

*Chapter 6*

**THE EX-SCAVENGERS OF DELHI: INTO  
ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF LIVELIHOOD –  
EXPLORING UNEXPLORED TERRAIN**

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**ABSTRACT**

While schemes are being formulated to eradicate manual scavenging in India, concerted efforts are required on the part of the government and other agencies to ensure that those who have lost their jobs as scavengers are provided with alternative livelihoods. This paper draws on empirical data to throw light on the plight of erstwhile manual scavengers. As a part of the urban planning process, sewer lines were laid out in Delhi over the last 15 years, which resulted in some few thousand manual scavengers being ousted from their jobs. Very few availed of any rehabilitation packages offered by the government and most of them were completely unaware of such provision. Moreover, a few of these ex-scavengers, given the option, would like to revert to scavenging once again. A review of the profile of the former scavengers is vital to understanding the situation and assessing whether government efforts at rehabilitation of disadvantaged groups have met with success. Field research reveals that government efforts to do away with this occupation without making alternative arrangements for the livelihoods of the concerned group are undesirable and have not achieved the intended objective. The paper traces various aspects of the profile of the ex-scavengers and provides a fertile data base for further research and development work in the area.

**INTRODUCTION**

With the Commonwealth Games just over and the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fast approaching, Delhi the capital of India is making all out efforts to improve the city's infrastructure, including 'sanitation'. One of the initiatives taken by the Delhi government in this direction is the conversion of dry toilets into wet toilets. A very welcome step on the part of the State, which, however, has a flip side- the loss of livelihoods for a specific section of the working population, i.e., those engaged as manual

scavengers in the old sanitation system of dry toilets. A look at the profile of these workers reveals that the State's efforts at disbanding the demand for the profession have not been balanced by alternative arrangements for the livelihoods of the concerned group. The paper looks into life 'after scavenging' of this occupational group- the once indispensables of the city; an exploratory work, it aims to provide insights into the lives of the former scavengers, henceforth referred to as '*ex-scavengers*'.

## **SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Social exclusion and social inclusion are terms which are closely related to the above mentioned occupational group and the caste system in India, covered as a sub section below. Social exclusion is the denial of equal opportunities imposed by some sections of society upon other sections, thus curtailing their political, social and economic participation and preventing them from asserting their rights (Rao and Karakoti, 2010, p. 4). It is also linked with disempowerment, inequality and marginalization. In other words, it is a state of ill-being, disablement and disadvantage. In contrast, social inclusion aims at integrating the marginalized and the disadvantaged into society so that they too can benefit from and contribute to the social system and live a life of dignity. This aspect finds a mention in the Constitution of India in the form of 'equality'<sup>1</sup> and has been incorporated in the social framework through legislations and policies from the time of the country's independence.

The two terms are important in the present context as the ex-scavengers have been outcasts from centuries, because of the nature of their work, leading to their social exclusion. Since Independence, attempts have been made to integrate them into the social system through Constitutional provisions (Article 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 29, 46, 244, 334, 335, 338 etc...) and legal enactments such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Some significant measures were further introduced for their benefit in the 1990s with schemes such as the National Scheme for the Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents, launched in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997); the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993; the National *Safai Karamchari* Finance and Development Corporation, formed in 1997, Self Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers, 2007, the National Commission for the SC, 1990, etc. (Rao and Karakoti, 2010; Agarwal, 2011).

### **Casteism in India**

There are many theories of the origin of caste in India. Broadly speaking five theories are said to exist namely those of Manu, Nesfield, Ibbetson, Senart, and Risley (Prasad, 1957, p.15). Indian Hindu society has been traditionally divided into four castes (known as *varnas* in Sanskrit). Based on the concept of purity and pollution, the membership of a caste is said to

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned under the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of India. Article 14, Equality before law, states that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

be determined by birth alone thus making every caste a closed unit (Jayaraman, 1981, p.22). The Indian caste system can be seen as a system of social stratification with the following prominent features:

- Belief that there is common origin of all the members
- Possession of a traditional occupation
- Ascribed and not achieved status.

The four castes developed out of the necessity for different occupations and comprise Brahmins (teachers or priests); Kshatriyas (warriors, kings or administrators); Vaishyas (farmers, merchants, businessmen); Shudras (servants and labourers). The caste system achieved prominence as the social and economic system required governance, defence, trade, and services which meant specific roles for every citizen. People were thus classified according to their function, occupation and economic position in society. Brahmins were to be the spiritual leaders, teachers and exponents of law; Kshatriyas were the warriors, princes and kings - in short, the nobility; Vaishyas, the merchants were responsible for commerce and Shudras included individuals who performed services for the community - manual and agricultural labourers, artisans, masons, janitors, etc. No king was complete without Brahmins and gradually the Brahmins attained immense power. Shudras, lived on the fringes of society as the outcastes or untouchables, but were still very much a part of mainstream society as the tasks of scavenging, maintaining cremation grounds, killing or hunting animals for food, working in leather and other unclean materials, all fell to them. It is this last category that has been traditionally marginalized and deprived of a humane living (Basu, 2003, p.13).

Thus initially each of these groups was created to perform specific functions, but gradually this formation took an ugly shape wherein some groups were given greater priority and respect over others, and the concepts of pollution and purity pushed down the last caste, that is, Shudras. Shudras thus were set apart and at the bottom of the four divisions, as the people who pollute with the mere touch of their body or belongings. Mahatma Gandhi in the 1940s, with a view to restoring their status, renamed them as *harijans*, which when literally translated means "the people of God", and today they are referred to as the Scheduled Castes. The incidence of the exclusion practised in the country can best be described in words of Issac (1965, p. 27-28)

“.....The details were frequently unbelievable. In many places they could not enter at all upon streets or lanes used by high caste Hindus, or else they had to carry brooms to brush away their footprints in the dirt behind them as they passed. In some places they could not contaminate the earth with the spittle but had to carry little pots around their necks to keep the ground reserved for caste Hindus spittle only. In one southern region, there were prescribed distances that untouchables had to keep from the different levels of upper caste people, 33 feet from the lowest rated group, 66 feet from the second middling caste and 99 feet from the Brahmins, the highest rated of all. By some rules, an untouchable had to shout a warning before entering a street so that all the holier folk could get out of the way of his contaminating shadow. Some rules fixed the manner of house he could live in, the style of dress until well past mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Untouchable's women could not wear any clothes above the waist and in some places even today nothing resembling ornaments or finery is allowed to the women of this class. In many areas, untouchables could not have music at their private festivals, nor could they enter any Hindu temple, caste Hindu house or take water from common village

well.....". The exclusion was also evident from the fact that they could not construct their houses within the city but away from it in the periphery of the city.

The present paper focuses on a particular occupational group within the Scheduled Castes, which was and still has been ordained to do the lowliest of the low tasks, that is 'scavenging', a practice which prevails till today in many parts of India. The study traces the alternative sources of livelihood taken up by this group and tries to ascertain whether the group has been mainstreamed into society. It needs to be clarified that today we cannot claim that untouchability exists in the same way as it did in the past. Indian society is dynamic and rapidly changing and the position of the untouchables has also changed over time. Yet this does not mean that the problem of untouchables has been completely abolished within the social order. However restrictions are less strictly enforced today, particularly in the metropolitan cities, and professions or occupations are no longer seen as the prerogative of a single caste, implying that today's India is out of the ascription mould of the traditional India and recognises merit and achievement as the parameters of growth irrespective of which caste one belongs to. Thus for example, putting the concept of caste in the perspective of present day India, a child whose parents worked as scavengers does not face the restriction of being forced to work in the same profession. With India making all out efforts to mainstream these vulnerable castes through reservation in educational institutions and in jobs, any individual can rise to any height and in whichever profession s/he wishes to pursue on the basis of merit alone.

## SCAVENGERS AND EX-SCAVENGERS

Manual scavenging has been a part of the sanitary infrastructure in the Asian continent including India, for centuries. One of the fifteen duties for slaves was the disposal of human excreta as cited in *Narada Samhita* (Ramaswamy, 2005, p. 5). Though the National Classification of Occupations (Census of India, 1991) under 'Group 54' makes no difference between a scavenger and a sweeper, it is the New Scheme of Rehabilitation and Liberation of Scavengers and their dependents, launched in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) that defines scavengers as 'those involved in the obnoxious occupation of the manual removal of night soil'. In other words the New Scheme covers persons working in the dry latrine areas under the definition of a scavenger and the same concept is used in the present context.

India is a welfare state and committed to look into the wellbeing of its people irrespective of their caste, creed, and race. However, development planning in India seems to have given inadequate attention to sanitation thus resulting in the persistence of manual scavenging in the country till date. In the words of Ramaswami, a retired chief engineer from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, "Indian cities have grown in a rapid and lopsided manner", which as he explains further, is because "while water supply gets votes, sewerage doesn't" (Ramaswamy, 2005, p. 9).

The Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India (GOI), had urged the government to ensure that all dry latrines in rural areas are converted into water seal latrines by March 2009. This was also given as the 'target date for the rehabilitation of the remaining manual scavengers' ("Eliminate Dry Latrines", 2008). The Minister also emphasized the eradication of manual scavenging as a high priority task intended to be

achieved by enforcement of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. All out efforts are being made; for instance, as per recent reports, Alwar, a town in the western state of Rajasthan, has been declared scavenger free (“Alwar Declared Scavenger Free”, 2009). But the question remains as to what happens to the scavengers once they are forced out of scavenging or voluntarily opt out. The following section attempts to answer this question through a case study of Delhi.

## **DELHI: A CASE STUDY**

Delhi was not exempt from the practice of manual scavenging which prevailed in the city in a major way till the 1990s. In 1992-93, the Delhi government identified a population of approximately 8,500 (Mukherjee et al, 1993) persons working as manual scavengers in the city under the then newly introduced Scheme of Identification and Rehabilitation of Scavenger and their Dependents, 1991. Around the same time the Government introduced the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. The Delhi State government thus worked out a program to rehabilitate the identified scavengers. The rehabilitation program definitely looked appealing in black and white but how well it was implemented was debatable (Singla, 2003, pp. 267-268). The same sentiments were echoed by Mander (2008) though differently, who felt that the scavengers the Delhi government claimed to have liberated were not those who were rehabilitated.

The subsequent years saw the laying of sewer lines in various parts of the city which apparently implied eradication of demand for scavenging from those areas. Fifteen years hence, i.e., in 2007, a fresh survey conducted in Delhi showed that the number of persons working as scavengers had declined from 8,500 in 1992-93 to 1,282 in 2007 (Singla, 2007), a significant fall in the number though not total eradication of the profession.

### **Where are they?**

The point of concern, however, is that no one knows what has happened to the 7,218 persons working as manual scavengers in the city – not even the *mohalla-wallas* (the residents who employed them) for whom they strived endlessly day in and day out, have cared to find out whether and how they are surviving .

In other words, with the fall in the demand for their services and a weak rehabilitation programme, one wonders where this once indispensable community of the city is today. Focus on the issue is even more justified when examined in the context that 80% of the scavenger population comprises of women who are not keen to leave scavenging and have expressed reluctance at the very mention of the word “training” (Singla, 2003, p. 268). The paper aims at charting this unexplored terrain.

## METHODOLOGY

The data collection for the paper was done in 2007 while conducting the Delhi Scheduled Castes Financial and Development Corporation (DSCFDC) sponsored census survey for the 'identification of manual scavengers' in the city of Delhi. Along with the interview schedule designed to collect information on persons working as manual scavengers, another schedule was prepared to collect information from the *ex-scavengers* of the city. The sample size of *ex-scavengers*, therefore, is identical to the scavenger population working in Delhi in 2007 which amounted to 1,282 scavengers. The paper is thus based on a sample of 1,282 *ex-scavengers*. The study is exploratory in nature as this is an unexplored area.

The respondents (*ex-scavengers*) were identified from the then nine districts of Delhi<sup>2</sup> on the basis of convenience sampling. They were primarily selected from East Delhi, North East Delhi, Central Delhi, and West Delhi.

The data collection began in the month of January 2007 and finished in the first week of July, 2007 thus taking a total time of six months. The stages were namely:

- i. Selection of field enumerators
- ii. Preparation of Interview schedule and pre-testing
- iii. Finalizing the schedule and collection of data
- iv. Delhi's nine district base for data collection
- v. Field visits by the research team

### **Selection of Field Enumerators**

The process of primary data collection was facilitated by a team of 17 enumerators. They were located through the Department of Social Work, the Women Studies and Development Centre, University of Delhi and the Department of Adult Education. The majority of the 17 enumerators were people from the field and thus familiar with the nuances of fieldwork. One of them had even worked in the 1993 survey on the identification of scavengers. Six of them were new but interested in the work. All of them were given an orientation prior to the project.

### **Preparation of Interview-schedule**

The data was collected through a structured interview schedule. The schedule ran into two typed pages and covered aspects relating to the socio-economic profile of the *ex-scavengers*, earnings, savings, debt situation, reasons for migration to Delhi, profile of new job, training and loan taken for new job, comparison between earlier job and present job, etc. The first draft of the schedule was finalized in the third week of December and pre-tested during the same time. Modifications were made for language and order of questions to get better response. Three questions were removed due to repetition of information.

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<sup>2</sup> Till July 2007 Delhi was divided into nine districts namely: New Delhi, Central Delhi, North Delhi, North West Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi, South West Delhi, North East Delhi, and East Delhi.

## **Finalizing the Schedule and Collection of Data**

The schedule was finalized after having incorporated the necessary modifications. The final schedule ran into two pages with 18 questions with sub parts to each question. An orientation to the survey was organized for the field enumerators in the first week of January in the Department of Social Work. Sufficient time was given to go through the prepared schedule, and subsequently each question was taken up and explained. The importance of certain questions was specified such as that of getting the complete residential address and workplace address, using legible handwriting, etc. The enumerators were made aware of the difficulties they could face in getting proper responses and thus the importance of their communication skills and patience to listen was emphasized. Many respondents had a tendency to use their local dialect during data collection which they were told to be careful about. The importance of non-participant observation was also highlighted. Initially all the enumerators were given 10 schedules each along with a writing-pad, pen and a file containing an interview guide. The number of schedules was gradually increased for those who returned with satisfactory responses. Data started coming in from the third week of January.

Within a month there was a high rate of dropout of the enumerators which was due to the difficulty in identifying respondents. A total of eight to ten enumerators continued. Delhi's severe winter, and then the summer heat along with the difficult task of identifying the correct respondents led to many others dropping out after completing a part of the assignment. Of the total number of investigators, only five persons continued to work till the end. Initially the time spent on each schedule was half an hour which gradually reduced to 15-20 minutes as the investigators picked up speed and developed their own mechanisms to fill up the schedule.

## **The Sample**

The base for data collection was the nine districts and their sub-divisions into which Delhi is divided, namely- New Delhi, Central Delhi, North Delhi, North-West Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi, South-West Delhi, North-East and East Delhi. The work of identifying the broad areas which fall into each of the nine districts was simplified by the Corporation which provided a map of Delhi dividing Delhi into the nine districts. Though the map did not provide the names of the areas which were located in each district, it was a great help, as the investigators were now able to identify their areas by matching the outline map sent by the Corporation and the road map of the city. These nine districts were divided among the field enumerators.

## **Field Visits by the Research Team**

Field visits were made by the research team on occasions to cross check the validity of the data that was being collected. Sample checks were made to ensure the reliability of the collected information.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study have been presented in five parts. Part I gives the sex composition (Profile) of the ex-scavengers while Part II gives an insight into their alternative livelihoods and the feelings associated with the change in their jobs. Part III looks into the family's response to the new job. Part IV provides their financial status and Part V discusses the efficacy of the government rehabilitation programme for scavengers.

### ***Part I: Profile- Sex Composition***

The sample comprised of 30% female and 70% male ex-scavengers. It needs to be noted that while scavenging in the capital happens to be a female dominated profession with 80% of the scavenger population being women as per the 1992-93 and the 2007 survey, those who took up alternative jobs were mostly men. A somewhat similar observation has been made by Ashif Sheikh: "Another practical anomaly is that the Scheme (Self- Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers, 2007) caters to men while according to government statistics 98% of the estimated one million *dalit* manual scavengers in India are women" (Sulekha.com., 2009).

One of the reasons could be that women scavengers took a back seat and paved the way for the men of their families to enter better alternative professions. However, all the respondents in the present sample claimed that they were working as scavengers earlier, a large number (463 [36.1%]) having worked as scavengers for more than 10 years in the city.

### ***Part II: Alternative Source of Livelihood and Associated Feelings***

It is interesting to note that the ex-scavengers find themselves most comfortable with the broom and thus a large number of them have taken up tasks of cleaning and sweeping as alternative jobs. They have sought employment as sweepers in factories (2.0%), sweeping and mopping in private houses (13%), sweepers in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and other places (35% and above) as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Description of Alternative Jobs**

<b>New Job</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No response	002	0.1
Sweeper in MCD and in government schools	455	35.5
Sweeper (Delhi metro, bank, hospital, DDA, private schools etc...)	237	18.5
' <i>Mazdoori</i> '--Casual labourer	218	17.0
Sweeper/ cleaning in private houses	167	13.0
Sweeper in factory	025	2.0



Peon, waiter, gatekeeper ( <i>chowkidaar</i> )	050	3.9
<i>Bhangra-dhol</i> (traditional drum players)	006	0.5
Self-employed (business, driver, carpenter)	122	9.5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1282</b>	<b>100</b>

It is interesting to note that the government happens to be their major employer, as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), government schools and hospitals, banks, the Delhi metro and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) are all government institutions, thus making the scavengers the servants of the state- a dream come true for all of them. However, only some of them are in permanent employment while the majority work on contract basis. Nearly four percent are employed as peons, gate-keepers (*chowkidaars*) and waiters, which marks a shift from working as sweepers.

The unorganised sector, which comprises more than 90% of the workforce in our country, has provided space to many for employment. For instance, in the present study, 17% of the respondents are working as casual labourers, 0.5% earn their living by playing ‘*bhangra-dhol*’ (traditional drum players) and 9.5% are into self employment- working as carpenters or drivers or running small businesses like *parchoon-ki-dukaan* (small grocery shops). Those working in these jobs in the unorganised sector are the ones who are most affected and feel the pain of leaving scavenging, as their new jobs provide no certainty of regular work and require considerable mobility thus increasing the physical strain involved.

➤ **Feelings after Entering a New Vocation—**

Table 2 shows that the majority (97.1%) of the respondents are relatively happy with the change of profession though some (2.9%) feel the strain of their new jobs. The reasons are varied as enumerated below:

**Table 2. Feelings after entering new vocation**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
No response	1	0.1
<b>Better Now: Reasons</b>		
It is a good feeling	224	17.5
Feeling of cleanliness	455	35.5
Better standard of living	70	5.5
Life is more disciplined	9	0.7
Have feel of being above the <i>balmiki</i> (lower caste)	44	3.4
Are on our own feet	3	0.2
Money is received on one day which is good	29	2.3
Feeling of dignity and respect	140	10.9
Earlier job required too much of walking which was strenuous	12	0.9
Get weekly holiday which was not earlier	17	1.3
Better earning	218	17.0
Benefit of a permanent job--pension, security	23	1.8
Total	1245	97.1
<b>Better Earlier—Reasons</b>		
Now we have to run from one place to another for <i>mazdoori</i> (work)	4	0.3

Earlier job gave better money as compared to new job	14	1.1
Things were as they were earlier-- no difference	19	1.5
Total	37	2.9
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1282</b>	<b>100</b>

Over thirty five per cent like their present job because it is clean, while for 17.5% the new job makes them feel good. Seventeen per cent earn better now, while 11% get a feeling of more respect and dignity. Other factors mentioned for liking the new job were -better standard of living, more disciplined life due to the nature of the new job, feeling of being above the other lower castes, feeling of independence, weekly holiday, receiving salary on one day unlike during scavenging<sup>3</sup>, less strenuous work, benefits of a permanent job like pension security, etc.

However, it is equally important to recognise the reasons expressed by the 2.9% who want to go back to their earlier job of scavenging. About 1% felt that their scavenging job offered them better earnings, while 0.3% found scavenging physically less strenuous than their present work. Over 1% felt no difference in the two jobs which can be interpreted as implying that the new job is as unsatisfactory as scavenging.

On being asked to choose between their new work and the earlier job of scavenging, though the vast majority of the respondents- 1,232 (96.1%) opted for the first option, the point of concern is that 50 respondents (3.9%) expressed the wish to go back to old profession of scavenging. This warrants the attention of policy makers and activists. The specific reasons given for wanting to revert to the occupation of scavenging were—

- We have purchased the ‘*mohalla*’ (work place)<sup>3</sup> for which services of scavenging have to be provided (0.5%)
- Absence of alternative work (0.6%)
- Scavenging is our ancestral profession, which cannot be abandoned (1.3%).

The reasons given by the respondents who preferred the present job centered on the negatives in the profession of scavenging such as- a despised profession due to nature of the work (46.3%), responsible for skin ailments (9.9%), offers very little money (18.6%), provides no respect (5.6%), hard work unmatched by remuneration (1.4%).

### ***Part III: Family’s Response to Alternative Vocation***

The families of the scavengers have welcomed the change of job. They report a feeling of prosperity- *khushali hai* (54.3%), better standard of living (19.9%) and a feeling of cleanliness (8.0%). There is also the pleasure of receiving money on a single day unlike in scavenging<sup>4</sup> (6.6%). Families are happy also because their children are performing better in

<sup>3</sup> Selling and purchase of *mohalla* (work places) among scavengers is a common practice. Each scavenger on an average serves 20-25 houses per day and no one else from the profession can replace him/er in serving those houses without the scavenger’s consent. The scavenger may like to sell the ownership of the houses which s/he serves, to another scavenger which is done at a cost price. Reasons for selling could be migration, repaying debt etc. For information of the readers, many a times the ownership is given by the scavenger to their married daughter/s in dowry as gift.

<sup>4</sup> Scavenging forms a part of the unorganised sector and thus is not governed by laws. Despite a verbal understanding between the scavenger and their employer on the mode and time of payment, the employers do not

school (6.9%). However, families of ex-scavengers working in the unorganised sector as casual workers strive hard to fend for themselves as they are not receiving sufficient money in their new jobs (1.7%). Twenty four families (1.9%) feel “no change” implying that their condition is similar to what it was before, that is, as unsatisfying.

#### ***Part IV: Financial Position***

Money received is a vital factor in making a job respectable. More than 50% of the respondents revealed that they still have to rely on loans for survival. The major source of loans mentioned were friends, relatives, shopkeepers and other non-institutional sources. The reasons cited for taking loans were- insufficient earnings (37.9%); emergencies (19.7%), alcoholic husband (0.4%). Reasons given for not taking loans were quite a few out of which- being able to manage without loan (31.4%) was encouraging from the point of view of livelihoods. It needs to be added that the financial position of the ex- scavengers is better in comparison to those who continue to work as scavengers.

#### ***Part V: Rehabilitation or Not?***

This section attempts to answer a pertinent query: whether the ex-scavengers under study could be considered as rehabilitated under the government initiative? To place the discussion in context, the efforts of a voluntary organisation “Sulabh International” in the same area are detailed. The activities initiated by Sulabh are need based, well researched, focussed and well monitored. They have resulted in scavenger families coming out of the profession completely. In the present study, the respondents’ entry into alternative jobs has been coincidental and not the result of any planned action by the government in the form of initiating training programmes, placement, etc. Further, their employment in government jobs (refer Table 1) was due to the demand for their services by the government rather than in response to their needs.

The respondents’ views on the loans and training availed by them for entering into new vocations for rehabilitation, provides further clarity to the issue. In response to the query, 98.7% replied that they had not taken any loan from the government for the purpose of taking up their alternative job. Hesitation and apprehension was sensed when asking this question, probably because of the reference to money and the fear of some unforeseen complications.

On inquiring as to how many of the respondents had received training for their alternative vocation in the various trades as mentioned in the Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), only 29 (2.3%) claimed to have received training as against the 1,253 (97.7%) who said they had not availed of any training. On enquiring as to why training facilities were not availed of, the majority expressed ignorance of any training programme ever being organised for them by the government. Of them 57.6% said that even if such training was organised, they were unaware of the venue; 17.8% mentioned lack of education being a deterrent to their attending any such program, 4.6% spoke about the lack of time for such activities, while 3.8% blamed their parents for not allowing them to attend any training. An additional 3.1% felt that scavenging did not need any kind of training. The graph below (Figure 1) depicts the frequency of training in various skills which were availed of by 29 (2.3%) ex-scavengers, who have been trained.

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feel it necessary to make the payment at the beginning of the month and do it at their convenience, much to the annoyance of the scavengers.

Out of the specified skills selected by the respondents only tailoring, automobile driving and beauty parlour training are included in the list provided by the Self Employment Scheme of Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SSRMS). However, the respondents were not able to provide any details of the training institutes including whether they were run by a government agency or a private agency.

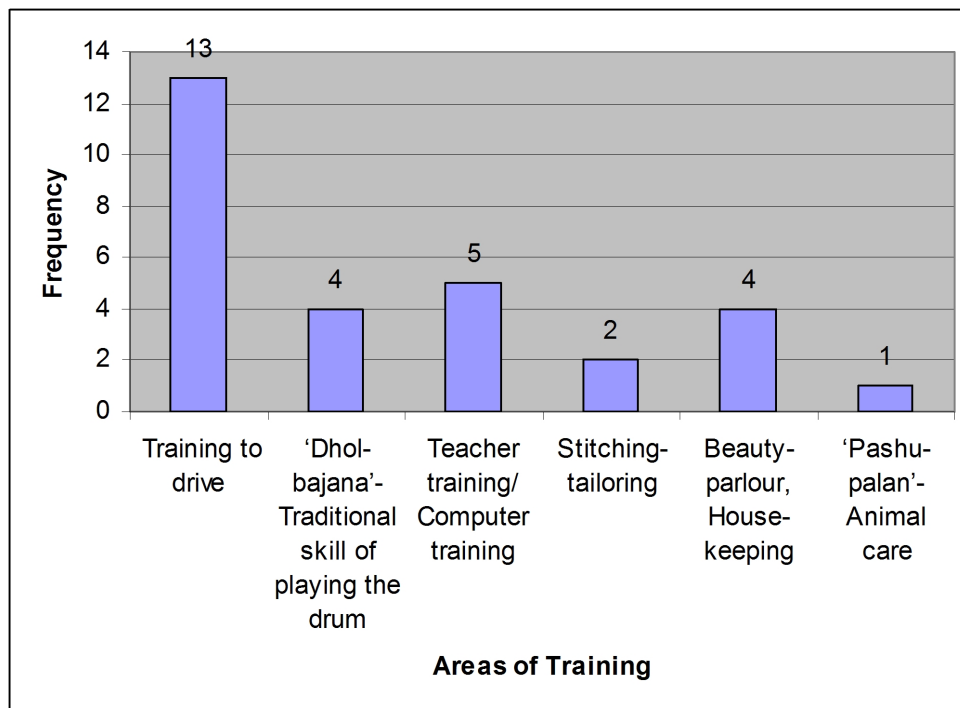


Figure1. Frequency of Training in Various Skills.

From the above discussion it appears that the government has made no serious efforts in freeing scavengers from their traditional occupation and rehabilitating them into other jobs. It appears that those who benefited from the rehabilitation programme did not belong to the target segment (Mander, 2008; Singla, 2003: 267).

### ***...And the Families Continue to Work as Scavengers***

The demand for the job still exists and so does the profession. More than half of the ex-scavengers i.e., 665 (51.9%)<sup>5</sup> revealed that their family members still continue to work as scavengers. The reasons cited by them were- financial condition (28.7%), non-availability of alternative work (12.2%), ancestral work (9.4%); and the purchase of a *mohalla* (1.6%).

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

<sup>5</sup> Notes: the figure of 665 needs to be taken with caution as the respondents were not found to be very clear with the term scavenger and they tend to mix it up with the task of cleaning flush toilets or removing garbage from the houses.

The most significant finding is that the majority of ex-scavengers have settled down as sweepers which is what they are most comfortable doing and some would like to switch back to scavenging given the option. They live in debt and are ignorant of government schemes and rehabilitation programmes designed for them. A substantial proportion of ex-scavengers have secured a government job or other decent job and are reasonably satisfied but the focus of concern is those who have not been among the privileged and face a daily threat to survival, which lures them to revert to scavenging. This is a reflection on the almost complete failure of the government in rehabilitating the scavenger community.

It thus becomes important that the ex-scavengers, their families and those presently working as scavengers are rehabilitated in the true sense of the term through the provision of training in the vocation (of their choice) which also has market viability. More emphasis needs to be given to the next generation which is more receptive to change. With more than half of the respondents relying on loans to survive, financial institutions need to be made small-user friendly. Finally, these efforts would have the desired impact only when this vulnerable community is empowered so that its voice reaches planners and policy makers. It is here that civil society has a role to play.

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