

LIVING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF SANITARY WORKERS IN TIRUPPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract

This paper tries to find the living and working environment of sanitary workers in Tiruppur district. The names of scavenging castes suggest that they are a functional community recruited from many different racial and social groups. It is very likely that people belonging to the lowest strata were compelled to take on this profession especially in the urban areas due to economic necessity. Hindu society in traditional India was divided into five main strata: four varnas, and the fifth group the outcaste, whose members were untouchables. Each caste is sub-divided into jati or sub-caste. Jati is an occupational group ranged in terms of ritual purity. The occupations of the first two varnas are clearly stated to be priesthood, administrative and military duties respectively. Below them the Vaishyas, in modern usage, were mainly merchants, and finally the Shudras were the producers. At the bottom are the untouchables who are regarded as unclean, base and impure, a status which affects all their social relationships. They must perform unclean and degrading tasks such as cleaning the human waste, urinals (toilet cleaning), disposal of dead animals, sweeping and scavenging. They must be segregated from members of the caste system and live on the outskirts of villages or in their own settlements. This article is purely based on the primary data. The collected data have been analyzed with the help of ANOVA analysis.

Keywords: Origin of scavenging, Sanitary workers, Percentage and regression analysis.

Introduction

The country, since its independence has made remarkable progress in almost all fields, which includes Green Revolution, White Revolution, Blue Revolution and information technology revolution, only to name a few and thereby improving the economic conditions of many segments of the population. However, there is one community which has largely remained untouched by such enviable progress is the community of municipal sanitary workers (SafaiKaramcharis). Totally cut-off from the mainstream of progress and immersed in ignorance and poverty, they are still subjected to the worst kind of oppression, discrimination and indignity and they are still treated as the lowliest of all. The names of scavenging castes suggest that they are a functional community recruited from many different racial and social groups. It is very likely that people belonging to the lowest strata were compelled to take on this profession especially in the urban areas due to economic necessity.

Hindu society in traditional India was divided into five main strata: four varnas, and the fifth group the outcaste, whose members were untouchables. Each caste is sub-divided into jati or sub-caste. Jati is an occupational group ranged in terms of ritual purity. The occupations of the first two varnas are clearly stated to be priesthood, administrative and military duties respectively. Below them the Vaishyas, in modern usage, were mainly merchants, and finally the Shudras were the producers. At the bottom are the untouchables who are regarded as unclean, base and impure, a status which affects all their social relationships. They must perform unclean and degrading tasks such as cleaning the human waste, urinals (toilet cleaning), disposal of dead animals, sweeping and scavenging. They must be segregated from members of the caste system and live on the outskirts of villages or in their own settlements.

The post-Vedic period witnessed the growth and consolidation of power due to the presence of hereditary groups in a hierarchy with Brahmins at the top and the untouchables at the bottom. These untouchables are called by different names such as "Harijans" (a glorified term, coined by Narsimha Mehta and adopted and popularised by Mahatma Gandhi) "Exterior Castes" (J.H. Hutton), "Depressed Classes" and "Dalit".

The Dalit, too, had traditional occupations but with a distant difference. By and large their occupations were least desirable and defiling (Srivastava, B.N. 1997). Apart from regional and local occupational variations the Dalit had mainly two main categories of profession, namely, leather processing and cleaning or sweeping. A caste working as remover of nightsoil and the cleaner of latrines belongs to a well defined group in the Indian social structure. All such workers in India are today covered under the general term "Scavenger". For this occupational group there are various names and titles in use in different parts of the country but the better known terms are 'The Mehtar' and its Mohammedan counterpart 'The Halalkhor'.

Cleaning or sweeping involved streets, drains and sewers; removal of human and animal excreta; raising of pigs, etc. Since toilets in most cities were not provided with flush, the scavengers had to carry buckets of human faeces on their heads. Their jobs are not only degrading, polluting and tedious, but they are also poorly paid. To eat the left-over of another person's plate is considered

highly degrading. It is a common practice among the scavengers to collect one or two chaatis from the houses they serve. Although this is a part of their customary rights and wages, it amounts almost to begging. This practice of collecting food is gradually disappearing from big cities, but it is still very much prevalent in small towns and villages.

Meaning and Definition of Scavengers

Literally, scavenging means cleaning up or removing filth, garbage, rubbish dirt, etc. A 'scavenger' therefore, is a person who is engaged or employed to clean, clear, collect, remove dispose or otherwise handle night-soil, filth, carcasses, garbage, rubbish, etc. Thus, interpreted, the word 'scavenger' should include in its sweep all sanitation workers even if they are employed at plush corporate offices as long as they functionally belong to this group. In fact, the definition of the term 'Scavenger, has led to considerable acrimony between the Ministry of Welfare, the nodal Ministry of Government of the India after the welfare of disadvantaged section of the society such as Scheduled Castes and tribes, people employed in unclean professions such as scavengers and flayers, minorities, backward classes etc. and the National Commission for SafaiKaramcharis, a national level statutory Commission set up in August, 1994 under the provisions of National Commission for SafaiKaramcharis Act, 1993 (64 of 1993). Incidentally, the official Hindi word for the term 'scavenger' is 'SafaiKaramchari' which should, literally speaking, mean a sanitation worker. Unfortunately, the Hindi translation of the word scavenger has compounded, rather than abated, the prevailing confusion and disagreement over the interpretation of the word scavenger. Before its amendment in 1996, the National Schemes for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents, launched in 1992, defined 'scavenger' asunder:

“A scavenger is one who is partially or wholly engaged in the obnoxious and inhuman occupation of manually removing night soil and filth”

Now the Government of India has modified the definition of scavengers and it effected from 1st April 1996. The changed definition is as follows:

“One who is partially or wholly engaged in the obnoxious and inhuman occupation of manually removing night-soil and filth”

The Hindi version of the printed text of the Scheme refers to scavengers as SafaiKaramacharis “SafaiKaramachari” has also been defined in clause (e) of Section 2 of the National Commission for SafaiKaramcharis Act, 1993 as follows:

“SafaiKaramacharis means a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta or may sanitation work”.

“That a section of humanity should be condemned to such degrading condition is a slur on our culture and a disgrace to our society”. (A report of a committee of the National Labour Commission on the working and service conditions of sweepers and scavengers (1967-69).

A person employed to clean the street, seeks and collects discarded stems is an animal, a beetle, feeding on carrion refuse etc. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978).

That section humanity should be condemned to such degrading condition is a slur on our culture and disgrace to our society.

Origin of Scavenging

Ancient books do not mention any caste like the scavengers or removers of nightsoil among the traditional occupations nor do they mention any caste exclusively relegated to this profession. Even to this day scavenging as a profession does not exist in most of the rural areas.

The institutionalization of 'sweeping and scavenging' as a profession seems to be of recent origin. There is a reference in Kautilya's Arthashastra that during Maurya period defecation in an open space in the towns was prohibited but there is no mention about the disposal of nightoil by scavengers. The old scriptures, however, throw some light on the system of scavenging. Dr.Bindeshwar Pathak (1991) writes in his "Road to Freedom" that 'according to the contents of the scriptures and other literatures, scavenging, especially the disposal of nightsoil by a particular caste or castes of Indian society, has been in existence since the beginning of civilization with the emergence of towns. One of the fifteen duties for slaves enumerated in the Naradiya Samhita was to dispose of human excreta. In Vajasaneyi Samhita the Chandals and Paulkosa have been referred to as slaves for the disposal of nightsoil. Those who were made captives, were forced to clean latrines, bucket privies and throw off the nightsoil at distant places. These captives, when freed, were not accepted by the society and they formed a separate caste and continued the work of scavenging. During the British period with the setting up of army cantonments and municipalities, a large number of people were perhaps required to provide this service on a regular basis.

The names of scavenging castes suggest that they are a functional community recruited from many different racial and social groups. It is very likely that people belonging to the lowest strata were compelled to take on this profession especially in the urban areas due to economic necessity.

Stephen Fuchs (1981) has pointed out that "the endogamous sub-sections of this lowest of all low-castes, are not without a certain social gradation. Within the scavenging caste some sections are superior to others, and the social status is determined according to the origin of the section, claiming a former higher rank, or according to the type of work a particular section is doing. The lowest place is generally occupied by those sections which carry nightsoil. The highest sections have given up

scavenging entirely, and have adopted other occupations, such a leather work, weaving or farming. Among these lowest scavenging sections which remove nightsoil there is still a distinction; those who serve in private houses consider themselves higher than those who clean public latrines. It should not be forgotten that this type of work has to be carried out in urban environment and in villages where the women are not permitted to leave the house, even where it is for a call of nature. Each of these sub-sections has its own rules and regulations as to what work is permitted and where the line is to be drawn. Some do not touch nightsoil, but do all other scavenging work in the villages, including the removal of dead animals and garbage.

Problem that has Been Focused in the Study

Sanitary workers are at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder of the society, whose condition is much worse than even that of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (SC and ST) in general. The nature of work they still carry out is not only inhuman and derogatory, but also quite condemnable. Many court rulings have been passed and many official measures and Acts have been implemented in order to not only promote the living conditions of the sanitary workers, but also to totally abolish the inhuman practices being carried out by them. But, even today, such practices are taking place in many states, railways and in other places. Modernization of the towns and city sewer systems has only changed the nature of work being done by the sanitary workers who are now forced to undertake the work of getting into the sewer pipes at the cost of their lives. Moreover, even their children are looked down upon by the society. The Centre for Human Rights and Social Justice noted that the children of manual scavengers are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in their schools, where they are forced to perform cleaning and scavenging work, and where discrimination undermines all aspects of their education and often causes them to drop out of school altogether. Also, after the introduction of economic reforms in the country, the process of contractualisation has also caught up with the sanitary workers, since most of them are employed on contract basis, losing even the benefits of permanent workers. In this background, it becomes quite necessary to examine the living and working environment of the municipal sanitary workers with the help of primary data, which is attempted in this study.

Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study PMKVY

To assess the living and working environment of the sanitary workers

Research Methodology

Data Source

The data collected for the study is both primary one. The required data for the study were collected and compiled from various respondents from scavengers in Tiruppur district. In addition, other required data were collected from various magazines and journals.

Techniques of analysis

The collected data have been used for analysis with the help of statistical tools. The statistical tools namely ANOVA.

Sampling Design

The secondary data collected from scavengers in Tiruppur district. The primary data collected from structured interview schedule for the 400respondents.

Research Hypothesis

The following are the hypothesis has been framed in the presented study.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between personal factors of living and working environment of the sanitary workers.

Model Derived From The Study

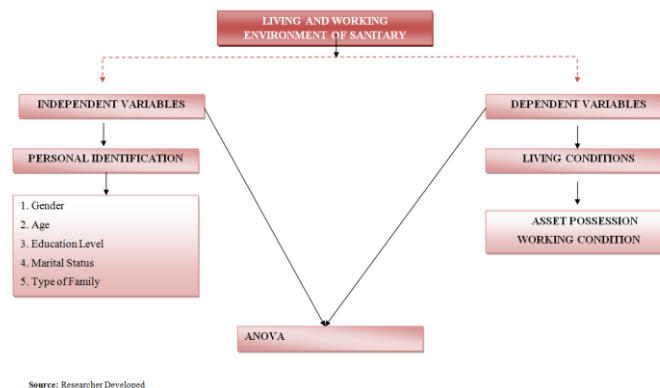


Table – 1: The Age Influences the Assets Possession of Living Conditions in Sanitary Workers

H₀₁ (a): There is no significant relationship between Age and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio/Transistor	Between Groups	17.098	2	8.549	7.053	.001
	Within Groups	481.212	397	1.212		
	Total	498.310	399			
Tape recorder	Between Groups	40.595	2	20.298	27.371	.000
	Within Groups	294.402	397	.742		
	Total	334.997	399			
Television	Between Groups	2.220	2	1.110	.960	.384
	Within Groups	459.078	397	1.156		
	Total	461.298	399			
Phone	Between Groups	21.861	2	10.931	18.698	.000
	Within Groups	232.076	397	.585		
	Total	253.938	399			
Bicycle	Between Groups	12.547	2	6.273	8.385	.000
	Within Groups	297.031	397	.748		
	Total	309.578	399			
Two wheeler	Between Groups	.006	2	.003	.008	.992
	Within Groups	140.704	397	.354		
	Total	140.710	399			
Fridge	Between Groups	.922	2	.461	.727	.484
	Within Groups	252.015	397	.635		
	Total	252.938	399			
Fan	Between Groups	11.660	2	5.830	10.946	.000
	Within Groups	211.450	397	.533		
	Total	223.110	399			
Mixer	Between Groups	23.346	2	11.673	16.751	.000
	Within Groups	276.654	397	.697		
	Total	300.000	399			
Grinder	Between Groups	9.734	2	4.867	6.196	.002
	Within Groups	311.864	397	.786		
	Total	321.598	399			
Gold jewels	Between Groups	.655	2	.328	.366	.694
	Within Groups	355.095	397	.894		
	Total	355.750	399			

Source: Primary Data

Table -1 depicts the ANOVA of personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers during the study period. As far as age is concerned, the variables **Tape recorder, Phone, Bicycle, Fan, Mixer and Grinder** have the p-value which is less than the 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. That means that there is a significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers. Rest of the variables is not significant at 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. That means that there is no significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

Table – 2 The Education Level Influences the Assets Possession of Living Conditions in Sanitary Workers

H₀₁ (c): There is no significant relationship between Education and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio/Transistor	Between Groups	.000	1	.000	.000	.992
	Within Groups	498.310	398	1.252		
	Total	498.310	399			
Tape recorder	Between Groups	.009	1	.009	.011	.918
	Within Groups	334.989	398	.842		
	Total	334.997	399			
Television	Between Groups	1.886	1	1.886	1.634	.202
	Within Groups	459.411	398	1.154		
	Total	461.297	399			
Phone	Between Groups	.047	1	.047	.074	.786
	Within Groups	253.891	398	.638		
	Total	253.937	399			
Bicycle	Between Groups	.041	1	.041	.053	.818
	Within Groups	309.536	398	.778		
	Total	309.577	399			
Two wheeler	Between Groups	.530	1	.530	1.504	.221
	Within Groups	140.180	398	.352		
	Total	140.710	399			
Fridge	Between Groups	2.227	1	2.227	3.535	.061
	Within Groups	250.711	398	.630		
	Total	252.937	399			
Fan	Between Groups	.191	1	.191	.341	.560

	Within Groups	222.919	398	.560		
	Total	223.110	399			
Mixer	Between Groups	.001	1	.001	.002	.967
	Within Groups	299.999	398	.754		
	Total	300.000	399			
Grinder	Between Groups	.350	1	.350	.434	.510
	Within Groups	321.247	398	.807		
	Total	321.597	399			
Gold jewels	Between Groups	.832	1	.832	.933	.335
	Within Groups	354.918	398	.892		
	Total	355.750	399			

Source: Primary Data

Table -2 shows the ANOVA of personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers during the study period. As far as education level is concerned, the selected all variables have the p-value which is greater than the 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. That means that there is no significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

Table – 3 The Marital Status Influences the Assets Possession of Living Conditions in Sanitary Workers

H_{01} (d): There is no significant relationship between Marital Status and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio/Transistor	Between Groups	12.565	3	4.188	3.414	.018
	Within Groups	485.745	396	1.227		
	Total	498.310	399			
Tape recorder	Between Groups	8.139	3	2.713	3.287	.021
	Within Groups	326.858	396	.825		
	Total	334.998	399			
Television	Between Groups	29.701	3	9.900	9.084	.000
	Within Groups	431.597	396	1.090		
	Total	461.297	399			
Phone	Between Groups	68.531	3	22.844	48.791	.000
	Within Groups	185.406	396	.468		
	Total	253.937	399			
Bicycle	Between Groups	1.167	3	.389	.499	.683
	Within Groups	308.411	396	.779		
	Total	309.578	399			
Two wheeler	Between Groups	.780	3	.260	.735	.531
	Within Groups	139.930	396	.353		
	Total	140.710	399			
Fridge	Between Groups	6.833	3	2.278	3.665	.013
	Within Groups	246.105	396	.621		
	Total	252.937	399			
Fan	Between Groups	9.821	3	3.274	6.078	.000
	Within Groups	213.289	396	.539		
	Total	223.110	399			
Mixer	Between Groups	52.918	3	17.639	28.271	.000
	Within Groups	247.082	396	.624		
	Total	300.000	399			
Grinder	Between Groups	.564	3	.188	.232	.874
	Within Groups	321.033	396	.811		
	Total	321.597	399			
Gold jewels	Between Groups	5.797	3	1.932	2.187	.089
	Within Groups	349.953	396	.884		
	Total	355.750	399			

Source: Primary Data

Table -3 depicts the ANOVA of personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers during the study period. As far as marital status is concerned, the variables **Television, Phone, Fan and Mixer** have the p-value which is less than the 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. That means that there is a significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers. Rest of the variables are not significant at 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. That means that there is no significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

Table – 4 The Type of Family Influences the Assets Possession of Living Conditions in Sanitary Workers

H_{01} (e): There is no significant relationship between Type of Family and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Radio/Transistor	Between Groups	4.057	2	2.029	1.629	.197
	Within Groups	494.253	397	1.245		
	Total	498.310	399			
Tape recorder	Between Groups	2.997	2	1.499	1.792	.168
	Within Groups	332.000	397	.836		
	Total	334.997	399			
Television	Between Groups	20.929	2	10.465	9.434	.000
	Within Groups	440.368	397	1.109		
	Total	461.298	399			
Phone	Between Groups	14.999	2	7.499	12.460	.000
	Within Groups	238.939	397	.602		
	Total	253.937	399			
Bicycle	Between Groups	2.366	2	1.183	1.529	.218
	Within Groups	307.212	397	.774		
	Total	309.578	399			
Two wheeler	Between Groups	59.550	2	29.775	145.645	.000
	Within Groups	81.160	397	.204		
	Total	140.710	399			
Fridge	Between Groups	2.963	2	1.482	2.353	.096
	Within Groups	249.974	397	.630		
	Total	252.938	399			
Fan	Between Groups	4.452	2	2.226	4.041	.018
	Within Groups	218.658	397	.551		
	Total	223.110	399			
Mixer	Between Groups	25.057	2	12.529	18.090	.000
	Within Groups	274.943	397	.693		
	Total	300.000	399			
Grinder	Between Groups	23.752	2	11.876	15.829	.000
	Within Groups	297.846	397	.750		
	Total	321.597	399			
Gold jewels	Between Groups	63.158	2	31.579	42.847	.000
	Within Groups	292.592	397	.737		
	Total	355.750	399			

Source: Primary Data

Table – 4 shows the ANOVA of personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers during the study period. As far as type of family is concerned, the variables **Television, Phone, Two-wheeler, Mixer and Grinder** have the p-value which is less than the 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. That means that there is a significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers. Rest of the variables are not significant at 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. That means that there is no significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers.

Table – 5 The Gender Influences the and Working Conditions of Sanitary Workers

H_{02} (a): There is no significant relationship between Gender and Working Conditions of Sanitary Workers.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Nature of Employ	Between Groups	1.530	1	1.530	9.151	.003
	Within Groups	66.547	398	.167		
	Total	68.078	399			
W. Hrs	Between Groups	7.397	1	7.397	17.670	.000
	Within Groups	166.603	398	.419		
	Total	174.000	399			
Type of work	Between Groups	3.129	1	3.129	3.752	.053
	Within Groups	331.869	398	.834		
	Total	334.998	399			
Type of Equip.	Between Groups	2.369	1	2.369	3.069	.081
	Within Groups	307.209	398	.772		
	Total	309.577	399			
No. of yrs Experience	Between Groups	3.129	1	3.129	3.752	.053
	Within Groups	331.869	398	.834		
	Total	334.998	399			
Monthly Income	Between Groups	51.957	1	51.957	46.328	.000
	Within Groups	446.353	398	1.121		
	Total	498.310	399			
House hold Income	Between Groups	3.129	1	3.129	3.752	.053
	Within Groups	331.869	398	.834		
	Total	334.998	399			
Working Conditions	Between Groups	3.495	1	3.495	2.799	.095
	Within Groups	497.002	398	1.249		
	Total	500.497	399			

Source: Primary Data

Table - 5 shows the ANOVA of personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers during the study period. As far as gender is concerned, the variables **Nature of Employ, working hours and Monthly Income** have the p-value which is less than the 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. That means that there is a significant relationship between personal factors and Assets Possession of Sanitary Workers. Rest of the variables is not significant at 5 per cent significance level. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted. That means that there is no significant relationship between personal factors and Working condition of Sanitary Workers.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made on the basis of the analysis and information gathered from the respondents during field survey:

- Use of more machines and equipments should be encouraged in the activities carried out by the sanitary workers and proper replacement for their work need to be implemented. This will help avoid the workers to enter the sewers and indulge in manual scavenging, risking their lives;
- Governments should also come forward to provide comprehensive health insurance policy, with cashless treatment not only to the sanitary workers, but also for their dependents;
- There is an urgent need to improve the educational opportunities for the children of the sanitary workers, since they are not able to benefit from the existing system of education. This will provide them enormous confidence to seek employment elsewhere;

Conclusion

This study examined the living and working environment of the municipal workers who are employed in the municipalities of Tiruppur district, Tamil Nadu. This study brings out the problems faced by the sanitary workers and the difficulties faced by them in a holistic manner, between the contract workers and permanent workers. While the living and working conditions of a sanitary worker in general are quite poor, that of the contract workers is much worse. They are given only consolidated wage, which is quite low and are not given any allowances or sufficient holidays. Provision of safety gears is also very inadequate, which puts their life under severe risk.

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