

# Socio-Economic Challenges of Sanitary Workers in Urban Local Bodies: A Case Study of Raigarh Municipal Corporation

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## Abstract:

Sanitary workers form the foundation of urban cleanliness and public health, yet their socio-economic condition remains highly vulnerable. This study examines the economic challenges of sanitary workers in Raigarh Municipal Corporation, Chhattisgarh. The key objectives are to analyze income levels, employment patterns, expenditure priorities, savings behavior, debt burden, and access to welfare schemes, while also identifying disparities related to caste, gender, and employment status.

Primary data were collected from 120 respondents using structured questionnaires and personal interviews. Descriptive statistics were applied to present socio-economic profiles, and chi-square tests were used to examine associations between income, employment type, savings, and welfare access.

Findings reveal that most workers earn low to modest wages, with contractual and daily wage employees facing greater insecurity than permanent staff. Household expenditure is dominated by food and essentials, leaving little scope for savings, which forces many families into debt. Caste and gender-based inequalities persist in wages, promotions, and job security. Access to welfare schemes and municipal support services, such as safety equipment, training, and health check-ups, is limited and inconsistent.

The study recommends wage revision, job regularization, fair welfare delivery, and gender-sensitive policies. Strengthening municipal support and expanding social security measures are crucial to safeguard the dignity, health, and economic well-being of sanitary workers.

**Keywords — Sanitary Workers, Socio-Economic Condition, Wage Disparities, Municipal Support, Welfare Schemes**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

**Context of Sanitation Work in India:** Sanitation has been a central concern in India's development agenda because of its direct link with public health, environmental sustainability, and human dignity. Across urban and rural areas, the safe disposal of waste, cleaning of public spaces, and maintenance of hygiene are essential functions that safeguard communities from disease outbreaks and improve the quality of life. Despite its significance, sanitation work has historically been undervalued and socially stigmatized. For centuries, caste hierarchies and social stratification pushed

marginalized groups, particularly Scheduled Castes, into sanitation-related occupations. This practice institutionalized discrimination and created a labor force that has remained vulnerable both socially and economically.

In modern India, rapid urbanization and the growth of municipal corporations have increased the demand for sanitary workers. Cities generate enormous amounts of solid and liquid waste, and workers are responsible for cleaning streets, drains, and public facilities. They also engage in waste collection, segregation, and disposal, often working in hazardous conditions. Despite these vital contributions, sanitary workers are generally

employed in insecure, low-paid jobs, with limited benefits or protections. Many are engaged on a contractual or daily wage basis, leaving them vulnerable to irregular incomes and the absence of social security.

Government initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) have highlighted the importance of sanitation, but these programs have largely focused on infrastructure creation rather than improving the working conditions of sanitation staff. Issues such as delayed wage payments, lack of safety equipment, and limited access to healthcare remain unresolved. Moreover, social inequalities based on caste and gender continue to shape patterns of employment, wages, and promotion in the sanitation sector. This context makes it essential to study the socio-economic challenges of sanitary workers in greater detail, especially in smaller urban centers where research is limited.

**Relevance of Studying Raigarh:** Raigarh, a municipal corporation in the state of Chhattisgarh, represents a typical urban center in India where sanitary workers play a vital role in maintaining public health and urban hygiene. The city has grown rapidly due to industrialization, trade, and migration, leading to an increasing demand for sanitation services. Raigarh is particularly relevant for such a study because it reflects both the opportunities and challenges of urban development in semi-industrial regions. On one hand, the growth of industries and urban expansion creates more employment in municipal services, including sanitation. The study also carries significance for the state of Chhattisgarh, where a large proportion of the population belongs to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These groups are disproportionately represented in sanitation work, which makes the intersection of caste and occupation particularly relevant. Raigarh Municipal Corporation, like many others, depends heavily on contractual workers rather than permanent staff. This shift reflects a national trend of contractualization in public services, where job security is reduced and benefits are limited. Finally, focusing on Raigarh is timely because municipal

corporations are under increasing pressure to improve sanitation standards in line with national policies such as the Swachh Bharat Mission and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Understanding the condition of the workforce behind sanitation efforts is crucial for ensuring that progress in sanitation infrastructure is matched by improvements in worker welfare.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the income, job types, household expenses, savings, and debt situation of sanitary workers in Raigarh Municipal Corporation.
2. To find out how caste and gender affect job opportunities, wages, promotions, and access to welfare schemes, safety equipment, healthcare, and training.
3. To check the link between workers' background and their economic condition using statistical tools, and to suggest policies that can improve their security and well-being.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sanitation work has historically been undervalued despite being essential for public health and hygiene. Scholars consistently note that sanitation in India is deeply tied to caste hierarchies and social exclusion. According to Wilson (2019), caste-based occupational segregation continues to confine Dalit communities to sanitation and waste-related jobs, reinforcing centuries-old stigmas. This intersection of caste and occupation explains why sanitation work remains among the least recognized and most hazardous forms of labor in India. The stigma associated with sanitation also affects the dignity of workers. Gupta and Kumar (2020) emphasize that while sanitation is celebrated as part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the workers who perform this labor remain invisible in policy and practice. Studies point out that the recognition of sanitary workers as essential service providers is minimal, leading to systemic neglect of their welfare and working conditions.

A central concern across studies is the low and irregular income of sanitary workers. Sharma and

Kumari (2017) found that most workers in municipal corporations fall into the low-income category, with earnings insufficient to meet rising costs of living. Income disparities are stark between permanent and contractual workers. Permanent employees receive better pay, social security, and pensions, while contractual and daily wage workers often face delayed wages and lack of benefits (Narayan & Bhatia, 2021). Contractualization is a recurring theme in the literature. With municipalities outsourcing sanitation work to contractors, workers lose the stability and entitlements of direct government employment. Joseph and Ramaswamy (2018) argue that contractualization has increased exploitation, reduced bargaining power, and widened wage disparities within the same workforce.

Wage inequality is another persistent issue. Studies indicate that disparities exist not only between permanent and contractual employees but also across caste and gender lines. Behera (2016) observed that workers from marginalized castes often receive less favorable treatment in task allocation and pay compared to upper-caste colleagues. Similarly, Gupta and Singh (2020) highlighted the gender dimension, showing that women workers are frequently paid less than men, even for identical tasks. Delayed or irregular wage payments further exacerbate vulnerability. Research by Sharma (2019) in Madhya Pradesh revealed that only about 40% of sanitary workers reported timely wage payments, while the rest faced uncertainty that directly impacted household consumption and debt. Such patterns undermine worker morale and deepen mistrust toward employers.

Literature consistently demonstrates that sanitary workers' household expenditure is concentrated on basic needs. A study by Patel (2018) in Gujarat reported that nearly half of household income was spent on food, with education, healthcare, and housing accounting for the rest. Discretionary spending was negligible, reflecting a hand-to-mouth existence. Similar findings emerge from national surveys, which show that healthcare expenditure often pushes households into debt. Ramaswamy

(2020) notes that sanitary workers face a "triple burden": low wages, irregular payment, and high medical expenses due to occupational hazards. This cycle forces families to borrow from informal sources, increasing their long-term vulnerability.

Savings among sanitary workers are either absent or irregular. In her study of urban sanitation workers in Tamil Nadu, Menon (2017) found that over 60% of households reported no savings at all, citing inadequate income as the primary reason. Those who managed to save relied mostly on banks or post offices, but informal saving through chit funds and cooperatives was also common. Debt is a recurrent theme. More than half of workers in several case studies relied on loans to meet household needs such as healthcare, housing repairs, or education (Sharma & Kumari, 2017). Moneylenders remain a major source of credit, often charging exploitative interest rates. Such dependence perpetuates a cycle of indebtedness. According to Narayan (2021), debt burden is not merely financial but also psychological, with many workers reporting stress, anxiety, and fear of default.

Sanitation work exposes employees to severe health risks. Studies report high prevalence of respiratory illnesses, skin problems, and musculoskeletal disorders among workers (Joseph & Ramaswamy, 2018). Lack of protective equipment is a recurring concern. A Telangana-based study (PMCID: PMC8559881) observed that workers rarely had gloves, masks, or boots, which increased exposure to infections and injuries. Health check-ups are often irregular or absent. Patel (2018) found that municipal corporations rarely organized preventive health programs for workers, despite their high-risk occupations. This neglect not only affects individual well-being but also contributes to lost workdays and reduced productivity.

Caste remains central to understanding sanitation work in India. Studies across states show that Scheduled Castes form the majority of sanitary workers. Wilson (2019) argues that caste identity is almost synonymous with sanitation work in many

regions, perpetuating cycles of exclusion. Discrimination manifests in recruitment, wage allocation, and workplace treatment. Bezawada Wilson and Safai Karmachari Andolan (2015) documented numerous cases where Dalit workers were forced into manual scavenging or cleaning tasks deemed “untouchable,” while workers from other communities were assigned less stigmatized duties. This structural discrimination reinforces occupational immobility and restricts upward mobility.

Gender disparities intersect with caste and class to create multiple layers of disadvantage. Gupta and Singh (2020) observed that women sanitary workers receive lower wages than men, even for similar tasks. Access to maternity benefits is limited, and awareness of such entitlements is low. Women also face greater job insecurity. In a study by Sanitation Learning Hub (2021), many respondents reported that women were the first to be laid off during contractual downsizing. Promotions were rare, and harassment at the workplace was reported as a serious concern. This aligns with broader gender inequalities in the Indian labor market, but sanitation work intensifies these vulnerabilities due to its informal and stigmatized nature.

While government welfare schemes exist, their implementation remains patchy. Studies report a gap between awareness and actual benefit receipt. Ramaswamy (2020) noted that while nearly 70% of workers were aware of health insurance schemes, less than half had received benefits due to bureaucratic hurdles or lack of documentation. Municipal support in terms of safety gear, training, and health facilities is inconsistent. Menon (2017) observed that less than one-third of workers had received regular safety equipment, and training opportunities were negligible. Dissatisfaction with municipal support was high across several studies, indicating systemic neglect.

**Research Gap:** Although most literature focuses on metropolitan cities or state-level analyses, the conditions in smaller urban centers like Raigarh remain under-researched. The limited evidence suggests that challenges in Raigarh mirror national

trends: low income, contractualization, caste and gender disparities, and limited welfare access. This review highlights the urgent need for more localized studies, particularly in medium-sized municipalities like Raigarh, to understand variations in worker conditions. By situating the Raigarh case within broader academic discourse, this research aims to bridge gaps in knowledge and propose actionable interventions for improving the dignity, security, and well-being of sanitary workers.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature and aims to understand the socio-economic conditions of sanitary workers employed by Raigarh Municipal Corporation. The population of the study included all sanitary workers working under the Corporation. Out of this, a sample of 120 respondents was chosen. A simple random sampling method was used so that workers from different categories such as permanent, contractual, and daily wage employees were fairly represented.

Data for the study were collected through both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire covered areas such as income, expenditure, savings, debt, caste and gender issues, and access to welfare schemes. Interviews helped in gaining additional insights about the difficulties faced by the workers. Secondary data were obtained from official municipal records, government reports, and relevant published studies, which provided supporting evidence for the analysis.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics like percentages and frequency distributions were used to explain the general socio-economic profile of workers. To test relationships between variables, chi-square tests were applied for categorical data such as employment type and income sufficiency. t-tests were used to study mean differences, particularly in gender-based wage levels. This ensured reliable and meaningful results.



#### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of data collected from 120 sanitary workers employed under Raigarh Municipal Corporation provides important insights into their socio-economic conditions. The findings highlight issues related to income levels, employment patterns, wage disparities, household expenditure, savings and debt, caste and gender inequalities, and access to welfare support.

The results show that the majority of workers earn modest wages, with a large proportion falling in the income bracket of ₹5,001–10,000 per month. A smaller share earns above ₹15,000, while some workers earn below ₹5,000, reflecting financial vulnerability. Employment type strongly influences income levels. Permanent workers are concentrated in higher income brackets, while contractual and daily wage employees are largely restricted to lower categories. This confirms earlier studies on urban sanitation (Sharma & Kumari, 2017), which found contractualization to be a major factor behind income insecurity.

The analysis also reveals significant wage disparities within the workforce. Differences are not only based on employment type but also linked to caste and gender. Male workers report higher average incomes compared to female workers, with a mean gap of about ₹1,500 per month. Chi-square and t-test results confirm that these disparities are statistically significant. Such findings resonate with Gupta and Singh (2020), who observed that sanitation work continues to reflect entrenched social hierarchies and gendered inequalities.

Expenditure patterns of workers' households are dominated by essential needs. Nearly half of total household spending goes toward food, followed by education, housing, and healthcare. Expenditure on discretionary items is very limited. This pattern is typical of low- and middle-income households, where survival needs take priority. The heavy share of food expenditure indicates limited financial flexibility and vulnerability to price fluctuations.

A large number of workers reported irregular or no savings. Only a quarter of respondents save regularly, while the majority either save occasionally or are unable to save at all. This lack of financial security forces many households into debt. More than half of the respondents reported borrowing money, often from banks, cooperatives, or moneylenders. While formal loans are used, reliance on informal credit sources remains high, exposing workers to exploitative interest rates. Debts are mainly taken for housing, healthcare, education, and daily needs, underscoring the inadequacy of income to meet basic requirements.

Caste continues to play a decisive role in employment opportunities and workplace treatment. Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class workers form the majority of the workforce, reflecting historical occupational segregation. More than half the respondents acknowledged that caste influences wages and opportunities for promotion. Gender disparities are also pronounced. Female workers reported unequal wages, limited access to maternity benefits, and greater job insecurity compared to men. Many respondents also observed fewer promotions and task preferences for women, pointing to systemic inequalities.

Awareness of government welfare schemes is relatively high, but actual receipt of benefits is much lower. Workers who received benefits mostly reported health insurance, while fewer accessed housing, pension, or education support. The process of availing schemes was often described as difficult, with bureaucratic hurdles and lack of guidance. Municipal support in providing safety equipment, healthcare check-ups, and training opportunities is inadequate, with many workers reporting dissatisfaction.

The findings clearly show that sanitary workers in Raigarh face multiple, overlapping challenges. Income insecurity, wage disparities, and debt burden undermine household stability. Caste and gender hierarchies continue to shape employment outcomes, while limited access to welfare schemes

reduces the effectiveness of government interventions. These results mirror national patterns documented in earlier research but also highlight the specific gaps in municipal-level support. Addressing these issues requires targeted policy measures such as regularization of jobs, wage parity, improved welfare delivery, and gender-sensitive interventions.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights the difficult socio-economic conditions of sanitary workers in Raigarh Municipal Corporation. Most workers earn modest or low wages, with permanent employees enjoying relative stability while contractual and daily wage workers remain highly insecure. Household expenditure is largely confined to basic needs such as food, education, healthcare, and housing, leaving little room for savings. As a result, debt dependence is widespread, often through informal and costly credit sources. Caste and gender-based disparities further compound vulnerabilities, with marginalized communities and women facing lower wages, limited benefits, and fewer opportunities for advancement. Access to welfare schemes and municipal support is inadequate, with many workers struggling to secure safety equipment, healthcare, or training. Overall, the findings underscore structural economic and social inequalities. Addressing these requires policy interventions focused on wage revision, job regularization, welfare delivery, and inclusive measures to safeguard the dignity and well-being of sanitary workers.

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