CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Title of the Study

Social outrage of manual scavenging in Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu.

General Introduction

Our battle is not for wealth or power.

It is a battle for freedom.

It is the battle of reclamation of Human Personality

- Dr. BhimaRaoAmbedkar

Manual scavenging, a dehumanizing practice, though denied of often nonexistence - still prevailing in various part of the states of India in general and TamilNadu in particular. Those engaged in this occupation often belong to Dalit of Dalits - in major propositions and also other scheduled caste communities to a minimum extent. Specifically, the scheduled caste communities, who are stratified in the lowest ladder of the social order, are frequently dragged on to perform manual scavenging. They are not in a state to overcome the social tyranny of the conventionally forced employment on them; thus for the purpose of survival they are forced into - with no other alternative left out; than to engage in manual scavenging.

Manual Scavenging is the collection of human and animal excreta using brooms and small tin plates in baskets and which is carried on the head in order to dispose them away from the living place normally to a longer distance. The allocation of labour on the basis of caste is one of the fundamental tenets of the Hindu caste system. Within this system scheduled castes have been assigned tasks and occupations
which are polluting and dirty and should not be done by other caste communities - such as sweeping, disposal of dead animals and making leather chapels and few other work using skin of the dead animals as the raw material. (Skin is once upon a time considered as a material neglected to be handled by the scheduled caste communities). By reason of their birth, scheduled castes are considered to be "polluted." (Hutton, J. H.1963). The removal of human and animal waste by members of the "sweeper" community is allocated to them and strictly enforced upon them. (United Nations Commission on Human Rights 2002, cited in Siddaramu, 2013). 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 has been 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)

Patnaik(cited in Srivastava, 1997) stated that according to the sacred scriptures and other literatures, scavenging, particularly disposal of night soil by a particular caste or castes of Indian society, has been in existence since the outset of the
civilization. One of the fifteen duties of the slaves quoted in the *NaradiyaSamhita*, was to dispose of human excreta. Moreover, Patnaik referred the scriptures of *VajasaneyiSamhiti* that the communities Chandals and Paulkasa are slaves meant for the disposal of night soil. It is also mooted that the advent of Muslim invaders in India, paved way for creation of sweeping and scavenging as a formal profession. Then, during the British period for setting up army cantonments and municipalities, a large number of people were required for scavenging (Srivastava, 1997).

The British introduced their thunder boxes owing to the availability of the cheap labour. In the army tourage the *Bangis* were engaged. Till the development of municipalities and towns by the Britishers, the toilets of these days, were not the norm. The Indian middle classes adopted the sahibs' toilets and the chamber pots began to be used in westernized Indian homes. Small towns that had developed sewage system did not require *Bangis*. (Thekaekara, 1999)

Malkani (cited in Thekaekara, 1999) with the support of assorted academics stated that the today's scavengers are descendants of captives of war forced into night soil cleaning as prisoners. After the captives were released, they remained polluted and ostracised by their fellow caste people. They thus formed a separate caste of *Bhangis* who were renamed Mehtars by Akbar.

Akhter (2012) exposed that after the partition and despite Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against untouchability and experiments with clean and new designs of toilets, the Indian or Pakistan political leadership and elite made no attempt to stop this dehumanizing work or create alternative employment. Pakistan refused to allow the untouchables involved in safai work to move to India. While the Indian government tried to secure safe passage to India for the Hindus in Pakistan, there was
no concern about the 'Dalit Hindus' left behind in Pakistan or not that a better life awaited them in independent India. Dr BR Ambedkar raised this issue in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in December 1947. However, nothing tangible in terms of a social or economic shift in their lives occurred during the Nehruvian era.

Under the caste system there are mainly four castes while castes are divided in sub-castes. Dalit caste also has many sub-castes such as Sweeper, Basor, 'Bhangi', Balmiki and traditionally they engaged in manual scavenging in India. They are the person in the government offices called sweeper or Safai Karamchari (SK). Safai Karmchari Andolan (SKA) - is a National Social movement in India; struggling to eradicate the practice of manual scavenging and fighting for equality, dignity of the manual scavenging communitys (Pachouri, 2008).

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, 2006). 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)

Nakkeeran (2003) argued that wage gaps reflect the hierarchies between the ideological valuations of male and female work. An aura of importance around men's work is constructed and accordingly women are constantly pushed to do relatively more monotonous, arduous, unrecognised and underpaid work.
Due to the ubiquitous practice of open defecation, exposed wastewater running through the village streets, and lack of understanding about germ theory and hygiene, people are exposed to the risk of health consequences. Manual scavengers, however, face a dual risk of exposure to harmful pathogens in both their environment and. Scavengers are consistently exposed to human and animal waste with minimal or no protective equipment. Anecdotal evidence that there were no safe equipment(s) available and even if it were available many scavengers prefer not using the protective gear, due to issues of comfort and stigma (Arpels, Bui, Guha, Rosenberg, Sarin, & Sudhalkar, 2011).

Without significant changes in mindset of people from all of the various castes, demand for the kinds of sanitation initiatives that would eliminate the practice of manual scavenging will remain low. Specifically 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 (there have been number of instances where women or girls who use open defacation are sexually assuauted and molested – To quote a very recent phenomenon that happened in Utter pradesh where two minor girls were raped while they went for open defaction, (The Hindu, 15 June 2014)). 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).

The failure of safety and health carelessness by the employers or contractors has resulted in more than 100 scavenging workers die every year due to inhalation of toxic gases or drowning in excrement (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006). Kamdar Swasthya Suraksha Mandal filed a public interest litigation claiming that
there were no compensations to the surviving families of the manual scavengers who are killed cleaning sewers (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The problems pertaining to manual scavenging have not been alleviated by the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 or its rehabilitative measures (Human Rights Watch, 2007, p.85).

Mander (2013) exposed that this law was weak in letter and poorly implemented. Governments themselves flouted the law with impunity by operating public dry latrines and employing manual scavengers to clean these. They falsely reported full abolition of manual scavenging, but the practice still exist, hitherto none of the persecutors (employers or contractors) has been punished under the law. If this humiliating practice has declined, it is because organisations of manual scavengers themselves have bravely battled the practice, publicly burning baskets that they deployed to carry human excreta on their heads, and demolishing dry latrines.

The Supreme Court pulled up the Centre for its failure to enact a law to ban manual scavenging despite giving assurances many times earlier that it would soon amend the relevant Act (The Times of India, 2013). Sankaran (2008) argued that the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993 has conferred no powers at all to the Commission except that of calling for information, thus reducing the Commission to an advisory bereft of any real authority. On 18th September 2013, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 was passed on. It has been critiqued that this law doesn’t eliminate the manual scavenging practices. The explanation in the Act under section 2 (1) (b) has legitimized manual scavenging by stating that it can be done by using protective gears and other devices. Manual scavenging must be prohibited in any form (Action Aid, 2013).
Kuksal (2011) argued that while a parliamentary law bans the manual scavenging and the government approves project to wean the underprivileged section away from this dehumanising occupation, cruel caste apartheid and brutalising poverty perpetuate the practice. The neo-liberal economic policies restrict alternative possibilities of having a dignified livelihood.

Safai Karamchari Andolan – a National organisation working for the eradication of manual scavenging, pointed out that the Supreme Court postponed his organisation’s case dozens of times over many years; many collectors declared that it 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.

An account for Tamilnadu scenario need to included in a part of two – few studies, patten, comments invalued, consiquence – using – to be coverd. With these back droup, an empirical attempt is made think descriptive research design was employed to portray the stratified communities which are forcibly engaged in manual scavenging practices. The various forms of scavenging practices; related occupation; health hazards, the decorum maintained to respect the human dignity and values of those engaged in manual scavenging practices forms are the preminent other areas coverd in this research the study was conducted in Tirunelveli district of
Tamil Nadu, India. The number of manual scavengers interviewed was 400, which was selected from the Universe of the total manual scavengers in Tirunelveli Corporation. There are various types of manual scavenging practices in Tirunelveli Corporation, thus the study area was focused within the Corporation limits. Snowball sampling method was employed in the selection of the samples that covered manual scavengers engaged in various types of manual scavenging practices. The fields of study were Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporation in Tirunelveli district.

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 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.

**Statement of the Problem**

Scavenging is a humiliating and undignified practice of removing the human excreta and intolerable wastages from streets, roads, railway lines, hospitals, common toilets, etc. Often, the scheduled castes are pulled into the manual scavenging practices. Those without economy and education to liberate themselves from the atrocities of manual scavenging, have left out with no option than to do engage in scavenging. Sadangi (2008) asserted that manual scavengers (known as Bhangis or
Valmikis, among other caste names) are compelled to undertake their task, often being prevented from taking any other job.

They are the worst victims of untouchability as they considered as unclean, impure and placed at the lowest level of the caste hierarchy. Bezwada (cited in United Nations Development Programme, 2012) expressed that manual scavenging is a caste, human indignity and a gender problem which many times is treated as a sanitation issue. Chaudhary (cited in Kumar & Varghese, 2005) expressed that the so-called high caste people have inhibition to introduce the scavengers to their friends' circles and the children are cautioned not to socialise with the scavengers' children.

The National Advisory Council (2010) expressed the official failure to eradicate manual scavenging, the most degrading surviving practice of the untouchability in the country. This involves mostly women, but also men and even children - gathering human excreta from individual or community dry toilets with bare hands, brooms or metal scrapers into wicker baskets or buckets and then carrying this on their heads, shoulders or against their hips into dumping sites or water bodies which is normally far away from the residences. Others are similarly employed to clear, carry and dispose excreta from sewers, septic tanks, drains into which excreta flows and railway lines.

Kumar and Varghese (2005) asserted that the scheduled castes are engaged in the unclean occupations and other unskilled jobs. The condition of the scavengers is very deplorable and they are the most vulnerable section among the scheduled castes. The working condition of the scavengers is very poor and the remuneration is also very low. Among the manual scavengers, the women are the most exploited (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Gupta (2007) argued that the manual scavenging as a caste
based occupation, in which scheduled castes are fully engaged on - (other castes are excepted and very very rare scene). There are different caste names for the manual scavengers across the country, such as the Bhangis in Gujarat, the Pakhis in Andhra Pradesh and the Sakkiliars, Pagadai, Arunthathiyars, Mathri, Mathiga, Thotti, Adi-Andhra in Tamil Nadu. Even though the scavenging practice is outlawed, the practice continues in most States.

The scavenging castes are known by different names in different States like Bhangi, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mehtar, Mazhabi, Lal Begi, Halalkhor etc. in northern India; Mukhiyar, thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli etc. in Southern India; Mehtar, Bhangias, Halakhor, Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Barvashia, Metariya, Jamphoda and Mmela etc. in Western and Central India. In 1971 censes some of them started returning as Adi Dharmi, Adi Dravida, Adi Karnataka and Adi Andhra. Hutton, in 1931 estimated the population of various scavenging castes to the extent of 20 lakhs in the undivided India. After independence, the Census in 1961 estimated their population to be 8.2 lakhs. The number of Scavengers who were engaged in the removal of night-soil was 3,86,725 which can be projected as 6.18 lakhs for 1981. The Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission had estimated the number of Scavengers in respect of Scheduled Castes for the year 1989 as 4.0 lakhs. (Srivastava, 1997)

In India, there were 6,00,000 scavengers while by 1995-96 the number escalated to 7,87,000 (Sadangi, 2008, p.227). The number of manual scavengers, as per the record of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment of the Government of India for 2002-2003, was 6,76,009 (Sankaran, 2008, p.131). National Family Health Survey of India observed that in 1999 there were about 120 million dry latrine units in use (International Institute for Population Sciences, cited in Meerman, 2009).
Meerman (2009, p.85) expressed that the work is not only in the private sector, scavengers are hired by the government to clean the government latrines at all areas levels. The railways and the installation of the Ministry of Industry even maintain dry latrines and employ manual scavengers. In 2002-03 the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment eventually disclosed that 6,76,000 manual scavengers exist in India and the existence of 92,00,000 dry latrines across 21 States and Union Territory (Human Rights Law Network, 2009).

Behar, Das and Thakur (2002) pointed out there are approximately 2,60,000 Dalits that are engaged in manual scavenging. International Dalit Solidarity Network in their 2002 report (cited in Kuksal, 2011, p.146) projected that there were one million scheduled caste manual scavengers. Action Aid India (cited in Kuksal, 2011, p.146) conducted survey in 2002 in six states, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar, estimated that manual scavengers are found in at least 30,000 dry latrines. The scavengers belong to the Valmiki community and its sub-sects-badbai, charmkar, barguda and bherva. There is a sharp contrasting data between the government and NGOs’ projections on the numbers of the manual scavengers in India.

Although laws of India are supposed to protect the scheduled castes from degradation and exploitation, but the reality of these people has sparsely transformed. In many villages, most upper caste people still expect the scheduled castes to render conventional subservient jobs on demand and without pay (Hanchinamani, 2001). A system of laws designed to proscribe and punish acts of discrimination on the basis of caste (Narula, 2008). In 2003, the Supreme Court directed all state governments to file affidavits on manual scavenging in government premises, in consequence of the
initiatives taken by social action groups which documented the scavenging practice extensively and submitted the evidence to the Court (Ramanathan, cited in Kannabiran, 2012).

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition Act) 1993 is a law banning manual scavenging and punishing offenders for employing manual scavengers and for construction of dry latrines. But some states claim that their respective State do not have manual scavengers at all; considering based on the banning of the practice of removal of dry latrines. On the contrary, the practice of manual scavenging has taken various shapes such as cleaning common toilets, removing medical wastages, cleaning the septic tanks and manholes, cleaning the railway toilets and tracks, etc, though practically manual scavenging – but are not deemed to be manual scavenging practices by most States of India.

Water Aid India in its 2009 survey report (cited in Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013) exposed that the common health ailments among the manual scavengers are parasitic infections, gastrointestinal disorders, skin ailments, diminished vision and hearing due to toxic fumes inhaled during cleaning of septic tanks and manholes. Respiratory diseases like breathlessness and consistent cough were experienced by some scavengers. Communicable diseases such as dysentry, typhoid, malaria and tuberculosis were observed among manual scavengers. Heavy menstruation, miscarriage, severe anemia, irregularity in heart beat are common health problems among the women scavengers.

Septic tanks and manholes are severe health hazards. There are incidences where the manual scavengers are killed while cleaning the septic tanks and manholes. But the employers find ways and means to convince the surviving families of the
deceased persons and preventing them from filing of cases against the culprits. The social action groups working for abolition of manual scavengers have filed some cases to get compensation for the surviving families. The manual scavengers due to fear of intimidation and repercussions and revenge from the employers, they often hide incidences that affect them.

Gomala (2010) has observed that thousands of women manual scavengers are forced to eke out their livelihood by scavenging and cleaning dry latrines by using metal pans and a short broom to scoop up the night soil. Women scavengers suffer chronic inadequacies of housing, clothing and even primary medical facilities.

When both the parents are engaged in manual scavenging they are not in a state to care for their children. The children of the manual scavengers in the youth ages are pulled by the sanitary officers and contractors to engage in manual scavenging. Generation after generation the scheduled castes engaged in manual scavenging are forced to do the intolerable manual scavenging to keep the area clean for others but their life is in a dismal state. UN experts published a 9-point presentation for achieving the world’s Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for sanitation by 2015, in which they disclosed that for more people in India have access to a cell phone than to a toilet and improved sanitation (Hamilton, 2010). Though Rehabilitation programmes are initiated by the government the manual scavengers would not have a dignified life until the total eradication of the manual scavenging in any form is done.

This study tries to disclose the various forms of the manual scavenging practices, the working and living conditions and two measure the level of social discrimination faced by the manual scavengers.
Scope of the Study

This research study on ‘Social outrage of manual scavenging in Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu’ is a significant one to observe the various forms of the manual scavenging practices, the socio-economic conditions of the manual scavengers, working and living conditions of the manual scavengers and the discrimination and exploitation in work place and society. This study will provide a detailed outlook in the various forms of the manual scavenging practices. Thus the Government machineries and organisations working for abolition of manual scavenging might take into account the seriousness of the manual scavenging and its retarding effects in the lives of the manual scavengers. The future researchers who involve in studying manual scavenging have deeper understanding in carrying out further study on the issue.

The study results would help the research institutes, academicians, the social action groups, the Government departments to understand the existing manual scavenging practices and its dimensions and to commit them for the total eradication of this in haven practice.

Chapters of the Study

This research thesis was categorized into five chapters. The chapters are:

Chapter 1: This first chapter furnishes the title of the study, general introduction providing remarkable and general statements about the need of the study and about the data collection on brief outlook, statement of the problem on the focal issue of manual scavenging practices, its origin and continuation, existing laws to abolish the
practice and the ill-effects of manual scavenging in the lives of the manual scavengers, scope of the study and eventually the chapters of the study.

**Chapter II:** This chapter shows the literature reviewed about the concept of manual scavenging and its caste association, historical background about the manual scavenging practices, incidences about the manual scavenging practices in terms of socio-economic, working condition, occupational hazards, discrimination exploitation and occurrence of death.

**Chapter III:** This chapter explains the research methodology of research design, field study, sampling design, tool adopted, pre-test of the tool, primary data collection, data analysis and limitations of the study.

**Chapter IV:** This chapter presents the analysed data with suitable interpretation with tables and with appropriate statistical test results.

**Chapter V:** This last chapter gives the findings of the study and appended with conclusion that summarizes these study.