



THE SAFAI KARMACHARIS' INEQUALITY REPORT



SAFAI KARMACHARI ANDOLAN

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About Safai Karmachari Andolan

Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) is a programme of Aman Vedika for the liberation and Rehabilitation of persons and communities affected by the caste based discrimination by work by descent of manual scavenging.

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INTRODUCTION

“Sanitation workers provide an essential public service but often at the cost of their dignity, safety, health, and living conditions. They are some of the most vulnerable workers. They are far too often invisible, unquantified, and ostracized, and many of the challenges they face stem from this fundamental lack of acknowledgment” (World Bank, ILO, WaterAid, and WHO. 2019. “Health, Safety and Dignity of Sanitation Workers: An Initial Assessment.” World Bank, Washington, DC).

In India, Sanitation work is predominantly in the informal and unorganized sector. It includes cleaning latrines – both public and private, emptying pits, cleaning open drains and open defecation, going down manholes and septic tanks, cleaning

human waste while cleaning garbage, waste collection and transporting waste. The work is considered to be dirty and the persons and their communities, associated with sanitation work are stigmatised as polluting

In India sanitation and related work, is relegated to a caste-based family occupation. The term ‘sanitation worker’ has evolved from the word ‘scavenger’ which is a caste term for a person who cleans latrines, sweeps streets, picks up garbage, cleans drains, open defecation etc. In local Indian languages the names ‘thoti, bhangi, etc are used which are derogatory caste names. The caste-based social structure in India, has stigmatised the work of sweeping streets, cleaning of public latrines, sewerage work, cleaning railway tracks, collecting

and disposing garbage and other forms of sanitation work as unclean and impure. Such work has been imposed upon the dalit communities who are outside the caste system and considered to be impure, polluting and untouchable by birth. It is not mere employment but a discrimination of, work by descent, form of occupation. Historically, the caste system has categorized particular Dalit communities to be the 'untouchables' and forced them into manual scavenging, to handle human waste - from

human excreta, menstrual waste to dead bodies and animal carcasses. The communities continue to be stigmatized as polluting and impure. The safai karmachari communities are excluded into living in segregated habitats that are crowded and lack the basic amenities of safe housing, water and sanitation, even to the present day. Centuries of intergenerational deprivation and denial of education, dignified livelihoods and decent work, has resulted in extreme vulnerabilities and poverty.



THE ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES OF SAFAI KARMACHARIS

Safai Karmachari Andolan,
engaged with safai
karmachari women in 7
states – Maharashtra, Madhya
Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh,
Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh

and Telangana to study the
economic inequalities of the
safai karmachari communities.
The Human Development
Index (HDI) rank¹ of the
states is as follows

State	HDI (2025)	Rank
Delhi	0.839	2
Maharashtra	0.768	9
Tamil Nadu	0.753	13
Telangana	0.740	20
NATIONAL AVERAGE	0.704	
Andhra Pradesh	0.695	25
Madhya Pradesh	0.664	33
Uttar Pradesh	0.631	35

HDI is a composite index that takes into consideration health, education and income. Delhi as the national capital ranks 2 next to Goa for HDI. Three states – Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Telangana are above national average of which two are southern states. Among the states with a lower than the national average, Andhra Pradesh is a southern state. At the very lowest are northern states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indian_states_and_union_territories_by_Human_Development_Index#cite_note-9



METHODOLOGY

Safai Karamchari Andolan engaged with 1476 women from the Safai Karmachari community from 7 states of India - Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharastra and Madhya Pradesh through personal face to face interviews and Focussed group discussions

A SURVEY held face to face interviews using a survey questionnaire with 676 persons in all the seven states.

FOCUSSED GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

The study engaged with safai karmachari communities in five states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in 40 Focussed Group discussions with 800 members.

The study process included identifying and training youth in the community to hold the personal interviews and facilitate the focused group discussions.

Review Of Government Data On Safai Karmacharis

A desk review of the Government of India's data on Safai Karmacharis drew a blank. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has repeatedly reported to the parliament that there is no manual scavenging in the country and they “do not have the data on safai karmacharis as it is a state subject”. The Ministry gave this standard answer to questions raised in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for data on sanitation

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-3349
ANSWERED ON - 24/03/2021

TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT SANITATION WORKERS

3349. # SHRI NEERAJ DANGI

Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:-

- (a) the number of temporary and permanent sanitation workers employed in the country, State-wise;
- (b) whether it is a fact that there is a difference between the allowances and facilities provided to the regular and casual sanitation workers, if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the sanitation workers are provided with adequate safety equipments while working;
- (d) if so, the reasons for their death due to suffocation during the sewage cleaning work; and
- (e) if not, the reasons therefor and the steps taken by Government for ensuring their safety?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT
(SHRI RAMDAS ATHAWALE)

- (a) No such statistics are maintained by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- (b) Sanitation is a State subject, Sanitation workers are engaged by either the local bodies or organisations requiring sanitation services. The wages are accordingly decided by the employer who engages the workers.
- (c) Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Rules stipulate that the Employer is required to provide the safety gear, devices and ensure safety precautions prescribed under the Rules. In addition, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs have also circulated the Standard Operating Procedure to be observed while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.
- (d) The fatal accidents in sewers and septic tanks are due to non compliance of the prescribed safety measures and Standard Operating Procedure.
- (e) A National Policy on Mechanised Sanitation Eco-system has been formulated and circulated to the States for implementation. This policy, inter-alia, envisages appointment of Responsible Sanitation Authority in each district and a Sanitation Response Unit in each municipality, which shall be fully equipped with necessary machines, devices and vehicles for mechanised cleaning and professionally trained manpower to ensure safe cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

workers. The question on the number of sanitation workers has been asked several times since 2018. Each time the minister of Social Justice and Empowerment has given the same standard answer. The last time this answer was tabled in the floor of the Lok Sabha was on 18th December 2024.

To a question on number of manual scavengers on 30.3.2022, the minister has responded that two surveys in 2013 and 2018 has identified 58098 manual scavengers but that, “there is no report of people currently engaged in manual scavenging in the country”.

“The Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) provides: (i) one-time cash assistance of Rs 40,000 to the identified manual scavenger (ii) loans up to Rs 15 lakh at a concessional rate of interest (iii) a credit-linked back-end capital subsidy of up to Rs 3,25,000 and (iv) skill

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT
LOK SABHA**

**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.2462
TO BE ANSWERED ON 06.08.2024**

SANITATION WORKERS

2462 SHRI HIBI EDEN:

Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the details of deaths that have occurred due to the cleaning of sewers and drainages since 2019, State and Year-wise;

(b) whether the Government has disbursed the compensation of Rs. 10 lakhs and Rs. 30 lakhs, as directed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, to the families of sanitation workers who have died due to hazardous cleaning practices since 2014, and if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government has disbursed any compensation for workers that have been permanently disabled due to unsafe sewer/septic tank cleaning practices since 2014 and if so, the details thereof; and

(d) whether the Government has not maintained data on the caste composition of workers in the sanitation and cleaning sectors, despite evidence that over 90% are from Dalit communities and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT
(SHRI RAMDAS ATHAWALE)**

(a) and (b): Year-wise and State-wise details of workers who have lost their lives due to hazardous cleaning of sewer/septic tanks and the compensation paid to them since 2014 to 2023 is at **Annexure**.

(c) and (d): No incident of disability has been reported from the States/Union Territories.

The reports sent by States/UTs does not mention the caste details.

development training for up to two years with a stipend of Rs 3,000 per month. There is no allocation under this scheme in 2023-24 (BE) and it appears to have been discontinued. An examination of trends shows that there has been poor utilisation of funds for several years. After the National Survey on Manual Scavengers

Annexure referred in reply to parts (a) and (b) of the Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2462 for Answer on 06.08.2024 regarding Sanitation Workers

State/UT wise and year-wise details of death of persons while cleaning in sewers and septic tanks and compensation paid since 2014 to 2023.

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Name of State/UT	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death
Andhra Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bihar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chhattisgarh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gujarat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Haryana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Himachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karnataka	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Name of State/UT	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death	Total No. of death
Kerala	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Maharashtra	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Madhya Pradesh	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Odisha	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Punjab	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rajasthan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tamil Nadu	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Uttar Pradesh	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Uttarakhand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Bengal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53

in 2018, the allocation was increased, but remained inadequate considering the number of manual scavengers identified in the survey².”

In the last four years there has been discussion on status of sewerage work

in the parliament. The Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment has tabled data on sewerage deaths in the parliament. The following is a screen shot of the question and answer tabled in parliament on 6th August 2024.

² CBGA. *Walking the Tightrope An Analysis of Union Budget 2023-24*

The Findings

The findings highlighted below, point to structural and economic inequalities based on caste and gender that continue to oppress the communities of Safai Karmacharis and maintain barriers that prevent their economic empowerment.

Educational levels are very low in the Safai Karmachari community

Several generations of the Safai Karmacharis never went to school and learnt to read or write. The caste system with its rigid

rules of keeping education to the twice born castes of brahmins, kshatriyas and Vaishyas, denied several generations of communities of Safai Karmacharis who are at the very bottom of this social hierarchy, all access to education. This historic deprivation has resulted in a very low education status of the Safai Karmacharis. The responses of 672 persons on their education status found deprivation and denial of education to be systematic and consistent.

State	EDUCATIONAL STATUS				
	0	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 12	Above 12
Andhra Pradesh	15	19	26	1	7
Telangana	15	12	24	13	27
Tamil Nadu	13	11	45	14	13
Uttar Pradesh	29	27	20	11	8
Delhi	4	14	9	0	2
Maharashtra	30	16	36	4	1
Madhya Pradesh	54	55	63	1	4



Less than 10% of those surveyed had studied beyond Class 12, and only 17% had continued their education after class 10. A large 48% have less than 5 years of education. 24% have never been to school. While the government has special educational schemes for the community, the children have not benefitted from these entitlements. Only 206 had benefitted from government education schemes. A mere 88 members had received the Pre Matric Scholarship meant specifically for children of scavenging community. Only 78 children are benefitting from Post Matric Scholarships and 47 are receiving some other scholarship. Only 13 children have secured admission into the special residential schools.

PRIMARY OCCUPATION AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

The result of this deprivation in education shows up in the large majority of the respondents being in caste based, intergenerational, sanitation work. The focused group discussions revealed that the community could not access non-scavenging employment or livelihoods due to lack of education and caste-based social compulsions. 563 women responded to the question on occupation and source of income. 800 women in the focussed group discussions reported different forms of sanitation work. It included cleaning of dry latrines, public latrines, sewer work, open drains, septic tanks, railway tracks, open defecation areas,

latrines in others houses, garbage, public areas etc. 676 persons responded to the question on how many generations back in their families have been engaged as scavengers. 534 persons (79%) stated three generation and above. Many just said “forever”.

Of the 1247 persons engaged in the survey and focused group discussions, more than 90% said they were sanitation workers. Even those who said they did other work probably do this in addition to the sanitation work they do. The discussions revealed that the income from the alternate livelihoods was far from adequate to sustain a household.

Occupation as Source of Income

	Uttar Pradesh	Delhi	Telangana	Andhra Pradesh	Tamil Nadu	Maharashtra	Madhya Pradesh
Sanitation	91	21	70	61	91	54	175
Cooking	3	2	1			2	1
Beautician	2		1				
Teacher	1		2			1	
Tailor	2	5	2	2	5		7
Livestock	3			1			
Domestic					11	8	
Driver					3		
Business	3		1		3		

The interviews with the safai karmachari women revealed that 635 (90% of those surveyed) women were in paid work. Of this a large majority of 563 (79%) women were engaged in different forms of sanitation work. It included forms of (legally defined) manual scavenging of dry/ insanitary latrines (58); open drains (26); Railway track (93) and open defecation (23). Only 72 (11%) persons reported to have an income from non-scavenging occupations.

The employment status: contractual or temporary labour based on casual labour and daily wages.

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contractual or temporary labour based on casual labour and daily wages.

	Government	Private	Self employed	Casual daily wage	Temporary	Contract
Andhra Pradesh	13	19	3	10	5	0
Telangana	5	33	5	8	13	1
Tamil Nadu	5	28	3	16	16	19
Uttar Pradesh	5	22	0	2	24	14
Delhi	1	1	0	5	6	4
Maharashtra	0	79	0	0	0	0
Madhya Pradesh	0	0	3	21	127	22

Income Status

	Delhi	Telangana	Maharashtra	Uttar Pradesh	Tamil Nadu	Andhra Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh
3000 - 5000	9	2	18	37	5	2	84
5,000 – 10,000	14	12	44	33	70	15	72
10,000 – 20,000	4	28	15	6	11	15	9
Above 20,000	1	3	0	5	1	1	18

Majority of the women have a monthly income of less than Rs. 10000/- a month. only 29 of them are earning more than Rs. 20,000/- a month.

The vulnerability of the community is further compounded by a lack of assets and accumulation of debt

	Money lender	Bank	Employer	Mortgage/ Pawn shop	Others
Andhra Pradesh	33	25	0	14	4
Telangana	22	10	2	9	12
Tamil Nadu	67	34	7	41	3
Uttar Pradesh	17	21	3	8	0
Delhi	16	12	0	4	1
Maharashtra	0	8	3	13	13
Madhya Pradesh	16	59	2	10	12

501 (74%) women said they had borrowed money either from the bank or from private money lenders. In the focused group discussions it was stated that banks denied loans to workers in unorganized sector. The wages are far from adequate to cover household costs. “If there is a crisis or an extraordinary event, we have to borrow from money lenders at exorbitant and compounding interest”. Majority said that they are never able to settle debts with their meagre wages or any other monetary means. Money lenders only demanded payment of the interest. They never demanded for the settlement of the principal amount. “When demand for the interest became aggressive and abusive, we take another larger loan to pay off part interest and for meeting other needs”. Many also stated that the money lenders took away their ration cards and even bank ATM cards as a security against the loan. It was worse with mortgage as they had lost almost all their gold and personal assets to the local pawn shop. They pawned items like gold, vehicles, household kitchen vessels made of brass and steel and even mobile phones and watches.

The Property and Assets of Safai Karmacharis:

Safai Karmacharis women live in segregated bastis which are located near community garbage dumps or the municipal sewage treatment plant. The bastis are overcrowded with single room shacks which are mostly temporary and unsafe. The houses are single room

structures and crowded together without access to public water and sanitation services. Around 439 claimed to own either one or more of the assets – house plot, house, agricultural land, livestock, vehicle and livelihood asset. 413 safai Karmacharis said they owned a house.

STATE	Land	House	Agricultural land	Animal	Vehicle	Livelihood asset
Andhra Pradesh	0	32	0	1	6	5
Telangana	10	37	0	0	12	4
Tamil Nadu	3	40	2	2	44	14
Uttar Pradesh	0	58	0	0	0	0
Delhi	0	23	0	0	0	0
Maharashtra	0	79	0	1	19	0
Madhya Pradesh	0	144	1	7	12	8

When the Safai Karmacharis said they owned a house, it meant that they did not pay rent for the house. Only very few 16% possess legal documents as proof of ownership. Only 4% had a livelihood asset – petty shop, mobile vending cart, sewing machine and vehicle used for livelihood activity. 93 vehicles were owned and used by the men in the household. 11 Safai Karmacharis stated owning goats and chickens. The focussed group discussions revealed that the houses and the basti land was owned by the local body. There was the ever-prevailing threat of eviction.

Dignified Livelihood through the lens of the Safai Karmacharis:

Dignified livelihood for the Safai Karmacharis, is an occupation, work or employment that will break the link between caste and dehumanizing occupation and to empower the person to reclaim equality, dignity and human personhood.

A livelihood skill for the Safai Karmacharis is the combined

knowledge and capacities to engage in an economic activity that will remove the stigma of manual scavenging, unclean occupation and untouchability. It should be applied to earn an income to provide quality of life for a household without compromising self respect and dignity.



	Andhra Pradesh	Telangana	Tamil Nadu	Uttar Pradesh	Delhi	Maharashtra	Madhya Pradesh
Agriculture	3	2	7	1	3	0	2
Construction	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Carpentry	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Driving	1	0	10	1	0	1	3
Livestock rearing	3	2	9	22	3	2	7
Cooking	8	48	52	23	12	78	159
Tailoring	13	27	36	18	12	8	33
Midwife	0	2	3	2	0	4	7
Beautician	1	10	5	5	3	4	9
Computers	2	10	12	3	0	2	3
Teaching	2	21	5	3	1	4	9
Any other	18	18	1	0	2	3	3

All stated to have atleast one skill that could be a livelihood. Cooking and tailoring were most often stated. Even though the skill of cooking and tailoring was limited to a domestic scope within the household, the focussed group discussions revealed that it was common for women to do large scale cooking for their domestic events. Both tailoring and cooking had the potential to be turned into a small business given the right resources of financial investment and training. The finding is the aspiration that named a domestic skill to initiate a dignified livelihood to break free from an intergenerational caste based occupational discrimination .

Access to Government Entitlements:

Have you received any benefit from the government rehabilitation?

STATE	Yes
Andhra Pradesh	6
Telangana	10
Tamilnadu	27
Uttar Pradesh	30
Delhi	5
Maharashtra	1
Madhya Pradesh	2

Health issue	Respondents
BP/ Diabetes	180
Aneamia	177
Body Pains	132
Gastro Intestinal	73
Respiratory	70
Menstrual issues	54
TB	38
Skin	35
Miscarriage	15
Cancer	2

Name of the card	Andhra Pradesh	Telangana	Tamil Nadu	Uttar Pradesh	Delhi	Maharashtra	Madhya Pradesh
B.P.L Card	44	71	84	32	9	0	56
Antyodaya Card	0	3	2	2	0	0	5
APL	0	2	1	45	3	81	81
Any other	3	4	1	0	1	9	3

Close to 50% of the women surveyed did not have a BPL card which means that large numbers of Safai Karamchari families are not eligible to avail of the universal benefits for below poverty line households. Only 81 respondents (12 percent) stated to have received a government entitlement for rehabilitation.

Health is the biggest problem for the Safai Karmacharis - It was found that 60% went to government hospitals for health care, while many went to a private clinic and even resorted to over the counter at the local pharmacy. Only 131 had received government support for health care through the government health card.

Only 76 persons stated to have received Education support for their children (pre matric, post matric scholarships and RTE admissions)

Health Expenses	600 -1000	1000-3000	4000-6000	8000-10000	10000-15000	20000-30000
Respondents	74	223	53	28	7	9

Caste and Gender Based Occupation and Discrimination:

In the caste system, location, habitat, sur names and generational occupation are used to identify the caste of a person. It has been found that both the society and state make implicit and explicit efforts to keep the person in his/ her caste-based occupation. The Safai Karmacharis live in segregated bastis (ghettos). Within the bastis, the Safai Karmacharis are segregated by community and occupation. The basti communities are stigmatized and stereotyped, as impure and polluting and identified with 'unclean' occupations. This has resulted in restricting and hindering the Safai Karmacharis communities to access opportunities for dignified

and non-scavenging livelihoods.

Government schemes include explicit plans to maintain this caste derived occupation of scavenging. One of the main components of the Self Employment for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) scheme is "Subsidy on Loans to manual scavengers/ sanitation workers and their dependents for sanitation related projects (for projects upto Rs. 15 lakh)". In the loan-based schemes for rehabilitation, the highest amount is allocated for 'maintaining pay and use toilets (25 lacs)' and 'sanitary marts (15 lacs)". (National Safai Karmacharis Finance & Development Corporation Schemes Programmes)

The statement	personal interviews (673)	FGD (40)
I am doing this work because of my caste	478	yes
Because I am a woman	428	yes
Others look down on me because of my work	471	yes
My children are treated badly in school because of my work	312	yes

Most respondents felt discriminated against because of their occupation. An overwhelming majority of respondents said they were Safai Karmacharis because of their caste and because they are women. All the participants are living in a segregated basti based on caste and their occupation as Safai Karmacharis. They face discrimination on a regular basis. 1270 women said that others look down on them because of the work they do and 312 women said their children are discriminated against in school because of the work they do. Deprived of education and alternative occupation and lack of opportunities and resources, they continue to experience caste, gender and occupational discrimination.

79 percent (534/ 676) of the participants stated that three generations and more have been in some

Safai Karmachari women face intersecting forms of stigma, exclusion, untouchability and discrimination of caste, Patriarchy, Class and Occupation

The Safai Karamchari women are bearing the multiple oppressions of class, caste, gender and occupation. They are the worst affected victims of the casteist social order with its norms of purity and pollution. Caste and gender based intergenerational denial of access to education, property, wealth and decent economic engagement has resulted in poverty and exclusion, situating Safai Karmacharis women at the very lowest in the social order and excluded from government schemes for social and economic development.

The Caste and patriarchal social order have imposed several socially constructed identities on Safai Karamchari women: Dalit, scavenger, sweeper, Safai Karmachari, servant, untouchable, polluting, impure, low caste, woman, poor,

slum dweller, uneducated, low class, wife, daughter in law, mother. She is rarely called or referred by her given name in her workplace, public, community or household. Each of these (caste, gender, class and occupation) identities interlink and intersect to inflict several problems that exacerbate and intensify the ever present problems from the other identities. The safai Karmachari woman faces untouchability and oppression from caste which intensifies and is intensified by the oppression and untouchability from the occupation and identity as a safai karmachari. As a woman, she faces menstrual untouchability, male supremacy, domestic violence and denied freedom of movement and speech within the household and community.

Top 3 Problems Faced by Women	Respondents	%
Health	323	54
Occupation	321	54
Domestic Work	297	50
Water and sanitation	216	36
Indebtedness	193	32
Menstrual Issues	169	28
Domestic Violence	143	24

474 persons (80%) stated that they are engaged in this occupation because of their caste. When the safai karmacharis were asked to list the top three of their problems, 321 persons said that the caste-based occupation of scavenging is one of their top three problems. Caste and occupation discrimination and untouchability are interlinked. The discrimination by work by descent of the caste system has forced generations of Dalit communities into manual scavenging as a caste-based occupation by birth. The caste social order has stigmatized Dalit communities as impure, polluting

and untouchable and must only engage in occupations of cleaning human waste – excreta, dead bodies, menstrual waste etc.

Generations of occupational discrimination and violence and the denial of education, dignified livelihoods and economic opportunities has pushed the safai karmachari women into a life of poverty and deprivation. The segregated bastis are excluded from public services of water and sanitation. A combination of occupational discrimination, wage and income deprivation and low standards water and

sanitation has resulted in a cycle of occupational diseases, poor nutrition, physical stress, health problems, indebtedness, poverty and disempowerment.

426 persons claimed that they are employed in the sanitation sector because (1) the sanitation sector engages only women to clean public latrines, sweep streets, public spaces and collect garbage and (2) the patriarchal family structure permits women only into caste and generation based occupations of scavenging. Even within the house, cleaning is a women's task. Within the community and household, the safai karmachari is victim to the patriarchal practices and culture of male supremacy and domination. Gender discrimination within the household results in women bearing the entire burden of unpaid domestic work and care of the child, elderly and sick. 24% of the respondents stated domestic violence as a top problem. Yet again the patriarchal combination of gender discrimination, domestic violence, male supremacy keep the woman under strict control without

freedom of movement and speech. She feels disempowered to speak out against atrocity and accepts the intergenerational caste and patriarchal control over her as a normal.

216 persons (36%) stated that one of the top 3 problems is water and sanitation. The safai karmachari women are in constant worry about water. 50% pay for water and many women said that their economic activity was compromised because of the responsibility and stress of providing water in terms of wages, employer satisfaction, exhaustion, loss of wages, missing school and compromising their home based business. The women attributed body pains menstrual pain and cramps and insomnia to the burden of providing water for the household. The casteist mindset and attitude that the safai karmachari communities are inherently polluting and therefore do not require as much water for hygiene is a factor for this discrimination and exclusion in not providing adequate water to safai karmachari communities.

As the struggle continues

The problems push her deeper into poverty and hinders her access to equal opportunity to make her dependent and vulnerable to the cycle of caste and patriarchal discrimination and violence. As this violence and discrimination gets passed on from one generation to another, it becomes internalized as a normal way of life. Safai Karamchari women bear the

burden of discrimination and violence stemming both from caste prejudice and patriarchy. Indebtedness, Menstrual issues, Health issues, the burden of domestic work, domestic violence, occupation related issues, and access to water and sanitation emerge as the major issues that the Safaikarmachari women face on a regular basis.

The constitutional guarantees and laws meant to address the issues faced by Safai Karamchari women:

Health

Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) to include a right to health, making it an integral part of a dignified life. The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized that "life" in Article 21 means a life with human dignity, not just mere survival, and that access to healthcare is essential for a dignified life.

Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs):

While not enforceable in court, the DPSPs (Part IV of the Constitution) also play a crucial role in promoting the right to health.

- Article 38: Directs the state to strive to promote the welfare of the people.

- Article 39(e): Directs the state to protect the health and strength of the people, and to ensure that neither children nor adults are exposed to labor unsuitable to their age.
- Article 41: Requires the state to provide public assistance to the unemployed, sick, and disabled.
- Article 47: Directs the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and to improve public health.

The Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

(PMJAY): is a flagship scheme aimed at achieving universal health coverage, providing financial protection against catastrophic healthcare costs for the poor and vulnerable.

Occupation

Article 14 Equality before law embodies the general principles of equality before law and equal protection of laws.

Article 15. Prohibition from discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

Article 16. Equality of Opportunity provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

Article 17: Abolition Of Untouchability— “Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Article 39 requires the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39(a)];, and equal pay for equal work for both men and women [Article 39(d)].

Article 42: Ensures just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 43: Provides for securing a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life, and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.

ARTICLE 46: Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Weaker sections— The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2018

The "Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013" (MS Act, 2013) prohibits manual scavenging, mandates rehabilitation, and penalizes violations, coming into effect on December 6, 2013.

Domestic Work

The United Nations SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate has the indicator 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work. The Government of India in its progress report on the SDGs has reported the data on unpaid domestic work by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

(MoSPI). In this data, 80% women are spending about 5 hours of their time in unpaid domestic work against 1.5 hours spent by 25% men. Women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work. However the GOI has recorded this data but do not seem to have applied it in any schemes. In Tamil Nadu the government has implemented a scheme – Women Rights Scheme, which recognizes the unpaid work with a scheme of financial assistance of Rs. 1000 for women in “financially unstable households”. In other states governments have implemented the free bus travel bus schemes for women which again are in recognition of the unpaid work done by women. These schemes are restricted to states, the union government implements loan and subsidy based schemes for economic initiatives.

Water and Sanitation

Women carry the burden of providing water for the household. So walking miles to fetch water or going sleepless many hours in the night to access the piped water and water tankers which keep to those early or late hours in the night. If the water is made available in the day women will lose a day wages and often lose their only source of employment. The burden of providing water for the household adds to the stress of the women and has its consequence on the health, nutrition, child care and education, physical and mental well being, employment, livelihoods and self employment.

In India, the right to water and sanitation is recognized as a fundamental human right, drawing from the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, and is also recognized in international law through human rights treaties. There are several judicial interpretations that derive the right to water and sanitation from Article 21: the Right to Life. The Government of India has implemented several flagship schemes for water and sanitation like the Har Ghar Jal Yojana and the Swachh Barath Abiyan.

Indebtedness

While the Indian Constitution doesn't explicitly guarantee protection against "unjust indebtedness," Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) and the principle of "unjust enrichment" provide avenues for legal recourse against unfair practices related to debt and financial obligations. In India, protection against money lenders is primarily addressed through state-level legislation, such as the Tamil Nadu Money-Lenders Act, and the RBI's guidelines, which aim to prevent exploitation and ensure fair lending practices to regulate lending activities, including registration requirements for money lenders, interest rate ceilings, and procedures for dispute resolution.

Menstrual Issues

In India menstrual justice has always focussed predominantly on menstrual hygiene. It has not addressed the issues of stigma and restrictions on a menstruating person as impure, polluting and untouchable. There are a few judicial statements and orders that have addressed these issues but did not make the necessary impact to address the gender injustice. Menstrual issues have remained within the ambit of hygiene and products rather than ensure justice to the menstruator.

The Constitution in Article 51A (e) enjoins upon every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women and Article 21 Right to life can be interpreted to address the issues of menstrual untouchability. There are no specific laws or schemes for menstrual justice.

Domestic Violence

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005): This act provides legal protection for women against all forms of domestic violence, empowering them to seek legal redress.

One Stop Centre and Universalization of Women Helplines: Ministry of Women and Child Development is administering the two schemes from Nirbhaya Fund. The One Stop Centres (OSCs), popularly known as Sakhi Centres, aim to facilitate women affected by violence (including domestic violence). The Women Helpline (WHL) Scheme provides 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence. The services include a range of integrated services under one roof such as Police facilitation, medical aid, providing legal aid and legal counselling, psycho-social counselling, temporary shelter etc.

Safai Karamchari women and the communities, have been denied the fundamental rights, constitutional guarantees, laws, policies and schemes.

The only point to be made in conclusion are the words spoken by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

“

...however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot.

...The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depends are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics.”



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