

Unveiling the Social Landscape: Exploring Inclusion and Identity of Sanitation Workers in Selected Areas of Delhi

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ABSTRACT

Sanitation employees are among the most important aspects of civilization. Even in the face of social and economic hardship, they continue to work for us. The stigmatized social stratification continues to be a major driver of these employees' destiny. As a consequence, people, families, and communities, mostly Dalits, are forced to undertake duties that are not only dangerous and stigmatizing, but also extremely underpaid. This paper focuses on the tough existence that sanitation workers lead and it goes on to discuss the issues they face inside the age of urbanization and modernity as well as discusses the diverse need of social security schemes. The responder discovered several sanitation workers at various places in Delhi. There are sanitation employees who were involved in various sorts of manual scavenging, including sewage cleaner, septic tank cleaners, rag pickers and open drain cleaners, as well as other sanitation workers operating in dormitories. Only 30% of those who involved in manual scavenging were aware of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR, 2013), and only 20% were knowledgeable that manual scavenging is illegal. Government programme for rehabilitation, alternative jobs, and children's education provide them with little advantages. This insecurity is increased by lack of social security, causing their unforeseen costs in times of illness, unemployment, or calamity to lead them into a downward spiral of poverty. Any country's social security system should take into account the nature of economic instability.

Key Words : Sanitation workers, Untouchability, Unknown identity, Rehabilitation, Social security

INTRODUCTION

Sanitation employees are among the most important aspects of the society. However, their working conditions are unfavorable, and they are forced to labour in dangerous situations that put their lives in jeopardy (Chellamma and Vijaykumar, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2016; Kisana and Shah, 2021). Therefore, issues with workers' working conditions should be resolved and some solutions must be taken to better their situation (Sen, 2015). The social security schemes many flaws and some recommendations should be included alongside it.

Unorganized employees' diverse needs should be emphasized (Mather, 2012; Mehta *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, certain suggestions must be made to make the law more inclusive (Hirway, 2006). We must bring attention to the challenges that plague the unorganised sector (Naidoo and Frye, 2005). The importance of minor unions and groups in these industries can be very helpful. In order to attain social security, the necessity to decentralize social security systems should be given due importance (Mahmood, 2010; Jhabvala, 2013; Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2017; Sindecharak and Kwanyou, 2021). There are flaws in the rules and practices that

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govern sanitation personnel. The legislation does not consider all sanitation employees to be manual scavengers.

There are many areas in which recommendations are required (Sathyaseelan, 2013). After the United States and China, India is third in the world in terms of trash generation. According to 2013 research published in *Nature*, India's trash output is among the fastest rising in the world. India's urban areas are estimated to produce 62 million tonnes of solid trash every year, or 160,000 TPD. By 2030, this amount is expected to rise by a ratio of 2.7, and by a ratio of 7 by 2050. If society is healthy, it will not be able to replicate from generation to generation. The great majority of the women and men in this town who dispose of rubbish, on whose labour the town's population depends, do not work without alcohol. Liquor is claimed to soothe employees' bodies ravaged by pain as a result of long and arduous shifts by stealing their nasty experiences of garbage labour. And 90% of municipal trash workers—let alone the army of informal workers—die of ageing illnesses before they retire (Harriss-white, 2020). If Swachh Bharat (Clean India) is to become a reality, the government and individuals must work together to address all areas of sanitation. The concerns of caste, which is closely related to sanitation work across the country, and sanitation workers' rights is a big challenge (Kumar, 2007; Kumar, 2014). A sample of homes were examined from the slums of major cities in an attempt to reexamine the caste question in the Indian setting. Most social groups are vulnerable in terms of numerous socio-economic and demographic indices; however, the proportional extent of deprivation varies. The level of deterioration in the chance of feeling well-being beyond a threshold limit is steeper for the socially backward classes than for the others. However, such a tendency is less obvious in particular cities, meaning that all social groups are equally vulnerable. These findings have significant policy implications, demonstrating that policy actions for poor regions, regardless of caste, are more essential than caste-based assistance programmes (Mitra, 2014). Domestic employees, either in or out of the India, lack strong bargaining power in comparison to their employers, making it difficult to determine working terms and conditions (Stopnitzky, 2012). Employers have the right to terminate the employment of domestic employees at any moment, without having to go through any formal procedures and without having to pay any termination benefits (Naik, 2009). Domestic workers have been

afforded a slew of statutory rights under domestic laws that have remained restricted to the statute book (Farooqui, 2020). The truth is diametrically opposed to the rules. Domestic workers' problems are centered on awful and pitiful working conditions, as well as reduced level of employment benefits (Lenka, 2019).

The worldwide sanitation issue is quickly urbanizing. Although aggregate statistics are available, however little known about how sanitation is established, maintained, threatened, and challenged (Rangamani *et al.*, 2015; Sabale, 2017) in informal communities (Hueso and Bell, 2013; Patwary *et al.*, 2021; Oza *et al.*, 2022). The research examined significant aspects in which informal sanitation is generated, rendered vulnerable, and politicized, based on an ethnography of two very distinct informal communities in Mumbai. Patronage, self-managed procedures, solidarity and exclusion, and open human defecation are the four informal urban sanitation systems studied (McFarlane *et al.*, 2014). Despite a ban on Manuel scavenging, India's sewer cleaners continue to work (Darokar, 2019; Ghosh, 2017; 2021). Apart from that, a number of laws and regulations create loopholes in the programmes themselves. Sanitation employees die every day as a result of the failure to follow the safety requirements (Bhasin, 2012; Kannolath, 2019). Working is prohibited only for records, not for applications (Parth, 2014). There are number of societal limitations that keep sanitation employees stuck in a vicious cycle of social shame (Sahoo *et al.*, 2015; Selvamani and Rajan, 2015). The caste system, which links these individuals and forces them to participate in these activities can be linked closely (Acharya, 2019; Menezes, 2019).

The everyday battle can be mirrored, and their unacceptably difficult labour in society might be viewed as a pact for death for someone fighting for their own identity (Doron *et al.*, 2018). Workers involved in sanitation efforts have been assigned an unidentified identity in society, which is regarded as undesirable. They become invisible in the society as a result of this identity, and their future success and goals are hampered. They may appear to be the most basic labourers required by society because we rely on them for our everyday cleaning jobs, but they have been associated with unwanted identity. That meaning is cognitively ingrained and may be found at the heart of society. This meaning has given rise to an identity for these people, one that is disagreeable and unwelcome. We should consider how these individuals can participate in society freely. It is society that shapes

and modifies the meaning of attributed identity; it is not a natural process. This civilization may select their roles, alter their tales, swap meaning and identity at any point throughout their lives, and fully reshape themselves.

Study area :

Delhi is the largest city in the country. It is surrounded by Haryana from three sides. Towards the east, it is bordered by Uttar Pradesh. It covers 1,484 square kilometers of land (573 sq. mi). According to the Census of India 2011, Delhi's population was over 11 million., while the entire population of the NCT was around 16.8 million. The NCR, which includes the surrounding satellite towns has a total population of over 26 million people in 2016, making it the world's second-largest metropolitan area (UN). Delhi is now divided into one division, 11 districts, 33 subdivisions, 59 census towns, and 300 villages. The previous Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was trifurcated in January 2012, resulting in local civic government. Approximately 49% of Delhi's total residents live in slums and an illegal colony with no civic facilities. The majority of slums are lacking in basic amenities.

METHODOLOGY

The whole work is based on a qualitative and observational research conducted in distinct places around Delhi. The respondents' opinion was collected using an open-ended questionnaire. The survey comprised sanitation employees ranging from dormitory cleaners to septic tank cleaners, those cleaning roads and sidewalks to those collecting rags from waste and many more informal workers. The surveys were filled out at various places. The study's framework has been structured based on those who responded. In addition, a deductive investigation was conducted based on various research publications and articles on the subject. A descriptive analysis at the end has been presented to sum up the study for conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hardship and Challenges :

The sanitation workforce's working circumstances are greatly influenced by the metropolitan environment. Sanitation employees, although being human, are forced to labour in inhumane conditions. During a field study, it was discovered that they encounter several issues in their

daily lives. Although it may appear that laws and rules protect them, the reality is quite different. They are scarcely recognized or given a place in society. One of the key causes for this was discovered to be the caste system. In the informal sector, considerable segments of the lower and artisan classes are engaged in unskilled or low-paid semi-skilled occupation (Bremner, 1990). Unskilled employees are recruited from the lower castes, and there is a clear propensity for distinct castes to concentrate in specific occupations (Prakash, 2009). Caste is especially important for poor employees in the unorganised sector because they lack resources other than those provided by their caste ties. These laborer's everyday lives revolve on a trash. When sanitation employees were questioned about the policies put in place for their safety at the time, they had little knowledge of them. They only know the government is helping them, but they have no idea what that help is. The shortage is not just on the part of the employees, but also on the part of those who push them to do such dangerous labour. Even if the government is making some moves in this direction, none of them are aimed at totally eliminating it.

It can be observed that, despite the fact that it is required by law to wear safety equipment while laboring in these circumstances, these employees are unable to do so. The majority of the workers stated that they are not provided with proper safety equipment. They put their lives on the line for a living, yet no one is looking out for them. Another significant issue is that even when contractors promise to furnish tools, they do not do so on schedule. Contract labourers, whether temporary or permanent, are unable to speak much about what is going on around them. They don't know their realm of work because their work schedules aren't set up appropriately. They will remove them and hire others if questioned. Contractors hire individuals for very cheap pay. Nothing can be done if something happens to them. Contractors take advantage of them since there are no set working hours. They may even ask them to assist them with domestic chores. Even though they do their hardest, if they are unable to reach the work on some days, their salaries are reduced. There are no allowances or benefits available from the contractor in the event of an accident. A sanitation worker working in hostel and paying guests narrates that "Once while returning home, I met an accident, my hand was broken, and my legs were severely fractured. Students from the dormitories helped me for medical treatment. The contractor did not provide me

with any assistance. Furthermore, my pay was docked for not showing up for work. Whatever the contract supervisor says, it's a law here." The Government's minimum wage and the real wage scenario are not the same. The labourers are paid a pittance for their efforts. They don't even obtain a job on certain days. These unorganized workers experience societal stigma in addition to daily hardships. They are prone to prejudice at all times. They are compelled to stay unnoticed due to their employment. They are prone to prejudice at all times. They are compelled to stay unnoticed due to their employment.

When questioned about people's attitudes toward them, one respondent answered, "In this case, the question of who has the power to show respect emerges. It becomes clear that asking for or expecting respect is impossible. Unfortunately, the typical attitude in this atmosphere is that respect is not granted to all people equally, but rather is only given to individuals depending on their caste connection. This brings up a crucial question how can individuals who fervently believe in the relevance of caste comprehend the inherent worth of every person as a human being? It becomes crucial to encourage these people to develop greater empathy and understanding, as well as to recognise and respect the intrinsic value and dignity that every person holds, regardless of caste. Even when given significant financial incentives, people from other castes are unwilling to take on this employment because of the perceived shame associated with it." Tragically, society often takes advantage of their difficult situation, putting them at greater risk. Scavenging women are individuals who die on a daily basis as a result of caste and gender injustice. They are made to do very difficult jobs under highly complicated situations. The laws should be enforced rigorously. Only then will these individuals be able to enjoy genuine liberty.

Workplace Condition and Health :

In India, the estimated 6 million migrant and seasonal sanitation workers, both adults and children, work in a variety of settings providing basic public services. They often face extreme health and safety risks on the job. The occupational health hazards, as well as alienation from health-care providers, are not only ignored, but also unaccounted for the health risks faced by sanitation employees. A sanitation worker's life expectancy is a serious problem. According to a 2005 survey performed by the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC)

with 200 sewage employees in Delhi, there are few workers over the age of 60, and the number of workers over the age of 50 is rapidly declining, indicating that sewage workers have a shorter life expectancy. Adults and children who work in the sanitation industry are on the front lines of this potential danger. In the fields, they are exposed to a variety of biological and chemical pollutants. As they come into close touch with these pollutants and hazardous residues, they are exposed to them. They come into touch with a variety of wastes, which they absorb via their skin (Yan *et al.*, 2015). They have been poisoned in certain cases by lethal poisonous wastes. In India, a sanitation worker dies every five days, according to official reports. These facts and reports, however, cannot be considered realistic because the ground reality is far worse than these figures suggest. Unless their issues are really significant, the majority of these afflicted workers do not seek medical help. Workers in the sanitation industry are rarely covered by health insurance.

Apart from the societal injustices they confront, these employees often experience health issues as a result of their labour. Exposure to hazardous gases, cardiovascular disease, degeneration, musculoskeletal issues, infections, anxiety and depression, immune system abnormalities, skin difficulties, and respiratory problems are among the health risks. Infectious infections including influenza, the common cold, measles, and streptococcal sore throat can spread among employees. Workers may come into direct contact with toxics in the lack of suitable protective gear such as safety gloves, resulting in severe exposure and skin rashes. As a result, sanitation personnel have no idea what circumstances they are exposed to at work or what the health implications of that exposure are. In the job, these people are exposed to a variety of dangers. Workers require health and safety training in order to safeguard themselves while on the job. They require information about their legal rights. They require not just knowledge of workplace risks, but also the legal authority to intervene when unsafe situations exist that threaten damage or death. In addition, the legislation must be reinforced in order to safeguard employees properly.

Diverse Social Security Needs :

Informal employees' wages are often poor, and their job chances are unstable. This insecurity is increased by their lack of social security, causing their unforeseen costs in times of illness, unemployment, or calamity to lead them

into a downward spiral of poverty. Any country's social security system should take into account the nature of economic instability. In a society, one may accurately predict which groups are in need based on the great majority having steady full-time employment with contracts and union-backed collective bargaining. Governments are highly aware of the need for social security and are attempting to alleviate their circumstances, entitlements, and plans. There are now a number of entitlements offered by the government to all citizens for both financing and providing the services (Olivier, 2019). Despite this, the government's entitlement programmes continue to help the poorest citizens. It has been estimated that approximately half of the truly destitute in most of the region do not receive government assistance. The government's implementation mechanism is too cumbersome and prone to leaks and corruption. Because the government's pipelines are choked, other implementation mechanisms are required. In today's India, we have a wide range of plans. The cash line (cash benefits such as pensions or scholarships), the food and commodities line (supply of products and services for free or at discounted rates for individuals classified as poor), and the labour line are examples of these systems (provision of Another hesitation labour to be performed by those designated as poor, in return for monetary payment or food). These are the three primary methods in which the government tries to directly reduce poverty and economic instability by giving products that people need, labour for a fee that they can use to buy the goods they think they desire, and money that they can use to generate employment possibilities (Farooqui, 2020). Direct cash transfers have been suggested as a strategy of maintaining social security in recent years. Pensions and scholarships are also examples of cash transfers, and polls have revealed that both types of social security are more stable than others that require constant involvement. In India, unorganised workers account for more than 90% of the workforce, and to lessen insecurity and vulnerability among this big workforce, changes in social structure and economic systems becomes must.

Employees in diverse economic activities are included from sanitation workers to vendors and temporary tea-shop workers to factory subcontracted and temporary workforces. The numerous economic operations throughout this sector seem to be at varying levels in terms of innovation, productivity, wages, and profitability. As a result, the affordability and paying

capacity of employers, as well as the demands of employees for social security, vary by activity (Unni and Rani, 2002;2003). The diverse groups of workers are not covered by a single package. Again, these workers' precise social security demands vary greatly. Though a minimum social security package is desired for labors at the bottom of the income and pay scale, it will be beneficial if care is given to the individual requirements of workforce in various classes. With the support of unions, NGO efforts, and steps taken by local governments, unorganised workers in various sub-sectors have achieved significant progress throughout the years in terms of social protection (Unni and Rani, 2002;2003). Several state governments have established welfare committees to provide significantly greater degree of social security. There is a rising view that social protection should be extended to disadvantaged sections through multiple techniques and social insurance plans. Several non- governmental organisations, microfinance institutions, trade unions, and state governments are taking steps in this direction. The poorest groups, including the dispersed small categories, must be covered by a basic social security package designed to meet the bare minimum of requirements. In fact, the minimal plan will cover the workers who are not covered by trade-specific social security.

Conclusion :

The study revealed a number of obstacles and hazards that sanitation employees encounter. Environmental and occupational health and wellbeing, legal and institutional concerns, financial instability, and social difficulties are the four dimensions. Sanitation employees are frequently harmed by a lack of legal protection and implementation of current regulations. Sanitation employees, particularly those hired on a temporary basis, are underpaid. Low-wage, unskilled sanitation employees are frequently stigmatized and discriminated. This is especially true where sanitation is related to a caste-based framework and is frequently assigned to castes believed to be lower in the caste hierarchy. This stigma adds to the social ostracization and barriers to social mobility that sanitation workers experience, and it also leads to intergenerational discrimination. These variables result in implicit or explicit prejudice, which impedes employees' social inclusion, job advancement, and social mobility. The last decade has seen a massive drive for better sanitation in both urban

and rural India, and significant progress has been made, with hundreds of millions of people now having sanitation facilities.

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