

Sociology of Sanitation: A Study of Scavengers of Lucknow

Abstract

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Ruchi Awasthi

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Prof. Bibhuti Bhushan Malik

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
SCHOOL FOR AMBEDKAR STUDIES
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
(A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
VIDYA VIHAR RAEBARELI ROAD LUCKNOW- 226025
UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Scavenging is a caste created and inherited occupation, which is passed down, as an inheritance after one generation to the next generation. Scavenging is considered as a highly demeaning, impure and dishonoured occupation in India and scavengers who are involved in scavenging occupation often supposed to be permanently polluted and this notion governs their entire sphere of interaction. The scavengers relegated at the bottom of human society in India. Even the other scheduled castes are ranked by custom and public opinion in various levels of acceptability, but scavengers have been continuously relegated to the stigma of untouchable category, due to the unclean nature of their occupation connected with the insanitary services. Scavenging is equivalent to modern-day slavery.

This study attempts to examine empirically the status of sanitation workers of Lucknow city. The plight of scavengers who have to earn their livelihood in handling a work that is banned since many years due to depreciating nature. Scavenging remains a complicated socio-economic problem, which not only requires adequate funding, but also needs a radical change of mental outlook.

Manual scavengers are considered as third-grade persons and seen through the lens of their occupation, which exposes them to the nuisances of the caste hierarchy of India. Upper caste considers this job to be the obligation of lower caste people which further isolates these sections from the mainstream of the society. Also, scavengers live in deplorable conditions, suffer humiliation and deliberate discrimination. Studies on manual scavenging fail to address all problems related to work of scavenging in the current scenario. Privatization has changed the employment situation in sanitation occupation over some years. Subsequently, rather the sanitation work is the accountability of the government and the local bodies who in turn hired only some specific scheduled castes for the scavenging work through the customary rights system. In the public and private sector, most of the Safai Karmis who have been serving for more than twenty years are yet not permanent. They are lowly paid and deprived of any health care facilities and privileges in comparison to any other government employee working in fourth class. The common problems to all scavengers are the miserable conditions of work and unstructured employment. Due to the contractual nature of sanitation occupation, they are mostly vulnerable. Their wages are not fixed. The sanitation worker faced discrimination and

untouchability alike as faced by manual scavengers in past; which becomes their way of life.

Scavengers who work as cleaner in social space along with individual space have been denied dignity as human beings. There is a strong relationship between caste and occupation. This perpetual relationship forces the whole community to experience the psychological suffering of social exclusion and monetary woes. In India, scavenging is still performed manually and is a lowly paid work. Safety of those involved in this sector is not assured.

The other serious issue faced by sanitation workers is that those involved in sewer cleaning have to go inside the sewer lines for conducting cleaning work when machines fail to do the same. High risks are involved in sewerage work. When the workers enter the manhole they are exposed to poisonous gases, which cause serious health problems, and may lead to fatal diseases and even cause deaths. But no serious research has been done in this area which is a grave matter of concern. If we search any study on this serious issue we cannot find an appropriate mechanism and a single policy based study dedicated exclusively to resolve the issue of septic tank workers. This miserable condition of sewer worker can be assessed by the fact that the department of Indian Railway employs the largest number of manual scavengers on a contractual basis. In order to hide the fact that manual scavenging is still promoted by the government. Furthermore, the societal perception towards manual scavengers is disheartening and depressing. Political will is missing to improve the conditions of scavengers. No political party is taking up this section as their priority. Their welfare is left out from the developmental plan.

This research has tried to reveal the overall living and working condition of Sanitation worker. Under these circumstances it becomes pertinent to adjudge and study the comprehensive situation of the scavengers are engaged in sanitation services.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the socio-economic status of scavengers / sanitation workers of Lucknow.

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2. To explore occupational mobility among scavengers/ sanitation workers of Lucknow.
 3. To explore issues and problems faced by scavenger/ sanitation workers of Lucknow city to perform their work.
 4. To know the level of untouchability and discrimination prevalent among scavengers/sanitation workers because of their caste and occupational identity.
 5. To analyse occupation mobility and change among scavengers of Lucknow city.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on sets of theories which have been accepted as interrelated for the present purpose. In the first set of this research, the double theoretical constructions about social mobility and status congruence have been adopted to investigate social mobility among the scavengers within the caste system and class structure. For this purpose the theory of social mobility propounded by Lipset and Zetterberg has been used with needed modifications. We have adopted this approach because a comprehensive study of social mobility is possible through such an approach namely the dimension of occupation. In their theory of social mobility Lipset and Zetterberg have highlighted the dimensions of occupational and consumption positions, social class and power positions, as well as given a methodological note. They have also highlighted out causes and consequences of social mobility. For this purpose the theory of social mobility propounded by Lipset and Zetterberg has been used with needed modifications. We have relied on this approach because a comprehensive study of social mobility is possible through such an approach namely the dimension of occupation.

In the second set study has adopted the multidimensional approach of the methodological portion of this theory (i.e., inquiry of father's and son's earlier and present occupations). In this method, Lipset and Zetterberg have recommended an investigation keen on father's previous occupation along with his last one and son's present as well as previous occupations.

The present study mentioned that social mobility among scavengers is related to their status in both class and caste systems. For measuring this type of mobility present study also included Homan's theory of status congruence in theoretical framework. According to Homan's theory, if there are individuals who have their status factors for example diversity of work, office accountability, pay, seniority, and work autonomy in an organization 'in line', they claim their status congruity, and

those whose status factors are 'out of line' do not their status congruity. In Homan's terminology, 'in-lineness' may be a condition of relative and distributive justice for such individuals, whereas 'out-lineness' may lead to status anxiety. This theory adopted for measuring the congruence or similarity of achieved and ascribed statuses of scavengers who may be in-line in their achieved status but out of line in the ascribed one, although their out-in-line status would mean here status within the line in the traditional status hierarchy. In such a case they might face a problem of status anxiety. In the theory of reference group behaviour and relative deprivation, Merton and his associates have suggested that certain individuals or groups tend to adopt the behaviour (and attitudes) of other groups or individuals in order to achieve a similar social position (Merton & Rossi, 1968). But if they fail in their achievement, they suffer from relative deprivation, because they find others belonging to their group achieving success in similar situations. The above stated theory is centered actually on definite assumptions directly related to the study of social mobility in class based society. On the other hand a study of social mobility in India in general and among the scavengers in particular; mobility has to examine the mobility of the status in the caste system besides that in class structure.

The above mentioned theories adopted for the theoretical framework of this study have been linked up with one another. In the first set of frameworks the incidence of complete social mobility can properly be examined only when the changes in scavenger's caste status are taken into account along with changes in their class status. If there is change in scavenger's class status but no change in scavenger's caste status, at that time scavenger's status will be incongruent or different then social mobility incomplete. In such a situation it has been noticed that permanent sanitation worker's class status has been improved due to better payment from other sanitation workers but there is no change has been found in their caste status therefore they suffered from status anxiety. Thus, there is sufficient ground to link Lipset and Zetterberg theory of social mobility with Homans' theory of status congruence and status anxiety.

There are two prospects in Homans' theory of status congruence. If an individual finds his status incongruent, he will either develop status anxiety as mentioned above, or pay the cost of accepting his status inferiority. Through an exchange of social behaviour and face-to-face interaction he will learn the skills for

achieving his status congruence. In this sense, his superiors become his reference group. Thus, the second possibility of status congruence may be related to the theory of reference group/ individual behaviour adopted in our theoretical framework. Similarly, the theory of status congruence can be related to the theory of status identification, because those who have congruent status may prefer contra identification more than those whose status is incongruent, as mentioned above.

Conceptual Framework of the Study are as follows:

Sociology of Sanitation

It is an applied discipline. The subject matter of Sociology of Sanitation is mainly the study about social, physical, and physiological pathology with all its complexities. The main scope of sociology of sanitation is to make scientific study of health and hygiene with reference to the social organization and its association with structure and function.

Sanitation

The word ‘sanitation’ also refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal.”

Manual Scavengers

Manual Scavengers are people employed for manually carrying human excreta from public and private toilets. In this study, the term ‘Scavengers’ is synonymous with Safai Karmacharis engaged in all type of scavenging work.

Scavengers

In this study the word Sanitation Worker/ Scavengers/ Safai Karmchari, has been used interchangeably.

Manual Scavenging

In this study, the type of work considered as dirty is described as scavenging including sweeping, toilet cleaning, garbage cleaning, and medical leftover cleaning. Following research methodology has been used for systematic approach to collect and analysis of data in this research.

The universe of the present study is Lucknow city. The Lucknow city is the capital city of Uttar Pradesh state, also a large city in northern India. Lucknow is fourteenth most populous city. The sample of the study is drawn from scavenging caste a sub caste of scheduled caste. The respondents of this research are those sanitation workers who are working as Safai Karmchari involved in various types of scavenging

work including manhole cleaners who enter the manhole and deep sewers as a part of their duty.

The study covers 300 sanitation worker living in Lucknow city who are selected through non -probability sampling method. According to the nature of the study, non-probability sampling further adopted a purposive sampling Method to pick out respondents who are currently working as Safai Karmi. In the present study all respondents choose from those scavenging communities whose father/mother (previous generation) were working as manual scavengers/ sanitation workers since three generations and also presently respondents of the study are also engaged in scavenging work. For this reason purposive sampling is the most suitable method for the sampling.

Research Design

In this study a mixed methods approach has been used that involves collecting data, analysing and mixing quantitative e.g., surveys and qualitative e.g., focus upon groups interviews and case studies. In this Research, descriptive research design is used for explaining nature and magnitude of scavengers of Lucknow city.

In this study I have identified scavenging communities using census 2011. I have taken sample for the study from scheduled caste and scheduled sub-caste data using census 2011. I have extracted from census those sub castes who are working as scavengers from centuries.

After identifying scavenging communities at all India level; I used census for a sub-caste of scavenging communities who are found in Lucknow city. For this purpose I have visited various scavengers' areas and identified those Slums/Bustees where large numbers of scavenging communities are residing. After visiting various scavenging areas in Lucknow city, I have chosen five scavenger's Bustees using convenience sampling. For better representation, I have taken ten percent of the total population from each scavenger's bustee. Each respondent represented 1 household as a unit of the study. For instance in Lav Kush Nagar there are 1000 households in the locality out of them I have selected 100 respondents. Likewise in SDA colony there are a total 900 households out of them 90 respondents have taken for study. Similarly, Mohan Making road, Balmiki Nagar had 450 scavengers' households out of them 45 respondents have been taken. Balmiki Nagar Paper mill colony 350

scavengers' household exists out of them 35 respondents were taken as sample. Further there are 300 scavengers' households in Sagra Balmiki Busti 30 respondents were taken as sample.

In this study primary data has been mainly collected through the Interview Schedule. In this interview schedule structured as well as open-ended questions on various aspects of the problem was prepared. It was modified after its pretesting on 30 respondents. Therefore, the scavengers have been interviewed on the basis of structured schedules. From time to time research clarified enquiries, somewhere if required the respondents have been given an opening to meet their reaction that could be sensibly observed, the respondents throughout the interview observing the sentiment involved to their response the subject when they seems to be bore and expanses on which is maximum spoken that time researcher had to corroborate the responses gathered through discussions. Among the respondents (especially septic tank workers) were the possible important cases which need to be highlighted. The relevant information apart from responses to the questions listed in the interview schedule was extracted from them and noted down later. The secondary sources of data in this study included the reports, journals, books and other published material related to the area of study.

In this research, collected data has been analysed using statistical packages (SPSS) to tabulate and to construct frequency tabulations and percentage of data wherever required. And data presented systematically using excel graphs as per chapter plan with appropriate diagrams and figures.

Chapter two Sociology of Sanitation: A Review discusses several ideological and social aspects of scavenging in a comprehensive manner. The themes such as socio-economic status, working and living condition, prevalence of untouchability and social discrimination, level of social and occupational mobility, health status, and unsafe sewer work condition are discussed to draw as outline for this study. These selected works focus on their analysis mainly manual scavenging and manual scavengers. The chapter has reviewed several aspects of scavenging such as cultural, structural, and multi-dimensional approach to understand the magnitude and problems associated with scavenging and scavengers. Pioneer studies conducted by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak Prof. Nandu Ram's study on SC's and several other studies have been reviewed under this chapter systematically. Largely the review of literature

observes that there is a shortage of empirical studies on sanitation workers in India. Also, holistic studies are missing. Though these studies have basically based on secondary sources are meagre and insufficient to understand scavenging in holistic manner.

The chapter three Sociology of Sanitation and the Scavengers: A Profile has been given data based on socio-economic caste census obtained from the census 2011. Subsequently the next portion of the chapter based on important sections explaining various facts related to scavenging communities of Uttar Pradesh based on census 2011. In this section only four sub castes of scheduled caste identified as scavenging communities of Uttar Pradesh and their data based on caste, religion and literacy has been analysed. Afterwards a detailed and comprehensive account of scavengers of Lucknow has been discussed which is based on empirical observation through field work. The chapter had a detailed account of religion, caste, sub-caste, age, and educational level, monthly income of respondents followed by condition of housing, dwelling units and other civic amenities available for scavengers of Lucknow city.

Chapter four Sociology of Sanitation: Issues and Problems delineate issues and problems faced by scavengers of Lucknow. These issues are identified as discrimination, caste based occupation, hazardous work condition incomes discrepancy among scavengers. And basic problems confronted by the scavengers fell in the broad categories of health-related concerns, poverty, caste based occupation and discrimination, inbuilt stigma and prejudice for the scavenging work, precarious work conditions which are further compounded by the workers poor knowledge of existing laws and apathy from government agencies concerned. Against this background, the chapter also covers specific dimensions of the condition of the sewer workers such as nature of work, contract labour and its effect, and work-related safety and health issues. The chapter touches the entire aspect of scavengers' life. The chapter explores the linkage between caste and scavenging in present context. For this various case studies are recorded and written in precise manner to clear the real and authentic situation of the study area.

Chapter five Occupation Mobility and Change: An Overview focused on the inhuman occupation of scavenging being practiced by the scavengers; and community underneath and exposed to multiple evils all over India, scavengers and their community members have experienced some changes due to education, political awareness, change in occupation are discussed systematically. The chapter explores

approaches adopted by scavengers to protect themselves from stigma and describes how these approaches are temporal and incomplete. It also addresses the perception of scavenger's son education, social status for their children's social mobility. Social mobility has described among scavengers and its relationship with changes taking place among scavengers of Lucknow. In this section an effort was made at two levels to know the nature of status identification of the respondents. At one level, they were asked about their interaction with the non-scavenging community of other-scheduled castes. And their interaction pattern with the upper caste. They were asked about their surnames, their disclosure of caste identity, and their observation regarding mobility in different aspects of life in the society. This was followed by an enquiry about their class identification. At the second level, the nature of their behaviour towards their own castes and the reference individuals and or groups was inquired about. Finally, their perception of the status identification of their fathers, at both levels, was recorded. In further analysis first this chapter has discussed occupation followed by mobility, its various forms and its significance in scavenger's life and finally, focus on social mobility in the scavengers' context. Chapter covers scavengers opinion about doing sanitation work with the support of primary data collected from the field.

On the basis of the above analysis following conclusions are drawn:

- Scavengers of Lucknow city come to be worst state they have to face discrimination on numerous levels that pushes them into extremely vulnerable situation in a caste-ridden Indian society, each caste has associated through a certain preference and each low caste person associated with certain disability.
- Scavengers have been given the lowermost status in social order. As untouchable they have grieved humiliations all the way through the time without end.
- Instances of prohibition of Sanitation workers in kitchen and preferences for the cleaning the toilet again underline the ideology of untouchability practiced by the society correspondingly by scheduled caste against scavenger's community in a undecorated manner.
- Due to social discrimination scavengers are financially backward as well. Maximum scavengers families living in scarcity due to structural influences as near to the ground family income because of being tied up in low paid

sanitation works, and particular issues as male scavengers almost indulge in smoking, drinking

- Majority of scavengers are uneducated and hence educationally backward. Despite the schemes for free education, scavenger's children are not going to school. The educational backwardness has deprived many scavengers' families from taking advantage of reservation policy. Politically also, scavengers are low status as compared to other scheduled castes.
- Government has launched several welfare and rehabilitation schemes for scavengers and sweepers though starvation is not observable among scavengers of Lucknow but other phases such as access to civic amenities, education, health and nutrition is quite low among scavengers of Lucknow city. The bare fact is that scavengers do not fall within prescribed parameters of poverty, the observation of the field; the condition under which they live and endure their lives is the evidence of poverty.
- It has been observed that the biggest problem for scavengers is that they do not live in planned colonies approved by the government; and they are compelled to live in places which are the vicinity of dirty sewer or empty filthy places. These scavengers bustees are often as declared illegal by the government, the scavengers residing in these illegal bustees do not have any type of government identity card and due to the mandatory identity card address in most of government schemes they are unable to register themselves in various schemes and deprived of numerous advantages of their welfare.
- There have been some positive changes in scavengers' social status compared to their parents who are manual scavengers. The level of education has increased slightly in comparison to their parent's time. The fear of being discriminated has decreased and they have started coming in contact with other communities of the society. Now they have adopted the urban lifestyle. Since they have become conscious the benefits of education, they are providing education their children and improving the socio-economic status of their families. Though they have not succeeded in improving significantly their socio-economic status, their status is undoubtedly not better than that of the scheduled castes as a whole. But from this; it cannot be interpreted that all the members of these castes have improved their socio-economic status.

Major Findings of the study are as follows:

- More than 1/3 scavengers come below the 20 years to 50 years age group. This age set includes the largest number of sanitation workers. This is known from the statistic that maximum numbers of scavengers engage in sanitation work in Lucknow are a very productive age group; they are mature enough and experienced also to undertake sanitation activity in the city.
- 1/3 scavengers are not literate. Only ¼ of scavengers have primary level education. This has resulted in the main reason for their illiteracy are marginalization and suppression from mainstream society. In sanitation work there is no need for education so that generally scavengers are not aware towards attaining education. Scavengers' new generation also face untouchability and discrimination practices associated to their caste and parents work.
- More than 1/3 scavengers' family income is below 10000 rupees per month. The lack of income limits them to access services which are available in Lucknow as an urban area. The better location is liable for better educational and socioeconomic facilities, but the scavengers of Lucknow city are still lagging behind due to reasons specifically low income and discriminatory societal attitude towards them as they are least benefited by all these facilities. All magnitudes of the deficiency due to low income have created a kind of hindrance in scavenger's life.
- The standard of living mainly included access to healthcare facilities, quality and availability of education, literacy rates, life expectancy, and occurrences of disease gives the glimpse of the economic status of scavengers' life. 1/3 scavengers' houses were made of impermanent resources teen shed clay or brick floors. Availability of education for scavenger's children comparatively improved but quality of education which is available to them is very poor. Life expectancy among scavengers is low. Occurrences of disease are very frequent among them. All these important factors has been observed to know standard of living of scavengers after counting all the fact standard of living found very low among scavengers of Lucknow.
- More Than 1/3 scavengers working in Lucknow are employed by private organisations. The ratio of government Safai Karmi is only 13.3 percent. Contract sanitation workers who are appointed by contractors are extremely

exploited in terms of wages and not receiving any equipment which are necessary for sanitation such as masks, hand gloves and adequate quantity of soaps. The case study has been documented to know the awareness level of scavengers towards using safety gears to perform sanitation work is noticeably indication of exploitation of scavengers by their contractor.

- 94.3 percent of scavengers experience people keeping untouchability with them due to their caste. Most scavengers' family members never carry out sanitation work even though they are facing untouchability due to caste labels tagged with their scavengers' caste identities. Entitlement of Sanitation occupation with particular caste makes scavengers untouchable. Members of non-scavenging communities look them as inferior and there is deep inferiority complex among scavengers.
- Almost 99 percent of scavengers those work under sewer lines carry out their work without any protective gears. 1/3 scavengers those are appointed for sewage cleaning are not trained in proper manner. The situation is very risky in terms of safety of the sewer worker who works inside the Manhole. They are not provided any kind of protective gears and safety equipment by their employer. Information obtained from study in the form of case studies recorded during research both confirmed the fact that safety gears are not offered to sanitation workers to carry out hazardous sewer work.
- Maximum people of scavenging caste do not have any information about reservation policy and they are not aware of it. The Scavenger community has not benefited with the reservation policy due to unawareness and low educational level.
- 56.7 percent of scavengers' family members are still doing sanitation occupations. It seems certain cases; the scavengers have a preference to change away from the further lower ranks of jobs to sanitation occupations. Marginal mobility is visible that 30.3 percent scavengers are involved in non-scavenging occupations and they are entering those livelihoods which are not considered polluted; it seems there is some occupational change. Among the third generation of scavengers of Lucknow city peripheral mobility has been seen these days. New generation of scavenger's has started doing work as labour work or other types of self-employment.

Suggestions

- The study recommends primary schools might be located in a distance of 1 or ½ kilometre around their settlement. There have to be an Education Centre in their bustees to enhance the literacy levels among the senior persons because the senior members in the household can emphasize the significance of education to the earlier generations. There might be separate reservations for scavengers' children in all government and private schools and colleges. Awareness camps might be thought of on a systematic basis, for spreading the benefits of education with a provision of on the-spot admission.
- It is recommended that educated members of the scavengers' community should appoint in higher level posts inside the sanitation department so that they ensure an unbiased and non-discriminatory environment for sanitation workers.
- To rehabilitate the sanitation workers/scavengers in a significant manner, it is very important bring to an end of unclean environments in which scavengers forced to live. Their colonies would not establish distance generally in the fringes of a city. The sanitation worker might be provided low-priced houses in general societies; this determination creates to their integration and assimilation with the larger society.
- Scavengers are inclined to numerous life threatening ailments. The risk section in their work is multiple as related to the other works. In reference to this danger, the scavengers might be paid an extra amount as allowance along with free treatment at the government hospitals as well as private hospital in case of any accident. The study recommends free of cost health care camps might be structured at monthly intervals in their locality for suitable diagnosis and treatment of diseases.
- The study recommended the government should impose proper setup for contract workers and daily wages workers so that they cannot be exploited by their contractor as well as private employers. All scavengers either they permanent or contract daily wages employee should provide minimum wage by their employer; and follow the rules of The Minimum Wages Act primarily to safeguard the interest of the sanitation workers.
- The study recommended government agencies should formulate special rules and regulations for safe use and maintenance of septic tanks. It is the government liability to implement an awareness programme for scavengers to all necessary precautions might be taken by septic tank worker to avoid themselves and others

from getting imprisoned inside the septic tanks. Proper precautions might be taken before entering septic tanks and all scavengers must be educated about the health hazards of sewer gases.

- The study recommended that a direction might be issued to all the authorities to include a section in the agreement with the contractor that the provision of the Manual Scavenging Act, 2013 shall be applicable. They will pay compensation of rupees 10, 00000 as ordered by the Supreme Court in the sewer death cases. And also ensure that no mediator is misusing the departed scavengers' family in any way. Death in a septic tank is a serious occupational risk confronted by sanitation workers. Several deaths in sewer even Lucknow city are unreported as these scavengers generally work on contract basis. There might be administrative authority to make spot official visits to such cases.

- The sanitation worker who works under the sewer, the moment they get hired even though on a contract system their accidental insurance might be mandatory processed. Several times they get injured and fatal must be provided with accidental insurance.