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**UNDERSTANDING SCAVENGING PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY  
PERSPECTIVE FROM GROUND**

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**Introduction:**

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. Reason being the upper castes Hindu is interested to uphold the age old practices to keep the lower caste person beneath their feet. 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. Despite legislation and program manual scavenging still persist in Indian society. According to the 2011 census, 2.6 million dry latrines exist and was the prior to these legislative provisions. Here it gives an indication only the implementation in law is one of the problems. Because people who suppose to give justice to the plea are have different mindset. All dry toilets are cleaned by the scheduled castes. So the grievances in their life still as it is. The states have dry latrine household, they are Andhra Pradesh, Assam, J&K Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal occupying 72 percent insanitary latrine in India<sup>1</sup>.

The main objective enforcement of the Employment of Manual Scavenger and Construction of Dry Latrine Prohibition Act 1993 is to get rid of unsanitary latrines, forbid the employment of Scavengers and the hazardous cleaning of sewer and septic tanks, and to maintain a survey of Scavengers and their rehabilitation. Supreme Court of India declared in *Safai Karmchhari Andolan vs. Union of India* March 2014 that estimate 96 million dry latrines being emptied but exact number of Scavengers is disputed, it appears beyond comprehension. Although various states governments forbid the inhuman practice of scavenging but inadequate implementation of these declaration is the major impediment. It fails to provide alternative livelihood to Scavengers. The sanitation workers should be given training with modern equipments and providing them opportunity to think and invest in the education of their children. On the contrary people of this occupation are depressed and discourage by the State governments, activist, and policy makers. Due to this they could not collect their strength to leave this occupation and look forward for another alternate. Manual scavengers strategically become the

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<sup>1</sup>Bhargavparikh Abhiyan (1998).

target of upper castes, as they want to maintain social order of caste system, thus they continue into the filthy occupation (Pullat, 2016).

#### Objectives:

- ✓ To study the impact of violation of the Human Rights of scavengers.
- ✓ To explore socio-economic challenges and discrimination of scavengers.

#### Methodology:

In depth case studies method adopts.

#### 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 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.

#### Introduction:

Case studies and Focus group discussion has conducted in Delhi area of Sultanpuri. There are three case studies and a FGD. Different case studies tries to cover three different person's occupational experiences one is case of migrated from Madhya Pradesh. A person has engaged in scavenging at the age of 14 years. Another case study tells about the how a person goes through scavenging occupation and their life struggle. Through the case studies covers the impacts on educations and how the child aspiration dies, when child lose his father.

In the focus group discussion deals with alternative works and future plans for their children.

#### Case 1)

Vijayis 45 years old and he is an employee of Delhi Jal Board in Delhi. He works in Delhi Jal board in sanitation department. Basically his family migrated from M.P when he was 12 years old. He is Kashap from M.P. his father was died while on duty. He told that his father died "hawa lagne se" then he further explained it while he opening the gutter covers poisons gasses attacked on him. So inhaling gas was the cause of his death. He is elder child of his parents. He started doing job at the age of 14 years.

He has recently suffered from eyes irritation and badly affected by the cut wounds, due to the gutter cleaning. After the death of his father sole responsibility to earn livelihood lies on his shoulders. "No promotion in this work, a worker cannot think much big just have a dream to get permanent on the same job", he said. He has three children and wife in home. Lives in semi pakka house in Sultanpuri Delhi. He also narrated an incident when he saw a child drown in sewage he dived into the hole. He works hard similar to other sanitation worker as do but promotion is denied. He took twenty years to become permanent in this job.

No health insurance, no special treatment and facility for the education of his children. He described “madam pata nhi kab se mara hua hu mai. Ab toh koi parak nhi padta ki gutter mai ja raha hun aur gandgi apne haantho se uthata hun”. It does not bother me now I am cleaning shit or get into gutter. I have already died now it is merely a survival option. He is still kachha woker of jal board. He is waiting to become pakka. His salary is 7000 only and live in Delhi is very hard.

No guarantee of education to his children.

**Caste study analysis:** through this case it cannot be hidden the plight of the Vijay. People in this occupation are under the intense suffering. The future of their upcoming generation is under full of uncertainty. If a thing runs in this way then it will not bring any social upliftment in their lives. Without making prepare them ask to go inside the pit holes and gutter. It is the symbol that govt. hardly any time to think over the pathetic conditions of these people. Vijay at the age of 14 years had joined this work. Similarly if he dies on work the same consequence will occur in front of his son. So another generation will also have the same destiny. Then the question arises is not this work and working conditions is a trap for the scheduled caste?

#### Case -2

Sumitra is 43years old. She lives in Mangolpuri in Delhi. Her work is door-to-door garbage collection (maholla) and sweeping. At the age of 16 years she got married. From the day of her marriage her mother in law handed over her (maholla) broom and basket. It was very terrific experience for her. She adopted it after finding no other alternate of livelihood. It was a fear to get thrown away from the house. She compromised. She has no complaints regarding work now because wound has filled. She got this job (mohlla from her grandmother) she is abiding tradition of her in laws.

Every day she goes to work despite intense pain in her knee and back. While asking to her say said “mujhe joddo ka dard hai” mera aadmi sharabi hai kuch nhi karta. Muje do baitiyon ki shaadi karni hai to bas unke liye aur apne pariwar ka pet palne ke liye kaam pe aana padta hai” I have arthritic pain. My husband is drunker and does not work. I have to come for livelihood. I have to marry two daughters, for the sake of them and fill the belly of my family I have to come daily on work. Her daughters are got education up to 5<sup>th</sup> class. So before the age of 19 Sumitra has a target to marry her daughter. While asks her why does such hurry. She said otherwise my daughter also have to come with me in work. If she remains free at home. My mother in law will force me to accompany my daughter at work. I would not want that my daughter do the same work.

#### Case analysis:

Patriarchy system is also works in scavenging. Man is usually free to make livelihood. Women have the responsibility to run house. The work of sweeping is the domestic work of women. Men do not do it even in homes. So in the present case one thing has been seen that patriarchy and division of work between man and woman is apparent. Women seem difficult to find an option to enter in other occupation.

Mahendera is 55 years old. He passed high school exam. He is from Haryana, he migrated to Delhi to search for works. When he was in Haryana had engaged in tailoring. After marriage he came in Delhi as his mother in law also did work in Delhi Municipal Corporation as a sanitation worker. Mahindra's mother in law employed him also in MCD. He took 19 years to become permanent employee. His all children are getting basic education up-to read and write. No children got higher education. His daughters are married at a very early age. He has aspirated further to employ his elder son in MCD.

**Case Analysis:**

Mahindra's case is quite different. Despite he is educated still enrolled in the MCD as the sanitation work. He can be given other work. He belongs to Valmiki caste. An entire criterion is to appoint him on the post of scavenger. Lack of aspiration and education has compelled him to work in same occupation.

**Focus Group discussion (FGD):**

**FGD is conducted in Delhi Jal Board area of Sultanpuri.**

Eight respondents are attended the FGD. The age group of these respondents is 25 to 50. This group includes five males and three females. Both educated as well illiterate respondents involved in FGD. Some of them are migrated and native in Delhi. The occupation status of respondents shows that they are temporary and contract workers. The income of the respondents suggests that they are earning very less up to 4000-6000 thousand per month. They reside in slum area. They do not accessing basic amenities neither at work places nor where they reside.

The general discussion about work conditions and future of your children and how they got their job, job satisfaction, is any social stigma associated with this work are asked to respondents to get an insight of this work.

**Alternative job awareness of respondents:**

This question is asked to respondents to get information about their alternative jobs. To explores their children aspiration and dreams for future to choose carrier possibilities. Out of 8, only 6 have some kind of 'information 'or sources about alternative jobs availability for them and for their children. Only 2 respondents have little information about alternative jobs but they are reluctant to come out from present occupation. They are very doubtful about acceptance by other than their community occupation because they feel excluded from so called society. No other alternative for their job profile.

One respondents replied that "App hi battawo, hamare pass koi option hai kya? Hum bachpan se yahi kam kar rahe hai. Hume nahi lagata ki hume log dusare kamo mai shamil karnege. You tell us madam do we have any other alternate? We are doing this work since our childhood".

Some of the respondents do not like this work and very egger to find alternative. They said that this work ruin our life and have no future for our children. "Iss Kam ke wajah se hamare shoshan ho raha hai. Babasahab ne kaha that ki Gandagi wale kam chod to, jin logo ne ye kam

chod diye, wo log age bhad gaye, aur hum piche rah gaye, Babasahab ke logo bhi, hamara sath nahi diya hai. Hame acchi shika apne bacho ko deni chahiye. Aur ye kam jalti chod dana chahiye. Ye kam hamari gulamgiri ka lakshan hai. Par koi asha ki kiran najar nahi aati”.

The urgency to come out from this work is only with 2 respondents, other feel that they are happy with this occupation. It seems that they do not have alternative options and information.

Some of them remained silent for a while, then answer came very enthusiastically yes, we want to make our son and daughter to educate and sought them to become officer “sahab” one of the worker also called his son and introduced who is taking training of sanitation inspector. Father eyes were shined with full of pride. The basic satisfaction in his mind he has done one work in life that made his son an asset who is skilled and educated no such agony shall be encounter in his life what he faced while attended the interview. Then another woman also revealed the same desire to make their children educated and never put such situation where they forced to clean others shits! They have their own decision no such compromise like things come in their life. Keep the shadow of this work away.

#### **Experiences of respondents work:**

4 respondents describe their experiences. In job they have faced very derogatory treatment. As a sanitation worker our life is very pathetic. We are treated as evil spirits. And neither our boss nor governments do work for our wellbeing. It is only on paper but in actual they do not even provides us basket.

Ramphal tells about his experience. He describes people of locality never give a glass of water to drink. People hate us, while travel in local buses passengers try to make distance. People scold us “*hey chhuda aur saffai wale kachra kyat era baap utha ke le jayega, saale haram ki khaate ho*”

People use to address by saying sanitation worker will your father collect the garbage. You people eat without pay heed to work.

At work site we do not find any place to seat and have our lunch. If we are outside of municipal corporation office force to take shelter of tree or park. People behave very uncertainly. You can compare what we eat with the small amount of 4000-6000. “*ek toh hamare liye ko samaanjank kaam nhi nirdharit kiya aur upper se bure vaywhar ka saamna karna paddta hai. Unchhi jaatiyo wala ka*” dignify work has not determined for us. Along with this we have to face bad behavior from upper castes people.

One of them narrated his story of an interview, yes ma’am I faced an interview he told me very proudly. Then asked him what did you do in your interview? He replies he dive and came out with silt in his hands. Further, he explained- drainage means gutter where to dive bare and without thinking much of hygiene and consciousness dive into filthy water and brought out shits and garbage. Sometimes if a dead animal is there we have to ask to remove it. Even though how worst it is stinking. We have to do work. If get succeed to bring all shits, job guaranteed to us. Another incident one person jump into the drainage with the motto to save a school child, in the great expectation he will get his job permanent after seeing his courageous act. Unfortunately he did not get any promotion or permanency in job. Same experienced shared by Vijay Kumar. He described the experience at the time of appointment in MCD. Researcher

asked with curious how your interview was. He explained his boss asked him to dive in a gutter and bring stuff like garbage (shit, dead animal). That would be the criteria of appointment.

### **Contact with this work:**

A woman her name is Laxami. Tells about her mother employee her in MCD when mother got tuberculosis. Sole responsibility shifted on her shoulders to run the house.

Similarly a Parwati tells When she was 15 year old from teenage she is continued in this work. Then also another woman raises her voice madam. I was employed by the effort of my neighbor friend. After second years of marriage my husband loses job and finding no job. Then my neighbor helped me. Laxmi says madam *hum jaisi auranton ke liye koi aur kaam nhi hai. Hum anpdh hai koi hunnar nhi jaanti*”

Women like her do not have any other work opportunity. We are illiterate. We do not know any skill.

### **Analysis of FGD:**

Through the analysis of this FGD that respondents have to struggle hard in their day to day life. The people’ perception towards them is also not good. It realizes that they are forcefully joining this work. It is predetermined by the society which caste people do what kind work. Another interesting fact comes out from this FGD people have very poor background; they do not have enough resources to change their livelihood option. People of this group are in majority illiterate. They trap in Poverty and stagnating conditions of work. One of the respondent while explains her mother illness. (Her mother has tuberculosis while she worked as a scavenger.)Her mother gets tuberculosis by doing this endanger job. This situation how wreck the life of teenage girl. By citing this example here would like to emphasis. State should take the responsibility and accountability to ban this practice practically. Socio-economic assistance should be given to them. Education and health facility should be given free of cost. These people are not able to come out from this work. One of the reasons of their pathetic condition is they have lack of resources. Caste is barrier and castiest practice increases their grievances.

### **Conclusion:**

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Thus by understanding the case study and Focus group discussion certainly reached on conclusion that scavenging is the scourge and it has reduced human being into things. The violation of human rights in their profession is very common. With respects to the scavenging, the nature of caste, financial stress dynamics and occupational mobility from scavenging to other occupations. It is at one level, a moving out of the dilemma of avoiding a starving and financial crisis, of being pulled in two contradictory directions.

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. Dalit valmiki women have less opportunity to see the world, and what is the significance of education is another issue of their intact with this occupation. Some of the women are indulged in this occupation because of their socialization and nurturing in this way they feel comfortable to accept this occupation as their means of livelihood. Lacking of education is not a deliberate act of this community but it is a social and political strategy to keep them intact within this occupation. That is why throughout this entire paper it has emphasized upon term “inherited occupation”. If dalit women of valmiki community get educated definitely they feel awful towards this indignity in job and confident to accept other occupation for their survival and dignity.

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