

Human Dignity

Social Justice

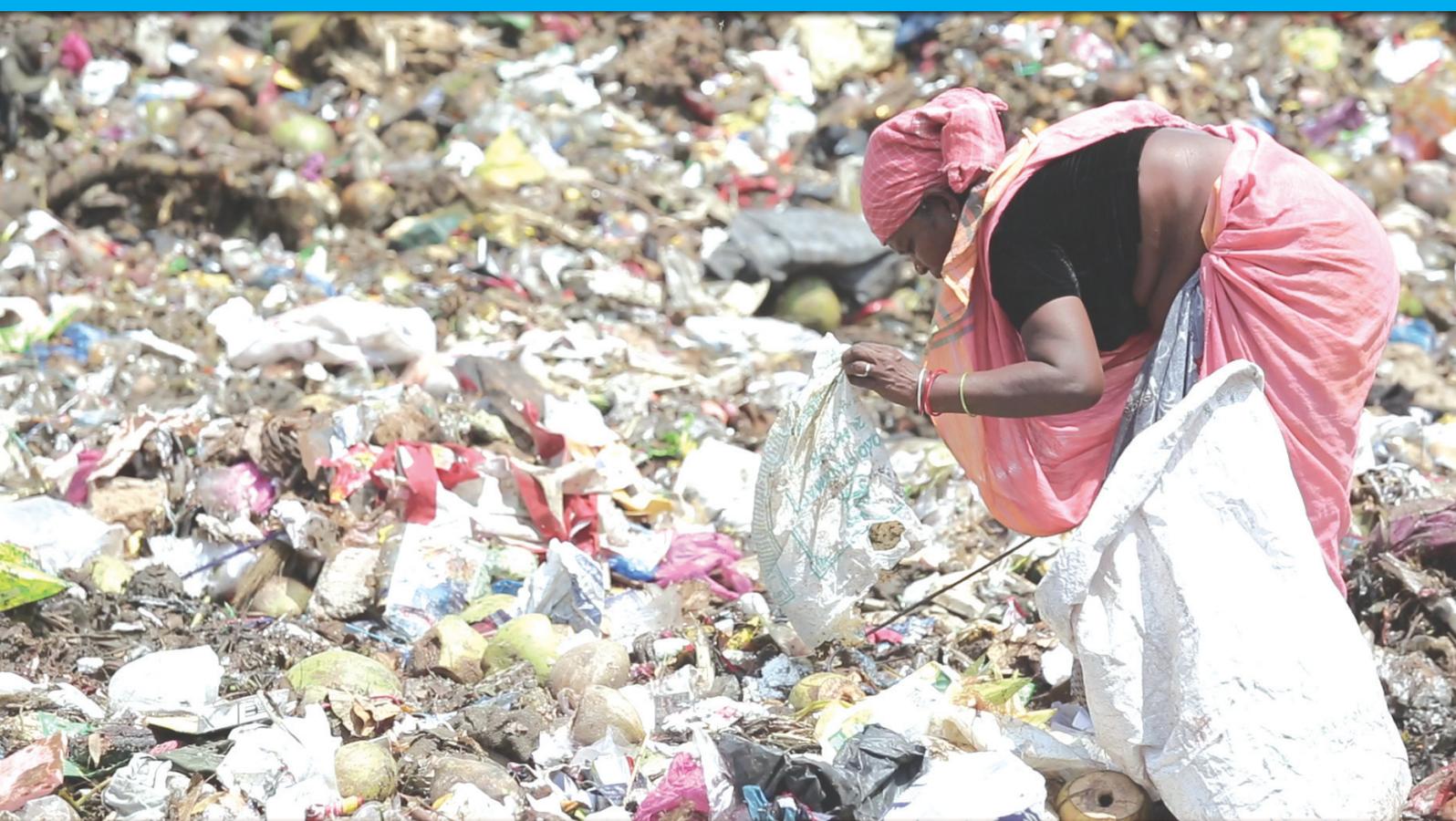
Social Democracy



A Study on the

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS of WASTE PICKERS

in
Andhra Pradesh



DALIT BAHUJAN RESOURCE CENTRE

D.No. 4-16-25/6 , Bandlamudi Complex, Bharathpet
Amaravathi Road, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.

Ph: 0863-2254271, 7286045555 E-mail: apdbrc@gmail.com Web: www.dbrcindia.org

About us...

Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre is a Non governmental Organisation (NGO) registered under Andhra Pradesh Public Societies Registration Act 1860. It is registered in 1992 as a movement for promotion of livelihood, dignity and self respect of Dalits, Adivasis, vulnerable and marginalized communities with special focus on women and children.

DBRC is working in 8 Districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and facilitating the Dalit Bahujans, Informal Waste Pickers, Sanitary Workers and other marginalized communities for their empowerment.

Objectives of DBRC

- To build, strengthen the marginalized and vulnerable communities to access, ascertain the human development components such as education, health, livelihoods and dignity with right centric approach.
- To take up social research, develop analytical reports on state policy to sensitize, empower marginalized communities.
- To support, strengthen efforts of the central and state, and local governments in empowering downtrodden, marginalized communities.
- To build and enhance capacities and skills of people's organizations, NGOs, institutions in implementation of health, education, livelihoods, cultural and social programmes for the betterment of the marginalised communities.
- To reach out, rescue, rehabilitate the vulnerable communities in terms of social, natural disasters with timely need-based relief.
- To publish books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, make films, documentation to further strengthen the objectives of the society.

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I measure the progress of a Community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar



Mr. Alladi Deva Kumar
Executive Secretary,
DBRC

Foreword

Waste Picking is one of the major occupations in the informal sector taken up by the migrants due to lack of alternatives. Though, they are doing good to the society by collective waste, segregating them and assisting in the process of recycling. They are facing stigma and discrimination from the society. DBRC has conducted a study to understand the socio economic conditions of the waste pickers and this study report will be the basis to take up new interventions for strengthening their livelihoods and facilitating them in the integration of waste pickers in the solid waste management scenario.

DBRC also plans to take up interventions in order to support the waste pickers in finding new alternatives.

Based on the findings of the study DBRC will move ahead and focus on empowering the waste pickers in living a better life with dignity and self respect.

Introduction

India is growing at rapid pace, so are its dump-yards. Union Government is keen to get rid of dump yards and manage garbage mess. From last one year waste management has taken the central stage with the launch of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (Clean India Mission). On an average, Urban India generates 188500 tons per day* (2013) at an average rate of 0.5 kg per person per day amount of waste. As per 74th amendment of Indian constitution, the management and disposal of waste is a responsibility of urban local bodies. Most local bodies are short of staff, have no capacity to undertake vast operations. Formal mechanisms are failing to address garbage mismanagement.

Like all other sectors in India, waste management is largely identified with informality. Most of the people who manage waste are informal waste workers termed as 'waste pickers'. They pickup waste from dump yards, streets, segregate and sort it, later sell it to scrap dealers who pump it in manufacturing units as raw material, thus keep the economy running. Their role in recycling is yet to be recognized. Most wastepickers belong to



marginalized communities and are vulnerable.

From July, 2014 Dalit Bahujan Resource Center (DBRC) decided to engage with communities of wastepickers. For making any new intervention, it is indeed necessary to undertake a thorough investigation of socio-economic status of the community. Therefore, a study plan was prepared and undertaken in four cities i.e. Hyderabad, Vishakhapatnam, Guntur and Vijayawada. All the four cities have strong presence of activists of DBRC. In each city, 200 wastepickers were interviewed and called for focus group discussions.

During the study many issues faced by waste-pickers were identified. They live on fringes of urban economy. They lack proper houses and house sites, live in thatched houses, without protection. Electricity, water, drainage and toilets are not available to them. Their children are not provided with education. They have regular health issues and more over they all are harassed by police and goons. Some of them live nearby dumping yards. They are prone to all kinds of air borne infections. Most of them have no access to social security measures. They often fall sick due to their profession, working in odd seasons and odd places.

About Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre

Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC) was established in 1997 and working for the empowerment of the Dalit Bahujan communities with special focus on women, children, unorganized sector workers and the other most vulnerable communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. DBRC is working in 364 villages of 8 districts in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with rights based approach. During our work, we realized that waste pickers are most vulnerable group and they are deprived of basic needs such as housing, health, drinking water, education, entitlements and social security measures. The team of DBRC decided to learn more about interventions made in wastepickers communities, visited the different ongoing interventions on waste pickers in Pune and Bangalore. After the exposure visit, DBRC initiated a study on Waste pickers in 4 cities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana i.e. Guntur, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad.

Objective of the study

DBRC is working on the issues of Dalit Bahujan (vulnerable and marginalized folks) focusing on their rights and entitlements and empowering them by organizing them. As mentioned in the introduction, waste management in India



is recognized with large scale informality. Most of the workers i.e. waste pickers belong to marginalized communities i.e. Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and Backward Classes as identified by Indian constitution. In this context, DBRC has decided to undertake an action oriented study on “Socio-economic status of wastepickers” in Vijayawada, Guntur, and Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad-Secunderabad regions.

Specific objectives of the study

- Immersion in wastepickers’ community
- Understanding the socio-economic status of the community covering areas like health, education and demographics
- Framing recommendations and action plan for intervention.

Methodology

- Socio Economic profiling of 200 wastepickers and their families in each Municipal Corporation i.e. Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur and Hyderabad.

- Focus Group discussions with wastepickers for understanding issues and concerns.

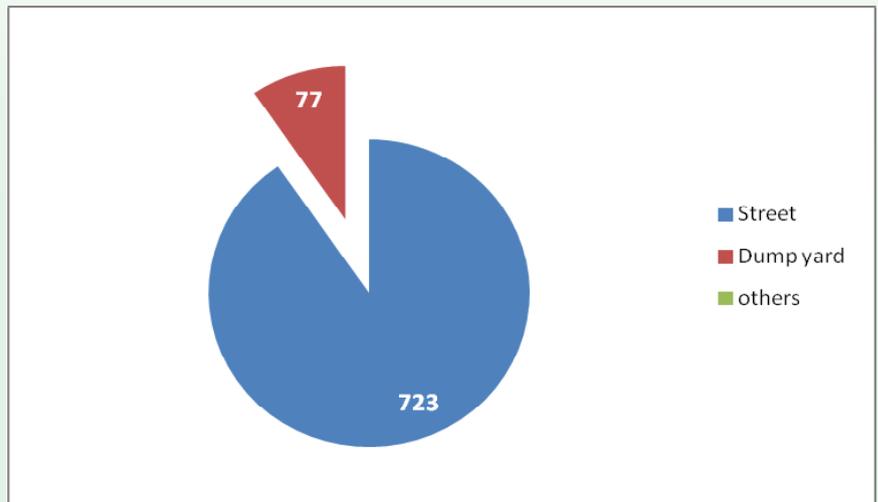
The sociological tools used were individual family profiling, focus group discussions with waste pickers, and in-depth interviews with scrap dealers. Accordingly the tools were developed, field tested in Guntur Municipality and later taken up for further study in above mentioned municipal areas.

DBRC selected 2 social researchers from each municipal area, trained them on the tools and later conducted the study with regular monitoring. The data collection was simultaneously done in all 4 municipal corporations as mentioned above. The data collection was done during February to April 2015. The collected data was verified, validated while conducting focus group discussions. Focus Group discussions, In-depth interviews were conducted in all the municipal corporation areas. The profiling of waste pickers was done during their working time, i.e. while they are collecting waste on roads, dumping yards and selling the waste to the scrap dealers ■

Trends and patterns emerged during the study

- Proportion of waste pickers picking waste from streets and dump-yard:

The waste pickers engaged in picking waste from streets are more in number than those in dump-yards. There are multiple reasons for this proportion. Dump yard can only sustain a certain number, any increase causes competition, resulting in lower income of all. It is also found that the street waste picking is lesser enticing on health than the dump yard, as a result many prefer the former. In

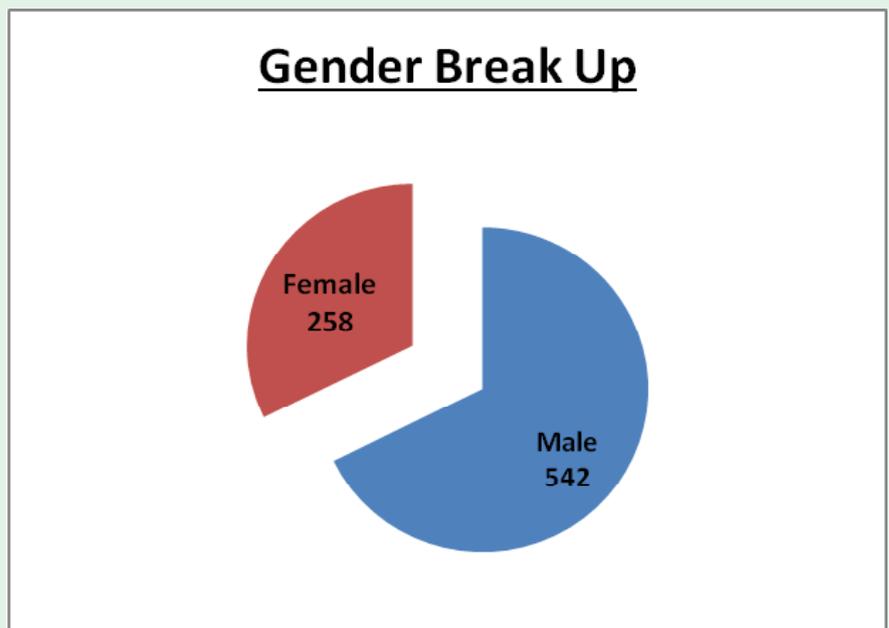


many cities dump yards are far from the residence of waste pickers, economically it doesn't make sense to travel that far for waste picking. Even amongst waste pickers there is hierarchy, those picking waste from dump yard are considered the bottom of informal waste economy. It is not possible for the waste pickers to avail the social security schemes of the Government as they don't have an identity card.

Gender dimension

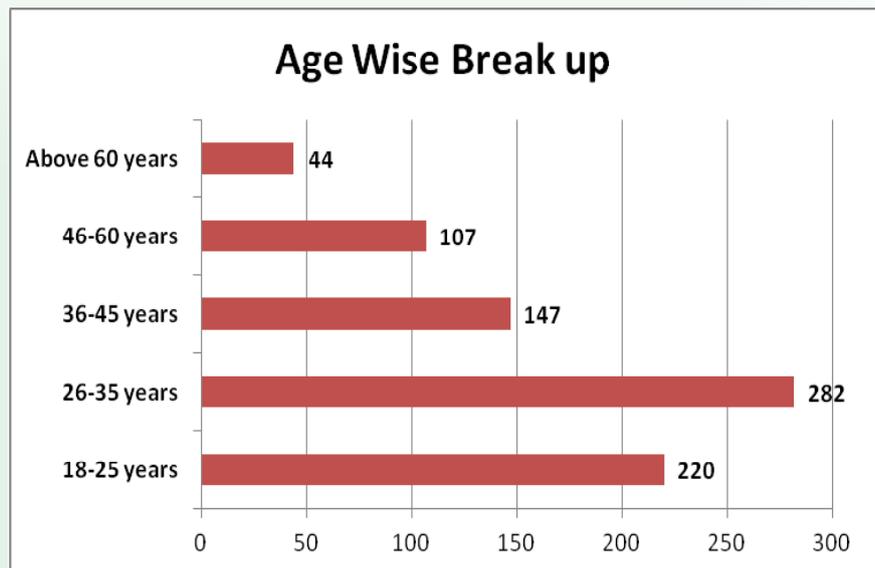
Waste-picking profession is a family business where members of all age groups are involved. Family members are engaged in collecting, segregating and selling waste according to their own convenience. The study conducted in 4 municipal corporation areas suggests there are more men in waste picking than women. It was observed that 37% of women engaged in waste picking are bread winners and head of their families. In the households headed by men, there were women who also earn bread for families, in addition to their conventional role i.e.

taking care of family needs. Most of the waste pickers are prone for alcohol addiction and some of them are prone for trafficking and prostitution. Any intervention made in the area has to be considerate of gender dynamics and engagement with women.



Demographic observations:

As per the study carried out in 4 cities in Andhra Pradesh, out of 800 surveyed, 649 of them, which means 81 % are between the age group 18-45 years. Young people are choosing waste picking over the other informal economy professions as it has timing liberty and possibility of daily or weekly income. You earn as much as you pick or collect.

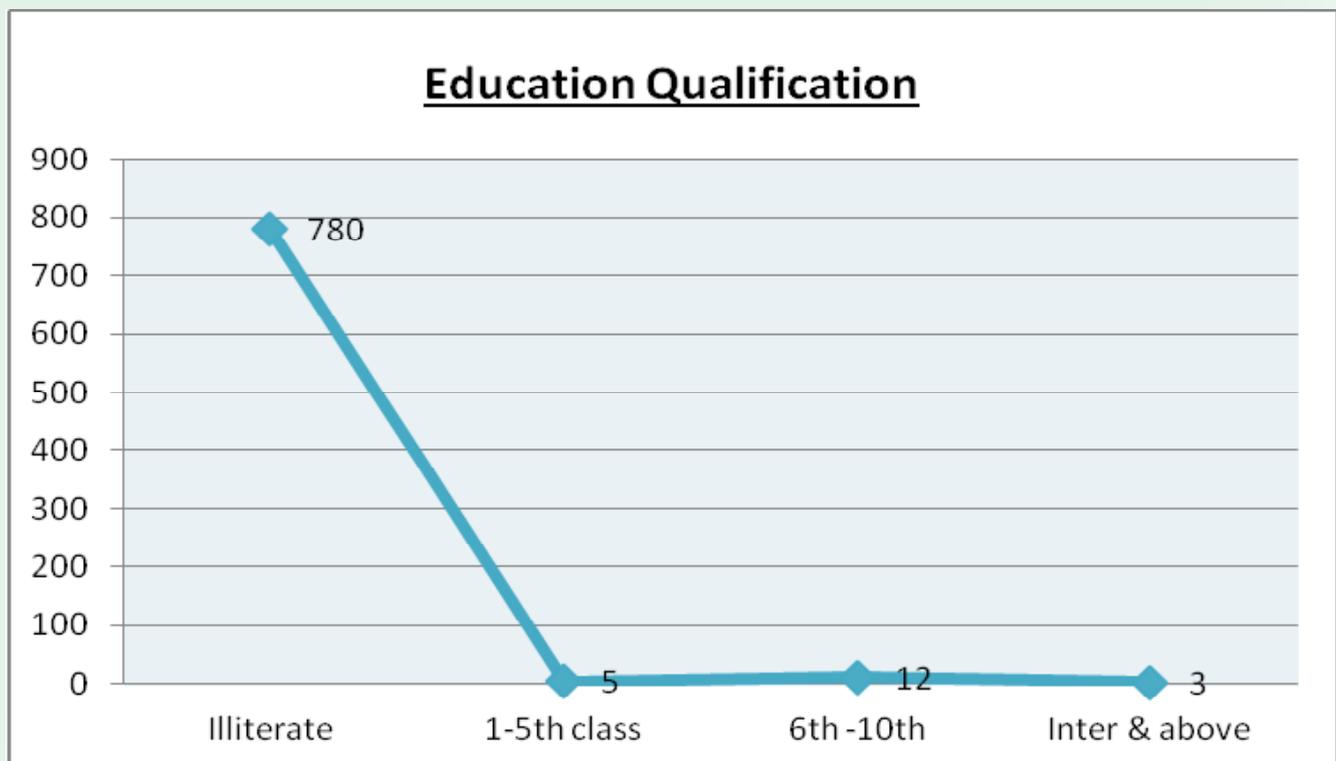


Education Status

780 out of 800 waste pickers have never been to school. For many households priority is earning, food and sustenance, education comes later. Caste and class based discrimination in educational institutions,

absence of quality education in state run schools and unaffordable private good quality institutions are many reasons for wastepickers not going to school. Many waste pickers live on the fringes of the cities

and settlements, many a times the schools are far away from their settlements. The distance and the amount to be spent on travelling is discouraging.



Incineration of Waste will Throw Marginalized Communities like Yanadis out of Business

Kabir Arora

Published on 'Waste Narratives':
www.wastenarratives.com

Guntur known for its chillies is set to become an important city. Residual state of Andhra Pradesh, after creation of Telangana, has chosen its capital to be in the area between Guntur and Vijaywada. Rapid urbanization is on its way. It is high time that the city starts upgrading its infrastructure and pursues the path of inclusive growth. I'm here in Guntur at the invitation of colleagues from Dalit Bahujan Resource Center (DBRC). They work on entitlement based issues including land rights for oppressed classes and marginalized communities. In 2014, they decided to engage with wastepickers in both Vijayawada and Guntur.

Guntur, as per the estimates provided in the 2010 City Development Plan, generates around 350 Metric tons of waste every day. Out of which 310 MT is collected daily and sent off to the dump yard. Dump yard is located in Naidupet and occupies 72 acres of land. The dumping site is placed at a very scenic location, right at the bottom of hills with a small pond in neighborhood, which by the way provides water for many residents in the area.

To 'scientifically' manage the garbage mess Municipal body with state government has proposed 'waste to energy' plant. The City development Plan mentions that only 6% i.e. 20 MT of waste is recyclable, and rest is inert and organic 31 and 63 percent respectively. Anyone

who has studied waste ecologies in India will call the estimated percentage of recyclables a farce. Real time data availed from the sample of more than 12497 households in Bangalore, provided by Hasiru Dala, states that 68.5 percent of waste is organic, 21 percent is recyclable and rest 10.5 percent is reject and sanitary. Proportion of recyclable material is higher than the estimates given by Municipal body. If that was not the case, city would not have had 1000 wastepickers running the informal waste economy on their shoulders. The higher percentage of inert on paper will be helpful in strengthening the argument for incineration, thus the proposition of waste to energy plant. 'Waste to energy' is based on incineration technology and has severe impacts on health, environment and economy. Instead of incineration a stronger emphasis on recycling will create a 'win-win' situation. It will help provide raw materials to the industry and support communities who are engaged in wastepicking.

In case of Guntur most of the wastepickers, unlike many other Indian cities, belong to 'Schedule Tribe' category. They are Yanadis, who were once upon a time forest dwellers and were forced out of forest through push and pull factors. Generations ago, they were based in Nellore and Chittoor and now spread across the whole state. After leaving forest life, their major vocation became hunting snakes and rats in the farm land, thus helping the farmers save their crops.

Many of them were also engaged in scavenging. With changing times, their vocations have again changed but their social and economic conditions are still worst. Due to societal discrimination most of them live at the fringes of urban economy.

All the wastepickers we met in the dump-yard were Yanadis. When asked about their conventional vocation, they all firmly said –wastepicking. As far as their memories go, their parents and grandparents were picking and sorting waste. In past they were based in Old Guntur- Balaji Nagar, once the dump-yard there was shut, they moved to Naidupet.

The workers from Yanadi community who pick and sort garbage from the Naidupet stay few yards away. With temporary huts made out of palm leaves and flex banners, they have created a small niche for themselves and call it Ambedkar Nagar. It is an informal settlement with land belonging to government. There is always threat of eviction looming on their head.

During the visit we saw many children along with their parents in the dump yard. Literacy and education become second priority when the questions of next meal are unanswered. The other reason of children not going to school was that the government school allocated to the area of Naidupet is very far from their neighborhood. Local leaders like Srinivas and Pastor Manik Rao have not given up. They are keen to get children of the community educated. In a small church which they have constructed, classes for small children are held on daily basis. There are 30 students. They are pursuing their friends, neighbors and co-workers to send their children to school. It takes time to get everyone convinced as there will be lesser hands helping in work. Last year, according to Pastor Rao there were more than 70 students. Government was planning to shut down the Naidupet Government School as the number

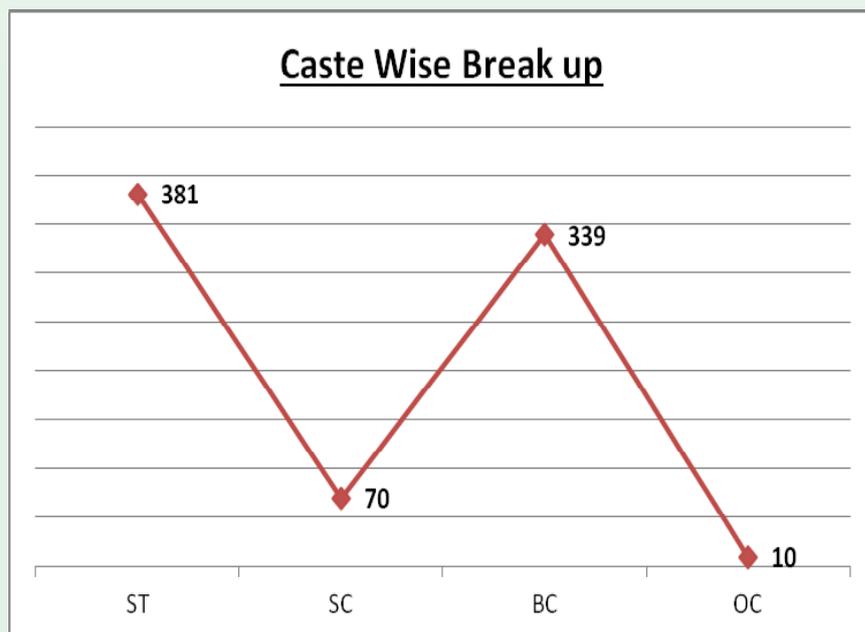
of children attending it was very low. To ensure the school continues its operations, Pastor agreed to send most of his students to the government school. Knowing that school is far and distance can result in drop outs, Srinivas- local leader of the community is sponsoring the auto travel of all school going children.

Coming to the queries around social security, most of the wastepickers we met today had no identity cards except few who recently got ‘Aadhar Cards’, but they don’t know what to use it for. Tummalankamma was the only one in the whole group who has a ration card. The ration card is of no use, as the Public Distribution System (PDS) shop is far away. According to her, they were recently called for Biometric identification, which she and her husband got it done. Apart from that she doesn’t know anything about it. The condition of the whole community is deplorable. Their earnings are meager –INR 500 a week i.e. equivalent to one dollar a day in which they have to survive as a family.

If a waste to energy plant is installed in the area. Most of the residents –Yanadis whose last resort for earning is wastepicking will go out of business. Guntur is on its way to become a part of capital region, which will be no less than a world class city, the local and state government should manage its waste properly and also ensure that those who are dependent on it don’t lose their livelihoods. They should get proper safety equipments, good pay for their work and strengthened social, food and health safety net. The amount which will be burned for installing incineration plant can do a lot better for Yanadis and further enhance the scale of recycling. To ensure that Yanadis get what they are rightfully entitled as equal citizens of India, colleagues in Dalit Bahujan Resource Center (DBRC) getting ready for long battle ahead. ■

Caste wise division of waste pickers

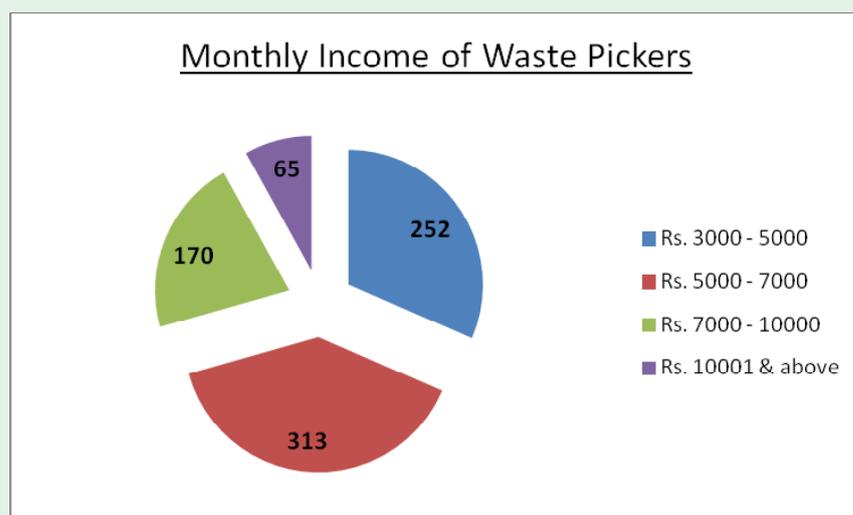
Caste is one of the important factors in Indian society to determine the growth and advancement of any community. Marginalized communities are identified as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and backward classes (BC) in the constitutional framing. All the menial unsafe jobs by default are given to these communities. The pie diagram depicts that there are more Scheduled Tribes in waste picking and this very different from the Nationwide



trends. As per the Caste wise division around 47.6 % are STs, 8.75 % are SCs, 42.7 % are Backwards Classes and 1.25 % are others.

Monthly income of wastepickers

Most waste pickers earn between INR 3000-5000. There are many who are apparently earning more than INR 5000, their income may look higher but their conditions are not different from the others. The Waste Pickers are inhibited to alcohol by which the waste pickers suffer of economic problems and they depend on the scrap dealers for loans and



by the time, they try to repay the loan, the interest would have gone up. This data has to be taken with a pinch of salt as the numbers are not representatives of expenditure made on essentials like rent or maintenance of house, food, health and travel for work.

Availability of identity cards and access to social security

Identity cards are essential to move around in India. Anyone without it can be termed as illegal immigrant. One needs to have an identity card for accessing most social security measures. Occupational identity cards for wastepickers are not available in Andhra Pradesh. Karnataka, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir have shown progressive signs and issues cards to wastepickers so that they can access social security measures framed for ‘unorganized sector’ (informal economy workers).

A lot of those interviewed have had Aadhar-Biometric Identification Card, but very few of them have ever used it for any official purposes. 377 respondents have ration card. Usage of it for availing food is



very minimal. The government has liberalized giving aadhar cards. If the waste pickers get aadhar cards then the waste pickers will get an address and this will help them in getting support from the government for different services.

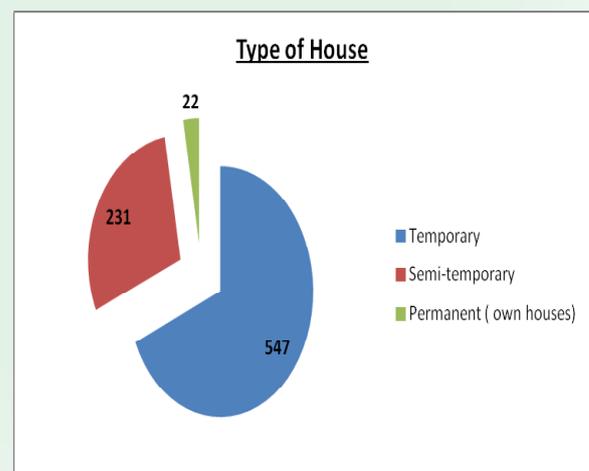
Not all waste pickers will be eligible for pension schemes as they are largely addressed to people in old age, disabled and

widow (for women) category. There are few who regularly get pension, the amount is meager and doesn't provide much for sustenance. There are other schemes like Rashtriya Swasthya Beema Yojna (National Health Insurance Scheme), scholarship for children of parents in unclean occupations relevant to wastepickers but no one as yet accessed them.

Status of housing

547 % (68.4%) families live in the make shift tents which consists of plastic sheets exposed to lot of hardships, 231 (28.9%) families living in semi temporary houses and only 22 (2.8%) families living in permanent structures. These permanent structures have been given during the time of natural calamities by some organisations as the waste pickers were residing in these areas for a long time.

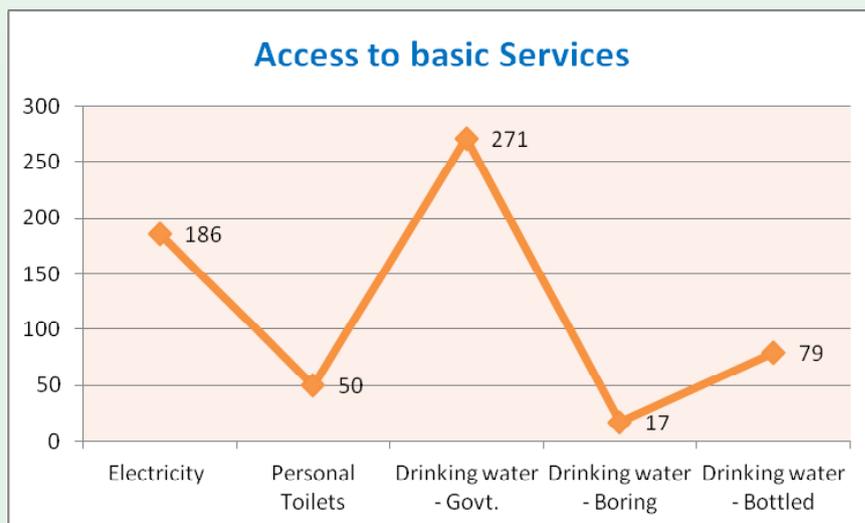
- When we say temporary or semi temporary houses it means mud huts, thatched roofs, houses covered with flex or palm leaves as their roofs.



Access to basic services:

Out of total 800 respondents only 186 families are having access to electricity. It means some have in their house and some have street lights in their area. The pie diagram depicting the status of housing says that around 22 families are having permanent houses but not all of them have electricity connections.

33.8% of total respondents are using water provided by Municipal supply system in their respective living areas. 9.8% of respondents are buying bottled drinking water even if it is expensive. It shows that they are forced to buy bottled water as they have no other source of drinking water. 2.1% of respondents are using bore water which is very less than the percent of population who



are buying water. The drinking water is very far from their reach. Another major facility is toilet which is a matter of dignity, comfort, privacy and more over a health issue. The study reveals that 50 (6.2%) respondents have mentioned that they are using personalized toilets. It is also reveals that the more than

90% of the waste-pickers are either using public toilet which in most cases is unhygienic, disease prone and many go for open defecation. Lack of house, meager facilities, bad living and working conditions, lack of drinking water all are adding to the increased vulnerability of wastepickers community.

Case Study

Shekar, a 52 year old man migrated from Chennai to Vijayawada around 15 years ago. After getting down at Vijayawada railway station, he started searching for someone who could help him. Then he saw some people collecting waste in the railway station. He joined them and took up waste picking as a profession.

He along with other Waste Pickers starts at 4.00 a.m in the morning and goes around 20 kms in Vijayawada and collects about 20 to 25

kgs of waste and sells them to the scrap dealers. He eats on the road side tiffin shops and sleeps near the footpath near a shopping complex at Vijayawada. He baths at krishna river and uses the toilets at the bus complex. He earns about 100 to 150 rupees per day.

After DBRC has started working with the waste pickers, the first person identified during the survey was Mr. Shekar. When we talked with him and he has helped us identifying other waste pickers. We have developed very good rapport with the waste picker community.

In July, 2015 he suffered from severe fever, cough and cold. Though, he went to the government hospital, health condition didn't improve rather deteriorated. Though, he was ill in order to earn for his food, he went for waste picking. As he was trying to collect some iron waste near the river, he slipped and fell down and died.

The municipal authorities have moved the dead body to the mortuary and waited for

someone to claim it. But as he didn't have an identity card, they couldn't trace his address. So, they cremated him by the time we knew about his death.

Such incidents would have happened before, but we couldn't digest such incident which happened to our friend who has helped us reach out to the waste pickers in Vijayawada. RIP dear friend...RIP ■

Major Findings of the Study

- 68 % of Waste Pickers are men ; 32 % of them are women
- 81 % of Waste Pickers are in the age group between 18 and 45 years.
- There is 98 % illiteracy among the waste pickers
- 92 % of Waste Pickers collect waste on the streets and the rest collect waste in the dumping yards.
- 47.6 % of them are STs, 8.75 % are S.Cs, 42.7 % are B.Cs and 1.25 % belong to other castes.
- The communities involved in waste picking are social discriminated by the society.
- 90 % of them who are waste pickers have inherited this work from their parents. They also select spouse from the same profession.
- The monthly income of a waste picker's family varies from Rs. 3000 to Rs. 10000.
- In 93 % of the waste pickers families, the husband, wife and their children are also picking waste.
- 68.4 % families live in temporary houses, 28.9 % of them live in semi temporary houses and 2.8 % of them live in permanent structures.
- 38 % families are having electricity facility.
- Only 6 % of families are having toilet facility.
- Only 38% of them having voter card, 68 % of them are having aadhar card and 47 % of them are having ration card out of which only 2 % are utilizing PDS as they live very far from the place where ration is distributed. ■

Other Observations

- For Most of the Waste Pickers, Waste Picking is an inherited Profession. Some of them took up this profession after marriage.
- Daily Schedule : The Day for the Waste Pickers starts at 4 am in the morning. They travel around 30 km a day. Though each person start their work separately, they are accompanied by their immediate family members i.e spouse and children. They travel on the road by walk carrying the bag for collection of waste. They have their breakfast at 10 a.m at the roadside hotel. At around 2 p.m, they stop at one place to segregate the waste collected and after segregation they sell their waste to the scrap dealers and reach their home by 3 p.m. After coming, they cook their food and eat.
- Their Daily income ranges from Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 per family. The clarity on

expenditures is yet to be availed. This income is possibly inclusive of what they pay for debt clearance.

- Most of them, carry big bags on their shoulder, collect the waste and come back by auto. They use a stick or thin rod to pull the useful waste from the pile of garbage. Each waste picker collects around 25 kgs to 30 kgs of waste every day. They segregate the waste at the dump site or at the scrap dealers selling points. Most of them in these areas sell their waste on day to day basis to the scrap dealer and collect the money. The waste pickers are aware about the dishonesty of many of the scrap dealers in measuring the waste collected, but they still continue to sell to the same person as they have taken money on credit from him. The waste pickers pay half of their earnings to the scrap dealers in the form of debt clearance.
- The Waste pickers are prone to get infected with different diseases. They and their family members suffer from fever combined with body pains, leg pains skin related infections such as itching, burning sensation and bad body odor due to their unclean practices and long working hours in the sun.
- Most of the waste pickers are illiterates. They are not particular about their children's education. Though some of them join their children in government school, the children don't attend the school regularly. Sometimes, the children go with their parents as there are no elders in the family to look after children. Some children who attend school in the morning, go out for waste collection in the evening.

Challenges & Risks faced by Waste Pickers

- **Waste Pickers are unorganized**
- **They face stigma and discrimination**
- **Their daily earnings are not constant/fixed**
- **They are prone to health issues / hazards**
- **Being unskilled, they cannot opt for alternative livelihood.**
- **They are forced to migrate as they don't have a permanent house.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

There can be a whole umbrella list of recommendations on the issues concerned. Keeping in my mind that research is oriented for developing an intervention. Therefore, recommendations are kept limited according to the relevance.

- Incorporating waste pickers into waste management and recycling programs can in many cases be socially desirable, economically viable, and environmentally sound. To do so, however, decision makers need to recognize that waste pickers can be an asset, and municipalities need to engage with them as potential partners.
 - To ensure public recognition of their work, it is important that efforts are made to pursue Municipal bodies for issuing occupational identity cards for wastepickers as done in Bangalore, Pimpri Chinchwad, Pune and Srinagar. It will ensure that their profession is legitimate. This will increase their access to social security measures framed for unorganized workers and reduce harassment from police.
 - For pursuing the case of occupational identity cards, organizing of wastepickers is must. Enumeration of all wastepickers in all 4 cities will be the second step after organizing.
 - Health checks up camps at frequent interval are must as wastepickers are vulnerable group and have a lot of health problems.
- Immediate enrollment of children of wastepickers in schools. Summer camps to keep their interest in education, scholarships for children studying in school to ensure zero drops out.
 - Thorough study should be conducted to understand the role played by informal waste economy in waste management and ways should be discussed for its inclusion.
 - Interventions should be gender and demographic sensitive in the community.





DALIT BAHUJAN RESOURCE CENTRE

D.No. 4-16-25/6, Bandlamudi Complex, Bharatpet, Amaravathi Road, GUNTUR.
 Ph: 0863-2254271, 7286045555. E-mail: apdbrc@gmail.com Web: www.dbrcindia.org