

**A March towards Dignified Life: A Case Study on
advocacy processes and strategies of Manual
Scavenging Community in Tumkur Karnataka (India)
for Dignity and Freedom**

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The structurally marginalised and the disempowered groups often face challenges of claiming their entitlements, negotiating with service providers and in seeking responsiveness of the systems. Amidst the marginalised sections also, communities existing on extreme margins like sub-castes/categories of *Dalits*¹, who are involved in work of manual scavenging, sweeping, sewage work/cleaning septic tanks, removing garbage and carcasses etc. are particularly vulnerable.

Lack of accountability of systems and absence of recognition of their basic rights and dignity, lack of quality of care are amongst some of the noticeable hurdles for these marginalized groups. Despite manual scavenging being outlawed under different legislations and host of programs, policies for eradication of manual scavenging and elimination of insanitary latrines and policies for rehabilitation of the workers in place, these communities continue to face structural barriers of social exclusion, caste based discrimination and untouchability; financial vulnerability, extreme health hazards while in contact with human excreta and untimely deaths due to involvement in the menial work of cleaning septic tanks,

¹ The term Dalit literally means downtrodden or broken. The literature uses 'Dalit' to refer to one's caste in South Asia; it applies to members of those subordinated castes which have borne the stigma of "untouchability" based on birth. They are also traditionally forced into occupation such as tanning leather, manual scavenging and sweeping streets etc. which is considered "impure" or "polluting." Due to their caste identity Dalits regularly face discrimination and violence which prevent them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India. <http://www.ncdhr.org.in/dalits-untouchability/>. Accessed May 5, 2016.

gutters and sewers. They continue to remain deprived of their basic rights, resources, health, education and other social services besides employment opportunities and dignity.

Thamate, a community based organization in Tumkur district of Karnataka state, is engaged in empowering the marginalized community of Madigas (Dalit community involved in manual scavenging and sewage work) to engage with systems to make it more accountable and seek responsiveness from different governance institutions. Thamate has been proactively involved in creating platforms and spaces for the marginalised community to share their concerns about policy implementation along with working towards eradication of manual scavenging and seeking dignified opportunities for them.

This case study explores the initiatives taken by Thamate which has steered with multi-pronged approaches at different levels including local, state, national and international (incipiently) levels for ensuring accountability from governance institutions and in raising the concerns of social exclusion and entitlements of the extremely marginalized manual scavenging community through advocacy, networking and evidences.

It reflects the story of Thamate's intervention to eradicate manual scavenging using different strategies at multiple levels such as advocacy for access to entitlements like minimum wages, Provident Fund (PF), health insurance, safety equipment etc.; of providing avenues for younger generation to education to break the cycle of hereditary occupation of manual scavenging and take up alternative employment; providing educational support to children of manual scavenging community and initiatives of collectivising members of the Dalit Madiga community involved in the manual scavenging work to demand for their

rights, and also collect information to file PILs (public interest litigation) on different discrepancies defying the implementation of the diverse legislations including the Manual Scavenging Act, 2013; file Right to Information (RTI) applications to seek information on entitlements and policy provisions, apart from conducting fact findings in deaths of sewage and manhole workers and ensuring compensations for the deaths.

Methodology

This case-study adopts the qualitative research methodology wherein methods of document analysis and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted with key activists and community leaders of the manual scavenging community in the field area of Thamate in Tumkur. It draws on published and unpublished archived sources on Thamate, annual reports of Thamate, published documents on manual scavenging, case stories, informal discussions and interactions conducted with mobilized members and community leaders, Dalit rights activists and experts on rights of manual scavenging community.

The aim of the case study is to understand the larger context of violation of rights of the manual scavenging community involved in manual scavenging and sewage work in the state of Karnataka and exhaustively delve into developing an understanding of the different advocacy strategies used by Thamate with alliances, partners and networks in claiming entitlements, the challenges faced and the impacts of the advocacy strategies. It also aims to understand Thamate's focus to organize and mobilise the community around the issue of dignity and

rights and develop an understanding on the strategic advocacy and legal interventions pursued by Thamate, its outcome and challenges faced. The case explores accountability in reflections on the experience of interaction of the manual scavenging community with the different governance institutions through Thamate. It reflects how the manual scavenging community initiated its collectivization under the Thamate and it's and used different advocacy strategies in engaged in demanding accountability and negotiating for rights and reclaiming dignity.

The people who remove human excreta have been addressed as manual scavengers in the country by the existing literature and they largely belong to the Dalit community (in some places low castes Muslims also pursue the work) and rank the lowest in the hierarchical structure. The scavenger community in India is highly heterogeneous and is subsumed under layers of sub-caste. Manual Scavengers have been largely addressed as Bhangis, Chuhras, Arunthathiyars, Rellis, Madigas, Mehtars, Pakhis, Thotis, Sakiliars etc. depending upon the state of residence. The Census defines Manual Scavenger, who cleans a dry latrine or carries human waste to dispose it off. The definition like much of the discourse is centred upon dry latrine cleaning.²

In this case study, the term 'Manual Scavenger' is used for all categories of persons involved in all forms of collecting waste, cleaning sewage pits and drains, sweeping roads and collecting and disposing of human and animal excreta, and disposing animal corpses and these include manual scavengers, sewer workers and sanitation workers, sweepers employed by civic bodies and contract workers and those working in unorganized/private sector. In the case

²Ingole, A. (2016): 'Scavenging for the State,' Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue No. 23

study the term manual scavenger is being used as a neutral 'term' which is not value laden.

Background: Understanding Systemic Contours of Manual Scavenging

The de-humanising practice of manual scavenging is officially banned since decades in India under The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993³ (which makes provisions for the abolition of this practice, and for the identification and rehabilitation of manual scavengers) and under the more recent; The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013;⁴ which revised and broadened the Act of 1993 and established more stricter punishments. The 1993 Act outlines prohibition of and or maintenance of dry latrines and employment of manual scavengers. However, as reflected by figures of Census2011, there are still 26 lakh insanitary latrines in the country where human excreta is either being deposited into open drains or removed manually⁵ And manual scavengers continue to clean these dry latrines inspite of the bans imposed. Barred legally and with periodic appointment of various committees and commissions by the government to look into the plight of the scavenging community,⁶ ⁷ manual scavenging continues unabated across different states of

³Government of India, Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Toilets (Prohibition) Act 1993, No. 46 of 1993

⁴ The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013; in The Gazette of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, September 19, Delhi

⁵ The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill 2012, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, (March, 2013) accessed from- <http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Manual%20Scavengers/SCR%20Manual%20Scavengers%20Bill.pdf>

⁶Ravichandran, B.(2011): 'Scavenging Profession: Between Class and Caste?,' Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.46, Issue No. 13, pg-21-25

India. A ground report produced by India Spend and human rights organisation Video Volunteers in May 2016 revealed that the practice continues unabated across states even in one like Gujarat, which earlier declared itself free from manual scavenging.⁸

Statistics from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (2011)⁹ data released in July 2015 outline that 1,80,657 households are engaged in manual scavenging for their livelihood in the country. Around 167,487 households work as a manual scavenger, according to a reply in the Lok Sabha (Parliament's lower house) by the Ministry of Rural Development on February 25, 2016, based on the Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011¹⁰ and nearly 12,226 manual scavengers were identified across India, according to a reply to the Rajya Sabha (Parliament's upper house) on May 5, 2016, by Minister of State for Social Justice.¹¹

Miffed by the apathy of governments to implement the legal provisions and institutional guarantee of rights for the manual scavenging community the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA)¹² filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court of India in 2003, which called for strict enforcement of 1993 Act and enforcement of rights guaranteed under the Constitution. However the PIL

⁷Teltumbe, A.(2016): Dalits Cry on the Eve of the Ambedkar festival in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue 11, No.19 pg 10-11

⁸<http://www.videovolunteers.org/gujarat-officials-deny-continuation-of-manual-scavenging/>
Accessed June 2, 2016

⁹<http://secc.gov.in/> accessed November 23, 2015 and May 25, 2016

¹⁰<http://164.100.47.192/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=29086&lsno=16>, Accessed on

¹¹<http://164.100.47.192/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=28208&lsno=16>, Accessed on June 2,2016

¹²Teltumbe, A. (2016): Two Years of an AmbedkarBhakt and the Plight of Dalits in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue 23, No.19 pg10-11

continued to be a struggle for nearly 12 years, wherein SKA and partner organizations submitted voluminous data on existence of manual scavenging denied by various state governments. In 2014, the apex court passed a judgment on the PIL to prevent deaths in the sewer lines and septic tanks and directed for compensation to those who died since 1993 besides reiterating the states to implement the 2013 Act.¹³ In the PIL, the apex court also noted that “over 95% [of them] are Dalits (persons belonging to the scheduled castes¹⁴), who are compelled to undertake this denigrating task under the garb of ‘traditional occupation.’ The principal reason behind the perpetuation of this practice is the caste system.” Bhim Yatra, a 125 days march undertaken by the SKA through 500 districts in 30 states of India, which culminated at New Delhi on 13 April 2016, documented 1,268 instances of worker deaths inside sewers between 2014 and 2016, out of which only 18 deceased have received compensation.¹⁵ Reflecting upon the communities involved in the menial task of scavenging International Labour Organisation (ILO) outlined that 99% of the people forced to do this work are Dalits, and 95% of them are women.¹⁶ Reflecting upon the systemic deprivation of the manual scavenging community, Teltumbde A (2016)¹⁷ showcases the drop in the allocation for Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers from 557 crore (2013-14) in the last two budgets (2014-15, 2015-16) to Rs. 439.04 crore and Rs.470.19 crores respectively, which were further slashed to a token entry of Rs. 10 crore. The

¹³Sathasivam. P, (2014): SafaiKaramchariAndolan And Orsvs Union Of India And Ors on available on <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/6155772/> and <http://safaikarmachariandolan.org>

¹⁴ Scheduled castes is the Constitutional term used for the marginalized castes

¹⁵Teltumbe, A.(2016): Dalits Cry on the Eve of the Ambedkar festival in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue 11, No.19 pg 10-11 and <http://safaikarmachariandolan.org> accessed May 25, 2016

¹⁶Mander, H., International Labour Organisation(ILO).(2014): Resource Handbook for Manual Scavenging, Delhi

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allocation for Pre-matric Scholarships to the Children of those Engaged in “Unclean” Occupations shows an even more dismal picture. While the budget allocation was marginally raised to Rs 10 crore (2014-15) from the earlier Rs. 9.5 crore (2013-14) was slashed to Rs 2 crore in the (2016-17) budget.

Highlighting the derogatory situation of women manual scavengers in a survey across three states of India, a survey report on Socio Economic Status of Women Manual Scavengers developed by Jan Sahas Social Development Society and UN Women¹⁸ outlined that women manual scavengers are deprived of crucial services of education and health as well as decent employment opportunities. 82% women in the survey never got the opportunity to go to school. It highlighted that their children face discrimination in schools because they belong to the community which is considered ‘untouchable’. The health facilities for their treatment which are expensive are of substandard quality and at distances far from their habitation. 60% of women manual scavengers and their children had never visited Anganwadi centers and 59% families had no access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) where subsidized food grains are provided by the Government. The survey revealed that their participation in local governance and political processes is negligible. Discrimination and humiliation does not allow them to raise their voice in Gram Panchayats. These women and their families have very poor access to various government schemes and entitlements in all three states. Only 4% got financial assistance to construct houses under house schemes. 17% of families got wage

¹⁸Jan Sahas Social Development Society and UN Women.(2014):Socio Economic Status of Women Manual Scavengers available on http://in.one.un.org/img/uploads/Socio_Economic_Status_of_Women_Manual_Scavengers_Report.pdf

Accessed on May 25, 2016

employment under MGNREGA and only 13% of women had availed provisions under SMRS Scheme aimed for rehabilitation of manual scavengers. Substantiating the lack of implementation of legislation to eradicate manual scavenging, report of National Round table Discussion organised by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on December 21, 2012¹⁹ highlighted that there have been interventions from the High Courts, the Supreme Court, the National advisory Council (NAC) as far as the manual scavenging issue is concerned however inspite of an active Judiciary and well written laws there was lack of adequate implementation of the laws on the ground. In March 2012, a national hearing on the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and their children held by the Garima Abhiyan,²⁰ in which members of the Dalit community from across ten states shared experiences of being involved in the demeaning occupation gave witness to the fact that untouchability still exists in India and highlighted that rehabilitation of manual scavengers remains a distant dream. Corroborating the stance of lack of official apathy in eradicating manual scavenging Human Rights Watch (2014)²¹ report documented that manual scavenging persists with the support and collusion of local officials. It spelled that people who have left manual scavenging, even those who had the support of community-based civil society initiatives, report significant barriers to accessing housing, employment, and support from existing government

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)., (2012): 'Social Inclusion of Manual Scavengers', A report of National Round Table Discussion, Delhi

²⁰RashtriyaGarimaAbiyan, (2012): Uncompleted and unsuccessful rehabilitation of manual scavengers and their children in India. Brief report on National Public Hearing on Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers and their Children in India, held at Indian Social Institute, Delhi on March 28, 2012.

²¹Human Rights Watch. (2014).Cleaning Human Waste , "Manual Scavenging," Caste, and Discrimination in India, available on <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/25/cleaning-human-waste/manual-scavenging-caste-and-discrimination-india> accessed on November 23, 2015 and May 15, 2016

programs. Apart from the social atrocities the workers face, they are also exposed to certain health problems by virtue of their occupation. These health hazards include exposure to harmful gases, cardiovascular degeneration, musculoskeletal disorders, infections, skin problems and respiratory system problems.²²Two major studies carried out by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)²³ in two states of Gujarat and Maharashtra delineated the morbidity patterns among the manual scavenging community and the adverse impacts of the work on the health status. The studies reflected that majority of the scavenging workers were found to be suffering from the diseases of one type or the other and the common ones included skin disorders, communicable diseases, respiratory diseases (like breathlessness and constant cough-particularly manhole workers and septic cleaners suffered) and parasitic disorders, diminishing vision and hearing etc. The studies indicated that the average age of those involved in the scavenging workers was 40-45 and men died earlier of women.

The studies also indicated that despite of being involved in the hazardous jobs the scavengers were not provided with necessary safety equipment. Seconding the degrading work situation of the scavengers, a survey conducted in 2015 for 1091 workers in the third best civic body of India, (Pune) in the state of Maharashtra,²⁴ showcased that the civic body could not ensure eradication of manual scavengers and better conditions for the sewage workers and these are co-terminus with the situation in the rest of the country. The survey findings

²² Dr. Sainath, C., Dr. Ahmed K. M.,(2014):‘Occupational health hazards in sewage and sanitary workers’ in Indian Journal of Basic and Applied Medical Research,Vol.-3, Issue- 4, pg 31-35

²³Ramaih. A(2015) : Health Status of Dalits in India in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.50, Issue No.43, pg 70-74

²⁴Ingole, A. (2016): ‘Scavenging for the State,’ Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue No.

reflected that the most of the sewage workers came into direct contact of the human waste during the course of the work and violations of the 2013 Act were evident as most of the sewage workers had not received any form of training for the work. Amongst the toilet cleaners the survey identified that the toilet cleaners suffered humiliation not in the place of the work but also where they stayed owing. Majority of the workers surveyed shared that they were from the castes that have been traditionally involved in manual scavenging.

Significant legislations and Constitutional provisions have argued for guarantee of rights to the most marginalized groups of the manual scavengers, but examples in the literature on manual scavengers identify that manual scavenging and the structural marginalization, deprivation and exclusion of those involved in the work is a reality. The manual scavenging community are at the bottom of the hierarchical structure and remain largely undereducated, underserved, underrepresented and actively discriminated against.

Within a backdrop of the state's reluctance to acknowledge the existence of the manual scavengers, this case study attempts to explore the spaces and chances of the extremely marginalized to claim human dignity and accountability of the state towards those who have been kept on the extreme margins.

Chapter II

THE CONTEXT: A SNAPSHOT OF MANUAL SCAVENGING IN KARNATAKA

Box 1: Deaths of Paurakarmikas

On afternoon of November 28, 2015; two manual scavengers died while cleaning a soak pit in the locality of Saraswati Puram, 6th cross Tumkur town in Karnataka. Narasimamurthy (35) and Chikkanna (32) were both residents of Kuripalya slum in Tumkur town. The two workers had been previously working as contract manual scavengers and also served as Under Ground Drainage (UGD) workers.

Few months before their deaths they had left the contract job and began the job of cleaning soak pits. Marasimhamurthy family comprises of 4 children and his wife Anjanamma. Chikkanna is survived by a five year old daughter who is being reared by his sister after the death of his wife. Both the persons involved in cleaning of the soakpit, were hired by Kempanarasaiah, city corporation civil contractor and member of national political party. He had known the two manual scavengers closely and due to this acquaintance, he assigned them the task to clean the soak pit in his house at Saraswathipuram on the day. Around 3pm both of them died after inhaling toxic gases in the soakpit. Local police was informed and they removed dead bodies from the soakpit which was 12ft deep.

Kuripalya resident Kavya Kimpeshwari, who is also associated with Thamate at the Bheemshala (coaching centre) informed that this was the first death in the slum dwelling, where two men died due to asphyxiation while working in a soak pit in a posh locality of the town. The workers had been working in very apathic

conditions without any protective gear.(which is mandatory as per legislation)
She added that residents of nearly 150 households of the slum were involved in some kind of manual scavenging work. All are working either as contract manual scavengers or with the civic body. She added that the workers were forced to eke out a living through manual scavenging work as the population in the slum had few alternative employment opportunities and this is the only work they know.

Following the incident different Dalit organizations and Dalit rights activists of Safai Karmachari Kavalu Samithi, (SKKS) and Thamate, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS), People's Union Civil Liberties Karnataka (PUCLK) and political union CITU protested at the site of the incident and demanded for registration of complaint of the incident and against the civil contractor who had employed the two persons. The activists informed the chairpersons of the national and state SafaiKarmachari missions respectively about the incident and also demanded Rs.10 lakh as a compensation for the family of the deceased workers, on the basis of legal provisions. The activists protested till late evening and held a dharna at the site and refused to allow the bodies to be taken for postmortem.

Officials including District Collector, Corporation Commissioner, District Social Welfare (DSW) officer and Superintendent of Police (SP) visited the site and discussed the matter and promised the Rs.10 lakhs compensation, and an FIR against the house owner, house for the family members of the deceased Manual Scavengers family and their children's education.

Compiled by: Obalesh,Thamate and Surekha Dhaleta, CHSJ from site of the incident in Saraswathi-puram and Kuriplaya, Tukmur

The two deaths of Narasimamurthy (35) and Chikkanna (32) in Tumkur Karnataka, and many more which occur every year across India (22,000 deaths as estimated by SKA) and different states are a summary of the problem and the contradictions of the system, lack of system accountability and non-recognition of human rights besides a reflection of marginalized history entrenched in caste discrimination and social-exclusion.

Belonging to the Madiga caste, both Narasimamurthy and Chikkanna had to unclog and clean septic tanks in a private house which led to their untimely death. The deaths of sewage workers highlight the ironic paradox that the state of Karnataka showcases that even being a precursor in the Southern region to advocate for a ban on manual scavenging as early as in 1970's, manual scavenging continues unabated. K B Oblesha, State Convener of Safai karamchari Kavalu Samithi (scavengers watch dog committee) Karnataka and Founder secretary of Thamate shares that there is vast asymmetry between official data concerning the number of people involved in manual scavenging in the state as well across India. The 2011 Census puts the figures of Karnataka as topping in Southern areas of India with nearly 15,375 manual scavengers. In 1993-94 the Karnataka state along with different NGOs conducted a survey putting up a figure of 14,555 manual scavengers in the state both in rural and urban areas. In 2002-03 the figures went up to 26,004 and in 2007-08 it were 40,692 scavengers. The government sources in the Karnataka estimate the manual scavengers to be nearly 57,000 now, however the surveys and studies carried on by different human rights organizations and the civil society organizations, pitch the number of manual scavengers to be around 3.3 lakhs in the state, he adds.

Karnataka was the first state to ban by a Government order carrying of night soil as head loads or in any other form.²⁵ In Karnataka, the term *Pourakarmikas* is used for the persons employed in all forms of collecting waste, cleaning sewage pits and drains, sweeping roads and collecting and disposing of human and animal excreta, and animal corpses and these include manual scavengers, sewer workers and sanitation workers.²⁶ The Government of Karnataka had constituted a committee on the improvement of living and working conditions of sweepers and scavengers headed by I P D Salappa way back in 1973, which did extensive reviewing of the work and living conditions of workers in Karnataka and other states and outlined recommendations for the betterment of the *Pourakarmikas*. The Minister of Municipal Administration BBasavalingappa in Karnataka took this bold and concrete step to eliminate the carrying of night soil in any form in the state in 1973 and also changed the nomenclature of sweepers and scavengers to that of '*Pourakarmikas*' as decided at a conference in New-Delhi in September 1972.²⁷ Basavalingappa changed the name to *Pourakarmikas* as they were called as sweepers or by their caste names, which were abusive and value loaded terms.

Even after more than four decades of the implementation of ban on scavenging in Karnataka, different media reports and studies in the state and in the larger context highlight that manual scavenging continues to be an extreme form of social exclusion and the states complicity in its continuation reflects violation of human rights. The communities involved in the manual scavenging work in the

²⁵ Government of Karnataka(1976). Report of the Committee on the Improvement of Living and Working, Conditions of Sweepers and Scavenger (Salappa Committee Report), Pg 2

²⁶2015, Rangamani et.al.

²⁷ Government of Karnataka(1976). Report of the Committee on the Improvement of Living and Working, Conditions of Sweepers and Scavenger (Salappa Committee Report)

state like across India are subjected to gross discrimination, neglect of rights and are exposed to various health hazards due to the nature of the work. 46 manual scavenger deaths have happened in Karnataka from April 2008-16 according to the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA).

The state government reports continue to deny the existence of widespread manual scavenging in Karnataka; whereas statistics juxtapose another reality. A survey report developed by Ahmedabad based organization Janvikas²⁸ in association with 12 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) based on a survey of 250 areas (villages and slums) and 5,827 households across five states of India including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, found that despite the legislations seeking to eradicate manual scavenging, the system still exists in these places. Thamate too contributed in the research in Karnataka in the study. The study revealed that while the high court of the state of Karnataka had in its interim orders/ directives prohibited entry of persons in manhole unless absolutely necessary, and not without safety equipment's in any case, its implementation remains a big question. Municipalities and municipal corporations in both these states have purchased jetting and suction machines to clean underground drainages, yet underground drainage workers employed with municipal bodies enter manholes without safety equipment. Gayathridevi(2011)²⁹ enquired in a study on manual scavengers in North Karnataka, that government efforts were not focused upon the community of manual scavengers in the state and reforms have not enabled social mobility which the community needs for its uplift. In the field studies conducted in two

²⁸ Janvikas (2012): Status of Scavenging Community in India, Ahmedabad

²⁹ Dr. Gayathridevi K G (2011) Mirage of social mobility: The case of Safai Karmacharis in Karnataka, Centre for Ecological Economics and Natural Resources of Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore

fast-growing urban centres of Gulbarga and Tumkur, the study highlighted that that manual scavenging is thrust upon poor and migrant Scheduled Caste families. Mehtars and the Mangarodis are employed as manual scavengers in Karnataka, the study highlighted. Most of the SafaiKarmacharis are women but a majority of them lend their services on behalf of the menfolk and women workers are marginalised and deprived of benefits reaching them directly. Similarly a study to find out economic status and life style of manual scavengers in Gulbarga district of Karnataka³⁰ elicited that 38.2% of the respondents earned meager incomes between Rs 4500-6500 per month. 61.8% of the respondents were not having any nutritional food. 44.6% respondents affirmed facing the stigma of discrimination while pursuing the manual scavenging job.

Qualitative studies pursued by SOCHARA (2009) and JEEWA (2009) a CBO in Chitraguda attempted to understand the perceptions of *Pourakarmikason* their work, social and economic context and how all these influence their health status and health seeking practices³¹³². The studies highlighted that manual scavengers in Chitradurga belonged to the Madiga community and the manual scavengers ended up doing the work as they hardly had any other alternative employment and have little access to medical care. The 2009 study systematically documented the healthproblems of a group of *Pourakarmikas* in Chitradurga town in Karnataka. The2012 study reflected that contracting out of sanitation and manual scavenging work had become more common since the

³⁰Bhimasha, J. and Sedamkar, C.B. (2015): Socio economic conditions of manual scavengers with special reference to Gulbarga district of Karnataka state in Indian Streams Research Journal, Vol.4, Issue 12

³¹ SOCHARA, Community Health Cell (2009)Invisible Guardians, Silent victims:A study on the health status of the Pourkarmikas of Chitradurga townChitradurga District, Karnataka

³²Pradyumna, A. (2012): Perceptions of conservancy workers and manual scavengers on their occupation and health—a qualitative preliminary study, SOCHARA, Bangalore

decade of 2000 and there was a variance in salaries of contract and permanent manual scavenging workers, besides permanent workers getting better opportunities. Women contract workers were relatively more marginalised and got lesser wages relative to men contract workers. It further revealed that the manual scavenging community members had no savings, and there was no job security, and contract workers children had to drop out of school due to financial constraints. Alcohol intake emerged as a common habit among men in study. The 2012 study highlighted that occupational health was not perceived as a major concern by the workers, as this could be partly because the workers had internalized the health risks arising from their work. Only on repeated probing it became apparent in the study that health issues secondarily related to occupation such as maternal health, lack of safety equipment, alcoholism and sanitation were areas of concern for the manual scavenging community.

A snapshot of Madigas in Karnataka and Tumkur

According to 2011 Census, in Karnataka the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population are 22% out of which 16% belong to the scheduled caste of Madiga, Mala and others and 6% to scheduled tribe community. There were 101 divisions among scheduled castes, out of which Madiga and Mala communities are considered untouchables within the Dalit community also. Compared to Madiga community Mala community is still better off in terms of socio-economic status, owing to the fact that they reside mainly in and around districts which have good agriculture activities. Madiga community mainly resides in the areas and districts which are drought prone and where agriculture activities are less. "The health indicators are poor and recent survey shows nearly 32 lakh malnourished children in this region; 90% of whom belong to the Schedule castes and

Scheduled Tribes,” explains Obalesh. Tumkur district is the nearest district to capital city of Karnataka, i.e. Bangalore. Tumkur comprises of 10 Taluks, 4 Taluks fall in the minor irrigation and semi rain belt and the other 6 taluks are drought prone and fall in scanty rain fall area including the Pavagada, Madugiri Sira blocks. Majority of Dalits and other most marginalized sections which are land less agriculture labourers live in these areas. The total population is 28 lakhs in Tumkur and 45% are Dalits and out of the 45% of Dalits, 80% are Madigas and largely are either involved in sweeping work or the manual scavenging work and 20% other from other backward communities.

Madigas in Tumkur, Pavagada, Madhugiri and Sira blocks are migrant agriculture laborers, who have been treated as outcastes for many years. They were forced to undertake work generally considered impure, like sweeping, cleaning the village, dispose-off the dead animals and process animal skin. The same community is now working as manual scavengers, sweepers and manhole workers in rural and urban areas. Basic human rights like housing, drinking water, healthcare and education are not in their reach. Local money lenders and dominant caste people exploit them in day to day lives. They live on pavements and slums having fear of demolition at any time. In Tumkur town, scavengers live in around 10 slum areas. Each slum area has a population of minimum 100 Madiga families. They work for Rs. 1000–2000 per month for cleaning of one housing / commercial society (approximately 150 houses). There are no other sources of income among them. While around 1842 Madiga men and women are employed directly (permanent and on contract) by the Tumkur and the Pavagada Municipal Corporation, rest of them are working in the unorganized sector cleaning housing societies, hospitals, commercial complexes, multiplexes and schools, etc. Their conditions of work are unjust, environment is unhygienic and

they are rarely given less labor intensive and hygiene promoting equipment. Their social security is also not taken care of.³³

Dalit movement as a platform for manual scavengers struggle in Tumkur: Some reflections

Advocacy work with the manual scavengers within the Dalit movement in Karnataka has started only recently and is particularly challenging, owing to the fact that this community has been oppressed for decades and this oppression has multiple layers says Obalesh. The history of repression against the Dalits (which includes manual scavengers also) goes back several hundred years in India. Historically, the people have been victims of repression and atrocities perpetrated by landlords- stigma, violence and crimes. For generations the Madiga community was victim of the practice of manual scavenging and Devadasi system in Karnataka. But it started onwards 1970's when empowered voices from the Madiga community like Prof. Krishnappa started the literature movement and Bisvalingappa exerted political influence of the by the Social Welfare Minister. In one of the informal meeting he issued a casual statement about the Karnataka Literature as waste ('Boosa' meaning groundnut waste). There was a wave of dissent among the privileged class and they demanded the resignation of the Minister, citing the fact that an untouchable cannot speak about the literature. This event sparked protests from the Dalit community and Prof. Krishnappa started a campaign to protect the Minister. 'Dalit Sangharsh Samithi' (DSS) came into being at this time.

³³ COPASAH FLE report available on <http://www.copasah.net/facilitated-learning-exchange-visit-2--south-asia-region.html>

The decade between 1970 and 1980 was the period of marked violence against Dalits, due the growing unity and development of organised protest which was not tolerated by the dominant caste people. The growing intolerance among the upper castes came to the fore when members of a Dalit family were beaten mercilessly and made to drink urine for having taken some grass and flowers from the garden of an upper caste, during a local festival. This incident gave rise to a state-wide agitation and the responsible people were punished under 'Prevention of Atrocities Act' and compensation was also given to the victims. However, in 1990's the movement got split into two ideological factions- one supporting political representation for the community and the other wanting to continue on the path of struggle. Initially Mala community supported the struggle based ideology and Madigas were in favour of political representation; but in reality Mala community acquired the political recognition slowly by individuals making their way into various political parties and they gained power, while Madiga community still continues to struggle. The struggle that continued for twenty years is now suffering due to the formation of these factions. The benefits of the reservation available to the community is being utilized more by the Malas and other Schedule Caste communities, while the Madiga community (which constitutes the major proportion of the population) hardly get any reservation. A commission was formed by the Government for sorting the reservation issue and it recommended 6% reservation for Madigas, 5% for Mala, 3% for other Scheduled Castes and 1% for other minor SC. These recommendations continue to be implemented.

Chapter III

Addressing the issues of dignity of Manual Scavenging

Community in Tumkur: Genesis of Thamate

Corroborating the situation of the manual scavenging community in Karnataka and delineating upon the struggle for accountability in Tumkur district Dorairaj K,³⁴ member of Karnataka Dalit Movement and District President of PUCL-Karnataka, shares that the Dalit movement is significantly quite old in the state and dates before independence. The visible moves towards addressing the issues of manual scavengers in Karnataka can be observed in the 1970's, inspired by the momentum generated by the Dalit movement and its vociferous leaders like Bisvalingappa and Prof. Krishnappa. It was the caste affinity which brought the different categories of Dalits together under the banner of Dalit Movement.

Some mobilised Dalit youngsters formed the Dalit Yuvak Sangh in 1970s in Tumkur and took up the issue of the manual scavengers working with the civic body. The manual scavenger workers who were permanent employees of the Municipal Corporation were subjected to ill-treatment and untouchability, undue work pressures and were not getting timely salaries and other benefits such as pensions from the Municipal Corporation. The Dalit YuvakSangh which was part of the Dalit movement collectivized and mobilized the manual scavengers,organized protest marches, staged dharnas and gheraoed officials of the civic bodies to apprise them with the situation of the permanent manual scavengers. This mobilization of the manual scavenging workers into collective

³⁴Source :Discussion with Dorairaj, K in Tumkur

started yielding positive results and the workers started demanding the rights from the civic body and were able to get benefits of pensions and regular salary.

This collectivization had another layer to it as the Dalit Madigawomen could raise the issue of the removing toddy vends (alcohol vends) in Tumkur and were successful to an extent. He adds that the Dalit Movement became a platform for the people belonging to depressed sections to raise their concerns and negotiate for their rights in many ways. Dalit movement including the youth wing provided an opportunity for up-coming leaders from the downtrodden sections to develop self-confidence. It united the people and provided an opportunity particularly to the youth and created conciseness to raise voice against violation of their human rights and demand land reforms, reservation in educational employment etc.

Dorairaj explains what followed as a process of collectivization in Karnataka was a hopeful and a forceful crusade to expose claims of the state bodies of eradicating manual scavenging by evidence-gathering and fact-finding on the existence of manual scavenging and the practice of night soil carrying in which different organisations and Dalit movement were involved. This initiated a process of ensuring state accountability. However, he shares that as the contractual system paved in the manual scavenging work since early 2000, it was a difficult task to ensure accountability from the contractors. During the course different groups, members of Dalit student movement moved forward together with a vision of dignity for the manual scavenging community besides eradication of the practice and Thamate is spin-off of one such a struggle. Thamate has emerged in its present form, from different campaign-movements like the Dalit movement, health rights movement, he adds.

Thamate and its intervention

Thamate has been working with manual scavengers and Dalits for over twenty years since 1996 as part of Karnataka Dalit student Movement and health movement in Karnataka. Formed by manual scavenging community members, it is a membership based people's organisation of the scavengers (Madiga) community. It is based in Tumkur and works intensively in 2 City Corporation, 2 municipalities, 10 slums and 56 villages and it also has a volunteer base across the state of Karnataka. It has reached to more than 15,000 Manual scavenging families in Tumkur through various interventions.³⁵ Obalesh recounts, many empowered likeminded Dalit youth including him, travelled across different parts of Karnataka in 2003-4 as part of the Dalit student movement and health movement and met several Dalit professionals to identify the situation of the manual scavenger community and build relations with different stakeholders. "We also explored the national landscape and met different stakeholders, movement activists including National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) to understand the situation of the manual scavengers and Dalits," he adds. Different challenges faced by the community were identified during the exploratory phase like lack of education, addiction to alcohol, lack of benefit of government schemes, lack of equipment/resources from the government for cleaning activities, no representation in governing institutions, negligible wages, no established retirement age, transfer of manual scavenging work to the next generation, lack of vocational skills, over worked and overburdened manual scavengers, lack of awareness about their rights, no alternate job opportunity, practice of untouchability with manual scavenging community as they were still

³⁵ Source : Annual reports of Thamate and discussions with Obalesh and key members and activists of Thamate

doing caste based work etc. The access to basic and essential services in the manual scavenging settlements including quality education, clean drinking water and sanitation, affordable healthcare and housing continued to be negligible.

It deemed significant to the activists that the challenges of accountability were too pronounced for the most marginalized communities of manual scavengers due to their poverty, caste related discrimination, and caste related occupation of manual scavenging into which their life-circumstances have pushed them. Non-recognition as workers even after 20 – 30 years of work as manual scavengers, the vulnerability of the community as a whole due to the caste, class, gender issues emerged as important challenges for the accountability processes along with the lack of political will, and non-responsiveness of the governance institutions to do away with the scourge of manual scavenging.

The activists realized that it was significant to collectivise and mobilise people from the manual scavenging community, with an understanding that an aware and mobilized community can successfully advocate for their own rights but collectively. Thamate was initiated as first step to educate, mobilize and organize Madiga community in Tumkur and Pavagada city.³⁶ These insights were concretised into a formal initiative and as a need was felt to develop a legal identity for an organisation which would work towards eradication of manual scavenging and as a result Thamate was registered in 2006. The organisation was shaped as one that would be a membership one and would work towards eradication of manual scavenging and support manual scavenging community members to demand and seek justice collectively with other stakeholders and hold

³⁶ Source: Annual Report Thamate 2011-12 and discussion with Obalesh, founder of Thamate

institutions accountable, and ensure that the human rights violations are remedied.

The nomenclature 'Thamate' which means a drum made from animal hide is a distinct Madiga cultural instrument. The sound of the Thamate has long been used to continue discrimination and slavery with the Madigas and was used to disburse information, celebrate festive occasions and deaths in upper caste families. Madigas were routinely called to beat the Thamate. Following the development of the organization Thamate, Obalesh founder of Thamate, who is also from the Madiga community says, "From now on, the 'Thamate' will be used for the empowerment of the community, not as an instrument of slavery and discrimination, hence, the name Thamate."

Strategies adopted by Thamate

Subsequent to an identity of an organisation, Thamate and its team started working towards the issue of the Manual Scavengers in Tumkur district and other nearby areas. Thamate has adopted different strategies for eradication of manual scavenging system and development of the community as hybrid approaches and not as stand-alone ones, and these include strategies for eradication of Manual Scavenging System and creating alternative skills and employment; improving educational status of children of Manual Scavengers families; ensuring social security and implementing social welfare programs, improving health status and legal intervention. Thamate has focused on making the different government systems and schemes work and has participated and partnered in different state and national level campaigns on health, food, and

social security to claim rights of the MS community. The focus has been on right to education, education and work besides claiming dignity among others.³⁷

During the initial phases Thamate focused on conducting community meetings. In 2008-09 Thamate identified 375 Safaikaramcharis out of which 175 were purely doing manual scavenging work, cleaning dry latrines with bare hands. These community members were provided trainings and capacity building on safety measurements at work place, utilisation of government schemes for the community. The main focus initially was on immediate issues and needs to be met on sanitation, working and health conditions of workers and their unsolved problems. The community mobilization was initiated at three levels focusing on the children of the manual scavenging communities; young and adults and the aged.

Advancing further to the use of multi –pronged strategies Thamate has been participating and contributing to national and state level networks on various issues such as SafaiKarmachari Andolan, Safai Karmachari KavaluSamiti (SKSS) NCDHR, Jan Arogya Andolan, Right to Food Campaign, National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) etc. Apart from the advocacy at local level with local government Thamate has progressed to being part of legal advocacy process through PIL in High Court of Karnataka. It is significantly involved in educating and empowering community building leadership cadre, promoting community monitoring committees, setting up education support centers for children and establishing linkages with other organizations and institutions for vocational skill training of youth. It has involved methods like survey, discussions,

³⁷Information gathered during group discussion with Thamate activists and from annual reports of Thamate

monthly group meetings, video and photo documentation, media and legal advocacy meetings with municipal and other related officials along with manuals scavengers apart from mobilising various Government orders, policies, guidelines, conducting training with MS workers whenever they are like during mainly evening and night, making understand the guidelines, and other official documents in local language, accessing PF, medical entitlements, etc.

THAMATE is directly involved in mobilising nearly 1,852 MS workers currently across Tumkur³⁸

Table 1: Number of contract sweepers with whom THAMATE is involved directly		
	Municipality	Gram Panchayats
Madhugiri	70	33
Pavagada	61	33
Tumkur	350	
Sira	75	

Thamate's role in Community Mobilisation and Awareness on Health Entitlements

Amongst the intervention areas where Thamate is involved directly, Madhugiri is relatively a newer area where initiatives have been going on for around four-five years. The manual scavenging community is getting organised in this area,

³⁸Ibid

whereas in other areas like Pavagada, Tumkur, the community is well organised with a strong mobilisation.³⁹

For those who have been in this profession for decades together, Thamate is involved in mobilising them and helping them form community-based monitoring groups, ensuring a fair wage (most workers don't even get paid minimum wages), job permanency, access to social security benefits like PF, ESI, health cards, and also access to personal safety equipment. **Jayamma**, a liberated manual scavenger and leader of one of the Community Based Monitoring Groups (CBMG) reflects that she started participating in the Thamate Community meetings in 2011 and the meetings inspired her to participate more in the meetings and be aware of their rights. Jayamma went on to take a leadership role in the group. "Now we regularly take part in meetings with the same officials of the municipality who used to treat us like a bonded labourer previously. We organise worker meetings and also independently manage group bank accounts. We had to stand when the officials came, and then sit as a mark of respect to them. We are not scared of them now and we demand our wages without fear. This has been possible after the formation of our collective group which is the Sangha." Monthly meetings are conducted in the Sangha, to review the work and improvement and look into future planning as well set up preparatory process for organizing district level and higher level meetings and activities, she adds.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Source: Vijaya K, S (2016) Video Thamate- Towards an Awakening, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz-g0uN-axE>, Published May, 2016

Muthyalappa who belongs to Madiga (Dalit) community, from Pavagada town of Tumkur district and is another liberated manual scavenger outlines the strategic approach of Thamate through his story. Muthyalappa illustrates “I dropped out of school when I was in class seven. I am the sole breadwinner in the family comprising of five including aged parents and two sisters. After dropping from school in 2002, I pursued my father’s occupation that of a contract sweeper and since then shouldered the responsibility of taking care of my family. As a contract sweeper I earned a salary of Rs.900 to 1200 per month. This amount was very less to meet my family needs and I didn’t know of any other means to earn additional income as this was the only work I had seen my family doing. To add on extra income I started pursuing manual scavenging work which made my monthly income nearly Rs.2000. Though this provided some monetary relief to us but I felt ashamed of this occupation when I met my peers and classmates. During 2010-11 a Thamate, started an intervention with contract sweepers and I learnt about different rights and significance of the collectivization. Thamate organized a two days residential training program for all 34 contract sweepers at Tumkur. It was for the first time that such a residential program for sweepers was organized. The theme of the training was contract sweepers living rights and alternative employment and this training was an eye opener for us.”⁴¹

Motivated by the training conducted by Thamate, Muthyalappa began to conduct several meetings to collectivise manual scavengers and formed a community based monitoring group (CBMG). Muthyalappa took on the

⁴¹ Source : Vijaya K, S (2016) Video Thamate- Towards an Awakening, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz-gOuN-axE>, and discussion with Muthyalappa in Tumkur

leadership of the group and participated in several trainings and meetings with Municipality officials. Muthalappa became the first point person for mobilizing other sweepers in Pavagada municipality area and he made efforts to exhort his co-workers to participate in meetings and residential trainings. Encouraged with the trainings, and with enhanced capacities, he left manual scavenging and pursued an alternative job of selling waste ground nut powder. He started reaping a profit of nearly Rs.6000 per month and also continues with the job of contract sweeping. As a change maker and leader Muthyalappa managed to exhort 34 scavengers to leave this menial work. Apart from being a change maker and a leader he is also the member of SafaiKarmachariKavaulSamithi (SKSS) – a collective of SafaiKaramcharis unions, who are working at the community base, with municipality and conducts investigations into every SafaiKarmachari or under-ground drainage worker deaths) and represented in UNDP National round table discussion in 2012 at New Delhi.

Siddhagangaiah who has been involved with Thamate since 2006, outlines, Thamate is actively engaged in creating awareness on health and entitlements and monitoring of public health system. Between 2007 and 2009 Thamate actively participated in community monitoring and planning component, which was part of the National Rural Health Mission (a flagship program of Government of India). Under this program community monitoring in health in total of 160 villages in Tumkur district was conducted by Thamate and Thamate was involved in monitoring 66 Primary Health Centres (PHCs). The team of Thamate involving the manual scavenging community members was trained and surveyed the PHCs and documented the situation there. Various gaps were identified in the process and these were brought to government's notice, and advocacy was done to ensure that the facilities in the 160 PHCs improve. Besides this Thamate has been

involved in conducting functionality and implementation of Indian Public Health Standard (PPHS) and different Rapid Assessment of PHC, Taluk hospitals, sub-centres at Pavagada, Madugiri and Tumkur.” He adds that during one to one close interaction with MS community workers and through surveys conducted on the health situation of the MS community at Pavagada, Madugiri, Tumkur, different health problems, respiratory issues, cough, fever, skin problems of the workers have surfaced following which Thamate has been organising free medical camps at Pavagada, YNH, Madugiri wherein manual scavengers get treatment and medical care. Following the advocacy process Madiga community women have also got health entitlements under different health schemes and benefits such as that of JSY, Madilu kits, prasuthiarike, Bhagyalaxmi bands, immunization and other facilities.

Oblaesh highlights that the MS community and Dalit women suffer from serious health problems and men too have health problems. They cannot afford to go to big hospitals; neither do they want to avail the services in the public health system. They neglect their health issues largely due to discriminatory attitude of the service providers and also absence from work means loss of wages especially for contract workers; therefore they largely refrain from seeking healthcare or rely on local private practitioners. Thamate identifies people with serious health issues and they are mobilised to seek healthcare hospital and it is ensured that they meet the appropriate service providers. It is ensured that the patients discuss everything with the doctor and share all information about their health problem. From the service providers front also it is ensured through advocacy and continuous engagement that they provide treatment including all medicines. Thamate also supports their referral to Taluk, district hospitals and other hospitals in Bangalore.

Testimonies are collated and discussed in public hearings how MS community members are turned away by health providers, or expected to pay informal fees for the services, and instances of abusive treatment are also documented.

Working Draft

Box2 : Photostory initiative helps to negotiate for rights of Gangamma

Thamate has been conducting fact findings on denials of health care and health entitlements among marginalised manual scavenger community. With the use of ICTs for social accountability initiative, Photostories were documented and shown as evidence of neglect of health services and denial of health rights of marginalised women. The photostory of 50 year old B. Gangamma from Tumkur district was showcased to the civic body authorities where she is working as a contract work and involved in cleaning and maintaining toilets without any protective gear thus violating her dignity and health rights which increases her vulnerability to disease and injuries. This reflects the lax attitude of municipal authorities towards such workers especially women contract workers, who face the triple burden of caste, gender and occupation-related violations. She was not provided any sick leave, or financial support by the civic body authorities for a surgery to be undertaken for a gynecological problem and the public health service providers refused to conduct her surgery. After sustained advocacy with use of Photostory, the concerned municipality where she works has had taken cognizance of her application for refund of the surgery cost undertaken in a private hospital with 22.10% allocations. Gangamma will get the refund soon.

Inspired by the success of photostory of Gangamma, other manual scavenging workers have come forward to undergo the pre-medical checkups and have started negotiating for their health rights. The Local government general hospital officials have also assured that the medical treatment issues of manual scavenging community will be will the priority now.

Breaking the Cycle of Manual Scavenging through Bheemshale and Youth training

During the formative years, team members of Thamate learnt that there was a need of multi-pronged strategies to focus on the younger generation in order to break the cycle of the manual scavenging, thus different strategies were initiated on weaning them away from the profession as their socio-economic conditions force them to pursue the occupation of their parents. Obalesh explains that that there were instances of discrimination that the children of MS community faced in the mid-day meal programs organised in local government schools. The Sangha members pressured Block Educational Officer to respond to the situation. While the mid-day meal situation has changed, however the children of the MS community continue to face subtle forms of discrimination even if they enter schools for education; teachers do not give them enough time or attention and don't make any efforts to even to help them get better in their studies. Improving educational status of children of Manual Scavengers families is the essential step to break the vicious cycle along with providing with them opportunities of alternative employment.

Divya (19) who is one of the teachers in the after-school tuition centres (*Bheema Shale*) run for children by Thamate, describes *"The Bheema Shale helps to children to cope-up with their academics and motivate children of the MS community to go to school."* Divya who is from the Madiga community has finished health inspector's course opines, *"There is a high dropout rate among children from MS communities; the Bheemashale has been supporting the children of the MS community. The coaching centers have provided us opportunities to move ahead in education, besides introducing us to our rights as*

well boost our confidence. There is a focus also on preparing children for quality and competitive educational centres like Morarji and Navodaya schools also.”

Fourteen year old Devraj, who is a class eight student in a government residential school admitted through intervention of Thamate says, *“We are provided different facilities like bags, books, notebooks, stationery by Thamate which our parents cannot afford and in the Bheemshale students are coached and helped in difficult subjects like English and Mathematics and also supported to prepare for entrance exams. After 5th standard they help us to write exams for the government Morarji residential schools. If students are interested, they make all efforts to get us into hostels also.”*

Ramakrishna from Thamate adds, *“Many children drop out from school and loiter around. We undertake initiatives to meet parents and ask about their children and the status of their current education and the complexities being faced by them in pursuing education. Apart from rural areas, surveys to know about the school children dropout situation are also conducted in slums also to identify children and they are re- admitted to regular schools. It is ensured that we meet such children and counsel them to pursue education.”* He adds, *“Parental participation and planning meetings for their children’s education are regularly held. Parents school based meetings are held with school teachers to seek their support and make them aware of their children’s progress. Majority of parents have participated in parents meeting, they feel happy and they express their view that it is a different experience, to be involved in the education process of children.”*

Alternative learning opportunities to children of MS community are also provided in terms of summer theatre workshops,

Venkatesh team member of Thamate who has been conducting youth facilitation meetings among the MS community members illustrates, *“Thamate has initiated support to help the youth to acquire vocational training through different institutes and also help submit applications to different corporations for self-employment support. With such initiatives many youngsters have been able to enter different professions other than the demeaning manual scavenging work.”*

*Vijay Kumar from Pavagada shares, “I completed my class 10th in the village school and after that I completed two year ITI course with help of Thamate. My brother is associated with Thamate and has been attending youth mobilization meetings. He advised me to get in touch with Thamate and said they will help me attend the course. With the help and motivation from Thamate, I could complete the course.”*⁴² Mahesh from Madhugiri, reflects *“youth from the Madiga community tend to pursue the same occupation as their parents due to lack of education, employment opportunities. I have been able to move beyond the conventional occupation and am currently working as an administrative assistant.”*

Legal Intervention

Registering FIR, conducting FFT, Accessing compensation/ rehabilitation

In October 2011, 3 manual scavengers died in the Kolar Gold Field (KGF) City corporation limits in Karnataka while cleaning soak pit. Though Thamate had been peripherally involved in legal interventions earlier but with the KGF incident Thamate made its strong presence along with PUCLand

⁴² Source: Vijaya K, S (2016) Video Thamate- Towards an Awakening, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz-g0uN-axE>,

SafaiKaramchariKavaluSamithi (SKSS) in jointly conducted fact finding report, informs Obalesh. Thamate, SKKS and PUCL teams visited and conducted fact finding and got a FIR registered and demanded compensation for the family of the dead of Rs 11lakhs each. With the probe, two engineerswere arrested. The fact finding team also participated in protest organized at the hospital mortuary where the dead bodies of the workers were kept and the fact finding team also roped in the state and National SafaiKarmachari commissions to create a pressure on the erring contactors and officials. These fact finding documents reports equip Thamate to engage in evidence-based dialogue with governance institutions in order to improve the accountability of service providers.

In 2013, the government of Karnataka conducted a survey of manual scavengers, in this process the government deliberately excluded, contract Pourakarmiks and Jhadamalis (MS working in Village Panchayats). The government refused to recognize them as manual scavengers, inspite of them fitting in the legal definition of manual scavengers. They clean human waste everyday besides open defecation. Based on this Thamate got them together, to declare that they are manual scavengers. They signed notarised affidavits of self-declaration. A total of 273affidavits were submitted to the state human rights commission. The state human rights commission was requested to direct the government to recognize them as manual scavengers. Steps like Legal Petitions to different commissions; including State Human Rights Commission and launching a complaint to the Lokayukthahas been undertaken by the Manual Scavenger community under the leadership of Thamate.

We have been monitoring and analyzing various social security and social welfare programmers through utilizing RTI Thamatehas been filing RTI applications on various

information and issues related to MS and other Dalit issues. It also has initiated an influential process by submitting memorandums of application to different political entities and government functionaries like Chief Minister of Karnataka, State human Rights Commission (SHRC), State SafaiKarmachaari Commission (SSKC), Principal Secretary and Rural Development and Panchayat raj, Principal Secretary Department of Urban Development and Directorate of Municipal Administration and District Commissioner- Tumkur. For instance Siddhgangaih highlights, signature memorandum was submitted for Health Insurance and safety measures, PF benefits at Pavagada Municipality for contract workers. In that memorandum it was demanded that all MS workers should have get social security Benefits, ESI,PF, Health cards, accessing school children's scholarship under SafaiKarmachari Rehabilitation scheme. In 2013, 27 RTI applications were submitted to secure the audit reports of Tumkur district hospital, it was found out that nearly Rs.66 lakhs was misused by the hospital authorities, informs Obalesh. Along with different rights activists and civil society members, we organized a mass protest in front of DC office for demanding free and quality treatment for sweepers and MS members, he adds.

Conclusion

The story of the Thamate is that of the ongoing struggle of the manual scavenging community, the extremely marginalised section of the Dalits have waged for nearly two decades for attaining dignified life and doing away with the scrouge of manual scavenging. The case study discerns that Thamate has seen lot of gains, contributions, changes made in its journey at different levels like getting compensation for deaths of Pourakarmikas, collectivizing for health and other public services at district and state levels, increased participation in national policy level making bodies and global networks. Given an understanding that it is too simplistic to critically reflect that the gains and the changes made by Thamate still have to permeate the structural axes of marginalization the case study attempts to map the challenges that the manual

scavenging is trying to juggle for creating dignified life opportunities and break the barriers of social exclusion embedded deeply in unequal power relations and plagued by the dimensions of caste, untouchability, gender, class etc.

Working Draft