Introduction

Manual scavenging, a dehumanizing practice, those engaged in this occupation often belong to scheduled caste communities. Specifically, the scheduled caste communities, who are stratified in the lowest ladder of the social order, are frequently dragged on to do manual scavenging.

Manual scavenging could simply be defined as manual removal of excreta (night soil) from "dry toilets", i.e., toilet without the modern flush system, especially without the water seal (RashtriyaGarimaAbhiyan2011, cited in Siddaramu, 2013).

The existing laws have provisioned for closure of dry latrines but there are various forms of manual scavenging practices that are not exposed in the Acts as occupationally hazardous and for putting an end to such practices. Despite Government rehabilitation schemes, millions of Dalits, most of them are women are forced to continue the intolerable manual scavenging. This practice observed from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Those involved in manual scavenging due to the prevailing of dry latrines not only suffer from the inhuman pain of scavenging human faeces but also go through the agonizing pain and humiliation of discrimination, occupational health hazards of peril, untouchability and social exclusion. (Meenakshisundaram, 2012)

The caste system is historically maintained by the caste structure in India—a structure in which Dalits are kept at the bottom of the social order and with the nature of no climbing of the ladder is possible (Irudayam, Aloysius, Mangubhai, & Lee,
The distribution of caste based work is still linked with intersectional identities of caste, class, dirt work and gender in the age of technology; women of these sub-Dalit castes are mostly engaged in cleaning dry latrines while their male counterparts are employed in government offices like Municipality Councils or hospitals to perform menial jobs such as cleaning toilets, collecting hospital wastes and collecting human extract from manholes. (Pachouri, 2008)

Without significant changes in mindset of villagers from all of the various castes, demand for the kinds of sanitation initiatives that would eliminate the practice of manual scavenging will remain low. In number of villages people are used to defecating in the open. While this poses many problems in terms of health, privacy and safety, particularly for women, the people controlling the resources, typically men, do not understand the importance of sanitation and hygiene and are therefore not willing to invest in improvements (Arpels & et al., 2011).

Bezwarda Wilson, the National Convenor of the Safai Karamchari Andolan, an organisation working for eradication of manual scavenging, pointed out that the Supreme Court postponed his organisation’s case dozens of times over many years; IAS officers declared that there was no manual scavenging in their districts, ignoring evidence to the contrary (Narayanan, 2013). Manual scavenging, the obnoxious and degrading occupation, have made the manual scavengers themselves despise but feel hapless and entrenched into doing (Sankaran, 2008, p.131). The manual scavengers who have not tasted the educational benefits feel that it is their destiny to do manual scavenging. On the otherside, the community at large, who look after their own family life, have a stereotype image that the oppressed communities are destined to do manual scavenging.
This study attempted to observe the socio-economic condition of the manual scavengers. Chiefly, the study focuses on the various types of manual scavenging practices the manual scavengers are engaged and analyses on the working conditions, behaviour patterns, attitude of the society towards the manual scavengers and the level of awareness among the manual scavengers on the entitled laws.

A quite number of literature sources on manual scavenging were carried out by the organisations working for the eradication of the manual scavenging. Observing the gap, this study tries to fill up it by exposing the life pattern of the manual scavengers and how they are being affected in various forms. This research work has been carried out in broader discipline of social work with collection and compendium of varied range of reviews from interrelated disciplines.

The critical theory emphasizes on human emancipation from domination and oppression. In the case of manual scavengers, they are in a forced state of engaging in caste-based occupation that degrades their socio-economic and health status. Thus, they need to be liberated from the manual scavenging practices and have a better employment in an alternative sector with better salary, self-esteem and dignity.

The researcher would like to find out the socio-economic status of the manual scavengers of Tirunelveli district, the various forms of manual scavenging they are engaged, the working conditions of the manual scavengers, health condition, behaviour pattern, attitude of the society, forced labour practices and social discrimination in the living area.
General Objective

- To study various manual scavenging practices that suppress the life standards of the manual scavengers in Tamil Nadu.

Specific Objectives

- To observe the socioeconomic status of the manual scavengers.
- To find out the working conditions of the scavenging practices and related occupation and health hazardous.
- To discover the behaviour patterns of the manual scavengers that effected due to scavenging practices.
- To assess the status of the children of the manual scavengers.
- To find out the attitude of the society toward manual scavengers.
- To find out the level of forced labour in the living areas of the manual scavengers.
- To determine the level of social discrimination in the living areas of the manual scavengers.
- To analyse the level of awareness among the manual scavengers on entitled laws.
- To enumerate viable strategies for enabling the manual scavengers to have better life standards with economy, better health and dignity.
Hypothesis

1. There is no mean difference between extent of working condition and personal and economic variables.
2. There is no mean difference between level of forced and menial labour practices and personal and economic variables.
3. There is no mean difference between level of discrimination in public places and personal and economic variables.
4. There is no mean difference between level of preclusion of development aspects and personal and economic variables.
5. There is no mean difference between level of awareness on entitled laws and personal and economic variables.
6. There is no mean difference between extent of working condition and occupational related variables.
7. There is no mean difference between level of discrimination in public places and occupational related variables.
8. There is no mean difference between level of prevention of dignity and self-respect and occupational related variables.
9. There is no mean difference between level of awareness on entitled laws and occupational related variables.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was employed in this study to describe the socially stratified communities in the lowest ladder being forcibly engaged in manual scavenging practices. The study delineates about the manual scavengers engaged in
various forms of scavenging practices and its related occupational and health hazards, and to analyse whether the manual scavengers are treated in respect and dignity in the society. Using snowball sampling, the manual scavengers in various occupations i.e more than 9 manual scavenging practices were identified. The total samples were 400. Interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the manual scavengers in Tirunelveli district.

**Major Findings of the Study**

The major outcomes of the study are listed below.

**Personal Background**

More than half of the manual scavengers (54.3%) are males and a considerable proportion of the manual scavengers are females (45.8%). This data disagrees with the findings of the Baker, et al., (2008) that most manual scavengers are female, but their male relatives suffer from the same discrimination. The statement of the Baker, et al (2008) is true in relevance to the data across the country. But in South Tamil Nadu it could be inferred that males are more as manual scavengers, this statement agrees in line with the outcomes of Premchander, et al., (2013), that men are employed in cleaning of septic tanks or engaged to enter into manholes for cleaning the sewer system.

Most manual scavengers (57.8%) are in the early middle age group of 33 years to 45 years. A significant proportion of the manual scavengers (58%) have not crossed the middle school education. A large majority of the manual scavengers (89.8%) are married.
Various Forms of Manual Scavenging Practices

A considerable proportion of the manual scavengers (24.7%) are engaged in cleaning the drainage, next 21.1 percent of the manual scavengers in cleaning the toilets, 17 percent in cleaning the human excreta in the streets, 11.3 percent in removing the human and animal carcass, 10.8 percent in dumping the wastages in the lorries, 8.5 percent in cleaning the septic tank, 2.6 percent in disposing the biomedical wastages, 1.3 percent of the manual scavengers are engaged in removing the excreta from the railway tracks and 2.4 percent in other type of scavenging practices.

Half of the manual scavengers as also engaged in removing the wastages, in addition to their regular scavenging occupation. Around two fifth of the manual scavengers are employed as government workers. A considerable proportion of the respondents (33.5%) are employed as permanent workers. About 32 percent of the respondents are contract workers. A considerable proportion of the respondents (43.5%) have family members as substitute workers in the scavenging work.

Nearly three fifth of the manual scavengers are first generation workers. The remaining two fifth of the manual scavengers are second and third or previous generation engaged in the scavenging practice shows their less human life.

Family Data

The total number of family members is 1603. The mean family size is 4.01. It is noticeable that the total number of school dropouts in the families of the manual scavengers is 67 and the total number of child labour in the families of the manual scavengers is 20.
Education and Economic Details of the Families

A large majority of the manual scavengers (91.3%) do not have any family member with graduation. Nearly three fifth of the manual scavengers do not have own house. Nearly two fifth of the manual scavengers have housing land in forest area, which signifies that the manuals scavengers based on their caste based occupation they have isolated from the mainstream society. The income range is below Rs.100000 for 92.2% of the manual scavengers. More than 85% of the manual scavengers neither have wet land nor dry land. A distinct proportion of the manual scavengers (78.5%) are trapped in debt, this datum fall in line with the outcome projected by EveryChild (2010).

Working Conditions

A quite number of the manual scavengers (45.3%) work between 6 hours and 8 hours in scavenging occupation. Around three tenth of the manual scavengers work between 8-10 hours a day. Though working hours of manual scavengers is lesser than the manual scavengers of north India who work between 11 hours to 15 hours a day as reported by Prasad(2005), but most of the manual scavengers in the study area (91.75%) start the work around 5 am. A considerable proportion of the manual scavengers (43.8%) have spouse engaged in scavenging occupation.

Many scavengers (32%) feel that engaging in scavenging occupation is their fate. More than half of the interviewed manual scavengers (53.5%) are not provided with safety equipments. A greater majority of the manual scavengers (90.5%) are not provided separate room for changing the dressesimplies the least importance given to these workers.
Nearly two fifth of the manual scavengers are forced to work than the fixed work hours. About 28.3 percent of the scavengers expose that they are forced to work when not in a better health. Around two fifth of the manual scavengers have injuries during scavenging. Of whom a vast majority of them (92.7%) have not given any compensation for their injuries from the employers reflecting the total neglect of these workers.

Most of them (83.2%) have health problems due to scavenging practice. About 7 percent of the manual scavengers expose that the co-workers died during scavenging work. Most respondents (52%) are facing ill-treatment in the hands of their employers shows an irony that life risk on one side and abuse on the other for the ill – fated group.

**Behaviour Pattern**

More than half of the manual scavengers are alcoholic. Most of the manual scavengers (72.2%) are force to start consuming alcohol after entering into scavenging occupation. Around three fifth of the manual scavengers reveal that their co-workers are alcoholic. This result is consensus with the outcome of Ziyauddin and Sanghmitra (2005) that most Dalits engaged in ‘special occupations’ explore alternatives to cope with their working conditions. Lifestyle habits such as tobacco chewing, paan chewing and consumption of alcohol are encouraged, developed and continued. These habits shall be understood along with the physical, social, economical, and psychological complication in addition to their occupational hazards.
Status of the Children of the Manual Scavengers

Of the 142 respondents having children, 23% of them express that their children are not engaged in cleaning the school toilets, but 12.5% of the respondents state that their children are engaged in cleaning the school toilets. The latter result agrees with the finding of Center for Human Rights and Social Justice (2010) that Dalit children are forced to clean classrooms, offices, toilets, and urinals on a regular basis.

Attitude of the Society towards Manual Scavengers

A large majority of the scavengers (99.8%) have no respect for their scavenging occupation from other caste communities. This statement agrees in line with the outcome projected by Prasad (2005) that the scavengers had no status in society because of the nature of work and their belonging to scheduled caste groups.

Forced Labour and Menial Practices in the Living Area of the Manual Scavengers

Most manual scavengers (59.8%) express that they or their family members performed funeral rites of the deceased body of the upper castes. Of the 400 manual scavengers, 36.5% of them state that they or their family members cleaned the graveyard path of the upper castes. A majority of the manual scavengers (67.8%) articulate that they or their family members cleaned the streets of the upper castes during festival times.
Of the 400 manual scavengers, 96 manual scavengers convey that they or their family members mended the slippers. More than half of the respondents state that they or their family members cleaned the animal carcass.

**Discrimination faced by the Manual Scavengers in Public Places**

More than half of the respondents are not allowed to take water from common tops in their living areas. A majority of the respondents (71.7%) are not allowed to sit in public bus stand in their living areas. Of the 400 respondents, 67.8% of them are not allowed to drink water in cup.

**Prevention of Dignity and Self-Respect**

More than three fourth of the respondents express that they or their family members are not allowed to wear town on shoulder and to sit along with the upper castes. More than 50 per cent of the respondents are not allowed to wear cap after shaving the head, to own a motor cycle, to drive cycle or motor cycle in the streets of upper castes and to take bath in common lake/pond. Around two fifth of the respondents state that they or their family members are not allowed to enter into upper caste areas with slippers.

**Preclusion in Development Aspects**

More than half of the respondents disclose that they and their family members are scolded malignly in caste name by the upper castes. Around one fifth of the respondents experienced the suppression from the upper castes for them or their family members going for government posts other than scavenging.
Extent of Awareness on Entitled Laws

A sizeable proportion of the manual scavengers (47.8%) are not aware on Employment of Manual Scavenging and Abolition of Dry Latrines Act, 1993. A quite number of the manual scavengers (23.8%) are not aware about the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

Weighted Scores of the Major Items

Of the 400 respondents, 64% of them have worse working condition in their manual scavenging employment, 22.3% of them have worst working condition. Most of them (64%) have experienced higher level of forced and menial labour practices. A majority of the respondents (68%) are discriminated in public places to a higher level. Of the 400 respondents, 273 respondents (58%) have disrespect by the upper castes to a higher extent.

Significant of Mean Difference

- There is a significant mean difference between the extent of working condition of the respondents and the personal and economic variables (age group, own house, yearly income and land entitlements).
- There is a significant mean difference between the age group of the respondents and the level of forced and menial labour practices.
- There is a significant mean difference between the level of discrimination faced by the respondents in public places and gender of the respondents.
o There is a significant mean difference between the level of prevention of dignity and self-respect and the age group of the respondents.

o There is a significant mean difference between the level of preclusion of development aspects and the age group of the respondents.

o There is a significant mean difference between the extent of awareness among the respondents on entitled laws and the marital status of the respondents.

o There is a significant mean difference between the extent of working condition of the respondents and the respondents’ generation involved in scavenging occupation.

o There is a significant mean difference between the extent of working condition of the respondents and the alcoholic habits of the respondents.

o There is a significant mean difference between employment type of the respondents and the level of discrimination faced by the respondents in public places.

o There is a significant mean difference between alcoholics among the respondents and the level of prevention of dignity and self-respect.

o There is a significant mean difference between the level of awareness among the respondents on entitled laws and the employment type of the respondents.
Suggestions

The Government has to take effective measures in the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013. Eradicating the complete practice of manual scavenging along with demolition/conversion of all dry toilets, construction of dry latrines and individual dry latrines need to be one of the utmost priorities of the Government. Technology and mechanization need to be in place for cleaning the underground drainages and railway train toilets. The Civil Society Organisations or Community Based Organisations need to mobilise and organise the manual scavengers across the State to ensure strict implementation of all the legal provisions.

Conclusion

Manual scavenging practices exist in many forms and the people belonging to scheduled caste communities are engaged in such practices. The Arunthathiyars who are engaged in manual scavenging, do not have alternative employment to renounce the scavenging practices. Though in the modern times, the occupational mobility has increased for the rural caste suppressed masses to find out alternative employment to have dignified life. But less education, controlled occupation mobility and restricted association of the focused manual scavengers and the poor inertia of law to abolish the manual scavenging have pushed them to continue in the manual scavenging practices.