



# ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES OF SAFAI KARAMCHARI WOMEN **MADHYA PRADESH**



**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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Madhya Pradesh is a state in central India. It is the second largest state in India next to Rajasthan. The state ranks 33 on the Human Development Index. The National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS5) for the years 2019 -2021 has the following data for Madhya Pradesh.

## FACTS OF THE NFHS 5

*(peoples Archive of Rural India. Anushka Mukherjee. 2021)*

1. In Madhya Pradesh, around 73 per cent of households surveyed were located in rural areas. Of all the households surveyed, 45 per cent lived in a pucca house and 98 per cent had electricity, the report notes.
2. As high as 26 per cent of households in Madhya Pradesh (33 per cent in rural areas and seven per cent in urban areas) did not have any sanitation facilities. Around 78.4 per cent households in the state had access to basic drinking water services but only 28 per cent had water piped into their homes.
3. The preschool attendance among children between the ages of 2-4 years was around 25 per cent in the state. School attendance among students between the ages of 6-14 years was 90 per cent and dropped to 55 per cent among students aged 15-17 years.
4. According to the report, 23 per cent of women in Madhya Pradesh between the ages of 20 to 24 years had married before the legal minimum age of 18 years.
5. The contraceptive prevalence rate among currently married women (aged 15-49 years) was 72 per cent, a substantial rise from the NFHS-4 record of 51.4 per cent. Around 66 per cent of the women surveyed used modern contraceptive methods.
6. The infant mortality rate was recorded to be around 41 deaths (before the age of one year) per 1,000 live births. This is a decrease from the NFHS-4 estimate of 51 deaths per 1,000 live births. The under-five mortality rate also reduced from around 65 deaths (before the age of five years) per 1,000 live births in NFHS-4 to 49 deaths per 1,000 live births in NFHS-5.

7. As per the report, almost 91 per cent of births, in the five years before the survey, took place in a health facility and the remaining nine per cent took place at home. A total of 89.3 per cent of births were delivered by a skilled provider – doctor, nurse, midwife, auxiliary nurse midwife or lady health visitor – and four per cent were delivered by a traditional birth attendant.
  8. According to the survey conducted, around 77 per cent of the children (aged 12-23 months) had received all the basic vaccinations against major diseases including tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio and measles. Only 3.6 per cent children in this age group had not received any vaccinations.
  9. Between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5, the percentage of children in Madhya Pradesh who were stunted (too short for their age) reduced from 42 to 36 per cent and the percentage of children who were wasted (too thin for their height) declined from 26 to 19 per cent. However, almost 73 per cent of the children (aged 6-59 months) in the state were anaemic.
  10. The report notes that 54.7 per cent of women and 22.5 per cent of men (aged 15-49 years) suffer from anaemia.
  11. Only 38 per cent of the households in Madhya Pradesh had any kind of health insurance or financing scheme that covered at least one member of the household.
  12. A high percentage of women (84.6 per cent) and men (91.4 per cent) in the state have heard of HIV/AIDS. However, only 18.7 per cent women and 26.2 per cent men had ‘comprehensive knowledge’ of it.
  13. Around 61 per cent of women between the ages of 15-24 years used hygienic methods of menstrual protection. Almost half (49.5 per cent) of the women used sanitary napkins, 11.5 per cent used locally prepared napkins, 1.2 per cent used tampons and 0.6 per cent used menstrual cups.
  14. During the 12 months preceding the survey, 83 per cent of men and 35 per cent of women (aged 15-49 years) were employed. Also, as per the findings, almost 75 per cent of the women in Madhya Pradesh have their own bank or savings accounts which they themselves use.
  15. In the state, around 28 per cent of women (aged 18 to 49 years) had experienced either physical or sexual violence, whereas five per cent reported having experienced both. Only 15 per cent of the women who had experienced such violence sought help.
- Safai Karmachari Andolan held face to face interviews using a questionnaire on the status of 203 safai karmachari women in Bhopal and Sagar to highlight the economic inequalities that the safai karmachari women were experiencing.

# THE ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES OF SAFAI KARMACHARI WOMEN MADHYA PRADESH

Safai Karmachari Andolan's economic inequality survey in Madhya Pradesh covered 203 women from the safai karmachari community in Bhopal and Sagar Districts. The results highlighted below point to structural inequalities based on caste and gender that continue to oppress them and maintain barriers that prevent their economic empowerment.

## ►► Educational levels are very low in the Safai Karmachari community

EDUCATION	
No education	54
Class 1 - 5	55
Class 6 - 10	63
Class 11 - 12	1
Above class 12	4
No education	54
Class 1 - 5	55
Class 6 - 10	63
Class 11 - 12	1
Above class 12	4

While the government has special educational schemes for the community, access to these entitlements is shockingly limited. The schemes are poorly implemented due to apathy and lack of political will. It shows the casteist attitude of withholding equal access to education to a historically excluded community.

Only 4 women have studied beyond Class 12, and nearly 40% (close to 80) have never been to school. Education for their children continues to be challenge.



## Scholarship for Children's education:

Availed of government support for children's education	17
Children availed Pre Matric Scholarship for children of scavenging community	5
Children availed Post Matric Scholarship for SC	1
Children availed any other Scholarship	3
Children secured admission in Special Residential School	3

Only 17 benefitted from government education schemes. Among the 203 surveyed only one member had managed to receive the Pre Matric Scholarship for Scavenging Committee and one had a child studying in the Special Residential School.

►► **Primary Occupation and Employment Status** - Of the 203 persons who participated in the survey, close to 163 (80%) said they were involved in some kind of sanitation work.

## OCCUPATION

Cleaning work	10
Cooking	1
Domestic worker	0
House maid	1
Housewife	17
Knitting	1
Not working	0
Sanitation worker	16
Scavenger	9
Sweeper	139
Tailor	7
Tuition teacher	0

Even those who said they did other work probably do this in addition to the sanitation work they do.

## SANITATION WORK

Cleaning of dry latrine	4
Sewage cleaning	3
Cleaning septic tank of latrine pit	0
Cleaning latrine in other households	11
Cleaning of public flush latrine	1
Cleaning open drain	0
Cleaning railway track	63
Cleaning open defecation	14

The 103 who said that they were specifically in sanitation work said they were involved in cleaning dry latrines, public latrines, sewer work, cleaning open drains, cleaning septic tanks, cleaning faeces from railway tracks, cleaning faeces from open defecation areas, cleaning latrines in others houses. Of the 103 persons who are involved this kind of work, 70 are cleaning faeces from railway tracks, pointing to gross violation of rights by the Railways.

## ►► Safai Karmacharis are Discriminated by the Caste Based Work by Descent

94% of the community members have been affected by manual scavenging for more than 2 generations and except for 66 women, the remaining have themselves been doing this work for more than four years.

### INTERGENERATIONAL OCCUPATION

More than three generations	34
Three generations	120
Two generations	36
One generation	1

The intergenerational and hereditary nature of this occupation is a typical feature of caste and untouchability manifested by the work by descent discrimination. It is obvious that the previous generations of the respondents have been engaged in manual scavenging of dry latrines.

### YEARS IN SANITATION WORK

More than 20 years	36
10 - 20 years	64
5 - 10 years	26
Below 5 years	66

Except for 22 (10%) who have permanent government employment, the employment status is precarious with all the others either in contractual or some form of temporary labour.

## Employment Status:

### Government Employment

Permanent	22
Temporary	29
Casual daily wage	2
Contract	16

### Private Employment

Permanent	0
Temporary	98
Casual daily wage	19
Contract	6
Self Employed	3

Manual scavenging is prohibited by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013. Madhya Pradesh has had several sewerage deaths over the last few years. 3 deaths in September 2021; 9 deaths in June 2023; 3 deaths in 2024. With only 10% under government employment all others are in unorganized sector unprotected by any labour laws for decent work and wages.

►► **Livelihood Skills:** 182 women said they have, the Safai Karamchari women have little or no other livelihood skills.

### LIVELIHOOD SKILLS FOR ALTERNATIVE OCCUPATION

Agriculture	2
Construction	0
Driving	3
Livestock rearing	7
Cooking	159
Tailoring	33
Midwife	7
Beautician	9
Computers	3
Teaching	9
Others	3

Tailoring and cooking can be viewed more as domestic skills rather than livelihood skills. Combined with the extremely low levels of education, they have practically no options for alternative occupation

►► **Income and Indebtedness: Assets and Liabilities:** Given the lack of education and alternative livelihood skills, the members of the community are forced to continue in the sanitation work earning a meagre amount.

### Monthly Income:

Less than 5000	84
5000 - 10000	72
10000 - 20000	9
Above 20000	18

Majority of the women - 158 of those surveyed – 78% have a monthly income of less than Rs. 10000/- a month that is lower than the state minimum wages standard. only 18 of them are earning more than Rs. 20,000/- a month.

### Debts:

Moneylender	16
Bank	59
Employer	2
Mortgaged gold or other articles	10
Others	12

The vulnerability of the community is further compounded by a lack of assets and accumulation of debt. 99 women said they had borrowed money either from the bank or from private money lenders.



## ►► Housing, Assets and Government Entitlements

Safai Karmacharis live in segregated bastis with very low standard of housing, water and sanitation. Around 67 claimed to own some asset. Of these, 33 claim to own a house but it is not certain if they have any legal ownership document.

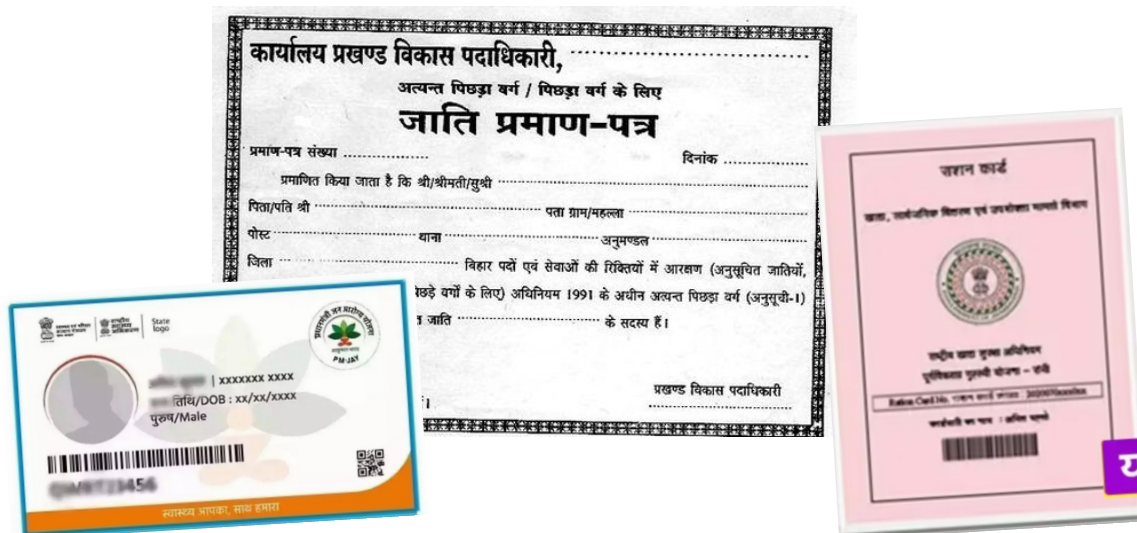
Living in own house	144
Living in rented house	16
Living in unauthorised housing	43
Hut	92
Tiled Roof	4
Thatch or wood roof	35
RCC house	63
Slab	7

169 (83%) are living in temporary structures for a house. Only 27 (13%) own any kind of assets. The safai karmacharis are excluded from all government housing, WASH and livelihood schemes.

### Assets/Property:

House	33
Animal	7
Vehicle	12
Livelihood asset - pushcart, sewing machine, shop, etc.	8
Animal and Vehicle	2
Animal and Livelihood asset	1
House and Livelihood asset	2
House and Agriculture land	1
House and Vehicle	1

►► Access to Government Entitlements: The survey revealed that the Safai Karmachari women have very limited access to government entitlements.



## ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT ENTITLEMENTS

Caste Certificate	21
Government rehabilitation benefit	2

## Ration Card:

BPL Card	56
Antyodaya Card	5
APL	81
Other	3

## Government Health Card:

Ayushman	79
ESI	8

Only 21 women have a caste certificate. Only 87 women had a government health card and just one woman said she had received government support for health issues. Only two women have benefitted from the Government Rehabilitation Program. Not having a caste certificate and having an above the poverty line card is an outright violation of the government schemes.

## ►► Caste And Gender Based Occupation And Discrimination:

94% respondents said they felt discriminated against because of their occupation and felt that it was only because of their caste that they were in the occupation of manual scavenging.

### CASTE AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Working as safai karmacharis because of caste	190
Working as safai karmacharis because they are women	196
Working as safai karmacharis both in parent's and in-law's place	167
No-one to take their place when they don't work	168
Living in segregated habitation because of caste	186
Living in segregated habitation because of occupation	188
Discriminated against because of occupation as manual scavenger	183
Children discriminated against because of parents' occupation as manual scavenger	166

An overwhelming majority of respondents (190) said they were safai karmacharis because of their caste and 196 said it was because they were women that they were in this work. Majority of those surveyed - 186 - are living in a segregated basti based on caste and specifically their occupation as safai karmacharis. They face discrimination on a regular basis. 183 women said that others look down on them because of the work they do and 166 women said their children are discriminated against in school because of the work they do. Given the lack of access to education and alternative occupation because of lack of skills and resources, they are forced to continue in the same work. 167 specifically said they do this work in both places. Further, 168 women said that even if they do not do this work due to whatever reason, no one else will.

## ►► Issues of Women

The Safai karmachari women in the community bear the burden of discrimination and violence stemming both from caste prejudice and patriarchy. They are forced to do this work no matter where they live - whether in their maternal home or their in-laws home.

### PROBLEMS WOMEN FACE

#### Health Issues

Respiratory	34
Stomach/Liver	16
Skin	7
Tuberculosis	1
Blindness	20
Menstrual problems	12
Anaemia	53
Blood Pressure	80
Diabetes	13
Others	10

#### Issues women face:

Domestic violence	58
Water and sanitation	88
Menstrual issues	39
Health issues	139
Indebtedness	67
Hunger	8
Domestic worker	167
Occupation	87
Others	1

All women had health issues. Not a single woman said that she was free from health problems. In addition to the low wages, bad working conditions and low level of nutrition women age earlier and are not able to live a full life. The high numbers of respiratory, gastro, anemia, blindness shows the impact of the work of cleaning latrines and exposure to harmful chemicals.

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 low education levels, lack of alternative livelihood skills, lack of assets, burden of debt, denial of entitlements, perpetuate their economic inequality that both stems from their caste based occupation and keeps them in the same occupation.

# Conclusion

The historical caste-based discrimination and exclusions has resulted in a cycle of intergenerational work by descent and segregation, trapping the safai karmachari community in an endless saga of poverty and deprivation. For long the Government of India has been making allocations for the education, dignified livelihoods, housing, WASH and many other schemes that have specifically targeted the safai Karmachari communities. But every year there has been underspend on the budgetary allocations resulting in revision to lower funding for the liberation and rehabilitation of the communities.

Most government programmes are based on eligibility with proof of identity and ownership of housing and assets to access support. The historically excluded communities have been disempowered systematically by denying these validating documents to prove eligibility as the survey shows that a large 90% did not have the community certificates and documents to prove eligibility. By using this criteria, the schemes have bypassed the community in the maze of bureaucratic systems, formats and mechanisms. This is like a conspiracy to maintain the untouchability of the caste system. The situation of the safai karmacharis is obvious and visible. It

does not need any sophisticated system to implement such schemes for a community victimized by the worst atrocity of manual scavenging. It only requires a committed and proactive political will which is blatantly lacking in the system either by design or oversight. This non consideration of the community's historical injustice is evident in the move of the government to remove the funding for the Self-employment scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers with the justification of bringing in infrastructure and machinery related schemes of the National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem; Jal Jeevan Mission and SBM which are universal and do not have any particular focus on empowering the safai karmachari communities with economic equality. The exclusion from education and decent work disempowers the community to assert and access inclusion in such universal schemes.

Only 10% of all Safai Karmacharis are in permanent government employment. All others are employed by private contractors or on daily wage casual employment. Noone was self-employed and this was after the government of India had spent thousands of crores on the scheme for the self-employment for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers for almost 25 years.



# The Recommendations

- ◆ Schemes with adequate budget allocation and utilization on addressing the historic injustice, discrimination and untouchability of manual scavenging of the safaikarmachari communities
- ◆ Bring back schemes for housing, education, health, dignified non-scavenging livelihoods and employment, social security and prevention of sewer deaths.
- ◆ Make our habitats fit for human living with adequate basic amenities of water, sanitation and dignified housing.
- ◆ Make special budget allocations for the equality and dignity of safaikarmachari communities and liberty from untouchability and discrimination
- ◆ Free water and sanitation facilities for every safaikarmachari household
- ◆ Adequate and easily accessible health and medical aid insurance schemes
- ◆ Employment in the government sector is a guarantee to socio-economic empowerment. When a woman has a permanent public sector employment she will not only empower herself but her entire family and community. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated that he measures the progress of a community by the progress of the women in that community. This is a powerful measure that will overturn and transform the caste and patriarchal equations.
- ◆ Implement the 2014 Supreme Court order fully and absolutely to prevent sewerage workers deaths in septic tanks and manholes.
- ◆ The District collector/ District magistrate should be responsible for all sewerage workers deaths that happen in their respective jurisdiction and to be named in the FIRs of sewerage deaths.
- ◆ Issue a white paper on the preventive measures taken to stop sewerage deaths
- ◆ A special session of parliament on the liberation and rehabilitation of persons engaged in manual scavenging and stop sewer deaths





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