

CONCLAVE

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY OF SANITATION WORKERS IN INDIA



CREA WORKS
ON GBV, SEXUAL
HEALTH RIGHTS

ENGAGEMENT IS WITH
STRUCTURALLY EXCLUDED
COMMUNITIES - WOMEN,
PERSONS WITH DISABILITY,
TRANSGENDER ETC

IIHS FOCUSES ON
VULNERABLE SANITATION
WORKERS, ADVOCATING FOR
THEIR RIGHT TO EQUAL PAY,
GENDER-FRIENDLY
INFRASTRUCTURE, AND
GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL
MECHANISMS.

IIHS'S ENGAGEMENT
ENCOMPASS ENSURING
ACCESS OF SOCIAL SECURITY,
ENHANCED OCCUPATIONAL
SAFETY

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
IS DRIVEN BY
COMPENSATION
RATHER THAN
PREVENTION

MORE EVIDENCE
IS NEEDED ON
MATERNITY,
GENDER & CASTE
INTERSECTION

WE ARE LOOKING
AT SANITATION
FROM A
FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVES

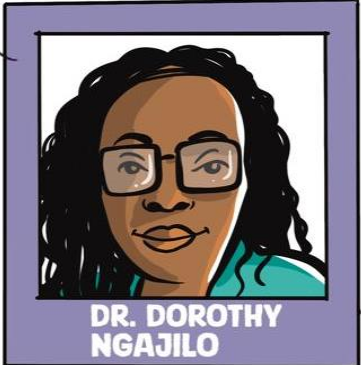
The Conclave on **Occupational Health of Sanitation Workers in India** was organized by Crea with the support of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS). The conclave aimed to apply an intersectional lens to bring caste, gender, disability and other perspectives into the discourse while discussing and highlighting the pressing health concerns of sanitation workers.

The conclave brought together experts, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to discuss the critical issues surrounding the health and safety of sanitation workers.

Workplaces have a critical role in protecting and promoting the health and well-being of workers. What are the key Insights and practical interventions, based on WHO and ILO recommendations for creating healthy, safe, and resilient workplaces that support the overall well-being of workers in an ever-changing world? How do these international guidelines address the occupational health of sanitation workers?

HEALTHY, SAFE, AND RESILIENCE WORKPLACE FOR ALL

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK IS A HUMAN RIGHT



A GOOD WORKING CONDITION LEADS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

1.9 MILLION WORKERS DIE EVERY YEAR DUE TO VARIOUS DISEASES



WORK RELATED NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE HAVE MAJOR IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND WELL-BEING

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES POSE HUGE RISK TO WORKERS' WELL-BEING

CLIMATE CHANGE HAS ALSO LED TO VARIOUS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ISSUE



JUST A FAVORABLE CONDITION FOR WORK COULD GO A LONG WAY

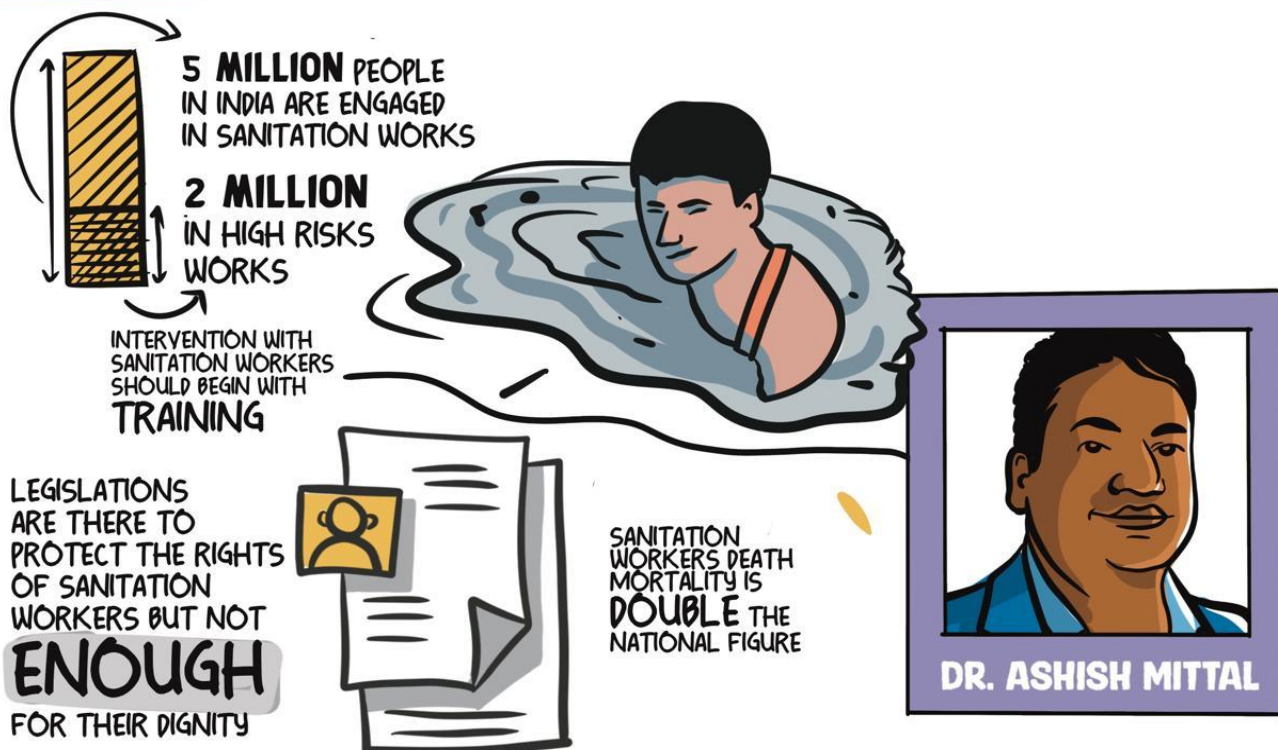
INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO WORKPLACE HEALTH BENEFITS EVERYONE



PROMOTING WELL BEING PROMOTES GROSS DOMESTIC HAPPINESS

Occupational safety and health (OSH) of sanitation workers is an emerging concern for policymakers and practitioners. While the OSH field has historical roots dating back to the industrial revolution, sanitation workers in India seem to be overlooked in these critical discussions. Despite multiple legal frameworks inspired by the Constitution of India, the absence of focused OSH measures for sanitation workers begs the question: What are the consequences of excluding them from this vital discourse?

HEALTHY, SAFE, AND RESILIENCE WORKPLACE FOR ALL



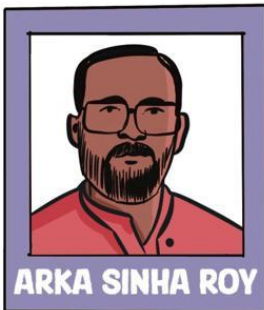
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH OF SANITATION WORKERS

DALITS ARE TRAPPED IN SANITATION JOBS DUE TO STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, WHILE GOVERNANCE, UNDER NEOLIBERAL AGENDAS, SHOWS 'SOCIAL NAUSEA.'



IN THE LAST 31 YEARS, 1,247 SANITATION WORKERS HAVE DIED ON THE JOB.

innovations



ARKA SINHA ROY

*FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS FOR URBAN LOCAL BODIES IN ADOPTING SAFETY TOOLS RESULT IN INADEQUATE PROTECTION FOR SANITATION WORKERS.

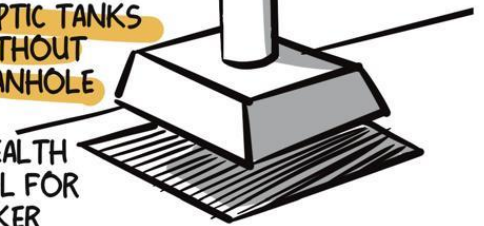
NON LEACHING SEPTIC TANKS WITHOUT MANHOLE

FUTURE:

DEVELOPING AN OSH MANUAL FOR SANITATION WORKERS



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SCREENING IS VITAL FOR SANITATION WORKER SAFETY.



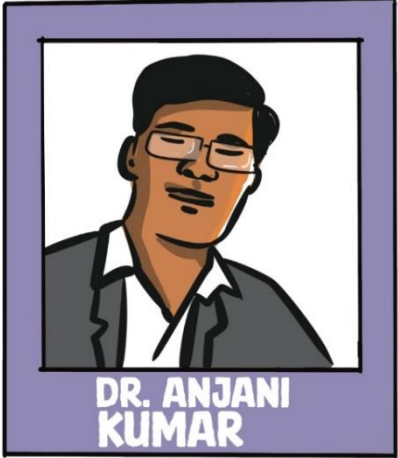
What happens when a sanitation worker falls into or gets trapped inside a septic tank or sewage system? Why do these accidents often claim multiple lives? Understanding the behaviour of toxic gases in confined spaces like septic tanks and sewers is crucial to ensuring worker safety. These confined environments pose unique occupational hazards, and safeguarding sanitation workers begins with knowing the risks and preventive measures essential to their well-being.

OHS IN SANITATION WORK

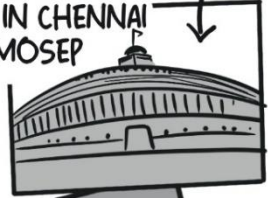


HAZARDS ARE INNATE TO WORK!

WORK  HAZARD

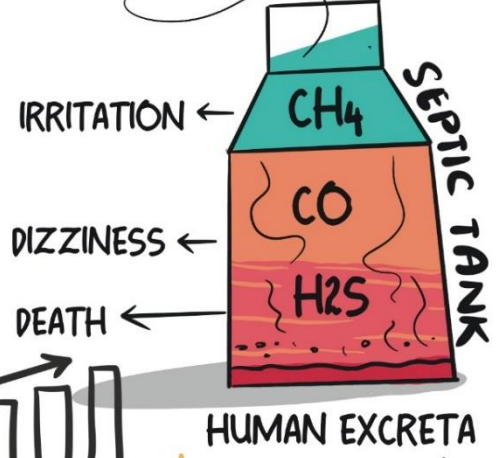
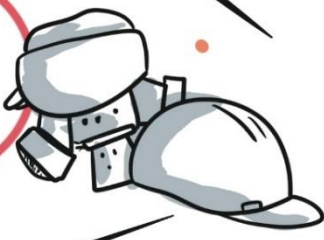


TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS HAVE COME UP IN CHENNAI WITH HOMOSEP ATOM.



ALREADY **TEN DEATHS** WHILE THE ISSUE OF SANITATION WORKERS IS BEING DISCUSSED IN THE PARLIAMENT IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS.

BUT DEATHS CAN BE HIGHER THAN THE AVAILABLE DATA



DEATH STATISTICS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

IMPLEMENTING **SIMPLE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS** CAN BE LIFE SAVING



What are the experiences and perspectives of sanitation workers regarding workplace hazards and risks, and the availability of support systems? How do sanitation workers define and perceive their own occupational health? Do these perspectives differ from the data available in existing research or official reports?

EVERYDAY'S HAZARDOUS RISKS ?



KALPANA SHARMA



SANTOSH

I EARN AROUND
RS. **8000**
PER MONTH

WE DO FACE
UNTOUCHABILITY
ISSUES EACH DAY

● MY SUPERVISOR
STEAL RS.1000/-
AS COMMISSION
FROM ME.

● **SADDEST PART TODAY IS**
EVEN AFTER SEVENTY FIVE
YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE WE
ARE STILL TRYING TO FIND
SOLUTIONS TO THIS ISSUE



RAJESH

● FOR DOOR TO
DOOR COLLECTION
I GET RS.20 ONLY
AS A TIP



VICKY



BARU

NOT SURE

● ITS A
CONTRACTUAL-
JOB WITH NO
GURANTEE, ANYTIME
THEY CAN FIRE US



ARAVALI

● PEOPLE
DONT SEGREGATE
THE WASTE AT THEIR
HOMES, WHICH IS AN
ISSUE

TRICHY HAS

400 TOILET,
MANY ARE MANAGED
BY WOMEN SHG

● GOVERNMENT
SHOULD SUPPORT
THE INFORMAL
WORKERS WITH
PPE KIT TOO AT
SUBSIDISED RATES.



**SANITATION
WORKERS
VOICE**

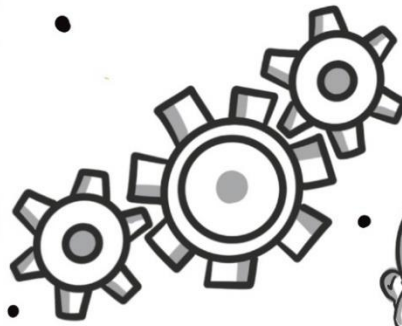
Sanitation workers often experience joint and muscle pain that worsens over time, potentially leading to long-term disabilities. Lifting heavy loads or working in awkward postures are frequent causes, yet the connection between these activities and cumulative injuries remains underexplored. Can AI technology assist sanitation workers and supervisors by providing real-time alerts when postures or loads exceed safe thresholds, thereby preventing long-term injuries?

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IMPACT

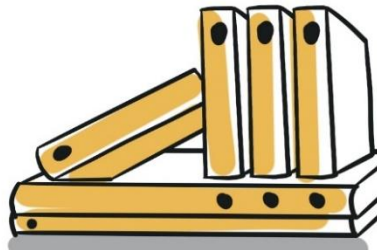


DR. NIKHIL BUGALIA

VIRTUAL REALITY
DOES SPEED UP THE ENTIRE
RESEARCH PROCESS NOW.



TECH AND DATA
BASED RESEARCH
SHOULD ALSO
CONNECT TO
REALITY



MUSCULOSKELETAL
DISORDERS STILL NEED
SPACE IN EXISTING
LITERATURES AND
POLICIES

WE ARE USING
**COMPUTER
IMAGING**
TO IDENTIFYING
PHYSICAL
HAZARDS
(RISK POSTURES)



Our
Study
Shows

BACKPAIN
WAS THE BIGGEST
CONCERN AMONG
THE SANITATION
WORKERS

WAY FORWARD

WE NEED
TO MODIFY
WORK
PROCESS

WE ARE
USING AI AS
**SCALABLE
TECHNOLOGY**
TO ASSESS RISKS



WORK SAMPLE
TO IDENTIFY HIGH
RISK FACTORS

Discussions on the occupational safety of sanitation workers frequently focus on personal protective equipment (PPE). However, while policymakers often criticize workers for not adhering to PPE guidelines, questions remain about the appropriateness of the PPE itself. Are sanitation workers using gear designed for them, or simply adapted from other industries? Are these devices adequately tested with worker input? Cultural factors also play a role in determining PPE adoption. Addressing these concerns is crucial to reducing hazards and ensuring workers use equipment that truly protects them.

PPE & SAFETY OF SANITATION WORKERS



We need to ^{move}
**FROM
BLAME
TO CLAIM**



LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON WORKERS IS A MAJOR REASON FOR THE LOW ACCEPTANCE OF PPE.

SYSTEMIC APPROACHES HELP ANALYZE AND IMPROVE SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND PPE FOR SANITATION WORKERS



WHO
WILL TEACH US THAT WE ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO DISPOSE SANITARY PADS OR CIGARETTE BUDS IN TOILET ??

PPE CANT SOLVE ISSUES WITH SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

1. GLOVES
2. MASK
3. GOOGLES
4. BOOTS
5. REFLECTIVE JACKET
6. HEADBANDS

PPE KIT RANKING



What are the different existing policies and institutions in place in different states for OSH, and what do the different governance structures propose in terms of required actions and recommendations? Is there a need for a comprehensive OHS policy specifically for sanitation workers, or integrating these in existing national policies? How should this process be initiated, and which ministries should be involved, especially for the informal sector.



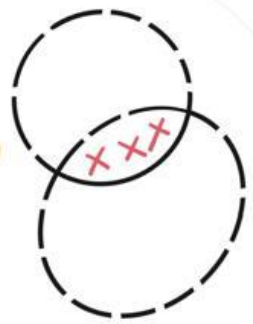
WE NEED MORE COLLECTIVES OF SANITATION WORKERS

POLICIES MEANT FOR POOR ARE NOT REACHING THEM

PROBLEMS WILL ONLY BE SOLVED THROUGH PROACTIVE AND CONSISTENT GOVERNMENT ACTION

WE SEE POLICIES AND LAWS FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS OF THE ELITE

CONVERGENCE IS THE **BIGGEST** ISSUE SO FAR



PPE'S ACCEPTANCE IS STILL YET TO BE THERE

BUT BUDGET ALLOCATION AT ULB IS THERE FOR PPE AND ALSO FOR TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

ITS TIME AWARENESS SHOULD BE REFLECTED INTO **ACTIONS**



RECYCLING IS A BIG INDUSTRY & NEW PRIVATE SECTOR PLAYERS ARE JOINING IN



NNILADRI CHAKRABORTI



CHINMAYI MALHARI NAIK



XERXES RAO



ARWA BHARMAL



VR RAMAN

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY MECHANISM

TO ENSURE OCCUPATION HEALTH OF WORKERS



Sanitation workers experience layered vulnerabilities based on their social positions and employment status—whether permanent, casual, or daily wage—further complicates their well-being. How does the existing mental health services in India respond to the health needs of sanitation workers? Reflections on how the intersection of caste, gender, and disability intensifies the mental health challenges faced by sanitation workers and restricts their access to healthcare services.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELBEING

WOMEN
SANITATION WORKERS
FACE SEVERE
DISCRIMINATION
DUE TO CASTE,
GENDER,
AND POVERTY



MENTAL HEALTH
PRACTICE IS BLIND
TO CASTE BASED
**STRUCTURAL
OPPRESSION**

- VIEW MENTAL HEALTH AS A **STRUCTURAL ISSUE**; SUFFERING REFLECTS POWER DYNAMICS.

WE MUST
ADDRESS

THE STIGMA, EMOTIONAL
VIOLENCE, AND
MALNUTRITION ENDURED BY
SANITATION WORKERS AND
THEIR CHILDREN



DEVELOP
CULTURALLY
SENSITIVE PRACTICES
BY EXPLORING
SANITATION
WORKERS' VIEWS ON
STRESS AND ILLNESS.

THE SWACHH BHARAT
MISSION **FAILED**
TO ADDRESS THE
CASTE-BASED LABOR



**BRINELLE
D'SOUZA**

**RECOGNITION OF
INJUSTICE AND
COLLECTIVE
RESISTANCE**
ARE NEEDED
TO ADDRESS
LABOR AND
HEALTH
RIGHTS FOR
SANITATION
WORKERS.

MANY ENTER
SANITATION
WORK BECAUSE OF
**SYSTEMIC
FACTORS**

**INTERVENTIONS
MUST ADDRESS
STIGMA AND
THE LACK
OF AGENCY
IN SANITATION
WORK.**

CHILDREN OF
SANITATION WORKERS
FACE EARLY
RESPONSIBILITIES,
TRAUMA, AND
DISCRIMINATION,
AFFECTING THEIR
EDUCATION AND
WELL-BEING.



MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING



THERE IS A **STRONG NEED** TO LOOK AT THE ISSUES OF SANITATION WORKERS THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS



ARE WE

LOOKING AT THE ISSUE OF SANITATION WORKERS AS INDIVIDUALS?

THEY HAVE **PERSONAL CHALLENGES** AT THE BACKDROP OF CASTE AND RELIGION

INCLUSIVE WASH MEANS IT MUST INCLUDE SANITATION WORKERS

SANITATION WORKERS WITH LACK OF MOBILITY DUE TO INJURY AT WORK LEADS TO LONG TERM TRAUMA

BREAKING THE SILOS IS THE KEY NOW

SANITATION WORKERS ARE ALSO **EXCLUDED** FROM EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN WASH

GENDER ROLES, BIOLOGICAL CHANGES WITHOUT ACCESS TO SIMPLE WASH FACILITIES **LEAD TO**

STRESS

WE NEED TO CONSIDER SANITATION WORKERS' INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND FULLY THEIR MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Case studies from regions as diverse as Kashmir to Tamil Nadu reveal the systemic cycle of caste-based oppression, intertwined with patriarchal structures, which disproportionately impacts Dalit women—particularly those engaged in scavenging—along with their health and well-being.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



BHASHA SINGH

THE SWACHH BHARAT AND NAMASTE SCHEMES **DENY** THE CASTE SYSTEM'S ROLE ON SANITATION WORK

RAILWAYS - CONTINUED PRACTICE OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

MANUAL SCAVENGING IMPOSES SEVERE STIGMA & TRAUMA, PARTICULARLY ON WOMEN



DENIAL INCREASES STIGMA AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG SANITATION WORKERS.



PERSONAL STORIES

HIGHLIGHT ONGOING STRUGGLES AND ASPIRATIONS



SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY, EXACERBATES THE CASTE-BASED **OPPRESSION**

ONCE PEOPLE KNOW THEIR WORK, **DISCRIMINATION RISES**, DEEPENING THEIR STRESS AND TRAUMA



DESPITE SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION, WOMEN SANITATION WORKERS, HAVE SHOWN REMARKABLE

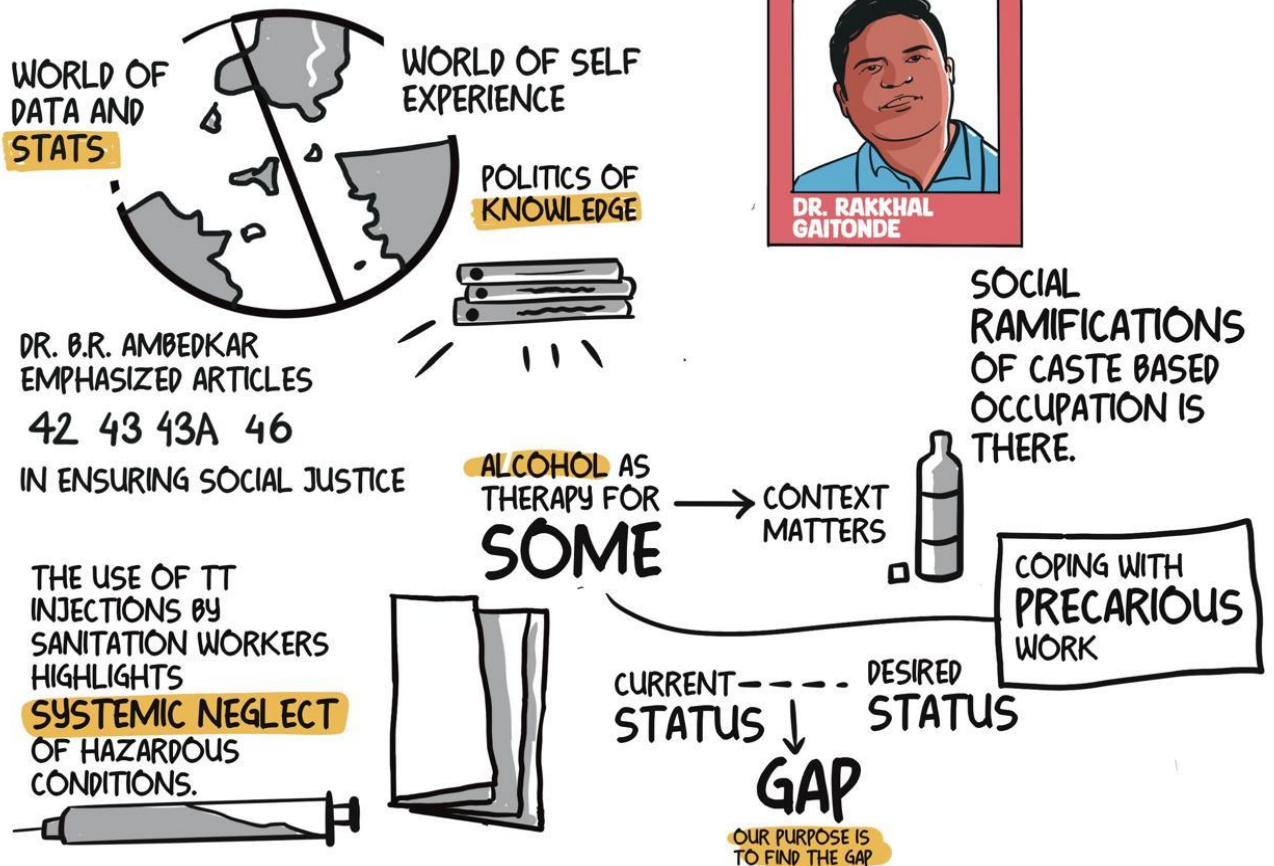
RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE,

ADVOCATING FOR THEIR RIGHTS



The research and data sanitation workers have been using a narrow focus on toxins and ergonomics, neglecting the multi-dimensional and multi-level conceptualization of risk. Can issues such as alcohol consumption and the irrational use of multiple tetanus injections be fully understood without considering the broader context of workers' lives and the socio-economic and political vulnerabilities that drive these high-risk health behaviours?

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH OF SANITATION WORKERS



How has the intersections of gender, work and health covered in feminist research and theory in India? What is the role of trade unions in advocating for the rights of women in informal, stigmatized occupations such as sanitation work, surrogacy, or commercial sex, where there is a large female workforce. Can these trade unions, traditionally focused on formal labor, evolve to better represent the needs and interests of women in these informal, marginalized sectors.

WOMEN, WORK AND HEALTH



**PADMIINI
SWAMINATHAN**

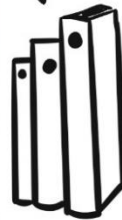
LABOUR
ADMINISTRATION IS **CRITICAL** FOR
THE ENTIRE
SECTOR

NATIONAL LABOUR
COMMISSION 2022

90%

OF WORKERS
IN INDIA ARE
EMPLOYED IN
THE **INFORMAL**
SECTOR

POLITICALLY
AFFILIATED TRADE
UNIONS **PRIORITIZE**
PERMANENT
WORKERS' ISSUES,
FOCUSING MOSTLY
ON MEN.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE
PRESENT IN MANY OFFICIAL
GOVERNMENT REPORTS AND
HAVE BEEN WAITING TO BE
IMPLEMENTED FOR YEARS

CLEAN
KERELA
MISSION

MUNICIPALITIES CLAIM
THAT THEY AND THE
WOMEN HAD A
WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS IN
SPITE OF LOW WAGES.

LABOUR CODES

PRIORITIZES EMPLOYER'S
INTEREST MAKING
SANITATION WORKERS
EVEN MORE VULNERABLE

Empowerment REALLY?

● ALTHOUGH WOMEN ARE HIGH
IN NUMBERS, THEY ARE
OFTEN SEEN AS PART OF THE
INFORMAL SECTOR, EVEN
WITHIN FORMAL SECTORS



A THRESHOLD OF
250
WORKERS FOR
INSTITUTING A SAFETY
COMMITTEE AT THE
WORKPLACE IS TRULY
INADEQUATE

How do various movements in India— health, caste, and labor movements—contribute to advocating for the rights and well-being of sanitation workers? In what ways do these movements intersect, and how do they address the unique challenges faced by workers, particularly those from structurally excluded communities (based on gender or caste), and advocate for their health, working conditions, and access to social justice?

INTERMOVEMENT DIALOGUE



MUMBAI DONT
HAVE A
SANITATION POICY

WE DONT SEE
MINDSETS OF THE
STATE TO ELIMINATE
MANUAL SCAVENGING

HAZARDOUS
CLEANING IS
NOT PROHIBITED

SPACE FOR
RAISING ISSUES
ARE **SHRIKING**
IN REFERENCE TO
AZAD MAIDAN

OUR FIGHT IS
AGAINST
CONTRACTS &
ALSO ABOUT MAKING
PEOPLE AWARE OF
THEIR RIGHTS.

DISSENT IS BEING
PENALISED
MORE THAN EVER
BEFORE

INFORMALISATION
OF LABOUR IS
INCREASING

SALARY SHOULD
NOT BE CALLED AS
HONORARIUM

SANITARY WORKERS
FACE VASTLY UNEQUAL
WORKING CONDITIONS.

*There are lies
There are bigger lies
and there are statistics
- Mark Twain*



About the Visual Notes and Further Information

These Visual Notes were developed with the dedicated support of the key facilitators and organizers, along with active input from participants and subject matter experts, during the "Occupational Health and Safety of Sanitation Workers in India" conclave, held on 1st & 2nd August, 2024, in Mumbai, India. Indrajit Sinha (WAYCo.), an award-winning visual communication specialist, led the live creation of these notes, but it was the organizers' strategic direction and insights that were instrumental in shaping the documentation throughout the event.

Their leadership ensured that the critical issues facing sanitation workers were thoughtfully captured, and that the Visual Notes reflected the shared understanding of the discussions and the urgent need for enhanced health and safety protocols in this vital sector.

For more information or a comprehensive report of the conclave, please contact Soumya Tiwari at soumya.tiwari@creaworld.org (CREA) or Arka Roy at arka.roy@iihs.ac.in (IIHS).

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