

A Legacy of Stench!

An Account of

Lives and Struggles of *Safai Karmacharis* in Patna



April 2011

Based on a Participatory Study Undertaken by

Nidan (with support from WaterAid) and **Praxis**

Acknowledgements

Members of the Study Team

From Nidan

Ranjan Kumar, Ranvijay Kumar, Amit Kumar, Pooja

From Praxis

Anindo Banerjee, Abhay Kumar, Jay Verma, Shilpi, Vijay Prakash

Data Entry Support

Preeti, Rakesh Chatterjee

Advisory Support

Shri Tufani Ram (General Secretary, Patna Corporation Employees Union)

Shri Girija Shankar Prasad (*Rashtriya Safai Karmachari Aayog*)

Shri Satish Kumar (HUDCO)

Shri Vishwaranjan (Pria)

Shri Arun Kumar (Clean India)

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Acknowledgements

Members of the Study Team

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Chapter 1

Sanitation Workers in contemporary Indian Societies – An Overview

Sanitation workers have historically played a cardinal role in maintaining the hygiene of human societies. While societies have always needed sanitation workers to exist and handle the unwanted residues of human settlements, they have hardly ever been extended their rightful status and have often been treated as ‘untouchables’, relegated to the lowest rung of Indian social order. Just as the need and nature of sanitation work haven’t changed much over time, the relative status of development of sanitation workers has also remained virtually frozen in time compared to other contemporary social groups, in spite of a number of significant policies of affirmative action aimed at improving the quality of their lives.

A study on the lives and conditions of sanitation workers was undertaken jointly by **Nidan** (with support from WaterAid) and **Praxis – Institute for Participatory Practices** during April – July 2011, which sought to revisit issues of Patna-based sanitation workers with an eye on the intent of drafting a dedicated legislation for comprehensive development of sanitation workers and their communities.

Who are Sanitation Workers?

According to the ‘Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993’, any person employed or engaged to manually clear, carry or dispose human excreta partially or fully comes under the purview of the term ‘*Manual Scavenger*’, and hence people engaged in cleaning of latrines, sewer works and sanitation works in municipalities and *gram panchayats* come under its purview. Though the definition is largely restricted to practices of manual scavenging in community dry latrines/ individual dry latrines only, all persons who are engaged in clearing of human excreta in any place/ form must come under the purview of this Act.

Most *Safai Karmacharis* in contemporary Indian societies hail from Scheduled Castes, who perform a variety of sanitation works ranging from cleaning of drains, lavatories and premises, to undertaking hazardous tasks of disposing hospital waste and corpses. Often it’s not only concerns about livelihood that push people into this occupation but the deep and subtle social conditioning related to their caste that results in the entry of large number of people from Scheduled Castes in sanitation work. The fact that sanitation workers face discrimination not only because of their caste but also due to their choice of occupation makes them doubly disadvantaged. They are often subjected to face untouchability in the forms of denial of entry into temples, public places and the homes of their clients.

Despite efforts on the part of the Indian state to propel the development of Scheduled Castes by way of policies of reservations and other affirmative actions, the situation facing

safai karmacharis has hardly changed over time. The identity of being a *dalit* and constraints of poor economic conditions and limited choices often leave no option other than accepting the burden of his or her traditional occupation, for an individual bearing a caste-identity linked with sanitation work. It's no mean coincidence that a whopping majority of sanitation workers in the country belong to Scheduled castes.

In March 1992, Government of India enacted the National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents. However, the scheme did not make much headway. The unsatisfactory progress of the Scheme has been attributed to a number of reasons, including inadequate attention on the part of State Governments and concerned agencies. According to bodies like the National Commission for *Safai Karmacharis*, one key factor is the persistent denial of existence of manual scavengers on the part of state governments. Bihar is one state where the practice of manual scavenging is still prevalent and the efforts of the state government to deal with issues related to manual scavenging are grossly inadequate.

Rationale for the study of sanitation workers

The study of sanitation workers in Patna was conceptualized with an intent to delve deep into the prevalent conditions of life, livelihoods and citizenship of sanitation workers in Patna, and was undertaken in realization of the absolute lack of any credible field-studies on the subject, particularly in Bihar. The study sought to generate insights that could be weaved into a framework of policy for comprehensive development of *safai karmacharis*. Envisaged as a community-led study guided by a select pool of sanitation worker and their leaders in the city, the study was carried out across eleven localities of Patna that together house 1231 families of *safai karmacharis*. In the process, issues relating to as many as ten different forms of sanitation work were examined.

Salient particulars about the study

The study sought to generate insights regarding the following aspects of life of sanitation workers in Patna:

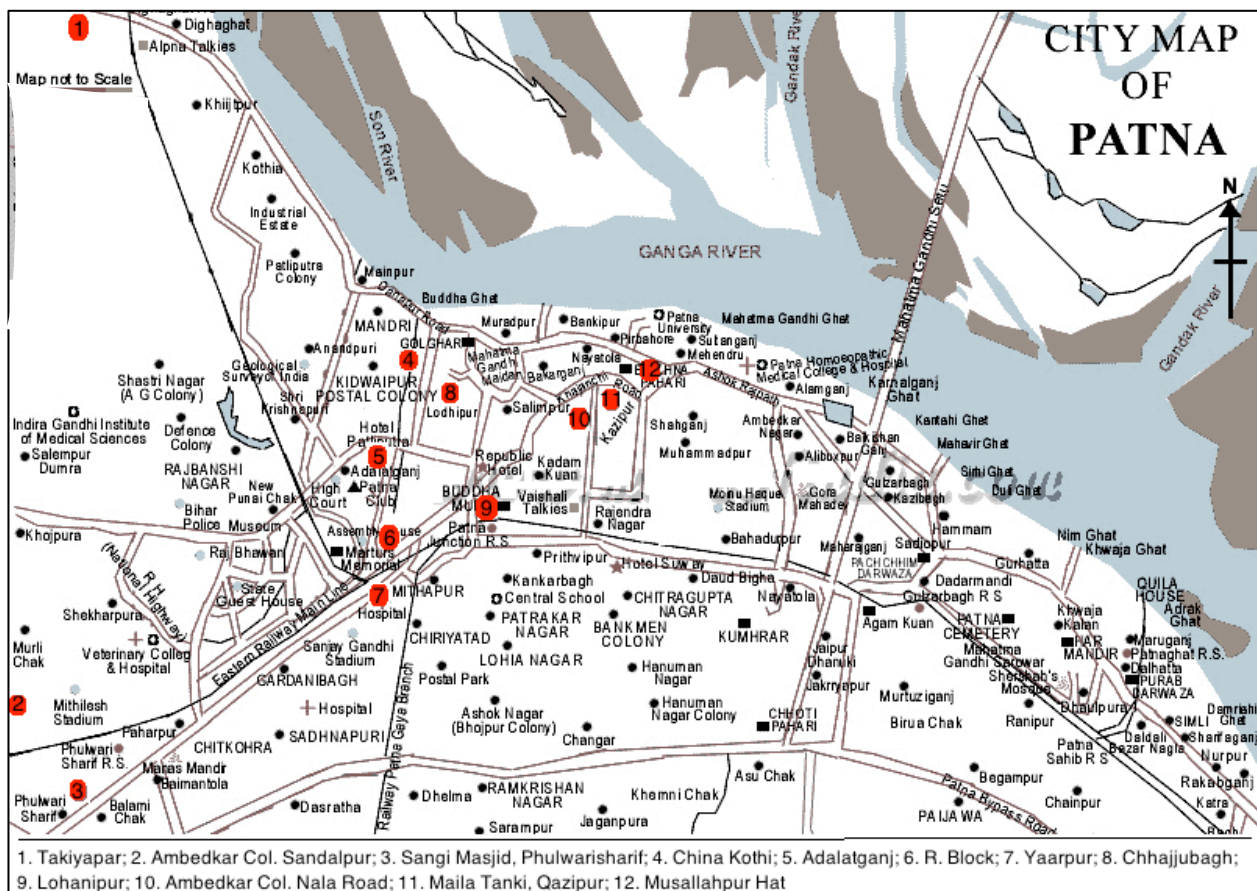
- Identification of key locations of habitation of sanitation workers and assessment of living conditions;
- Drawing up the social and economic profile of sanitation workers in various localities;
- Identification of key issues related to prominent types of sanitation work pursued in Patna;
- Assessment of experiences of sanitation workers as citizens and their access of their critical rights and entitlements;
- Assessment of social capital within the community of sanitation workers and experiences of collective action;

- Salient implications of the study for a comprehensive policy for development of sanitation workers.

As many as twelve localities of Patna were covered in the study. These included the following:

- Adalatganj
- Ambedkar Colony, Nala Road
- Ambedkar Colony, Sandalpur
- China Kothi
- Harijan Colony, Chhajjubahg
- Lohanipur
- Maila Tanki, Qajipur,
- R-block
- Sanghi Masjid, Phulwarisharif
- Takiyapur
- Yaarpur
- Musallahpur Hat

Diagram 1.1 below shows the localities in Patna where the Study was carried out.



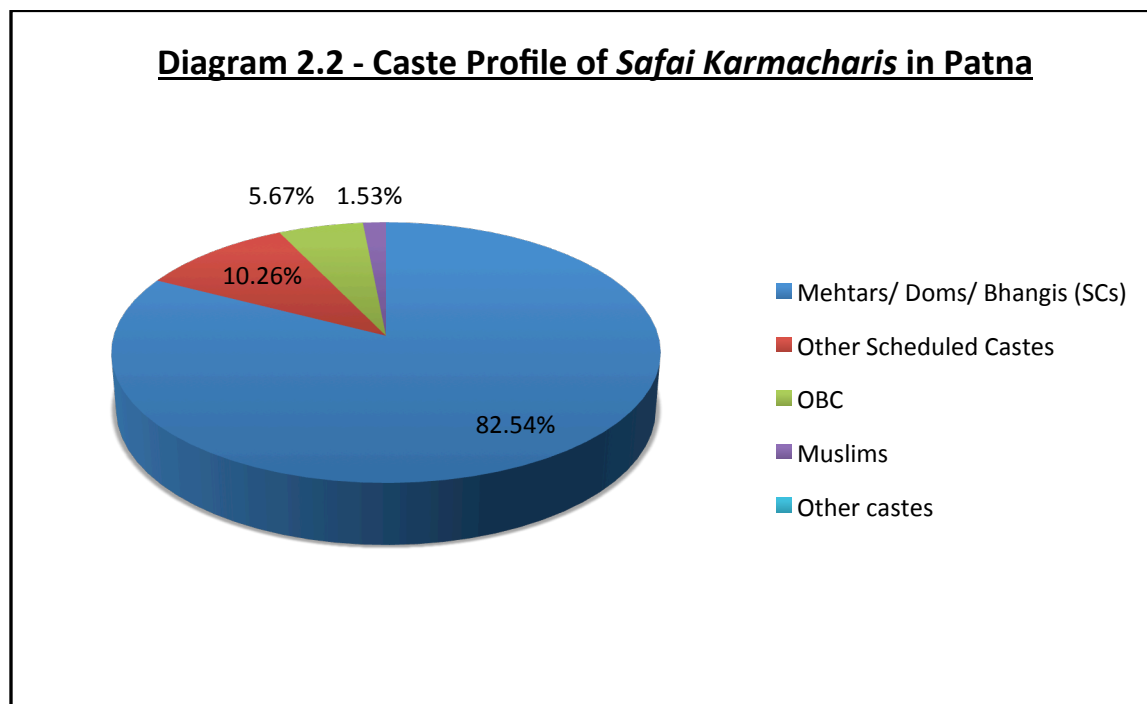
Chapter 2

Typical Profile of a Sanitation Worker in Patna

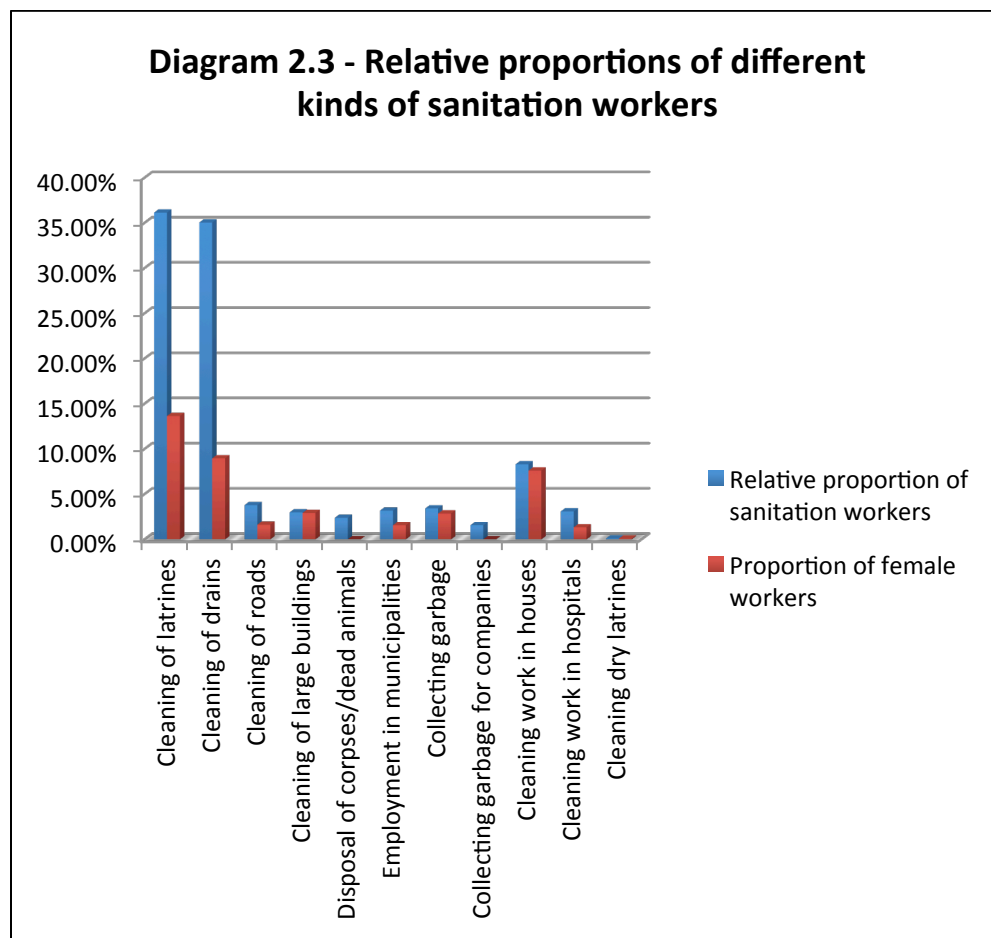
The study of *safai karamcharis* was conducted across twelve localities of Patna, exploring the lives of various groups of sanitation workers, their social profile, types of scavenging work undertaken by them and issues related to their livelihoods, living conditions and access to various civil and political rights.

As many as 9,268 sanitation workers, hailing from 1,726 households were identified in the course of a survey undertaken across 12 localities of Patna. Within the survey population, nearly 46% *safai karamcharis* are women, while localities like Chhajjubagh and Takiapar also have a good number of children engaged in rag picking. Amongst the surveyed localities, Yaarpur, Lohanipur and China Kothi (Mandiri) have the highest concentration of sanitation workers, with 2,656, 2,453 and 1,062 people in the occupation respectively.

The study confirms the fact that even in 2011, most *safai karamcharis* hail from the caste-groups traditionally engaged in sanitation work. As many as 82.54% of all sanitation workers hail from the Dom, Mehtar, Basfor or Bhangis communities, which are known to be traditionally involved in the occupation. An additional 10.26% workers comprise of various other scheduled castes, including a significant 6% hailing from *Musahar* caste. While nearly 5.38% of workers belong to other backward classes (mostly *Mallahs*), about 1.57% workers are Muslims, mainly a group known as 'Mehtar' Muslims. Diagram 2.2 presents a caste break-up of sanitation workers identified in the twelve locations of Patna.



Amongst various types of sanitation work, cleaning of latrines is the commonest livelihood option of *safai karamcharis* in Patna, followed by cleaning of drains and employment as domestic help. Nearly 46% of all sanitation workers are women, engaged mainly in cleaning of latrines, drains and large buildings, besides working as domestic help and rag pickers. Women are generally not involved in disposing off corpses or dead animals, or in collecting garbage for private companies on handcarts. However, most *safai karmacharis* engaged in ‘manual scavenging’ in Patna are women, which reflects an important gender issue, i.e. the greater likelihood of women to be forcefully subjugated to perform sanitation work of the most abominable kind. Children too are involved in sanitation work in the localities of Chhajjubagh and Takiyapar, mostly in rag picking. Diagram 2.3 presents a visual pattern of dependence on sanitation work in various localities, while the following Chapter discusses a number of issues related to various kinds of sanitation work undertaken in Patna.



Chapter 3

Snapshots of key issues facing sanitation workers

This chapter discusses key issues of workers engaged in various types of sanitation activities. Most livelihood choices of sanitation workers are laden with severe risks and hazards, accentuated by experiences of discrimination and exploitation and prevalent across worksites of varying types.

The most teething issue relates with the practice of manual scavenging. While manual scavenging is prohibited as per the 'Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 (Act No. 46 of 1993)', the practice hasn't been totally eliminated, as evident in the continued existence of dry latrines in several localities of Patna. Phulwarisharif is one such area where some localities continue to have dry latrines, with as many as 20 – 25 sanitation workers employed in manually disposing excreta off nearly 40 units of dry latrines. The picture on the right presents one such dry latrine near Sangi



Masjid, Phulwarisharif, showing a lady collecting night soil from a dry latrine. Kamla Nehru Nagar is another locality where dry latrines exist even today. Railways also employ 'manual scavengers' for cleaning of tracks through contractors.

Yes, 'Manual Scavengers' exist even in 2011! A Profile from Phulwarisharif, Patna

Gudiya Devi is a 24-years old *safai karmachari* engaged in manual cleaning of excreta from the dry latrines located in 8 houses of Sangi Masjid area of Phulwarisharif, Patna. She has been working as a manual scavenger ever since she got married to Mohan Ram.

Gudiya visits the houses once every week and uses discarded bowls and plastic containers for manually extracting excreta. It takes her almost half an hour to clean each unit. She has to dip her hands in the excreta, take out the filth using the bowl and fill up the plastic containers. She then has to manually carry the containers full of excreta through the streets of the locality and dump at a place locally referred to as Guhgaddi, which literally means a ditch of excreta. She has to keep her nostrils covered with a cloth to ward off the offensive smell. Often insects climb onto her body and legs while doing this work. While passing through the street, she has to hear derogatory remarks from people in the locality and is expected to stay clear of fellow passers-by. Young boys throw stones at her.

As the size of the plastic containers provided to her by her client households is often small, she often has to do multiple rounds of cleaning in each dry latrine. She is paid between Rs. 15 – 20 per container, for up to 3 containers per house in a day. She doesn't do any other work. Till date, she hasn't received any support from the government.

A recent Progress Report (June 2011) of projects sanctioned in Bihar as per the revised guidelines of Integrated Low Cost Sanitation Scheme (ILCS) acknowledges the existence of as many as 1222 dry latrines units in Patna district, sanctioned for abolition or upgradation. Work under the project vis-à-vis these units is stated to be 'completed'. These units are located across the Urban Local Bodies of Nagar Parishad Danapur Nizamat (location of 264 dry units), Nagar Parishad Khagaul (location of 25 units), Nagar Parishad Phulwarisharif (location of 292 units) and Nagar Parishad Maner (location of 319 units). Of these, as many as 252 units are of the 'Uthao' category, where excreta has to be manually lifted, and as many as 411 are of the 'Bahao' category, where excreta is forcefully flown into a main sewage channel. Annex. 1 of the report presents the status of progress of ILCS in various municipalities in Bihar. Incidentally, an affidavit filed by the Government of Bihar at the Supreme Court denies existence of any manual scavengers in the state.

In addition, the cleaning work performed by sanitation workers in several localities involves disposal of night soil deposited in open street-side drains. A number of urban slums in Patna have an extremely poor concentration of private as well as public lavatories, which leaves the residents with no option but to use the roadside *nullahs* for relieving themselves. At times when the drains overflow, the *safai karamcharis* are required to dredge out blockages within underground tunnels by manually entering them and extracting all the filth. The picture on the right shows one such worker in the R. Block locality engaged in cleaning a drain by manually immersing himself in the underground tunnel.



Given the cleaning of drains involves disposal of human excreta in many locations, any definition of manual scavenging confined only to the context of dry latrines would be flawed. A minimum of 159 households were found to be involved in cleaning drains used commonly for defecation, located in Chhajjugh, Takiyapar, China Kothi, R. Block, Qazipur (Maila Tanki), Phulwarisharif (Sanghi Masjid) and Sandalpur (Ambedkar Colony).

3.1 Choices and trade-offs

The people involved in sanitation work are almost exclusively *dalits* (barring a few exceptions to the tune of 7% (ref. Chapter 2), whereby a small number of economically disadvantaged households hailing mostly from the EBC category are found engaged in sanitation work) and economically weak. The social and economic profile of *safai karamcharis* often compels them to take up their traditional occupation, aided by social pressure as well as due to lack of any viable alternatives. Several instances, where young members of communities of *safai karamcharis* had to resort to sanitation work despite their reluctance surfaced during the study. Youth of the community are often conditioned

to respond to social pressures for cleanliness. The experience of Uma Devi, who courageously took up the unconventional enterprise of selling edible food items, indicates the difficulties of transcending adverse *status quos* (ref. Box 3.1). In another case (outlined in the same Box), Shri Baidnath Ram was not allowed to settle in his own house on account of his caste.

Box 3.1 – The burden of caste identity

Uma devi, a 65-years old resident of Sanghi Masjid, Phulwari makes a living by collecting and selling garbage. She had received financial support of Rs. 3000 from Bihar State SC Cooperative Development Corporation about a year back and started the business of selling *Kachauri Ghughni*, a dish made of unleavened flour and chickpea stew. However, her caste identity as a 'Dom' prevented her from getting customers and nobody came to her shop. As a result, her entire business went into loss and she was forced to revert back to garbage selling to clear her debt.

Baidnath Ram belongs to the *Dom* caste and is a sanitation worker in State Bank of India. He purchased a piece of land near Phulwarisharif station and constructed a house on this land to settle. When he started living in his house, his neighbor who belongs to a different caste opposed his plans to settle down in the new house on account of his caste identity. Subsequently, he was tortured a lot by his neighbours. Once he decided to abandon the house and rented in a tenant belonging to an OBC caste. Now his tenant does not pay him the rents and has started to even threaten him with dire consequences. Baidnath Ram is so scared of him that he has even stopped going to him.

During the study, not a single household of people belonging to castes like *Dom*, *Mehtar* or *Bhangji* was found employed as domestic assistants, attributed by sanitation workers of Takiyapur to their caste identity.

A *safai karamchari* is often compelled to deal with various trade offs while selecting work. Table 3.1 presents a summary of key risks and issues faced by sanitation workers in various occupations and the corresponding income levels. The choices that seem to fetch more income are often more distressing, e.g. while disposal of corpses fetches up to Rs. 150 – 200 within 2 – 3 hours, it is seen as the most dehumanizing and abominable kind of work. Similarly, while cleaning of latrines in general and cleaning of dry latrines in particular fetch a moderate level of income within only a few hours, these are seen as the most avoidable types of work. While employment with municipalities is preferred on account of high payoffs, no new recruitments of sanitation workers have taken place in Patna Municipal Corporation in the last two decades.

Table 3.1 – Salient risks and issues associated with different types of sanitation work

Kinds of work	Range of daily income (Rupees) per individual	Range of working hours in a day (hours)	Risks at worksites
Cleaning of latrines	100 – 150	3 – 7	Threat of inhaling or coming in contact with acid and filth, often causing skin ailments and respiratory problems,
Cleaning of drains	40 – 200	3 – 7	Threat of snakebites, insect-bites and injury due to exposure to sharp objects like glass fragments; particularly while using hands in cleaning.
Cleaning of roads	50 – 400	6 – 8	Exposure to dust and risk of respiratory ailments
Cleaning of large buildings	80 – 100	4 – 8	Unjust behavior of people; shortage of leave-days
Disposal of dead bodies	150 – 200	2 – 3	Exposure to foul smell and unhygienic residues of corpses; unjust and rude behavior of people; low payment.
Employment in municipalities	225 – 400	8	Payments are often late; inadequate no. of leave-days
Collecting garbage	30 – 80	7 – 11	Threat of stray dogs; exposure to insects and flies
Cleaning work in hospitals	40 – 150	6 – 8	Threat of exposure to discarded needles, blood and unhygienic residues
Work as domestic help	20 – 45	3 – 7	Unjust behaviour of employers; accusations of thefts etc.
Collecting garbage for private companies	80 – 100	7 – 8	Threat of stray dogs; infection from flies and insects
Manual scavenging	70	2	Extremely dehumanizing, with exposure to unhygienic waste

Amongst the places where the study was carried out, ease of availability of work in terms of demand-supply gap (of labour) was found to be lowest in China Kothi and Sandalpur, followed by R.Block and Chhajjubagh. The risks related to sanitation work were felt to be high also on account of an almost universal shortage of cleaning tools and safety measures for *safai karamcharis* engaged in various kinds of sanitation activities assessed during the study. In addition, a number of *safai karamcharis* have to face health hazards of various kinds in their occupations of choice, including severe accidents. Box 3.2 presents the case of 3 sanitation workers, who faced a dangerous bomb blast while collecting garbage near *Gandhi Maidan* police station.

Box 3.2 – Living with occupational hazards – a fate that often turns fatal...

A group of 3 rag-pickers of Chhajjubagh were collecting garbage near Gandhi Maidan police station when they found an aluminum box, which they tried open. This triggered off a bomb, killing one of them on the spot and grievously injuring the other two. Similarly, Shanti Devi and Hari Mallik met with fatal road accidents while engrossed in sweeping roads and lost their lives. Kalu Ram, a *safai karmachari* employed in Danapur, died of asphyxiation after entering a drain.

In addition, a number of sanitation workers are subjected to situations of slow-death on account of severe health hazards faced by them in their work-sites. The survey undertaken in 11 locations of Patna indicated a very high concentration of serious ailments among sanitation workers, summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 – Key health problems faced by *safai karamcharis* of Patna

Sl. No.	Location	Key ailments prevalent among sanitation workers
1	Qazipur Maila Tanki	Arthritis, Epilepsy, Tuberculosis
2	China Kothi	Asthma, Piles, Polio, Tumours, problems of liver, Tuberculosis
3	Ambedkar Colony, Nala Road	Breathing problems, neck problems
4	Takiyapar	Asthma, Tuberculosis
5	Harijan Colony, Chhajjubagh	Asthma, chest pain, skin diseases, orthopedic disabilities, Epilepsy, liver damage
6	Sangi Masjid, Phulwari	Stones, Tuberculosis
7	R Block	Chest pain
8	Yaarpur	Asthma, Tuberculosis, breathing problems, mental illness, heart problems, orthopedic disabilities, AIDS, eye problems, Arthritis, Cancer, Filariasis, Epilepsy
9	Adalatganj	Skin diseases, Tuberculosis
10	Ambedkar Colony, Sandalpur	Appendicitis, stones in gall bladder, heart problems, Hepatitis, liver problems, TB, mental illness, breathing problems, swelling, skin diseases, Asthma, disabilities and Polio

Sandalpur, Yaarpur, Chhajjubagh and China Kothi seem to be localities having a relatively high incidence of diseases and ailments among sanitation workers. Skin diseases and breathing problems seem common in all the eleven locations where the study was carried out. Ambedkar Colony of Sandalpur also seems to have a good number of mentally ill patients. A number of *safai karamcharis* lose their life to prolonged illness, as evident in the cases outlined in Box 3.3.

Box 3.3 – Instances of slow death and impairment

Akshay Lal Ram, a resident of China Kothi (Mandiri) used to work for Patna Municipal Corporation. He was employed as a sweeper. Incessant cough and infection caused due to prolonged exposure to dust and dirt took a toll on his life. None of his survivors received any compensation after his death.

Sumitra Devi and Urmila Devi met with similar fates. Prolonged use of acid in cleaning latrines caused lasting damage to their eyes.

Amongst various categories of sanitation workers, some sections are especially more vulnerable on account of their capability of undertaking underground cleaning work. Often referred to as '*Kalkatiyas*', the underground sanitation workers enter deep manholes without inadequate protection, and risk their lives every now and then. Often such workers are forced to undertake such hazardous cleaning for a pittance, at times for a bottle of alcohol only! The pressure built on them for undertaking such work often prevents them from being able to say no.

Box 3.4 '*Kalkatiyas*' – an especially vulnerable section of sanitation workers

'*Kalkatiya*' is a term used to refer to *safai karmacharis* specialized in entering underground drainage channels for cleaning. The reference dates back to the practice of employing skilled sanitation workers hailing from Kolkata for underground cleaning work, which started about 50 years back. The practice of undertaking manual cleaning of underground drains and channels is still rampant in Patna, most often in localities like Nala Road and Yaarpur, where *safai karmacharis* are required to enter manholes of depths ranging up to 30 – 40 feet.

Several accidents were recalled by sanitation workers of Patna consulted during the study, relating to practices of underground cleaning. Kallu Ram – a worker from Sultanpur locality of Danapur and employed in the local Municipal Council lost his life while undertaking underground cleaning work.

Variations in availability of sanitation work

"We cannot afford to skip work any day, as there are many more people eyeing a limited quantum of work now. If one doesn't turn up for work even for a day, he is replaced by another worker the very next day!"

– Baby Devi, a sanitation worker of Takiyapar

Amongst various kinds of sanitation work, employment in municipalities emerged as a highly preferred option, mainly due to relatively better payoffs and uniform availability round the year. Discontinuation of new recruitments of sanitation workers as regular employees in Patna Municipal Corporation since 1984 was lamented by a number of sanitation workers and their trade union leaders. However, *safai karamcharis* from only

136 households are employed by Patna Municipal Corporation as of today. Cleaning of latrines and drains ensure livelihood for sanitation workers from as many as 961 and 854 households respectively and thus make the commonest choices for the workers. While nearly 300 households in the surveyed locations have women working as domestic help; roads, large buildings and hospitals are cleaned by sanitation workers from over a hundred households each respectively.

In terms of seasonal availability of livelihood options for sanitation workers (ref. Table 3.3), Qazipur and R.Block seem to have the widest variety of options, with as many as eight different kinds of sanitation work pursued by local workers. R. Block has seven different work-choices available every month of the year, while Qazipur and Sandalpur have six such options and China Kothi has five. While cleaning of latrines is pursued in as many as 9 surveyed locations, workers in as many as 7 sites pursue cleaning of drains and jobs offered by municipalities.

Table 3.3 – Seasonal Availability of different kinds of sanitation work in various localities

Months →	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Types of sanitation work ↓												
Cleaning of latrines	ADF GHIJ	ADF GHIJ	ABDF IGHJ	ABDF IGHJ	ABDF IGHJ	ADEF IGHJ	ADEF IGHJ	ADF GHIJ	ADF GHIJ	ADF GHIJ	ADF GHIJ	ACD FIGHJ
Cleaning of drains	FG	FG	AFG J	AFG J	ABF GJ	ABE FGHJ	ABE FGHJ	AFGJ	AFGJ	AFGH	FG	CFG
Cleaning of roads	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ	ABG FHIJ
Cleaning of large buildings	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABGJ	ABC GJ
Disposal of dead bodies	EGH	EGH	H								G	EGH
Work in municipalities	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABG HIJ	ABC GHIJ
Rag picking	AG	AG	AG	AG	AG	G	G	G	AG	AGH	AGH	AG
Lifting garbage for companis	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI	BFI
Domestic helpers	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABG HJ	ABC GHJ
Cleaning work in hospitals	AFHJ	AFHJ	AFH J	AFH J	AFH J	AFH J	AFH J	AFHJ	AFHJ	AFHJ	AFHJ	AFC HJ

[A: MailaTanki, Qazipur; B: China Kothi; C: Ambedkar Colony, Nala Road; D: Takiyapur; E: Harijan Colony, Chhajjubagh; F: Sanghi Masjid, Phulwarisharif; G: R Block; H: Yaarpur; I: Adalatganj; J: Ambedkar Colony, Sandalpur]

People involved in disposal of dead animals and corpses hail mostly from the three localities of Harijan Colony Chhajjubagh, R Block and Yaarpur. Sanitation workers of Chhajjubagh, Phulwarisharif and Takiyapar engage in very few types of sanitation work, as shown in the Seasonality Analysis diagram.






One of the significant outcomes of the study was regarding the **skewed division of workload between male and female safai karmacharis**. Box 3.5 presents a comparison of the workloads of Sandhya Kumari and Pardesi Ram – *safai karmacharis* based in Maila Tanki locality of Qazipur. It is evident that female workers bear a disproportionate high share of workload within the household domain, despite being involved also in earning income for their household. The example shows how Sandhya Kumari has to perform nearly 10 hours of work within her


household, besides being required to go out for sweeping streets for almost 3 hours everyday. In contrast, Pardesi Ram – an employee of Patna Municipal Corporation – performs 7 – 8 days of work everyday for the municipality, but has no involvement in household activities. The pattern of division of workload on gender lines is by and large similar for most households of *safai karmacharis* where such an analysis was carried out. The two photographs embedded in this paragraph contrast the typical daily routines of men and women in communities of *safai karmacharis*.



Box 3.5 – Analysis of gender division of workload amongst *safai karmacharis* in Qazipur (Maila Tanki)

	5	6 – 9	10 – 11	12	1	2	3	4	5 – 8	9	10
 Sandhya Kumari	Gets up; Does household work (at least 3 hours)		Goes out for cleaning work (2 hours)	Returns home for household work, cooks lunch (4 hours)		Goes out for cleaning work after lunch (1 hour)		Returns home, cooks food (3 hours)	Stitches /weaves clothes, watches TV		Eats and sleeps
 Pardesi Ram	Gets Up	Works in the office (PMC) (7 - 8 hours)				Eats lunch, sleeps, watches TV			Eats	Sleeps	

 Engagements in income generation work

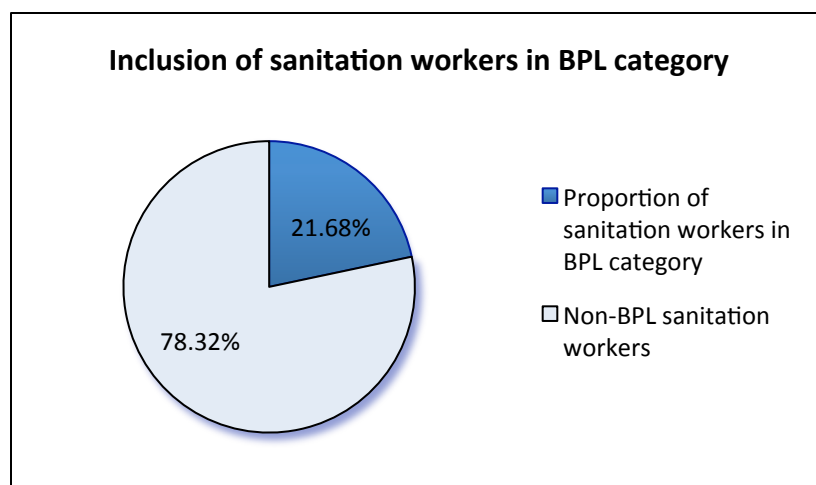
 Engagement in household chores

Chapter 4

Sanitation Workers as Citizens

Despite a number of important policy initiatives to offset the historic disadvantages faced by sanitation workers in India, the actual level of uptake of their civic entitlements and development incentives has been very low. The study undertaken in twelve locations of Patna brings to the fore alarming instances of deprivation and vulnerability faced by community of sanitation workers, which have been discussed in this Chapter.

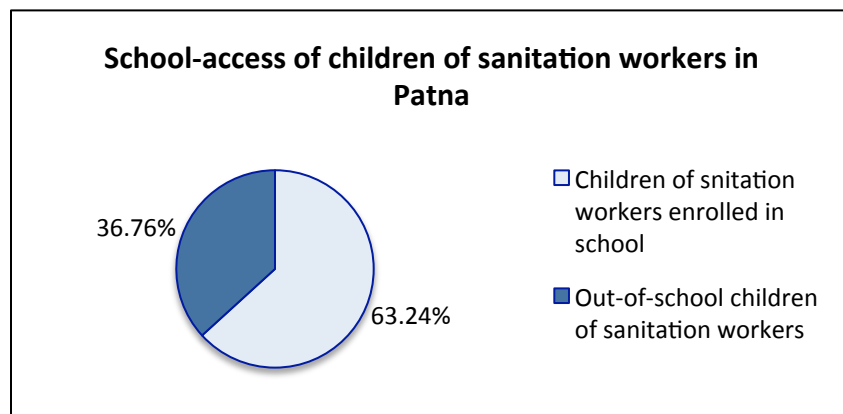
Enumeration in BPL category



Identification as ‘poor’ and enlistment under the BPL category is an essential criterion for an Indian citizen to be eligible to receive a range of subsidies and incentives for development. However, despite their extremely disadvantaged economic status and social profile, only a handful (22%) of *safai karamcharis* in Patna are included in the BPL list.

The coverage is highest in the localities of Takiyapar (82%) and Qazipur (33%). Inclusion of sanitation workers in the BPL category is especially low in the localities of Nala Road (0.038%), Yaarpur (0.15%) and Chhajjubagh (0.07%). As many as 31% families of sanitation workers in Patna avail of kerosene oil supplies meant for both BPL and APL categories.

Entitlements for students



The ratio of ‘out of school’ children to the total number of school-going children is especially high in the case of school-age children of sanitation workers. As many as 1037 children were found to be ‘out of school’ during the survey, compared to 1784 children who were enrolled in school, across the 12

localities where the study was carried out. Significantly, **only 15.35% of all school-going children of sanitation workers are beneficiaries of scholarships meant for facilitating the study of SC children**. Only 4.6% households of sanitation workers have at least one person having studied in a college.

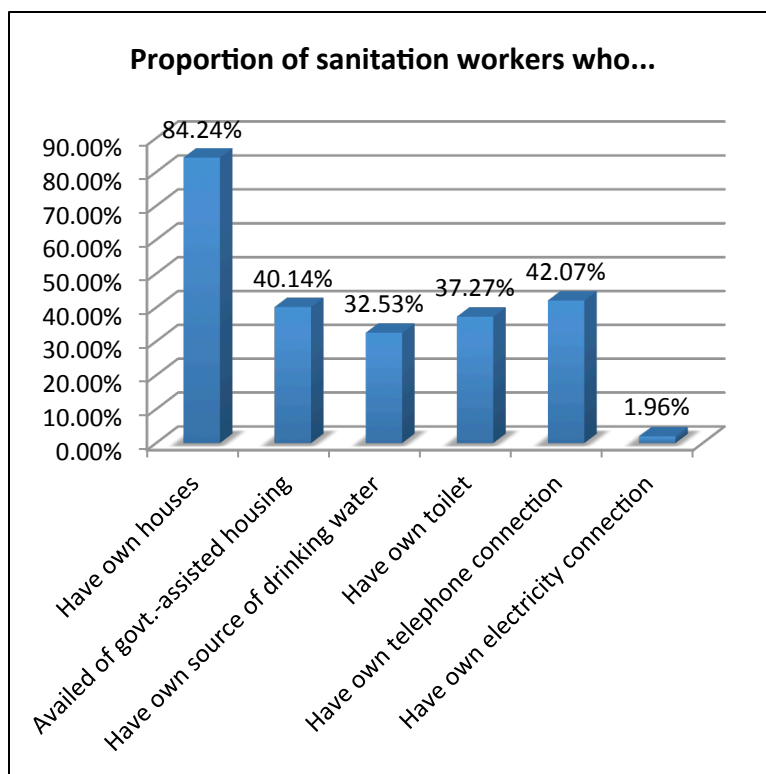
Access to loan facilities

Only 9.36% households of sanitation workers living in the twelve locations of the study have availed of loan schemes delivered by institutions like National *Safai Karmachari* Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) and Bihar State Scheduled Castes Cooperative Development Corporation (BSSCDC) meant for facilitating development of households of sanitation workers.

As a matter of fact, as many as **48.39% of households of sanitation workers in Patna are severely indebted** and have outstanding credit amounts exceeding Rs. 5000/-. Local moneylenders are the commonest source of credit for the sanitation workers, who charge exorbitant rates of interest, commonly ranging between 5 – 10%. The level of such indebtedness is particularly high in the localities of Takiyapar (82%), Nala Road (81%), Chhajjubagh (72%) and Musallahpur Hat (69%).

Access to housing, shelter and basic amenities

Nearly 84% of sanitation workers in Patna live in their own houses, mostly for several generations. Nearly 40% families availed of government schemes in owning houses, mostly in Musallahpur Hat (100%), Sandalpur (91%), Nala Road (83%) and Lohanipur (61%). However, most instances of provisioning of houses to sanitation workers are at least ten years old. However, nearly 42.36% sanitation workers rated their locality to be 'extremely dirty'. Only 37.27% of sanitation workers owning houses have their own toilet, while only 32.53% own sources of drinking water. Ownership of own toilets and sources of drinking water is especially limited in the localities of Adalatganj and Takiyapar, with less than 10% households owning such amenities. While R.Block has only 4.76% households owning toilets, about 23.8% families have own sources of drinking water.



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While about 9.89% households of sanitation workers have faced displacements at least once, nearly 40.4% families are currently living under the threat of displacement, mostly in the localities of Qazipur, Nala Road, Takiyapar and R. Block. Nearly half of sanitation workers living in Yarpur, Chhajubagh and Phulwarisharif are also facing the threat of eviction.



A few important housing schemes were launched in 1995 for sanitation workers, leading to provisioning of flats to *safai karmacharis* in several localities of Patna. However, processes of provisioning of houses have been very sporadic and housing schemes operationalized during the later years under schemes like IHSDP did not have any specific entitlement for sanitation workers. As a matter of fact, several housing colonies established in the mid-nineties became subjects

of disputes during the later years, e.g. the Ambedkar Colony on the Nala Road. The picture above, shot in Takiyapar locality, shows the typical surroundings of dwellings of *safai karmacharis* in Patna and a water collection point.

Experiences of collective action

‘Safai Karmachari Union’ and ‘Patna Corporation Employees Union’ are the two main trade unions having a significant level of inclusion of sanitation workers, though only about 1.19% of all sanitation workers have membership in a trade union. Patna Corporation Employees Union has a membership of about 1500 people and has been raising demands related to recruitment of survivors of deceased workers on compassionate grounds and provision of pensions; besides provision of facility of drinking water and financial assistance for repair of houses of sanitation workers.

Most *safai karmacharis* associated with Unions owe allegiance to specific leaders. Prominent leaders who have played a key role in organizing collective initiatives of sanitation workers include Shri Tufani Ram, Shri Rajendra Ram, Shri Nand Kishore Yadav, Shri Baiju Ram and Shri Ramesh Ram. Box 4.1 profiles Tufani Ram – one of the prominent Union leaders of sanitation workers.

Box 4.1 – Sixty years of perseverance – the story of Tufani Ram

Shri Tufani Ram is backed by a long history in raising issues of sanitation workers as a trade union activist. Since joining the Patna Corporation Employees Union in 1952, he has been making persistent efforts in raising the demands of sanitation workers. The Union currently has 2,000 members. Key issues and demands of workers raised by him include timely payment of wages, availability of cleaning materials, construction of housing colonies and payment of bonus and wages equaling the entitlements of state government employees.

Shri Tufani Ram fondly remembers the efforts of Sardar Gurbachan Singh, a sensitive former Commissioner of PMC, who played a key role in acceptance of many demands of the sanitation workers, including timely payments, provision of *saaris*, soaps and cleaning tools for workers etc. A number of residential quarters were also constructed for the workers. In March 1983, when Tufani Ram became the General Secretary of the Union, the struggle of workers against their economic exploitation acquired renewed zeal and their voices were heard even in the Rajya Sabha. This led to acceptance of the longstanding demand for pensions for the employees of the Corporation in 1986.

One of the key achievements of the collective initiatives anchored by Shri Tufani Ram relates to the adoption of system of payments through account payee cheques, initiated in 1999, following an unrest over unlawful deduction of Rs. 10,000 out of arrears amounting to Rs. 18,000/- sanctioned for municipal workers in Patna Municipal Corporation.

In recent times, the Union has taken up demands of provision of jobs to the survivors of deceased workers on compassionate grounds, besides issues related to eligibility for leaves. The Union has also been rooting for elimination of the contract system, and for greater parity between wages paid to sanitation workers and the entitlements of other state government employees. Shri Tufani Ram also feels strongly about the need for recruitment of at least 4,000 new workers in the Corporation, provision of essential services to habitation of sanitation workers and regarding the need of an explicit policy for sanitation workers at the level of Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission.

In the opinion of leaders of various Unions of sanitation workers in Patna, increasing privatization of sanitation work and growing practices of employment on contracts often compromises the basic worker-rights of *safai karmacharis*, costing them even basic entitlements like taking a casual leave. Box 3.5 presents the case of Pardesi Ram, who was suspended for taking a casual leave and had to pay a bribe to be reinstated.

Box 3.5 – Cost of taking a leave

Lack of clear stipulation of basic labour rights of sanitation workers often costs the workers dearly. Pardesi Ram, a sanitation worker based in Qazipur locality and employed by Patna Municipal Corporation, was suspended from work for being on casual leave and was reinstated only after payment of a bribe of Rs. 5000/-.

Chapter 5

Synthesis and Policy Implications

Sanitation workers in Patna survive and operate under conditions that are grossly unjust, inhuman and compromised. They have been historically relegated to a status of extreme disdain and exclusion and despite a number of affirmative action policies have continued to languish on the margins of contemporary societies. Treated virtually as *dalits* amongst *dalits*, they need to be dealt with with a sense of urgency in delivery of essential services and entitlements due to them. This Chapter of the report emphasizes upon a few critical implications of the alarming conditions of life faced by *safai karmacharis* in Bihar, towards formulation of a dedicated policy for their development.

Essential interventions for enforcement of laws against manual scavenging

- The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act enacted in 1993 needs to be enforced with greater seriousness in Bihar, in view of the unabated practice of manual scavenging even in the state capital. Also, the state government should take a broader view of the definition of manual scavenging and include all forms of unsafe practices of manual disposal of filth and excreta.
- A comprehensive state-level survey needs to be carried out for identification of people engaged in manual scavenging in various forms. *Panchayat Raj* institutions and urban local bodies can be entrusted with reporting of prevalence of such practices within their jurisdiction on a periodic basis;
- An effective system of preventing manual scavenging at the roots needs to be evolved, possibly by vesting powers of imposing penalties over employers of manual scavengers in *Gram Kutcheries* in Bihar. Powers of vigilance vis-à-vis such practices can be vested in institutions of local self-governance, along with a protocol for prompt referral of cases to *Gram Kutcheries* or other designated courts.
- A comprehensive legislation clearly stipulating entitlements of sanitation workers with regard to terms and conditions of their employment, entitlements related to housing, education, health care and financial support for enterprises; and punishments for violation of essential conditions and entitlements needs to be drafted.
- Given that even after sixty years since independence there are no representatives from the community of sanitation workers in the state legislatures, a committee mandated with welfare of sanitation workers needs to be constituted in Bihar Vidhan Sabha and Bihar Vidhan Parishad, which could include representatives of the community of sanitation workers in an invitee status. Representatives from the community of sanitation workers should also be included in the State SC Commission.

Essential interventions for improving work conditions for sanitation workers

- For over two decades, no permanent recruitments of sanitation workers have been made by municipalities in Bihar and most workers are employed on contracts. Also, as many as 400 cases of recruitment of dependents of deceased workers on compassionate ground are till pending in the Patna Municipal Corporation. Ad-hoc employment on the basis of undocumented contracts not only subjects the workers to excessive workload and exploitation at the hands of contractors, but also brings about undue competition and uncertainties with regard to availability of work. Given the critical role played by sanitation workers in maintenance of hygiene of a city, their employment by a municipality must offer them job security, post-retirement benefits, social security benefits for workers as well as their dependents, and compensation terms commensurate with their especially challenging nature of work. They should be provided with identity cards, benefits of provident funds, Employees State Insurance Scheme, including group insurance, bank accounts and mandatory crèches for their children. All forms of employment of sanitation workers must be governed by legislations like Labour Act, Factory Act and Companies Act. Equal wages must be ensured for equal quantum of work, for all kinds of sanitation work, and payment of minimum wages must be strictly enforced for all forms and situations of sanitation work.
- While contract-based systems of recruitment of sanitation workers by municipalities must be abolished (as of today, most municipalities in Bihar do not even maintain any documentation of the contracts), given the prevalence of practices of sub-contracting of sanitation work by regular employees of municipalities of Bihar to casual workers for a pittance, opportunities of employment of sanitation workers in municipalities must be extended only to real sanitation workers. The profile of sanitation workers recruited by municipalities should be subjected to regular inspection to this effect. As a matter of fact, a number of sanitation workers from socially dominant castes were recruited by the Patna Municipal Corporation in 1974-75, who were later assigned responsibilities other than cleaning, e.g. clerical or assistance-related work. Many of such workers, officially recorded as sanitation workers, have been sub-contracting their official duties to unregistered sanitation workers for a pittance.
- Greater public awareness needs to be created about the illegal status of manual scavenging and dry latrines, besides regarding the liability of employers of manual scavengers to harsh punishments. Effective communication products with clear messages need to be developed for use through mass media instruments with greater regularity and diversity of content.
- Similarly, entry of workers inside manholes needs to be banned and if absolutely necessary, special permission should be required from none less than officers of the rank of Municipal Commissioners and adequate life-saving arrangements must be ensured with clearly defined accountabilities in the case of lapses. Also, such workers should be entitled to special packages of compensation, which need to be clearly

defined.

- Every act of sanitation work must be undertaken with due safeguards – i.e. using protective gear, employing safe tools for cleaning and with essential backing of free health check-ups, failing which the concerned employers should be liable for punishment.

Essential interventions for ensuring better living conditions and enhancing access to entitlements for sanitation workers

- Comprehensive surveys need to be undertaken by the state government for identification of every single sanitation worker and their habitation across all *panchayats* and municipalities of the state. Such a survey should also make an attempt to profile the experiences of sanitation workers in accessing different kinds of institutional services and entitlements, so that appropriate remedial measures can be initiated for addressing barriers to inclusion. Effective use of technology can be made (e.g. GIS mapping) to analyse physical accessibility of critical institutions of delivery of essential services (e.g. *anganwadi*, primary schools, health sub-centres etc.) for various habitations of sanitation workers, and habitations lacking an equitable level of concentration of key institutions need to be provided with the same.
- Priority needs to be given to sanitation workers in allotment of houses and in development of slums under schemes like RAY, IHSDP and BSUP. Measures of progress of such schemes must include disaggregated reporting of coverage of sanitation workers.
- The City Development Plan of Patna needs to have a focused component for sanitation workers. The existing plan does not even mention *safai karmacharis*.
