

# ***PouraKarmikas***

## **March towards Dignified Life and Liberation**

*A Case Study on Advocacy Processes and Strategies of THAMATE  
for the Rights of Manual Scavengers in Tumkur, Karnataka (India)*

Surekha Dhaleta, K B Obalesha, E. Premdas Pinto



**ತಮಟೆ**  
Thamate, Centre for  
Rural Empowerment



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2019

Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health (COPASAH)

Centre for Health and Social Justice, Delhi

THAMATE, Centre for Rural Empowerment Tumkur, Karnataka, India

*This case study is dedicated to the members of the Manual Scavenger community and their undaunted spirit, who have catapulted themselves from the extreme margins, to march towards dignity and liberation defying invisibility and non-recognition.*



*'From now on, the 'THAMATE', the cultural instrument (drum) of the most marginalised- (Madiga Community) will be used for the empowerment of this community, not as an instrument of slavery, indignity and discrimination'*



# Foreword

The world today is becoming increasingly complex and relatively simpler development aspiration of poverty alleviation has become complicated with a whole range of concerns including economic issues, income inequalities, social issues like inclusion, and environmental issues like climate change which affect both the rich and the poor people and nations. Participation, transparency and accountability are being seen as common principles, which help to navigate the process of coming to consensus solutions. COPASAH (Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health) is a collective of practitioners who have been applying these principles in the field of health governance in different places around the world. Health care is a contested area of governance and public policy action. In many countries, especially in the Global North, it is provided through state support, whereas in many countries in the Global South, public services are in disarray and the private sector is flourishing, creating huge inequalities in access and health outcomes. 'Privatisation' and 'fee for service' are a common refrain from many development think tanks, while a case for 'universal health care' is put out by others.

While cost of care and nature of public or private provisioning continue to be matters of public debate, it is undeniable that there is a huge power asymmetry between people, especially poor people in distress and providers. This power asymmetry affects the ability of the poor to access services in their best interests. In many countries, communities have themselves come together to negotiate better health care services from the state. In these Case Studies, we wish to highlight some of these organised efforts. These case studies, describes the work of colleagues at COPASAH, outlining how they conceptualised, organised and implemented these processes, drawing upon the principles of participation, transparency and accountability.

We hope these Case Studies will serve as stories of hope and inspiration for other practitioners to adopt similar practices while we strive for better health outcomes and for health equity in our common march toward health for all.

# Authors



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**K B Obalesha** is a Human Rights Activist, engaged in eradication of manual scavenging system and campaigning for dignified sustainable alternative employment for manual scavengers. His professional work experience of more than two and half decades includes ensuring accountability at all levels – community, state, national and global, through community-based initiatives and advocacy. He is also involved in motivating and educating community, officials, and the public for implementing the Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavenging and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013. In recognition of his contribution towards eradication of manual scavenging, he has been conferred an Honorary Doctorate in Social Work, by the Global Peace University, USA (2019-20 Batch) and the Global Best Social Work Award. He is the Founder Secretary and Executive Director, of THAMATE, Center for Rural Empowerment; State convener of Safai Karmachari Kavalu Samithi-Karnataka, and Member of the State Level Monitoring Committee – PEMSR Act 2013, Govt of Karnataka (India).



**E. Premdas Pinto [Premdas]** is a Human Rights lawyer and Public Health scholar-activist, working with social justice issues of the marginalised communities in India for the last 25 years. He is one of the co-initiators and continues to be a mentor for Jagru-tha Mahila Sanghatane (JMS). His academic journey includes scholarship from eminent institutions – master's in social sciences from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, law studies in Karnataka followed by diploma in human rights from the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru and a doctorate in health care jurisprudence from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He currently works as the Director- Research and Advocacy at Centre for Health and Social Justice ([www.chsj.org](http://www.chsj.org)) and is the global secretariat coordinator for COPASAH.

# Acknowledgement

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## List of Figures, Boxes and Tables

- Box 1: Definitions related to Manual Scavenging
- Box 2: Liberated Manual Scavengers share stories of empowerment and mobilisation: Reclaiming Dignity
- Box 3: Photo story initiative helps to negotiate for rights of *Pourakarmikas* (Gangamma)
- Box 4: Some testimonies from children and teachers at *Bheemashale*
- Box 5: Rapid Assessment and Right to Information Applications (RTIs) filed
- Box 6: Components of PEMSR Act, 2013
- Box 7: Continuous struggle to prove the numbers and establish existence of MS
- Box 8: Advocacy for Sanitary Infrastructure and Protocols
- 
- Figure 1: Theory of Change of THAMATE
- Figure 2: Manual Scavenging System – Power Dimensions
- 
- Table 1: Number of MS in Karnataka: The Number Asymmetry
- Table 2: Municipalities and Gram Panchayats in which THAMATE is directly involved
- Table 3: A snapshot of the initiatives of the SKSS in getting cases registered on Manual Scavenging in Karnataka (2017-18)
- Table 4: MS identified by the state government of Karnataka
- Table 5: Protests and some Gains Chronology

# List of Abbreviations

BBMP -	Bruhath Bengaluru Mahanagre Palike
CBMG -	Community Based Monitoring Group
CBO -	Community Based Organisation
ESMA -	Essential Services Maintenance Act
GP -	Gram Panchayat
MS -	Manual Scavengers
NCDHR -	National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
NGOs -	Non Governmental Organisations
NHRC -	National Human Rights Commission
PEMSRA -	Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and the Rehabilitation Act
PIL -	Public Interest Litigation
RDPR -	Rural Development and Panchayati Raj
RTI -	Right to Information
SHRC -	State Human Rights Commission
SK -	Safai Karamchari
SKA -	Safai Karamchari Andolan
SKKS -	Safai Karamchari Kavulu Samithi
SC -	Scheduled Castes
STP -	Sewerage Treatment Plant
UGD -	Underground Drainage
ZP -	Zila Panchayat

# Glossary

BHEEMSHALES -

Education Centres run by THAMATE

DALIT -

Dalit literally means downtrodden

DHARNA -

Peaceful Demonstration as an appeal for justice

GHERAO -

An occasion when people show that they disagree with something by standing around a person in authority and not letting them leave until they agree to do what the people want

GRAM PANCHAYATS -

The lowest governance unit in rural India for a population of ten thousand people.

JATHA -

Campaign

JADAMALIS-

Manual scavengers working in Village/Gram Panchayats in Karnataka

POURAKARMIKAS -

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 including manual scavengers, sewer workers and sanitation workers

PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION (PIL)-

A provision in the Indian judicial system which allows any individual or the court itself to file a suit in a court of law to protect public interest

RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI) -

Act of the Parliament of India to provide for setting out the practical regime of the right to information for citizens

SAFAI KARAMCHARI KAVALU SAMITHI (SKSS) -

A watchdog committee of sanitation workers, conducting investigations into the atrocities committed on SKs and under-ground drainage worker deaths and violations.

SANGHA-

Collective group formed by THAMATE

Scheduled Castes (SCs) -

Are various officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged people in India

TALUKS/ TALUKAS/THALUKAS -

Group of several villages counted together for administrative purposes

ZILA PANCHAYAT -

District unit of development interventions comprising of elected members

# Executive Summary

This case study is a narrative of 'community empowerment' initiatives taken by the subaltern group of the 'Madiga' community involved in the manual scavenging work in the Southern state of Karnataka, India. THAMATE, Centre for Rural Empowerment a Community Based Organisation (CBO) founded in 2006 in Tumkur district of Karnataka, has been working for the liberation and empowerment of the Madigas and restoration of their dignity and rights. It is continuously working towards the eradication of manual scavenging and the rehabilitation of the manual scavengers. THAMATE draws its name from the distinct cultural instrument (Drum) of Madigas which was used by the community. However the hegemonic castes used this THAMATE to enforce untouchability, discrimination and slavery.

This case study brings on record the voices of the marginalised voices under the banner of THAMATE- that demand accountability and visibilisation of deaths of the manual scavengers from the governance institutions. It unfolds the multi-pronged approaches and strategies used by THAMATE at different levels – from local to national - to ensure accountability through advocacy, networking, documentation and evidence.

THAMATE has been a flag bearer of the revolution that confronts the opacity of systemic institutions that have been diluting the rights and the legal provisions pertaining to manual scavenging guaranteed through the Constitution. For the same it has used various strategies, including Public Interest Litigations (PIL) that highlight the discrepancies in implementation of the legislations and court orders, the Right to Information (RTI) Act to seek information on entitlements and policy provisions, facilitating fact finding mission in case of sewerage and manhole workers deaths and ensuring compensations for such deaths and injuries. THAMATE has been successful in opening up avenues for the younger generation by providing them education support to them and in turn, breaking the cycle of succumbing back to manual scavenging. The community too has been receptive to the struggles of THAMATE and has been vociferous in demanding access to entitlements like minimum wages, Provident Funds (PF), health care, health insurance, safety equipments etc.

This case study is also a discourse of empowered leaders and the collective platform of manual scavenging groups like Safai Karmachari Kavalu Samithi (SKSS), and how the members of THAMATE have fought to claim their space in policy advocacy at different levels.

This narrative highlights both the achievements and challenges experienced in the journey while interacting with different governance institutions. It discusses the processes which THAMATE has adopted to amplify these marginalised voices.

# Methodology

This narrative borrows from grounded theory, and adopts a qualitative research methodology. Document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with key activists and community leaders of the manual scavenging community in the reference area of THAMATE in Tumkur and in Bangalore. It draws on published and unpublished archived materials on THAMATE, annual reports of THAMATE, published documents on manual scavenging, case stories, legislation documents, informal discussions and interactions conducted with members and community leaders, Dalit rights activists and experts on rights of the manual scavenging community. It also relies on the lived narratives as shared by the members of the manual scavenging community during discussions held with them.





# Contents

Foreword	3
Authors	4
Acknowledgement	5
<b>List of Figures, Boxes and Tables</b>	<b>5</b>
List of Abbreviations	6
Glossary	7
Executive Summary	8
Methodology	9
<b>Chapter 1</b>	Larger Context of Manual Scavenging 13
	Manual Scavengers remain uncounted 15
	Banned by Legislation but continues 17
<b>Chapter 2</b>	Context of Karnataka (Tumkur) and Manual Scavenging in the state 19
	Progressive move in Karnataka to ban manual scavenging -1973 20
	New Nomenclature for Manual Scavengers: ' <i>Pourakarmika</i> ' 21
	Madigas, the Most Disadvantaged Amongst the Scheduled Castes 21
	Sadashiva Commission advocating for internal reservations for the most backward Madigas 22
	Context of Tumkur District 22
<b>Chapter 3</b>	Locating the Genesis of THAMATE: The Story of THAMATE 25
	Collectivisation of Manual Scavengers in Tumkur 26
	Context of Establishing THAMATE 27
	THAMATE- The Dalit Drum – To be used for Empowerment of the Community 28
<b>Chapter 4</b>	Phases of struggle for Manual Scavengers: THAMATE makes presence 31
	Survey on Manual Scavengers Conducted By Government In 2013 34
	THAMATE Exhorts MS People to Register as Manual Scavengers 35
<b>Chapter 5</b>	Strategies and Approaches of THAMATE 37
	Theory of Change of THAMATE 38
	Strategies/ Approaches of THAMATE 39
	Formation of Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS): Empowered Collective Demanding Accountability 40
<b>Chapter 6</b>	Two Campaigns: Struggle for the Rights of MS and SKs 53
	Section I 54
	Section II 58
	Bureaucratic Apathy: Challenges faced in implementing cabinet decision of regularisation of SKs 60
	Backlash from Contractors 61
	The struggle of the <i>Pourakarmikas</i> continues 61
	CHALLENGES 62
	THE ONGOING JOURNEY – SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS 63
Annexure 1	65
Annexure 2	65
Documents Referred	66
References	67



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# Larger Context of Manual Scavenging



The caste stratified societal structures in India often throw challenges to the marginalised and disempowered groups in negotiating their entitlements, and seeking accountability and responsiveness from service providers. Among the marginalised sections, communities that exist on the extreme margins—sub-castes of Dalits<sup>1</sup> or Scheduled Castes<sup>2</sup> (SC) who are involved in manual scavenging, sewerage and septic tank cleaning, garbage and animal carcass removal and cleaning etc.—are the most vulnerable. Manual scavengers who fall in the last rungs of social hierarchy, even amongst the Dalits experience discrimination and systemic deprivation. Ninety nine per cent of the people forced to do the menial work are Dalits, and 95% of them are women (Mander (ILO), 2014).. These communities continue to face structural barriers of social exclusion, caste based discrimination and untouchability; financial vulnerability, extreme health hazards and untimely deaths due to involvement in the menial work, despite the fact that manual scavenging has been outlawed under different legislations in India<sup>3</sup>. A host of programmes, policies, commissions, committees (See Annexure 1) have been set up on orders from the apex court of India<sup>4</sup> to eradicate manual scavenging and eliminate insanitary latrines. A host of policies have been framed for rehabilitation of the workers also. (Singh 2009, Janvikas 2012, Human Rights Watch 2014, Ravichandran 2011)

Different studies and reports and recent research studies have established that manual scavenging work is degrading and it is thrust upon the Dalit community; the mainstream society has always kept them at a distance. The existing literature outlines that the situation of manual scavengers is a grim picture of denial and neglect and severe violations of human rights. Contracting out of sanitation and manual scavenging work is a common practice and there is a marked difference in the remuneration given to contract and permanent manual scavenging workers. Gender disparity is visible in manual scavenging. Women contract workers are relatively more marginalised and get lesser remuneration as compared to men contract workers. Manual scavenging community members have no savings, and they have no job security. Contract workers' children mostly drop out of school due to financial constraints. Job opportunities for the

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**Manual scavengers who fall in the last rungs of social hierarchy, even amongst the Dalits experience discrimination and systemic deprivation.**

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<sup>1</sup>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/>

<sup>2</sup>The Scheduled Castes (SCs) are various officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged people in India <https://web.archive.org/web/20121005040156/http://socialjustice.nic.in/sclist.php>

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

<sup>4</sup>SafaiKaramchariAndolanAndOrsvs Union Of India And Ors available on <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/6155772/> and <http://safaiKaramchariandolan.org>

community in other occupations other than scavenging are poor. (Jan Sahas and UN Women, 2014; Janvikas, 2012)

Almost all manual scavengers (and Safai Karamcharis) remain temporary workers on contract even after decades of service, and barely earn minimum wages. Alcohol intake is a common habit among men. The manholes and septic tanks they work in are replete with obnoxious gases and germs. The workers largely work without safety equipments exposing themselves to serious health hazards, accidents and untimely death. Their occupational health problems are compounded by poverty, malnutrition and alcoholism (Sainath, 2014; Ramaih, 2015). Despite pronounced legislations, FIRs are rarely registered in case of occupational deaths and compensation and rehabilitation initiatives are missing (Janvikas 2012; Teltumbe, 2016).

## Manual Scavengers remain uncounted

The existing literature has been using the umbrella term 'Manual Scavengers' for the people engaged in unsafe sanitary work. The scavenger community in India is heterogeneous and is subsumed under layers of sub-castes. Manual Scavengers belong largely to Dalit communities (in some places low castes Muslims also pursue the work) and have been largely addressed as Bhangis, Chuhras, Arunthathiyars, Rellis, Madigas, Mang, Mehtars, Pakhis, Thotis, Sakiliars etc. depending upon the state/region of residence. The Census defines Manual Scavenger as one who cleans a dry latrine or carries human waste to dispose it off. According to activists the definition like much of the discourse is centred upon dry latrine cleaning<sup>5</sup>, and tends to dismiss those who are involved in other sanitary work like cleaning of septic tanks, sewage lines, underground drainages etc.

Statistics from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (2011)<sup>6</sup> data released in 2015 outline that 180,657 households (in rural areas) are engaged in manual scavenging for their livelihood in the country. Around 167,487 households work as a manual scavengers, according to a reply in the Lok Sabha (Indian Parliament's lower house)<sup>7</sup> by the Ministry of Rural Development on February 25, 2016. A government survey identified nearly 54,000 people engaged in manual scavenging as of July 2019.<sup>8</sup> The survey was conducted in 170 districts of 18 states of India, and data from 11 states was unavailable. However findings of independent civil society organisations like the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA)<sup>9</sup> establish that the official figures are understatements and underreports

<sup>5</sup>Ingole, A. (2016). Scavenging for the State, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, No. 23

<sup>6</sup><http://secc.gov.in/>

<sup>7</sup><http://164.100.47.192/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=29086&lsno=16>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.ncsk.nic.in>

<sup>9</sup>Safai Karmachari Andolan is a movement that aims to completely eradicate manual scavenging from India. The movement began with the efforts of the youth from the community, led by Bezwada Wilson, who was born into a family of manual scavengers, and had seen the injustices meted out to them all his life. (<http://www.safaiKaramchariandolan.org/>)

of the existing number of people involved in this inhuman practice,<sup>10</sup> as there is a much larger number of people involved in this practice and data from many states is not available.

### *BOX 1: Definitions related to Manual Scavenging*

#### MANUAL SCAVENGERS:

- *The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993- defines 'manual scavenger' as a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta. The employment of manual scavengers according to this Act is prohibited as a criminal offence, however according to activists no one has been charged with employing workers in the 20 years the law came into force.*
- *According to The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and the Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act 2013, Manual Scavenger (MS) means a person engaged or employed, at the commencement of this Act or at any time thereafter, by any individual or a local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed or, or on a railway track or in such premises, as the Central government or a state Government may notify, before the excreta fully decomposes in such a manner as may be prescribed, and the expression "manual scavenging" shall be construed accordingly. (Source: PEMS Act, 2013, GOI, Gazette of India)*
- *The Census defines Manual Scavenger as one who cleans a dry latrine or carries human waste to dispose it off.*
- *SAFAIKARAMCHARIS (SKS) Safai Karamcharis means the person who are engaged or employed by agencies or local authority or contract basis in manually sweeping of the road and handling sanitary activities. Basically Safai Karamcharis(SKs)are not Manual Scavengers. However according to activists 80% of the SK's are MS as they are also doing manual scavenging work.*
- *INSANITARY LATRINES mean one without flush and underground drainage, open defecation place, and dry latrines*



<sup>10</sup><http://www.safaiKaramchariandolan.org/>

## Banned by Legislation but continues

The de-humanising practice of manual scavenging is officially banned since more than two decades in India under The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993<sup>11</sup> (which makes provisions for the abolition of this practice and for the identification and rehabilitation of manual scavengers). "In the Supreme Court order (dated March 27, 2014) in the Safai Karamchari Andolan vs. Union of India case, the court observed that handling human excrements with bare hands, brooms or metal scrapers or in baskets is an "inhuman practice," but it continues unabated (Teltumbe 2016). The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013;<sup>12</sup> revised and broadened the Act of 1993 and established much stricter penalties. It lays out statutory requirements to identify manual scavengers and for alternate provision for them. In December 2015, the Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Parliament) unanimously passed the SC/ST bill that provided for stringent action against those compelling any member of SC/ST communities to carry human or animal carcasses or do manual scavenging.<sup>13</sup> The 1993 Act outlined prohibition of or maintenance of dry latrines and employment of manual scavengers. However, as reflected by figures of Census 2011, there are still 26 lakh insanitary latrines in the country where human excreta is either being deposited into open drains or removed manually and manual scavengers continue to clean these dry latrines in spite of the bans imposed. According to the estimates of Safai Karamchari Andolan there are 2.6 million latrines (dry toilets) that require cleaning by hand.

Despite legal bans and periodic appointment of various committees and commissions by the government to look into the plight of the scavenging community, manual scavenging continues across different states of India in contravention to these legislations and Acts. Estimates from SKA pitch that nearly 22,000 MS's meet untimely deaths at work due to effects of obnoxious gases while cleaning manholes and septic tanks, every year across India. Data collated by the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis (NCSK)<sup>14</sup> which is a statutory body set up by the Act of Parliament; estimates around 817 deaths only since 1993 when the practice was outlawed in the country. Such asymmetry in estimates and data, suggest the states complicity in continuation of the banned practice of manual scavenging.

The existing discourse outlines a grim picture of denial and neglect and severe violations of human rights of the manual scavengers in India.

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**The de-humanising practice of manual scavenging is officially banned since more than two decades in India under The Employment of Manual Scavengers Act (2013) and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993**

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<sup>11</sup>Government of India, Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Toilets (Prohibition) Act 1993, No. 46 of 1993

<sup>12</sup>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

<sup>13</sup>[http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/rajya-sabha-unanimously-passes-sc/st-bill\\_1836972.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/rajya-sabha-unanimously-passes-sc/st-bill_1836972.html)

<sup>14</sup><https://www.ncsk.nic.in>





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# Context of Karnataka (Tumkur) and Manual Scavenging in the state



The context of this case study is the district<sup>15</sup> of Tumkur in the state of Karnataka. Karnataka holds the standing of banning manual scavenging by a Government order as early in 1970's.<sup>16</sup> However, the degrading practice is pervasive in the state also even after four decades of the ban order. According to the 2011 Census<sup>17</sup> Karnataka tops the Southern areas of India with nearly 15,375 manual scavengers (in rural areas). In 1993-94 the state of Karnataka along with different NGOs conducted a survey revealing a figure of 14,555 manual scavengers in the state, both in rural and urban areas. In 2002-03 figures went up to 26,004 and in 2007-08 it went to 40,692 scavengers. The government sources in Karnataka estimate the manual scavengers to be nearly 57,000; however the surveys and studies carried out by different human rights organisations and civil society organisations pitch the number of manual scavengers to be more than 3.3 lakhs now.<sup>18</sup> According to the human rights activists as across the nation the figure asymmetry in the state surveys also reflects how the state continues to deny the existence of manual scavengers.

**Karnataka holds the standing of banning manual scavenging by a Government order as early in 1970's. However, the degrading practice is pervasive in the state also even after four decades of the ban order.**

*Table 1: Number of MS in Karnataka: The Number Asymmetry*

Number of Manual Scavengers (MS)	Source
15,375 MS (in rural areas)	2011 Census (SECC Survey)
14,555 MS (rural & urban)	1993-94 (state and NGO survey)
26,004 (rural & urban)	2002-03
40,692 (rural & urban)	2007-08
57,000 (rural & urban)	2017 (Government Sources)
3.3 lakhs (rural & urban) Private and Govt sector	2017 (Independent Civil society organisations)
302+479= 781	2013-2016 (Identified manual scavengers from both rural & urban)

## Progressive move in Karnataka to ban manual scavenging -1973

As mentioned earlier, Karnataka was the first state to ban by a Government order the carrying of night soil as head loads or in any other form. In Karnataka, the term '*Pourakarmikas*' has been used

<sup>15</sup>A district is an administrative division of an Indian state or territory. In some cases districts are further subdivided into sub-divisions, and in others directly into tehsils or talukas ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_districts\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_districts_in_India))

<sup>16</sup>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

<sup>17</sup><http://secc.gov.in>

<sup>18</sup>From different documents of THAMATE

since 1970s 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 including manual scavengers, sewer workers and sanitation workers. The Government of Karnataka had constituted a committee for the improvement of living and working conditions of sweepers and scavengers headed by I.P.D. Salappa 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 B. Basavalingappa in Karnataka took this bold and concrete step to eliminate the carrying of night soil in any form in the state in 1973.

## New Nomenclature for Manual Scavengers: ‘*Pourakarmika*’

Basavalingappa changed the nomenclature of sweepers and scavengers to that of ‘*Pourakarmikas*’ at a conference in New-Delhi in September 1972. They were previously called by their caste names, which were abusive and value loaded terms.<sup>19</sup> 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, yet underground drainage workers employed with municipal bodies enter manholes without safety equipment (Janvikas, 2012.) But the statistics collated by human rights organisations outline a contradictory picture as 78 manual scavenging deaths have happened in Karnataka since 2008 in STPs & septic tanks.

Manual scavengers in the state belong to the Scheduled Caste and are predominantly from the Madiga, Mehtars, Mangarodis community and they end up doing manual scavengers work as they hardly have any other alternative employment and have little access to health and medical care. The manual scavenging community members has no savings, and there is no job security, and contract workers children have to drop out of school due to financial constraints. Alcohol intake is a common habit among men. (SOCHARA 2009, 2012)

## Madigas, the Most Disadvantaged Amongst the Scheduled Castes

According to 2011 Census, in Karnataka, the Scheduled Castes (SC) comprise 16% of the total population.<sup>20</sup> The Scheduled Castes

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**Basavalingappa changed the nomenclature of sweepers and scavengers to that of ‘*Pourakarmikas*’ at a conference in New-Delhi in September 1972. They were previously called by their caste names, which were abusive and value loaded terms.**

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<sup>19</sup>Government of Karnataka (1976). Report of the Committee on the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions of Sweepers and Scavenger (Salappa Committee Report)

<sup>20</sup><https://www.censusindia.co.in/towns/tumkur-population-tumkur-karnataka-803157>, Status of Scheduled Castes in Karnataka - Im4change, <http://www.im4change.org/docs/4179-chapter.pdf>, <http://censuskarnataka.gov.in/Data%20High%20lights-Karnataka-PCA-2011.pdf>

are 101 castes and sub-castes in Karnataka, the majority of whom were formerly classified as 'untouchables' and generally lived in a segregated area or separate colony on the outskirts of villages. The predominant castes among the SCs are Adi Karnataka, Holeya, Mahar, Mala, Madiga, Mang, Mochi, Dravida, Samagara, Dhor, Banjara and Bhovi. Scheduled Caste ownership of agricultural land is minimal and the majority of landholders have small and unviable holdings. Out of the 101 divisions, Madiga and Mala communities are considered untouchables within the Dalit community as well. Compared to the Madiga community, the 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 based work opportunities. Madiga community mainly resides in the areas and districts, which are drought prone and where agriculture activities are less. The Madiga community is located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy of Indian society. The community is treated as outcaste and is involved in activities of cleaning, sweeping the villages, manual scavenging, disposing of dead animals, processing and tanning etc.

## Sadashiva Commission advocating for internal reservations for the most backward Madigas

The disadvantageous status of the Madiga community has been confirmed by the State Government of Karnataka. In 2005 the state appointed the Justice A. G. Sadashiva enquiry commission which submitted its report in 2012. This report highlighted that the Madiga community was backward in all the fields and suffered disparities in the distribution of reservations in jobs. The commission had recommended providing 6% internal reservation to Madiga and its sub caste and had suggested that backward groups within the Schedule Castes categories would require special capacity-building initiatives and constant evaluation and enforcement.<sup>21</sup> According to activists in the state the Madigas still continue their struggle for to overcome their marginalised status..

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**In Tumkur, the members of Madiga community are largely landless workers while some are engaged in cleaning occupations. Because of a lack of resources, the community has remained under developed on various counts...**

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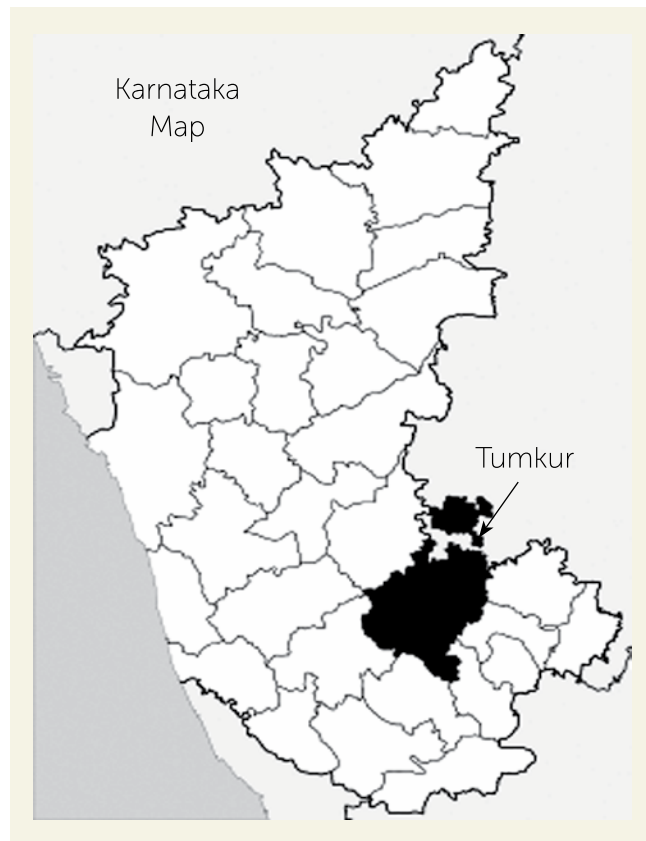
## Context of Tumkur District

Tumkur district, which is the context of the case study, is amongst the under-developed districts of Karnataka. Tumkur is a dry and a drought prone district. Tumkur covers 10 Taluks i.e. Pavagada, Madugiri, Koratagere, Sira, Chikkanayakarahally, Guggi, Kunigal, Turuvekere, Tipatur and Tumkur. The dry and the drought prone areas include Pavagada, Madugiri, Sira and Koratagere. The Schedule Castes

<sup>21</sup>[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/98826/13/13\\_chapter%206.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/98826/13/13_chapter%206.pdf) and from archived documents of Thamate.

constitutes 12.3% of total population in Tumkur as per the 2011 Census.<sup>22</sup> The practice of untouchability is high in the district with a strong domination of upper castes. Overall 65% of the Dalits are landless and 22% have 1-3 acre land. However, these people do not have the necessary documents for the land that is in possession of the landlords. In Tumkur, the members of Madiga community are largely landless workers while some are engaged in cleaning occupations. Because of a lack of resources, the community has remained under developed on various counts including low education among children, employment of youth in non-cleaning occupations, lack of access to government schemes.<sup>23</sup>

Having established the context of the state of Karnataka and Tumkur district and the status of the Madiga community involved in manual scavenging work in these places, the next section of the case study delves into the story of the genesis of THAMATE.



<sup>22</sup><https://www.censusindia.co.in/towns/tumkur-population-tumkur-karnataka-803157>

<sup>23</sup>Source: Archived documents of THAMATE



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# Locating the Genesis of THAMATE: The Story of THAMATE



Delving upon the struggle for accountability by the Manual Scavenging Community in Tumkur district, Dorairaj K, member of the Karnataka Dalit Movement and District President of PUCL Karnataka, contextualises the story of the genesis of THAMATE to the Dalit Movement. Dorairaj shares, 'The Dalit movement is significantly quite old in the state and dates before independence of India (before 1947.) The movement saw some momentum in the 1970s when vociferous leaders like Bisvalingappa and Prof. Krishnappa mobilised some Dalit youngsters and formed the Dalit Yuvak Sangh to take up the issues of the manual scavengers working with the civic body.'<sup>24</sup>

## Collectivisation of Manual Scavengers in Tumkur

The 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 Yuvak Sangh which was part of the Dalit Movement collectivised and mobilised the manual scavengers, organised protest marches, staged dharnas and gheraoed officials of the civic bodies to apprise them with the situation of the manual scavengers. This mobilisation yielded positive results and the workers started getting pension benefits and regular salaries. This mobilisation had another layer to it. It allowed Dalit Madiga women to raise the issue of removing toddy vends (alcohol vendors) in Tumkur and were successful to an extent.

Dorairaj adds that the Dalit Movement also provided an opportunity for up-coming leaders from the downtrodden sections to develop self-confidence and raise their voice against the violation of their human rights and demand land reforms, and reservations in education and employment opportunities.

The mobilisation, through evidence and fact finding, exposed the narrative of state bodies claiming eradication of manual scavenging and the practice of carrying night soil. It initiated a process of ensuring state accountability. However, according to Dorairaj, the movement suffered a temporary setback in the early 2000s, when the new contractual system made the task of ensuring accountability through private and individual contractors difficult. THAMATE is a spin-off of one such a struggle and has emerged in its present form through different campaign-movements like the Dalit Movement, health rights movement etc., he adds.

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**The mobilisation, through evidence and fact finding, exposed the narrative of state bodies claiming eradication of manual scavenging and the practice of carrying night soil. It initiated a process of ensuring state accountability.**

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<sup>24</sup>Source: Discussion held with Dorairaj, K in Tumkur in November 2015



## Context of Establishing THAMATE

THAMATE has been working with Poruakarmikas and Dalits for over twenty years since 1996 as part of Karnataka Dalit student Movement and health movement in Karnataka. It is based in Tumkur and works intensively in 2 City Corporations, 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.

*Table 2: Municipalities and Gram Panchayats<sup>25</sup> in which THAMATE is directly involved*

TALUKS <sup>27</sup>	MUNICIPALITY	GRAM PANCHAYATS - PRIVATE	PRIVATE
Madhugiri	70	90	56
Pavagada	61	87	67
Tumkur	580		1678
Sira	70		87
Gubbi	25		45
Chikkanayakanahalli	26		45
Turuvekere	35		67
Tipaturu	65		108
Koratagere	26		54
TOTAL	958	177	2207

Includes Private sector: Hospitals, Nursing homes, Schools, collages, lodges and other

## Exploratory Phase: Informal Situational Analysis of MS leads to formation of THAMATE

**K B Obalesha**, founder member and Secretary of THAMATE, Centre for Rural Empowerment recounts, many empowered likeminded Dalit youth including him and senior Dalit activists travelled across different parts of Karnataka in 2003-04 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

**Non-recognition as workers existed even after 20 – 30 years of work as manual scavengers.**

<sup>25</sup>A gram panchayat ( ) or village panchayat is the only grassroots-level of panchayati raj formalised local self-governance system in India at the village or small-town level, and has a sarpanch as its elected head. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gram\\_panchayat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gram_panchayat))

<sup>26</sup>Taluk/Thaluka is a group of several villages counted together for administrative purposes

the situation of the manual scavengers and Dalits” he adds. In the exploratory phase the findings discerned the different challenges faced by the community—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 opportunities, practice of untouchability with manual scavenging community as they were still doing caste based work. 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 seemed significant to the activists that the challenges of accountability were too pronounced for the most marginalised communities of manual scavengers. This was due to their poverty, caste related discrimination and caste related occupation of manual scavenging into which their life-circumstances had pushed them. Non-recognition as workers existed even after 20 – 30 years of work as manual scavengers.

The activists had realised the power of collectivisation through earlier instances of confrontation with the state machinery. Thus, going ahead with an understanding that an aware and mobilised community can successfully advocate for their own rights but collectively, THAMATE was initiated as a first step to educate, mobilise and organise the Madiga community in Tumkur and Pavagada city. The 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. As a result, THAMATE was registered in 2006. THAMATE as an 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, hold institutions accountable, and ensure that the human rights violations are remedied.

## THAMATE- The Dalit Drum – To be used for Empowerment of the Community

The nomenclature ‘THAMATE’ 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. The THAMATE’s sound was used to disburse information, celebrate festive occasions and deaths in upper caste families.

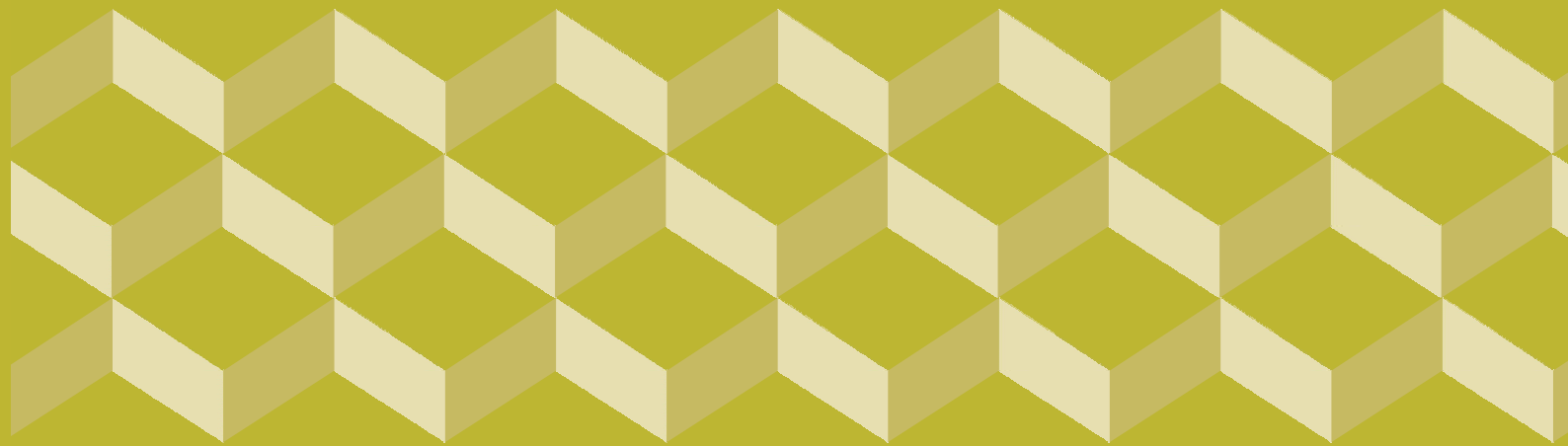


Madigas were routinely called to beat the THAMATE. Following the development of the organisation THAMATE, K B Obalesha, who is also from the Madiga community says, "From now on, the 'THAMATE' will be used for the empowerment of the community, not as an instrument of slavery and discrimination, hence, the name THAMATE."



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Phases of struggle for  
Manual Scavengers:  
THAMATE makes  
presence



The trajectory of the movement for the struggle waged by human rights activists, civil society organisations and THAMATE along different movements as well by the state machinery for the dignity and entitlements of Manual Scavengers in Karnataka can be broadly divided into four phases. *(The categorisation has been done for this case study based on the broad inferences drawn of major occurrences and incidents, events and development of legislation etc. in relation to the Manual Scavenging issue in the state as well in the larger national context. The categorisation is not exhaustive but indexical of the major events and occurring.)*

The history of repression against the Dalits (which includes *Pourakarmikas* as well) goes back several hundred years in India and the state of Karnataka mirrors the situation of the larger context. Historically, the people have been victims of repression and atrocities perpetrated by landlords—stigma, violence and crimes. For generations the Madiga community has been a victim of the practice of manual scavenging in Karnataka. The voices from the Dalit communities gained impetus 1970's onwards when empowered expressions from the Madiga community people also gained currency, like that of Prof. Krishnappa and the Minister of Municipal Administration, B. Basavalingappa as mentioned earlier.

### PHASE I: 1970S' – 1993

Collective and continued advocacy work with the manual scavengers within the Dalit movement in Karnataka is more recent and is particularly challenging, owing to the fact that this community has been oppressed for decades and this oppression has multiple layers, outline members of THAMATE. Though sporadic efforts to eradicate manual scavenging have existed in the state of Karnataka for long, however what came forth as a turning point in addressing the issues of Manual Scavenging in the state was the I.P.D. Salappa report (which is mentioned in earlier chapters in the case study). Even though the Salappa report is considered to be a turning point in the struggle for manual scavenging but much of the Dalit activists were also not aware of it and didn't pursue a follow up of it.

### Phase II: 1993-2009

In 1993, the Central Government of India brought out the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Dry Latrine Construction (Prohibition) Act. This Act was notified in the Gazette of India in 1997. This Act spelled out prohibition of the construction of dry latrines, specified their conversion to pour-flush latrines, and also spoke of penalising those constructing dry latrines and talked about rehabilitation of the 'manual scavengers' to other occupations. By abolishing such a hazard prone and demeaning practice, the Act aimed to restore the dignity of the individual as enshrined in the Constitution of India. However, according to the activists neither the

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**Voices from the Dalit communities gained impetus 1970's onwards when empowered expressions from the Madiga community people also gained currency, like that of Prof. Krishnappa and the Minister of Municipal Administration, B. Basavalingappa as mentioned earlier.**

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civil society nor the state government took some concrete actions on the provisions of the 1993 Act in Karnataka.

### Phase III: 2009-2013

Savunur Incident: THAMATE initiates steps in conducting Fact-Finding

On July 20, 2010, several members of the Bhangi community in Savanur<sup>27</sup> (Haveri District, Karnataka) smeared human excreta on themselves in front of the Municipal Administrator's office protesting against the Municipality's plan to evict them from their dwellings. They had been living there since eight decades. Bhangi is a sub-caste of Madigas, the community that has been treated as untouchables and form part of the Safai Karamcharis who do manual scavenging cleaning the dry latrines. Following the Savanur incident, the State Government filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court and issued a statement in the Parliament that there is no manual scavenging in Karnataka. However, the nature of the protest done by a section of the most marginalised even amongst the Dalits caught the imagination of the national media and the local media in Karnataka and this incident gave a traction to the activists working towards eradication of manual scavenging. Resultantly a separate forum was established in the state in 2010, i.e. the Forum for Dignity of Manual Scavengers, and THAMATE became a significant part of this forum and got involved in conducting the fact-finding of the Savunur incident.

### Kolar Gold Field Incident: THAMATE Makes its Strong Presence in Fact Finding and Legal Intervention

In October 2011, three manual scavengers died in the Kolar Gold Field (KGF)<sup>28</sup> City corporation limits in Karnataka while cleaning a soak pit. Though THAMATE had been peripherally involved in legal interventions earlier, with the KGF incident THAMATE made its strong presence felt along with PUCL and

Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS) by jointly conducting a fact finding report. 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 11 lakhs each. With the probe, two engineers were arrested. The fact-finding team also participated in protest organised at the hospital mortuary where the dead bodies of the workers were kept. The fact-finding team also roped in the state and National Safai Karamchari Commissions (NSKC) to create a pressure on the erring contactors and officials. These fact-finding documents and reports equipped THAMATE to engage in evidence-based dialogue with governance institutions in order to improve the accountability of service providers

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**Though THAMATE had been peripherally involved in legal interventions earlier, with the KGF incident THAMATE made its strong presence felt along with PUCL and Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS) by jointly conducting a fact finding report.**

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<sup>27</sup><http://www.mfcindia.org/main/bgpapers/bgpapers2014/am/bgpap2014g.pdf>

<sup>28</sup>Source: THAMATE Archived Document

## 2011 Census reports number of Manual Scavengers

In 2011, Census and the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) reports brought out reports on existence of manual scavenging in the state and at large in the nation, which provided impetus to THAMATE to further advocate about the number asymmetry of manual scavengers existing in the state.

### Phase IV: 2013 Onwards

*The leaders of THAMATE identify the fourth phase (2013 onwards) as the most proactive though challenging period in the struggle. The earlier phases are acknowledged as setting the context and stages of gaining traction in the struggle.*

## Survey on Manual Scavengers Conducted By Government In 2013

In 2009, the apex court had sought a query based on the SKA and its associate Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in which THAMATE was involved as a key partner. The Supreme Court queried about the status of manual scavengers in all states of India, as the states had submitted affidavits to the court that there were no manual scavengers existing in the respective states. In contravention to the statements of the states, the PIL filed by SKA provided voluminous data and evidence collated from different states highlighting that practice of manual scavenging continued to exist even after prohibition of the practice as suggested by the 1993 Act. (Teltumbe, 2016)<sup>29</sup> In 2011, the Government Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) brought out the figures of the 1, 80,657 households in manual scavenging in the country (in rural areas). The Census reports also outlined that 3500 statutory towns all over India had insanitary latrines and many people were still involved in removing night soil from these insanitary latrines. This data became quite useful to push the MS campaign for THAMATE. Based upon the evidence provided by these reports on the existence of the practice of manual scavenging, the Government of India (GOI) ordered for conducting a survey for identifying Manual Scavenging in the country. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also gave instructions to conduct a survey on manual scavengers and issued guidelines for the survey in August 2013.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Teltumbe, 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

<sup>30</sup><http://secc.gov.in/statewiseCasteProfileReport?reportType=Caste%20Profile>  
<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133286>  
[http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/Data\\_sheet/India/Latrine.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/Data_sheet/India/Latrine.pdf)



## THAMATE Exhorts MS People to Register as Manual Scavengers

Before bringing the 2013 legislation on manual scavenging, the Government had asked for self-declaration by the manual scavengers. When few people involved with MS work went to declare themselves as MS in the Pavagada and Madhugiri sub-divisions in Karnataka, the municipality officials refused to recognise them as Manual scavengers and identified them as Safai Karamcharis. Following the 1993 Act provision of penalising both employee and employer for doing manual scavenging, confusion still prevailed regarding who are MS and who are SKs. Thus, the officials in the state were also not ready to register individual as Manual Scavengers. Exhorted by THAMATE's activists, 700 people wrote letters to the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to register them as MS. The SHRC took time for the process. Justice Hunagunda, member of the state commission sought clarifications. After much effort, finally 302 manual scavengers were registered as part of the state government survey of the NHRC. These 302 (urban) were officially recognised as MS, towards end of the year 2013.

In 2013, the government of Karnataka conducted a survey of manual scavengers, in this process the government deliberately excluded contract Pourakarmiks and Jadamalis (MS working in Village Panchayats). The government refused to recognise them as manual scavengers, in spite of them fitting in the legal definition of manual scavengers as they were cleaning human waste everyday besides open defecation sites. Based on this THAMATE got them together to declare that they are manual scavengers. They signed notarised affidavits of self-declaration. A total of 273 affidavits were submitted to the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC.) The state human rights commission was requested to direct the government to recognise them as manual scavengers.<sup>31</sup>

These instances suggest the tendency of the authorities to either ignore or remain unknown to the existence of Manual Scavengers. THAMATE members have realised that when they approach the functionaries with systemic data collated as evidence base, and as a collective -informed voice and seek accountability from them, the authorities do feel pressurised. However in the process they have also realised that the pressure does not necessarily ensure success each time. The process needs continuous and sustained interventions.

Having established the context of THAMATE's presence and struggles for the rights of the manual scavengers through different phases, the next section of the case study attempts to bring to highlight the different strategies and approaches used by THAMATE.

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**... When few people involved with MS work went to declare themselves as MS in the Pavagada and Madhugiri sub-divisions in Karnataka, the municipality officials refused to recognise them as Manual scavengers...**

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<sup>31</sup>Source :Discussion with Thamate leaders and archived documents of THAMATE



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# Strategies and Approaches of THAMATE



During the establishing phase of THAMATE, the leaders and activists recognised the power of collective struggle and mobilisation of marginalised voices. It dawned upon the activists that nurturing manual scavengers capacities at the grassroots was a significant step towards establishing leadership amongst them besides making them aware of the policy context. Thus, it aimed for a participatory role of the manual scavengers' community where mobilised MS could themselves negotiate for their entitlements.

K. B Obalesha articulates that the focus of THAMATE is eradication of manual scavenging practice through legal interventions, organising the community for their rights, improving education among families of SKs/MS and improving health status of their families. Towards achieving these goals, THAMATE has adopted different strategies and approaches which are not linear processes; these are contextual and sometimes iterative.

## Theory of Change of THAMATE

THAMATE's theory of change is focused around eradicating manual scavenging through an array of strategic interventions at different levels starting from grassroots mobilisation at the community level. The underlying thought is that those involved in manual scavenging are a segment that has faced social exclusion, invisibility, indignity, non-recognition and denial of human rights apart from facing immense caste discrimination and untouchability. They have remained excluded from participating in the policymaking processes and face a lack of political will, support of state machinery and society at large in implementation of eradication of manual scavenging.

In this context, the key focus is collectivising and mobilising them and building leadership from the marginalised community of informed and empowered voices to demand accountability from governance institutions for dignified life, human rights, health and wellbeing and quality services. This theory of change recognises the wide divide that exists within the marginalised segment of manual scavengers, in resources, knowledge and policy making. Therefore, THAMATE wants to position itself as a collective voice of the marginalised.

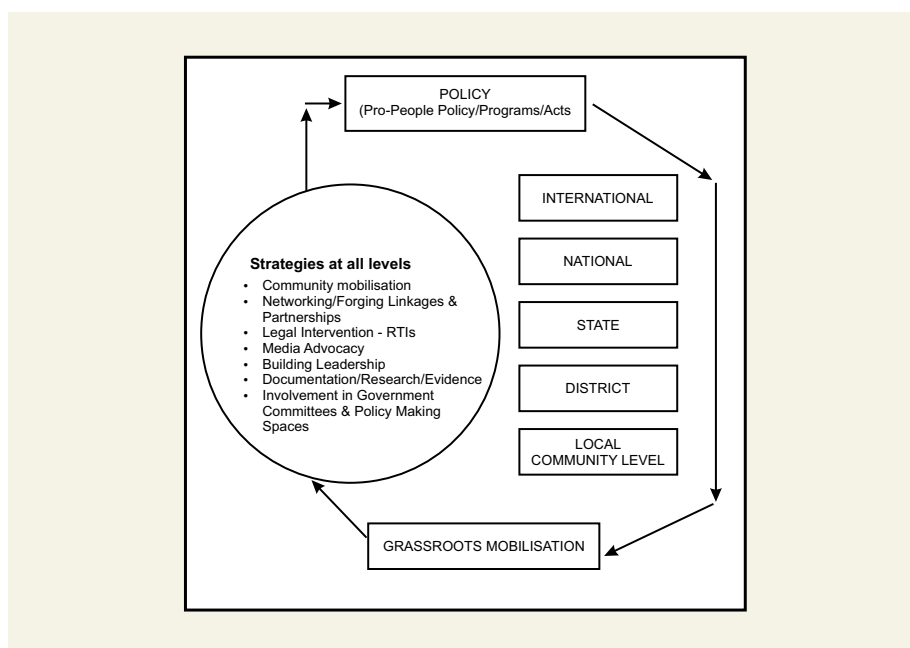
THAMATE has believed that the struggle to achieve the goal of dignity cannot be traversed alone; strategic alliances and networking are significant for advocating changes at all the levels and influencing policy actors and processes. In this endeavour it has forged partnerships and linkages with civil society, social movements, academic institutions, networks, government bodies and committees. THAMATE has emerged as one such civil body of people from the disadvantaged Madiga community people trying to bring in a bottom up approach and grassroots mobilisation for marginalised voices.

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**... It aimed for a participatory role of the manual scavengers' community where mobilised MS could themselves negotiate for their entitlements.**

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Figure 1: Theory of Change of THAMATE



The goal is to strengthen these voices and to represent them and ultimately influence policies for accountability and rights of the marginalised sections. THAMATE'S overall strategy has evolved as the collective experience of the manual scavenging community interacting with governance institutions, state machinery and other contextual opportunities.

## Strategies/ Approaches of THAMATE

### a) COMMUNITY MOBILISATION

As described earlier, THAMATE observes community mobilisation of SK/MS as a key element in the struggle and this is done through different modalities like awareness on rights/entitlements of MS/SK. In addition awareness on official entitlements e.g. on wages, ESI schemes, housing, safety equipment is done. Awareness about health rights and health issues are also addressed by organising medical camps for SK/MS and identifying major health ailments etc. Building capacity on identification of denial of rights and violations, addressing issues of violence on women and conducting consultation meetings with bureaucrats etc. are other steps. Mobilisation of SK/MS and leadership building is done through the formation of Community Based Monitoring Groups (CBMG). In the CBM groups, regular meetings are conducted and awareness is created about the entitlements and rights of SK/MS. Proactive members from the CBM groups take lead as leaders. For instance in the Pavagada area 60 SK group was formed and they all have emerged as leaders, the basic

criteria is that the members should be active and should understand the entitlements and rights of SK/MS. Different CBM committees have also been formed and are called Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS)<sup>32</sup>

*“The Jadamalis were paid Rs. 500-1000 and the Pourakamiks were paid Rs. 2200 per month. The workers were not getting their entitlements. They did not even have information on the entitlements. We realised that the members of the dominant caste were siphoning off the resources meant for us. THAMATE developed its work around ensuring community’s access to all entitlements”*

- Subbarayappa, THAMATE

## Formation of Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS): Empowered Collective Demanding Accountability

In the process of community mobilisation THAMATE has endeavoured to form the Safai Karamchari Kavulu Samithi (SKKS). SKKS was initiated in 2009-10 after the tragic protest of Safai Karamcharis (also working as manual scavengers) in front of municipal office by smearing excreta on themselves in Savanur (Haveri District, Karnataka). This incident brought to light the continuance of the practice of manual scavenging in Karnataka, the low socio-economic status of the Dalit communities engaged in this occupation as well as the absence of any organised voice from the community.

Amongst the intervention areas where THAMATE is involved directly, Madhugiri is relatively a newer area where initiatives started around five years go. The manual scavenging community is still being organised in this area, whereas in other areas like Pavagada, Tumkur, the community is well organised with a strong mobilisation. For those who have been in this profession for decades, THAMATE is involved in mobilising them and helping them form community-based monitoring groups, ensuring a fair wage (most workers don’t get paid even minimum wages), job permanency, access to social security benefits like Provident Fund(PF), ESI, health cards, and also access to personal safety equipment.

<sup>32</sup>SafaiKaramchari Kavalu Samithi (SKSS) refers to watchdog committees, they are a collective of Safai Karamcharis who are working at the community base and with municipality and other local bodies which conducts investigations into every Safai Karamchari or under-ground drainage worker deaths and violations and takes up the cases for

## *BOX 2: Liberated Manual Scavengers share stories of empowerment and mobilisation: Reclaiming Dignity*

**Muthyalappa**, who belongs to Madiga community from Pavagada town of Tumkur district and is a 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 people 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 THAMATE started an intervention with contract sweepers and I learnt about different rights and significance of the collectivisation. THAMATE organised 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 organised. The theme of the training was contract sweepers living rights and alternative employment and this training was an eye opener for us."

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 leadership of the group and participated in several trainings and meetings with Municipality officials. Muthyalappa became the first point person for mobilising 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 groundnut powder. He began earning a profit of nearly Rs.6000 per month and continues with his 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 SKKS and represented them in the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) National round table discussion in 2012 at New Delhi, India

**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 group 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. 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 organising district level and higher level meetings and activities, she adds."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, 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."

"We used to go to the health inspector's house to do odd cleaning jobs and we went wherever he sent us. Now we have stopped all that. We have stopped cleaning their filth, ever since we become part of the Sangha." **Timmaiah-Pavagada, Tumkur**

## b) LEGAL INTERVENTIONS

### • Associate in SKA PIL: Establishing Existence of Manual Scavenging and Demanding Compensation of the Deaths

THAMATE is involved in different legal interventions like filing registration of First Information Reports (FIRs) under criminal provisions of the relevant Acts and on deaths of MS after conducting fact-findings whenever incidents of deaths/violations of MS come to light. Identifying violations and taking up cases of compensation for the death is also done. In a long and continuous struggle waged by the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA)<sup>33</sup> in 2003, THAMATE has been an active partner in a PIL which called for strict enforcement of 1993 Act and enforcement of rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The PIL continued to be a struggle for nearly 12 years, wherein SKA and partner organisations (including THAMATE) submitted voluminous data on existence of manual scavenging denied by various state governments. In March 2014, the apex court i.e. the Supreme Court of India 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 Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 Act.<sup>34</sup> THAMATE has been involved in the follow up process of the PIL judgment, collating and establishing evidence for the deaths and advocating for the compensation of the deaths.

### • PIL in association with PUCL – (PIL Registered by PUCL-KARNATAKA)

THAMATE has been instrumental in filing PIL in association with People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in Karnataka High Court in 2009. Because of the PIL, the Karnataka High Court formed a Committee including officials and members from the civil society. THAMATE has been in the lead, working with the committee members on the status of MS in the state of Karnataka. The committee conducted fact-finding, spot visits, checking underground infrastructure etc. THAMATE presented a report of the committee findings to the state High Court. The outcome was a High Court order (dated 2010/11) which announced for interim compensation of five lakhs rupees and the order came for mechanisation of Under Ground Drainages (UGDs) and use of jetting and suction machines for the MS work.

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**The PIL continued to be a struggle for nearly 12 years, wherein SKA and partner organisations (including THAMATE) submitted voluminous data on existence of manual scavenging denied by various state governments.**

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<sup>33</sup>SafaiKaramchariAndolan(SK A) is a national movement committed to the total eradication of manual scavenging and the rehabilitation of all scavengers for dignified occupations <http://www.safaiKaramchariandolan.org>

<sup>34</sup>Sathasivam. P, (2014): SafaiKaramchariAndolan And Ors vs Union Of India And Ors on available on <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/6155772/> and <http://safaiKaramchariandolan.org>



### • SKKS involved in getting FIRs and complaints lodged for deaths of manual scavengers

The SKKS has also been investigating, following up and making legal interventions into cases of manual scavenging deaths in Karnataka. The watchdog committee has inquired into incidents of mortalities and injuries occurring during work in UGDs, manholes etc. and fights for justice for the families of the victims including getting compensations for the deaths as per Supreme Court Directions in Safai Karamchari Andolan vs UOI case and the provisions of the 2013 Act. In association with different human rights organisations, SKSS also ensures that FIRs are filed against the errant officials and contractors as per different section of the 2013 Act. Until June 2017, 60 persons had died in cases of manual scavenging as per the data maintained by SKKS and PUCL-Karnataka.

*Table 3: A snapshot of the initiatives of the SKSS in getting cases registered on Manual Scavenging in Karnataka (2017-18)*

Cases registered	Cases analyzed	Cases closed without Charge sheet (B-report or C-report)* B case dismissed and C-report cancelled	Cases where Charge sheet yet to be filed	Cases where Charge sheet filed	Average no. of days to file Charge sheet	No. of convictions
24	18	3	5	10	160	0

- Out of the 18 cases analyzed, police has filed B-report in one case and C-report in two cases. The complaint in two of the cases informed us that police never approached them to provide evidence in the cases.
- In 5 cases, the charge sheets are yet to be filed: time elapsed since filing of FIR in these five cases ranges from 238 days to 732 days.
- Of the 10 cases where charge sheets have been filed, in 7 cases the accused have failed to appear even after repeated summons while in rest of the 3 cases hearing has commenced.
- Of the 10 cases where charge sheets have been filed, only in 5 was it filed with the mandated 90 days period. Average time taken to file charge sheet was 160 days.
- Out of the 18 cases analyzed, 8 involved fatalities, but only in 2 cases IPC section 304(2) been added to the FIR on account of protests by civil society groups. The general tendency is for police to file FIRs under IPC 304A.
- In 3 out of the 18 cases analyzed, sections of MSR Act 2013 were not added. In several cases, where sections of MSR Act 2013 have been added, it was done only after intervention by civil society groups. IN general, there is lack of awareness among police officials about the provisions of this Act.
- Out of the 18 cases analyzed only one or two had following sections of IPC in the FIR: Sec 336 (Act endangering life or personal safety of others), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intentions).

## • FILING OF RTIS:

THAMATE has used the Right to Information (RTI) as a medium to secure information on various information and issues related to MS and other Dalit issues. In 2013, 27 RTI's were submitted to secure the audit reports of Tumkur district hospital. Through RTIs significant information was unearthed and it was found that nearly Rs.66 lakhs were misused by the hospital authorities. Along with different rights activists and civil society members, THAMATE organised a mass protest in front of DC office for demanding free and quality treatment for sweepers and MS members and against the corruption in the hospital. A financial misuse complaint was registered in State Human Rights Commission – SHRC. (More details in Box 5)

## c) DOCUMENTATION AND EVIDENCE BUILDING:

In association with different networks and alliances, THAMATE is involved in collating evidence on violations of MS and denial of entitlements. These are done by conducting fact findings, collecting information through RTIs. In addition case stories are developed and documentation of local level violations is done, photo/video documentation is used to document and disseminate evidence as well create awareness on the rights of the MS. For example in the Savunur incident THAMATE with its network associates conducted a study through Video Documentation, Photo Documentation and by conducting Family Surveys, which was later presented as an evidence and an outcome of the fact finding. This documentation helped in demanding accountability from the erring officials.

## b) MEDIA ADVOCACY:

All forms of media including print/electronic/online are engaged by THAMATE for creating awareness on issues related to MS/SKs and raising cases of violations. THAMATE has used press conferences as a viable medium to address the issue and make the media aware of the fact-finding reports on different denials faced by the MS community. The media agencies also provide day to day coverage to the issues of MS community and the fact finding reports as shared by the CBO. More recently, THAMATE has initiated the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) –accessible technology and social media to negotiate for the rights of the manual scavengers.



*BOX 3: Photo story 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 Information Communication Technology (ICT) for social accountability initiative in association with COPASAH, Photo stories were documented by THAMATE and shown as evidence of neglect of health services and denial of health rights of marginalised women to the concerned authorities.

The photo story of 50 year old B. Gangamma from Tumkur district was showcased to the civic body authorities where she is working as contract worker and is involved in cleaning and maintains toilets without any protective gear. This lack of availability of mandatory equipments while working in unsafe conditions, violate her health rights and increase 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 gynaecological problem and the public health service providers refused to conduct her surgery. After sustained advocacy with use of the Photo story, 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 got the refund. Inspired by the success of photo story of Gangamma, other manual scavenging workers came forward to undergo the pre-medical checkups and 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 a priority now. (2016-17)

## e) PUBLIC PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

As a significant strategy to visible and mainstream the SK/MS issues THAMATE has been holding different events and protests to create a public discourse around the issues. They also hold protests, stage dharnas to bring to fore the different systemic discrepancies, denials of rights of MS/SKs. In more recent times THAMATE with its allies and with nearly 15,000 *Pourakarmikas* staged a massive protest in Bangalore to press for the demand of regularisation of the workers. THAMATE also carried out a state level Jatha( campaign) across 20 districts of the state in March 2016, which culminated in submitting a memorandum to the Chief Minister of the state, the result of which came forth as regularisation of SKs.



## f) NETWORKING, ALLIANCE AND COALITION BUILDING

THAMATE leaders have realised that working collectively for advocacy processes at all levels—local, state, national and global levels with likeminded allies does lead to certain successes.

- At local levels and up to the district levels, THAMATE has teamed up with different organisations working on the MS/SK issue. These include SafaiKaramchari organisations/associations and unions and human rights organisations like People's Unions for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Alternative Law Forum, Slum Jan Andolna etc. and independent Dalit movements. It has also collaborated with likeminded organisations and academic institutions such as the National Law School, and friends in media and mainstream publications.
- At the state level the collaborations have been with the state level Scavengers Dignity Forum and with the SKSS. At the national level, alliances have been formed with the SKA and the Manual Scavengers Dignity Forum besides other networks.

- At the national and global level THAMATE has endeavoured to align the issue of MS/SKs with the different organisations and networks like the People's Health Movement (PHM) and with the global network of COPASAH. THAMATE has been participating and contributing to national and state level networks such as National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), Right to Food Campaign, National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) etc. on various other issues also.

## h) POLICY ADVOCACY: THAMATE CREATES SPACE IN VARIOUS COMMITTEES

THAMATE and its members have created inroads into various policy spaces and committees. It has proactively advocated for a change in the situation of the SKs/ MS by being part of different committees at the state and district levels. THAMATE is a member of state level MS survey committee formed in 2016. This committee was formed in 2016 (from February –December 2016) for verifying the Census 2011 data on MS. THAMATE is part of the state level monitoring committee on strengthening the implementation of the PEMSR 2013 Act, since December 2016. In addition, THAMATE team associates are members of the district and sub division Monitoring committee for MS in two districts of Tumkur and Madhugiri. More recently, THAMATE members have been part of the MS/SK Research Advisory Committee, which is conducting research on the situation of the MS/SKs in the state and is also part of team of National Law School of India University, Bangalore conducting research on MS. As a part of the MS Vigilance Committee for implementation of pending compensations on deaths of MS, THAMATE has been proactive in documenting the deaths and working towards getting compensation for the family of the deceased. At the national level THAMATE has been an active partner in policy advocacy with the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA)

## i) COMMUNITY LEVEL INTERVENTIONS OF THAMATE

The focus population of THAMATE includes children, youth and seniors amongst the MS people.

**CHILDREN:** The organisation attempts to break the exploitative cycle of manual scavenging by keeping children of the MS away from the occupation professed by their ancestors. *Siddhagangaiah, member of the CBO outlines 'Currently, the drop-out rates among the children of families working as MS/SK is very high, especially at the secondary level in schools. Moreover, those students who after a lot of personal and family struggle, have managed to study till High School or till degree level or complete vocational training courses, often find it difficult to find employment.'*

THAMATE runs education centres referred to as 'Bheemshales' in residential areas of MS/SKs which provide daily evening coaching to school-going children up to secondary level in subjects which



they encounter the most difficulty in. Through these supplementary coaching efforts, the CBO attempts to bring down drop-out rates among the children and also improve their academic performance. It also facilitates hostel seats and children of the MS in better-quality residential schools run by State-government and private schools under Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. THAMATE also arranges for special coaching classes for admission tests to these schools and eligible children are provided with support during the admission process.



Breaking the Cycle of Manual Scavenging through Bheemshale

*Siddhagangaiah, explains. 'There were instances where children of MS community faced discrimination in the mid-day meal programs organised in local government schools. The Sangha members pressurised the Block Educational Officers to respond to the situation. While the mid-day meal situation has improved, 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 and attention and hardly make any effort to help them get better in their studies.'*

**YOUTH:** In this group, youth up to 35 years of age are oriented on self –employment/vocational skills and alternative occupations. The goal behind this strategy is to dissuade the youth from following manual scavenging and to exhort them to pursue dignified occupations and provide support to them to explore other job opportunities. The youngsters are mobilised by forming youth groups and regular meetings of youth groups are held where they are oriented about different skills sets and job opportunities. There are youth who have completed degrees or vocational trainings but are not able to find jobs. Youth Resource Centers (YRC) run by THAMATE provides skills training and enables placement in alternative employment, through the YRCs.

**BOX 4: Some testimonies from children and teachers at Bheemashale**

**Divya (19)** A teacher in Bheemashale describes 'The Bheema Shale helps the children to cope-up with their academics and motivate children to go to school.'

**Pavithra and Devraj**, students at Bheemashale opine 'We are provided different facilities like bags, books, notebooks, stationery by THAMATE which our parents cannot afford. In the Bheemshale students like us are coached and helped in difficult subjects like English and Mathematics and also supported to prepare for entrance exams'

**Ramakrishna** from THAMATE adds '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. Surveys to know about the school children dropouts are conducted in slums and rural areas by THAMATE 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, "Parents meetings with teachers are arranged by THAMATE to make them aware of their children's progress. Majority of parents have participated in these meetings. They feel happy with this experience of getting involved in the education process of their children."

THAMATE has collaborated with organisations like Unnati Centre and The Nudge Foundation in Bengaluru offering vocational training. A number of youngsters have received training from these institutions and are now pursuing gainful employment in places like Bengaluru and Tumkur.

**Mahesh** from Madhugiri reflects 'Youth from the Madiga community tend to pursue the same occupation as their parents due to lack of education and employment opportunities. I have been able to move beyond the conventional occupation and am currently working as an administrative assistant with the help of THAMATE.'

**Venkatesh** team member of THAMATE who has been conducting youth facilitation meetings among the MS community members illustrates, 'THAMATE has initiated support to help them to acquire vocational training through different institutes and also helps them to 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.'

**SENIORS:** This group comprises of largely those people falling in the age group of 35-60 above years and those who are involved in MS/SK work or are retired from the work. For the senior people, THAMATE advocates for all the benefits of social security, health rights and pension schemes etc. The senior people are also a part of the CBM groups. Those working as MS/SK are oriented in the CBM groups on the entitlements such as of EPF, ESI etc. THAMATE also does advocacy for the minimum wages of the SKs, their regular work, medical benefits, implementing provisions of municipality schemes. In addition, THAMATE is involved in getting documents of social

security and availing social security benefits for the seniors, getting the health cards, pensions and ensuring Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) benefits. It is also ensured that those involved in the MS/SK work get safety equipment like gloves, mask and gumboots. Regular medical camps are organised by THAMATE for all including children, youth and seniors to ensure better health for all.

## j) ADDRESSING HEALTH RIGHTS ISSUES

THAMATE'S work also involves addressing the general and specific health issues faced by MS & SKs. To improve the health conditions of MS/SK, THAMATE works towards strengthening the existing public health system. In addition attempts are made to link the community to various government-run healthcare programmes and schemes. The CBO also organises free and regular medical camps for screening of various medical conditions as immediate health interventions.

*Siddhagangaiah who is associated with THAMATE since 2006, outlines 'THAMATE is actively engaged in creating awareness on health entitlements and monitoring of public health system services. Between 2007 and 2009, the CBO actively participated in community monitoring and planning component, which was part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)—[a flagship program of Government of India]. Under this program community monitoring of health facilities was done in 160 villages in Tumkur district by THAMATE and 66 Primary Health Centre (PHCs) were monitored. The team of THAMATE comprising of manual scavenging community members was trained and they surveyed the PHCs and documented the situation and the gaps in these health facilities. Various gaps were identified by the team in the process and these were brought to the Government's notice, and advocacy was done to ensure that the facilities in the 160 PHCs improve.'*

*He adds, 'MS community members suffer from serious health problems. They cannot afford to go to big hospitals. They neglect their health issues largely due to discriminatory attitude of the service providers at the health facilities. 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, 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. On the service providers front it is ensured through advocacy and continuous engagement that they provide treatment to them along with medicines. THAMATE also supports their referral to Taluk, district hospitals and other hospitals in Bangalore. THAMATE along with its associates has been involved in conducting functionality and implementation of Indian Public Health Standard (PPHS) and different Rapid Assessment of PHC (See BOX 5), Taluk hospitals, sub – centres at Pavagada, Madugiri and Tumkur.



**BOX 5: Rapid Assessment and Right to Information applications (RTIs) filed in Madhugiri and Pavagada Taluk hospitals and Tumkur district hospital**

*Information on Vacant positions of health staff in all categories, poor maintenance of hospitals, lack of basic amenities like drinking water and toilets was gained through RTIs and a rapid assessment of the Madhugiri and Pavagada Taluk hospitals was undertaken by THAMATE in association with its allies. It was also discovered that routine writing out of prescriptions was being done even though district and Taluk hospitals were using funds from ARS. Referrals were being made to private hospitals for even routine diagnostics and treatment including normal deliveries.*

*THAMATE drew attention to the Auditor General's report (obtained through RTI) which indicted the district hospital for financial irregularities, non-utilisation of funds and unreasonable delays in undertaking activities, non-replacement of sub-standard drugs supplied by the Drug Logistics Society, non-recovery of fees from private nursing schools, misuse of funds from Special Component Plan to buy equipment for the dialysis centre.*

*THAMATE and associate organisations held a protest rally in front of District administration office. In response, the District Collector agreed to undertake surprise visits to the hospitals and take action against erring officials and ensure that hospitals were functional in the district. He sought a copy of the Auditor General's report and promised to take it up with the District Surgeon. A rally was also held near the Zilla Panchayat (ZP) office to bring to the notice of the authorities the anomalies in functioning of public health systems. ZP Secretary promised to call for a meeting of all medical officers in the district and facilitate an interaction with the protestors so that the latter can directly raise problems and sort it out. A memorandum was also given to Zilla Panchayat (ZP) office and pointed out that presently there is no oversight of Taluk hospitals and PHCs by the ZP which are under its jurisdiction and demanded that there be better supervision and coordination. Protestors also pointed out the ZP had not responded to any of the previous memorandums and that demands had been only piling up. ZP secretary promised to address the issues raised in the memorandum in consultation with the protesting groups.*

Source: [www.phmovement.org/en/node/8141](http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/8141)

The work journey of THAMATE finds expression in its different strategies and advocacy processes which are multi-pronged, continued and sustained processes- Keeping the core mission integral- of eradicating manual scavenging and claiming entitlements and dignity for the disadvantaged community or *Pourakarmikas*.



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# Two Campaigns: Struggle for the Rights of MS and SKs



For this case study, we have attempted to segregate the two struggles, that of Manual Scavengers and Safai Karmacharis, though it is an overlapping and an interlinked phenomenon.

*THAMATE'S activists outline that this phenomenon of Safai Karmacharis being Manual Scavengers (MS) is a South India specific feature. The practice is prevalent in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In other places, SK and MS are separate categories and the government has not registered them as MS.*

## SECTION I

- **The Riddle Remains:** Are Safai Karmacharis Manual Scavengers? The definitions of Manual Scavengers and Safai Karmacharis are spelt out by PEMSAR Act, 2013 and each group has specific characteristics in terms of the demarcated work boundaries. However, THAMATE'S work experience delineates that the SK's are manual scavengers at least in Karnataka. They explain that the SKs are not regular employees and get less payment and fewer wages. According to them, SKs are not recognised as proper workers and are bereft of the benefits that the regular workers get. They are forced to go for undignified work of manual scavenging especially when they migrate to urban areas.
- **Confusion over the terminology of SK/MS:** Where do Jadamalis fit in? : K B Obalesha opines that there is still confusion in the use of the terminologies of SK/MS. It is unclear whether the Jadamalis engaged in sweeping work across Gram Panchayats of Karnataka fall in the SK or MS category. The Jadamalis are involved in sweeping and cleaning of open defecation. There is no clarity on the terminologies associated with SK/MS and this poses a big challenge to the activists working in the field.
- **The 1993 ACT- Some confusion continues:** The 1993 Act advocated the prohibition of construction of dry latrines and provisioned for penalisation of both the employer and the employee, i.e. those who would be employing people to clean the insanitary dry latrines, as well those who take on the work of cleaning the insanitary dry latrines. Three to four months after the Act was enforced, the municipal body in Karnataka and in other states, gave a call through advertisements for MS to get registered as manual scavengers, and seek rehabilitation after getting registered as MS. This provision in the Act came forth as confusing, as the officials of the civic bodies and the health inspectors were employing MS. Due to fear of penalisation they did not register the MS. In 1996, though there was an attempt to formulate rules for the MS/SK, the confusion over terminologies continued to persist till 2013. It was only in 2013 that the central government formulated the PEMSAR Act, which brought some clarity to the situation. The PEMSAR Act came into effect on December 6, 2013.

## The PEMSAR 2013 Act: A stepping stone for THAMATE to pursue its struggle for MS Campaign

Following the PEMSAR 2013 Act, THAMATE has been proactively involved in implementation and monitoring of the legislation and is working in four arenas - eradication and prohibition of manual scavenging, rehabilitation of manual scavengers, taking legal action in case of lack of implementation of the Act and in incidents of denial of rights of the manual scavengers.

*BOX 6: PEMSAR Act, 2013 has basically four components that of Eradication, Prohibition, Rehabilitation and Legal action.*

*THAMATE has strived to implement the basic tenants of this Act in upholding the rights of the MS.*

- *Eradication: The focus on this component is identifying insanitary latrines and working towards demolishing these.*
- *Prohibition: In Prohibiting Manual Scavenging THAMATE has been involved in identifying MS to prove their existence to the state which denies their existence. It is also involved in getting them registered and working towards banning the dehumanizing practice of manual scavenging*
- *Rehabilitation: THAMATE also works towards providing all the provisions of rehabilitation under the 2013 Act*
- *Legal Action: When there is denial of rights of the MS, THAMATE resorts to taking legal action for the lack in access to the entitlements.*

## SOME KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CAMPAIGN STRUGGLE OF MS CAMPAIGN WAGED BY THAMATE & SKSS

- After struggle pursued by THAMATE and its alliances in May 2016 one positive outcome came forth in terms of the release of first Gazette notification from the state government which spoke of a cabinet decision of compensation for 302 manual scavengers in the state.
- A big outcome which THAMATE identifies as its biggest achievement is building of community leadership- Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS), the watchdog committee comprising of members of the Madiga community. The SKKS members are working with the community and the municipality, conducting investigations into the deaths of every Safai Karamchari and underground drainage worker.
- THAMATE along with its associate organisations and networks has been at the helm of affairs for forming vigilance committees at the sub-division, district and the state level. Vigilance Committees have been formed in all 30 districts of Karnataka. Safai Karamcharis are members of the committees at each level and 22 members are



from SKKS across these committees. In the state vigilance committees four members are from SKKS and THAMATE respectively.

- THAMATE has played an active role in forming the Safai Karamchari Commission which caters both to the SKs and MS. Negotiating with the commission THAMATE has been able to get compensation for the deaths of 65 manual scavengers. After 2008, THAMATE has been closely monitoring the deaths and has registered 59 FIRs.
- On demand of THAMATE several workshops have been conducted on the 2013 Act for higher administrative and police officials like Deputy Collectors (DC's), Superintendent of Police (SP), etc. to make them aware of the provisions of the Act. In another attempt at advocacy done by THAMATE, the Safai Karamchari Development Corporation (SKDC) has earmarked Rs. 50 lakhs to create awareness and implement the 2013 Act.
- In alliance with its associate networks, THAMATE has instated some processes to implement the PMSR 2013 Act. The follow up actions taken up by THAMATE involve identifying insanitary latrines, registering the existing number of insanitary latrines and demolishing them, besides getting sanitary latrines constructed.

**Box 7: Continuous struggle to prove the numbers and establish existence of MS: Survey of Rural Manual Scavengers conducted by Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (RDPR), Government of Karnataka (GOK)**

Section 14 of the PEMSR Act, 2013 directs all Gram Panchayats to conduct a comprehensive survey for identification of persons employed as Manual Scavengers within their jurisdiction within two months of the enactment of the Act. But by the end of 2015, no action had been taken by the authorities in Karnataka. With the constant pressure being built by THAMATE and SKKS for initiating the survey, especially through the State-level Convention organised by SKKS in collaboration with National Law School of Indian University, Bengaluru in 2014 which was attended by the Social Welfare Minister, the

process finally began in year 2016. Between January –September 2016 representatives of THAMATE participated in six state-level meetings with RDPR officials leading up to the survey. A comparative analysis of the verification process followed by 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) and the proposed methodology of the RDPR department was conducted. Material describing the RDPR survey, survey form in local language Kannada and Hand bills for creating awareness on 2013 PEMSR Act along with SECC survey guideline booklet were provided to the participants. As a result of this effort, 30 district level survey committees were formed with representation of several Dalit activists in them.

In February 2016, THAMATE initiated a ground-level campaign for identification of manual scavengers. First, in co-ordination with Government of Karnataka, awareness was created regarding the identification process. Then, during the whole month, members of THAMATE visited all 33 Gram Panchayats and 145 villages in Tumkur district, encouraging people who had worked or were working as manual scavengers to come forward and file applications declaring the same. At the end of the process, a total of 102 applications were submitted for registration as MS from Tumkur district. It was discovered that the number of manual scavengers in rural areas in Karnataka which was pegged at 15,750 by the SECC 2011, had been reduced by the government to 477. Officially, in Karnataka there are 302 MS in urban areas and 477 MS in rural areas bringing the total up to 779. The gross underestimation reflected in these figures was brought to light by the fact that in Tumkur and other districts where THAMATE and SKKS were active in the survey campaign, 390 new self-declarations were filed by individuals for registration as MS. The struggle of THAMATE continues to prove the existence of Manual Scavengers.

**MS identified by the state government of Karnataka**

Sl.No	YEAR	Urban	Rural	Total MS
1	2013	302	0	302
2	2016-17	0	474	474 (as for SECC data 15,734)
3	2017-18		1721	1721
				<b>2653</b>



### Box 8: Advocacy for Sanitary infrastructure and Protocols

THAMATE has been documenting sanitary infrastructure in urban bodies. The findings discern that the Sewerage Treatment Plants (STPs) are not practicing mandatory guidelines for cleaning. THAMATE team visited pollution control board and identified that there were guidelines for constructing STPs but no guidelines exist for cleaning STPs. Following this background research and documentation of various deaths of Underground Drainage (UGD) workers, THAMATE has focused on advocacy for creating sanitary infrastructure guidelines and developing protocols for cleaning of STPs. THAMATE along with its associates has been involved in conducting fact findings on the denial of rights of manual scavengers, Safai Karamcharis since the Savunur incident in 2009. It has conducted fact finding exercises on several deaths of MS, UGD workers occurring in Karnataka.

In early 2017 owners at a high end Apartment (Jatti Dwarkamayi Villa) took on the services of three migrant Dalit youth to clean the STP in their premises. One youth died due to the toxic fumes of gases emanating from the STPs. These labourers were engaged through unauthorised contractors. The nearby police station at Whitefield registered a regular FIR under the influence of the high profile of the owners of the apartment. However, after intervention by THAMATE and fact finding conducted by THAMATE and SKKS members a complaint was registered under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavenging and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013 and the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act 1989 as amended in 2015. The deceased youths mother got a compensation of Rs. 14 lakhs, though a young life was lost. More details of the incident and fact finding report can be accessed on: <http://www.countercurrents.org/2017/06/09/death-of-a-dalit-youth-while-cleaning-sewage-tank/>.

## SECTION II

### THE STRUGGLE OF SAFAIKARAMCHARIS

Since 2008 onwards, THAMATE mobilised and formed the Community Based Monitoring (CBM) groups of all the SKs. Before 2008, though sporadic groups, unions of SKs existed, and some unions were affiliated to the leftist parties of Communist Party of India. The focus of these unions was class issue and they were addressing issues of wages and weekly holiday. Taking a different perspective, THAMATE collectivised all the SKs on the caste and class dimension. THAMATE'S standpoint and appeal was to organize SKs and educate them about their entitlements and make each one of them a leader who could raise their voices and negotiate for their rights. The focus was to:

**To abolish contract system under the 1974 Contract Act**

**To outline to the civic bodies to regularize the SKs and make them regular employees**

In the move to build leadership among the SKs, Safai Karamchari Kavalu Samithi (SKKS) were formed in 10 Taluks of Tumkur district. Later the SKKS were formed in 22 districts of the state. THAMATE took



the responsibility of strengthening the perspective and ideology of the SKKS leaders. With the formation of SKKS, different unions/groups of SKs which existed earlier were united on a single platform. They identified issues of low salary and EPF as two major points of advocacy to begin with. In 2013, the Chief Minister of the state, constituted Chandrashekhara committee to see into situation of MS. The SKKS submitted a report to the committee, however recommendations were not implemented.

- In 2014 the SKKS for the first time raised a demand for minimum wages for the SKs with the Regulatory Board and also negotiated safety equipment for the SKs. The regulatory board on the suggestions of SKKS recommended increased wages for the SKs.

*Table 4: Protests and some gains chronology*

May 25, 2017	Following the ignorance and inaction on the two reports submitted to the government THAMATE, SKKS and SKs held a one day protest against the official apathy
May 26, 2017	Parckechaluvila' against the government, 'VACHANA BRASTA SARKARA' – protest against the government, the theme became, Down, Down with the government which does not keep its promise. Before the protests, the SK Development Corporation had suggested for increased salary, however this decision was also not implemented.
June 12, 2017	Indefinite strike was called by the <i>Pourakarmikas</i> in Bengaluru (over 10,000 workers) in association with SKKS and other unions. 30,000 workers protested at same day across different places including Tumkur, Dahrwaad and Bengaluru etc. The <i>Pourakarmikas</i> , contract workers of the Bruhat Bengaluru MahanagaraPalike (BBMP) Municipal corporation) and at other places demanded regularization of their work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The demand of the workers was to remove the word contract from job titles and direct payment of their salaries from the urban local bodies like on the basis of the model in Haryana.</li> </ul>
June 13, 2017	The Municipal Minister along with other civic body officials visited the spot of the indefinite strike in Bengaluru and assured implementation of the cabinet decision of regularization and direct payment of workers.
June 13, 2017	Strike rolled back by <i>Pourakarmikas</i> and SKKS after assurance given by the respective minister and officials to hold a meeting on June 20, 2017; to work out the details of implementation of the decision.
June 23, 2017	Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister of the state announced in media, regularisation of 11,000 contract workers in three months. It was announced by the CM that the civic workers getting a salary a minimum salary of Rs. 13,600 to Rs.21, 000, (present salary is Rs. 4,000- 7,000) would get and the amount would be paid directly to the bank accounts by the civic body. It was established in the statement by the CM that 20,000 workers were employed as <i>Pourakarmikas</i> by various civic bodies across the state. It was declared that the services of 11,000 <i>Pourakarmikas</i> , including 4,000 working for the BBMP- were to be regularized in the first phase and the remaining were to be done subsequently.
Aug 7, 2017	Notification of implementation of the order

- The combined struggle of THAMATE and SKKS finally yielded a result in May 23, 2016, when the state government took a cabinet decision to abolish the contract system and the window period for regularising the contract SKs was given as March 31, 2017. The decisions called for abolishing contract system and regularise more than 35,000 *Pourakarmikas* in the state, including around 30,000 in Bengaluru.

## Bureaucratic Apathy: Challenges faced in implementing cabinet decision of regularisation of SKs

Bureaucratic lethargy did not allow the decision to be implemented and created unreasonable hurdles for execution of the decisions. The SKKS and THAMATE held 2-3 meetings with the Chief Minister (CM) of the state to advocate for the issue, however things did not proceed as intended. All Supreme Court decisions were shown to the CM as evidence to support the issue of abolishing the contract system and regularize employees. The pretext given by bureaucrats was that regularisation would lead to a burden financially to the Government and civic body in crores. (Source: Internal correspondence documents with bureaucrats- Dated 17-06-2016; 7-12-2016) Besides this the officials also reasoned that the SKs wouldn't work hard once they are regularised.

To further complicate things the CM of the state asked to study the systems of the states of Punjab and Haryana as these states according to him didn't have any contract system and the SKs were being given direct wages. SKKS conducted a counter study in many parts of the state of Punjab in Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Amritsar and in Haryana. The study revealed that the many SKs were daily wage workers in these places. SKKS submitted to the CM (state government) an independent study and the study ordered by the CM, however there came no reply from the government on it.

The biggest achievement for THAMATE, SKKS and its associates came with this announcement from the CM of abolition of the contract system. Other entitlements which have been gained in the struggle and are going on 2017-18- Plan of Action -Rs. 80 crores dedicated by the Karnataka State Karamchari Corporation Board for education, housing, awareness, skill building, children's education, entrepreneurship, scholarship and direct loans for SKs. Within this plan of action Rs. 50 lakhs has been dedicated to creating awareness on the manual scavenging issue and amongst the MS community. THAMATE along with SKKS is dedicated to implementing the Plan of Action.

## Backlash from Contractors

The decision to abolish the contract system did not go well with the contractors and the protests of the workers also earned the ire of the civic body authorities. According to activists from THAMATE and SKKS, the contractors and most of the officials belong to the dominant castes and the work of sweeping, manual scavenging is usually done by people from Dalit communities, thus the abolition of contract system came forth as a big disappointment and challenge to those in power positions. Later an order was also issued empowering the local self-governments to recruit *Pourakarmikas* directly, without the interference of the contractors. Miffed by both the decisions, the contractors started lobbying and pressed for rollback of the decision of abolition of the contract system. There was resistance from the contractors and a counter –protest was held by them for three days in front of BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike), the Bangalore Municipal Corporation. The contractors coercively took signatures from around 300-400 *Pourakarmikas* and established to the civic authorities that the workers themselves were against the abolition of contract system. Intimidating tactics were also used by the contractors on workers, especially those who asked for the pending salaries. Media reports also highlighted contractors' attempts to harass women workers for demanding their pending salaries. Following the notification of the orders of regularisation of workers and increased salary when some *Pourakarmikas* questioned their pending salary and arrears and outlined the decision to protest the civic authorities. The BBMP implemented the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) in September 2017, which prevents contract workers from going on strike and protests.

## The struggle of the *Pourakarmikas* continues

For THAMATE the struggle for the rights of the MS, establishing their identity and eradication of manual scavenging continues. THAMATE leaders voice that with the change in the nature of sanitation system the nature of the practice of manual scavenging has also undergone change as well. Earlier, manual scavenging meant carrying of night soil in baskets (though it continues wherever dry insanitary latrine are existing.) With the introduction of the flush toilets the need arose for cleaning drains and pits-chambers into which these toilets discharge the waste. As sewer lines and underground drainage system (UGD) came into existence, workers were employed to clear blockages by getting down into manholes. Most recently, because of concern for lakes in capital cities like that of Bangalore in Karnataka, Sewerage Treatment Plants (STPs) have been made mandatory for large apartment complexes. When these STPs malfunction, workers are hired to manually clean and repair the STPs. In Karnataka, as in the rest of the country, all the old and newer forms of manual scavenging co-exist

today. One aspect of the practice of manual scavenging that continues to fester and remains unchanged is its caste-based nature.

## CHALLENGES

THAMATE has straddled a journey of more than a decade and half to mobilise and collectivise the most marginalised sections of the Madiga community. The leaders echo that it is still a long- long way to go. The journey of THAMATE has rendered some palpable gains, like visibilisation of the deaths of the *Pourakarmikas*, compensations for the deaths and injuries of the MS, responsiveness at some quarters from the functionaries for the entitlements, creation of alternative employment opportunities and education for the children of the *Pourakarmikas* and so on. They believe that some intangible gains also have discerned through this process of enabling the 'agency of the subaltern group' -increase in confidence in members of the community in articulation and expressing demands, a pool of empowered leadership of the *Pourakarmikas* i.e. SKSS who have started challenging hierarchies and official apathy at different levels and begun claiming their dignity.

But they also express that the path straddled is riddled with different challenges. The major bottlenecks that have emerged in the struggle against eradication of manual scavenging; include state-official-social apathy in terms of resistance at all levels in establishing the existence of Manual Scavenging. The other hurdle has been the disparaging move by bureaucrats-officials towards efforts to eradicate this practice. Besides this, there is a serious lack of awareness and knowledge of officials on laws-legislation related to manual scavenging. THAMATE leaders are making attempts to inform officials of the different legislations and PEMSR Act through workshops and generate political will regarding eradication of manual scavenging. According to the leaders the legacy of penalisation of both employees and employer as outlined by the 1993 Act continues to have a strong deterrence even after amendment by the 2013 PEMSR Act which restricts punishment to employers only.

Leaders interviewed in Tumkur and Bangalore of PUCL, Slum Jan Andolan also echoed that one of the limitations also is the pervasiveness of private 'Contractors' involved in the work from whom demanding accountability is a daunting task. According to different activists the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)<sup>35</sup> the nation -wide sanitation campaign in India, which emphasises on construction of 'toilets' to prevent open defecation has also failed to eradicate the practice of manual scavenging as it ignores the caste aspect of sanitation, and the burden of cleaning these toilets.

THAMATE leaders also highlight the other aspect of challenges – the lack of awareness of rights and entitlements among those working as Manual Scavengers, themselves. They add, that years of suppression, discrimination, lack of education and other basic amenities has made them vulnerable. The history of multiple oppressions, discrimination and distance from the mainstream, lack of education and opportunities, has restricted the potential

<sup>35</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swachh\\_Bharat\\_mission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swachh_Bharat_mission)

of being aware of rights and entitlements and the ability to negotiate and demand accountability. Manual scavengers are still not coming forward to get themselves registered as MS. The influence of the 1993 Act penalisation is deep situated amongst the MS also as with the officials also.

## THE ONGOING JOURNEY – SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

The story of THAMATE reflects a struggle which the marginalised Madiga community is pursuing by permeating the structural axes of marginalisation, to create dignified life opportunities and fostering steps for eradication of the inhuman practice. It is a discourse of empowered leaders of a collective of *Pourakarmikas* passing different stages of mobilisation, collectivisation, capacity building, empowerment, collating systemic data and evidence and then advocating and negotiating for their rights and entitlements.

The lived experiences shared by the MS community members have fed into writing this case story. We do not purport it to be a comprehensive account and one that captures the range, complexities and contours of manual scavenging. Neither do we assert it to be a critical narrative of the processes of THAMATE. It would be too simplistic and premature to critically reflect on the changes which THAMATE and the collective group of SKSS have initiated in a milieu that is characterised by power asymmetry and unequal social structures that pose a serious threat to the dignity and rights of the most marginalised *Pourakarmikas*.

Through this snapshot of narratives of the *Pourakarmikas*, we want to highlight the relevance of THAMATE's grassroots experience and advocacy processes and strategies. The overarching drivers of this journey of THAMATE are 'a subaltern group' of the Madigas, who are struggling to establish and claim their dignity, identity and existence by defying marginalisation, caste prejudices, resource deprivation and non-recognition.

We want to reflect that the small steps gotten by the struggle in the state can be emulated for mobilisation of the most marginalised and for negotiation for their rights. At the same time through this case study, we want to underline that with a progressive backdrop existing in the state of Karnataka – a ban on manual scavenging since 1970's – Why does the practice continue unabated in the state as well across the nation. *Pourkarmikas* still continue to face 'collective segregation', a subordinated status, marginalisation and distinction based on their work. It is also an attempt to indicate that programmes like the Swachh Bharat Mission are on a spree to create toilets, but tend to ignore that the onus of cleaning the filth from these toilets still rests with the lowest in the rungs of social hierarchy. Through this synthesis of a narrative of a disadvantaged group we reflect on the larger apathy, as how policy makers, the state machinery and society as a whole we have failed to reach out to the most vulnerable and the socially excluded: The *Pourakarmikas*.

# Annexure 1

Some of the main committees and commissions constituted by the Government in India for assessing situation of manual scavenging

Committee/Commission	Suggestions/ Recommendations
1949: The Scavengers' Living Conditions Enquiry Committee (Barve, B.N.), Government of Bombay. The Committee submitted its report to the Government of Bombay in 1952. In 1955 the Ministry of Home Affairs circulated a copy of the major recommendations of the Barve Committee to all the State Governments requesting them to adopt these recommendations	Suggested ways and means to improve their conditions of work and to fix their minimum wages.
1953: Backward Classes Commission (Kaka Kalelkar), Government of India.	Described the condition of manual scavengers as sub-humans and highlighted the outdated techniques of night soil removal and sanitation which included manual removal of human waste by scavenging communities.
1960: Report of the Scavenging Conditions Enquiry Committee (Malkani, N.R.), Ministry of Home Affairs, Central Advisory Board for Harijan Welfare, New Delhi. The Committee started to work from January 1958 and submitted its report in December 1960.  1969: The Committee on Customary Rights to Scavengers (Malkani, N.R) Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi.	The committee in its report blamed the existence of dry latrines as a major impediment to the abolition of manual Scavenging in India.
1969: Committee on Conditions of Sweepers and Scavengers (Pandya.B.P) National Commission on Labor, Govt. of India. New Delhi.	Recommended the enactment of a central legislation to regulate the working condition, living condition of the sweeper and scavenging communities and also recommended creation of adequate and efficient enforcement mechanism
1989: Basu Task Force (The sub-committee of the task force constituted by the Planning Commission)	Besides other recommendations, suggested for social Rehabilitation Programmes that would provide alternative jobs
1976 Govt of Karnataka constituted IPD Salappa committee	IPD Salappa himself is a safaikarmacharie He travelled across state and prepared compressive report and Recommendations and submitted to state Govt

(Source: Ravichandran, B. (2011). Scavenging Profession: Between Class and Caste , Economic & Political Weekly, vol. 45(13), Parameshwara, N. (2016) The role of BBMP in the rehabilitation of *Pourakarmikas* in Karnataka special reference to Bangalore city a sociological study, PhD Thesis Bangalore University & Gupta Abhishek (2016) Manual Scavenging: A Case Of Denied Rights in ILI

# Annexure 2

Lived Experiences shared (during Focussed Group Discussions and Interviews conducted in Tumkur and Bengaluru) by *Pourakarmikas*, activists and community leaders corroborated the gender disparities and power asymmetry existing in their work. The unequal power relations could not be dealt exclusively in the case study. However it was felt imperative to include a brief note on it here, as a snapshot of the experiences shared by them.

## Power Dimensions and Gender Disparity in Manual Scavenging

Gender disparity is visible in manual scavenging, women contract workers are relatively more marginalised and get lesser remunerations relative to men contract workers. Majority of the SKs are women and among the youth though the number of girls is less, a significant number of girls' work as SKs. Women usually enter the domain of manual scavenging after marriage. The biggest challenge for women MS is lack of economic resources and the added responsibility of the household which makes them vulnerable forcing to take up these jobs. Their vulnerability is a compounded effect of poverty, lack of adequate economic resources, lack of education and skills for alternative employment and alcoholism of their spouses in most of the cases. This cycle continues to perpetuate for women MS and SKs. The contractors also prefer to employ women as it is easier for them to control women. A general understanding ingrained among men contractors is that women MS are regular at work, vulnerable and won't defy orders. A majority of the *Pourakarmikas* employed in the Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), airports and railway stations in the state of Karnataka are women.

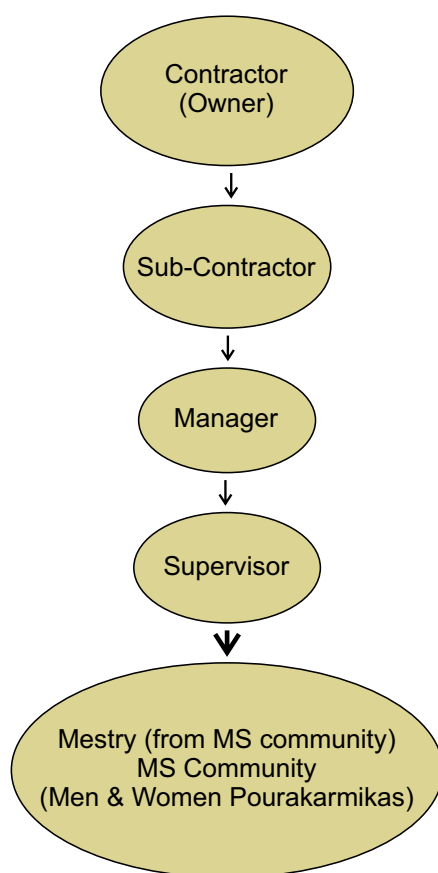
The manual scavenging system is deeply mired in caste hierarchies and caste-based discrimination is visible in how the system operates. The upper dominant caste men occupy the positions of the authority as the beneficent employer. At the helm of affairs in the entire system are the contractors who are upper –dominant caste men and it are a very rare occurrence that a contractor is from the MS community. All the contractors are men. The second layer is occupied by sub-contractors who are also dominant caste men and manage the tasks for the contractors. The third level is occupied by managers who further manage the sub-tasks and they are also from upper castes. Following managers are the supervisors who are in charge of areas or the municipal wards. The lower position in this hierarchy is occupied by the Mesteries who are men from the MS community and they work in direct contact with the community. They control work for roads, streets allocated to them and follow the direct orders/instructions from those higher above in hierarchy. The Mesteries and other people of the MS community working as MS/SKs use the terminology 'owner' to address the contractor. Though the mestery is from the manual scavenging community however when it comes to power, they also behave as the proxy of the contractor.

*Table A: Types of workers in Gram Panchayats and Urban Bodies – Caste Matrix*

SafaiKaramcharis	All belong to Dalit communities – Madigas, Malas, Bhangis etc.
Waterman	All belong to Other Backward Classes(OBCs)
Bill Collectors	All belong to Upper Castes ( Dominant Castes)



Figure 2: Manual Scavenging System – Power Dimensions and Gender Disparity in Karnataka



**A Note on Contribution:** K B Obalesh, one of the founder members of THAMATE is a key contributor to this case study. His lived experiences and his journey of involvement along with other members of THAMATE and its alliances, in the struggle for eradication of manual scavenging have enriched the case study. The narratives of the Manual Scavenger form a significant resource to this case study. We have attempted to not compromise on the objectivity in bringing out the narratives of the marginalised sections and their struggle in claiming their dignity and entitlements.

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Basement of Young Women's Hostel No. 2

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