dry-latrines system is abolished, scavenging will be difficult to remove

from the country. It, thus, decided to enforce Protection of Civil Rights act and laid down these goals. I pleaded for:

- a) Conversion of all dry-latrines to pour-flush ones, and Providing training to liberate scavengers and to settle them in various trades/employment.

This responsibility was later transferred to Ministry of Welfare, Government of India. The state governments initiated various rehabilitation programmes for scavengers on advice of welfare Ministry. Within the existing framework, training, bank loans, hostel facility for children of Scavengers was introduced. There was no separate programme exclusively for scavengers. The state Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporations set up schemes for them. In 1989-90, a scheme launched by state aimed primarily to provide low cost sanitation facility.

Methodology: The objective of this study was to know causes, process, constraints, facilitating factors and consequences of occupational mobility on the scavengers and their family members –psychological, social economical and health.

The study was conducted with the assumption that other things remaining the same, scavengers having education, belonging to young age with exposure to activities related to their welfare are likely to be found in large number in comparison to the aged, illiterate and unaware respondents into the non-caste occupation. Also the respondents in the white collar occupations have experienced more changes in their life style, expectations, attitude etc., in comparison to those who are in blue collar jobs.

In order to test validity and readability of above assumptions, an empirical study was conducted in the city of Bangalore. The process of urbanization in the city has brought the new momentum within the couple of decades. Due to industrialization, large number of people has immigrated in the city. Most of those who are engaged in unorganized sector live in slums. Slums are both authorized and unauthorized.

Sampling technique was followed to select the required number of samples. Household listing was made in all the selected sums, from that, another list was prepared. In this list only those households were selected whose head is not in the caste occupation.

Data was collected with the help of interview schedule and group discussion. It consisted mobility, hindering and facilitating factors and consequences of occupational mobility. Questions related to governmental facilitates and future of their children and their total well-being, for example, how the conditions of the scavengers can be improved by displacing them from the caste occupation? Etc. was covered in group discussion.

Results of the Study: From demographic and attribution point of view the scavengers of Bangalore are not monolith. Out of 250 sampled household's

having 1480 family members, 31 percent population is either illiterate. The similar numbers of respondents are educated up to the primary level. 17.63 percent respondents are educated up to middle level and only 0.34 percent has received technical education. Majority of males are engaged in blue collar jobs, a few of them are in white collar jobs. In the past, it was quiet unthinkable or just impossible for them to join white collar jobs. About 20 percent scavengers are still in case occupation.

50 Percent family members fall up to the age of 19 years and as we move towards up, gradually the number of populating decreases, so at the time of making schemes, the number of younger population should be kept in mind. The male population is slightly higher than the females.

It is also clear that education and occupation does not negatively affect the flow of income. It is apparent from the fact that only 2 percent of families are getting less than Rs. 1,000, out of 502, 95 scavengers are earning between Rs. 1,000-2,000, about 15 percent are earning between Rs. 2,000-3,000 and about 15 percent are earning more than Rs. 3,000.

Most of the colonies are located in the areas which were well connected to the city and community based transportation facility. In spite of it, respondents had their own means of transportation like bicycle, scooter, moped, motor cycles, auto-rickshaw, car, tata sumo etc. The person having auto-rickshaw, car, tata sumo, are also earning through these vehicles, so these are their means of livelihood, too.

In response to a question that, in which caste they will prefer to marry their son, it is found that they pre-

ferred to marry within their own caste, preferably in those families who had left the caste occupation. 21 percent of respondents agreed to make their children married even if bride side is still engaged in the caste occupation. Only 7 respondents gave weight age to the children's desire, 3 respondents wished to make their children married in upper caste.

56.8 percent of respondents had taken benefits either in field of education, reservation or any other manner. About 64 percent respondents were knowing some of the schemes such as Pratistha, Pawanputra, Reservation, Mohalla Sudhar, Nehru Rojgar and Scholarship etc., which have been lauded for liberation, employment and rehabilitation of scavengers.

Conclusion: Critical examination of different dimensions of life of occupationally mobilized scavengers equip us to make different conclusions. These conclusions are totally based upon the views and opinions expressed by the respondents. However, it has been examined critically in the light of the undercurrents of the society. Also, based upon the views of respondents as well as information's supplied by the key information's from the city of Bhopal, a set of recommendations have been made. It is assumed that if these recommendations have been made. It is assumed that if these recommendations are translated into action by all the concerned, the plight of the mobilized scavengers experienced at different levels and in different forms can surely be reduced. Further, it may fasten the ongoing process of mobility and social change among large number of scavengers.

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