

## **A Sociological Analysis of the Working Conditions of Sanitation Workers: A Case Study of New Delhi Railway Station**

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### **Abstract**

*The Indian Railways is the largest organisation of the Indian government, employing over a million people. Despite technological advancements, most of the waste from the rail tracks is still cleaned manually by sanitation workers, who collect solid and liquid waste with minimal equipment. This manual labour not only affects their health but also hampers their socioeconomic development. The present study focuses on the sanitation workers cleaning the railway tracks of New Delhi Railway Station, aiming to understand their socio-economic and working conditions. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and a structural tool was used to assess the information. This article highlights the categorisation of sanitation workers as manual scavengers. The results reveal that over 98 per cent of the respondents belong to Scheduled Caste groups, indicating a low socio-economic profile among the workers at the station. Despite technological advancement, most of the work is still done manually, and existing policies have failed to improve the workers' conditions despite state intervention. The findings suggest the need to reorient programs and policies to bring about necessary changes.*

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**Keywords:** Sanitation Worker, Safai Karamachari, Manual Scavenging, New Delhi Railway Station, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

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### **Introduction**

The term 'sanitation worker' refers to individuals involved in sanitation services, including both dry and wet waste management. Only a subset of these workers, specifically those who handle human waste, are classified as manual scavengers (W. Murphy, 2020). Sanitation workers are employed or engaged in cleaning, maintaining, and operating sanitation systems. They are known by various titles, such as sweeper, cleaner, 'Safaikaracmchari', and 'Safaiwalla'. However, in practice, they are more commonly referred to as 'Kachrawala' (garbage people) rather than 'Safaiwalla' (cleaning people) (Raghavendra & Kumar, 2022). Similarly, a joint report by the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and WHO (World Health Organisation) defines sanitation workers as individuals responsible for cleaning toilets and performing cleaning tasks in public, private, and institutional settings. This definition also includes workers who empty pit latrines and septic tanks, as well as those who clean sewers and manholes (Yuvraj et al., 2022). Reports indicate that five million people in India are engaged in sanitation work, of which two million partake in 'high-risk' activities, such as cleaning sewers (Garg, 2019). This study aims to develop an empirical understanding of the socio-economic and working conditions of sanitation workers who clean railway tracks and

participate in manual scavenging. Most workers express concerns regarding their job security, income, and social conditions in the workplace. This paper presents their concerns while systematically and statistically analyzing these conditions.

The Prohibition and Employment Act of 2013 states that individuals using protective gear while handling human waste should not be classified as manual scavengers. However, the act fails to clearly define what constitutes protective gear, resulting in ambiguity that could be exploited by government agencies. Sanitation work is often performed under unsanitary and degrading conditions, rendering it inherently contaminated. Workers in this field are typically underpaid and compelled to work in unsafe environments. Despite attempts to improve their situation, little progress has been achieved, and many promised developments remain unfulfilled.

Ghosh (2020) argues that public agencies significantly contribute to the perpetuation of manual scavenging. For instance, the Indian Railways, the largest employer of manual scavengers, claims to have eradicated manual scavenging from its sanitation operations. Nevertheless, workers continue to engage in manual scavenging but are labelled as "sweepers." Many trains utilise toilets that release waste directly onto the railway tracks, necessitating manual cleaning. This practice endures because hiring labour at minimal cost through contractors is cheaper than employing a generator jet machine, which incurs higher operating costs. Consequently, the lack of technological adoption hinders the eradication of manual scavenging.

The sociology of sanitation is the applied branch of action sociology, striving to ensure social equity and dignity for every underprivileged individual. Pathak (2013) explains that the sociology of sanitation is a scientific study aimed at addressing the societal problems associated with sanitation, water, health, hygiene, ecology, environment, and social deprivation, which impact not only one's life but also the lives of others. The sociology of sanitation is interconnected with the issue of sanitation workers, primarily based on the continuation of caste-based occupations. Sacchidananda (2001) argues that the practice of manual scavenging has received neither proper attention nor recognition regarding its inception, existence, desirability, or epistemology (Ziyauddin, 2022).

The increasing LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) reforms have further facilitated the exploitation of Scheduled Caste (SC) communities due to rising privatisation and contextualisation in the country (W. Murphy, 2020). Most sanitation workers are employed on a temporary or contractual basis. According to a study, only 11% of sanitation workers are permanently employed by the government, while approximately 43% work on

contracts, and the remaining 46% are casual workers (W. Murphy, 2020). This contractual system exacerbates the working conditions for these workers. Many toil for years at low wages, hoping to secure permanent employment, only to face exploitation by government agencies. Workers employed through contractors also indirectly benefit the government, as it can evade responsibilities in the event of accidents.

The railway sector primarily employs sanitation workers through a contractual system or private agencies, which means their presence often goes unrecorded. Although they may work as scavengers under the railways, they remain unrecognised (Singh, 2014). Each year, numerous scavengers die from inhaling toxic gases and a lack of protective gear, but the government seldom acknowledges these deaths. The families of the deceased must seek compensation, which is often not received, as municipalities evade responsibility by labelling the workers as privatised and blaming the contractors. In many instances, contractors flee after a workplace fatality (Kumar, 2014). Due to this contractual system and the informalisation of sanitation service employment, manual scavengers are denied credit from financial institutions, forcing them to borrow money from lenders at exorbitantly high interest rates.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the socio-economic background of sanitation workers at New Delhi Railway Station, including caste, income, education, and family structures.
2. To analyse the employment conditions of sanitation workers, particularly their contractual status, job security, and financial stability.
3. To assess the working conditions of sanitation workers, focusing on occupational hazards, protective measures, health risks, and behavioural Patterns.
4. To investigate the impact of caste-based discrimination and social exclusion on the lives of sanitation workers.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the socio-economic characteristics of sanitation workers at New Delhi Railway Station?
2. What are the working conditions of sanitation workers employed on platforms at New Delhi Railway Station, and how do these conditions impact their health, safety, and behavioural patterns
3. How do sanitation workers experience caste-based discrimination and social exclusion in their workplaces?

### **Methodology**

This study examines the working conditions of sanitation workers at New Delhi railway station using primary quantitative data collected via semi-structured interviews, observation, and in-depth interviews. Data were gathered from platforms 1, 3, 5, 14, 16, and 17-21. Purposive and snowball sampling identified over 60 participants, ensuring relevant and direct experience. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility and consistency, while on-site observations and in-depth interviews enriched the data with detailed narratives. Secondary data were also analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes and socio-economic challenges. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the research purpose and assured of confidentiality. Personal information was concealed to ensure privacy and safety, promoting confidence and genuine sharing of experiences.

**Research finding:**

**Table 1: Age-Income profile**

<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Income profile</b>				<b>Total No of respondents</b>
	<b>Below Rs.10,000</b>	<b>Rs.10,000 to 15000</b>	<b>Rs.15000-20000</b>	<b>Rs.20000 above</b>	
<b>Below 30</b>	8	15	0	0	23
<b>31-40</b>	1	6	10	0	17
<b>41-50</b>	0	2	9	1	12
<b>50 above</b>	0	0	4	4	8

**Source:** Fieldwork Data by Author.

The study comprised 60 respondents, categorised by age as follows: 23 were under 30, 17 were between 31 and 40, 12 were between 41 and 50, and eight were 50 or older. Regarding monthly earnings, nine respondents (15%) reported earning less than Rs 10,000 per month. Twenty-three respondents (38.3%) reported earnings between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000, another 23 reported earnings between Rs 15,000 and Rs 20,000, and five respondents (8.3%) reported earnings above Rs 20,000 per month.

The investigation revealed that permanent railway employees tend to receive higher remuneration compared to those on contractual systems or employed by private agencies. Moreover, a correlation was observed between age and income; younger workers reported lower salaries despite demonstrating higher levels of work engagement. Furthermore, respondents expressed concerns regarding salary deductions for leave and penalties for tardiness.

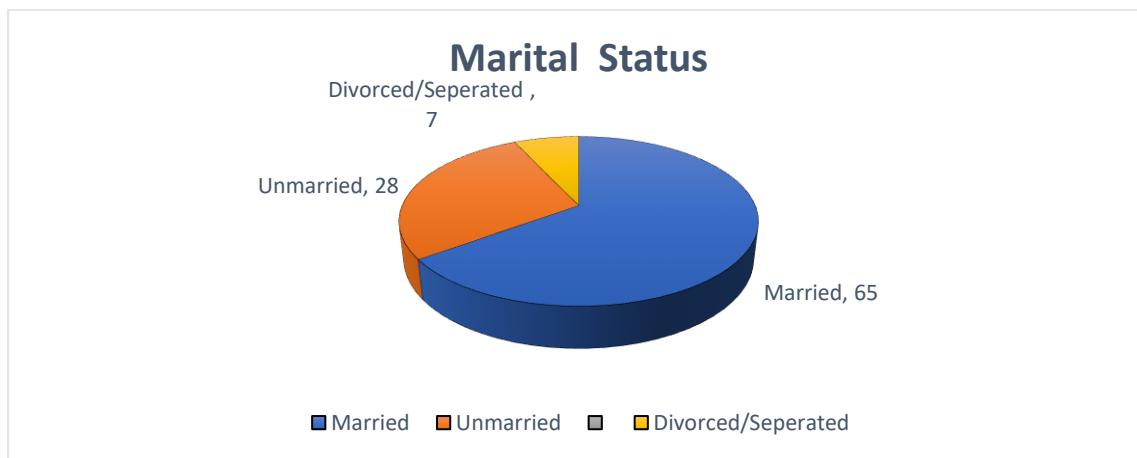
**Table 2: Caste and Religion**

<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Caste</b>	<b>Subcaste</b>			<b>Total Respondents</b>
	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>Balmiki</b>	<b>Bhangi</b>	<b>Others</b>	
<b>Up to 30</b>	23	21	18	3	2	23
<b>31-40</b>	17	16	16	1	0	17
<b>41-50</b>	12	12	9	3	0	12
<b>50 Above</b>	8	7	4	3	1	8

**Source** - Fieldwork Data by Author.

The results reveal a direct connection between sanitation work and specific caste affiliations. Over 96% of the respondents belong to scheduled caste groups, with 98% identifying as Balmiki. The remaining respondents were from the Mehtar and Bhangi castes. All respondents adhered to the Hindu religion. The researcher found that, even within the same caste, some individuals held notions of superiority over others. This indicates the presence of horizontal stratification within the same caste group. Sundar (2002) argues that caste in India is not just a social identity; it is also deeply embedded in religious connotations, which become evident in everyday social interactions, including occupational roles. This intersection of caste and religion continues to shape the experiences of Dalit sanitation workers, perpetuating their marginalization within both social and religious hierarchies.

**Figure 1: Marital Status**



**Source:** Fieldwork Data by Author. Data in percentage.

In this study, the respondents were categorised into three variables: married, unmarried, and separated/divorced. Around 65% of the respondents were married, while 28% of the respondents were unmarried. Around 8 % of the respondents were those who were divorced or separated from their partner. Out of the 65% of married respondents, around 25% were married before the legal age of marriage. This fact has been deeply rooted in the context of the educational status of the surveyed people. Due to early marriage, they are compelled to take their family's social and economic responsibilities. It also limits their life opportunities. As a result, they started to work as sanitation workers.

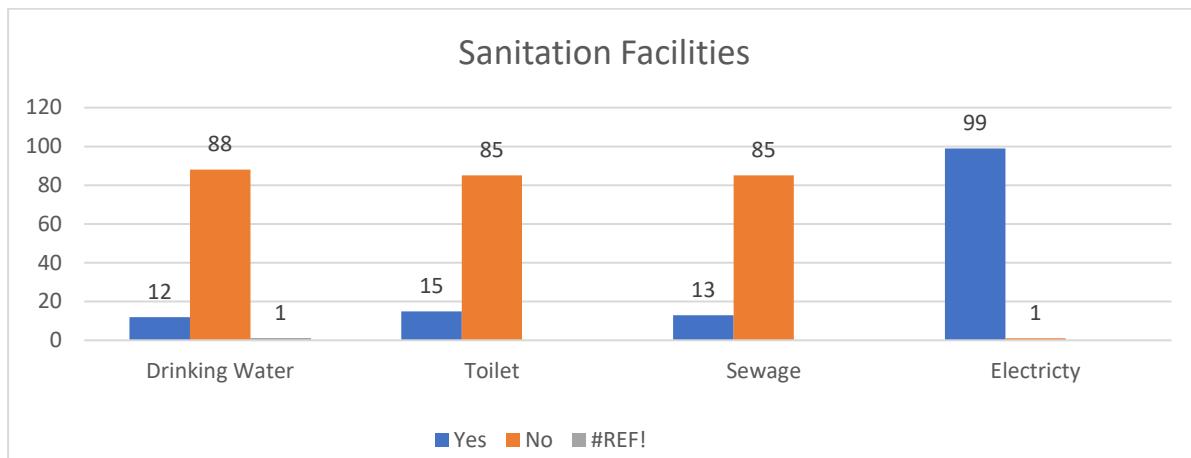
**Table 3: Housing Profile**

Age groups	Type of households		Type of housing		Housing type			Total number of respondents
	Nuclear	Joint	Owned	Rented	Kucha	Pucca	Semi-Pucca	
Up to 30	19	4	0	23	5	7	13	23
31-40	9	3	0	17	4	3	10	17
41-50	5	7	2	10	4	4	4	12
50 above	4	4	3	5	2	4	2	8

**Source:** Fieldwork Data by Author.

Out of the 60 respondents who were surveyed, around 76% of the workers lived in the area near the periphery of the railway station, which is considered a ghetto. They had access to community toilets in their areas but lacked other sanitation facilities. Around 16% of the respondents lived in thatched houses. They did not have access to basic sanitation facilities like toilets and drinking water, and they lived in unhygienic conditions. About 12% of the respondents lived in pucca houses, which had access to toilets and drinking water; the majority of these respondents were government employees. Around 6% lived in tiled houses, which were largely rented.

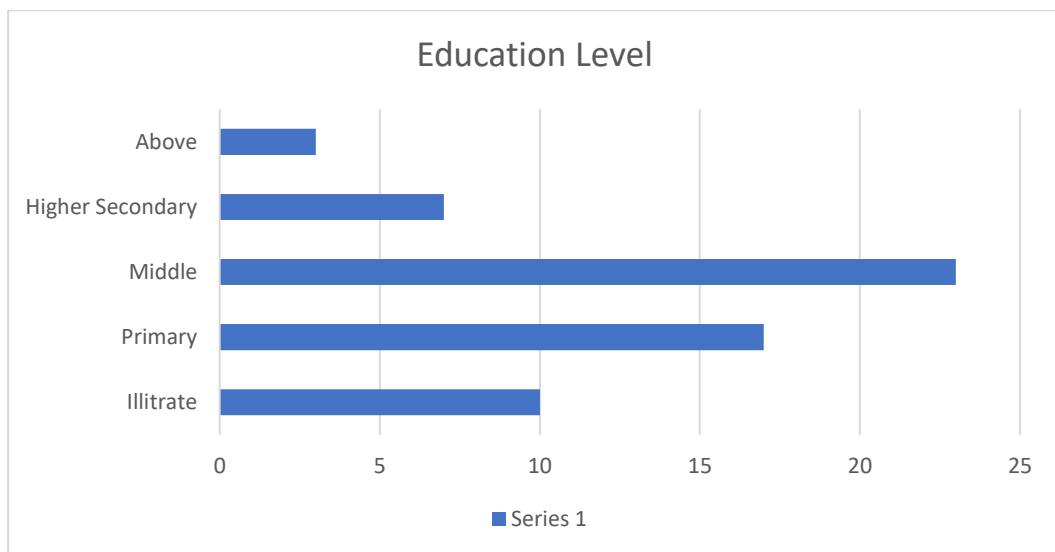
**Figure 2: Sanitation facilities**



**Source:** Fieldwork data by Author, Data in Percentage

The majority of respondents in the area where they live do not have access to sanitation facilities and are forced to rely on other sources. Lack of access to drinking water is a major issue in the ghettos of Delhi. The study revealed that over 88% of the respondents do not have access to drinking water facilities in their residential areas and have to rely on public water taps and neighbouring facilities. Many respondents mentioned that they are not allowed to use water from neighbouring areas with tap water facilities in public community areas or parks. Most respondents use community toilets near their residences as the area lacks a sewage network and developmental facilities. The researchers observed that the living conditions in these ghettos do not meet basic amenities such as drinking water, toilets, and sewage connection.

**Figure 3: Education profile**



**Source:** Fieldwork Data by Author.

The data presented aims to illustrate the literacy levels of the respondents. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write in any language. The findings indicate that approximately 5 per cent of the respondents were unable to write, although many of them could read. Furthermore, about 10 per cent had completed primary school, 14 per cent had completed middle school, 4 per cent had finished higher secondary education, and 2 per cent had pursued education beyond the higher secondary level. The researcher observed that the challenging circumstances faced by the respondents were largely attributed to extreme poverty and the perpetuation of certain occupations across generations. A significant number of respondents had to support their parents in sanitation-related work, which resulted in their discontinuation of formal education.

**Table 4: Family Occupational Association**

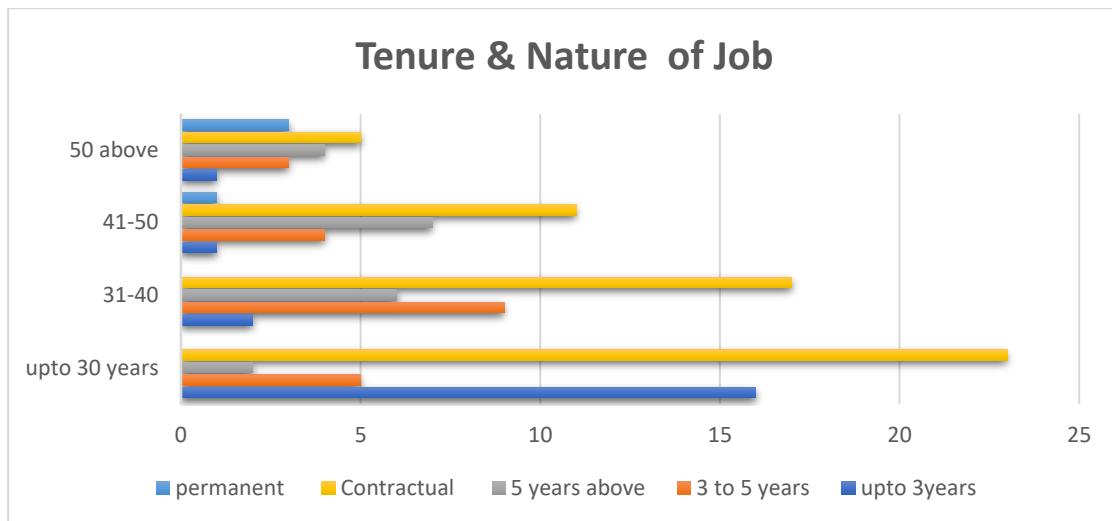
<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Any family member working in the same occupation</b>		<b>Earlier generations worked in the same profession</b>		<b>Are children, if any, going to school?</b>		<b>Total number of respondents</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>Up to 30</b>	19	4	18	5	22	1	23
<b>31-40</b>	14	3	14	3	15	2	17
<b>41-50</b>	8	4	9	3	12	0	12
<b>51 above</b>	6	2	7	1	8	0	8

**Source** – Field work data by Author.

The research findings indicate that over 76 per cent of the respondents work in the same profession, either at the same place or in different locations. Furthermore, more than 88 per cent of the respondents reported that their previous generations were also engaged in similar professions. This suggests that there is limited intergenerational mobility among sanitation workers. The study observed that despite being sanitation workers, almost every respondent expressed a desire for their children to pursue higher positions such as officer or skilled jobs. The new generation is showing a greater interest in education, with over 98 per cent of sanitation workers' children enrolled in government schools. According to the respondents, education is the primary means to improve their socio-economic status, making it an important tool for transforming their lives. The researcher also noted that despite migrating to urban areas, these individuals continue to work as sanitation workers, as they have limited economic opportunities due to their low caste and socio-economic background. This perpetuates a cycle

of untouchability, poverty, and illiteracy, leading to their overall backwardness compared to other caste groups. (Awasthi, 2023).

**Figure 4: Job Tenure Profile**



**Source:** Fieldwork data by Author.

### **Job tenure profile**

The duration of employment is largely influenced by age and the relationship with the employer. Workers who follow instructions without questioning them tend to have longer job tenures. Research shows that over 94 percent of respondents are contractual workers operating within contractual systems, while only 6 percent are permanent employees who have been with the company for more than 20 years. Many workers hesitate to raise objections about necessary equipment and facilities due to the fear of losing their jobs. During discussions, it was noted that anyone who voiced concerns was promptly terminated by the employer. As a result, workers feel overwhelmed and are reluctant to express any issues they may have.

### **Reason for choosing this occupation**

In response to the researcher's question about why they chose their current positions, 55 per cent of respondents cited a lack of opportunities in other sectors. It was noted that the workers have no other viable economic options in their villages, and their poor financial situations compel them to work as manual scavengers. 25 per cent of respondents had previous experience in this occupation and found working as urban sweepers more satisfying than cleaning human waste in their villages, which they perceived as more humiliating. 15 per cent of the workers joined with the misconception that they would secure permanent positions after a few years, despite this not being the case.

**Table 5: Working conditions**

Age Groups	Face discrimination at the workplace		Protective Gears		S.S B		Accident at the workplace		Paid compensation		Total Respondents
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	
Up to 30yrs	19	4	14	11	2	1	20	3	2	21	23
31-40	14	3	15	2	1	5	13	4	2	15	17
41-50	10	2	11	1	9	3	11	1	5	7	12
50 Above	7	1	6	2	6	2	8	0	4	4	8

**Source-** Fieldwork data by Author; Y-yes, N-No, S.S.B- social security benefits

Officially, the working hours are set at eight hours, but in reality, there are no fixed working hours. The workload is arbitrarily determined and depends on the contractor's mood. The researcher noted a shortage of workers, resulting in an excessive burden on those who remain. Over 82 per cent of respondents indicated that they were never compensated with an extra allowance for additional work. If any respondent complained to the contractor, they risked termination or could face physical or verbal abuse. Thus, this modern slavery leads to socio-economic exploitation. The researcher further observed that while uniforms are provided, they do not offer any significant safety during cleaning tasks. Most workers rely on brushes or broomsticks, even after using the jet machine. The researcher pointed out that the jet machine has its limitations, as it can only fully clean dry and wet waste from the rail tracks. Manual cleaning is still necessary; thus, despite technological advancements, most work remains manual. The researcher noted that the majority of workers lack protective gear while cleaning the tracks. The results show that only 38 per cent possess protective headgear. Furthermore, over 75 per cent of respondents reported having experienced physical injuries at work, yet they did not receive any financial compensation for these injuries. The most compensation the majority of workers received was merely one day's leave.

### **Health and Behavioral patterns**

Health is a major indicator of development. According to Boroohah's 2010 study, there is an association between caste and health. The study found that lower caste individuals face more health problems, primarily due to exclusion from government health facilities. The research

noted that many workers were experiencing skin problems and poor physical health, possibly due to malnutrition or the use of addictive substances. Despite a monthly deduction of Rs 500 for a health card, over 92 per cent of the respondents did not possess health cards to access railway health services. The study also highlighted the lack of regular health check-ups for these workers, who are already engaged in unhygienic practices such as manual scavenging. The study also revealed that over 28 per cent of respondents had a history of chronic illness, while 73 per cent reported persistent health issues, including joint pain and respiratory problems—conditions likely exacerbated by occupational hazards and prolonged exposure to unsanitary environments.

A significant 75 per cent of respondents reported daily alcohol consumption after work, citing it as a source of psychological relief, temporary escapism, and social entertainment. While some denied these habits, their colleagues contradicted these claims, highlighting the normalisation of substance use in their occupational culture. Additionally, 83 per cent of workers consumed tobacco products, such as bidi or gutka, further underscoring the prevalence of substance dependency among sanitation workers.

### **Discussion**

Many workers endure adverse socio-economic conditions. They lack adequate resources to live a dignified life, and most are paid less than the minimum prescribed wage. Many sanitation workers exceed the stipulated working hours, and many are compelled to work even when ill. These workers accept these conditions out of a sense of obligation. This exploitative labour arrangement is referred to as ‘Structural violence’ by John Galtung (1969, p. 171). They remain unaware of their rights and relevant legislation. Research by Anand (2018) highlights that precarious working conditions, lack of formal contracts, and absence of social security schemes exacerbate their vulnerability. Further, Desai and Mahadevan (2021) assert that sanitation workers, particularly in urban spaces like railway stations, are subjected to systematic neglect, with authorities failing to implement adequate welfare measures.

The researcher observed that although equipment like jetting and suction machines is required by law, it is rarely used in practice. Cleaning is primarily done manually, as many contractors avoid using expensive, fuel-powered machines to cut costs. The availability of Dalit labour makes manual work more convenient than investing in technology. This observation aligns with findings from Sharma (2020), who noted that despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and the Rehabilitation Act (2013), manual scavenging continues in various parts of India, including railway stations. This persistence is due to entrenched caste-based labour structures and the cost-saving strategies employed by contractors.

Singh (2014) made similar observations when interviewing railway sanitation workers about their hesitance to use high-pressure jets. The workers claimed that these jets do not effectively clean excrement and cannot be completely removed without manual labour. Moreover, many workers are unaware of laws that require contractors to provide them with protective safety gear. Despite constitutional protections and labour regulations, these workers feel powerless to challenge their oppressive conditions due to fear and dependence on economic stability (Guru, 2009, p. 58).

The researcher also noted that contractors maintain a network with various offices to receive advance notice of inspection checks. This way, they ensure that workers use jet machines and water pipe machines only on the day of inspection. One respondent, who spoke under the condition of confidentiality, recounted: "*We know when inspections are coming because the contractor tells us to use the machines that day. But as soon as the inspectors leave, we go back to using our hands.*" The workers and sweepers live in constant fear of the contractor, dreading job loss or verbal and physical abuse if they speak out against him.

The respondents face social, cultural, and economic exclusion in society primarily because of their low caste, leading to their low social status and occupational status. Most of the workers admitted that they are not being treated well by the upper caste groups, and most people maintain a distance from them because of their nature of work and low caste status. This study also found that these respondents face religious-cultural exclusion in their native places. The respondents reported that they are being avoided in religious rituals and are generally included for sanitation and sweeping purposes in the name of participation. Thus, they face unfair treatment when participating in religious activities and rituals. Most of the respondents have never attended any upper-caste marriages or any family functions in their native place. Thus, they suffer religious and cultural exclusion, which further exacerbates their marginalisation. Dalits, particularly sanitation workers, are systematically excluded from community gatherings, festivals and religious events, thus reinforcing the notion of purity and pollution (Ilaiah, 2015, p. 21). Another respondent narrates, "*We reside in the same village as everyone, yet we are excluded from weddings or celebrations,*" she expresses. "*The only occasion we are asked to come is to tidy up after everyone as if we don't exist.*" These statements highlight how caste systems are evident in daily social interactions, fostering a sense of isolation and cultural oppression (Guru, 2009, p. 72).

Occupational mobility among sanitation workers remains significantly constrained, with over 80 per cent of respondents experiencing a lack of intergenerational mobility. This pattern reflects a broader sociological phenomenon wherein caste-based labour segmentation

reinforces occupational immobility, as marginalised communities remain confined to hereditary occupations with minimal upward mobility (Deshpande, 2011). Research on caste and labour markets highlights that sanitation work, predominantly performed by Dalit communities, is structurally maintained through social and economic exclusion, preventing access to alternative employment opportunities (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Furthermore, occupational exclusion is a pervasive issue, as upper-caste groups often exert control over employment hierarchies, limiting sanitation workers' access to more dignified and remunerative jobs (Jodhka, 2012). This systemic exclusion manifests not only through direct workplace discrimination but also through the denial of skill development programs and employment benefits, further marginalising sanitation workers in the labour market (Harriss-White, 2003). The compulsion to remain within these stigmatized occupations is thus not merely a matter of economic necessity but a result of entrenched caste-based labor practices that restrict social mobility and reinforce structural inequalities. Addressing these inequities requires a multidimensional approach, including affirmative action, labor rights protections, and inclusive policy measures that challenge caste-based discrimination in occupational structures.

The behavioural patterns of sanitation workers, particularly their consumption of alcohol, gutkha, and tobacco, are significantly influenced by their challenging working conditions, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and psychological stress. Many sanitation workers engage in physically demanding and hazardous tasks, leading them to use these substances as coping mechanisms to manage fatigue, exposure to unsanitary conditions, and societal stigma. The lack of job security, low wages, and insufficient health support further contribute to their reliance on these addictive substances, creating a cycle of poor health and financial instability. Additionally, the normalisation of such behaviours within their social circles makes it difficult for individuals to break free from these habits, increasing the risk of long-term health issues such as respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and oral cancer.

From a sociological perspective, substance use among marginalised labourers is not solely an individual choice; it is a coping mechanism conditioned by their circumstances. Research conducted by Kannothe Thazha Kuni (2024) on Dalit labourers and health behaviours highlights that alcohol and tobacco consumption among marginalised groups often serves as a response to chronic stress, systemic discrimination, and exploitative working conditions. This study's findings align with the understanding that sanitation workers, who are trapped in precarious employment with low pay, poor living conditions, and social exclusion, rely on substances to alleviate the psychological toll of their situation.

This phenomenon can also be understood through Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus, which explains how social structures shape individual dispositions and lifestyle choices in ways that often reproduce cycles of disadvantage. Within this framework, substance use among sanitation workers is not simply a personal habit but a reflection of their embedded social realities—where structural inequalities, caste-based occupational segregation, and economic precarity condition their everyday practices. As Bourdieu posits, social agents internalise their material and symbolic conditions, which in turn influence their health behaviours in ways that reinforce their marginalisation.

The signs of untouchability and discrimination are evident at various levels. The researcher observed that these workers reside in areas that lack basic amenities, resembling ghettos. During discussions with the workers, it was brought to the researcher's attention that people tend to avoid them, even during work-related interactions. This behaviour reflects the widespread practice of considering certain individuals as impure or polluting. This prejudice negatively impacts the socio-economic status of the workers involved in these occupations. The majority of the respondents expressed that they experience discrimination from those of higher castes, primarily due to their low occupational status and caste. The institutions that perpetuate discrimination contribute to the social exclusion of these communities. As a result, these communities endure significant social and cultural exploitation and oppression (Illaiah, 2015, p. 14).

## **Conclusion**

The working conditions of sanitation workers at New Delhi Railway Station reveal significant issues of marginalization, stigma, and inequality within the Indian labor market. These workers endure hazardous environments, lack adequate safety measures, and face job insecurity, reflecting persistent social hierarchies. Despite existing legal frameworks, they experience structural violence that perpetuates their vulnerability, including brutal working conditions and insufficient pay (Wilson, 2015). Public agencies have failed to improve the living conditions of the most marginalized, neglecting their constitutional rights to life and dignity. Although some judicial interventions have had a positive impact, manual scavenging continues in various forms.

It is essential to raise legal awareness among the scavenger community and address the caste system that underlies occupational hierarchies. Abolishing the contractual employment system is crucial to accurately identify manual scavengers, as many remain unreported due to temporary work arrangements. These workers often face violations of their basic rights,

including inadequate wages. Providing proper uniforms, protective gear, and social security benefits is necessary to ensure accountability.

Therefore, the plight of sanitation workers highlights both state and societal failures in protecting marginalized individuals (Khanna, 2016). Eradicating manual scavenging requires more than just policy reforms; it demands a societal shift in attitudes toward labour performed by marginalized groups. Ultimately, improving working conditions for these labourers is a social and moral obligation that can foster equity and dignity for all, transcending caste and occupation.

### **Future Research Directions**

The present study emphasizes the significant socio-economic and occupational challenges faced by sanitation workers at New Delhi Railway Station. However, there are several unexplored areas for future research. One important avenue to investigate is conducting comparative studies across different railway stations to understand the regional variations in working conditions. Other major railway stations in Delhi, such as Nizamuddin Railway Station, Delhi Cantonment Railway Station, and Old Delhi Railway Station, could provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of sanitation workers in railway stations throughout the city.

Additionally, the impact of technological interventions, such as mechanised cleaning and bio-toilets, requires deeper investigation to assess their effectiveness in reducing human involvement in hazardous waste management. There is also a need for longitudinal studies on health impacts, specifically examining chronic illnesses and access to healthcare for sanitation workers. Moreover, studying intergenerational occupational mobility can reveal how the children of sanitation workers navigate opportunities for advancement. There is also scope for future research that could involve women sanitation workers and investigate the intersection of caste, gender, and employment vulnerability to better understand the specific challenges faced by women in this field, including workplace harassment and wage disparities. Addressing these research directions can provide a comprehensive understanding of sanitation labour and drive meaningful social and policy changes.

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