

Working conditions of pourakarmikas in Bangalore city: An analytical study

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Abstract

Pourakarmikas toil in working conditions that are far from perfect. Hired by contractors selected by the City Municipal Corporation, there have been occasions when they have not received their salary for more than six months. Deep financial distress has even led to an instance of suicide by them. A Pourakarmika work on the roads for hours, with no accessories, no toilet facilities and in unhygienic conditions-all for meager, and often erratic, compensation. And yet they slog on in the occupation for years. People, who have been in Bengaluru for years or generations, refuse to do the physical collection of garbage.

Marginalized groups from outside Bengaluru are brought in to do these jobs. In fact, Bengaluru exploits these marginalized people, as it does not offer them alternative work avenues. As a result, they continue to slog in sanitation jobs such as cleaning septic tanks, public toilets or collecting garbage. The present study is an analytical study of the conditions that the Pourakarmikas in Bangalore City are subjected to. It introspects about the factual data in respect of the Pourakarmikas in the context of Bangalore City.

Keywords: social capital, hygiene, economic conditions, livelihood

Introduction

Living and working conditions are two of the best indicators of status of any community. On any typical day, pourakarmikas (or PMKs) collect garbage from households, segregate them into wet and dry, sweep the streets and load the collection onto trucks by 10am. Across the city, more than 18,000 people are heading out to report for a job that keeps the Garden city clean.

Pourakarmikas segregate wet and dry waste by hand press it down with their feet before loading it into trucks for transport to dumping yards outside city. As pick up garbage with their bare hands, most Pourakarmikas have viral infections, skin allergies and respiratory problems. "Most of them have health problems but cannot afford treatment on their limited salaries."

Background of the Pourakarmikas

India is the only country in the World where a particular section of the Society is traditionally responsible for keeping the habitation clean by removing the waste products of the society including the human excreta. This is a disgrace to the country instances are not right even today when one can see people carrying night-soil in buckets on their heads or removing human excreta by physical touch. The country which won freedom from the slavery of the British people 72 years ago is not able to liberate from human bondage more than one million people who are called Bhangis, Mehtars, Balmikis, and the like. and are still engaged in their traditional occupation of sweeping and scavenging.

The scenario of scavengers in rural and urban areas is different. The scavenging class living in towns work under municipalities, corporations, hospitals, colleges, hostels, nursing homes and such other institutions. They, therefore, are enlightened enough to form their own organizations and

trade unions. In case of an increase of confrontation with their employers, they show their mettle without any hesitation.

Statement of the Problem

The plight of the Pourakarmikas really needs a lot of concern. They serve the society and the public in the truthful way by engaging in work like removing the garbage, sweeping the streets cleaning toilets and the like. Their contribution in civic maintenance and cleanliness is truly commendable. Their financial, social and economic conditions are very pathetic and needs the government support. The Reforms from the Government and Support from the labour organizations have to work cohesively to better the social and economic conditions of the Pourakarmikas. The Government intervention in solving the real problem of the Pourakarmikas is needs humane approach. The occupational hazards are very common to the Pourakarmikas as they are subjected to relentless and unhygienic working conditions. Their living standards are far below normal. All these combine to demand the assistance from the law making bodies and the Government. Not much positive and welfare policies are framed by the government due to caste politics. The problems for the Pourakarmikas should become prime importance for the general public and government as these Pourakarmikas serve the society and the public at most truthfully removing the garbage and sweeping the streets and cleaning public toilets, are playing as significant contributions to the civic maintain and cleanliness.

The empowerment approach to the state and reforms in strengthening the Pourakarmikas is necessary. The demands side looks at creating new laws and policies that enable the Pourakarmikas and their organizations which can work combined together both the government and Pourakarmikas

and their organization in order to attain better social and economic conditions of Pourakarmikas. The scavengers are mentally and physically suffering from a lot of problems, when the intervening government should arrange recreational activities for them. This would reduce the mental and physical stress. They are not in good position. So government must provide the welfare and finance assistance.

Working Conditions

The lack of uniform procedure in work allocation and allotment is a matter to be dealt with. Job card is not worked out which again leads to chaotic work estimates to them. The randomization and arbitrary fixation of work load is unscientific and at times leads to extra load of work. During special occasions, functions, late night celebrations, festivities and the like they are overburdened. The Bangalore Bruhat Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) extracts the work from the Pourakarmikas during such situations to pacify the general public and unwanted media attention. In commensurate with the work they do over and above the routine work, they are not equitably given the remuneration. Local bodies entrust the work to the supervisory staff who in turn maintain the work schedules of pourakarmikas. The unfair treatment from supervisory staff, undue work pressures by the recruiting authorities are all add to the existing plethora of problems. They swap away their energy. The technological revolution has very less in store to the Pourakarmikas, the whole, the treatment that they are met

with are far below human Consideration and courtesy. The scientific implements and methods need to be brought in to bring regulation. The health hazards as in chronic disease because of unfair working conditions is the regular and routine feature among the Pourakarmikas.

Work Profile of Pourakarmikas

From demographic and attribution point of view, the Pourakarmikas in Bangalore City are not monoliths. The number of illiterates are however higher among the older population than among the younger. Majority of them have left caste occupation but a significant number of them are in between the caste occupation and white-collar jobs. This is primarily because of lack of higher vocational education. The male functional leaders of the house hold who are relatively young and educated have all shifted from the caste occupation. They left it because of availability of other jobs and the social and cultural stigma attached to the traditional work.

Scavenging work was performed by a certain sub-caste Shudras or rather were obliged to perform. Due to the nature of their work they are regarded as untouchables and thus were segregated from the reach of other respectable and so called touchable people. They had to live separately in clusters outside the town or extreme part of the villages. They were subjected to various forms of discriminations and disabilities. Thus, they continued to remain socially downtrodden and economically backward. In general, their existential reality can be shown as a snap shot below

<p>Snap Shot of the Pourakarmikas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pourakarmikas constitute a group treated as impure and ritually avoided; ▪ They are backward and oppressed because they have been assigned the lowest status in society; ▪ Minimal social contact has kept them at a distance from the society; ▪ Because of their degradation they have been compelled to accept discrimination as a part of their fate; ▪ Most Pourakarmikas are illiterate and thus, educationally backward; ▪ Pourakarmikas are economically backward too as they are engaged in own paying jobs and male members indulge in bad habits like smoking, drinking and gambling; ▪ Due to their economic and educational backwardness, they have also not been able to take advantage of the privileges meant for the welfare of the dispossessed; and

Salary Structure of Pourakarmikas

There are two types of Pourakarmikas. They are permanent and contractual. Total Pourakarmikas are about 17, 500 working in BBMP. Out of them, 2,500 were made as permanent in 2007 and the remaining 15,000 were continued as contract workers and they were brought under direct payment system in July, 2017. Salaries of Pourakarmikas as permanent employees were fixed at Rs. 10,400 – 12, 600. There was a long fight from the union of Pourakarmikas to get their minimum wage fixed by the Labour Welfare Department of Government of Karnataka before July, 2017. But, all the 15,000 contract workers, who were brought under direct payment system in July, 2017 in BBMP have been getting the minimum wage of Rs. 11,666 and the same is modified as and when the Labour Welfare Department of Government of Karnataka revises it. Previously they used to get their salaries between Rs. 6000 and Rs. 7000 from the agency which provides employment. The new scale fixed for “D” group employees is Rs. 17,000 to Rs.28, 950. Hence, it is clear that the salaries of Pourakarmikas were less than the minimum wage fixed by the Labour Welfare Department of Government of Karnataka before July, 2017.

Survey Results

The research is conducted study on the working conditions of the Pourakarmikas (scavengers) in the Bangalore City area. For the study 300 Pourakarmikas (scavengers) have been interviewed to muster information regarding their working conditions and the government policies that help in liberating the scavengers from scavenging profession.

The following are the major results of the survey:

- A significant majority of the Pourakarmikas in Bangalore City in all the settlements mostly belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- The Pourakarmikas in general are still living in illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. The condition of the sanitary workers is better.
- Although substantial proportions of the sample Pourakarmikas are illiterate, they are sending their children to schools. Free educations, scholarships, special incentives given to them by the municipalities have contributed to the growth of awareness about the importance of education among them.
- Even though the Pourakarmikas expressed satisfaction with their present occupation, they prefer other than sanitary work to their children.

- They have access to temples and also move closely with the members of the other communities.
- The sanitary workers usually suffer from malaria, typhoid, T.B. and skin diseases. There are few instances of elephantiasis. However, more than half of them opined that they have no health problem.
- Mortality among them is high compared to general mortality rate. Majority of them die in the age group of 45-55 mainly because of T.B. The mortality rate is

- higher among males than females.
- All of them, including women and children, are addicted to drinks.
- The N.G.Os have not played any significant role in bringing about transformation among this group.
- The practice of carrying night soil on the head is officially abolished; the flush-out system of latrines has also enabled them to improve their status.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Nature of Work of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Nature of work	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sweeping of Roads and Streets	98	32.7
2	Disposal of Waste Material	75	25.0
3	Cleaning of Latrines	21	7.0
4	Cleaning of Drains and Septic tanks	61	20.3
5	Other Works (Drivers, Supervisors, Helpers, etc.)	45	15.0
Total		300	100

The scavenging work includes cleaning of roads and streets, disposal of waste material, cleaning of latrines, cleaning of drains and septic tanks, and other works (Drivers, Supervisors, Helpers, and the like who participates in scavenging work. A probe was made as to how much Pourakarmikas are involved in these tasks. Data in Table – 1 indicates that majority of Pourakarmikas that is 32.7% of the respondents are doing sweeping work, 25% of the respondents are doing the occupation of disposal of waste material, 20.3% of the respondents are cleaning drains and septic tanks, 7% of the respondents were cleaning latrines and rest of 15% respondents doing Other Works (Drivers, Supervisors, Helpers, etc.).

It is essential that the legal provisions meant for the protection of the Pourakarmikas is known by them so that enumerates the awareness and protection of life. This variable helps the researcher to ask several questions for further processing. It is found from the above table that the majority of the respondents about 58.7% of the respondents are aware of the laws regarding the prohibition of manual scavenging and only 41.3% of the respondents are not aware of the same. So, it can be said that, the majority of the respondents have awareness about law of prohibition of manual scavenging.

Table 2: Working Experiences of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
1	Up to 5 Years	107	35.7
2	6-10 Years	85	28.3
3	11-15 Years	65	21.7
4	16-20 Years	25	8.3
5	21 Years and above	18	6.0
Total		300	100

It is essential for the study to know the working experience of Pourakarmikas that enumerates the past history of life. This variable helps the researcher to proceed with several questions. It is found from the table that, 35.7 % of the respondents have less than 5 years of experience, 28.3% of the respondents have 6-10 years of experience, 21.7% of the respondents have 11-15 years of experience, 8.3% of the respondents have 16-20 years of experience and only 6% have experience of 21 years and above. Hence, it is clear that more than 64 % of the respondents fall into the group below 10 years of experience, as concept of contract labour has gained importance during 21st Century.

Table 4: Job Satisfaction of the respondents

Sl. No.	Job Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	193	64.3
2	No	107	35.7
Total		300	100

A probe was made as to the level of satisfaction of Pourakarmikas at their jobs. It is found that, out of 300 respondents, 64.3% of them are satisfied with jobs they are doing due to their socio-economic background and about 35.7% of them are not satisfied and have been in bad conditions doing scavenging work. So, it can be said that the majority of the respondents are satisfied with their jobs in BBMP and they are expecting that their positions may be made permanent in future.

Table 3: Awareness about Law of prohibition of Manual Scavenging

Sl. No.	Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	176	58.7
2	No	124	41.3
Total		300	100

Table 5: Occupation of the Family Members

Sl. No.	Family Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Occupation of the Parents			
1	Yes	183	61.0
2	No	117	39.0
Total		300	100
Opinion on the Occupation of the children			
1	Yes	35	11.7
2	No	265	88.3
Total		300	100

The data collected regarding the occupation of the family members reveal that 61 % of the respondents have been following their parents scavenging work and only 39% have

Come to this job due to their migration and unable to get better job opportunities. But, more than 88% of the respondents opined that their children should not continue in their job and they have to move to the higher and better jobs

and only 11.7 % of the respondents opined that their children may also continue their job as they are not able to educate their children properly.

Table 6: Education of the Family members

Sl. No.	Education level	Frequency	Percentage to Total
Education of the Respondents			
1	Illiterate	76	25.3
2	Primary	167	55.7
3	High School	52	17.3
4	PUC	5	1.7
Total		300	100
Education of the Children			
1	Pre-Primary of the children	60	20.0
2	Primary	163	54.3
3	High School	62	20.7
4	PUC	15	5.0
Total		300	100

The data collected about the education profile of the respondents reveal that 25.3% of the elders in the family are illiterates, 55.7% of the adults have primary education, 17.3% of adults have High School education and only 1.7% of the adults have PUC education. Hence, it is clear that most of the elder family members are either illiterates or with low literacy levels and therefore they have opted for

this scavenging job. However, it is clear from the table that 20% of their children are in Pre-Primary Education, 54.3% are in Primary education, 20.7% of them are in High School Education and 5% possess PUC Qualification Hence, it is clear that the respondents have been showing interest in educating children in order to send their children to higher and better jobs.

Table 7: Migration Status of Respondents

Sl. No.	Migration Status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Natives within the BBMP	86	28.7
2	Migrants from Rural Villages within Karnataka	117	39.0
3	Migrants from Rural Villages of Andhra Pradesh	72	24.0
4	Migrants from Rural Villages of Tamil Nadu	25	8.3
Total		300	100

From the Table, it is obvious that most of the respondents are migrants from rural villages of Karnataka (39%) and migrants from rural villages of Andhra Pradesh (24%). They have been migrated to BBMP due to the influence of contractors and due to their poverty conditions. The natives accounted for only 28.7% as they have moved to the better occupations due to the education and consequent acquisition of skills and also better opportunities in different jobs.

as permanent and contract Pourakarmikas. The livelihood of contract Pourakarmikas is still far below the life of permanent Pourakarmikas. In spite of these lacunas people are showing interest to enter into the scavenging owing to a huge rural migration from villages of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh due to their poverty conditions. The people in this profession find it inevitable to continue and at the same time earn their livelihood.

5. Conclusion

The present study accounts for understanding the present working conditions of Pourakarmikas. The data are collected directly from Pourakarmikas where they expressed their hapless position. Already Pourakarmikas are from downtrodden strata of the society, they are illiterate, ignorant, unaware of the legal provisions in the system. Most of the Pourakarmikas are not satisfied with their profession yet they are compelled to continue in the same profession owing to financial conditions and their poverty levels. At the same time most of the Pourakarmikas are not aware of the laws that are existing in favor of them. Neither the government is giving them awareness nor the Pourakarmikas are willing to know about the existing laws. This is the reason among many reasons said to be the cause behind the problems of Pourakarmikas. As far as Pourakarmikas are concerned, they are categorized

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