

ARTICLES

Scavengers and Scavenging in Andhra Pradesh

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An attempt has been made in this article to briefly review the nature of practice and forms of manual scavenging in different areas in Andhra Pradesh, the castes which are engaged in this practice, their social profile, work conditions; and the impact of programmes taken-up to eliminate the practice and rehabilitate the scavengers. Efforts of NGOs involved with the upliftment of scavengers, and the movements led by them have been examined followed by a reflective review of future strategies to bring the scavengers into the mainstream of social life. The study is exploratory in nature and semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from the sample respondents comprising leaders who are involved with the issues of Safai Karmacharis, and other dalit NGO leaders. Respondents purposively selected from the scavenger communities were interviewed to obtain first-hand information about their work, living conditions and problems confronted by them. Checklists of questions were used to guide the interviews with the respondents. In addition, the official statistics drawn from different sources were used to supplement the information

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INTRODUCTION

If I were to be born again, I would like to be born in the family of a scavenger so that I may relieve them of the inhuman unhealthy and hateful practice of carrying head loads of night soil.

Mahatma Gandhi

Scavenging, as an occupation, is violation of human rights as it impinges on human dignity and the worth of the human person. Since it is connected with the handling of night soil and filth, the status of scavengers has come to be so degraded socially, that they are made untouchables among the untouchables (Fuchs, cited from Srivastava, 1997:17). Scavengers suffer discrimination in social, economic and cultural spheres. They are voiceless and do not get political attention because of their small numbers and socioeconomic backwardness. They are invisible, and due to their social insignificance and powerlessness they cannot make news. They are, in fact, resigned to their fate, that is, manual disposal of waste and filth that has been imposed on them by

the traditional caste system. *Lesser Humans: The Lives of Bhangis of Gujarat* (1997) is a film made by the Drishti Media Collective, which shot after shot shows how the bhangi community in Gujarat, especially their women, are engaged in the most dehumanising work of cleaning human excreta — thus highlighting the situation of a disempowered community.

In this article,¹ an attempt has been made to briefly review the practice of scavenging in different areas in Andhra Pradesh (AP) including their social conditions and the impact of programmes taken up to eliminate this heinous practice and rehabilitate scavengers. Efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved with the uplift of scavengers have been examined followed by a reflective review of future strategies to bring the scavengers into the mainstream of social life. Of the few studies available on scavengers (Ali, 1994; Gupta and Prasad, 1984; Srivastava, 1997), none have explored the specific nature of their work conditions. Keeping this in view, the present exploratory study was taken up. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from sample respondents comprising leaders² who were involved with the issues of *Safai Karmacharis*, researchers, and other dalit NGO leaders.³ Forty respondents purposively selected from the scavenger communities⁴ were also interviewed to obtain first-hand information about their work, living conditions and problems confronted by them. Checklists of questions were used to guide the interviews with the different categories of respondents. In addition, the official statistics drawn from different sources were used to supplement the information.

THE PRACTICE OF SCAVENGING

A scavenger is one who is partially or wholly engaged in the occupation of manually removing night soil and filth. Scavengers predominantly service dry latrines by manually removing human excreta and also engage in the removal or manual handling of dead bodies of animals and humans. The practice is reported to be still prevailing in both urban and rural areas and women form the bulk of the workforce among scavengers. The scavenging castes are known under different names such as Thoti, Paky, Chachati in different parts in AP. They are called Bhangi, Balmiki, Mehtar, Dom or Sanei in Northern and Eastern parts of India.

Estimates of Population

A re-survey conducted in 1996, as part of the National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents (India, 1998:88), estimated that the total number of scavengers in the country was 8,25,572. The other sources are Census data and the data collected by the Task Force appointed by the Planning Commission to study the problems of scavengers. As can be seen from Table 1, the

Census data of 1961 and 1981 reveal that only 25 per cent of the total scavenging population in AP belong to Scheduled Castes.(SCs). It is about 46 per cent for 1981 at the country level.

The remaining scavengers belong to communities other than the SCs. The Task Force data for the year 1989 shows a slightly higher estimate of scavengers, that is, 17,731 and 4,00,999 for the state and country respectively. It is also noted that, among the total population, the proportion of women was more than that of men. Similarly, the highest majority (that is, 83 per cent) of scavengers is reported from urban areas (Srivastava, 1997:71).

The AP Scheduled Castes Cooperative Finance Corporation (APSCCFC) Ltd. conducted a re-survey in 1996 and identified 7,448 scavengers 'engaged in the inhuman occupation of manually lifting night-soil' (APSCCFC, 1998-1999). Table 2 shows the district-wise list of the identified scavengers.

TABLE 2: District-wise Distribution of Number of Scavengers Identified: 1996 Resurvey Data

<i>District</i>	<i>No. Identified</i>
Srikakulam	66
Vizianagaram	121
Visakhapatnam	130
East Godavari	359
West Godavari	154
Krishna	1594
Guntur	351
Prakasam	128
Nellore	210
Chittoor	340
Cuddapah	34
Ananthapur	235
Kurnool	176
Mahabubnagar	56
Ranga Reddy	560
Medak	22
Nizamabad	379
Adilabad	120
Karimnagar	87
Warangal	40
Khamman	84
Nalgonda	229
Hyderabad	1943

Source: A.P. Scheduled Castes Coop. Finance Corporation Ltd., 1998-1999. Implementation Manual on Rehabilitation of Scavengers, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad. p.7.

Practice of Scavenging: Contexts and Castes

Manual scavenging in AP is currently prevailing in two types of contexts. The first type consists of (i) community latrines still functional in some old towns/major panchayats/mandals; (ii) service-type latrines existing either clandestinely or openly in some old localities; and (iii) latrines in some old local/government offices such as sub jails, schools, shanties, and so on. The second type of context where work amounting to the practice of scavenging as reported by the respondents are: (i) cleaning human excreta from railway tracks in railway stations; (ii) handling hospital waste, including organic waste from maternity homes, operation theatres, post-mortem/forensic labs, pathology labs, and so on; (iii) disposal of dead bodies of humans and animals; and (iv) sweeping streets or areas infested with open defecation.

Considering the first context, the respondents reported that dry type latrines in private households, and community latrines of old type still exist in towns in AP such as Ongole, Nellore, Chirala, Bapatla, Ananthapur, Cuddapah, Anakapalli, Chodavaram, Narsipatnam, Yellamanchili, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, and certain towns in East and West Godavari districts. Activities taken up in the second type of contexts could be termed as universal.

Coming to caste composition of scavengers, according to the respondents and as mentioned earlier, scavenging is taken up by persons belonging to different caste groups including those from dalit communities. The other caste groups, who are in considerable numbers in scavenging practice in the State, are: Yadava, Gowda, Gavara, Chakali (Rajaka) and Settibaliya — all come under backward classes. There are also Scheduled Tribes (STs) like the Yanadis and Irekis who scavenge. All these communities comprise more than 50 per cent of the scavengers in the State. However, as pointed out by the respondents, if the nature of work activities were to be narrowed down to manual handling of night-soil, filth or dead bodies, then almost 90 per cent of the workers taking up these tasks would be from dalit communities.

Though data are not available to estimate the proportion of different caste groups among Dalit communities working as scavengers in the State, it is reported by the respondents that different castes have predominance in different areas. For example, Relli also called as Chachada, Paky, or Thoti, are predominantly scavengers in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, and partly in Guntur and Krishna.⁵ The Madiga are found in majority as scavengers in Kurnool, Ananthapur, Cuddapah, Chittore, Mahabubnagar, and Rangareddy. In the Hyderabad region, Haddi, Relli and Mehtar (an SC which migrated from Rajasthan and Haryana), are in excess as scavengers. Yanadi, an ST, does scavenging work in the districts of Prakasam, Nellore and parts of Krishna (for example, Machilipatnam) and Guntur (for example, Macherla).

While the Madiga and Yanadi scavengers are mostly involved with work relating to the disposal of dead and decomposed bodies of humans and animals, the Relli are mostly involved with the work of lifting night-soil. Of all the dalit communities who are engaged in scavenging, the Relli and Madiga are reported to be more in number. In many towns, the Malas have a near monopoly on sweepers' jobs. An important phenomenon identified while having consultations with leaders of scavenging communities during the study was the intra-caste domination and exploitation mostly between Relli, the fruit gatherers and fruit sellers, and Paky, the scavenging category. The Paky allege that the schemes or loans meant for scavengers seldom reach them. 'They (the Relli who are fruit gatherers and sellers) take all the benefits in the name of scavengers, whereas we, who do the real scavenging work, are left out without any help', complained Raju, one of their leaders.

Work Conditions

The scavengers in AP are mostly found to be employed as:

- (i) *Regular employees in municipal and other civic bodies:* Workers in this category are variously called in different civic bodies as public scavengers, sweepers, sanitation workers, public health workers, and so on. Thus, workers attending to activities such as sweeping streets, cleaning open drains, spraying, and those who do night-soil and filth-related work are combined in this category.
- (ii) *Daily wageworkers in government and quasi-government organisations or in private households:* This category of workers are employed by the civic bodies and other organisations to do scavenging-related work.
- (iii) *Substitute workers employed by regular employees in the organisations mentioned above:* This category of scavengers comprises those who are employed by the regular jobholders. As indicated by the respondents, it was a common practice that most of the people who were on regular pay rolls in the first category did not belong to SCs and those belonging to SCs did not do scavenging work. These unofficially employed substitutes (or badlis) were paid any amount between Rupees 600/- and 800/- a month from their salary of around Rupees 5000/-. Most of the substitutes were dalits such as Paky and Madiga, who were forced to work in deplorable and filthy work conditions. However, when it came to the selection of beneficiaries, one of the respondents (a leader of Relli community) alleged that, 'people on the regular payrolls get the advantage at the expense of those who have been engaged in scavenging as substitutes'.

Nature of Work

As the servicing of the latrines of private households are no longer the responsibilities of the municipalities, the present work of the regular

employees is confined to cleaning public latrines and streets. On the contrary, daily wage scavenging and work in private households are more demanding. In general, women are found in large numbers in this kind of work. This is also corroborated by other researchers (for example, Sainath, 1999). Men handle work relating to garbage/night-soil collection, loading and unloading into drums and disposal of night-soil along with other garbage at the waste disposal depots. Many respondents of the study felt that manual cleaning of dry-latrines and disposal of dead bodies of animals and humans, are some of the most obnoxious scavenging practices. Works of Macwan (1999) and Drishti Media Collective (1997) also support this view. However, some leaders and scavengers who participated in the study expressed that septic tank cleaning and unclogging underground drainage were equally obnoxious and inhuman scavenging practices that continued even today in major cities, including Visakhapatnam. Kumar (2002) also observed the same. As part of cleaning the septic tanks, they mixed kerosene with the night-soil to reduce the stench that emanates from the putrefied excreta. During the study, one of the leaders involved with the issues of scavenging recounted his observation of such work.

I was fresh from college... wanted to study the conditions of scavengers.... I accompanied a group of them who was engaged in septic tank cleaning; there I saw one worker lifting night-soil with a bucket from the tank. In the process, the worker's foot slipped on the edge of the tank and he lost balance. As a result his full arm was plunged into the slushy muck! Slowly he took out his arm. He kept the bucket aside and casually cleaned the excrement with his other hand. I felt so disgusted at the sight that I sat there stunned and then broke into tears. Why should a human being be forced to do this inhuman work? I asked myself. Then I decided that I must work for their liberation.

(Bejwada Wilson, State Convenor of Safai Karmachari Andolan)

This shows that conversion of dry latrines is only a partial solution to eliminate the dehumanising aspect of the practice.

Occupational Hazards

The work of scavengers is quite hazardous as they are exposed to night-soil, urine, decomposed waste and all kinds of filth. However, no protective gloves or other measures are reported by the respondents as being provided to them. The most frequent health-related complaints by them are: helmenthic infections, nausea, fever, and body pains. Women using short brooms need to bend forward while cleaning and so become more vulnerable to health hazards like back pain. The *Shramshakti: Report on the Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector* also listed the same as the frequent health problems faced by 'sweeper and scavenger' women (India, 1988: 147). The scavengers in the study expressed that during rainy season their work

becomes worse and so is their health condition and their leaders opined that as women scavengers were expected to work in public or private toilets at odd times, they were also frequent victims of sexual harassment and abuse.

THE SOCIAL MILIEU AND LIFESTYLES OF SCAVENGERS

In this section, the social milieu of some predominant caste groups practising scavenging in AP is described. Those of others such as Yadava, Settibaliya, Chakali, and so on, who are in minority, are not discussed here.

As mentioned earlier, persons belonging to SCs, STs and Backward Classes (BCs) practice scavenging. The State Government in its AP Scheduled Castes Rationalisation of Reservation Bill, 1997⁶ categorised SCs into four groups: (a) Relli and other castes, (b) Madiga, and so on, (c) Mala, and so on, and (d) Adi-Andhra, and so on. The 15 per cent reservation meant for SCs is divided among the groups as 1-7-6-1 per cent, in that order. The Supreme Court struck it down later. The SCs are divided into two groups: one supporting the reservation bill (mainly Madigas), and the other opposing reservation (the Malas). The struggle to get the SCs categorised by one section of the community and preventing such categorisation by another section of the community is continuing even today.

Relli: Grouped under SC-A, it is one of the 59 castes mentioned in the brochure of SCs of AP and constitute 0.83 per cent of the total SC population in the State. The Relli, which in Telugu means a kind of a grass, prefer to call themselves as Sapri or Sapru. They are distributed in 10 districts of AP, but are present predominantly in Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts. They speak a corrupt Oriya language, which does not have a script. Their male-female literacy rates are 33.6 per cent and 12.7 per cent, respectively. The Relli are considered as an endogamous group of Haddi. Thurston (1909–1975) says, 'the Haddi may be divided into Haddi proper, Relli, and Chachadi which are endogamous divisions.' The name Haddi is derived from 'Haddi' a latrine, or hadda, which means bones as members of this caste collect all sorts of bones and trade them. The Relli followed the occupation of gardening, vegetable and fruit selling until the famine hit the country in 1877. Later, due to abject poverty, they took to other occupations like scavenging and came to be known as Paky. Gradually Relli and Paky became two separate identities. Most of their colonies are found to be congested and unclean (Gokuldas, 1990; Mallikarjun Rao, 1982; Prasanna, 1990).

Madiga: They are concentrated in AP. Siraj-ul-Hassan (cited from Singh, 1994a:817) listed the various names of the community as: Madiga, Madigowd, Madigaru, Madru, Dher, Chandal, Antyaja, Ettivandlu, Panchamollu, Matangi, Gosangi, and so on. They are also referred to as Arundhatiya, Jambavalu, Jambavanthulu, Adi-Andhra,

and so on. Their social interaction with the other communities in villages is limited. It is stated that their untouchable status was due to their habit of eating beef (Singh, 1994a).

Mala: Mainly based in AP, they are distributed in all the districts. Some derive (Hassan, cited from Singh, 1994a:872) the name to be a corrupt form of *mailawaru*, by which the Mala as scavengers, were formerly known. Those who settled in urban areas are found in organised sector employment and as sweepers in local bodies.

Yanadi: The Yanadi were notified as a criminal tribe during colonial rule but were denotified after Independence. Thurston (1909–1975) noted that their name was derived from the Sanskrit word *anadi*, denoting those whose origin is unknown. Yanadi are divided into two endogamous divisions: Challa and Manchi. In Telugu, manchi means good and challa means unclean. The challa Yanadi are mostly engaged in scavenging work relating to disposal of corpses and dead bodies of animals. A majority of them are very poor as they do not have any permanent source of income or occupation. Though the social status of the Challa is lower, they never accept food and drink from the Mala and Madiga castes. Similarly, their contacts with other caste groups are also very few (Singh, 1994b).

SCAVENGERS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

As scavenging has been found to be a hereditary occupation, because of poverty and backwardness, most of the children of scavengers in due course become scavengers themselves. Similarly, women in the families of scavengers also end up doing scavenging. With a view to break this vicious circle, steps have been initiated by the government, starting in the early 1980s, for the liberation and rehabilitation of scavengers. They are:

Enactment of Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 to facilitate conversion of dry latrines into water-borne sanitary latrines. The Act became applicable in AP, with effect from January 26, 1997. However, according to the Act, unless the government notifies the areas as coming under the purview of the Act, the practice of manual scavenging will not become illegal in those areas. In 1998, the Government of AP issued a notification,⁷ covering 12 urban local bodies⁸ and called for objections to the notification within 90 days of its publication. No announcement came forth afterwards and it was not clear whether manual scavenging was prohibited in these areas or not, leave alone the status of the remaining areas in the state.

Much earlier to the introduction of the National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents [NSLRS](1991–1992), efforts have been made at the State level, to convert dry latrines into water-borne latrines through the Low Cost Sanitation (LCS) Programmes. These programmes were implemented

from 1982–1983 to 1991–1992 under different names, that is, Scavenging elimination programme, Vimukthi programme, and so on, in which 113 urban local bodies and 107 municipalities were covered. Under these programmes 1,85,664 household dry latrines and 1,983 community latrines were converted into sanitary ones with a total cost of Rupees 31.24 crores. Further, the state government implemented, from 1993–1994 onwards, the Integrated Low Cost Sanitation (ILCS) Programmes for EWS category houses for construction of sanitary latrines. In 1999, it was estimated that about 3.5 lakhs houses needed sanitary latrines. As regards the progress of the schemes, besides the tardy coverage of the household units, the implementation of the scheme itself was not satisfactory. By October 2004 it was estimated that there were a balance of 10,500 community dry latrines and 200 individual dry latrines to be demolished/converted.

The NSLRS being implemented in 1992–1993 aimed at the liberation of the scavengers from their existing hereditary practice of manual scavenging and at identification, training and rehabilitation of scavengers to provide them with alternative and dignified occupation in a mission mode since 2000. Further, all the day latrines in the State have been identified and with the help of the local bodies demolition of these dry latrines has been taken up. In the State, the APSCCFC Ltd., was entrusted with the implementation of the Scheme. The Scheme was expected to eradicate manual scavenging by the end of Ninth Plan period. According to the APSCCFC Report, so far from 1992–1993 to 1997–1998, 6,764 scavengers in the State were rehabilitated with an expenditure of Rupees 18.21 crores and 3,600 candidates were trained with an expenditure of Rupees 20.1 lakhs. The training was given as per TRYSEM norms. Upto that point of time, the Government of India released an amount of Rupees 13.4 crores of grant to the Corporation for implementation of the schemes (APSCCFC, 1998–1999:1). The Government of AP has constituted the 'AP Mission for Eradication of Manual Scavenging and Rehabilitation of Scavengers' with a specific objective to declare AP State as 'a manual scavenger free state' by the end of 2002. The data was subsequently extended to March 2004. However, as demolition/conversion of all identified dry latrines could not be achieved by March 2004, the next date for declaring the State as manual scavenging free has yet to be set. Further, to achieve Mission goals, the State Government has constituted State Coordination Committee with the Chief Secretary as Chairperson, District Monitoring Committee with Collector as Chairperson as per G.O.Ms.No.84 S.W.(POA) Department, dated September 4, 2001. Also, State-level Executive Committee was constituted vide G.O.Ms.No.83, dated September 4, 2001. In spite of the fact that they were constituted in 2001, the meetings were sporadic and the executive committee met only once till 2004.

Though the existence of dry latrines was considered as the root cause for the continuation of the manual scavenging activity, the findings of

the end line evaluation of scavenger rehabilitation programme of the Government indicated that 42 per cent of the community dry latrines are still in use.

Of the reports about the condition of scavengers in newspapers (Eenadu, 2004) are of any indication, the removal of dry latrines has not significantly changed the working conditions of scavengers as visualised under the NSLRS in AP. After the introduction of water-borne latrines, the scavengers are pressed in to service in the cleaning of septic tanks which is as dehumanising as that of manually removing night-soil. Though the NSLRS proposed the mechanisation of cleaning of septic tanks with the help of vacuum loaders/gulpers in most parts of the State, such provision is absent. Therefore, these workers directly come in touch with the drainage water without the provision of any safety measures. A review of the programmes at the national level also suggests that the National Scheme has achieved little (Ramesh, 1999).

The National Safai Karmachari Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) approved a list of nine schemes during the year 1997–1998, and released an amount of Rupees 124.7 lakhs for benefiting 259 scavengers in the state. The schemes approved are: Auto-rickshaw (petrol/diesel), Videography, Mini dairy, Flour mill/Wet grinder, Tent house, Concrete mixture, Garment making and General engineering (APSCCFC, 1999:12). The Action Plan for 1998–1999 aimed to assist 631 beneficiaries with an amount of Rupees 473.2 lakhs under NSKFDC-assisted schemes and 715 beneficiaries with an amount of Rupees 357.5 lakhs under Government of India assisted schemes. Monitoring of the implementation of all these programmes is done by state- and district-level advisory committees constituted for the purpose.⁹ Evaluation of the rehabilitation programmes taken up during the years 1992–1993 and 1996–1997 revealed that 90 per cent of the schemes were implemented properly and income levels of the assisted families were fairly improved (APSCCFC, 1999:6).

Pre-matric scholarships for children of scavengers, a central scheme introduced in the year 1977–1978, aims at financially assisting the children of scavengers and sweepers to pursue education upto matriculation level. The scholarship, covering both day scholars and hostellers, ranges between Rupees 20/- and 500/- per month, depending on the class of study. The Scheme did not, however, make much headway in the state as the parents initiated children into work very early to support the family.

NGO INITIATIVES: SAFAI KARMACHARI ANDOLAN

The Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) have organised the earliest unions of Safai Karmacharis in the State. However, these unions did not aim at changing the attitude of scavengers toward their occupation, their life situation, and the means

to come out of it. Keeping this in view, the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), a movement for elimination of manual scavenging was initiated in August 1997.

The scavengers are willing to leave their obnoxious jobs — but they have no self-confidence, as they are uncertain of their ability to sustain themselves in other vocations. There is a need to change the attitudes of scavengers so that they can leave this occupation. Unless this happens no tangible shift can be effected in their situation.

Ajaykumar, District Convenor, SKA

This is only movement in AP for the elimination of manual scavenging. With Bejwada Wilson as the State Convenor and S.R. Sankaran, IAS (Retired) as its Advisor, the SKA has seven members who are also convenors of their respective districts. The origins of SKA can be traced back to Mr. Wilson's protest movement organised at the Kolar Gold Fields for the elimination of manual scavenging in Bharat Gold Mines Ltd. His work created a furore in the Parliament and the then speaker of Lok Sabha wrote to all State Governments to submit a status report to the House on the practice of manual scavenging in their respective states. Wilson's efforts bore fruit in ending the practice of manual scavenging in Kolar Gold Fields. Later, after an initial survey, Mr. Wilson spread the movement to Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh where he started a school for the children of the Safai Karmacharis. As Wilson puts it:

We want the Safai Karmacharis to make the movement their own and propagate it. To facilitate this, the SKA was not registered as a society as it would impose a formal structure on a dynamic movement. The very institutional structure also sets boundaries to the movement and other NGOs may tend to see it as a separate entity.

The SKA is keen to explore alternative forms of employment for the scavengers and proper compensation to them for the loss of work due to conversion of dry latrines. It aims at studying the living conditions of scavengers in selected districts to take up a long-term strategy for their liberation and rehabilitation. The SKA further aims to achieve mass action among the scavengers through working with Dalit networks in the State.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Though, due to their powerlessness and small numbers, their voices are seldom heard, the misery, the exploitation, and the abominable conditions in which they live and work cannot be continued any longer in a civilised society. Historically, to initiate a process of change in the direction of eradicating scavenging, education and access to capital seemed to be the two significant means for dalits. However, there is an element of truth in the criticism that scavengers' demand for capital was translated into loans for consumption and their quest for education was reduced to vocational training in anachronistic crafts (Prashad, 2000:123–29). Mere lip service

still marks the attitude of most of the implementing agencies with regard to the programmes of scavengers and their dependants.

During the present study, consultations with scavengers and their leaders revealed several aspects such as lack of awareness among beneficiaries about programmes, inadequate methods of identification of beneficiaries, allegations of procedural delays, and corruption in the implementation of the programmes. Extreme poverty and illiteracy among scavengers are the major reasons for the lack of awareness about the programmes, besides non-availability of candidates for schemes. Some respondents among the dalit scavenger leaders also pointed out the intra-caste domination and exploitation between Relli and Paky categories in terms of access to these schemes. Further, most of the schemes/trades approved by NSKDFC need further scrutiny in the light of changing market conditions. As women outnumber men their share in the programmes and their occupational health problems need focus. The incidence of alcoholism, use of tobacco and its products such as Khaini, and prevalence of child labour are found to be high among communities. At the state level, voluntary initiatives and leadership among scavenging communities are weak and needs strengthening. Keeping these in view, there is a need to:

- create awareness among the scavenging communities about the programmes and to evolve adequate methods of beneficiary identification,
- give top priority to education for the children of scavengers,
- consult the representatives of scavengers and NGOs working with them to make the preparation of lists of indicative trades/schemes for the rehabilitation of scavengers,
- develop women-specific programmes and give preference to women in the selection of beneficiaries,
- improve the work conditions by introducing modern technology for cleaning gutters, septic tanks, underground drainages, and
- arrange periodic health check-up, especially for women.

Further, small initiatives at the grassroots level among the scavenging communities need to be promoted through provision of leadership training, information about their rights, exposure to and awareness about developmental programmes. Such initiatives will, in the long run, help build an effective movement for the upliftment of scavengers. NGOs have a crucial role to play in changing the attitudes and values of scavengers and in helping them understand the need to settle in alternative occupations. Direct work with scavenging communities, however, needs sensitivity, and should be complemented with work in other fronts such as education, improvement of conditions of work, examining the stereotypes pertaining to scavenging communities, and so on. For instance, the Sulabh International showed us the importance of public toilets and has also led to release scavengers from head loading human excreta. Despite such efforts, unless public conscience aroused, the scavengers themselves are made aware of human dignity and

government and local bodies put forth sustained efforts, no substantial improvements in the conditions of scavengers can be achieved.

NOTES

1. This article is a revised version of the status paper submitted to the People's Commission on Abolition of Scavenging (PCAS), Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, New Delhi. Preparation of the earlier version of this article was supported by PCAS.
2. President, Relli Youth Association (RYAN), Visakhapatnam; District Coordinator, Safai Karmachari Andolan and Secretary, CHETANA, Anakapalle; Secretary, Mahila Sadan (Dalit Women Literary Parishad), Guntur; Secretary, Citizens' Welfare Association, Visakhapatnam; Convenor, Andhra Pradesh Relli Rights Protection Samiti, Hyderabad; State Coordinator, Safai Karmachari Andolan, Secunderabad.
3. Chief Functionary, Jana Chetana, Srikakulam; Head, Department of Social Work, MR College, Vizianagaram.
4. Cantonment Relli Street and two other communities, Vizianagaram; Scavengers' Colony, Near King George Hospital, Visakhapatnam.
5. The name 'Paky' is an occupational category, while Relli is a caste name. Rellis are basically fruit gatherers and sellers, and scavengers among them came to be known as Paky, Thoti or Chachada. The fruit gatherers and sellers and the scavengers among the Rellis stay in separate habitats and their social inter-mixing is also limited. However, their social strata are interchangeable with economic mobility.
6. President of India assented to the Bill (President Okays, 1999).
7. G.O.M.S.No.479, M.A., dated August 22, 1998.
8. Kurnool, Srikakulam, Mandapet, Eluru, Tadepalligudem, Nuzvidu, Nellore, Tadipatri, Proddutur, Adilabad, Koratla and Mahabubnagar.
9. G.O.M.S.No.147, Social Welfare (H2) Department, dated October 4, 1994.

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