WORKING CONDITION OF WOMEN SANITATION WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Despite various social policies since independence the situation of the Scheduled Castes in India is still improved to satisfactory level. The status of women sanitation workers or municipality sanitary workers is one of the good example for this. The working condition of women sanitation workers or municipality sanitary workers have remained virtually unchanged for over a century. Apart from the social atrocities that these workers face, they are exposed to certain health problems also. Against this background this working paper examines issues related to social, economic, health and occupational problems of women sanitation workers and reasons for working condition. The study also made an attempt to highlight their major issues and problems, which may require an urgent attention of the governmental authorities as well as society. The study suggests that there is a need to implement cultural specific divergent policy responses for the speedy upliftment and mainstreaming this community. This study has been conducted on women sanitation workers.[1]

KEYWORDS

This Study has been Conducted on Women Sanitation Workers.


INTRODUCTION

Human development, as a concept, will have a little value or significance until the human development levels of disadvantaged people, particularly of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are raised to the levels of those of the dominant classes. India has entered the Twelfth Plan period and recognized as economy with growing gaps where the spectacular successes made have not been shared by all equally. A major weakness in the economy is that the growth is not perceived as being sufficiently inclusive for many groups, especially SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities. Gender inequality also remains a pervasive problem and some of the structural changes taking place have an adverse effect on women. Both the Central and the State Governments have implemented policies directed at the socio-economic empowerment of these communities. But still the condition of these communities has not improved up to a satisfactory level.[2]

In India, Caste system has become one of the major impediments to the sustainable economic development of the country. An important feature of the India case system is that a particular occupation is associated with each caste. While higher castes enjoy wide range of choices in occupations, the unclean jobs got associated with lower castes in Indian traditional caste based society. For instance in early days of nineteenth century most of the scheduled caste people were performing unclean jobs which include manual scavenging, sweeping streets, cleaning drains and sewers, etc. and these people are called as Sanitary Workers or Safai Karamcharis in Northern India or pourakarmikas in Karnataka.[3]

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Apart from the social atrocities that these workers face, they are exposed to certain health problems also. At this juncture this working paper examines issues related to social, economic health and occupational problems of sanitation workers and reasons for social and economic exclusion. The study also made an attempt to highlight their major issues and problems, which may require an urgent attention of the governmental authorities as well as society.

Working Condition

The working conditions of the sanitation workers have remained virtually unchanged for over a century. Socioeconomic upliftment of women sanitation workers pertaining to their working condition and habitant, etc. are some of the areas of priorities which may need urgent attention. The respondents prefer to work only in one area without being transferred. This is the view of officials and a few comparators whom we have interviewed. By working in only one area for long, women sanitation workers gain familiarity with local households and clean their toilets or front road for additional incentives-cash or kind, which gives them an opportunity to earn a few bucks or rotis for their additional services, especially for cleaning the toilets. In addition they also receive food, clothing and monetary contribution on festive occasions, marriages and other special occasions from these patron households.

In some houses, they are also offered tea on the days they provide their services. If they are transferred from one area to another, they would stand to these benefits besides being forced to establish themselves in the new area. In fact such transfers are opposed through their leaders in the trade unions. Further, the present method of contractual work is believed to be the result of such protests by women sanitation workers. In addition, the government is about the huge expenditure it incurs on providing social security benefits to them in terms of pension, gratuity, etc. Therefore, contractual form of employment is preferred and the trend is gathering popularity. Also, women sanitation workers do not like the idea of working under a private contractor, who would be stricter in terms of extracting work.[4]
Training
During the time of joining to the duty and from time to time the corporation gives training related work, hence the question was asked about the training that was it useful for them or not. UGD (Underground drainage) section women sanitation workers (Workers do clean the toilet pits, etc.) are given same training and not for all the women sanitation workers.[5]

Safety Measures or Instruments
Corporation from time-to-time issues some safety instruments like gum boots, helmets and glove, but most women sanitation workers opine that they were not given any such instrument. The women sanitation working under contractors is worst sufferers. Women sanitation workers under contractors were provided only one shirt for a year, besides that they were not provided anything. It is the primary duty of the corporation/the government to see that these safety instrument are to be worn compulsorily before the women sanitation workers start their work and see that it should be worn till the end of their duty.

Reasons for Choosing the Job
In the study area not all the respondents inherited their jobs from their father, often the letters of retirement years ago, thus the children of women sanitation have to now compete with others (Both SC’s and Non-SC’s) for seeking employment in the municipality once reserved for them. Once the work got privatized they started working under ‘contractors,’ thereby putting the whole issue of occupational mobility in a quandary. In Mysore district also, we see similar kind of occupational status of women sanitation workers.

Working Hours
The nature of work being the same, women sanitation workers in both the districts have similar working hours. They begin their work at 6 am and continue to work till 3 pm with two intermissions for breakfast at 9-10 am and lunch between 12 noon to 1 pm; but in practice, this is not strictly followed, although there is no change in the time they start their work, i.e. at 6 am, but there is a general tendency among the workers to skip the lunch break so as to complete the work as soon as possible and get back home before 2 pm for lunch once and for all. They get pair of uniforms and an identity card from the municipality.

Distance Relative to Work Place
Working as a women sanitation worker is something that amounts to a lot of physical strain on the part of the worker concerned and is more so in the case of women given their additional domestic and child-care responsibilities. The work also involves lot of walking, sweeping streets and cleaning the toilets of patron houses. Women Sanitation Workers walk on an average 10km per day; this includes walking to their place of work, which is not always the same as their residential area. In fact today the younger generation hates or dislikes any link between their residential area and their place of work. This is true of the awakened youth, where most Women sanitation workers are relatively better off with sons well settled with government jobs and better housing and other amenities.

Educational level of their children is quite high as compared to the older generation. Jobs of their children are secular in nature. This new found status does not allow the younger generation to disclose to outsiders that they are the children of Women sanitation workers.

CONCLUSIONS
To improve the working condition of women sanitation workers all over India, there is a need to set an agenda for their overall transformation. The biggest problem sanitation workers employed in corporation is non-regularization even after more than 10 years of their service as daily wage/contract sanitation workers. Hence, it is recommended that the services of all Women sanitation workers should be regularized by creating additional supernumerary posts. There is a need to recognize and directly recruit persons as full time Women Sanitation Workers implementing all provisions under the various labor laws in the country.

Necessary safety instruments and equipments should be provided compulsorily to the discharge of their work in a dignified and in a safety manner. Technical upgradation and mechanism to help the persons carry out the work in a safe manner. In many places materials like gloves, masks, overcoats, etc. are not supplied to the workers and in some places even if they had been provided the workers were not using them. Government should give clear instructions to corporation to give safely instruments to all sanitation workers and awareness should be created among Women sanitation workers to handling wastes, especially hospital wastes should be provided to all the women sanitation workers at the time of enrolment/employment. The work of sanitation workers must be considered as hazardous work. Further the mindset of the society must be changed: (a) That sanitary work must be respected as noble profession. (b) It should be considered as essential work.

Separate rest rooms should be constructed in all working spots for the sanitary workers, especially for female sanitary workers for changing dresses, to have food and also taking rest for some time after the work. Handicraft training must be given to men, women and children of sanitary workers. This will definitely lead to maximum utilization of the human resources of these people and besides it provides additional income. It will slowly change their profession in the future days.

REFERENCES