

## Manual Scavenging: Eradication and Rehabilitation

Karnataka Fellowships: K B Obalesh, Siddharth Joshi

Manual Scavenging – the practice of cleaning and removing human waste – has existed in India for a long time. Even though it was outlawed in 1993 and then again in 2013 (Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act or PEMSR), hundreds of thousands of people still engage in this activity out of necessity. These sanitation workers (Safai Karmacharis) mostly come from the lowest rungs of the age-old caste system. They face severe systemic discrimination and haven't had access to education or opportunities for employment in any other profession for generations.

In 2017 IFA started fellowship for Dr. K.B. Obalesh who is engaged in organizing these Safai Karmacharis and advocating for their rights and rehabilitation in the state of Karnataka. The number of manual scavengers in the state has been estimated to be in the range of 55,000 to 330,000 (depending on the source of information). These people have no savings, no job security, and no future. Most of them are engaged as temporary contract workers with very low wages and work in hazardous conditions. Many deaths are regularly reported as a result of their unsafe work conditions. Two additional Fellowships were subsequently provided to expand this work. One of them, Padma M was recently granted support by another organization.

### **The group follows a multipronged approach: -**

- Creating awareness of PEMSR amongst the public as well as amongst those still engaged in this practice
- Helping the manual scavengers obtain financial and other benefits
- Helping them obtain alternative employment

They work through the community based unregistered platform, **Safaikarmachari Kavalu Samithi and Thamate**, a registered organization that provided administrative support and mobilizes information and resources.

### **2022-23 Update**

Presently, they have presence in 22 Karnataka districts but are working most intensely in 14 districts (7 more than last year). In 2022, a total of 1905 new manual scavengers were identified for rehabilitation.

### **Awareness Building:**

In January, 2022, Govt of Karnataka formed a state level manual scavengers survey committee and nominated Dr. Obalesh as a member at state level for giving orientation on standard operating procedures for survey committee members and officials.



**Mass Awareness program on PEMSR ACT 2013**



**July 1st Indefinite protest in front of the district collectors' office**

### **Organizing:**

18 new Community Based Monitoring Groups (CBMG) were formed from the districts of Kolar, Tumkur and Bengaluru rural district. 130 new SK/MS members were given orientation on PEMSR ACT and rehabilitation entitlements.

### **Alternative Employment Model:**

In Kolar district, 10 rural manual scavengers received interest free loans from the Small-Scale Sustainable Infrastructure Development Fund to start employment in animal husbandry, small business, selling vegetables, etc. The loans are already being repaid.

### **Direct Benefits:**

- 450 applications were submitted to Karnataka Safaikarmachari Development corporation for alternative employment loans of which 234 got sanctioned for Rs.50, 000/ each for **Total benefit of Rs. 1.17,00000 in Tumkur district only**

### **Other funding sources:**

In 2022, Thamate garnered support from the Azim Premji Foundation to the tune of Rs. 2.5 Crores (over 5 years). This has allowed them to open an office in Bengaluru and increase the activity on behalf of the Safai Karmacharis. In 2023 they are also planning to distribute 350 – 400 bags of rations and 1500 books to school children through funds raised from local sources.



**350 school bags Distributed for Bheema Shales children**



**Obalesh with Karnataka Chief Minister and other ministers**

**Looking ahead:**

- The group plans to continue the rehabilitation of manual scavengers (plan to rehabilitate 300 MS in 2023).
- They plan to register a PIL in the Supreme Court for non-compliance of the PEMSR Act with the help of Center for Policy Research, Bangalore.
- They plan to conduct an informal sanitation workers survey with the support of Safaikarmachari commission, Govt of Karnataka in collaboration with National Law school of University Bangalore
- IFA is planning to support one more fellowship for these activities in another state (most likely Tamil Nadu) in order to expand our support of Dalit Empowerment

*-- IFA Liaison: Subhash Karkare*

**Empowering Domestic Workers in Kanpur, UP**  
Fellowship: Meenu Sur

Meenu Sur is one of our newer IFA Fellows with an extensive background in the Social Services sector and has worked on many projects in Uttar Pradesh for the past 30 years.

**She is the Founder and General Secretary of the Gharelu Mahila Kamgar (domestic women workers) Union, the largest union in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and as such has made great strides in advocating for the rights of unorganized workers in Kanpur. Main goals are to ensure that they receive at least a minimum wage and also benefits such as paid leave.**



**Her work has benefitted about 15,000 members, the majority of them women from the Dalit and other marginalized communities.** A large part of this work is to get these workers registered with Kanpur’s Labor Department. They get ID cards and are ensured that in the event of death, the surviving family get substantial monetary compensation from the UP Government. Another part of Meenu Sur’s work is ensuring that the Right to Education (RTE) Act is properly enforced. This Act aims to provide accessible, free, and mandatory education to all children. **It includes a mandate that calls for 25% of seats in private schools to be reserved for students from disadvantaged and weaker sections of society.** It also mandates a Rs. 5000 deposit to the account of every student comprising the 25% to cover the cost of books, uniforms, tuition, and supplies. Unfortunately, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP Government has not remitted the Rs. 5000 for the last three years despite Rs. 350 crores being available to the government. As a result, families are being forced to take loans to send their children to school. Meenu Sur is raising demands, with the support of union members, to get these funds released. COVID times also resulted in a switch to online learning and therefore Meenu Sur has put in significant efforts to advocate that all students in Kanpur are allotted smartphones.



**Representation by Meenu Sur at the Education Ministry in Lucknow to for the 3-year worth of funds to deserving students not remitted due to COVID-19.**



**Meenu Sur holding monthly meetings for the Gharelu Mahila Kamgar Union.**

*-- IFA Liaison: Sonali Saxena*