AN UNTOLD MISERIES OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS IN INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

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ABSTRACT
An estimated 1.2 million sanitary workers in India are occupied in the sanitation work. The working conditions of these sanitary workers have remained virtually unchanged for over a century. Sanitary worker comes under the urban informal and occupational hierarchy at lowest in the context of Indian society. Despite the social atrocities faced by these workers, they are exposed to certain health related problems by virtue of their occupation. Women’s emancipation gained momentum and they were considered equal if not superior to men. But when all is said and done, the status of women in India has been a fluctuating one sometimes encouraging and sometimes discouraging. However, the present status of women in society is quite encouraging but the women in marginalized section deserve careful study. Evocation of manual scavenging is mostly done by lower caste people and closely linked to the practice of untouchability. Sanitation workers mostly carry out their work in unsafe working conditions without protective gears or other safety gears or other safety devices. The paper discusses about the status of women and manual scavenging in India, it also explores the sanitary conditions in the state of Tamilnadu and the welfare measures that are provided to those workers in the state.

Keywords: Sanitary Worker, Socio-Economic Status, Manual scavenging, Rehabilitation package

INTRODUCTION
The status of women in India has been many ups and downs. The 20th century has been many changes in the global arena, economic, scientific and social. We have made noteworthy strides in all aspects of living of which the most exemplary one would be in the social sphere. Women have been given equal opportunities to compete with men and one another. In the last century and the early 20th century women were mostly relegated to the home and their place was the kitchen. The 20th century has witnessed a great deal of independence and autonomy for many countries. Women have been equal fighters for freedom. They have demanded for and received equality in education and there lies the secret of their success. Education and the awareness that comes with it have enabled this gender to fight their cause. Although gender discrimination has been banned by the constitution and women have been guaranteed political equality with men, yet there is a difference between constitutional rights and rights enjoyed in reality by women (Bhuyan and Panigrahy, 2006). They have emerged out of their kitchens and taken their places along with the men in becoming supplementary breadwinners. This has lead to move work in actual fact—now they are “Managers” of their home and family as well as part of the work force. They have penetrated almost all spheres of activity and figure prominently in all walks of life be it education, health, politics, science, social work or law. Today’s women are joint partners in the world scheme. Indian women have their place even in the Police, Army and now the first batch of Pilots has also been emerged.
There is a relationship between gender, caste, class, and income because the majority of poor women come from lower castes. Muslim women work at home because of purdah (Dixon 1982). Upper caste women resist manual labor while lower caste women participate in unclean jobs such as washing, construction work, and sweeping. Caste mobility is almost hopeless because of fate of birth (Dixon, 1982). Studies illuminate that poor households include more wage earning women (United Nations, 1997) yet their status remains low. Poor women remain confined to unstable informal work sectors.

India has always accorded respect to its women, as can be seen in history. The country had some great women such as Rani of Jhansi, Meerabai, Indira Gandhi etc., who have been acknowledged as leaders and thinkers of the society. In spite of these great women, the larger parts of the female species were not accorded their basic rights. It was only the pioneering effects of Mahatma Gandhi that lead to the emancipation of Indian women.

As of today there are still, a large percentage of women, especially in the rural areas who need to understand their rights and advantages. India is striving to provide the women equal status in society. Today, women can be proud that she is a home maker and an equal partner to the progress of our society.

EMINENCE OF WOMEN IN INDIA
Socio Economic status of Women in India
Any assessment of the status of women has to start from the social framework, social structures, cultural norms and value systems that influence social expectations regarding the behaviour of both men and women and determine women roles and their position in society. A society is composed of many institutions and most important of them are the system of decent, family and kinship, marriage and religious traditions. They provide the ideology and moral basis for men and women about their rights and duties and their status and role.

Many attempts have been made in India to increase women’s socio-economic status (United Nations, 1997). Critics argue that income generation alone does not increase the economic equality of women in India (Devi, 1999; Dixon, 1982; Drèze & Sen, 2002; Medhi, 2000; A. K. Sen, 1999). Amartya Sen (1999) argued that economic discrimination is a much “broader concept” (p. 108) than economic status and a complex relationship exists between culture and economic status of poor women in India. Although income generation is just one factor, the India Development Report (Parikh & Radhakrishna, 2002) stressed that economic growth is necessary to alleviate poverty. Socio-economic forces combine to greatly influence the development of poor women in India.

The Modern women and their Prospects in India
The Indian society still remains at cross ends; the individuality of women is yet to be realized by them. The western education which was imparted to them made aware that they were one of the two wheels of the life-cart and that they were also key persons in the family. They began to understand that an all round development of them, equal to men, was necessary for the growth and prosperity of the nation. The modern women have realized now that they have a personality of their own as a human being and that their mission in life does not end with becoming merely a wife and a good mother but also in realizing that they are also a member of the civic community. Thus, the modern women are not having a passive life. They are prepared to express and show their individuality in various walks of life.

Education is a catalytic agent for social change. Changes in life and position of women have been greatly accelerated by the spread of education. As a result, women organizations and a strong women’s movement took place. Many greatest women emerged in the scene. As a result of education, women’s
economic horizon expanded considerably and they have begun to feel that they must earn their own living. They have made their first response to the call for teachers. More than hundred year’s age in self, they took this profession. With the establishment of hospitals and health centers, women have qualified themselves as doctors, nurses, health visitors and mid-wives. When law, agricultural, engineering and other professional institutions were opened, they invaded these fields too. Now there is scarcely any venue of employment in which women have not entered. Various American studies have shown that there is a definite correlation between the educational level of women and their employment. Education is the most important determinant for men and women when it comes to occupational status (McClendon, 1976).

India now has not only women doctors, engineers, judges and officials holding high ranks but also women political leaders who mould and shape the destiny of India. The women have the right to choose and dictate according to their ambitions, but the society and men are the problem to them. Here lies the problem of human values and relationships. They just do not require merely legal measures for equal rights, but sympathy and understanding both at home and in the place of work.

MANUAL SCAVENGING

History of manual scavenging in India

The practice of manual scavenging in India dates back to ancient time. According to contents of sacred scriptures and other literature, scavenging by some specific caste of India exist since the beginning of civilization. One of the fifteen duties of slaves enumerated in Naradiya Samhita was of manual scavenging. This continues during the Buddhist and Mauraya period also. In India, Jahangir built a public toilet at Alwar, 120 km away from Delhi for 100 families in 1556 AD. Not much documentary evidence exists about its maintenance. Scholars have suggested that the Mughal women with purdah required enclosed toilets that needed to be scavenged. It is pointed out that the bhangis share some of the clan names with Rajputs, and propose that the bhangis are descendants of those captured in wars. There are many legends about the origin of bhangis, who have traditionally served as manual scavengers. One of them, associated with Lal Beg bhangis describes the origin of bhangis from Mehtar. Municipal records from 1870 show that the British organized municipalities in India which built roads, parks, public toilets etc. The British administrators organized systems for removing the night soil and employed bhangis.

Despite technological advancement, there are certain labour class, who to perform unhealthy and inhuman practice, facing the problem of untouchability, deprived with their basic rights and living life without dignity. This labour class is known as Manual Scavengers, performing hereditary occupation, unwillingly and forcefully for their empty stomach, sometimes their children also support them to earn livelihood. These categories of labour class are known as 'Bhangi' in our society. Actually, manual scavengers are the people, who take away the human waste (night soil) from insanitary, "dry" toilets. (Commissions, 2011), defined manual scavenging as the practice to remove human excreta manually with the help of brooms and tin plates from dry latrines. Commission explained that, the excreta are loaded into baskets which scavengers carry on their heads to locations sometimes several kilometers from the latrines. (Pathak, 1995), mentioned that this inhuman practice is said to have started in the year 1214 in Europe when the first public toilets appeared. (Suzuki, 2009), has explained this task to be one of the most disgraced work.

This inhuman practice of manual scavenging is caste-based as declared by Brahmins in the past and hereditary occupation for Dalits predominantly linked with forced labour. It is blot on Indian economy. (Masoodi, 2013), mentioned that there are 7,50,000 families still working as manual scavengers
(Census 2011). But he emphasized that actually there are around 1.3 million manual scavengers as above data not included the railway employees who have to clean the human waste from the railway tracks.

Manual Scavenging In India

The presence of dry latrines and the continuing practice of manual scavenging are serious sanitation challenges in India. This practice involves collecting human excreta, mostly by lower caste people and more specifically by the women from lower castes. Manual scavenging is historically linked to the practice of untouchability and the continuation such practices is forbidden under the constitution of India as per Article 17. In 2014, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 135 people, including more than 100 people currently or formerly working as manual scavengers, in the Indian states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. Women who clean dry toilets in rural areas often are not paid cash wages, but instead as a customary practice receive leftover food, grain during harvest, old clothes during festival times, and access to community and private land for grazing livestock and collecting firewood – all at the discretion of the households they serve. In areas where “untouchability” practices are intact, food is dropped into their hands or thrown in front of them.

Life expectancy amongst manual scavengers is low. Many develop asthma, skin infections and tuberculosis on the job. Hundreds reportedly die from the work each year. According to the Mumbai based research organization Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), 80% of the manual scavengers die before they turn 60 because of health problems. TISS says in Mumbai alone, an average of 20 sewer workers die each month from accidents, suffocation or exposure to toxic gases.

Anti-Manual Scavenging efforts in India

In order to abolish the inhuman practice of manual scavenging, recently, Indian government has introduced new act, “The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013”.

It is clear that despite scientific and technological advancement on various fronts that saves the manual labour, the practice of manual scavenging continues to exist in India. There are very simple and low cost alternatives available in this era which can solve both the problem of manual scavenging and safe disposable of human excreta (Velkova, 2003), highlighted on the separation of all household waste including biodegradable waste which have combined effect for both the municipalities and the households.

CONDITIONS OF SANITATION

Sanitation

Sanitation falls under the preventive type of public health. It is also another monopoly function to be under taken by the municipality. Sanitation includes removal of rubbish, sludge, night soil and dead animal’s controls of tiliees and mosquitos, drain drainage and sweeping. Prevention is better than cure “An improvement is general sanitation in the inhabited areas of the cities and towns to provide salutary”. Our atmospheres of living is a matter of view of controlling of large part of the preventible ill health.

Rights of Sanitation workers

Reminiscent of manual scavenging, sewerage work is also undertaken by lower caste people and closely linked to the practice of untouchability. Sanitation workers mostly carry out their work in unsafe
working conditions without protective gears or other safety gears or other safety devices. Death or serious injury to sanitation workers while cleaning sewerage with no or inadequate safeguards are frequent incidents. Those people are exposed to dangerous toxic and harmful substances. But this problem is not adequately addressed in the legal framework. The high court of Gujarat once made some comments in support of these workers’ life, health and dignity. “The sewerage workers are the citizens of this country and they are entitled to enjoy fundamental right as provided in the Constitution of India. It is a cardinal principle of the service jurisprudence that the employer has to take adequate care of the safety and well being of his employee. He cannot expose and employee performing duties which are dangerous in nature and likely to adversely affect his health or life. Hence it is the employer who should provide him with all the safety measures and if he is not able to make such provision, he has to refrain from asking such employee to discharge these duties.

Sanitary conditions in Tamilnadu state

Formerly during 1991-92 the sanitary workers were performing all functions given by Development of Municipal Corporation. After that the system was abolished by government of India. But it was

Sanitary Workers before 1991-92 they were doing all function given by sanitary Development of Municipal Corporation. After 1991-92 this system was abolished by government of India. But in 1995 it was implemented in few places, or Districts in Tamil Nadu. Now no where this system prevails like night soil removal work, in each door to door swelling. They are doing only official function of municipal sanitary workers a sweeping, rubbish collection, drainage cleaning like these function. If any individual privately wishes to clean his swelling latrinness, Sanitary workers has the option whether to go or not.

As India level considering phrase is more or less same as in Tamilnadu level also to the socio economic condition and workers condition. Some minor differences are there between state to state and District to District, working condition, living condition, welfare measures etc. Scavenger name was replaced by sanitary workers as Government order was called from 1995. In Tamilnadu after independence especially the government introduced all community introduced may joined in this occupation do work properly. They ask the Scheduled Caste instead people to work in their places and pay them an amount. Now a day some Government of offices still practice this system and this system should be abolished.

Among the Scheduled Caste those who are engaged in unclear occupation take sweeping and scavenging and those who are bonded labours, benefited tribes and homadic tribes are classified as vulnerable group. The Government of India emphasis that special attention, should he paid for the socio-economic development to those group. To make it more practical the effort of the state Government in this attention are taken into account dividing the assistance of special centre to the status.

Welfare of Sanitary Workers in Tamilnadu state

With a view to eradicating the detestable practice of manual scavenging and rehabilitating those who were engaged in this profession, this Government has been implementing rehabilitation schemes for manual scavengers. Having regard to the fact that the persons engaged in sanitary work belong to the lowest strata of the society, the Tamilnadu Government has established a separate welfare board for them and is providing various welfare benefits to them. In the interest of development of Adi Dravidar and
Tribal communities, separate allocations are made for them in the divisible plan schemes of the Government under the Special Component Plans for Adi Dravidars and Tribals.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In order to remove this disgrace from Indian society and to improve their social security, all the bodies and government have to work together with honesty and humanity. Government must import technology to improve the aggravated conditions of railways, the largest violator of the law. All the rules and regulations must be followed strictly and violator of the law must be punished. There must be fixed deadline to overcome the problem and that deadline must not be crossed. One agency must be formed in each and every state to conduct surveys regarding potential beneficiaries and feedback must be taken. Also checkpoints of development must not be measured only on the basis of existence of malls, flyovers, availability of metros, etc. but it must be measured on the basis of absence of discrimination on any ground and for all this, awareness of rights and schemes among manual scavengers is very essential for their upliftment. Liberation and rehabilitation both are equally important then only there will be positive relation between abolition of manual scavengers and labour welfare through their rehabilitation. One more thing which is equally important is to give them dignity and the respectful status in the society and for this we have to take steps forward. We must pledge not to discriminate and relate their identity with their past.

A Proposed Comprehensive Rehabilitation Package

- **Ensure discrimination-free, secure and alternate livelihoods** by providing skill development and livelihoods training to women, linking them to government employment schemes and entitlements as well as ensuring their land rights. Vocational training linked to employment for young people, and support to liberated manual scavengers in building alternate livelihoods could go a long way in ensuring steady, stable livelihoods for the future.

- **Create a favourable environment** through community awareness and sensitization of local administration.

- **Build the capacity of the community** to promote rehabilitation efforts and self-reliance and also build leadership in the community with a particular focus on Dalit women

CONCLUSION

Manual scavengers are at a double disadvantage. Although various anti-manual scavenging efforts were taken by the government after independence but existence of 1.3 million manual scavengers reveals that those efforts were neither in right direction nor very stringent. Government was very liberal in implementing laws. They are members of lower castes and as such, face enormous discrimination in society, and second, are disadvantaged because they are manual scavengers who clean human excreta. The challenge of rehabilitation is urgent, and requires a comprehensive approach that moves beyond expanding income generation or providing loans, to focus on various aspects crucial to secure the future of the next generation of liberated manual scavengers.

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