



GENDER AND SCAVENGING: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN SCAVENGING AND VIOLATIONS OF THEIR RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Scavenging is an old practice in India. It is inhuman, as they are deprived of human rights of the Scheduled castes, particularly the Valmiki community. It is a caste specific livelihood. Stigma of Untouchability in Scavenging keeps them into margin of occupational mobility. Indian Constitution has abolished the practice of Untouchability in Article 17, although this discriminatory practice is still continued in the Indian society. Mostly women are engaged in this work. They have to suffer double discrimination. They do not get even maternity leaves while they need intensive care. If the head of the family die doing in scavenging work, then the deceased family's members have to go through various processes to claim compensation. They have to run from pillar to post to get medical claims, and compensation in accidental cases. The scavenging practice also prevents them from accessing the health, education, food, clothing and shelter services and benefits. They are under the intense grip of poverty and socio-economic oppressions, thus their vulnerability status is perpetuated. Although various new provisions and enactments in laws are tried to mitigate the practice of scavenging yet the problems continue to the ever fresh and unending form. Its Socio-economic vulnerability, risks and poverty are still serious concerns even today.

Keywords: *untouchability, human rights and scheduled castes.*

INTRODUCTION

Scavenging closely associates with caste notion. So their grievances regarding working conditions and humiliation are not taken into consideration. Another aspect is that that Scavengers are not provided any safety gears, which can protect them from adverse health issues. Their Children are also come under the influence of this work. The education facility, health and decent standard of life are not guaranteed to them and their families. They are

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unaware about their rights. It leads to denial rights and equality. Frequently accidents are happened, many times death in a manhole due to inhaling of poisonous gases. It seems that this practice has accepted by society and thus it does not make any voice against it.

Scavenging refers to a group of people who are carrying, disposing and handling the human excreta from dry latrines and sewers. The hierarchy in Indian social system sustain upon the fourfold (Chaturvarna). It decides the occupation of particular castes. Scavenging is also one of the practices, which imposed upon the lower rung of Dalit communities. They have never enabled them to have an occupational mobility and reach a stage popularly called the main stream of society. The caste hierarchy does not support the abolition of scavenging. Scavenging never allow them to think to live dignify life. Dignity here means the access of education, better health and freedom to join other occupation.

Intersectionality: Caste, Gender, living standard, location, illiteracy and violation of human rights

Valmiki community from SCs is confined in this occupation. They are associated with an inhuman practice. They are engaged in cleaning, disposing and carrying human excreta from dry latrines and sewers. This inhuman practice comes from castes system. Segregation of occupation is by birth. No way to get rid it to this work. It is reserved for lower caste in India. An attempt has to be made ensure discrimination-free, secure and alternate livelihoods by providing skill development and livelihoods trainings 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 Scavengers in building alternative livelihoods could go a long way in ensuring steady, stable livelihoods for the future.

Supreme Court of India has banned practice of manual scavenging for more than 26 years. As per recent S.C judgment is given in the case of *Safai Karamchari Andolan and others vs. Union of India and others March 2014*. In India, there are 96 lakh dry latrines presently in functioning condition. It cleans by Dalit people only. Apart from this, several of deaths or accident happened at the site or in the septic tanks. Mostly women are involved in this occupation suggesting gender discrimination. Factors are adversely affected to development of Manual scavengers are psychological (harassment) economic (exploitation), political (domination), social (oppression) religious (subjugation) and cultural (suppression) (Vivek, 2000,).

Perpetuation of manual scavenging and challenges:

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Under the clean India mission million of toilets are constructed but complete silent about who clean these toilets, understand their plight, should accountable for the deaths of these manual scavengers. “Swachhta hi Seva” will continue to witness of such deaths. Faulty methodology also reflects the mindset of the committee. Take the example of lad committee recommendation. (Wilson, 2018)

The working conditions of the manual scavenger are not good. They are usually addressed by different names Bhangi, valmiki, jamadar and so on. Their identity has also very problematic known by their work even they have abandon the work still address by the derogatory caste names. But their reality is quite same. People who are illiterate and no inheritance as to pursue decent life by doing their forefathers’ occupations (kumar 2014)

Violation of Human Rights:

Under human rights violation sanitation workers come in the contact of danger and accidents. Numbers of disease, injuries and ailment are prevailing among them, so life expectancy is also reduced. No equipment or proper training are provided to them so death is the usually happened no such legislation concretely come with the approach to ban and rigorously take the responsibility of such deaths. The violation of human rights part the cruelest part of these tragedies is that the children, family and widows of the deceased sweepers have to run pillar to post for compensation. No agency ready to bear the cost of their deaths, all government and private bodies’ sidetrack their responsibility. The reason being is that claiming party is socially poor and depressed. Despite this members of the Valmiki community carry on this hazardous job. (Kumar, 2014)

This work never leaves any space for the humanity. It has an auto assumption a person does this work definitely belongs to lower rung of the society. No need to ask him to his caste. Some of them also address as scavenging community. It puts a stigma on the human dignity and violation of human rights. Study urges to make policies in terms of compensation including medical and accidental claims and their rehabilitation. In fact, they are entitled for regular medical checkups and medicines, but presently these facilities are not extended to them. It is suggested that concerned authorities should look into the matter and ensure that this service is in place for the benefit of the scavengers. It is the state responsibility and preamble of Indian constitution guarantees about the well being of all individuals should be taken in priority (H.Beck, 2005).

It is a great challenge, not only to the government but also to the civil society organizations to eradicate the inhuman practice of manual scavenging, which still continues even today after 71 years of India's Independence. It is on all of us responsibility to emancipate the scavengers from the clutches of dehumanizing occupation. According to the petition filed in the Supreme

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Court by the Safai Karmchari Andolan, along with six other associate organizations, and seven individual manual scavengers, the number of manual scavengers has increased from 5.88 lakhs in 1992 to 7.87 lakhs. The overwhelming majority of the scavengers are Dalits who have inherited this heinous occupation from their forefathers. Under such circumstances, the restoration of human dignity of each individual, as rightly enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, seems like a far-fetched dream to be realized. The government of India in 2013 Act finds that manual scavenging practice is deeply rooted in Indian society so here is the need to understand the plight of victims. The government's efforts failed to abolish this heinous practice, moreover, could not remove the fear from the minds of scavengers to leave this menial job and explore other alternative jobs. (Human rights watch, 2014).

The practice of manual scavenging goes against international human rights. In this direction the supreme court of India has ruled that India is also a member of other international conventions that reinforce obligations to end the unequal policies and discriminatory practices. (Human watch rights, 2014).

In India, 13,973 Manual scavengers are identified in 2018. A survey conducted by Ministry of Social Justice concluded that "Death of Manual scavengers highest in Gujrat state, 26 persons succumbed to death during 2015-16. It also showed that West Bengal, Tripura and Madhya Pradesh have lowest percentage of death of Manual scavengers. This survey has not conducted scientifically and left many scavengers out of this survey (Sen and Ghosh, 2018).

STATE WISE DATA OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS

State	No. of manual scavengers
Uttar Pradesh	11563
Karnataka	732
Tamilnadu	363
Rajasthan	338
Orissa	237
Assam	154
Bihar	137
Uttrakhand	137
West Bengal	104
Punjab	91
Andhra Pradesh	78
Madhya Pradesh	36
Chhattisgarh	3
Total	13973



(Source: The manual scavenging survey in statutory towns and rural areas in 2018 by ministry of social justice and empowerment).

Objectives:

- ✓ To study the impact of violation of the Human Rights and gender issues in of scavenging.
- ✓ To explore socio-economic challenges and discrimination of scavengers.
- ✓ To understand the lived experiences of women Scavenging.

Methodology:

Researcher has also organized a FGD and case study method is used with community members regarding their opinions to see scavenging work. How do you look upon the scavenging practice and to know the current opinion about scavenging? What are their challenges and experiences? In this FGD respondents take part and give a healthy insight to understand issue and complication of scavenging practice.

Data collection started in the month of and mid of Oct 2018 to June. 2019. Throughout the entire data collection process an observation record book also maintained. It required to keeping relevant information, issues of concerns pertaining to data for interpretation and analysis

Researcher has done a small survey to locate respondents. A list of respondents has been prepared with the help of purposive sample. Researcher went to the field every day early in the morning and continued till late evening. It was required because the respondents begin their work early in the morning and return late in the evening of the day. Researcher has to go through different phases of experiences in the field, such as gender, caste and nature of work. By visiting of respondent's home researcher gained very distinct and insightful feelings, comprehension and information as a whole.

Area of Study:

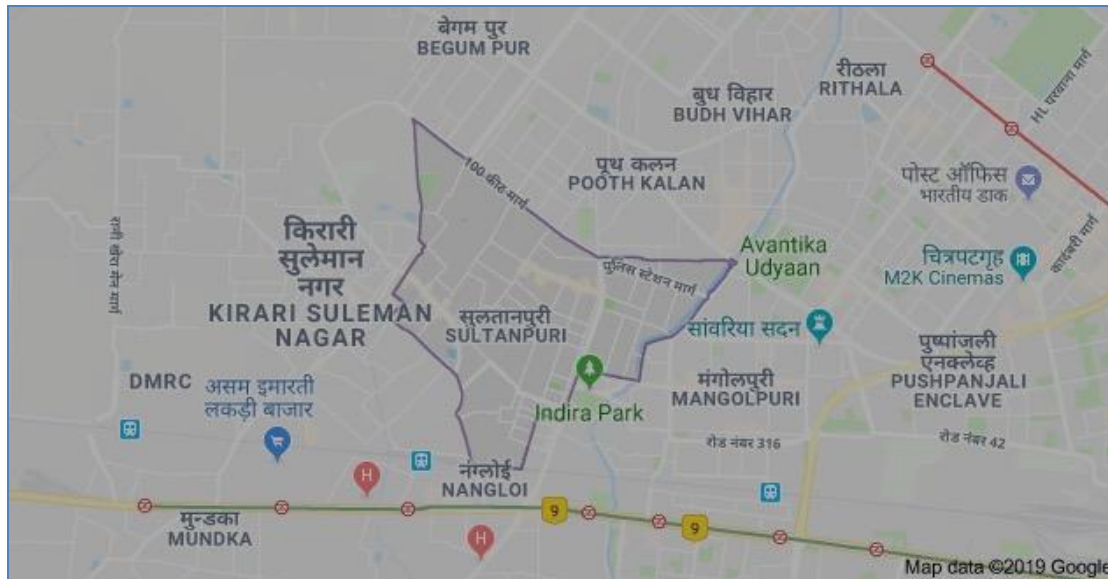
The study area is Delhi. It is the capital of India. Sultanpuri and Rohini are selected for data collection. This area is situated an outskirts of Delhi. Most of Scavengers are lived in these areas. Mostly belongs to Valmiki community (SC). This area is lacking basic amenities, such as lack of school, college, public health system, and inadequate road constructed. People easily get infected due to collapsed of public health and sanitation condition. Those people

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who clean entire Delhi are living in unbearable condition. During rainy season, these areas has a problem of water logging due to infectious diseases are spread rapidly.

Inadequate information about sex ratio, mortality and morbidity of these areas is another crucial factor. Researcher has not found any survey or data available to get an idea about socio-economic condition of these areas.



Findings of study:

Women generally come in line by the involvement of either her father or his husband in this occupation. If any one of them die or an accident happens and then the sole responsibility to run the house will lie on the shoulders of a woman. It is also need to understand that males are usually given tasks such as loading and unloading of the garbage while the women are employed chiefly for sweeping. A Picture of patriarchy and masculinity can be seen here.

Valmiki caste is represented in a highest number, 67.9 percent. Chamar around 10 percent and Jatav 5.7 percent are in the scavenging work. It shows that sub-caste categorization seems more rigid. In the bottom of sub castes are more disadvantages. Scheduled castes are the list of castes. It consists of around 1000 castes in all over India. Those castes such as Mahar, Chamar, Jatav, Mala, Madiga, that have advantage due to education, should have helped to disadvantage section of community but they do not help. One respondent recalled that “Babasaheb Ambedkar has said them to help other caste group so that we develop together and remove this caste based discriminatory practice exists in sub caste group” but they forget the dream of Babasaheb, now advanced castes are not cared about us.



Urbanization and scavenging:

An overwhelming majority of the respondents 75.4 % (40) are living in Delhi for more than 20 years of whom 35.8% by their birth while 39.6% may be as migrated. Nevertheless, all of them are working as scavengers. It could be concluded that whether be migrant or born in the city, one is bound to get into scavenging just because they are Dalits. It reiterates the ascription of scavenging occupation only for the Dalits by and large by the very virtue of caste factor. It is a perception that vicious cycle of caste is strong in rural places and it restricts the occupation mobility. This figure here is clearly showing Valmiki community even if migrate to Delhi like cities still they are indulged in the sanitation works. It is not their preference in work, but it depicts hurdle in occupation mobility.

Even though, Urban spaces such as Delhi, full of different kind of occupations and opportunities but it is less likely to access to Dalit. It confirms that Urbanization has not changed traditional occupational landscape.

It is noted that an overwhelming number of respondents belong to Hindu religion 92.5 % (49) followed by Muslim 5.7% and Sikh 1.9 %. Here reason to state that Hindu religion follows caste hierarchy and population wise Hinduism is a largest religion in India.

For respondents migrate towards metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai quite easy to adjust and earn livelihood despite they have to live in unhealthy conditions. No one is willingly leave their native places if dignity and livelihood opportunities available. But rigid practices of caste are still observed that reduce opportunities and occupation mobility. Apart of this, migration of Dalit people because they feel insecure and faces immense discrimination in their native places. Caste atrocity is the one of the bitter reality of such migrations.

Role of Caste and class:

Scavenging is precisely also decided by the caste of the person disregards of their physical and mental capacities. No concern relates to the ability of person, birth in a particular castes (Hindu religion) family is sole criteria to decide the occupation of a person. The Brahman deserves to become a Pandit, if a person comes from Kshatriya, he deserves to become a warrior, Vaiysha, working businesses and if he is Shudra then he will deserve to become a manual scavenger and so on. That do not mean only caste abiding religion is Hindu but the rest of the religions are also having implicated with the caste shadow, and converted scheduled caste of Muslim shall remain untouchable. That is why Muslim and Sikh are also seen in this profession though in much lesser number.



Social stigma and scavenging

Social stigma is attached with this work, a respondent narrate his experience that “if he asks for drinking water, people never allow us to use their hand pump touch by untouchable/sanitation worker”. Another respondent revealed her bitter experience, she told that after finishing one round of sweeping of street if she want to sit somewhere like park or take shelter below the wall of any person house other people do not allow them to sit or have rest. She also told in her interview people comment at her “haraam ka khaate hai saale” kaaam Dhanda toh kuch nhi”. They abuse us. It implies that discrimination and exclusion is widespread in this work.

A family said during data collection about their struggle- in getting admission of their grandchild. The principal of the English medium school denied to admit their child giving reason for that “schooling medium is in English and as you and your family does not come from the high profile, you better to keep in Hindi medium education. He even told to respondent that child is not sound mind. Also he commented that if you people will work on sweeper work then your child do not need any education. You are poor people and you should not waste time for education. You should send your son to work so that you will get some earning, and your son will get knowledge about sweeping. Respondent recalled this incident which clearly reveals the hideous side of the discrimination as well the helpless of this respondent. If such a practice continues to exit then under-development of education will persists among Dalit community.

One respondent recall his experience that “ *Mai bus mai Jana chahata thi, par mere sharir se badbu aa rahi thi, muje kisne bus mai nahi baitne diya, Maine pass wale hotel se pani Maga, muje pani tak nahi deya gaya*”(After completing my work, I wanted to pick up a bus, but driver and public had not allowed me to board on, my clothe and body were stinking with the smell of gutter’s dirt. When I asked water from nearby a hotel they denied to me). He further said “Is it my mistake? We have to face discrimination day in and out.

Health issues and income burden:

Availability of toilet in the home of respondents around 50 percent do not have toilet and are forced to openly defecation. There is also a public toilet, which is not cleaned, and no water available. Thus, lack of toilet is a source of carrying various infections. Water borne diseases due to open defecation are widespread in these areas. A poor sanitation facility is extra burden on income of respondents, as they have to pay from their pocket. Public health system of government is not found operational condition. Thus, mortality rate among these workers is highest due to failure of State government. It is the duty of state to provide certain basic



facilities to all citizen but sanitation workers are not provided any facility. These are the workers who keep the city clean but died due to lack of facilities provided by the state.

Safety gears are very essential to keep the scavengers away from the various diseases. Respondents working area is full of peril and their chances to get affected with skin and various other infections are very common. In majority respondents are not get any equipment only 1.9 says they get broom, spade and basket. Respondents inform that there is no equipment to carry the human excreta. One of the respondent replied that equipments provide by the municipal are not suitable to use. For instance shoes weight of the shoe is really heavy if one wears it and go inside the drainage it has increase problem for respondents. They prefer to leave it aside and do work barefoot.

Low wages and difficulty in surviving: Discrimination

Respondents get very low wages. It makes them hard to cop up with daily expenses'. The 98.1 percent respondent are borrow money from informal sector like local moneylender with a high interest rate, 1.9 percent borrow it from neighbor and friends. Without borrowing money they have problem to run home. Irregular salary and no time fix when they get salary. That gaps they have to fill by borrow money. It is hard to manage the things within the low wages.

workplace discrimination of respondents. Around 17 percent respondents face work based discriminatory, 47.2 are discriminated due to overtime and 35.8 have no salary on time. The contract workers face irregular salary issue. The reasons are quite clear that they have fear in their mind to fire from jobs if demands to pay salary on times. Respondents are given over time work without any extra payment, if they deny to this work then they will have face verbal abuse, discrimination etc. Work based discrimination gives idea that if respondents do not come on time, if late by few minute. The consequence is very unsupportive and putting them into trouble of getting salary.

Women scavengers 'have to face sexual harassment at work places. Although 37.7 percent of respondents face sexual harassment and 62.3 have not faced. The Women working on scavenging have to face intersectionality by caste, class gender and living standard in terms of illiteracy, location of residence, social status all components are responsible for that a scavenger woman has to face different type of discrimination. Here also need to observe it women is socialized in such a way in our society to keep tolerating misbehavior irrespective of that is disrespectful.

Discussion:

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One respondent said that ‘India is going to moon and preparing rocket’ but why they are not preparing equipment to deal with sanitation worker” He challenged so called Indian scientists to find solution here; otherwise your education is no worth. He said to social scientist as well that you must solve this caste based discrimination we are suffering from long time. In America has found solution for black problem. But what you educated people are doing? Some women told, “Who will do this work other than us”. It confirms that “they feel very insecure’ since this is the only livelihood option they have. During my data collection, there was intense debate to continue or discontinue with this work. Prof. Gopal guru suggests that ‘Lack of urgency to come out from this work’ is the one reason to continue this work even after banned it’ he further said that ‘ how can you expect to they do another work without alternative occupation. Why do they not want to ban and why they want to continue this work? These are relevant questions to discuss to understand a premise of this historical scourge and damage has done by this practice.

Respondents explain that people consider this work as caste based occupation 47.2, socially ostracized 52.8 percent. It suggests that one particular community should work in this occupation, other people should not. Around half of respondents discuss that people think that we are socially boycotted people. They think that it is a punishment given by God to us. Thus we will not have ‘Mukti’ (salvation) in this life; we need to wait for next life.

Prime minister of India Naradra Modi comments that scavenging work is a’ spiritual work. A respondent replied on this, “If it is so spiritual then he must do this work”. Frame of mind of the people is real problem to eradicate scavenging practice.

CONCLUSION:

Respondents have to face exclusion dichotomy. One side their occupation never gives them a status of dignity. The difficulty is prone in this profession apart from the work itself is risky. Gender based discrimination, violation of human rights, and unequal treatment at work place, women worker have to face dual exploitation being a Dalit and women, and stigma is another thing. Neither the honors are given to this work nor does other community join this work as their right of representation. Here the issue of reservation can also be implicitly taken into consideration. The respondents have experienced different treatment and atrocities. Respondents have to wait to quench their thirst until reach their locality no one offer them drinking water and place to sit.

This also reveals that sanitation work has low work status. So people think that they have a licence to abuse them. Get them offended and physical assault whenever they deny cleaning their street. One of the respondent tells his experience, while he finished his work in market one of the shop owner came out and shouted badly on me; “kya re chhude gutter saaf nhi kar

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sakta” on this respondent lose his temper and arm twisted, so physical abuse is common because there is no dignity in this work.

The nature of work pattern is also different for both men and women. Women usually are given the task of sweeping and carry basket on their heads, while men have been given work of loading and cleaning the drainage and septic tanks. So this discrimination is not only limited upto the allotment of work but also it goes ahead to award them salaries. Women are considered less capable to do work so their counterpart deserves the decent wage in comparison of them. So discrimination is existed in terms of wages and nature of work always prevalent. Patriarchal norms are worked behind such practices.

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