Dusting the Dawn
A Study on Women Sanitation Workers in the City Muzaffarpur, Bihar
PROLOGUE

“How do you find work at the farms?”

“You will see, and you will wish you never asked. Trucks come and take you to farms bigger that you’ve ever seen. You go to the farm houses and see which farmer will pay for a day’s work. They’ll offer you pay that will stink worse than the animal dung you’ll clean.”

“How much will they pay?”

“Does it matter? You’re not in any position to negotiate. If you can get something to eat from them, do it. It’s the next best thing to money.”

In his best English, Saleem offered his services to Mr. Polat, the lanky landowner. Mr. Polat looked him up and down, shrugged his shoulders, and introduced him to farm labour. At the end of the first day, Saleem lingered, thinking the farmer would pay him for his labour. But Mr. Polat shook his head, refusing to pay for a day of learning. …Saleem bit his tongue until he was back on the dirt path at sunset. He kicked and spat at the ground. …How would he explain to Madar-Jan that he had worked from morning to evening without receiving any wage? “

Mr. Polat’s daughter blocked his path and asked, ‘Do you go to school?’ He stared at her with anger and silence. The stench clung to his clothing and skin. She said, “I know work people do not go to school. But my father and mother say I must learn so I will not be a worker. They say I must be a school girl and be clean, to have a nice life.”

An excerpt from “When the Moon Is Low” by Nadia Hashimi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A lot has been written about the plight and status of sanitation workers in India. The magnanimous ‘Swacch Bharat Abhiyan’ has been taunted to ignore the real issues surrounding the people who are entrusted to keep the cities clean. The government policies, acts, regulations and associated schemes have been heavily critiqued. Despite the formulation of laws and commissions the situation of sanitation workers remains vulnerable. Every other day, the news of death of sanitation workers keeps surfacing and creates fury, unrest and disturbance. Newspaper articles reprimanding the government to perpetuate caste based violations in promoting sanitation work amongst the Dalit communities of India are eloquently written. Many times it is also advocated that this work should be stopped altogether.

The question that remains unexplored yet is that amidst the vulnerability of caste, class and gender what are the life choices of these workers. When a sanitation worker says that she doesn’t hate picking up garbage but expects that people will treat her respectfully for her work, it brings out an alternative narrative on the ways in which we perceive sanitation work. When a woman who sweeps the roads inside the colonies of the city suggests that each one us are responsible for the waste that we generate and we can’t blame the municipality for city’s unclean status, it further dents the gaze through which we have long been looking at public waste.

The current study on women sanitation workers is a departure from the conventional researches in the same domain because of its phenomenological methodology. Through this the lived experiences of women sanitation workers in their world of work has been analysed in continuum of their subject position as it keeps emerging, shaping and changing based on their caste, class and gender.

This study would not have been possible without the support and consent of the women sanitation workers of Muzzafarpur who despite their extremely busy schedules at home and at work agreed to be a part of this process. It is important to highlight that women sanitation workers have been subjugated to the violations not only of the society in which they reside but also of the state and worst of all the sector of ‘development’ (or the World of NGOs) that keeps giving them false hopes but nothing tangible changes in their everyday life. Working with the government body compels the women to remain silent on the issues of their entitlements. The women sanitation workers in Muzzafarpur despite these threats and fears agreed to undertake the participatory enquiry into documenting their lived experiences.

A special word of thanks to Mr. Ravish Chandra Verma, city manager at Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation for extending his support and time amidst his extremely busy schedule as well as other officials at the municipality who sometimes clandestinely and sometimes candidly expressed concerns related to the sanitation work in the city.

I would also like to thank my colleagues Nilanjana Bhattacharjee, Rashmi Ranjan, Anjaney Kumar and Vikas Singh for extending logistical, emotional and intellectual support in conducting this study. The experiences of engaging with the sanitation workers sometimes posed impasses which were resolved through informal discussions and I am grateful for their willingness to engage with me on the same.

The backbone of ECRC project’s work in Muzzafarpur is our community organisers commonly addressed as animators. Their deep connect, resilience and rapport with the community helped me in undertaking the phenomenological methodology for the study. I extend my sincere most gratitude to Gopal Shahi, Tripurai, Pooja, Ragini and Satyanshu for their support.
Discussions with Sanjay Dubey, Commissioner, Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation helped me think through some challenging yet interesting realities and I acknowledge his insights in this study.

A special word of thanks to my colleague and friend Praatibh Mishra who helped me understand the world of work of sanitation through Ambedkar's work.

I would like to thank my mentors Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA; Dr. Rajesh Tandon, President, PRIA and Dr. Anshuman Karol, Senior Programme Manager, PRIA for entrusting me with this work and helping me ideate and analyse the experiences from the field.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unflinching support and especially my daughter 'Mithi' for being considerate with my work schedule and frequent travels to the field. Without her understanding this work would not have been possible.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BJP: Bhartiya Janta Party
BPL: Below Poverty Line
CBD: Central Business District
CITU: Centre for Indian Trade Unions
EBC: Economically Backward Classes
ESI: Employee State Insurance
FSSM: Faecal Sludge and Septage Management
FSTP: Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant
GSM: Green Skills Mission
ILO: International Labour Organization
LIC: Life Insurance Corporation
MDVM: Maha Dalit Vikas Mission
MMC: Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation
NCSK: National Commission for Safai Karmcharis
NDA: National Democratic Alliance
NE: North East
NSDC: National Skill Development Corporation

NSKFD: National Safai Karmachari Financial Development Corporation
OBC: Other Backward Classes
PMC: Patna Municipal Corporation
PRIA: Society for Participatory Research in Asia
PSE: Participatory Settlement Enumeration
SBM: Swachh Bharat Mission
SCM: SMART City Mission
SC: Scheduled Caste
SCA: State Channelising Agencies
SDO: State Development Officer
SPUR: Support Programme for Urban Reforms
ST: Scheduled Tribe
WHO: World Health Organization
WSW: Women Sanitation Workers
1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the very few revolutionaries from the recent past who was pained by the phenomenon of untouchability. This phenomenon was premised on caste-based occupational characteristics that required certain sections of people to clean the dirt of other people such as disposing faecal waste, and animal and human carcasses. Even though Mahatma Gandhi is largely recognised as a vanguard of the Indian freedom struggle, he had proclaimed that sanitation is more important than independence (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 2015). Although many Gandhian veterans spearheaded movements on issues surrounding disposal of human waste, very few ever tried to address it directly. Most notable among such stalwarts are Baba Amte of Anandvan Ashram and Sri Bindeshwar Pathak of Sulabh International fame. Despite making a dent in the ecosystem of caste-based occupation, especially through technological innovations leading to the prevention of manual scavenging, it is distressing to note that caste-based discrimination continues to prevail in the country to a very large extent.

Sanitation is not easy to understand as a concept. While the dictionary meaning of sanitation defines it as ‘relating to the conditions that affect hygiene and health, especially the supply of sewage facilities and clean drinking water’, another definition states that sanitation literally means the measures necessary for improving and protecting the health and well-being of the people. Sanitation is any system that promotes proper disposal of human and animal wastes, proper use of toilets and avoidance of open space defecation. According to WHO’s definition, ‘sanitation generally refers to the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces.’ The word “sanitation” also refers to the maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal.

Sanitation in the present times encompasses a gamut of services. Sanitation may be largely understood to mean hygienic practices that could be categorised into personal and public hygiene. The former consists of handling menstrual waste, hand washing, cleaning of household toilets, managing household garbage production and segregation, ensuring consumption of clean drinking water, etc. The latter comprises a range of services starting from household garbage collection, sweeping of roads, cleaning of drains, dumping of ward level garbage to zonal dumping sites, and finally collecting and dumping a municipal area’s overall garbage to designated dumping
yards. The other types of work consist of cleaning school, community and public toilets, sewer lines, sewage treatment plants, septic tanks, and railway tracks. Yet another aspect of sanitation services includes making potable water accessible to all citizens, and supplying water for all kinds of cleaning requirements.

The discussion on sanitation remains partial without discussing who undertakes the sanitation work. All activities that ensure personal hygiene in private spaces are work towards cleanliness. The moment an individual’s waste is outsourced to another, it becomes sanitation work. Mahatma Gandhi had said, ‘Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for everyone to dispose of his own waste’ (Mishra, 1999). In today’s context, we tend to outsource most sanitation work, especially in public spaces, to a section commonly known as sanitation workers. This helps to make the nation’s dream of creating clean and green cities an achievable possibility, albeit distant. Shakuntala Devi, a permanent sanitation worker employed in the Municipal Corporation of Muzzafarpur, says, ‘Sehar mein do tarah ke log rehte hain. Kachra paida karne wale aur kachra saaf karne waale. Par sehari swacchta sirf nagar nigam ki jimmedari nahin hai. Aam logon ko bhi apna kaam thik se karna chahiye. Unko kachra idhar udhar nahin phenkna chahiye (There are two kinds of people in every city. The one’s who generate garbage and those who clean it. However, the responsibility of keeping a city clean is not solely that of a municipal corporation’s. The general public should also do their part of the work properly. They should not litter public spaces mindlessly).’ She goes on to add, ‘Roz karya sthal par kaam karte waqt haemin ye ehsaas dilaya jaata hai ki ham kachra saaf karne waale nahi balki kachra hi hain (Every day at our places of work, we are made to feel that we are not garbage cleaners, but rather garbage ourselves)!’ While sanitation work is relegated to a city’s sanitation workers, the reality of the matter is that each one of us is responsible for changing our behaviour towards our own garbage production, disposal, as well as our perception of those who clean our garbage. Marking this difference between our perceptions of what ‘sanitation’ is and who we consider responsible for ‘sanitation work’ becomes critical for understanding the phenomenological aspects of sanitation workers.

Under the Swacch Bharat Mission (SBM), the focus of the government has been on the construction of toilets. SBM does not address sanitation workers/safai

\[1\] Phenomenology is the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomena’ or the appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, and thus the meanings that things hold for us in our experience. Phenomenology studies the conscious experience from a subjective or first person point of view.
Participatory Research In Asia

karmacharis or their roles in a concrete manner. Criticising the SBM, Bezwada Wilson says, ‘Constructing new toilets without dismantling dry toilets is a directionless effort. The government is silent on this issue and is only highlighting the goal to construct 21 crore new toilets in the country. Swachh Bharat is about business. It is merely a corporate programme.’ More than 95 per cent of sewer workers are from India’s lowest social class, the Dalits, once known as ‘untouchables’. The job still exists because of the widespread apathy towards the community, who form the most deprived social group in the country despite efforts to end caste-based discrimination.

The government has failed to enforce The Employment of Manual Scavenging and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 2013, which made it illegal to employ manual scavengers. However, the law in itself is contradictory because it also outlines tests that must be conducted before a worker enters a sewer. It is a clear indication that the government itself cannot outlaw a job that employs a certain community, who would otherwise lack alternative work opportunities.

The present study is a phenomenological study (discussed in detail in Section 3 ahead) of sanitation workers in the city of Muzaffarpur, Bihar. With the onset of the SBM and the Smart City Mission (SCM) initiatives, a new wave of discussion on cleanliness has emerged. Remarkably, although SBM is premised on the community-led total sanitation approach leading to people’s movement on behavioural change towards sanitation, in its application it has been reduced to the construction of toilets. Muzaffarpur city has been declared as one of the proposed cities under the SCM. In the recently conducted swachhata survekshan 2017, its ranking was quite low at 304 out of the 434 cities assessed in total, indicating that it has a long way to go before it becomes ‘Meri Kalpana ka Sheher’ (the city of my dreams) (Suresh Sharma, Minister, MOHUA, Bihar) under the SCM.

2. Situating Muzaffarpur

Situating the city of Muzaffarpur at the cusp of its journey through history, its geographical contours and its present day socio-economic situation are both significant for a holistic picture of the space that this study tries to present. The state of Bihar is not only known for the ‘poor’ conditions of its people and its political space, but also for the intense caste struggles that have continued to the present

day. It's still safe to say (based on community-based interactions held as a part of this research) with some caution that caste-based violations and oppression have loosened their stronghold on the everyday existence of a number of scheduled caste (SC) communities in general. A counter narrative to this statement stands to be defied by the recently held communal rife during an uprising against the violation of the prevention of the SC/ST Atrocities Act.

In the following section, a brief history of Muzzafarpur is presented, followed by its contemporary socio-economic condition and an overview of the Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation (MMC), which is the direct space in which the study has been conducted.

2.1 Historical Relevance

The history of Muzaffarpur goes back to the times of Simraon dynasty (in the northeast part of Champaran) and its founder Nanyupa Deva who extended his power over the whole of Mithila and Nepal. During the regime of Harasimha Deva, the last king of the dynasty, Tughlaq Shah invaded Tirhut in 1323 and gained control over the territory. Tughlaq Shah handed over the management of Tirhut to Kameshwar Thakur. Thus, the sovereign power of Tirhut passed from the Hindu chiefs to the Muslims but the Hindu chief continued to enjoy complete autonomy uninterruptedly. Between 1211 & 1226, Ghais-u-ddin Iwaz, the ruler of Bengal, was the first Muslim invader of Tirhut. He, however, could not succeed in conquering the kingdom but extorted tributes. It was in 1323 that Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq established his control over the district.

Muzzafarpur is a part of Tirhut division which comprises of the districts of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga and formed a part of Bhagalpur Division of Bengal Province till 1856. The town of Muzaffarpur was founded in the 18th century by Muzaffar Khan, an ‘amil, or a revenue officer during the British rule. During the early period of the British Raj in India, Muzaffarpur was a favourite place of European indigo planters, who were scattered all over the districts of Muzaffarpur and Motihari.

Bihar witnessed much action during India's freedom struggle, when its social fabric was influenced by movements such as the famous Champaran Satyagraha. It was

3 [https://scroll.in/article/874328/interview-it-is-against-logic-to-say-dalits-will-file-false-cases](https://scroll.in/article/874328/interview-it-is-against-logic-to-say-dalits-will-file-false-cases)

4 *Bihar District Gazetteer- Muzaffarpur* by P.C. Roy Chaudhury, printed by the Superintendent, Secretariat Press, Bihar, Patna, 1958
also a bed of many political agitations, such as the crucial one held over the martyrdom of the adolescent freedom fighter, Khudiram Bose, who was executed in 1908 by the colonial government. Most of the meetings held by the Safai Karmachari Sangh (the trade union of sanitation workers in Muzaffarpur) are held in the Khudiram Bose stadium, and symbolically so. Mahatama Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya have had a deep influence on the city’s historical legacy. Bihar has always been a forerunner in the political history of the country. Before becoming the first president of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was a teacher at a college in Muzaffarpur. Other political leaders such as Rai Bahadur Shyam Nandan Sahay and Rai Bahadur Sri Narayan Mahtha were renowned members of the Indian parliament, who had played an important role in the cultural, social and political spheres of the town.

As many scholars argue, the Mughals as well as the British colonial rulers had reinforced the caste system. Both found it convenient for establishing their authority by choosing members of high caste communities to rule parts of the Mughal and British empires. Yet another argument is that their conquests tightened the bond among various Hindu castes to protect and reinforce their identities through the rigidity of the caste systems. However, the British Raj also outlined the ‘scheduled castes’ in documents such as the Government of India Act, 1935, and further made the presence of the caste system and its distinctions known. Currently, the total SC population in the state of Bihar is 15%; while in Muzaffarpur, it is about 8% of the total population. The state has a designated department for the welfare of SCs and scheduled tribes (STs) known as Mahadalit Vikas Mission, and has rolled out multiple schemes in the areas of health, education and employment for affirmative action. The state also has appointed Vikas Mitras in every ward to facilitate the availability of state sponsored schemes for Mahadalits.

2.2 Geographical Contours of Muzaffarpur

As one enters Muzaffarpur, the height of the roads and depth of the farms on both sides of the roads are conspicuous. As one enters the city, the gaping widths of drains are confronted, highlighting the reason for such wide open nullahas brimming with sewage water. At an elevation of 60 metres, the city is intersected by the rivers of Bagmati, Gandak, Burhi Gandak and Lakhandeyee. Hence, the district comprises

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5 A Concise History of India (pp. 137-138)

6 Dalits constitute nearly 15 per cent of Bihar’s population of 83 million. The poorest Dalits were declared Maha Dalits by the state. A government commission has identified 18 of the 22 Dalit sub-castes, including the Musahar, Bhuwiyan, Dom, and Nat as Maha Dalits. They constitute 31 per cent of the Dalit population in the state.
an extensive and fertile alluvial plain formed by the rivers that flow through it. The ground is not marked by any high contour and at many places there are chains of shallow marshes, which serve the purpose of draining out the excess water during the rains and the overflow of the rivers. A special feature of the district is that due to continuous deposit of silt many of its riverbeds are higher than the adjoining areas. This leads to frequent floods during the monsoons, particularly in the northeast and southwest parts of the district.

![Figure 1: District Map of Muzzafarpur](image)

The total area of Muzzafarpur city is 3,172 sq. km., while that of the district is 3,173 sq. km. It is one of the densest cities of Bihar. According to the Census 2011, the population density of Muzzafarpur is 1,514, higher than the state density of 1,106. Owing to the alluvial soil, agriculture is an important economic activity. The soil is also best suited for the production of high quality cash crops like tobacco, sugar cane, litchis and elephant foot.

2.3 Muzzafarpur in the Present Context

Muzzafarpur district is in the Tirhut division of the state of Bihar. It is the most important urban node in North Bihar, well connected through road and rail within the state and to other cities in the country. The district is also known as a gateway to Nepal, which is less than two hours away. Muzzafarpur city is the largest urban centre serving the districts of Champaran, Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Supaul, Saharsa, and Samastipur. It is located centrally to cater to the rising tourism of Buddhist and
Jain religious sites such as Hajipur and Vaishali. It is also the administrative centre of the region and houses divisional/ zonal headquarters of all major government departments. The city serves as the central regional wholesale market for small towns and villages in its vicinity, supplying various commodities and agricultural/ horticultural/ other fresh produce. There are eight private markets of which Sarayaganj and Kalyani along with the Gola area continues to be the Central Business District (CBD) of Muzaffarpur with around 2,000 shops. Muzaffarpur is famous for its lac bangles, which are sold in 150 special shops in the Islampur area. The city’s Sutapatti market is famous as a cloth hub, which supplies textiles from southern and western states to the eastern/NE states. The district is the centre of several industries. The Prabhat Zarda Factory, Bharat Wagon and Engineering Ltd., units of Leather Development Corporation and Muzaffarpur Dairy, a unit of the Bihar State Dairy Corporation are major industrial enterprises located in Muzaffarpur and its periphery. They have generated considerable employment and helped in establishing a number of small industries, including a few cottage industries.

2.4 Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation (MMC)

The Muzaffarpur city is divided into 49 wards and 10 zones. Each zone, or anchal as it is commonly known, comprises about 05-07 wards. As per the Census 2011, there are 65,870 households residing in the city, with a total population of 3,54,462. Out of this total, 1,87,564 are males and 1,66,898 are females. Thus the average sex ratio of Muzaffarpur is 890. The population of children aged 0-6 years is 44,280, which is 12% of the total population. There are 23,275 male children and 21,005 female children. Thus the child sex ratio of Muzaffarpur is 902, which is greater than it’s average sex ratio (890).

The city’s literacy rate is 83.1%, which is higher than the 63.4% of Muzaffarpur district and 61.80% at the state level. The male literacy rate is 75.7% and the female literacy rate is 69.3%. These ratios reflect a sharp rise from Census 2001, which recorded the city’s literacy rate as 48% with the male literacy rate at 61% and the female literacy rate at 35%.

According to Census 2011, there are 105 informal settlements with a population of 31,607 (from 5,292 households) in the city, whereas the survey conducted by the SPUR Programme of the state government in 2011, identified 137 informal settlements with a total population of 77,456 and 7,035 BPL families. However, officially MMC has notified 105 slums as per the definition and characteristics laid out in the State Slum Policy 2011.
3. Methodology of the Study

The study on women sanitation workers in Muzzafarpur, Bihar, was undertaken to focus on the discussion that sanitation movement is ill conceived in the absence of any policy framework/guideline and provisions for sanitation workers. Hence, the current research tries to unfold questions on who undertakes the sanitation work and how do we perceive a sanitation worker in general. As has also been discussed above, the discussion on sanitation and cleanliness has acquired multiple dimensions since the launching of SBM in 2014. The mission will complete its tenure in 2019, and so far has not yet been able to pay much attention to the ‘sanitation workers’ who are the foot soldiers of this mission. While the ideas around implementing a sanitation policy and sanitation plan is to create clean and liveable cities, most of these policies focus on urban infrastructural capacities instead. Thereby, missing out on who cleans, where and what they clean, how do they clean, and why do they clean the city? Moreover, what will happen if they refuse to do this ‘cleaning’? Can they refuse? Hence, a phenomenological study was undertaken to understand the lived experiences of women sanitation workers.

Phenomenology is simultaneously a philosophical approach and a research method (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007; Connell, 2003; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology stems from the Greek words ‘phenoein’ meaning appearance and ‘logos’ meaning reason. As a philosophy, phenomenology is ‘a radical beginning, a return to philosophical questioning, and a way to see the world anew as it really is rather than as it is constructed’ (Caelli, 2000, p 371). As a research method, phenomenology is ‘the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.6).’ ‘Phenomenology is the study of essences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p. vii).’ Essences are the essential elements of a phenomenon, those things which makes it recognisable as such (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology does not look for cause-effect relationships, nor does it seek to generalise (Porter, 1999). It is a process of observing and analysing ‘the things themselves’ (Husserl, 1962) in a new way. ‘A good phenomenological text has the effect of making us suddenly “see” something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life experience (van Manen, 1997).’

The research question for this study is: What is it to be a woman sanitation worker in the city of Muzzafarpur, Bihar?
This study will use a hermeneutic phenomenological human science process as outlined by Max van Manen. Van Manen (1990) delineates what phenomenological human science is and what it is not. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of lived experience as it is immediately experienced; however, it cannot be understood until it is reflected upon. Phenomenology does not attempt to generalise or create theory; rather it allows the essence of the experience to emerge from the data. It does not seek to solve problems. Phenomenology highlights what makes an experience unique. Interpretation of experiences creates a constant awareness of what it means to be human and aids in the quest to reach our full humanity. Phenomenology reveals the lifeworld through language. Hence, writing is an integral component of the phenomenological process. Writing allows the discovery of memories. As well as how ideas are expressed can create a deeper meaning than what is written.

Phenomenology uses inductive research methods to comprehend universally-lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological researcher acknowledges the ‘whole might be quite different than the sum of its parts’ (Omery, 1983). The researcher analyses and interprets lived experiences to find essential themes and the themes taken together allow meaning of the experience to emerge as a whole (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology addresses the concept that a person’s life world shapes the interpretation of an experience. Interpreting the lived experiences of the participants to ensure they encompass the grammatical and psychological axes requires the researcher to ‘hear’ and ‘see’ beyond the given words. Tone of voice, body language and silences are relevant and essential for hermeneutic interpretation. ‘Composing linguistic transformations is not a mechanical procedure. Rather, it is a creative hermeneutic process (van Manen, 1990, p. 96).’ There are four existential factors that may prove especially helpful as guides for reflection in the research process: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time

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7 Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was concerned with developing phenomenology as an alternative to methods traditionally used by natural sciences. Husserl argued that to really know and understand concepts we must turn to concrete experience. A fundamental concept is the lifeworld, the world of lived experience inhabited by us as conscious beings, and incorporating the way in which phenomena (events, objects and emotions) appear to us in our conscious experience or everyday life. Husserl conceptualised the lifeworld as pre-reflective—that is, our focus is on what we perceive rather than how we perceive it. Husserl’s project was to isolate ‘essences’—invariant features and structures of phenomena—and to describe these as precisely as possible. By isolating such essences from a range of experiences, Husserl argued that it might be possible to identify the qualities giving a specific experiential phenomenon its distinctiveness. Husserl believed that to do this, it was also necessary to adopt a specific attitude, to suspend—or ‘bracket’—presuppositions and judgements so that a clear and unblinking view of the lifeworld could emerge. This attitude is known as the epoché. (https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-28/august-2015/learning-lifeworld)
Lived space (spatiality) is pre-verbal and typically not reflected upon; however, it is the space that affects how we feel. Standing near the border of India and Pakistan may elicit feelings of fear and vulnerability, while standing in front of the India Gate may elicit feelings of patriotism and national pride. Lived space in the context of women sanitation workers may involve a change in the way it feels to ‘come home’. Home may no longer be the place to rest and feel content, but a place of constant uncertainty and neverending responsibility. While the workplace, which in the present case is the streets, may be a place of freedom for venting out inner frustrations in companionship with fellow workers and to experience self-worth for being a provider of the family.

Lived body (corporeality) is body in life. It refers to the fact that we are always physically in the world; our bodies are inescapable (van Manen, 1990). This is particularly important for women sanitation workers as they perform the ‘cleaning’ with their lived body. The ‘bodily space’ of sanitation workers requires it to be physically present and in action, as well as emotionally unrecognisable to people in general and to bodies of authority in particular. The ‘bodily space’ of sanitation workers may become numb, like losing the sense of smell or neglected since their labouring bodies overstress both mentally and physically on one hand and unable to get adequate nutrition on another.

Lived time (temporality) is subjective (van Manen, 1990). For example, while trailing the garbage truck from the city to the dumping site, about 14 km further for two hours under the scorching heat seemed to be very long. However, spending about four hours in the evening talking to the women in one of the slums seemed inadequate. In other words, lived experience affects how time is perceived. It is a connection between the human perception and social organisation of time. Sanitation workers battle against objective (clock) time to do all that needs to be done, which alters how they experience time spent at their workplace and at homes. For instance, while trailing a woman sanitation worker during the course of field research, it became difficult for me and my colleague to keep up with her pace as she walked very fast. The fast walking is correlated to time saved for rushing back home to attend to the needs of her children.
'Lived other (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them (van Manen, 1990, p. 104).’ A woman sanitation worker’s relationality constantly shifts with the nature of engagement with the employing authority, with her co-workers, with her children and other family members and with the other women/people in her neighbourhood. Her relationality with the state is also subject to the various changes based on the nature of dependence that impacts her overall life.

Attending to the speaking of language becomes critical for the researcher to be able to tease out the real intent from the hegemonic or internalised ideas. A dual axes approach to interpretation allows the researcher to stay true to the nature of the participant’s intent. The axes are the grammatical axis and the psychological axis (Pehler, 2003; Moran, 2000; Chan, 2001). The first axis pertains to language; the interpretation must stay true to the linguistic style of the participants. The second axis pertains to the author’s frame of reference, her/his historical, social and cultural experiences that create the lived experience (Pehler, 2003; Chan, 2001; Moran, 2000).

4. Situating the Context of the Phenomenological Study on Women Sanitation Workers

In Muzzafarpur, from 2012-2016, the MMC had given the contract for the city’s sanitation services to NIDAN. Since 2016, the delivery of sanitation services, its management and maintenance has been directly under the jurisdiction of the MMC, under the direct supervision of the City Manager who reports to the Commissioner. Each ward has a municipal office, superseded by a zonal office. The permanent, adhoc, as well as contractual employees are directly employed with the municipal corporation. Each ward has a set of 10-13 sanitation workers that comprise sweepers who sweep the roads and aggregate the garbage in heaps, garbage collectors/coolies who pick up the garbage heaps and load it in their thela or cycle carts and dump it in a designated area in each ward. The coolies are also responsible for cleaning drains and septage as required. There are also truck drivers who collect the garbage from the dumping site and load it in their truck. These trucks then carry the truckload of garbage to dump it at the dumping yard in Rautiniya, which is about 14 km away from the city. Each truck makes about two rounds of the dumping yard. Each ward is supervised by a ward inspector/Jamaadar. Each zone is

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8 NIDAN is an organisation based out of Patna, and one of its function is to work as a contractor with various municipalities. It also works extensively with informal sector workers.
supervised by the Circle Inspector who maintains attendance records and communicates with the City Manager at the municipal office. The Commissioner is the signing authority for releasing payments to contractual and adhoc sanitation workers. The payments are directly transferred into their bank accounts. However, no one reported receiving a payment slip for the same.

The sanitation workers work in two shifts. In the mornings they work on an average from 5:00am to 10:30/11:00am. Then they get three to four hours off from 10:00/11:00am to 2:00pm. The afternoon shift thereafter is from 2:00pm to 5:00pm. In total, the workers are required to work for eight hours per day on an average. During both shifts, the sanitation workers are expected to mark their attendance on the biometric system installed at each anchal zonal office. Of the 10 zonal offices, the biometric system had not been installed in three of them, as of March 2018.

**Figure 2: Time chart of women sanitation workers in Muzaffarpur**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>WSW 1</th>
<th>WSW 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.30-4.30</td>
<td>Wake up, morning ablutions, drink tea, get ready</td>
<td>Wake up, morning ablutions, drink tea, get ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-30-5.00</td>
<td>Leave for Zonal Office and mark attendance</td>
<td>Leave for Zonal Office and mark attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00-10.00</td>
<td>Sweep the designated roads</td>
<td>Sweep the designated roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00-2.00</td>
<td>Get back to home: cook food for children, wash clothes, fetch drinking water, wash clothes and take bath</td>
<td>Get back to home: cook food for children, make dagras and sell them on in the market nearby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-5.00</td>
<td>Second shift for sweeping the roads</td>
<td>Second shift for sweeping the roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00-6.00</td>
<td>Leave for home, reach home</td>
<td>Leave for home, reach home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00-8.00</td>
<td>Rest, fetch drinking water from the pipeline</td>
<td>Rest, fetch drinking water from the pipeline, wash clothes and take bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-10.00</td>
<td>Cook food, put children to sleep</td>
<td>Cook food, put children to sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00-3.30</td>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Time spent on basic physiological needs
- Time spent in household chores
- Time spent at work with MMC

There are about 900 sanitation workers in Muzaffarpur, which includes sweepers, coolies and truck drivers, as well as workers for the department of drinking water. Of these, about 250 are permanent workers. Of the total sanitation workers, 225 are women. During the present field work, the sweepers, coolies and the ward inspector/jamadar were paid Rs 300 per day since April 2017. Since it is a contractual employment arrangement, Sundays are unpaid holidays. Rs 300 are also compliant with the Bihar state’s minimum wage parameter. The truck drivers get paid Rs 8,700
per month. The validation meeting that was carried out with the women sanitation workers and municipal staff in June 2018 informed that the daily wages have been increased by Rs 13 per day with effect from April 2018.

There are three trade unions in MMC at present namely (1) the Nagar Nigam Karmachari Sangathan, (2) the Kamgaar Union, and (3) the Muzzafarpur Karmachari Sangathan. The former two are the collective of officials of the municipal corporation, while the latter is a collective of workers, ward inspectors and circle inspectors. In the city of Muzzafarpur, women sanitation workers are employed as sweepers alone. All other work such as garbage collection, cleaning the drainage and septage, and driving the garbage truck are undertaken by men. Apart from that each of the positions in the sanitation hierarchy, such as ward inspector, sanitation inspector and circle inspector, are held by men. In addition, some of the women who have been permanently employed for more than 30 years with the MMC have not been promoted (MMC Employee List 2018-19). Roshni Kumari, who is employed with the MMC as a sweeper shared that despite being tenth pass and applying for the position of supervisor, her request has not been honoured. When she worked with Nidaan she was a supervisor and would manage one ward for ensuring cleanliness. After the MMC took over sanitation work in the city, she was coerced to take up the job of sweeping. Multiple requests and applications by her were turned down on the pretext that in present hierarchy within MMC, women are not appointed as supervisors. Hence, the study on women sanitation workers focussed on bringing out their lived experiences, specifically with respect to their world of work as well as their job experience of sweeping.

4.1 Sample Size and the Methods Used to Conduct the Study

To conduct the present study, 20 personal discussions were held with women sanitation workers. Of the 20, five are permanent workers, two are adhoc, and 16 are contractual employees. Five focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with groups of 10 women each. In total, 50 women participated in the discussions. Dialogues were also held with a coolie, two truck drivers, five ward inspectors/Jamaadars, four circle inspectors, two ward councillors and a trade union leader. Two women sanitation workers were trailed at their job site, apart from trailing the garbage truck from Muzzafarpur city to Rautiniya, the MMC’s garbage dump site. Attempts were made to interview each woman within their spaces of habitation. FGDs were also held in the settlement of their residences. The sanitation inspectors,
coolies and ward inspectors were interviewed at their work sites or in anchal/ zonal offices.

The places of residence of these sanitation workers are in the town’s slum bastis. Since majority of these workers are from the SC community, they also reside in clusters that are named after their castes. A study undertaken by Praxis and Nidan in Patna (‘The Legacy of Stench’ – 2011) confirms the fact that even in 2011; all most all safai karamcharis hail from SCs. As many as 82.54% of all sanitation workers are from the Dom, Mehtar, Basfor or Bhangi and Dusadh/ Paswaan sub-castes. An additional 10.26% workers comprise various other scheduled castes, including a significant 6% from the Musahar caste. While only 5.38% of workers belong to other backward classes (OBCs; mostly Mallahs), about 1.57% workers are Muslims. During the field work, it was also found that Christians and other castes such as Yadav and Kanu also perform sanitation work. In terms of caste, 41% (4,836) of enumerated slum households are SCs. A significant 40% (4,643) are OBCs. Only 15% households belong to the general category. About 3% (311) households belong to the ST category. This indicates that a large portion of slums are inhabited by SC groups. Their disadvantaged socio-economic conditions also lead to a reduced access to basic services, rights and entitlements (PSE, Muzzafarpur).

The settlements in which this study was conducted are inhabited by the sanitation workers who live in caste-based community settlements, which are as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Name of the slum basti</th>
<th>Ward No.</th>
<th>Brief Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mestar Tola, Saraiyaganj</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mestar Tola is located at the centre of the Sariyaganj market. All the people residing in this settlement belong to the Mestar caste also commonly known as sweepers or Harijans, which is categorised as SC. Surrounded by tall buildings of the market the basti nestles in a very small patch of square shaped land with about 70 households and 300 people. This land, although considered to belong to the state has a history of being a Muslim crematory ground. Lakshmi’s father in law came here for the first time when he was only 15 years old. At that time he started working in a butcher shop. The owner of the butcher shop owned this land which became a crematory ground. The owner appointed Lakshmi's father in law to become a caretaker of the land. As the former was also heirless he left this land to him. Since then 5 generations have lived on the land. The community has been receiving threats from the marwaris who occupy the market nearby to leave or sell the space but they have put up a strong front and warned them to shy away from their land. Lakshmi said, ‘Bahut log aakar rasid mangte hain, Toh main kehti hoon mera Jeevan hi mera rasid hai. Hata nahin paoge’ (many people come here and ask for documentary proof and I say that my life is a proof. You won’t be able to remove us). Most of the men and women are employed with MMC mostly as contractual labours. The others are either privately employed for doing works related to cleaning in households, shops and nearby hotels and hospitals. Apart from this women and children also engage in rag picking, coal extraction from burnt ash heaps from the hotels etc. the settlement has open drains laid throughout the settlement. The houses are built as if on the banks of these drains. There is only one tap water available for the people in the basti apart from one hand pump. Quarrels on the water pump amongst women during summers are commonly voiced out problem. There is one community toilet, but most of the people defecate in open on the drain near the slum. All the residents have constructed their own houses most of which are brick ones. Anganwadi centre and primary school are in...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ward no. 11 which is at a distance from the slum settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Harijan Basti, Aghoria Bazar</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 | This slum is situated on Muzaffarpur- Hajipur road and falls within ward no. 30 of MMC area. It is near the office of irrigation department. The slum is centrally located surrounded by residential cum commercial locality. The slum is connected with pucca road which is motorable and the land is a government holding. This slum was rehabilitated by the government and hence is a notified slum with the population of approx 620. Household of this slum is approx 132. All houses have been connected with electricity. The people belong to SC (Harijan) community. Status of the houses is pakka. There is no primary school near the slum and Anganwadi centre is near the slum. People use tap water and handpump for drinking and other purposes. The slum has huge open drainage just at its entry and within the slum the drains are also open and overflowing. There are two community toilets. Most of the men and women are employed with MMC as *safai karmcharis*. Some of them earn their living as unskilled daily labours, foothpath vendors, and hawkers who make and sell brooms. Many women make traditional bamboo crafts and items which are used in marriages for ritualistic purposes. This is their traditional livelihood and many of them continue to do this as part time work or in the free time that they get from working at the municipality. The older women were seen making these crafts all through the slum.

Majority have their voter ID, aadhar card, ration card, Old age Pension facility etc. However, the houses are in dilapidated state. They have not been maintained and many houses have damaged ceilings. The residents shared that during rains it becomes difficult for them to live in these houses. There is a primary school building, which has been occupied by few families to reside as their homes have been damaged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dalit/Malik Basti, Bahalkhana Road</th>
<th>39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Bahalkhana road basti** is situated in Bahalkhana road under ward no. 39. The settlement is built on the sides of the road. The name Bahalkhana comes from "House of Oxen". In the old times the bullock carts were used to pick up garbage and transport it away from the city. These bullocks were owned by the municipality and they had built a shade to keep the bullocks in this area. That is how the settlement was named. This settlement was established about 90 years ago. 80 % settlement is housed on the government land. It is a notified slum. It has 139 households with population of 721. It has both kachha and semi pakka houses. It has no Anganwadi and school nearby. The nearest anganwadi and school is situated at a distance of 1 km. There are no hand-pumps in the slum; only two stamp posts are available for water supply. Men and women from the slum are working as sanitation worker in private houses, hospitals, hotels, and MMC. They have multiple issues like no voter ID, ration Card and access to primary schools for their children. No any health centre is available nearby. The nearest health centre is at a distance of approximately 2-3 km. There is a big dumping yard in the slum where garbages from other places including slums are being dumped due to which it this locality is always full of rotting stench. This slum also has a rehabilitated building which is in a very bad shape and is almost unlivable. There is a MMC workshop besides it. There are two community toilets in this area of which one is under-construction and another is in miserable condition due to no proper maintainence. Many young men are also employed as truck drivers and tractor drivers and one can see many of such tractors filled with garbage standing just at the entry of the slum in most of the evenings.

The Dom caste, which inhabits this slum have the traditional livelihood of making bamboo crafts and many women make and sell those during the marriage season.

The Dom caste, which inhabits this slum have the traditional livelihood of making bamboo crafts and many women make and sell those during the marriage season.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slum No</th>
<th>Slum Name</th>
<th>Ward No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ambedkar Nagar Dalit Basti</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ambedkar Nagar Dalit Basti is situated at the middle of Amar Cinema Road, Purani Gudri and Bahalkhana Road in ward no. 39. This slum was established in the year 1946. But got the electricity connection for the first time in 2014. This slum is not connected with proper motorable road. The land is owned both by the government and some are also privately owned. The total number of household is 128 and population is 611. There is no school in the slum but anganwadi centre is available. Only one hand pump and one stand post is available in the slum. People get water for drinking and other purpose from these. In summer season the handpump dries. No health centre is available nearby. The nearest health centre is situated at a distance of 2-3 kms. During the rainy season, the slum faces heavy water logging causing worst situation for transportation. One community toilet is attached with community hall whose condition is very miserable. They have issues of voter ID cards, ration card and adhar card and access to school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slum No</th>
<th>Slum Name</th>
<th>Ward No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lakdidhahi pul towards bandh, Balughat Ashram</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This slum is constructed on the land of both private and government land on the bank of river Budhi Gandak. This slum was established before 1947. Badal Sahni and Dashrath Sahni’s families were the first inhabitants of this slum who settled here from Maripur. Their main occupation was fishing and boating. When this slum was established there were only 4 houses. Then they started selling their land and now the slum has approximately 100 households. This slum has had two mishappening in the past. In 1952 a huge fire broke out and the whole slum was burnt. In 1987 the slum was washed out due to the massive floods. Laxman Sahni was the first who got electricity connection in this slum. There were no toilet system in those days so Dasrath Sahni helped women to cross the river for toilet. This continued for many years. Then Ramchandra Singh constructed first toilet in the community in year 2005. The Landmark of this slum is River Budhi Gandak, Surya Mandir, Mai Sthan and Purani Devi Mandir. There is no health centre, no proper transportation, and no Anganwadi centre in the vicinity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mestar Tola, Malgodam</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Malgodam Mestar Tola slum is about 70 to 80 years old. This slum is situated on the land of Eastern Railway Zone. All the people residing in this settlement belong to the Mestar caste also commonly known as sweepers or Harijans, which is categorised as SC. It is situated in the middle of the city. It is surrounded by government bus stand in the east, custom zone office in the west, juran chhapra in the north and railway station in south. There are four quarters of railway sanitation worker in it. There are 36 households with population of 158. All houses are kachcha made up of bamboo, plastics, and straws. There is no toilet in this slum. The whole slum is dependent on one railway stand post for water supply. There is no drainage system. Most of the residents go for open defecation. However, the slum looks very neat and clean. The youth and SIC members have been able to work together to cover the drains within the slum. The problem of staying on this land is that though the citizens belong to the city of Muzzafarpur, the land belongs to the railways. Because of this no application of IHHL under SBM are honoured for the residents of this place. Even though they are entitled to vote and the ward councillor lives only 100 metres away from the settlement yet no state government provisions apply to them and all the functionaries feel helpless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brahampura Dalit Basti</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>This slum is situated along with NH 28 and near Mahesh Bhagat Banwari Lal Madwari College. The name of slum signifies the caste of the people who reside in this locality. There are 34 households with population of 168 in this slum. The residents own the land and most of them are involved in a daily wage labour such as washing the bottles in huge amount of numbers daily. There are mostly pakkha houses. There are only 2-3 houses that are semi-pakka. Roads are motorable within the community and external roads are also made of concrete. There is a functional AWC and a PDS shop near the community in Krishna Toli. Female are mostly unemployed with MMC. The number of youth in this settlement is very low as most of them have migrated to earn and make a living. There is only one point of supply water. Approx 70 % households have toilet, rest go for Open defecation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is situated near Mai sthan, Sadpura under ward no. 33 of MMC area. It is located on the road side and within the city boundary. The settlement is surrounded by the residential complexes. This slum is spread across on the two sides of the concrete road. Within the slums the roads are narrow and kaccha. This land has been occupied by the slum dwellers since 100 year now. However, they do not have patta of their occupied land. The land ownership therefore is quite contested. This is notified slum with total number of households is 35 with population of 180. Almost all the houses are kuccha and have no electricity connection. The people belong to SC community, known as Dhunkar. Traditionally their livelihood was to do weaving of grass and bamboo to make furnitures. With the advent of plastic chairs and solid furnitures their skills have become obsolete in the current times. A very few men and women are employed with MMC as contractual labourers. There is huge level of unemployment in this locality. During the FGD many men and women approached us to find them an employment either with the municipality or anywhere else. The migration of men and youth from this community is also very high.

There is one primary school situated near the slum and an anganwadi centre. They do not have any source of water. They collect water from the hand pump installed at the Mushahar Primary School for their domestic use. There is no facility of toilet in the whole slum. People from all the households are compelled to go for open defecation. Children are seen openly defecating on the open drains. At the time of conducting FGDs the issue of water and toilets was vehemently voiced.

Maximum households are involved in making bamboo crafts which fetches them meagre incomes. Some women work as house-maids in the nearby households. Majority of the people possesss voter IDs, ration cards, old age pension benefits etc.

The slum is located in such a place that it has huge water logging problems. Especially during the rains the situation worsens and the yearly floods affect the locality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Maharaji Pokhar</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>This slum is constructed along the margins of Maharaji pond also known as pokhar in the local language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This pond was constructed by the king of Darbhanga and draws it’s name from there. There are about 200 households on the periphery of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the pond with population of about 2000 people. Majority of the households are Muslims and very few houses are of Hindus. This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>settlement came into existence in 1960; however, there is a lurking fear of dislocation amongst the inhabitants. Only 4 households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>have legally registered their land or patta as it is locally known. Most of the houses in the slum are kuccha houses made of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tarpaulin sheets and straws or bamboo with earthy floor. Although toilets have been constructed in the house, their drainage has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been routed into the pond. There is no community toilet here. People have limited access to drinking water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Although inhabited alongside of a pond, the locality of the slum was very neat and clean. The people negated any communal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tension and shared that they live peacefully and enjoy mutually respectful relationship with people from the other religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dusadh Toli, Amrit Bazar also known as Amrud Bagan</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>This is situated at Jail Chowk under ward no. 45. This slum is connected with the main and people are residing here for a more than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 generations. The land on which the slum is habitied is a private land. It is a notified slum with 50 households and a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>population of approximately 200. The houses in this slum are semi-pucca. This slum is free from open defecation. The Anganwadi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and a primary school are situated at a distance of 1 km. Every household has their own handpump. All have their voter ID, Adhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>card, Ration Card, Old Age Pension Card etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pakki Sarai (Campus)</td>
<td>Anchal 5 (Wards 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45)</td>
<td>This slum is situated near Pakki Sarai Chowk. According to local native, it is said to be one of the oldest inns of Muzaffarpur. Mostly household belongs to Muslim community and they are living in that inn only. The condition of that inn is very very miserable. All habitants have this fear of removal from this place. The number of households is 38 and total population is approximately 200. Most of the houses are kachcha, a few are pakka and semi-pakka. There is only one stand post in that area. There is a public toilet near this slum. There is no health centre, no Anganwadi, and no drainage system. The people have dug a pit for the drainage, which when filled up is emptied out by the inhabitants themselves, and the waste is deposited near a drainage system attached to a public toilet. Most people are local vendors, hawkers, and daily wage labourers. This area is surrounded by the houses of nartakis/ or the women who practice prostitution. They have been rehabilitated by the state in this locality over a huge area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Survey Locations on the Map

As is evident from the description above, the sanitation workers almost entirely reside in slum settlements. These places are ridden with issues such as open drainage, lack of access to basic services such as water and toilets. All the places that were visited were littered with garbage, marked by wide open drains with
stagnant water, and most of the households had no individual toilets. However, the houses of the workers, where the discussions were held, were neat and clean, aesthetically arranged despite minimal material possession. It was shared that in many of these areas, where these women reside, the sweeping was not done as it was not assigned by the ward councillor. When asked, ‘You clean the roads in the city, but your own locality looks unswept,’ they responded that, ‘Ghar ka bhi kaam karein, bahar ka bhi kaam karein, phir mohalla bhi saaf karein… Kaise hoga? (I work at home and at work, and then clean my locality as well? How will I manage so much work?)’

5. Understanding Women Sanitation Workers and Their World of Work

‘Raat mein teen baje hi neend khul jaata hai. Ghadi ko tukur tukur dekhte rehte hain. Char bajte hi bistar chhor dete hain aur haath munh dho kar, latrine se aakar nikal jaate hain. Panch baje hajiri laga dena padta hai. (I am awake by 3:00 in the morning. I keep looking at the watch. At 4:00 I get up, wash my face and hands, freshen up and leave. By 5:00 we must mark our attendances.)’

Much before sunrise, women in the city of Muzzafarpur occupy their designated streets/ territory of work with a long jhaadu (broom) in their hands and begin to dust at dawn. Sweeping the roads is not just about cleaning the road side litter. Rather it is a depiction of a spectrum of human behaviour, the state’s economy, political purview, caste–class rifles, cultural preferences, workplace dynamics and a peek into the subconscious workings of the mind and body of those who hold this broom.

Women who hold this jhaadu/ broom are usually inconspicuous as much as the jhaadu itself. Sweeping roads is so ordinary a task and taken so much for granted that one hardly notices it. By the time the crowds hit the roads, the streets are already swept clean and the women sanitation workers have left, making the work and the worker invisible. And while the work may still be visible or noticeable in the form of a clean street or heaped up garbage dumps, the women behind these heaps remain unseen. The relationship of these women with the jhaadu that they carry is intricate. It is a symbol of their identity as a municipal worker (associated with the government), a weapon to drive away goons and garbage, a symbol of untouchability (jhaaduwaali is also a mestar/ sweeper), a symbol of protest, and a symbol of the Goddess Lakshmi.
Classification of what is dirty and what is pure are not about the reality. Investing dirt with power makes it more manageable. Deciding that some people are irreversibly impure makes them more manageable too. They can be kept in their places. The moment we build a category, ‘Women Sanitation Workers’, we are implying the lowest among the lowest rung in the social hierarchy. Most women sanitation workers in Muzzafarpur are from the Dalit community, such as Mestar, Dom/Malik, Mushar and Paaswaan. Even so, writes Virginia Smith in Clean, her history of hygiene, ‘Distancing yourself from poisons, dust and dirt is one thing, but distancing yourself from invisibly “unclean” people and objects is quite an achievement of the imagination (Smith, 2007).’

Apart from coming from the lowest caste, women sanitation workers usually reside in squalid conditions in the peripheries of the city, with little or no literacy, surviving on the bare minimum resources and trapped in an intergenerational misery due to socio-economic and political apathy. This study is an attempt to confront the social system, which still believes that ‘One man’s excreta is another man’s headload’. It is also an attempt for people in authority to sit back and think if we are by any means perpetuating this intergenerational caste-based occupation, despite living in a technologically advanced 21st century. Lastly, it is an attempt to trigger thoughts and queries among one and all on what is this ‘garbage’ and who is a ‘sanitation worker’.

5.1 Basic Profile of Women Sanitation Workers

5.1.1 Age

Most of the women respondents as a part of this study could not remember their age, or year of birth. Most of them guessed an age bracket or a number; many asked their fellow women to tell their age. The reference to the age was marked by the age of their children. ‘Beta 16 saal ka ho gaya hai. Umar nahin maloom hai (My son is of 16 years now. I don’t know my age).’ Many also remembered their age in terms of the years of their employment with the MMC. ‘Bhudhiya tak mein khatwa liya, ab jaakar permanent kiya hai. Ab sirf do saal nukri ka bacha hai (They took hard work from me till I became old doing this, now they have made me permanent. Now I just have two years left of my employment).’

‘2016 mein retire hue hain (I retired in 2016).’
‘Pichle saal retire hue hain (I retired last year).’

‘Indira Gandhi ke samay se nigam ke saath kam kar rahe hain. Tab 2 rupya mahine ka milta tha. (I have been working with the municipality since the time of Indira Gandhi. At that time we would get a monthly wage of Rs 2).’

About 50% of the women respondents were in the age group of 30-40 years. However, during the validation meeting for the research findings it was found that on an average, the age of women sanitation workers is 25-35 years. Most of the women shared that they had been employed as sanitation workers in the city for more than 10 years. Almost all the women with whom discussions were held said that they have been a part of the continuum of generational work with the municipality as sanitation workers.

5.1.2 Caste and religion

It is poignant to note that occupationally sanitation work is designated to a particular caste. In case of Muzaffarpur, it is mostly the Mestar/Sweeper and Dom/Malik also known as Harijans. Over a period of time, although most of the caste barriers for entry into a particular occupation have been disrupted, in case of sanitation work it seems to have maintained its hold. Although it was reported that people from many other caste such as Yadav, Rajputs and Bhumihars have also entered the profession, it is of significance to look at such workers in a disaggregated manner. The posts or positions in the municipality, which are competitively occupied are vied for by all castes. However, the upper castes hold positions of sanitation inspectors and upwards. Of the four circle inspectors who were interviewed, only one belonged to the SC. The majority of foot soldiers who carry out the actual cleaning of the municipality still belong to the Dalit/Mahadalit communities.

While majority of the women sanitation workers whom I met during the course of the study were Hindus, most of the respondents shared that the sanitation

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work is no more sacrosanct of Hindu Mahadalits.

‘Ab sab jaat karte hain, musalmaan, Christian, bhumihaar; sabhi log is kaam mein ghuse hue hain (now all castes do this work, Muslims, Christians, bhumihaars; everyone has entered this job arena).’

‘Jo garib hain wo sab is kaam mein hain, sabko roti chahiye. Thik hi hai (people who are poor do this work, everyone needs food. It's fine).’

The economically disadvantaged people from most other religions are also employed in sanitation work. The study, however, was limited to interviewing mostly the Hindus who lived in slum settlements and were employed with the MMC, although it was not purposive. Of the total 20 women sanitation workers who were personally interviewed, 80% were from the Mahadalit community, which consists of Mestar/Sweeper, Dom/Malik and Paaswaan categories. Caste is intrinsically related to sanitation work. The employment generated in this domain has further linkages with how the caste plays an important marker of this work. This is evident from the ruling made by the government on November 1, 2017, when it declared that ‘any company, outsourcing for the state government, will have to ensure SCs get 16%, STs 1%, EBCs 18% and OBCs 12% reservation in the jobs.’ Hence, some of the crucial questions here are:

Does caste have any relation to the occupation of sanitation work among these women? And if so, what is the juxtaposition of caste and class in the context of women sanitation workers, or in other words, what is the ‘economic dimension of social malady such as caste?’ The experience of performing sanitation work and of being born in a mahadalit caste/community may have changed since Dr. Ambedkar wrote the Indian Constitution. Unfortunately, caste-based discrimination, untouchability and misfortune continue in various forms and figures. Sadly, the societal structures which lead people from specific caste to perform the work of cleaning the city under the authority of the municipal corporation have also not been able to break away the caste-based compulsions. The story of the respondents about their entry into this occupation is a reflection of this dogma.

5.2 How Do Women Enter Sanitation Work?

‘Mere maata pita dono nigam mein permanent the. Saas sasur bhi nigam mein hi the. Mere pati railway mein sweeper ka kaam karte hain, Platform No. 2 par. Mera bada beta nigam mein hai. Thela chalata hai (both my parents were permanent workers with the municipality. My parents-in-law were also employed with the
municipality. My husband is a sweeper in the railways at Platform No. 2. My elder son is in the municipality. He mans the garbage cart.’

‘Shuru mein saas lekar gayi thi. Unki tabiyat kharab thi. Toh saas baithi aur ham jhaadu lagaye. Bahut khush hui boli, “Kaniya ko jhaadu lagane aa gaya”. Saas retire hui toh hamko kaam par lagwa di. Ab 8 saal se kaam kar rahe hain. Meri maan bhi nigam mein kaam karke ham sabko posi. Mera papa peeta th. Meri naani SBI mein file idhar udhar karne ka kaam karti thi. Mera pati railway mein jhaadu lagane ka kaam karte hain (In the beginning my mother-in-law took me to work. When she was ill, I swept the roads. She was very happy and said, “My bride has learnt to sweep”. When she retired, she got me the job. Now I have been working since 8 years. My mother also worked with municipality and provided for all of us. My father was a drunkard. My mother’s mother was employed with the SBI. She would move files from one table to the other. My husband works with the railways as a sweeper).’

Mere saas sasur private mein hi saaf safai ka kaam karte the. Pati railway mein kaam karte the, ab retire hog gaye hain. Meri maan nigam mein thi, wohi hamko kaam par lagay (My parents-in-law were privately employed and did the cleaning work. My husband used to work in the railways, but now he is retired. My mother was employed with municipality and s’he helped me get this job).’

‘Meri maan nigam mein kaam karte thi. Pitaji bank mein. Dono jhaadu ka kaam karte the. Meri maan nei mujhe nigam mein naukri par lagayi. Mere pati private hospital mein sweeper ka kaam karte hain. Main 2014 se nigam mein kaam kar rahi hoon. Uske pehle main private mein safai ka kaam karte thi. Meri beti ki shaadi ho gayi hai. Uske pati Motihari nigam mein kaam karte hain (My mother worked with the municipality. My father was in a bank. Both were sweepers. My mother put me on a job with the municipality. My husband is employed in a private hospital and does the cleaning work. My daughter is married. Her husband works in the municipality of Motihari).’

‘Saat saal se kaam kar rahe hain. Husband aur ek beta nigam ke saath kaam karte hain. Doosra beta tent house mei kaam karta hai. Wohi Jhaadu poncho ka (I am working for seven years. My husband and a son work with the municipality. My other son works with a tent house. He has the same sweeping and cleaning work).’

These narratives read together, situate the intergenerational work of a single type of occupation for at least four generations. People who are privately employed are also engaged in the work of cleaning in various establishments. Some of them work in
private hospitals, shops and a range of service providers such as catering services and auto shops. However, what remains common is that they find an employment in works related to cleaning, sweeping, collecting and disposing garbage, either with the government or with private employers even in these present times.

On being asked what makes them do only this work, they said, ‘Maan ke pet se koi nahin seekhta hai. Sab cheez dekh ke seekhna padta hai taki kisi se gaali, baat nahin sunna pade (No body learns in the womb. Everything is to be observed and learnt so that we are not abused).’

Unfortunately, it seems that by virtue of their birth in a particular family from a particular caste, all that they can pursue as an occupation is sanitation work. The entry into the occupation with the municipality is intergenerational and reflects a continuation of family legacy. However, in some of the cases, it was also circumstantial despondency that led these women to take up their work. In one of the cases, the respondent got into this job because her husband fell ill and eventually died. In another case, circumstantial compulsions forced the women to take up the work in middle age. The following narratives help us understand this:

‘Abhi paanch saal se kaam kar rahe hain. Ghar banaye toh jyada karza liye, isiliye kaam shuru kiye. Pati Viklang hai. Unke pair mein steel laga hua hai. Wo auto chalate hain par zyada kaam nahin kar paate hain. Steel gadne lagta hai. 20 saal pehle hi pair tut gaya th. Operation ke baad 6 mahine mein nikalna tha lekin kabhi paisa hi hua hi nahi. Ab kehte hai jis din dard uthega us din akhra ghat mein kood kar mar jaenge (I am working for five years. When we built the house, we took a large loan, that's why I started working. My husband is disabled. He has a steel plate in his legs. He drives autorickshaw but cannot work much. The steel starts hurting him. His leg was operated 20 years ago. After 6 months of operation the steel was to be taken out, but we never had enough money to get the operation done. Now he says, ‘the day I will feel extreme pain, I will jump off the Akhra Ghat and kill myself’).’

‘Dus saal pehle mera aadmi khatam ho gaya. Jab beta janam liya tha tabhi Maan yahan bula li thi. Sasural mein bahut ginjan hota th. Beta kalap raha th. Mere maan baap namkeen bana kar bechte the. Ham Kanu hain na. Us samay logon ka dera mein jakar kaam karte the. Par bahut kam paisa milta th. Fir Nidan mein Rs 3,000 mahine par kam par lage. Mera bhai hamko ye kaam karne se mana kiya. Lekin hamko posata hai (10 years ago my husband died. When my son was born, my mom called me back to her house. My condition at my in-laws was deplorable. My son used to cry in hunger. My parents used to make and sell savouries. We are
traders by caste. At that time I started doing domestic work, but I used to earn very less. Then I got a job at Nidaan for Rs 3,000 per month. My brother told me not to do this work, but I survive because of it.

‘Hamare jaat mein safai ka kaam nahin karte hain. Ham bhi file idhar se udhar karte hain. Mere pati Jal board mein kaam karte the. Unka heart attack se dehant ho gaya. Us samay meri beti pet mein thi. Jab meri beti ka janam ho gaya, uske ek saal baad meri bahali hui, anukampa par. Pehle ham peon ka kaam nigam office mein karte the. Fir mera transfer Anchal office mein ho gaya (In my caste, we don’t do sanitation work. I move files from one office to the other. My husband used to work with the water board. He expired due to heart attack. At that time I was pregnant with my daughter. When my daughter turned a year old, I got the employment in his place. At first, I worked as a peon in the municipality office. Then I was transferred to the zonal office).’

These narratives depict that employment with the municipality as a sanitation worker has provided relief and ensured survival for many of these women.

5.3 Education

Ninety per cent of the total women respondents were illiterate. The respondents who were reported to be literate, either knew only how to sign their names or had studied less than Class 10.

According to the census survey, only 6% (1,395) of the female population in the slums of Muzaffarpur are graduates or post-graduates, with the condition being slightly better for men with 10% (2,524) graduates and post-graduates. The analysis of age-wise distribution of education suggested that dominantly 55% of the population in the age group of 60 years and above, and 16% of those between 15-59 years were illiterate. This is largely attributable to a lack of access to education in the earlier generation’s childhood, or even to any kind of adult education (PSE, Muzzafarpur, 2018).

The perception of education among the women sanitation workers in this study is linked with what they feel about the educational status of their children and with the environment that they inhabit. Additionally, two patterns emerged from the study.
One of them is where children have not been able to study and have gone back to the sanitation work either with the government or private employers. The other is where the children have been able to acquire decent levels of education (which they themselves value), but despite their education have not been able to find work outside of sanitation. The following narratives present a clear connection between how children of sanitation workers are impacted by education, which in turn impacts their employment status.

5.3.1 Children, Education and Sanitation Work

‘Baccha log ko padhane ka bahut koshish kiye par nahi padha (I tried a lot to educate my children, but they did not study).’

‘Bacche ko padha rahe hain, uske man se kaam karega. Baccha log tarakki karega. Gunh mut gijne wala kaam padha likhe log ko accha nahin lagta hai. Lekin naukri nahin milta hai toh kya karega? (I am educating my children; they will work as per their preference. Children will progress. Educated people do not like to deal with the shit. But when there is no employment opportunity, what can they do?).’

‘Padh likh kar bhi thela chalata hai. Nahi milta hai toh majboori mein karna padta hai. Ham bhi ye kam majboori mein karte hain kyunki padhe likhe nahin hain (Despite being educated, he drives the garbage cart. When they don't get employment they are forced to do this. I am also forced to do this work because I am illiterate).’

‘Accha man se bacha log padh liya toh kuch accha karega. Maa baap ke upar zarooor nahi hai ki baat hi manega. Hum goonh geejte hai toh wolog bhi wohi gijega? (If children study well then they will do something good. It is not necessary that they will do what their parents ask them to. I deal with shit, but will they also do the same?)’

‘Padh likh lega toh naam lega na. Maan kachra saaf karke padhai. Maan jaise geejegi toh baccha thode na geejega. Baccha log pehle kachra chunata tha. Unko pakad pakad ke school mein dakhila karwaye. Pehle yahan jhanda nahi fahara tha. Kabhi cake nahin kata tha. Ab ye sab hua hai. Baja bajwa deta hai. Baacchon ke padhai likhai ke liye ye sab kiye (If they study well, they will respect their mother. Their mother cleaned the garbage to sponsor their studies. But if their mothers are working with shit, will the children also do the same? Previously children used to go rag picking. They were all motivated and enrolled into a school. No flag hoisting used to take place before. Not even a cake was cut before. Now these things have started.
Now on some occasions music is played. All this has been done so that children will study.

‘Beta kehta hai ki tum toh jhaadu deti ho. Ham officer banenge. Nagar nigam mein kaam nahin karenge, SDO banenge (My son says that you sweep the roads. I will become an officer. I will not work with the municipality, I will become an SDO).’

‘Ganda mein jhulkenge tab na samjhega ki maan nigam mein thi (I work with the garbage for the whole day. Only then will children understand that their mother was in the municipality).’

‘Beta Athevin padha hai….kaam karta hai. Hotel mein. Wohi jhaadu poncho ka (My son has studied till Class 8….he works in a hotel. The same cleaning work).’

‘Pawan bahut hoshiyar tha. Padhai likhai mein. Barahvin pass kiya hai. Naukri sab bhi dhoonda, par mila nahin. Ab Nigam mein contract par kaam karta hai (Pawan was very intelligent in his studies. He studied till Class 12. He tried to find other employment, but did not get anything. Now he works with the municipality on contract).’

‘Beta log kuch nahin karte hain. Kehte hain ki kaun jaega nigam ke kaam ke liye? Baccha log ko padha likha liye toh wo log ganda kaam nahin karna chahta hai. Ab aaplog sab ke saath uthana baithna chahta hai. BA tak padhe hue hain. Zamana aisa hai na. Lekin kaam milta nahin hai. Accha kaam ke liye ghus mangta hai toh kahan se laenge. Bacche standard kaam karna chahte hain (My sons do not do anything. They say that they don’t want to work with the municipality. I have educated them, but after studying no one wants to do this dirty work. They want to mingle with the likes of you. They have studied till BA. But the times are like this. There is no work. For any good work we are asked for bribes, where will we get that money from? Children want to do standard work).’

‘Ek beta hospital mein kaam karta hai. Wahan bathroom saaf karta hai. Do beti hai unka shaadi karana hai. Bada beta baap ke jagah mein municipality mein kaam karta hai, circuit house mein (One son works in the hospital. He cleans the bathroom there. I have two daughters who have to be married. My eldest son works with the municipality in place of his father, at circuit house).’

‘Ek beta hai. 12th pass hai. Ab nigam mein kaam dhoond raha hai (I have one son who has studied till Class 12. Now he is trying to find employment with the municipality).’ ‘Hans kar, ro kar yehi kaam karna hai. Padhe likhe nahin hain toh yehi
karna hi parega. File par jo naam likha rehta hai wo bhi padhna nahin aata hai, jaankaari hi nahin hai (Whether happily or unhappily, this is the work that we have to do. We are uneducated and, therefore, this is what we must do. I can't even read any name written on the file. I don't know).’

The narratives when read together accentuate the contradiction in experiences of education among women sanitation workers. Where lack of education is perceived to be the reason for carrying out sanitation work, on the other hand even though their children have studied enough, they are still unable to get any work other than sanitation. Ninety per cent of the women respondents reported that they were illiterate, meaning they did not know how to read or write. Some of their children who have studied Class 10 or have completed their high school or graduation are evidently the first generational learners within their families. However, the educational climate of Bihar as well as of the nation has drastically changed over the past 60 years. The competition is huge and ruthless. Nevertheless, the women feel exasperated that despite educating their children, they are unable to find employment outside of their caste-based occupational compulsions. While the education of their children till Class 10 to graduation level may be perceived to be high among women sanitation workers, it is still just not enough to compete in the world outside, which keeps redefining educational standards for offering employment. Thereby, the promise of ‘education’ for breaking caste-class barriers seems to be a distant dream. ‘Ei toh anher hai ki BA karke bhi mera Bhagna Deepak, sab jagah interview dekar aaya, 3-4 desh ghoom kar aaya. Ab yahin khoj raha hai ki 5,000 rupya ka bhi kaam mile toh karle. Padh likh ke bhi koi fayda nahin ho raha hai. Balki padh likh ke kuch hone wala nahin hai. Hamko zamane par vishwas nahin hai. Mera pati dusvin paas hai. Devar bhi dusvin pass hai. Idhar udhar baaua kar aaye ab goonh gejej rahe hain (We live in darkness, my nephew who has studied till BA, he went to give interviews for jobs in 3-4 states. Now he is trying to find a job that will fetch him at least Rs 5,000. There is no benefit of studying. In fact, there is no use of studying. I have no hope from these times that we live in. My husband is 10th pass. My brother-in-law is also 10th pass. He roamed here and there in search of job, now he is cleaning the shit).’

The bio-politics of the population is the regulatory control that focuses on the mechanisms of life: birth, morbidity, mortality, longevity, seeking to invest in life and attempts to intervene upon characteristics of human beings as creatures who can be trained and augmented (Rabinow and Rose 2003). In order to become capable, humans are expected to acquire defined skill sets. Generally the pursuit of education is for gaining academic credentials that could be used to serve the purposes of extraction
and exploitation, leading to productivity and efficiency. In the Indian sub-terrain, in the wake of a booming service industry, the gains of education have been naturalised to bring economic prosperity. The nature of this education is particularly marked by the overt usage of the English language as a universal standard for high quality education. We are made to step up to seek these skills in the name of education to such an extent that they become unquestionable as well as the most desired attribute that the ‘modern’ generation ought to acquire. To be able to speak in English serves as an entry into a successful professional life, which in turn qualifies for personal success. This notion of ‘growth’, ‘health’, ‘education’ and other development indices have set up a universal marker of reaching up to a certain level of material ownership and consumption to define ‘development’. In saying ‘development’, however, most people are now saying the opposite of what they want to convey (Esteva, 2010).

Education, therefore, is not a standard skill set. Education is perceived differently by different classes and castes. The derivatives of education are also not universal. Hence, when the mainstream developmental discourse normalises education as the only means for breaking caste-class barriers for a better life and alternative occupations, for women sanitation workers, it fails to define for them, ‘how much is enough’ and for how long do they have to be ‘catching up’ (Rostow 1950 in Sachs 2010, xvii). During the validation meeting held in June 2018 with the municipal staff, they resonated with this finding and agreed that it’s a vicious circle in which the lives of their children are trapped, and it takes extraordinary effort and commitment to escape from this cycle of misery. They also suggested that in current times only school or college education is not enough, and hence education must be integrated with technical training to increase the employability of their children.

However, Dasai Ram, who is the circle inspector of zone 2, has a different perspective. He refutes that poverty of the sanitation workers is due to intergenerational occupational compulsions alone. According to him, ‘Aage badhne ka jajba hona chahiye (One must be passionate about moving ahead).’ Citing his

9 Since Truman’s speech in 1950, development has connoted at least one thing: to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment. When Nyerere proposed that development be the political mobilisation of a people for attaining their own objectives, conscious as he was that it was madness to pursue the goals that others had set; when Rodolfo Stavenhagen proposes today ethno-development or development with self-confidence, conscious that we need to ‘look within’ and ‘search for one’s own culture’ instead of using borrowed and foreign views; when Jinooh Omo-Faduka suggests a development from the bottom up, conscious that all strategies based on a top-down design have failed to reach their explicitly stated objectives; when Orlando Fals Borda and Anisur Rahman insist on participatory development, conscious of the exclusions made in the name of development; when Jun Nishikawa proposes an ‘other’ development for Japan, conscious that the current era is ending; when they and so many others qualify development and use the word with caveats and restrictions as if they were walking in a minefield, they do not seem to see the counter productivity of their efforts. The minefield has already exploded. (Esteva 2010, 2-3)
own life as an example he elaborated that he started working with the municipality as a *safai karmachari*, but he continued to study, s for examinations and got a graduate degree. Gradually he was promoted to the position of Circle Inspector of Zone 2 in the MMC. He suggested that each one of us has an opportunity to grow and break our own class-caste barriers. At present, none of his children are employed or engaged in sanitation work. They have moved on to take varied occupation in different sectors. On inability of finding an employment by an educated Dalit youth, he shared that this is the national level situation, *'Chapraji ka vacancy nikalta hai, engineers apply karte hain. Vacancy radd karana padta hai. Ye sab toh pure desh ka halat hai. Naukri nahin hai (When vacancies for peons are announced, engineers apply. The vacancies have to be cancelled. This is a situation of the whole nation. There is no employment).'*

The likes of Dasai Rams are certainly outliers even in the present day context. Dismantling caste-class barriers to access freedom and choice of education or occupation is still a tough task, despite state-society re-orientation on affirmative action. According to Dr. Ambedkar, *'education, wealth, labour are all necessary for every individual if he is to reach a free and full manhood. Mere education without wealth and labour is barren. Wealth without education is brutal. Each is necessary to everyone. They are necessary of the growth of a man (O.D.Heggade, 1998).'* In the absence of any capital and, therefore, inability to acquire technical education this population section remain economically backward and fall back into the only occupation alternative that is available. This possibly explains the educational backwardness of the sanitation workers and their children in current times as well. In the deeper entanglement of caste and occupation, all other social indicators remain stagnant or on a super slow growth trajectory.

The following section captures the experience of socio-economic pressures of continuing sanitation work, the reasons for their choice of work/or rather not leaving this work and experiences of discrimination that the women face on an everyday basis owing to the nature of their work. Read together the narratives tell a tale of a continuing history of subjugation and despondency, but at times also of relief and assurance that employment with the municipality is ensured.

### 5.4 Socio-economic Pressures of Continuing as Sanitation Workers

*’Mere papa railway mein naukri karte the pehle. Unka kaam dekh kar afsos lagta tha. Nafrat tha is kaam se. Sochte the ki ham yeh kaam kabhi nahin karenge. Lekin*
pati gujar gaye toh bacche ke liye jhaadu pakde. Apna bojh nahin uthaenge toh fir koi nahin uthaega. Kaam karenge toh baccha bhi sukh se rahega. Na naihar, na sasural ke saamne haath failate hain. Itna kam umar mein ham guardian ban gaye. Baccha cheez hi aisa hai ki usko padhane, apne pair par khada karne ke liye karte hain (My father was employed with the Railways. I used to pity him his work. I hated it. I used to think that I will never do such work. But when my husband passed away, I had to take up the broom to feed my children. If I do not fend for myself nobody else will. If I work my children will live a better life. I don't have to beg from my relatives. I have become a guardian at such a young age. When you have children one has to work for their education, to make them self dependent).’

“Sab hansa aur bola yehi kaam karegi? Kitna aadmi toh munh par hi hansa. Ghin maanne laga. Lekin kuch galat toh nahin. Kaam hi na kiye. Jhaadu marna hai. Kya galat hai? (Everybody laughed and said, “You will do this work?” Many people laughed at me. They started despising me. But I didn’t do anything wrong. I only worked. I have to sweep. What is wrong in that?)’

‘Majboori hai. Nahi kamaenge toh kaise chalega. Pet kaise bharega (This is my compulsion. If I do not earn, how will it work? How will we feed ourselves?)’

‘Baccha log ke liye shuru kiye. Sirf pet hi nhai hai na (I started doing this for my children. We have needs that go beyond just feeding ourselves).’

‘Isi mein zindagi kaatna hai. Ghinayenge toh kaise hoga? (I have to live my life like this. If I despise my work, how will I live?)’

‘Pehle sasta zamana thae. Ab agar ghar mein sab kaam nahin karenge toh posaega nahin. Beta, pati apna kharcha karte hain. Hamlog kya karke khayen?’ (Previously, it was cheaper times. Now if everyone at home does not work, it’s no longer possible to survive. My son and husband do their expenditures. What else can we do to not remain hungry?)’

‘Teen saal se bhai bank mein kaam karta thae. Bhumihaar teen lakh dekar kaam le liya. Peon/chapraasi ka post le leta hai. Bank mein kisi ladka ko bula lete hain aur Rs 10-50 dekar kaam karwa lete hain. Majboori mein phans jaate hain (For three years my brother used to work in a bank. But a Bhumihaar (an upper caste) gave a bribe of Rs 3 lakh and took away the work from him. The posts of peon are taken away from us like this. They call a boy to the bank and give him Rs 10-50 and get him to do their work. This is such a compulsive situation, we are tied up).’
'Bhai bola ki ye kaam accha nahin hai. Shikayat wala kaam hai. Lekin ham bole ki hamko posa raha hai (My brother said that this is not a good work. This work calls for lot of complaints. But I said that it helps me survive).'

'Hamare jaati mein jhaadu, naali, modhi ka kaam nahin karte hain. Majboori mein karna padta hai. Post ke hisaab se (In our caste we do not work with brooms and drains. It is our helplessness and compulsion that we have to do this. But it depends on the post).'

In Muzzafarpur, the entry into sanitation work is determined by the following:

- Whether one is related to someone already employed with the municipality, who are in majority Dalits/ Mahadalits
- Whether one has cordial relations with the Ward Councillor
- Whether one is willing to do ‘jhaadu’ and clean the drainage

The selection process is determined by how you hold the broom. Interestingly, while on one hand it is evident that working in sanitation with the municipality is certainly intergenerational and caste centric, on the other, it is also a relief and an assurance for workers who are employed with the municipality. Nevertheless, caste-based discrimination and socio-economic pressures for continuing this work emerge, as is evident from the narratives cited above.

**5.4.1 Experiences of discrimination**

'Hamlog mestar hain. Dom se alag hain. Shaadi apne hi jaat mein hota hai. Hamlog kutta choo denge toh jaat mein chanta jaaenge. (We are all Mestar. We are different from the Dom. We marry in our own caste. If we touch a dog, we will become outcastes).'

'Pehle bhed bhaav tha. Padhai likhai se bhed bhaav khatam ho jaata hai (Previously there was discrimination. With education discrimination ends).'

'Ek baar kisi ke ghar ke bahar kuda rakha hua tha. Usmein se ek kitab utha liye. Toh gaali dene laga. Bahut bura laha. Khair, hamko toh kaam karne se matlab hai. Bolne wala bolta hi hai. Bolta hai toh kya karenge? (Once it so happened that garbage was kept outside my house. I picked up a book from the garbage. The owners started abusing me. I felt very bad, anyway, I am responsible for doing the work. People who have to abuse will abuse. And even if they say anything, what can we do?)'

'Sadak par jhaadu lagane jaate hain toh aate jaate log sab bolte hain - Dikhai nahin padta hai, garda uda rahe hain. Ab road hi itna kharab hai, ki jhaadu sab kharab ho
jaata hai (When we go out to sweep the roads, people come and say, can’t you see, you are throwing dust around. The roads themselves are bad, and the brooms are also ruined).’

‘Harijan hai na, gande mein rehte hain (I am a Harijan, hence I live in dirt).’

‘Bhagwaan jaat bana diya hai lekin sab toh marke dharti mein hi jaega. Khoon toh ek hi hai (God has created caste, but when we die, we will all go back into the earth. All blood is the same).’

‘Dom aag nahi dega to shuddh nahin hoga, granthi nahi dega to punya nahin hoga, bhagwan harijan ka itna karja khaye hain. Itna baar kehte hain ki Dom hai chua jaega. Ab toh bahut sudhar gaya hai (If the Dom does not give fire then people will not become pious, if he doesn’t give granthi then there won’t be punya, God is indebted to us. People say so many times that if we touch them, they will be polluted. Now there has been a lot of change).’

‘Hamlog ke bagal ka mohalla mein Krishna ka mandir hai. Hamko wahan ghusne nahin deta tha, devta ka Pooja ke liye. Ab Byah shaadi mein pushtainise ham log suar khaate hai. Log sab kehta hai ki hamlog sab suar khaata hai aur devta ko choone aata hai. Toh hamlog naha dho ke na jaate hain, aise thodi na jaate hain. Hamlog ke devta ko suar chadta hai. Pichle saal Sanjay bola ki hamlog ko Janmashtmi mein madir mein Pooja karna chahiye. Janmashtmi ke liye baccha log paisa iattha kiya. Wo log bole…… ki nahin ghusega. Fir bhi hamlog sab gaye. Toh wo log halla kiya……Dom patti ke ghusa deliye, chua eliye, meat machli kha kar ailiya hai. …….sab mohalla ke aurat se bahas hone laga. Ham sab bole……pooja karenge toh karenge. Ham sab gaye toh baaki sab jat hat gaya. Ab regular jaane deta hai, koi rok tok nahin hai (In the adjacent colony, there is a Krishna temple. People wouldn’t allow us to enter and worship the Lord. We have always been eating pig meat during special occasions like marriage, people say that we eat pig meat and try to touch their God. But we bathe properly and then go. We sacrifice the pig to our God. Last year Sanjay said that we should be able to worship at the temple during Janmashtmi. So for Janmashtmi, the children collected donations. But they said, you will not enter. Despite that we went. Then they created a ruckus. People from the Dom settlement have been brought in…they have touched us, they have come after eating meat… all the women from the colony started arguing. But we were determined…and said….we will pray. When all of us went together, the others left by themselves. Now we go there regularly, no one stops us).’
'Ham Dom hai toh hamse safai kyun karata hain? Hamara dagra kyun khareedte hain? (If we are Dom then why do they get the cleaning done by us? Why do they buy our Dagra (bamboo craft used in marriages)?)'

'Jaan pehchaan ka aadmi jhaadu lagate samay mil jaata hai toh sharm aati hai (While sweeping the road, if someone we know meets us on the road, I feel embarrassed).

'Pehla din kaam karne gaye, toh gaon ka aadmi dekh liya. Bahut sharm laga. Chorne ka man kiya. Par staff log samjhata tha ki kaam itna badhiya hai mat chodo. Kahin aur jaegi toh kaam 8-7 karna parega’ (First day when I went to work, the people from my village saw me. I felt ashamed. I felt like leaving the work. But the other staff reasoned that this is good work and, therefore, I should not leave it. Anywhere else I will have to work from 8-7).

'Saas kehti thi ki pehle sab jaati nahi karta tha. Ab toh sab karta hai. Sab jaat ghus gaya hai. Koi chup kar bhi karta hai jaise musalman, kurmi, kaasi. Jaane dijiye koi bhi kama kha raha hai. Sabko pet ka dukh hai. Naukri ke laalach mein sab jaati kar raha hai. koi sabzi wali hai wo bhi kehti hai ismein kaam lagwane ke liye (My mother-in-law used to say that sometimes back not all caste would do this work. But now everyone does it. People from all the caste have entered into this work. Many people hide their caste and do it like Muslims, Kurmi, Kaasi. Anyway let it be, let people earn and eat. Everyone is compelled by their empty bellies. In the greed of employment, all castes have taken up this work. There is a vegetable vendor, now she is also telling me to help her get this work).

'Bhagwaan bekaar hi hamlog ko chota jaat mein janam de diya hai. Zindagi bhar ganda kaam karna padta hai (God gave us birth among the lowest caste for no reason. Now all my life I have to do the dirty work).

'Mera jaat sabka ganda saaf karta hai. Lekin ham paani maang liye kabhi toh kehte hain...theher jaiye...glass choo liye toh chua jata hai...par hamko chir ke dekhiye, khoon toh ek hi hai (My caste cleans up everyone’s dirt. But if we ask for water then they say...stop where you are...wait. If we touch the glass, it is polluted...but cut me open, I have the same blood).

'Marwaari sab ke yahan kaam karne jaate hain toh bolta hai- gate aur seedhi mat chuo. Ab sochiye ham jhaadu laga denge, nal khol denge, kapda dho denge, kachra beeg denge, par fir bhi hamare choone se dar lagta hai unko. Aur yahi agar ham keh denge ki ham kurmi hai toh sab kaam karwa lenge. Ham toh unko bole ki ham toh
aapka sab kaam kar dete hain lekin aapke dukaan par toh sab jaat aate hain. Unko toh aap jaat pooch kar samman nahin bechte? (When we go to work at the house of Marwaaris then they say, don’t touch the gate or the stairs. Now you only think, I will sweep, fill water from the tap, throw away the garbage, but even then they are afraid of our touch. And if we say that I am a Kurmi, then they will allow us to do all the work. I told them that I do all your work and yet you behave this way with me, but people from all castes come to your shop, why don’t you ask them for their castes before selling them goods?)’

‘Ham office mein kaam karte the toh babu paani maange. Peon nahin tha. Toh ham de diye paani aur rakh diye table par. Toh babu bole…Rama ro Bhayo, Hamko choo diyo… Ham bahut kharab baat bol diye…, O baba Itar ke paani bhitar gya. Chuma liya jaat gya…toh wo utha kar paani pi liye (When I used to work in the office, the officer asked for water. The peon was not in the office that day. So I went and kept the water on the table. So the officer said.Oh God! I have been polluted…so I said something very bad….Sir, the water from outside goes inside. But if one kisses you, then you lose your caste…on hearing this…he picked up the water and drank it).’

‘Hamare saath koi bhed bhaav nahin hua. Jamadaar aur Parshad izzat se baithate hain (I have never felt discriminated against. In fact, the ward inspector and the ward councillor talk to me with respect).’

5.4.2 Choice of profession

‘Kaam toh karna hi padega. Do gaali sun kar bhi karna padega. Bal baccha ke liye karna padta hai. Doosra jagah kaam dhoondne se accha yahin kaam karte hain. Nahin karenge toh ghar kaise chalega. Bal bacche ka shaadi kaise hoga? (I will have to work. Despite being abused I will have to work. I have to do this for my children. Instead of trying to find work somewhere else it’s better to work here only. If I don’t work then how will my household functions. How will I marry off my children?)’

‘Padhne ka shauk tha. Isiliye baccha log ko padate hain.Sochte the padh kar police bane. Galat aadmi ka pitai karein. Papa bhi daaru pita thaa. Late aata thaa. Maay ke aasra par hi bade hue. Ek baar Deepika Suniya taari ke dukaan mein baap ko maari aur Jeep mein utha kar le gayi. Thik hua. Lekin sudhre nahin. Jab 10 saal ki thi toh pitaji gujar gaye. Maan nigam mein naukri karke paali (I was fond of studying. That’s why I educate my children. I used to think that I will study to become a police person. People who misbehave, I wanted to beat them up. My father also used to drink a lot. He used to come late. I was brought up by the sheer hardwork of my mother. Once a
police officer, Deepika Suniya, beat up my father at a local alcohol shop and picked him up in a police jeep and took him away. That was the correct thing for him. But my father never improved. When I was 10 years old, my father passed away. My mother worked at the municipality and fed us.

‘Bhagwaan mil jayega, doosra naukri nahin’ (You may even meet God, but to land another job is impossible).

‘Hum jis se ji rahe hai se matlab hai. Mera yahi kaam hai toh yehi sabse accha hai. Log subah uth kar bhagwaan ka puja karne jaate hain. Ham subah uth kar kuda uthane ka kaam karte hain. Wahi hamara karm hai. Karm hi Pooja hai. Hamare toh sapne mein bhi kuda hi aata hai, ki kahan se uthana hai… (I am only concerned with what helps us survive. If this is my work then this is the best. People wake up in the morning and go to worship God. We get up in the morning to collect garbage. That is our duty. And work is worship. In our dreams too we see garbage, we plan where we have to collect it from…).’

‘Nagar nigam ke karmachari hain toh kaun jaat hain usse fark nahin padta hai. Ham kuda uthate hain aur yehi hamari pehchaan hai, log haemins plastic ke cup mein chai dete hain. Logon ki yehi mansikta hai. Usmein ham kya karenge. Isimein bahut log izzat karte hain toh kuch ghrina bhi karte hain (If we are employed with the municipality, then it doesn’t matter which caste we belong to. We collect garbage and that is our identity, people give us tea in a plastic cup. People have this mindset. Then what can we do? In this work, many treat us with respect and others look at us with disdain).’

‘Saksharta ke bina safai karmachari usi mein reh jaate hain. Bahut se karmchari unche post par isiliye promote nahin ho paate kyunki unko likhna padhna nahin aata hai (In the absence of literacy, sanitation workers remain in the rut. Many workers are unable to get promoted to higher positions because they do not know how to read and write).’

‘Humko is kaam se koi pareshaani nahin hai. Jo kalam chala rahe hain unko dikkat hai (I have no problems with this work. People who are used to writing with pens find it uncomfortable).’

**5.4.3 Reasons for not leaving**

‘Chorne ka nahin sochte hain (I don’t think of leaving this work).’
'Garib ka zindagi hai. Kamaenge nahi toh khayenge kya? (This a poor person’s life. If we don’t earn, then what will we eat?)'

'Paisa kam milta hai toh kya karein. Teen poti hai byah karne ke liye (If we get less money then what can we do? I have three granddaughters to be married off).'

The experiences of caste-based discrimination have reduced drastically, based on the respondent’s primary narrative. However, this experience could be interpreted in relative terms. Bihar has a history of Dalit and Mahadalit uprising and caste-based struggles. This is the reason why most of the Dalits, address themselves as ‘Ram’ or ‘Harijans’. In the experience of women sanitation workers, caste-based discrimination has reduced; however, it is important to note the relativity with which they are talking. Incidences of experiencing direct untouchability was not recorded during the course of research. Discrimination, nevertheless, exists in various other forms. Mr. Suresh Ram, the Ward Inspector said that even though his work is to inspect labours working in the ward, whenever he goes by he hears people saying, ‘kachrawala, naali modhi wala (The garbage guy, the drainage guy)’.

People living in buildings mindlessly throw their domestic waste on the streets, which many times fall on sweepers cleaning the roads, including dirty water (poncho ka paani). Water is offered to them in plastic cups and many shopkeepers wash the front space of their stores where sweepers sometimes sit down to rest. ‘Kuda wala subah hi kuda lene aata hai. Ghanti bahjata hai, seeti bajata hai lekin log sote rehte hain. Baad mein kuda ko sadak par, shed par fenk dete hain (the guy who comes to collect the garbage comes early in the morning. He rings the bell and whistles, but people don’t wake up. Afterwards, they throw the garbage on the road, or on the sheds of other houses).’

It is not that these little gestures go unnoticed by these women. However, their narratives do situate the discrimination as normal. ‘Bhagwaan hamko isi jaat mein janm diya hai toh kya karenge? (God has given us birth in this caste, so what can we do?).’ In addition, most of the women shared that they have no problems with sweeping or even cleaning toilets, because that is the work that they must do to feed themselves. ‘Ghinaenge toh pet kaise bharega? (If we despise this work how will we fill our bellies?)’

It seems that the work itself is not the problem, but the attitude of people in general with sanitation workers is perceived by them to be unfair and discriminatory.

The economics of caste system dissociates intelligence from work and creates contempt for labour. The theory of the caste is that a Brahmin who is permitted to
cultivate his intellect is not permitted to labour, and is in fact taught to look down upon labour, while the Shudra who is required to labour is not permitted to cultivate his intelligence. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out, ‘Caste devitalises a man’. It is a process of sterilisation.

Under the economics of the caste system, a person is forced to stick to his parental occupation, and the consideration of his knowledge is not material. What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men's hearts nor their minds are in their work? As an economic organisation, caste is therefore a harmful institution that involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.

Beyond caste, however, sanitation work is not only looked down upon, but also treated as worthless. That is possibly one of the reasons why at the individual level there is no evident accountability on how one disposes personal garbage and how they treat workers who are responsible for clearing other’s waste. Gayatri Devi, a Ward Councillor of Ward 2 illuminates that usually people living in colonies and RWAs complain about sweepers. However, we need to understand that these women get up way before we do and start cleaning neighbourhoods and roads. Hence, they must be treated with respect, ‘Ye log chahtii hain ki log prem se do shabd bole aur jahan jhaadu lagayi hain wahan thodi der toh safai rahe (They want that people speak to them politely and the places that they have swept should be honoured and kept clean by others at least for some time).’

5.5 Nature of Employment with the MMC

5.5.1 Attendance, leaves, fear of loosing jobs, lack of complaint redressal mechanism

To check absenteeism, the Patna Municipal Corporation (PMC) will introduce biometric attendance systems for its sanitation workers before Chhath this year. A senior PMC official said, ‘This can check proxy attendance. It will also reveal when workers report to work daily. This will show whether they reach the workplace on time or not. There have been numerous complaints from residents regarding absence of sanitation staff in their wards, but so far we did not have the mechanism to check what is happening in every ward (The Telegraph, 2017).’ As has been cited before, in Muzaffarpur, all the zonal offices have a biometric system for workers to mark their attendance twice a day, at the beginning of each shift.
While the nature of employment with municipal corporations across the nation and worldwide is contractual for various known reasons, the experience of being a contractual employee with the MMC presents an ethical dilemma. Dr. Ambedkar stated that history shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict, victory is always with economics; vested interests have never been known to have willingly diverted themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them. The sanitation workers have to work for the municipality for such wages as their employers/state choose to give. On this issue, the national and state policies combine to keep the wages to the lowest level possible for it is in their interests to do so. On the other hand, the Dalits/Mahadalits have no holding power. They must earn or starve. Since they have no bargaining power, they must submit to the rate fixed or suffer violence. ‘Garib ka zindagi hai, kamaenge toh khaenge, nahin toh bhukhe marenge (It is the life of the poor. If you earn you eat else you die with hunger).’ Ashok Rai who is a member of Safai Karmchari sangh in Muzaffarpur as well as the sanitation Inspector said, ‘Sarkaar ki ek mansa hai. Safai karmcharri unke sautele bete hain. AB Vajpayee kali todkar laye the sanvida ka. Ab wo phool ban gaya hai. Rs 8,000 mein jawan logon se kaam karwaenge jo do haath ke jagah char haath ka kaam karega (The government has an intention. Sanitation workers are their step children. AB Vajpayee had planted the bud of contractual employment. Now it has bloomed. In Rs 8,000 younger people will do the work of four hands earlier done by older people with two hands).’

Majority of the women (74%) who participated in the study are engaged with the MMC on contractual basis. Their experiences of working in the contractual form of employment reiterate fear, risk, insufficiency, and a mirage of hope. While working with the municipality, gives them an assurance of earning ‘minimum’ wages, it is also a preferred form of employment as private players are more extractive. On the other hand they live in hope of converting their contractual employment into permanent one, which in the current political economy looks unlikely in the near future. Additionally, most of the women sanitation workers were referred for the job by their own mothers who in turn refer their daughters and daughters-in-law, leading to perpetual opportunity of a regular employment, even though the form of employment is irregular in nature.
The experience of working under the contractual form of employment with the municipality evokes an everyday fear on multiple accounts. ‘Hamesha tukur tukur taakte rehte hain ki 4 kab bajega toh bhaagenge kaam par, haziri banaenge. Dar laga rehta hai. Jhaadu uthate hain road mein lag jaate hain. Chai bhi nahin peete hain. Supervisor visit karne aate hain -Jamaadar ya inspector. Complaint bhi aa jata hai ki ek mahine se jhaaru nahi lagaye, jabki roz lagate hain. Ham kuch bolte hain toh dhamki dete hai ki hata denge. Toh dar lagta hai aur kaam karte rehte hain (I keep looking at the clock, as soon as it is 4:00 we rush to get on to the workplace, mark attendance. I feel continuous fear. I pick up the broom and start sweeping. I don’t even drink tea. Supervisors come to visit, either the ward inspector or sanitation inspector. Complaints are filed against us that we haven’t swept the road for a month, while I sweep everyday. If I say something, I am threatened of being fired. Hence, I live in fear and keep working).’

The fear of losing one’s job is the fear of losing the only means of providing for the family. This fear is two fold, one of losing the daily wage of Rs 300 for a day of absence and the other of losing the employment opportunity. ‘Nigam se koi chutti nahin milta hai. Naga kiya toh paisa kat jaega. Ab toh computer laga diya hai’ (We don’t get any leaves from the municipality. If we miss going to work, the salary is deducted. Now there are computers).

‘Tabiyat kharab mein bhi hamhiko jaana hai. Agar beta ya pati chala bhi jaega toh bhi hamhiko haziri banae jana padega. Nahin toh paisa kaat lega (Even if I am unwell, I have to go to work. If my husband or my son goes to the workplace to do my work, I still have to go to mark attendance. Otherwise money will be deducted).’

‘Tabiyat kharab ho jaata hai toh goli khaakar bhi kaam par jaate hain. Deh mein dukh lekar bhi khatte hain, nahin toh paisa kaat lega. Dar lagta hai. Agar 10 din baith gaye toh hatana hi hai (If I am unwell I go to work, and I still get abused. I carry the pain in my body and do the hard work, otherwise the money gets deducted. I am scared. If we sit back at home for 10 days then they will certainly fire us).’

‘Mera chota bacha chhe din ka tha tabhi se kaam par jaane lage. Bacha pet mein tha tabhi bhi pura time naukri par gaye. Ek din bhi nahin jaane par Rs 300 kaat lete hain. Ghar kaise chalega? (My youngest child was six days old when I started going to work. When I was pregnant, I worked till the last day of my labour. If I don’t go to work for just one day then Rs 300 is deducted. How will my household run?)’
‘Rona yehi aata hai ki kya zindahi hai. Kaam karo nahin toh hata denge (I feel like crying about the life that I lead. Keep working or be fired).’

‘Ham hadtaal karte hain, toh bhi hatane ki dhamki milne lagti hai. Agar paanch din hadtaal karenge, toh paanch din ka paisa katega upar se shehar ki janta ka aakrosh bhi jheliye. Fir kaam ka paanch guna load ho jaata hai, wo hamhi ko karna hai. Sanvidhaan ke dayare mein rehte hue swatantra roop se larai nahin hoti hai (If we protest then also we are threatened for losing jobs. If we protest for five days then we lose five days’ wages. On the top of it we have to face the antagonism of people across the city. Then the work load multiplies by five times, because we only have to do it. Within the constitutional arrangement, there is no freedom of waging resistance).’

While on one hand, the nature of contractual employment leads to fear and uncertainty among the women, especially with respect to taking leaves, on the other, the state reasserts the merits of not taking leave by rewarding women who come to work everyday. ‘Mujhko ek din bhi naga nahin karne ke liye certificate mila hai (I have received the certificate of not being absent even for a single day).’

This fear leads to repression of voice as well as silence on demanding rights, even for carrying out efficient work.

‘Ham kya complaint karenge. Hamare khilaaf hi ho jaata hai. (What will we complain about? Complaints are filed against us only).’ Each of the respondents we spoke to about the provision of safety gears for sanitation work expressed that they require it, but do not ask for it. ‘Maangne se dega hi nahin, toh jaaenge maangne? (On asking also they will not give, so should we go asking?)’ One wonders that what could be the compulsions that allow them to remain passive, undemanding and submitting to the coercive processes of the state. To understand this better it is important to highlight the current political and bureaucratic climate of the Muzzafarpur city. The bureaucracy and the elected representatives remain at odds with each other and it becomes very difficult for the administration to implement any programme or enforce laws. During the validation of the research findings with the Commissiner, Mr Sanjay Dubey pointed out that according to him the sweepers (women sanitation workers) do not work for eight hours a day. Especially, in the afternoon shift from 2.00-5.00pm, they are not to be spotted sweeping the roads. He said that everyday while he is travelling around the city, he cannot spot any sweeping activity. While the findings from the research suggest that women do work in two shifts, the validation with the municipal staff also refuted this allegation. They revealed that the women are not
spotted sweeping on the main roads such as station roads and flyovers as they are extremely busy with traffic during the day time. The station road, in particular has a number of shops and vendors who operate their trade on the road, making it impossible to sweep in the day time. At that time, the women sweep roads inside the colonies.

While talking about the constant fear in which the women sanitation workers live everyday owing to the huge uncertainty of their jobs, Mr. Dubey expressed that in Muzzafarpur the political climate is difficult, because of which the Ward Councillors and the the Mayor makes it difficult for the Commissionary to implement any policy or programme. Hence, to appease them he has given a free hand to the Ward Councillors, so that they can hire or fire sanitation workers as per their will. He also admitted that he is aware that this has led to a lot of malpractice and corruption; however, it suits the interest of the bureaucracy, which requires two things. One is that out of the fear, the sanitation workers will work to save their jobs. The other is that according to the Fourth Pay Commission, it’s essential to rotate employees every six months. The Ward Councillors help him do this by hiring and firing sanitation workers. This observation was contested in discussion with him. He was told that the contractual employment does not really require firing employees but renewing their contracts every 11 months. However, he chose not to engage in any further discussion on this. Nevertheless, he commented that he would be willing to provide safety gears to the workers on condition that there is an assurance that the sanitation workers work eight hours every day.

5.5.2 Absence of provisions on making workplaces safe and enabling

The women sanitation workers employ their own means to handle occupational difficulties.

‘Na jhaadu, vardi, mask, kuch nahin mita hai. Apna shawl naak par bandh kar kaam karte hain (Neither the broom, nor safety gear or mask, we do not get anything. I tie my shawl on my nose to work).’

‘Mask toh bahut zaroori hai. Apna tauliya lagate hain. Dukh sunne wala koi nahin hai (Mask is very important. I use my own towel. Nobody is there to listen to our sorrows).’

‘Stole ko pakad ke hi kaam par nikalte hain. Beta mask bhi la diya hai (I never leave my stole while going out to work. My son has brought me a mask).’
‘Abhi rauda ka samay hai to sawere hi nikal jaate hain. Ghar char baje hi chor dete hain. Adha jhaadu laga kar, chhe baje anchal mein haziri dene jaate hain. Roz ka 40 rupaya kharch hota hai. Apne paise se hi jhaadu banwaate hain. Ek mahine mein teen jhaaru lagta hai. 120 rupaya kilo ke hisaab se jhaddu milta hai. (This summer season, the sun is too high right in the morning, so I go to work early in the morning. I leave my house at four in the morning. I sweep half the road and then go back to the anchal office to mark my attendance. Everyday I spend Rs 40. We use our own money to buy the broom. In a month about three brooms are required. The broom comes at a cost of Rs 120 per kg).’

‘Koi I Card, vardi, joota ya mask nahin milta hai. Salary time par nahin milta hai. Do mahine par ek baar milta hai. Himanshu sir the toh time par milta tha. Chutti milta hai pregnant hone par toh bhi permanent wale ko milta hoga (We do not get any ID card, shoes of uniforms. Salary is also not received on time. In two months we get our salary. If one gets pregnant, there are leaves probably for only permanent workers).’

‘Jhaadu bhi nahin milta hai. Aath deen mein jhaadu kiya gaya hai. Vardi bhi nahi. Saree bhi deta hai toh nau haath ka deta hai. Holi aur Chatth mein. Par koi bhi kaam ka nahin; 5 metre-11 haath ka kam se kam milega tab na lapetenge. Abri milega toh hamlog naaenge. Retire ke time par posting hua hai. Mera pati retire ho gaye 2012 mein. Doosra department mein rehte toh ghar chalate, pension nahi milta hai na. Ab ghar chalaye ki ghar banayen. Pension nahin milega toh dhol bajaenge ghar mein baith kar dabar dabar. 120 rupees per kg jhaadu milta hai aur ek mahine mein 10kgs jhaadu lagta hai. Retirement ke baad bhi koi kahin office mein kaam milega toh karenge. Baccha log ghar mein rakhega hi nahin, agar kamaenge nahi toh. Ghar mein baith kar beta putohu se laat joota karnge. Beta kuch nahin karta hai. Hamhiko poti ka byah bhi karna hai (We do not even get brooms. In eight days the broom is all used up. We do not have any uniforms. Even when they give us saree, its length is just nine yards. We get this during Holi and Chatth. So it’s of no use to us. The saree should be of 5 metre or 11 yards for us to be able to drape it. This time when we get it we are going to measure it. I got my permanent posting at the time of my retirement. My husband retired in 2012. If he were in a different department then he would have provided for the home, but now he doesn’t get pension either. Now should I manage my household expenditures or invest in building the house? If I do not get pension, then I have to beat the drums sitting inside the house. The brooms come at a cost of Rs 120 per kg and in a month 10 kg of brooms are required. Even after retirement if I get an employment in any office I will still work. The children may not keep us at home if I do not earn. If I sit back at home then I will have conflicts...')
with my son and daughter-in-law. My son doesn’t do anything. I only will have to marry my granddaughter.’

Not being given a broom for sweeping, not being given masks to protect them from the dust, not being given gloves to handle the garbage collection, etc., makes me think of not being given a pen and paper to write, not being given a computer to write reports. However, sanitation work continues to be done, on the terms and conditions of the state, which is the employer in this context. The negotiations with the state on these accounts have been tiring. The apathy of the state government as an employer is even more severe as it delays the payment to the workers too.

### 5.5.3 Delay in Payments

‘Hamne toh ek baar kaha ki sir thook aap fenkte hain, ponchta main hoon, pakhana aap karte hain, saaf main karta hoon, meri hi tankha baaki kyun? (I said once that sir you spit and I clean, you shit and I clean, but why is my salary delayed?)’

‘Time par paisa bhi nahin milta hai. Do mahine par ek baar tankhwah aata hai (We do not get our salaries on time. Salary comes once in two months).’

Increasing daily wages requires a different set of struggle altogether.

‘Din ka 25 rupaya badhane ka baat ho raha hai. Teen-char mahine se baat chal rahi hai. Kuch hua nahin hai. Ab hadtaal hoga tabhi badhega (There were talks about increasing our daily wage by Rs 25. The talks have been ongoing for three or four months now, but nothing has happened. Now we will have to protest).’

‘Permanent nahin bhi karega toh darmaha toh badha dijiye (Even if they do not make us permanent, they should increase our salaries).’

‘Kam pagaar mein kya kya kariye (What all do we do with such a low salary?)’

‘Aaj ke yug mein shiksha ka star itna uncha ho gaya hai ki ek bacche ki padhai mein 5,000-7,000 ka kharcha prati mahina hota hai. Karmachari kaise karega? (In today’s times the level of education has gone much high, so much so that the expense of educating a child is Rs 5,000-7,000 per month. How will a worker afford this?)

‘Hume 7,800 rupaya milta hai. Is zamane mein is paise mein mahila karmachari kya kya karegi. Pariwaar ko khilaegi, bacha log ko padhayegi, unka kapda latta kharidegi…kya ye sab ke liye itna kaafi hai? (We get Rs 7,800. With this money, what can a woman sanitation worker afford to do? She will feed the family, educate her children, buy their clothes… is this money enough for all of this?)’
As a result of delayed payments, most of the sanitation workers live a life of debt. Their experience of cyclical debt does not allow them to progress economically.

‘Bhar mahina Mahajan ka karja le kar khaate hain (For the entire month I take loans from the money lender to feed myself).’

‘Karj mein hi jiwan gujarta hai (My life is lived in debt).’

‘Tankha itna kam hai ki bacha log ko bhi padha nahi paate hain (The salary is so low that I can’t even educate my children).’

‘Bataiye 150-200 se ghar chalega? Dono log kamata hai toh ghar chalta hai. Mahajan bhi tabhi paisa deta hai (You tell me is it possible to run the household with Rs 150-200 per day? It is only when both of us earn that the whole family can survive. The money lender will also only give loans on such conditions).’

While the salaries of contractual labour in the MMC align with the state's minimum wages criteria, many women think they are paid far less with respect to their permanent counterparts and also for the nature of the job that they are required to do. ‘Jitna mehnat karte hain wo harzana nahin milta hai. Hamlog jaisa kaam karte hain hamko din ka 500 rupaya milna chahiye (We are not paid for the kind of labour that we put in. This kind of labour should be compensated with Rs 500 per day).’

5.5.4 Experiences of trade union

The existence of trade union or the Safai Karmchari Sangh is critical in the MMC, but it is ridden with its own limitations. Usually, people who hold the permanent positions among Sanitation Inspectors and Ward Inspectors head all positions in these unions. And while they keep holding meetings, protests and circulate the charter of demands, their negotiation with the state is not perceived to be effective even by the union members themselves. ‘Meeting mein kitni baar gyapan diye hain, ID card ko lekar, vardi ko lekar, samay par darmaha milne ko lekar, ESI ko lekar, arrear ke bhugtaan ko lekar. Kuch hota bhi hai. Bahut kuch nahi hi hota hai. Thak gaye hain (We have submitted a copy of our demands in various meetings. We have demanded for ID cards, uniforms, timely payments, regarding ESI provisions and payment of arrears. Some things do happen. But most of the things do not happen. Now we are tired).’

The labourers who are working on contract basis with the MMC are excluded from demanding benefits of pension, health and any other employment benefits by the nature of their contracts. Their participation in the trade union meetings are also token gestures. They are invited to join the negotiations only when there is a need to
hold protests. ‘Hadtaal hota hai, bulate hain toh chale jaate hain (If there is a protest and they call us, then we go).’

‘BJP sarkaar chaturth vargiya pad hi samapt kar rahi hai. Inka pura kaam hi outsource karna chah rahi hai. Iske liye ladai chaalu hai. Teen-char mahina pehle Dilli ke sansad bhawan par teen diwasiya dharna hua tha, budget shstra ke pehle. Budget mein bhi safai karmchariyon ke liye ko pravdhan nahin hai. Sarkaar angrezi shshan chala rahi hai. Jo stayi karmchari hain unka arrear salon saal se bakaya hai. Rajya sarkaar mein jo badhottari hoti hai who nikay par bhi lagu hona chahiye. Jo log retire ho rahe hain unke jagah mein bahali nahin ho rahi hai. ESI card ke liye awedan diye hain. Par ye sab baatein thande baste mein daal di jaati hain (The BJP government is doing away with fourth grade employees altogether. They want to outsource all that work. For this our struggle is on. About 3-4 months before we had protested at the parliament house for three days, just before the budget session. In the budget also there is no allocation for sanitation workers. The government is implementing British Raj. The arrears of permanent employees are stuck for years. The increase in fund allocation at the state level is also applicable at the city level. People are retiring and their places are vacant, because new employment is not happening. We have also given application for ESI. But all these discussions are pushed into the cold).’

The functioning of trade union itself is considered of no meaning by the workers. ‘Pehle tha union. Ek mat, ek rai, ek munh hota tha. Ab nahin hai. Union ka post dekar log ka munh band kara dete hain ki koi kuch bole nahin (Previously there was a union with one opinion, one voice and consensus. But now its not there. By giving a position within the union their mouths are sealed so they do not speak against any thing).’ The people who are the bridge between the administration and the workers say, ‘Hona toh bahut kuch chahiye. Ladai karke nahin ho rahi hai. Prem se thoda bahut mil bhi jaega (A lot of things must be provided. But we can’t fight and get them. With peace and love we may get some little things).’

‘Sthayi karne ke liye, wardi ke liye, I card ke liye. Awaaz uthate hain ek saath. Apna mudda rakhne ke liye mehnat karna padta hai (To make us permanent, for uniforms, for ID cards, we raise a collective voice. But to get our issues heard we have to put in lots of effort).’

The sanitation workers feel cheated and unheard even by their own union leaders. ‘Trade-Union mein sab chor hai. 100 mein se 80 beimaan phir bhi mera desh mahan
(In the Trade Union everyone is dishonest; 80 out of 100 are dishonest and yet we believe that our country is great).'

5.5.5 Interaction with elected representatives and administrative officers

The relation with the elected representatives and with bureaucrats also seems that of hope and despair entangled in a complex matrix. The Ward Concillors are the ones who are approached for recommendation for ensuring employment, but at the same time, negotiating with them is the story of unfulfilled hopes and ill conceived dependence.

‘Parshad ko koi shikayat nahin karte hain. Kitna aadmi ko chhante hain. 30-35 aadmi ka bahali radd hua hai. Hamhi ko hata denge toh kya karenge? (We do not go and complain to the councillor. Many people have been fired from their jobs. About 30-35 people’s employment has been nullified. If I get removed then what will I do?)’

‘Parshad ghoos le liya aur permanent nahin kiya (The councillor took money as bribe from us and did not give me the job).’

‘I paid Rs 20,000 as bribe to the councillor. I worked for about four months without any salary. I have the signed papers, but still no one is willing to listen.’

Bribing is so normal that the women said, ‘Humlog free mein naukri par lage. Ab toh parshad ko 50,000 rupaya tak dena padta hai naukri ke liye (We got the job for free. Nowadays, the councillor demands a bribe of Rs 50,000 for awarding the job).’

At the same time, empathy towards the burdens of the administrative in charge is also heard. ‘Tankhwah toh der se milta hai, lekin sahib sab bhi kya karenge, unka bhi galti nahin hai. Chota clerk sab bill nahin chadata hai. Bolta hai ki cheque par sign nahin hua hai (Our salaries are delayed, but what will the officers do, its not their mistake. The lower clerk doesn't submit the bill on time. He says that the cheque has not been signed).’

At the same time, the alienation of sanitation workers from the structures of the municipality is also expressed. ‘Saheb se koi bhet nahin karne deta hai. Dar lagta hai. Jab Himashu sir the toh bahut accha tha. Ekbaar tila Sankranti ka samay nazdik tha aur tankha nahin aaya tha. Sahab ke office ke bahar hamlog intezaar kar rahe the, milne ke liye. Sahab gaadi mein baith kar nikal rahe the, toh hamlog ko dekhe. Bulakar pooche ki kyun khadi ho? Himmat juta kar bole ki paisa nahin mila hai. Tanik der mein hi paisa bank mein aa gaya. Niman sahib jaldi chala jaata hai, ghuskhor sab reh jaata hai (Nobody allows us to meet the big officer. We fill fear. When
Himanshu sir was there it was very nice. Once the festival of Makar Sankranti was approaching and we had not got our salaries. We were waiting outside the office of the Commissioner. He came out and got into the car, then he saw us. He called us and asked that why we were standing? We gathered courage and told him that we have not received the money. In a little while the money was transferred in the bank. The good officers leave the city very soon, the one who is corrupt remains for a long time).

‘MMC mein 300-500 karmchari aise hain jo 2-5 saal pehle sewa nivrit hog aye. In sthayi karmchari ko aaj tak vetan ka arrear bhugtaan nahin ho paya hai. LIC ka bhugtaan nahin hua. Arrear ghus dekar nikala gaya hai. Antarvetaan bhi bakaya reh gaya aur karmachari mar gaya (At MMC about 300-400 employees are such who have retired 2-5 years ago. These permanent workers have not been paid their arrears. Their LICs have not been paid. Te arrear was released after bribing the officials. This extra earned income remained in the government’s kitty and the worker died without recieving his dues).’

‘22 mahine ka vetan bakaya tha aur mera karmachari bina dawai, bina kafan ke mar gaya (The payment of 22 months was unpaid and my worker dies without medicines, without a funeral).’

On the other hand, some of the experiences give one hope as we engage with the stories of the sanitation workers. Most of the workers are hopeful that someday their employment will be converted into permanent ones, which will change their lives.

‘Agar permanent ho jaata toh, kismet hi khul jaata (If we become permanent then it will be such a good fortune).’

Working with the MMC also is seen as a better workplace in relation to private employment. ‘Pehla din kaam par gaye, gaon ka aadmi sab dekh liya toh bahut sharm laga. Chorne ka man kiya, par baaki staff samjhata tha ki kaam itna badhiya hai, mat choro. Kahun aur jaegi toh 8-7 kaam karna padega (The first day when I went for work, one my village men saw me, I was embarrassed. I wanted to leave. But all other staff counselled me that this work is so much better, do not leave this. Where else you will go looking for a job, everywhere else you will have to work from 8:00 in the morning to 7:00 in the evening).’

The ward councillors pitch in to bridge non-functioning of the administration and enable the functions of the sanitation workers, ‘Tagaadi, fawra parshad kharid kar
diye. Tyre puncture hota hai toh nigam ko 500 rupaya dena chahiye, lekin vo bhi nahin milta hai (The councillor bought the equipment. The municipality must give Rs 500 to take care of the punctures, but that too we do not get).

On the hopes of change, however, despondency emerges, ‘Ab kya sudhrega. Ek bitta zamin nahin hai. Ghar paas karane ke liye, loan ke liye kaagaz pattar nahin hai. Kisi bhi sarkaari kaam ke liye 25 go kagaz lagta hai. Time hi nahin hai, toh chor dete hain. Hamlog ke paas Sarkar ka koi fund nahin hai. Gaon mein to Indira Awas hai (Now what will change? I don’t have even a yard of land. For everything like taking a loan or applying for a house we need to have documents. For any governmental work multiple documents are required. But I do not have time, so I leave. We do not have funds from the government. In the villages, they still have Indira Awas).’

The alienation from the state’s policy and schemes is further stressed in the following narratives. ‘Swacch survekshan ho ya Smart city mission, safai karmchari ke liye koi pravdhaan nhain hai (Whether it is swacch survekshan or Smart City Mission, for sanitation workers there are no provisions).’

‘Karmachaari ka pet bhar do aur pith par laad do, pet bhara rehne par aadmi kaam karta rehta hai (Just fill the stomach of the workers and load him with work. If the stomachs are filled then people keep working).’

‘Kaam karo, hakkad joto, karmachari baap baap karta rahe (Work and work harder, the sanitation worker will keep lamenting).’

‘Neta log kha kha kar pet nikaal kar mast maula ho gaya hai aur karmchaari kha-te khat-te sukh gaya hai (The politicians eat and eat and move around with the bloated stomachs and the workers keep doing hard work and his body is emaciated).’

‘SBM Swach Bharat Mission hai lekin karmachari ko Ganda Mission mein dhakel rahe hain (SBM is Swach Bharat Mission, but the workers are being pushed in the dirty mission).’

‘Rs 2.5 crore Muzzafarpur mein SBM ke tehath aaya hai. Lekin labour ko bina ladai kiye kuch nahin milta hai (Rs 2.5 crore came into the Muzzafarpur city under SBM. However, the labour doesn’t get anything without struggling for it).’

‘My assigned work area is too far from where I live. I have asked the Parshad to change it atleast 3 times. I have to wake up at 3 in the morning and leave for the road atleast an hour in advance. I leave by 4.00am so I can start work by 5-5.30am. If I have to take leaves for personal reasons such as attending a marriage then I lose my wages.’
Most of the protests and meetings even among the workers and the Trade Unions are reduced to demanding economic benefits. ‘I go to meetings. Recently there was a protest for increasing wages but nothing has happened till now.’

‘Hadtaal hota hai, bulata hai toh chale gaye (When there are strikes, they call us and so we go).’

‘Haal mein safai karmchaari ka hadtaal tha, naye prashasak Sanjay Dubey ke saamne wo keh rahe the, Rs 5,000 mein labour se kaam karwaenge. Par wo sab halla hi tha (Recently a protest was called by sanitation workers, against new commissioner Mr. Sanjay Dubey. He was saying that he will reduce our salary to Rs 5,000. But that was just a commotion).’

It seems that while concerns on safety, social security and institutional support is as hard to crack, the Trade Union has also accepted it and centred it’s negotiations on economic parametres, which has some scope of being heard.

These narratives situate the plight of sanitation workers as contractual labours with the municipality. Fear of losing one’s job, having no employment benefits, difficulties in accessing what is rightfully theirs—all combine together to compound the socio-economic deprivation that sanitation workers have been historically subjugated with.

The labour belong to sanitation work and, therefore, Dalits/ Mahadalit castes suffer from a variety of economic disabilities. The Dalit labour is the least preferred in production operations, but most preferred in the sanitation work. The social and economic practices together have led to their situation. The experience of living in perpetual debt because of not being paid on time by the municipality is one such causality of the same. As labourers they cannot demand reasonable wages. It seems as if their life is a continuous struggle. During the validation of the research findings the women sanitation workers flagged that apart from not being given emergency leaves for sickness, maternity issues, etc. The contractual form of labour does not pay them for 31 days of work, which according to them is outrightly unfair.

Dr. Ambedkar elaborated the economic deprivation of ‘Dalit labour’. According to him, in an agricultural country, agriculture can be the main source of living. But this source of earning is generally not open to the sanitation workers who come from the ‘untouchable’/ Dalit caste groups. All the women interviewed for the study reported as not having any land or any parental village property. Majority of them for more than four generations they have been in the city of Muzzafarpur and have constructed their little homes in little spaces in the margins of the city. As labourers they can not demand reasonable wages.
5.5.6 Political economy of contractual work

Through the gazette notification dated March 16, 2018, the current NDA government modified labour rules to encourage contract jobs across industries, signalling a strategic shift in employment from job security to job generation. While on one hand these measures may rank India better in terms of ease of doing business as it removes restrictions from hiring and firing employees, on the other hand it will make a large section of the labour force further vulnerable.

The changes, made through a gazette notification dated March 16, come at a time when the government is looking to address the problem of jobless growth—a major political challenge for the government ahead of the general elections due in 2019.

The draft rules make it clear that employers are not required to give notice of termination of employment for contractual workers, nor do employers owe any retrenchment pay to such workers. In other words, workers can be hired and fired without notice. It makes little difference then for the rules to say, as they do, that contractual workers are entitled to the same hours of work, wages and other benefits as that of permanent workers. During the validation meeting it was clearly stated by the women, ‘Kya hamlog permanent walon se kam kaam karte hain. Unko 25,000 hazar tak milta aur hamko sirf 7,800. Ye kahan ka insaaf hai (Do we work less than the permanent workers? They are paid Rs 25,000, while we get only Rs 7,800. Where is the justice in this?)’

In fact, the provision mandating that only a fixed-term worker who has served for three consecutive months is entitled to a two weeks’ notice (and in absence of notice, will be informed of the reason for retrenchment in writing) indicates how short a term of employment even the government envisions for the workers.

The NDA had first introduced hiring of fixed-term contract workers in 2003, but the UPA government in 2007 had reversed the order, owing to massive unanimous opposition from all the central trade unions.

Tapan Sen, General Secretary of CITU said, ‘It is a grossly anti-worker measure designed to temporarise and casualise the workforce to serve the interests of the employers’ class. Extending same wages and service conditions as regular workers to fix-term employees as mentioned in the notification does not mean anything since the very temporary character of employment and accompanying fragility in job
security will not allow such temporary employees to demand such equal treatment simply out of fear of losing employment.’

Amid the political climate on contractual employment, it is evident that the contractual form of employment will only make the conditions of workers more precarious, as employers will have no obligations towards the workers. They will get an almost free hand to hire and fire. There will be no job security and no social security for workers. The stories of sanitation workers reverberate with the repercussions of these forms of employment, even when the principal employer is the municipality in case of Muzzafarpur.

As for the claims of employment generation, Dr Hemalata said, ‘Employment generation depends on the purchasing capacity of the people. If the people have money, if they purchase, only then will they produce and only then will there be employment generation. Whatever employment is being generated is not creating that kind of purchasing power among the workers. It is not any decent employment.’ She said even an International Labour Organization (ILO) report of 2015 had said that attacking the rights of workers was not how employment generation took place. No wonder that a 2018 report by ILO estimates that 77% of Indian workers will be engaged in vulnerable employment by 201910.

In the light of policy decision by the ruling government, even trade unions are unable to reverse the political order on contractual employment. Hence, the issues taken up by trade union revolve around economics because that is the only possible ground on which they can negotiate. All other aspects related to job security and social security fall out of the purview of any change. In the name of sustainable development, therefore, the economical aspect of sanitation work is upheld by agencies like NIDAN. According to them, ‘waste is an asset’. Hence, sanitation workers must be treated as partners and not as people whom we look at from the angle of charity. Sanitation work is cleaning other’s dirt. As long as the dirt is produced by somebody else and cleaned by the other, treatment of waste would be difficult. Especially the composition of waste in India is such that segregation of waste to derive economic value out of waste is a far fetched dream. Sanitation work entails getting paid for a labour/task. But who does this work? A particular caste, a set of people defined by characteristics of educational status, site of residence, etc., are the one’s who do it. As far as the task defines a job role, it is fine; but this argument overlooks the perpetuation of caste-based work and intergenerational

10 https://newsclick.in/bjp-wants-all-workers-become-contract-labourers
poverty that then leads to lower educational status, economic poverty, lack of social security and experiences of discrimination. Despite being educated, the children of sanitation workers also land up in sanitation work, because of ‘majboori’ (compulsions) and in the name of ‘bhagwaan isi mein janam diya hai (we have been born into this caste). ‘Ghinaenge toh roti kaise khayenge? Padhe likhe nahin hain toh yehi toh karenge na. Hamare bacche jo padh likh gaye hain wo ye kaam nahin karna chahte hain. Bahut koshish kiya bacchon ko padhane ka par nahin padha (If we disdain this work then how will we eat? We are illiterate so we have to do this work. Our children who are educated they don't want to do this work. I have tried a lot to educate my children but they have not studied).’

The question, however, is that why did the child not study? Is it that s/he never wanted to study? Do they not labour enough? These are some of the questions which still need to be answered. Till the time the condition of sanitation workers is viewed from the economic angle by the state, this dredgery is going to further deepen and welfare manadate of the government is increasingly being sidelined to give space to capitalist principles of functioning through profits alone.

5.5.7 The governmental programmes and schemes

National Commission for Safai Karmcharis (NCSK) was brought to force to redress grievances and to take cognizance of problems and provisions of laws for safai karmcharis. The National Safai Karmchari Financial Development Corporation (NSKFDC) has been instituted by the government of India for the socio-economic development of safai karamcharis/ scavengers and their dependants by providing financial assistance in the form of various loan schemes and training programmes for upgrading their skills through State Channelising Agencies (SCAs) nominated by State Governments/ UTs, Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Nationalised Banks across the country (NCSK, 2018).

NSKFDC channelises its schemes in Muzaffarpur through the SC/ST Development Corporation and provides loans from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh to people from the SC community, and especially from Dalit and Mahadalit communities. These loans are given to start entrepreneurial ventures such as setting up small tea shops, putting up vegetable vending businesses, buying and operating tractors, etc. These loans are given for enabling entreprenurship among the people. This has led to a number of successful stories too.
In Bihar, the Mahadalit Vikas Mission was instituted in the year 2007 to ensure an integrated development of social, educational, economical aspects of people from SC/ST communities. Vikas Mitras\(^\text{11}\) were appointed in each ward and each Panchayat to link the communities to government schemes. These schemes are related to their skill development, primary education, access to basic services such as toilets, residential land, access to safe drinking water, provision of health card, among many others. The linkage of SC/ST families and their children with these schemes is still to be gleaned to ascertain their efficacy.

The green skills mission promoted by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has developed qualification packs for various levels of workers under Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) through the green jobs sector skill council. These qualification packs have been developed for septic tank technicians, FSTP operators, maintenance technicians and desludging operators (entrepreneur). These qualification packs have the provision of recognising prior learning and provides skill training for identified job roles. However, the policies have their own limitations.

`Majority of sanitation workers in India perform “yellow” and “black” jobs. Manual scavenging is a “yellow” job, and “black” jobs are done by those workers who clean our cities’ drains manually. Will they get to ride this dream of “green jobs”, especially when skilling sanitation workforce is not a priority at the municipality level?’ The exclusion is deeper than the lack of prioritisation of skilling sanitation workers. Do we have data on the number of sanitation workers across the country who perform ‘yellow’ or ‘black’ jobs, and need to be skilled for ‘green’, safer livelihood options, either as a sanitation worker or in an alternative job? No one has the answer, not even municipalities. Media reports suggest there are still 1.2 million people engaged in yellow jobs, and out of them, 90% are women (Anshuman Karol, 2018).

During the validation meeting when the existing policies, schemes and provisions were shared with the municipal staff they revealed that most of them did not know that such provisions existed. Some of them had heard of Mahadalit Vikas Mission and vikas mitras but they denied seeing their presence in the wards. The alienation with the state and central level schemes and policies down at the beneficiary level is stark and challenging.

\(^\text{11}\) During 2007-08, State Govt. sanctioned a special project of Rs. 288.19 crore for a period of three years. The project includes various schemes for the social, economic, infrastructure development. One of the major decisions of the state government was to appoint ‘Vikas Mitra’, a person at the Panchayat/Ward level to act as a bridge between the Mahadalits and the Government functionaries. (http://www.mahadalitmission.org/BMVM-about-us-list.php#W0t3kNFzbiU)
The intersection of class, caste and gender among sanitation workers reflect that their lives are stories of vicious circles of intergenerational poverty, caste-based discrimination, isolation in the larger socio-economic sphere of the spatiality they inhabit, leading to their perpetual backwardness. Their experience of debt is like the centripetal movement into misery, owing to delayed payments that further reinforces the debt cycles in which they just survive all through their lives. The state-led economy, in this case assumes a capital-centric position where each action is weighed against the profit, even when it is at the cost of human lives and their despairing situation. The economy based on performative labour of sanitation workers then reinforces this nature of labour work through its mechanisms of contractual and permanent work system.

It is time to question if these state-led schemes and opportunities are just not a ploy to keep some sections of the population from reaching the threshold of socio-economic deprivation. Compensating them just enough to enable their survival, but not enough to break the barriers of class, caste, gender or educational status. Hence, when hegemonic claims are made that education is one of the means to counter class-caste deprivation, one wonders if this argument holds true even in the present context. How are they supposed to keep up with changing standards of education, the high cost associated with quality education, and finally become a part of the competitive environment?

The question that remains is: do these schemes ensure upward mobility? Can there be convergence between the health card of the Mahadalit Vikas Mission and the MMC on provisions of health cards for sanitation workers? While promoting entrepreneurship among the SC/ST communities as ‘Swacchata Udyami’ does bring an angle of independence and ownership, but is it enough to ensure dignity of labour and the right to live a dignified life?

6. How Does Gender Play Out in the World of Women Sanitation Workers?

The term, ‘women sanitation workers’, denotes a complex intertwining of gender, caste and labour. Women sanitation workers in Muzaffarpur, employed with the municipality do the job of sweeping roads. As explained in the beginning of this report, the sanitation work itself is multi-layered where sweeping is the beginning, but also the lowest rung in the hierarchy of sanitation work and, therefore, women are at the lowest in the hierarchy of sanitation workers.
The segregation of job by sex could be historically situated in the ways in which societies came to be structured. The patriarchal system in which men controlled the labor of women and children in the family, gave power to men for hierarchical organization and control. This followed by men as capitalists in creating hierarchies in the production process in order to maintain their power. Capitalists do this by segmenting the labor market along race, sex, and ethnic lines among others (Hartmann, 1970).

Job segregation by sex is the primary mechanism in a capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labor market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labour. This domestic division of labour, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labour market. Thus, the hierarchical domestic division of labour is perpetuated by the labour market, and vice versa. This process is the present outcome of the continuing interaction of two interlocking systems—capitalism and patriarchy. During the field work, one of the respondents shared that when her mother was retiring, she coaxed her to take up her position at the municipality. She shared that her husband said that if she would go out to work, who will cook food at home? 'Khaana banaegi ki kaam karegi? (You will cook food or work outside?)' Her mother persuaded the husband and said, 'Dono ho jaega (she will do both)'. Hence, a woman finds approval of her working outside the home on a pre-condition that her household responsibilities will remain unaffected. While on one hand her income will supplement the household income, she is unabashedly expected to manage household work as well. Her working in the economic space is also treated as a favour. While the capitalistic forces demand that household finances would be inadequate if it resides on the shoulder of men alone, patriarchy demands that she juggles her responsibilities inside and outside homes. 'Ek kamaane wala, 10 khaane wala. Kaise khayenge, kaise padhayenge. Dono ko kaam karna hi hai (One person to earn and 10 people to eat. How will we eat, how will we educate. Hence both of us have to work).'

The resulting mutual accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism has created a vicious circle for women. Maintenance of job segregation by sex is a key root of women's status; but the consequences of that division of labour go very deep, down to the level of the subconscious. The subconscious influences behaviour patterns,
which form the micro underpinnings (or complements) of social institutions and are in turn reinforced by those social institutions (Heidi Hartman). ‘Pehle mahila log thela chalati thi. Ab upar se hi kaam milta hai. Hamko jhaadu ka hi kaam milta hai (Previously women used to ply the cart. But now the work is assigned from the top. We only get the work of sweeping).’

The dominant patriarchal ideologies on the capacities of women are then perpetuated from the top, which is of course dominated by upper caste men. Institutions such as municipal corporations, state-led policies as well as the dynamics within the family, reinforces these labour divisions. This is all the more prominent from the fact that there are no women ward inspectors, sanitation inspectors or circle inspectors.

The internalisation of sex-based difference and gender based discrimination remains unquestioned, replaying and relaying itself across ages and generations. Hence, when women say, ‘Aurat ki zindagi mein yahi likha hua hai. Kaam karna hai, khana hai kamana hai (A woman’s life is written out like this. We have to work, earn and eat)’, the undertones are also of psychic acceptance of their own worth. Of all other types of sanitation work women themselves consider jhaadu/ sweeping as the easiest. In Muzzafarpur at the time of the field work, few men were observed helping their wives and mothers on the eve of Chatth Pooja. ‘Bahut bada sadak hai. Akele hoga? Isiliye madad kar dete hain. Maa pavni hai, isiliye kaam kare aaye hain (It’s a long road. Is it possible to sweep it alone? That’s why I help her).’ These narratives suggest the breaking of gender-based barriers in unique circumstances as well as depict how the state as an employer allows labour substitution in times when women fall ill or for whatever reasons they may be unable to perform their sweeping work. On the other hand, this liberal arrangement also allows the women sanitation workers not to lose their day’s wages.

The ways in which women perceive their physical capacities are also a subconscious reproduction of this conditioning, in which their femininity imply weakness, dependence and subservience. Hence when women say, ‘Aurat ke liye Jhaadu dena hi thik hai. Mard ka kaam apne jagah par theek hai. Wo log kado nikalte hain, thela kheenchte hain, usmein jyada mehnat hain (For women it’s only right to sweep. The work of men is right in their place. They get into the drains, take out mud, they push the heavy carts, it requires much effort).’ Or when they say that, ‘Dilli mein aurat log bhi thela chalati hai kyunki wo log matha peeti hai (In Delhi, women operate carts
because they drink butter milk),’ it is a reflection of their internalisation of a socio-cultural conditioning that dissociates females from their physical capacities. In these expressions of sex and gender specific female subjectivity, women inadvertently claim that they are not as free as they ought to be.

The approaches through which people of each sex perform physical tasks are different. This difference is not due to muscular strength but in the ways in which they use their bodies to approach a task. Women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting and carrying heavy things, pushing and shoving with significant force, pulling, squeezing, grasping or twisting with force. ‘Aurat se belcha chalana, thela kheechna hoga? (Can women shove and push carts?)’ When we attempt such tasks we frequently fail to summon the full possibilities of our muscular coordination, position, poise and bearing. Women tend not to put their whole bodies into engagement in a physical task with the same ease and naturalness as men. For example, in attempting to lift something, women more often than men fail to plant themselves firmly and make their thighs bear the great proportion of their weight. Instead we concentrate our effort on those parts of the body most immediately connected to the task—the arms and shoulders—rarely bringing the power of our legs to use. Women do not trust the capacity of their bodies to engage itself in physical relation to things. Consequently, she lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along and at the same time protected (Young, 2005).

Additionally, most of the work deemed proper for women have cultural connotation. ‘Mahila naali mein utregi kaise? Admi log pura kapda khol kar utarta hai (How will women get down into drains? Men take off all their clothes before getting into drains).’ Preventing and protecting her at the same time from the harshness of engaging in an inhuman work engagement. Hence, the bodies of women sanitation workers become a site of accumulation of dirt, violence, humiliation and the male gaze.

They have to continuously prove that being allowed to work in the economic space by their family is a freedom to be used wisely. ‘Kaam karte hain toh Awara nahin ho gaye hain. Mohalla ke aadmi ke saamne Aanchal le lete hain (If we go out and work we have not become wanderers. If I see any man from my colony then I take my veil).’
6.1 Experiences of Sexual Harassment

Sweeping the roads require women to begin the work very early in the morning. Most of them leave their homes between 4:00 and 4.30 in the morning so that they reach their stipulated work territory and begin before working under the sun becomes unbearable. Going out at dawn entails its own set of struggles. 'Ek gaadi wala meri behen ko kaha ki, aajao chaar chakke se chalo pakki sadak par. Aap kahan jaate hain? Dhandha par jaa rahe hain kya? Toh usko Jhaadu dikhakar jawaab diya ki-laukta nahin hai. Jhaadu lagane jaa rahe hain (One person in a vehicle said to my sister, come over and sit in my four-wheeler on this concrete road. Where are you going? Are you going to find someone? So she showed him her broom and replied, can't you see? I am going to sweep).'

Some incidences of teasing, commenting and inappropriate physical advances such as catching women workers from back were reported. 'Subah subah nikalte hain, dar lagta hai, koi peeche se bhi pakad leta hai (We step out early in the morning and fear, sometimes people grab us from the back).'

However, most of the women also shared that it's up to them to prevent such mishappenings. 'Ward parshad ya supervisor hansi mazak karte hain, hammein dilchaspi lete hain toh ham jawaab nahin dete. Kaam mein busy rehte hain. Samman banana apne haath mein hai (Ward Councillors and supervisors try to get informal with us, they take interest in us, but we do not respond. We are busy in the work. It's up to us maintain our dignity).'

Jhaadu is a worker's identity of being employed with the municipality as well as a weapon for protection.

'Haath mein jhaadu hain, munh mein gaali hai. Kisi ko himmat nahin hai kuch bolne ka (We have brooms in our hands, and abusive words in our mouth. Nobody has the courage to say anything to us).'

'Humlog apne khacchar hai ki maarenge do thappad (We are ourselves ominous and are capable of slapping people).'

'Aurat log mard ko ghuma kar deti hai. Hamlog ko I card dena chahiye (Women give it back to the men. They should give us ID cards).'

'Meri beti bhor mein duty karne jaa rahi thi. Aadmi bola bahut sundar lag rahi ho. Pakadne ka koshish kiya. Auto wala bola ki pata nahi hai Jhaadu lagane waali hai. Isiliye beti ko bolte hain ki Jhaadu lekar chalo (My daughter was going to work very early in the morning. A man said that she was looking very beautiful. He tried to hold her. But the auto driver came to her rescue and said that don't you know she is a
sweeper? That’s why I tell my daughter that keep the broom in your hand when you start for work early in the morning).’

‘Humse sab darta hai. Humko boli hai kadak. Koi kuch kehta hai toh ham kehte hain ...KYA Kaha RE? Sab aadmi log kehta hai, chachi pranam (laughs)! (Everyone is scared of me. My voice is strong. If somebody tries to comment I say, “WHAT DID YOU SAY?” Then men say, “Aunty regards!”)

‘Badka lagga wala jhaadu hai. Koi kya bolega? (I have a big broom with a big stick. What can anyone say?)’

The municipality has rescheduled the timing of starting morning duty from six in the morning after few such cases were reported. However, advocacy for provision of ID cards to the women sanitation workers have not been honoured, which is an essential identification of who they are when they travel to their workplaces in the dark hours of dawn.

6.2 Women as non-complaining and efficient Workers

Women are also considered to be efficient workers and not trouble makers. ‘Mahila isliye kaam karti hai ki ghar pariwaar chalana hota hai. Taki unke upar jo jamaadarr hai wo do baat na bole, isiliye mehnat se kaam karti hai. Ladies log itne mehnat se kaam karti hai ki bolne ka koi mauka nahin deti hai (Women work because they have to manage their households. So that the supervisor doesn’t complain or speak harshly to them, that’s why they work diligently. Women work with much dedication and do not give any opportunity to complain).’ Said Suresh Ram, Ward Inspector, Ward 46.

Women sanitation workers are less demanding, more efficient and least paid. The work also brings sense of pride and worth to the women. ‘Humko log izzat karte hain. Baccha log bhi darta hai ki maan kaam karke aayi hai (People respect me. My children are also respectful and behave well, thinking that my mother has come back from work).’

They also find escape from their daily family tussles and share a nurturing relationship with women at their workplace. ‘Mahila par itna bojh rehta hai. Ek doosre se tasalli milta hai. Dukh toh jab tak saans hai rahega par sabra rakhna padta hai. Ghar ke log se baat karke itna khushi nahin milta hai jitna ki staff ke saath khush rehte hain (Women are burdened; but we find solace in each other. Sorrows will remain till the time we breathe but we have to keep the patience. I don’t find happiness by talking to people at home but with fellow women workers I feel happy).’
Women fear complaining, demanding or asserting. They fear the loss of work. 'Hata hi dega toh jobhi daal roti kha rahe hain wo bhi nahin (If they fire us then whatever food we get to eat today will also become impossible to arrange).'

'Ham kya complaint karein, hamare hi khilaf hota hai tab parshad ke paas jana padta hai (What should we complain about? The complaints are made against us and then we have to present our case before the ward councillor).'

'Kisko bolenge. Parshad ko bolenge toh bolega tum hi kaam nahin karti hogi tabhi na bolta hai. Sabse pehle jamadaar ko hi bolte hain. Lekin wo dekhta hai tab patiyata hai (Who will we complaint to? If we complaint to the councillor he will say that surely you don't do any work that's why these complaints are raised. Firstly we complaint to the supervisor. He believes us only when he sees it it with his own eyes).'

Being a woman sanitation worker makes them vulnerable not only due to the nature of contractual employment and type of the work that they do, but also because of their gender. On the one hand, they have the pressure of providing for their families, and on the other, to save their jobs. Hence, they live in perpetual fear, suffering in silence, unable to raise their voice or even demand any benefits. This makes them a preferred worker in a capital-centric patriarchal world.

6.3 Experiences of Menstruation

The bodily experiences of women with respect to their menstruation do not find an accommodating space in their workplace. If women complain of sickness during work hours they are treated with scepticism. 'Jamaadar kehta hai jhooth bolti hai. Kamm mein kami nikaal dete hain. Hajiri kaat dete hain (The ward inspector says that we lie. He picks out mistakes in the work that we do. He deducts our salary).'

A woman worker is supposed to carry her normal body to work, which is a body not bleeding from the vagina, and is considered to be efficient and eligible at the workplace. Hence, menstruating women must conceal any evidence of it each month for fear of disorder, subverting what is right and proper. 'Deh mein dukh lekar bhi khatna padta hai nahin toh paisa kat hi jaega. 4 din ke liye 2400 rupya kat jaata hai. Isiliye us samay par bhi naga nahin karte hain. Deh haath dukhta hai. Dawai manga ke kha lete hain.kaam karte hain (Even if my body aches, I have to do the hard work, otherwise my salary will be deducted. If we take leave for four days then Rs 2,400 will be deducted. That’s why in those days too we do not take leaves. My body is in pain, but I take medicines and go back to work).'
The fact that all supervisors are men adds to the problem. ‘Ladies supervisor hoti toh assan hota batana. Jamaadar ko bahana batana padta hai (If there were any women supervisors, it would have been easier for me to speak about it. With men supervisors, we have to use lies).’

‘Mard ko sab pata hai phir bhi anjaan banta hai (All men know everything yet they pretend and ignore).’

‘Kaam karte karte chakkar aa jaata hai. Chutti mangte hain toh nahin dete hain (I feel nausea at work. But if I ask for leave, they don’t give it to us).’

‘Parson hi tabiyat kharab ho gaya, toh baith gaye. Sweeper aaya bola Jhaadu lagati hi nahi hai (Day before yesterday I fell sick, so I sat down. The sweeper came and said that I do not work at all).’

‘Kamjori hota hai. Bleeding mein bhi daudna padta hai. Gents kehta hai ki aapka hamesha tabiyat kharab hi rehta hai (I feel weak. Even when I am bleeding I have to run. The men comment that I always complain of sickness).’

‘Doonu patta/ jaangh chila jaata hai, chal chal kar. Kabhi mahina mein do baar ho jaata hai, 20 din mein hi dubara ho jaata hai (Both my thighs are scratched, because of continuous walking. Sometimes I get periods twice in a month; only in 20 days it happens again).’

‘Ek baar Nitish Kumar aane wala tha, jab daaru band hone wala tha. To us din subah se hi kaam par gayi. Wahin par shuru ho gaya. Soche ki jamaadar ko kaise bolein? Toh baaki staff boli ki chup kar nikal jao. Toh nikal gaye. Ismein bhi chutti dena chahiye (Once Nitish Kumar was to visit the city, at that time when alcohol was being banned in the state. So that day I went to work very early in the morning, but I started menstruating there at the workplace. So then I thought how should I tell the supervisor about this? The other women said that quietly sneak out. So I just left the workplace. For this we should get leaves).’

Menstruating women must monthly deal with a misfit between our needs and the public institutions that afford our main access to social benefits and recognition. Workplaces in supposedly sexually egalitarian societies claim to include women equally with men. As such they assume public norms that generally fail to accommodate the particular needs of menstruating women, both physical and social. This failure of public acceptance increases a woman’s sense of shame, and can disadvantage her in the distribution of benefits.

Dominant norms in advanced industrial societies affirm that women should have the opportunities to do anything that men do, but at the same time force women to
conceal their menstruation. This normative humanism must thereby suppress deviant facts such as the physical and social implications of menstruation. This suppression has potentially disadvantaging consequences for women because menstruating produces some special needs in the context of public institutions such as at workplaces. This assumption of equality as sameness often unfairly discomforts and disadvantages. Additionally, they often ignore or punish the temporary unwellness some women suffer before or during menstruation.

7. Women Sanitation Workers and Associated Occupational Health

Hazards of sanitation work on one hand and complete absence of any preventive or curative health benefits for such workers on the other have assumed hyperbolic connotations. Municipal authorities, state and central government, safai karmchari missions, trade unions as well as media et al have notably taken cognisance of the lack of occupational safety and its implications on the human lives with little or no action. The NSK observed, ‘Safai Karamcharis are not being provided with necessary equipments and implements resulting in serious health hazards. Safai Karamcharis are mostly involved in an unclean profession and are bound to be subjected to various skin diseases and other serious ailments while working in unhygienic conditions of work. No safety equipments like gloves, masks, gum boots, soaps etc. are provided to the Safai Karamcharis by the concerned employer/contractor/NGO.’ The negotiations on all the aspects which would entail making work place environment safe and ensure basic health benefits have fallen on deaf ears. The trade unions have also not been able to mark any dent on their negotiations with various authorities across city, state and national levels. ‘Gyapan de dekar thak gaye hain, Sarkaar kaan mein tel daalkar baithi hai (We are tired of submitting the charter of our demands. The government is sitting back with deaf ears).’

Dealing with dirt requires using one’s body to wade through filth, exposing their lived bodies to occupational dangers. Sweeping of roads requires bodily confrontation with swathes of dust. Hence the body which sweeps inhales, gulps, gets poked and hosts dust on skin. Collecting, picking, shoving and dumping garbage entails using bare hands, treading on garbage dumps with bare feet and moving with heap loads of garbage bearing the stench. Cleaning the dirt requires immersing in the dirt first. Paradoxically, sanitation workers clean at a cost of their own uncleanliness, bringing hygiene to others by compromising their own, fumigating through their own contamination.
Experiences of sanitation workers in dealing with occupational hazards highlight resounding apathy, rather cruelty of the ‘welfare’ state and unfeeling society.

‘Dumping yard mein ghus kar kaam karte hain. Koi boot, koi joota nahin dete hain. Koi mask nahin dete hain. Bahut baar andar kachra dhass jata hai, usmein gir jaate hain. Baarish mein toh yahan kaam karna bahut mushkil ho jaata hai, badbu aur kichar je kaaran. Uli aa jaati hai (We work inside the dumping yard. We have no boots, no shoes. We have no masks. Often the garbage caves in, and we fall into the pit. During rains it becomes impossible to work here, because of the mud and stench. So much so that we vomit).’

‘Pair kat jaata hai. Kuch bhonka jaata hai. Shehar tak jaate jaate bahut khoon beh jaata hai (I cut my feet, sometimes some sharp objects wound us. By the time we go to the city a lot of blood has already been lost).’

The dumping yards are usually 15-20 km away from the main city. In MMC, every truck is supposed to make two rounds for dumping the garbage. At the end of each round, the drivers have to mark an attendance in the register at the site office, which is supervised by an official. However, this site office does not have facilities such as drinking water, first-aid kit or even a shed where the drivers can sit and rest when needed or in case of emergencies.

The labouring bodies of women sanitation worker continue to suffer incessantly.

‘Thakte nahin hain? Gatar gatar deh dukhta hai. Dawai kha kar kaam karte hain (Don’t I get tired? Every part of my body pains. But I take medicines and go back to work).’

‘Kamzori aane lagta hai, chakkar aane lagta hai, fir tension bhi rehta hai, ki haziri kat jaega, doosri or ye tension ki ghar mein khana kaise banega (I feel weak and nauseated. Then I suffer from the tension that if I don’t report to work on time, I will lose a day’s wage. On the other hand, I feel stressed about cooking at home).’

‘Garda se pura munh mein infection ho gaya. Munh dhak dhak kar kaam karte hain (Because of the dust, I have contacted infection in my face. So, I cover my face and work).’

‘Mera kareja dhak dhak karne lagta hai. Baith baith kar kaam karna padta hai. Kabhi BP low ho jaata hai. Dawai khaate hain. Jab se ye kaam pakde hain deh aadha ho gaya hai. Ghar mein thakni-harni, bahar mein bhi, khaane ka samay hi nahn hai (My heart starts pounding rapidly. I take rest frequently and then work. Sometimes my BP is very low. I eat medicines. Since the time I started doing this work, I have lost hald my weight. I have to slog at home and outside, I have no time to eat food).’
'Aankh mein garda baith gaya hai. Doctor bola hai ki chashma laga kar jhaadu lagao aur naak mein bhi baandho. Aankh nochta rehta hai aur dhundhla dikhta hai. Operation karwana padega par abhi paisa nahin hai. Kaan mein bhi kam sunai deta hai (My eyes are filled with dust. Doctor has said to wear spectacles and wear a mask at the time of sweeping. My eyes keep itching and the vision is blurred. I will have to get this operated but I do not have enough money. I also hear less with my ears).'

'Deh ka thakaan ho jaata hai, ghar bahar dono ka kaam karte hain. Kabhi khaate hain aur kabhi nahin khaate hai. Ghar mein meat, chicken bana kar jaate hain, lekin khaane ka time nahin milta hai (My body feels tired, working incessantly both at home and outside. Sometimes I eat and sometimes I don’t. At home I have cooked meat and chicken dishes but I do not have time to eat).'

'Dhool ke maare Ankh mein chubhta rehta hai (Because of continuous exposure to dust, my eyes keep hurting).'

'Verdi nahin dete hain. Thanda mein bahut dikkat hota hai. Par thanda thanda karenge toh pet kaise bharega? (They do not give us uniforms. In winters it is very difficult. But if we feel cold then how will we fill our stomachs?)'

Most of the women shared that exposure to dust has made them allergic, affected their eye sight and impacted their hearing. Headaches, respiratory issues and swelling of faces are common occurrences among these workers.

7.1 Is the Work Environment Safe?

Neither the work that these women do is safe, nor is the work environment empathetic to their real life conditions. As is also evident from the narratives above, none of the workers, including those who are permanently employed by the municipality have I-cards, uniforms or any safety gears including a mask. In fact, the truck drivers who transport garbage from the city to the dumping yard lamented that the municipality does not give them tarpaulin sheets despite requisitioning to cover the garbage load on the trucks. Because of this on the highway, when the truck is in speed a lot of garbage flies off the truck dropping on to fellow travellers inviting their ire and many times severe conflicts. Since the drivers, coolies and jamadaars/ward inspectors are also related to these women sanitation workers, their well-being concerns them.

‘Inlogon ko garmi mein nala mein ghusna padta hai aur haath se nikalna padta hai (They have to step down in the drains and use their hands to clean it).’
For women, there are no provisions such as maternity leave. The risk of losing job with the municipality surpasses all their other needs making them go to work in the most inappropriate times.

‘Baccha ko ham pet mein lekar bhi kaam kiye hain. Jis din dard utha us din bhi jhaadu lagaye. Uske baad 6 din ka tha tabse kaam jaane shuru kar diye, inke papa ke saath. Fir bhi bolta tha saaf se jhaadu nahin maarti ho. Us time par mere pati jhaadu lagate the, ham haziri banane jaate the (I went to work when I was pregnant. The day I got my labour pain on that day also I swept the road. After that the day my child was six days old I came back to work, along with my child's father. Even then the supervisor would say that you do not sweep the road. At that time my husband would sweep the road, I would go to mark the attendance).’

The narrative above also reflects that by allowing substitution of labour due to illness, motherhood or festivals, municipality allows certain kind of flexibility to these workers. Is this kindness real or is it to ensure that whatever the situation of the sanitation worker, the sanitation work in the city must not suffer?

The ward inspectors/supervisors extend their support to the women workers, when asked for it.

‘Ek baar subah subah nikle toh line kata hua tha. Toh jamadaar ko phone kiye aur bole ki dar lag raha hai. Fir wo aaya aur hamare saath saath road par chalta raha, tab jhaadu lagae (Once when I stepped out to work in the morning there was an electricity cut. So I called up the supervisor and told him that I feel scared. He came and walked along with us on the road, then I did the sweeping).’

More than 90% women expressed that they felt continuously exhausted, stressed, anxious and angry about managing both home and work.

‘Ghar ko bhi sametna hai aur bahar bhi, Khae chahe nahin khae. Isiliye kamzori chata hai. Samay hi nahin hai’ (I have to manage the house and take care of work outside, it doesn’t matter if I eat or I don’t. that’s why I feel weak. There’s no time).’

‘Gussa bahut aata hai. Itna bojh hai, ghar-bahar ka (I feel very angry. There is so much pressure of home and outside).’

‘Tension mein jab log ho jaata hai tab man nai karta hai ki jiyab. Ka karein tab. Ghar se kaam, kaam se ghar. Ab tension hai toh kya karega. Bol ke reh jaate hain (Whenever there is tension, I don’t feel like living anymore. But what can be done? Home to work, work to home. Even if there is tension what can be done? I just rant and then keep quiet).’
‘Chinta hota hai ki na jagah hai na zameen hai (I feel disturbed that neither do I have a place to live nor do I have any land).’

‘Rona yahi aata hai ki kya zindagi hai hamara. Kaam karo, nahin toh hata denge. Jammadar kehta hai Jhooth bolte hain, kaam mein kami nikaal dete hain. Hajiri kaat dete hain (I feel like crying about my life. I must work else I will be fired. The supervisor says that I lie, he picks mistake in our work, and cuts my salary).’

Those working on contract feel violated by the authority in many ways. They are not entitled to take leaves, they work on minimum wages which is far below the current pay commission of the country and their work load is same if not more.

‘Permanent ko pension milta hai, 16,000 tak milta hai, usko chutti milta hai, 25,000-30,000 tak salary milta hai. Hamlog din bhar kaam karte hain aur 7,000 kamate hain. Kapda bhi permanent ko milta hai. Jo ki bhar din jhadu pakade rehte hain. Budhi log ko ek road mein teen dibiya tel jalta hai lekin ham majboori mein kar rahe hain (Permanent workers get pension, up to Rs 16,000, they get leaves, their salaries are upto Rs 25,000-30,000. We also work all day long and earn only Rs 7,000. The permanent workers also get clothes. The old women keep holding the broom all day long, they pant while sweeping just one road. But we are also doing this under compulsion).’

7.2 Social Security to Manage Health Crisis

During these times it is each other’s help and support that the women sanitation workers bank upon.

‘Ek doosre staff se tasalli milta hai. Dukh toh jab tak saans hai tab tak hai, sabr rakhna padta hai. Ghar ke logon se itni khushi nahin milti hai. Wo log munh chhidhate hain. Staff ke saath khush rehte hain (We seek solace in each other. We will have sorrows till we breathe, but we have to be patient. The people in the family do not make us happy. They deride us. But fellow women workers make us happy).’

Women complained that sweeping the road has occupational health issues such as incessant pain in the body, sprain in shoulders (‘haath ukhad jaata hai’), scratches in thighs (‘dono patta chila jaata hai’) due to sweating and walking for longer periods of time, weakening eyesight, weakness of body, sinusitis, low blood pressure due to mental stress, allergy and infections. The medical problems of these workers are further compounded by various socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, poor housing conditions, and poor diet. In the absence of any health benefits such as ESI they are bound to suffer in silence.
8. Policy actions and their enforcement required to alleviate the working conditions of WSWs

PRIA’s participatory research findings with women sanitation workers in Muzaffarpur both reinforce some known challenges, pointed out by other studies, and add to new insights and knowledge. The following section present glimpses of the findings and their implications on current and future policies.

8.1 How Does the World of Work Affect them as Women?

- Women are assigned job roles within the sanitation work chain as sweepers by the MMC, denying them any choice of work or upward mobility in the hierarchy despite long years of their employment with the municipality. This is why there are no women in the position of supervisors at the ward or circle level. Hence, an immediate attention to this discrepancy is required.
- The workplaces are not equipped to support women when they are menstruating. There are no facilities such as toilets, resting shed, availability of sanitary pads at the workplace, etc. Menstrual unwellness remains unrecognised and ignored.
- Pregnant sanitation workers do not get any leaves during pregnancy or post-delivery and live with the threat of losing their jobs for taking leave.
- There is no formal complaint mechanism, which makes it difficult to express incidents of gender-based harassment, assault or work related discomforts, and thus makes them vulnerable. The lack of such mechanisms often encourage practices of bribery by supervisors (who are mostly males) when giving out salaries.
- Ward supervisors, sanitation inspectors and circle inspectors are all men because of which women find it difficult to share many of their difficulties.
- Trade Unions are also represented by men, which never brings the voice of women to larger forums.
- All women sanitation workers struggle and juggle household chores (including care giving) and the demanding cleaning jobs. It leaves very little time for self-care. Most of them complained of continuous exhaustion, feeling stressed, anxious and angry.

8.2 How Enabling or Disabling Are the Working Conditions for Permanent and Contractual Workers?

- The permanent staffs of MMC earn approximately Rs. 20,000-30,000 per month. They get pensions and arrears, while contractual workers in the same municipal
corporation earn Rs 7,800 per month. They remain unpaid for Sundays and any extra work on the occasion of festivals and marriages

- Permanent workers get holidays on a Sunday; have earned leaves, casual leaves and maternity benefits. Contractual workers have no earned or emergency leaves. However, both categories of workers do similar work and are exposed to similar occupational risks
- Permanent workers get allowances per month for buying brooms, but contractual workers’ pay for their own brooms too. Every month they require 5 kg of brooms, which cost them about Rs 500
- Permanent workers receive their salary on time. Contractual workers receive salary once in two months, impacting their economical sustenance and pushing them into a cycle of debt
- Both permanent and contractual workers have no ESI or health insurance. There is no provision for occupational health risk mitigation or support
- There are no first aid boxes at the anchal / zonal offices and at the Rautiniya dumping site, making their work riskier in case of onsite injury

8.3 What Are the Health Effects of Such an Occupation?

- None of the women have access to masks, gloves, uniforms or ID cards
- Nine out of every 10 women sanitation workers experience some kind of physical problem such as skin allergies, cough and breathing problems, hair-loss, high blood pressure, etc., which are exacerbated by the nature of their jobs
- Women complained that sweeping the road has occupational health issues such as incessant pain in the body, sprain in shoulders (‘haath ukhad jaata hai’), scratches in thighs (‘dono patta chila jaata hai’) due to sweating and walking for longer periods of time, weakening of eyesight, weakness of body, sinusitis, low blood pressure due to mental stress, allergy and infections
- The medical problems of these workers are further compounded by various socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, poor housing conditions and poor diet
- In the absence of any health benefits, such as ESI, they are bound to suffer in silence when they become chronically ill
8.4 Have Existing Laws/Policies Improved Sanitation Work Related Conditions?

- More than 70% women sanitation workers have no or very little awareness of the laws, schemes meant to protect or enable their lives
- Few institutions (civil society, unions, municipality, etc.) are involved in sharing information and generating awareness of women sanitation workers on their legal rights and entitlements
- Most importantly, raising voice, demanding rights and entitlements or even raising complaints seeks threats of losing jobs and induces fear among women disabling their collectivisation

8.5 What Can We Do To Improve Health and Safety of Women Sanitation Workers?

- Atleast four prominent policies apply to the women sanitation workers in Bihar, primarily because of their SC or Mahadalit status:
  - These are Prevention of Atrocities against SC/ST Act, Elimination of Manual Scavenging Act, National Safai Karmachari Mission operated through SC/ST development Corporation, Maha Dalit Vikas Mission; Green Skill Mission supported by NSDC and implemented though Urban Livelihood Mission
  - These policies have schemes on provision of health insurance and health card, promoting entrepreneurship, accessing skill development education for service-based employment, scholarships for children
  - In the absence of any specific provision for sanitation workers in particular, there is a need to look for convergence with the existing schemes by the MMC. This should be complimented with awareness generation activities by the city authorities, civil society, and other relevant institutions so that sanitation workers access these schemes
- The Municipality should take into cognisance the ‘voices’ of the women and design enabling contracts with provisions for leaves, fair wages, include payment for the 31st working day, make workspaces responsive to the needs of menstruation, and provide maternity leaves
- Provision of safety gears, ID cards, uniform, a copy of written contract, ESI or health insurance benefit remains to become a reality despite acknowledgements and hence an immediate action is required
A formal complaint redressal mechanism is absent from the municipal work space. Hence, an ICC or Internal Complaints Committee should be constituted to address women’s issues with respect to sexual harassment. Since, PRIA has pioneered ‘Sexual Harassment at Workplace’, MMC in collaboration with PRIA can act on it immediately.

Fair and independent workers unions should be encouraged to promote ‘substantive rights’—wages, hours of work, working conditions, and minimise income inequalities between the different categories of sanitation workers and also represent women in these forums.

Mandatory facilities (first aid kits, drinking water, and toilets) and policies like menstrual leaves must be considered to promote mental wellbeing of women workers.

Conscious efforts to include women in the role of supervisors should be considered.

Recognition of women’s double burden of work will go a long way in creating women friendly work environment for women sanitation workers.

9 Conclusion

About 1.1 million Sanitation workers keep Indian cities clean. They are primarily engaged in sweeping, sewer cleaning, septic tank cleaning, railway cleaning, and community/public toilet cleaning. More than half a million urban sanitation workers are women who are mostly engaged in cleaning toilets, drains, and streets. The Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) promises not only to make India clean, but also to improve the lives and work conditions of sanitation workers.

In the Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation (MMC) there are 900 sanitation workers of which 225 are women. Of the total number of sanitation workers only about 250 are permanent workers. In every ward there are on an average 13 sanitation workers of which 4-5 are women. They are being paid Rs 313 as daily wage since May 2018, prior to that they we paid at the rate of Rs 300 per day. Majority of the WSWs (more than 95%) belong to scheduled caste commonly known as Harijans or Mahadalits in the state of Bihar.

The women sanitation workers usually apart from belonging to the lowest caste reside in squalid conditions in the margins of the city, with little or no literacy, surviving on the bare minimum resources and trapped in an intergenerational misery on account of socio-economic and political apathy. Majority of the WSWs have been
in the caste based occupation of sanitation for at least four generations within the city of Muzaffarpur. The households to which these women belong to are either engaged with municipality or are privately employed. What remains common is that they find an employment in works related to cleaning; sweeping; and picking up and disposing garbage, accentuating their caste based family legacy of being sanitation workers.

The perception of education amongst the women sanitation workers in this study is linked with what they feel about educational status of their children and with the environment in which they reside. Two kinds of pattern emerge. One is where children have not been able to study and have gone back to the sanitation work either with the government or private employers. The other is where the children have been able to acquire decent levels of education (which they themselves value) and despite that have not been able to find work outside of sanitation. Majority of the WSWs are illiterate, meaning they did not know how to read or write. Some of their children who have studied 10th, 12th or graduation are evidently the first generational learners within their families. However, the educational climate of the Bihar state as well as of India has drastically changed over the past 60 years. The competition is huge and ruthless. Nevertheless, the women feel exasperated that despite educating their children, they are unable to find employment outside of their caste based occupational compulsions. While the education of their children till 10th to graduation may be perceived to be high amongst women sanitation workers, it is still just not enough to compete in the world outside which keeps redefining the educational standards for offering employment. Thereby, the promise of ‘education’ for breaking caste-class barriers seems to be a distant dream. Hence, when hegemonic claims are made that education is one of the means to counter class caste deprivation, one wonders if this argument holds true even in the present context. How are they supposed to keep up with changing standards of education, cost associated with quality education and finally be a part of the competitive environment.

All the women workers in Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation (MMC) do sweeping. Despite being employed with the MMC for more than 15-20 years none of the women have been promoted to any kind of supervisory role such as ward inspector, sanitation inspector or circle inspector. Some of the women, although very rare, who have passed 10th are also bound to do sweeping because the MMC does not employ women in any other role other than the sweeper. This reflects the gender based discrimination by the principal employer which is MMC.
About 75% of all women sanitation workers are contractual labourers with MMC. Their experiences of working in the contractual form of employment reiterate fear, risk, insufficiency on one hand and a mirage of hope on the other. While working with the municipality, gives them an assurance of earning ‘minimum’ wages, it is also a preferred form of employment as private players are more extractive. On the other hand they live in hope of converting their contractual employment into permanent one, which in the current political economy looks unlikely in the near future. Additionally, most of the women sanitation workers were referred for the job by their own mothers who in turn refer their daughters and daughter-in-law, leading to perpetual opportunity of a regular employment, even though the form of employment is un-regular in nature.

The labourers who are working on contract basis with the MMC by it's nature and lack of awareness on their entitlements as per contract law are excluded from demanding benefits on account of pension, health and any other employment benefits. Their participation in the trade union is just tokenism. The trade unions are also headed by circle inspectors or sanitation inspectors who more often than not belong to upper caste men. It seems that while concerns on safety, social security and institutional support is as hard to crack, the trade union have also accepted it and centred it's negotiations on economic parametres which has some scope of being heard of. WSWs as contractual labours with the municipality live in continuous fear of loosing one’s job, have no entitlements to leaves, employment benefits which combine together to compound the socio-economic deprivation that they have been historically subjugated with. The economic disabilities are further propounded by not receiving wages every month pulling them into perpetual debt cycles. If we analyse the budget of MMC for the year 2017-2018, their apathy and dysfunctionality is found to be severe and disturbing. As per the published budget of MMC for 2018-19 (Muzaffarpur Municipal Corporation, 2018) expenditure on wages was estimated for the year 2017-18 as Rs three crores of which the actual expense till December 2017-18 was approximately eighty lakhs only. While the actual expense towards wages for the financial year 2016-17 was 1.59 crore rupees, the revised budget for the year 2017-18 was brought down to 1.27 crores (See Exhibit 1) which is substantially lower than actual spent figure of 2016-17. Why is expenditure on wages low? It seems evident that employment has been reduced within municipality on an overall basis and number of labours being employed has gone down. If we look at the salaries and allowances component, that shows an increasing trend. In the year
2016-17 the estimated budget was rupees 18.34 cr against rupees 22 crores in the year of 2017-18 of which expense till December 2017 were 15.55 crores. Revised budgets and estimated budget for the year 2018-19 remains at rupees 22 crore which clearly depicts that while salaries and allowances component of the budget has gone up, wages are showing a downward trend. Now considering that the minimum wages has increased over the last few years, it clearly indicates that the number of contractual sanitation workers has gone down.

Unfortunately, budget for medical reimbursements for the year 2017-18 was rupees 6.05 lakhs, increased to 6.65 lakhs in the year 2018-19 (See Exhibit 1). While the allocated budget itself is meagre, actual figures on expenditure on health is not available. It is also unclear whether these reimbursements are for labourers or employees. Moreover there is no budgeted accounting under heads of ESI contributions, first aid, emergency health or health insurance. Apart from that contribution to pension fund of contingent staff has not been provided for in the budget (Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation, 2018). This is a telling situation on it’s own.

Further, City Manager at MMC heads the overall workforce of sanitation workers through circle/zonal inspectors and ward inspectors. According to the budget for city manager and others for the year 2018-19, it has been kept at rupees 1 crore. It is however, grossly underspent, as the actual amount spent in the year 2016-17 was rupees 363600 and expenses till December 2017 is rupees 295830 lakhs. Despite that the budget for the year 2018-19 have been kept at rupees 1 crore (See Exhibit 1). Moreover, the budget clearly reflects that amount expended towards Exgratia, performance bonus, health benefit, pension fund, overtime etc. is a paltry amount. This also highlights the need to probe the role of city managers, given, that he is working on such a small amount against the budgeted amount (Muzzafarpur Municipal Corporation, 2018).

Additionally, the actual expenditure on uniforms to staff in the year 2016-17 was Rs 3455 only. Budget estimate for the financial year 2017-18 was rupees 20 lakhs while the actual expense till December 2017 is rupees 1,88,181 and the budget estimate for 2018-19 is rupees 20 lakhs (See Exhibit 1). As is clearly evident, this budget is grossly underutilised at the expense of safety of sanitation workers. On further analysis of the expenditure being incurred and budgeted for contractual labourers as a percentage of the total revenue of MMC shows a grim figure which is less that 1% (See Exhibit 2). It needs to be understood, analysed and further compared with
other municipalities in the country which are performing well. Looking at the overall revenue of the municipality it is obvious that while collection and charges are wellfunded on one hand, the expenditure of the ULB on sanitation workers is outrageously low leading to their existing socio-economic condition.

The relationship of WSWs with the elected representatives and with administrative officers seems that of hope and despair entangled in complex matrix. The ward councillors are the ones who are approached for recommendation for ensuring employment, but at the same time experience of negotiating with them is the story of unfulfilled hopes and ill-conceived dependence.

The intersection of class, caste and gender amongst sanitation workers reflect that their lives are stories of vicious circles of intergenerational poverty, caste based discrimination, isolation in the larger socio-economic sphere of the spatiality in which they inhabit leading to their perpetual backwardness. Their experience of debt is like the centripetal movement into the misery, owing to delayed payments which further reinforces the debt cycles in which they just survive all through their lives. The state led economy, in this case assumes a capitalocentric position where each action is weighed against the profit, even when it is at the cost of human lives and their despairing situation. The economy based on performative labour of sanitation worker then reinforces this nature of labour work through its mechanisms of contractual and permanent work system

It is time to question why the state led schemes and opportunities do not enable women sanitation workers from reaching the threshold of the socio-economic deprivation. Compensating them just enough to enable their survival but not enough to break the barriers of class, caste, gender or educational statui.
EPILOGUE

In the Validation meeting held with women sanitation workers, the following poem was recited to share with them the essence of the research findings:

Madam, you keep coming in our slum
Make a note of us, this place so glum
You ask questions, you take away my data
May I ask you, why is there no change in my stata?

You ask about the education of my children
Whether or not they go to school
But they don't want to study Hindi, Maths, Physics…
Will they get a job if they do?
My son passed 10th, I can't even read my name on the file
But will he write like you with pen?
No, he won't, so he must know to sweep, shove, push and clean

You ask why I do this work
I do this because this is MY WORK.
You ask how I feel about working with garbage.
I don't feel shy, not shame nor despise
Because this work brings me food
So, I can live and my family survives

You come inside my room, sit on my bed
Drink water, that in steel glass, I provide
I don't know how you do that?
People usually give us water in plastic cups
They shoo us away from distance
And wash their front porches where we sit to sometimes rest
But madam, slit open your wrist and I will cut mine
And you will see it’s the same…. your blood and mine
I clean your garbage, your spit, your shit
But let me remind you I CLEAN it
And that doesn't make ME a dustbin

You say you want to know my story
Snippets of our lives, scars in our memory
Why are you so interested in me, in my tales of misery?
How else will you use me?
Like the ‘neta’ who comes only at the election time
Covering their nose with their hands
Because they can’t stand the stench of our locality
And then forget about the open drains here, once they win

In the name of the house, we have
A room, through its ceiling I can look at the sky
Every day in the morning, I fight for my turn at the toilet that stinks
And when I can’t fight my urge, and defecate in the open
Then too you moralise me
I have no freedom to ‘defecate’ even
Am I really living?
At the only water pipe, I prepare  
Not only to fill my vessels  
But to also argue, fight and sometimes  
Pull other women's hair  
Else my house will have no water  
To drink or to cook  
What should I do?

You ask how much I earn.  
If I tell you, your head will churn  
'You tell me, can you live in 7800 rupees a month?  
The 'babus' say we get the 'minimum' wage  
Yes the 'minimum'  
That I require to just exist  
So your corporation functions  
For bare survival, so I keep up and CLEAN  
But I don't progress or break free  
Of the un-freedoms of my 'Bhangipan'  
Of my 'garibi', of my 'majboori'  
Of my being 'anpadh' of my everyday interactions with 'goonh', that you call shit

So madam, you ask if I am happy in my situation?  
Well, it seems the God remains indebted to our 'jaat'  
By birthing us in a caste, and sealing our fates –lifelong I will work in dirt

You ask if I take care of my own cleanliness.  
I don't know how it feels to be clean, just after bathing I go back to sweep  
Sweat and weep  
I feel like crying for my life  
What is my life?  
If I work I eat else I starve  
I work at home and on the roads  
I work to pay my debts; this life itself is a load  
I work to live from dying  
I never retire madam, I just die working  
...

Didi, It seems, you think of me, that I think of you, as 'objects'  
But I know now that I am clean, because you keep me clean  
I can afford your 'labour' because you agree to work for the 'minimum'  
I can have degrees, because you are not there to compete with me  
You think that you are 'illiterate'  
But it's you who teach me the philosophy of acceptance

Your personality is beyond the society state imposed identity  
You fight not because it's your character, but so you survive  
And, you speak in harsh tones because that's your only defense  
Your way of life is an extraordinary story of resilience  
Of patience, of your ability to deal with 'nothingness', your ability to sadly smile away

You don't need my judgements, I need you  
This city will stop functioning without you  
And the netas will loose and babus will be hopeless
### Exhibit 1: Budgetary Allocation from the MMC’s Budget 2018-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Salaries and Allowances</td>
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<td>22,00,00,000</td>
<td>15,54,56,000</td>
<td>22,00,00,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Reimbursements</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,05,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,65,500</td>
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<td>City manager and others</td>
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<td>1,00,00,000</td>
<td>2,95,830</td>
<td>4,73,328</td>
<td>1,00,00,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>3,455</td>
<td>20,00,000</td>
<td>1,88,181</td>
<td>1,00,000 (seems to be erroneous)</td>
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### Exhibit 2: Revenue Budget 2017-18

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No./Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>110: Tax Revenue</td>
<td>2,25,14,41,935</td>
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<tr>
<td>120: Revenues and compensation</td>
<td>9,50,00,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>130: Rental Income from municipal properties</td>
<td>1,72,80,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>140: Fees and user charges</td>
<td>10,12,83,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>150: Sale and Hire charges</td>
<td>63,38,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160: Revenue Grants and subsidies</td>
<td>11,46,35,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170/180: Interest and Other Income</td>
<td>1,62,40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,45,72,20,645</strong></td>
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</table>
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This document is published under the Engaged Citizens, Responsive City (ECRC) project being implemented by PRIA, supported by the European Union. The project focuses on strengthening civil society of the urban poor to participate in planning and monitoring of sanitation services across three cities in India – Ajmer (Rajasthan), Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh) and Muzaffarpur (Bihar).

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