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POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION AMONGST THE RAGPICKER COMMUNITY OF AMRITSAR CITY; PRAGMATIC INSIGHTS

Kiran Sandhu

Senior Lecturer, Guru Ramdas School of Planning
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Rubinderjot Dhillon

Research Scholar, Department of Agriculture
Khalsa College, Amritsar

"The test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough to those who have little."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt¹

Prologue

Currently about three quarters of the global population growth is occurring in the urban areas of the developing world, causing 'hyper growth' in cities not equipped to deal with this situation (UNCHS, 2001). As such over 300 million urban poor in the cities of the developing world live in extreme poverty, "with fewer options but to live in squalid, unsafe environments and facing multiple threats to their health and security" (World Bank, 1999, p.1). Despite the fact that cities, even those in the developing world, in the present era of globalization, have emerged as significant actors in the global economic and political arena, generating more opportunities, yet urban poverty continues to persist and is in fact growing as trends indicate². India is the country with the highest concentration of poverty in the world with about 320 million people, (35%) of the total population³ falling below the government's official poverty line. The Human Development Report 2005 puts India at 127th rank in a list of 177 countries and in context of Human Poverty Index, India is ranked 58th in the list of 103 developing countries. The growing incidence and concentration of urban poverty in Indian cities is indicative of the fact that the policies and programmes of the governments have not really been able to target and alleviate poverty owing to a number of reasons including the failure to understand the multidimensional nature of poverty.

The issue of urban poverty is intricately related to waste (Gupta, 2004). This statement indeed throws light on two aspects, one the fact that most urban poor live in deplorable conditions and second the fact that in developing countries and in urban India in particular more than a million urban poor (ibid) find livelihood by engaging in waste collection and recycling activities within the preview of the informal sector and in a way are responsible for managing an average of about 15 to 20% of the city's recyclable wastes that would otherwise add to the existing piles of waste and cause havoc given the current state of the formal municipal solid

¹ President of the United States of America from 1933-1945.

² Detailed figures and relative trends regarding the poverty have been given in UNCHS, 2001, p14-15.

³ Including Urban and Rural.

waste⁴ management status in our cities. Popularly known as Ragpickers this segment of urban poor is one of the most disadvantaged communities and are the poorest of the poor⁵ as also a very vulnerable segment of the population, vulnerable to health hazards due to their scavenging activities as well as vulnerable to exploitation and social stigma. Despite their significant role in waste management in a city, this group enjoys no recognition, no job security or any form of social welfare safety net. This invisible section of the society is not the target of welfare schemes and policies of the government. Their livability is a stark reflection of the harshness and the vicious circle of poverty that inflicts them.

In context of this backdrop the following study is an attempt to understand the multi dimensional nature of poverty and its impacts on livability taking the case of the rag pickers in Amritsar City. The intention is also to highlight the role of the ragpicker as sine-qua-non to a city's waste management in the third world. The analysis of the multi dimensional nature is done within the perview of Amartya Sen's five freedoms (Political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunity, transparency guarantees and protective security)⁶. However before analyzing the poverty issues, the following writeup broadly underlines the waste management scene in our current urban setup with the purpose of understanding the occupational character and the role of the ragpicker in city's waste management.

India's waste management scenario

Despite the presence of legal rules and regulations⁷ framed by the government from time to time and also some commendable but small scale initiatives taken by some Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), NGOs and individuals, the Indian waste management scene continues to be extremely grim. As per estimates(CPCB⁸ 2000 and FICCI 2005) Urban India currently produces about 36.5 million tones of waste and this figure is expected to touch an astounding 300 million tones given the current spate in the consumption patterns and materialistic lifestyles of the 'haves' which has accelerated the per capita consumption⁹ and consequently waste generation. From a current per capita rate of 490 grams this is expected to touch 945 grams by 2047. Thus modern urban living has brought on the problem of waste which is increasing in quality and changes in composition with every passing day.

However the waste collection and disposal mechanisms of the ULBs continue to be equally alarming. Given the current state of affairs it is estimated that only between 30-60% (Rousse,2006)¹⁰ of the municipal solid waste generated in Indian cities is actually collected and

⁴ Municipal solid waste (MSW) refers to materials discarded in urban areas for which municipalities are usually responsible for collection, transportation and final disposal. This waste encompasses household refuse, institutional waste, street sweeping, commercial wastes and construction and demolition debris. In developing countries this also includes varying amounts of industrial wastes as well as dead animals and fecal matter.(Medina,2002)

⁵ Based upon a survey of Ragpickers conducted in Mumbai city by Stree Mukti Sangathana, a NGO working for their upliftment.

⁶ Stated in Noble Laureate Amartya Sen's seminal work Development as Freedom. Instrumental freedoms include political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security, which are all different but highly inter-connected.

⁷ Such as the Solid Waste Management Rules 2000 constituted under the Environment Protection Act 1986 that direct the ULBs to take stringent measures to manage municipal solid waste in urban areas.

⁸ Abbreviated form of Central Pollution Control Board.

⁹ Consumption linked to per capita income has a very strong relationship with amount of waste generation. As per capita income rises consumerist tendencies increase and so does the waste.(Gupta 2004)

¹⁰ Rouse, 2006 quotes this figure in context of the low income developing countries including India.

disposed off by the ULBs. Another study (Medina, et.al, 2002) mentions a collection rate of just 50% in urban India. Out of this collected waste only a fraction i.e, 7% is recycled through composting or WTE (waste to energy) measures and the rest 93% inclusive of the recyclable dry waste find their way into the dumping sites where they are then rummaged by the ragpickers. These ragpickers are a vital part of the informal waste recycling sector and in a way contribute to improving the city environs and aiding the ULBs in waste management in our cities though one might argue that this unintentional contribution is primarily due to economic compulsions. India's largest cities, the city of Mumbai has about 85000 ragpickers while the estimates in Delhi are put at 1 lakh¹¹. In fact scavenging and ragpicking activities are estimated to save a Class I city of the developing world at least US\$ 23 million (ibid) annually due to lower import of raw materials and reduced expenditure of the ULB on waste collection and disposal. Rouse (2006) mentions that in case of Delhi, the ragpickers, assuming that each earns about an average of Rs 50/day as a workforce have a daily turnover of Rs 50 lakh. Thus the informal waste management sector saves municipality considerable funds that would be needed to manage the waste currently handled by the informal operations. Thus though the informal sector operations are crucial to the waste management scene in Urban India yet the services provided by this sector is poorly understood or acknowledged and it ends up being projected as illegal and illicit and being looked down upon. The ragpicker being at the bottom of the rung of the informal sector waste recycling operations is the biggest sufferer economically as well as socially. Given the current trends of the move towards privatization of the solid waste management in Indian cities along with options of adoption of western management models and with no approach to integrate the informal sector operations into these neo-models, the ragpicker community faces a severe danger of losing this informal occupation as well.

Ragpickers in Urban India; An overview

The ragpickers can be described as important stakeholders in the waste recycling process as their presence allows for a very thorough recovery of recyclables. However these stakeholders earn very low returns particularly women and children who are usually economically exploited by the small and medium scale scrap dealers. A study conducted by the Garbage Farming and Ragpicking Institute of Wetland Management and Ecological Design Kolkatta observed that 44% of the ragpickers earned upto Rs 8/day, 13% earned Rs13 or a little more and the rest 43% earned between 25 and 40 Rs per day. Another study (Agape, 2004) finds the earnings to be between Rs 15-20/day while the more experienced ones earned between Rs 25-40/day. A majority of the ragpickers enter this occupation to escape chronic rural poverty as also due to lack of skills required in other occupations. For most first time rural to urban migrants ragpicking is often the only informal occupation that can absorb them and give them a small economic respite to survive.

Perhaps no other informal occupational setup can be described as more health hazardous as that of the ragpickers. These ragpickers delve through garbage dumps and landfill sites to collect recyclable materials¹² but in the process are exposed to non segregated hazardous wastes and gases from the landfills that lead to major health impairments in them. A study of health

¹¹ Mumbai produces 8000 tonnes of waste daily and for Delhi the amount is 7000 tonnes.

¹² As hazardous waste are usually not separated at the source for separate collection and disposal the ragpickers are exposed to more potential particulate, toxic materials, gases and infectious micro organisms

issues amongst ragpickers in Delhi by Ray et.al(2004) concluded that 94% suffered from various forms of respiratory disorders¹³, 52% also suffered from lung infection. The prevalence of diarrhea, dermatitis, scabies and other skin infections, musco skeletal¹⁴ diseases, infections from direct contact with contaminated materials, cuts and puncture wounds leading to tetanus, hepatitis or even HIV infection, headaches and nausea caused from anoxic conditions¹⁵. Infact a serious side effect of the waste handling is that the filthy nature of work demotivates the ragpickers to take good care of their own personal hygiene making them more susceptible then they already are.

In addition to economic hardships the ragpickers face severe social stigma wherein people see them as a class of untouchables, antisocial elements and subject them to harassment, discrimination and seclusion. Studies reveal that a majority of them have faced some form of harassment by the police or the economically better strata. Besides public policy too has been considering scavenging more or less as a nuisance or a problem to be eliminated. As such all solid waste management proposals entirely overlook the poor ragpickers. For instance the Municipal Solid Waste Rules 2000 that provide a framework for the ULBs for waste management, while highlighting the importance of waste recycling and directing the ULB to undertake the same by involving people in at source segregation but fails to mention or direct the ULB to integrate or work in partnership with the informal waste management sector to ensure a higher rate of waste collection and recycling in pursuit of the broader objective of zero waste and healthy cities. Thus in the absence of any support the ragpickers continue to live in severe poverty conditions marked by high levels of exploitation and deprivation.

As mentioned earlier, there have been some isolated cases wherein the NGOs are playing an important role in getting the services of the ragpickers recognized and working towards their upliftment within the same occupational sector. The Stree Mukti Sanghatana, an NGO in Mumbai is running programmes to help ragpickers overcome their disadvantages by organizing savings and credits, literacy classes, etc. In case of Hyderabad the Jubilee Hills Exnora Residents Association has employed ragpickers to collect waste in their area wherein the ragpickers have the security of a regular income as well as retain access to waste and earn money from its recycling as well. Therefore the JHE has been able to make a difference in their lives by providing avenue for upward economic mobility to a small group of ragpickers. A good example of a ULB taking initiative comes from Pune wherein 3650 ragpickers are registered with the Pune Municipal Corporation as authorized official waste collectors and have also been assured health insurance¹⁶.

However it is observed that these commendable initiatives are few and far between and so is the number of ragpicker beneficiaries. From the review of the ragpickers based upon various sources and studies some conclusions emerge. Firstly the ragpickers by and large come from very poor and primarily rural background consistent with the character of chronic poverty. Secondly the waste collection and recycling occupation provides immediate absorption and a route for modest upward economic mobility for these chronic rural poor seeking work in urban areas. Thirdly these ragpickers are a highly vulnerable group susceptible to health risk and

¹³ Primarily Asthama, bronchitis and Tuberculosis

¹⁴ Caused due to picking heavy loads and also long hours of bending while sorting out waste.

¹⁵ When the disposal sites have a high methane, carbondioxide and carbon monoxide concentrations.

¹⁶ Pune generates an estimated 1000 tonnes of waste out of which atleast 250 tonnes is handled by ragpickers amounting to 25% of the total waste of the city. In a first time move in India, the Pune Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra agreed to provide health insurance to the ragpickers in the city. The move which has been cleared by the Municipal Commissioner Mr T.C.Benjamin and is currently awaiting approval of the standing committee.

impairment that is bound to impose a greater economic burden on them. Fourthly in the absence of any formal support and a primarily capitalist driven economy, proposals and subsequent privatization of the entire solid waste system in a city is anticipated to be the biggest threat to their very livelihood and existence.

Ragpickers in Amritsar City

The specific case study pertaining to the ragpickers in Amritsar City seeks to highlight the conditions of poverty and deprivation amongst this community. The study is based on a sample of 50 ragpicker families drawn from two locations in the city. The data was collected by primary survey including observations, interviews and a detailed questionnaire was used for this purpose. The sample involves a heterogeneous composition of ragpickers by age and sex. The questionnaire was formulated taking Amartya Sen's five freedoms as the base to judge the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. In addition the three indicators of the Human Poverty Index which concentrates on deprivation in three essential elements of human life i.e, longevity¹⁷, knowledge¹⁸ and a decent living standard¹⁹ were also considered while formulating questions for the survey.

The city of Amritsar generates 500 tonnes of waste daily(The Tribune,2005). Though the Municipal Corporation claims to collect at least 80% of the waste, this does not appear to be the case considering the current state of waste management in the city. Though there is no formal count available, based upon information gathered from surveys it is estimated that there are anywhere between 3000-3500 ragpickers engaged in informal waste collection and recycling operations in the city. It can indeed be visualized that in the absence of these ragpickers our city would present a much more dismal scene then it already does with piles of waste littered around given the apathy or rather the inefficiency of ULB responsible for waste management in the city.

Area Profile

Two locations inhabited by the ragpickers were surveyed to get a feel of the issues and livability conditions. Both the locations ranging between 1.5 to 2 acres are situated along the GT road bypass. Location-I houses about 80 families while in location II there are about 100 families. Both the colonies are on land privately owned wherein rent is being paid to the landowners. In last twelve years the ragpickers have moved at least three times²⁰ due to the clearance of their encroachments. With the development pressure now moving towards the periphery of the city, it is a matter of time before they will have to seek a new location. Typically a 200sq yd area contains 6-8 jhuggis and the collective rent paid is Rs 800 -1000. In location-I electricity meter has been installed by the owners wherein the cost is collectively borne by the residents amounting to an average of Rs 200/month/Household. In Location-II the electricity connection has been withdrawn by the owner after the ragpickers failed to pay the bill and therefore at the moment are living in darkness burning night lamps.

¹⁷ Represented by the percentage of people expected to die before age of 40. However this calculation requires more detail study and has therefore not been considered in the scope of the paper.

¹⁸ Considers number of illiterate persons.

¹⁹ Reflected in access to health services, safe water and percentage of malnourished children under five. While the first two have been considered the third one is not considered due to the need for much more specific data .

²⁰ From Seetla mandir area, Goal bagh and Durgiana mandir area.

Household profiles

98% of the ragpickers come from West Bengal and from Murshidabad district in particular and have been in the city since 1 year to a maximum of 32 years. The ragpicker household comprise of an average of 7 persons. 97% of the economically active members of the community were engaged in ragpicking and sorting work while 3% worked as rickshaw pullers, casual labourers and domestic workers in case of women. 78% household had economically active children ragpickers and 66% reported economically active ragpickers above 60 years. The survey revealed that the age of the active ragpickers varies from 7 to 70 years. 74% cited escape from chronic rural poverty as a reason for adopting this occupation. 16% mentioned it as being due to unskilled and illiterate for any other work and 10% said it was due to their personal circumstances²¹.

With respect to each of the five freedoms²² listed by Amartya Sen as mentioned earlier, a list of key questions were framed to evaluate the nature and extent of poverty amongst the surveyed ragpicker households.

Economic Opportunity

The key questions pertained to income, expenditure and saving pattern, meal patterns²³, assets, working hours, economic exploitation, economically active family members and housing poverty comprising of shelter conditions and access to basic urban amenities. The earnings of the surveyed ragpicker families can be categorized into five as the table indicates.

% Households by income

Category	Amount	Number of surveyed households	% households
I	Below 1500	11	22
II	1500-2000	17	34
III	2000-2500	11	22
IV	2500-3000	7	14
V	3000+	4	8

Source: Primary Survey

Going by the income per capita specified for Punjab by the Planning Commission(2000), i.e Rs 388.15 per capita which means Rs 2717 for a household of 7 members, 78% of the ragpicker households fall below the specified limit indicating poor earnings. 96% of the ragpickers felt that they are economically exploited by the scrap dealers and middlemen who give them a pittance amount but the sell the material at a higher rate to the wholesale dealers and recycling units. The ragpickers stated that the large wholesale dealers and factories did not accept directly from them since they did not accept below 50kgs of each type of waste and to collect this amount may take a ragpicker household upto two weeks or more. Currently they sell the material to smaller scrap dealers and are paid Rs1.50/kg for plastic bags, Rs 8/kg for other

²¹ Such as having run away from home, orphaned, etc.

²² Modification within the contextual framework of the freedoms were made to make it suitable to apply at micro scale and to the Ragpickers in particular. As such instead of the word economic facilities, economic opportunity is used.

²³ The meal composition and nutritional value has not been considered.

plastic waste, Rs 6-10/kg for iron waste, Rs2-3/kg of paper waste, whereas the dealers sell them further for atleast three-five times the price given to the ragpickers. The other reason for the low price is also the quality of the material which gets deteriorated due to non segregation of the waste by the waste disposing households. When asked about protesting against this economic exploitation the ragpickers lamented that the dealers asked them to sell where they could get more. Because of this insecurity the ragpickers do not protest and go on receiving a small amount for 8-12 hours of hard labour in dangerous working conditions.

Regarding expenditure and savings, 94% of the households maintained that the highest expenditure was on food items followed by expenditure on healthcare issues. Only 2% reported spending on recreational activity such as the cinema. 94% reported no savings while the rest 6% spoke about investing a small amount varying from 100- 300 Rs in informal credit committees. 86% reported indebtedness and borrowing money at high interest rates²⁴ at some point in their life primarily due to health crisis, for social event such as marriage and for shelter construction. 30% of the surveyed ragpickers said that they had been without food a number of times in their lifetime. At present 14% households eat 3 times a day, 56% eat twice a day and 30% eat once a day.

Housing Poverty appears to be acute with jhuggis in both locations comprising of one small structure of 100-200 sqft and the occupancy rate is as high as 1:7. The initial construction cost of the jhuggi goes up to Rs 3000-5000 and the material comprises of plastic sheets, canvas, corrugated tin material and wood. However this shelter is highly vulnerable and requires a constant repair and maintenance varying between Rs 500-2000/annum. 20% households use stoves to cook while remaining 80% undertake cooking in the open using wood as fuel. The ragpickers sort out waste in the open in the immediate vicinity of their jhuggis and the whole area presents a scene of a dumping ground. Access to basic amenities that is water supply and sanitation is extremely poor. Handpumps is the source of water for both the locations and at an average there is one handpump for 12 families and used for all purposes ranging from cooking, washing and bathing. Since there is no means of waste water disposal, this accumulated water along with the waste deposits is a source of foul smell in the area. In the absence of any toilets all residents defecate in the open areas adjoining the bypass. The livability conditions of the ragpickers amongst piles of waste, stagnant waste water and lack of access to the most basic urban amenities can indeed be described as appalling.

As far as possession of assets is concerned 16% do not possess any asset worth a mention. The households who have stayed for a longer duration(8-10years) and who have more number of economically active members have been able to access some form of assets primarily beds and Television. As such 40% have beds, 14% have TV sets and these households belong to the last two income categories. 10% are the owner of the handcarts used to collect waste material while 24% rent from the scrap dealers and the rest 66% collect and transport the waste manually.

Based on the study of the different economic indicators it can well be said that the ragpickers economic circumstances can in no way be described as appropriate. A majority of them hover close or below the poverty line and face economic hardships and exploitation. Their housing poverty is a grim reflector of their livability conditions and in context of economic freedom the ragpickers seem to have none or little control on their economic wellbeing and this inturn affects all the other four freedoms that are stated as indicators of well being.

²⁴ Usually the scrap dealers are the money lenders as well charging interest rates as high as 50%.

Social Opportunity

The key questions in this context pertained to the sphere of health and education access. In respect of both health and education the ragpickers seem to belong to the most underprivileged category. The total illiterate adult ragpickers comprise 69%, the semi-literate (primary school dropouts comprise rest 31%. Amongst the children (below 14 years) only 18% are school going, as high as 49% are primary school dropouts and 33% have never been to school. Obviously economic compulsions are responsible for the early and high rate of school dropouts. Not a single ragpicker can therefore be termed as literate. All the ragpickers did say that they were keen that their children could study and if there was a free school to cater to this need then they would not put their child into this occupation and would rather be happy if the child could become capable to move out of this 'filthy and lowly paid' profession.

Interms of the health care the ragpickers were found to be an extremely vulnerable group. 41% had suffered from a major illness²⁵ in past 5 years and 68% suffered from chronic respiratory disorders. 53% reported skin diseases, 51% reported persistent physical weakness, 28% reported headaches and nausea and 33% reported continuous body pains such as backpain. 74% reported to have had injuries from cuts while picking or sorting waste. Hence a significant part of the health vulnerability of the ragpickers can be related to their occupational hazard and poor livability conditions. Interms of access to healthcare all the ragpicker households visited private doctors and quack doctors and expressed hesitation/lack of knowledge regarding access to government healthcare facilities. However the healthcare access is limited to major illness and for other ailments the ragpickers don't use health care primarily due to economic reasons. The average cost of treatment of a major bout of illness is estimated to be anywhere between Rs 500-10,000 and imposes a severe strain on the ragpickers. The illness also has an adverse affect through direct cost on treatment and indirect cost of lost income due to days missed or diminished productivity. Thus the health burden imposes a serious threat of downward economic mobility of the household which then manifests into a wide range of negative impacts affecting the development of human capital within the ragpickers household.

Protective Security

The key questions in context of this aspect pertain to household eviction, harassment by police/others, physical violence and abuse, self perception. As mentioned earlier the ragpickers have been evicted from atleast three locations before arriving at the current location and this is a prime reason of insecurity amongst the ragpicker households. For them access to land and secure tenure is a distant dream though a majority of them talk about consolidating their shelter in an incremental manner if given access to secure land by the government. 78% of the ragpickers expressed harassment by the police/ ganglords/ people from higher strata and atleast once they had experience physical abuse. All the households expressed continued feeling of insecurity and vulnerability and again blamed it upon their poverty and occupational conditions. All the ragpickers have a low self esteem and perceive them self as a deprived and a socially secluded community again due to the nature of their work. 96% felt that economic upliftment would make the biggest impact in their livability conditions whereas 4% stated access to education could

²⁵ Such as Asthma, diarrhea, tuberculosis, etc.

bring a significant change in their lives and help their children to acquire skills to move to other respectable and more economically fulfilling occupations.

Political Freedom

The key questions pertained to the existence of a ragpickers association and its use as a pressure group, interaction/working for a political party, possession of a voters card, visits by ULB authorities/ political leaders and positive outcome of the visit

All the household had never worked for a political party and also never voted since none had a voters card though three households did possess a ration card. The ragpickers are not organized in the sense that they do not really have a organization and neither have they exerted group pressure as they feel that social outcasts as themselves can never be heard. Though the community does have a hierarchy within itself and is headed by a Mukhia(head). The Mukhia is usually a scrap dealer within the community to whom most of them sell their waste. The households at location-II reported that they had never been visited by any ULB official or a political leader till date while the households in Location-I maintained that they had been visited by the local congress leader during Durga puja celebrations but there was no positive outcomes of the visit. Therefore in context of political freedom it can only be said that the ragpickers are politically inactive and not empowered enough to voice their concerns and needs and infact live in political seclusion.

Transparency Guarantees

The key questions pertaining to information access and transparency guarantees includes asking them about access to news through any Radio/TV, information about their nation and city and information about schemes pertaining to the poor. As indicate earlier 14% household have access to TV but only 6% ever listened to news, most use TV as recreation mode rather than informatory mode. However one can assume that some form of information may filter down passively through TV advertisements but the question is to use the information to know about their rights as the citizens of this country and this does not seem to be the case: All the ragpickers are not aware of any schemes by the government initiated for the upliftment of the poor nor are they aware of their rights as citizens²⁶ of India. So much so a good 38% mostly women and children could not name their country though a majority 88% could name the city. Thus even in context of this aspect of information access, the ragpickers do not demonstrate any significant awareness.

Concluding remarks

The case of the ragpickers in the city demonstrates the extent of the poverty and deprivation when evaluated in context of the five freedoms underlined by Amartya Sen. Analysis with respect to all the five freedoms highlights the conditions of deprivation and hopelessness that encircles the life of a ragpicker. Though initially ragpicking seems to provide an alternative and an escape route from extreme rural poverty, the high degree of susceptibility to crisis

²⁶ A few basic questions pertaining to the fundamental rights as mentioned in the constitution of India were included in the questionnaire.

particularly health and high cost of living in the urban environs appears to be a serious obstacle to sustain upward economic mobility. The case study also carries forward wider implications circumferencing around the issue of 'pro-poor' growth for sustainable urban development. This pro-poor growth pertains to all sectors of development including housing, access to basic urban amenities, pro-poor health and education systems, etc. The very recently launched NURM²⁷ proposes provision of land and access to basic urban amenities for the urban poor. Would access to this land or basic amenities really be possible in case of the poorest sections as the ragpickers, seems to be highly doubtful.

The livability conditions of the ragpickers would improve greatly if they have some form of access to secure tenure and basic amenities. For instance special waste processing zones wherein ragpickers can live and sort out waste with provision of piped water supply and community sanitation facilities connected to the city networks. Also the role of the ragpickers needs to be thought about in context of comprehensive city level waste planning and management wherein researchers and waste managers can further examine how current practices that contribute to waste reduction, recovery, reuse and recycling can be integrated into the present systems. We also see a possibility in upward economic mobility if the ragpickers are formally incorporated into the waste management process in the city wherein the Municipal corporation registers and authorizes them as waste collectors as has happened in case of Pune and lets them retain the waste for recycling. This would enable them to collect waste at source, thus minimizing the time spent in searching through garbage piles and being exposed to dangerous conditions. The ragpickers would be entitled to get a fixed amount say directly from the households and also be able to make money from recycling the waste. Also the health risks could be reduced by getting recyclable material at the source, the need to visit landfills and exposure to health risks due to rummaging activity would be reduced.

As far as access to health and education is concerned government and NGO initiatives are highly desirable though one can also assume that once the upward economic mobility starts taking place some form of health and education accessibility would automatically follow. Finally it may be said that the above mentioned suggestions need more exhaustive study and that falls beyond the scope of this paper. However whatever be the nature of the policy interventions initiated for waste management in a city it is our argument and belief that given the current role of the informal sector in city waste management operations, this sector should not be excluded while formulating an intervention. This sector needs to be embraced and not displaced and if interventions particularly those pertaining to privatization of waste management exclude this group, their very livelihoods would be lost and so would the ideology of pro-poor growth so vocally being hyped by the government.

²⁷ The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, 2005 launched by the Central Government targets sixty four cities in all and three cities from Punjab, i.e. Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Amritsar and under the aegis of this programme, largescale infrastructural up gradations and new provisions are to be made in the select cities.

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Satyapal Dang

Ex-MLA (Pb)

Vimla Dang

Ex-MLA (Pb)

By hand

Tel. : 0183-2258631 (O)

0183-2258023 (R)

EKTA BHAWAN,

G. T. Road,

Chheharta (Amritsar).

Pin-143105

Subject: Re Ragpickers

Dated... 14-7-2007

Dear Shri Kirpal Singh ji,

You are surely aware of poverty and Deprivation amongst the Ragpicker Community of the City.

I am enclosing here-with a Thesis of Ms Kiran Sidhu of GNSU ASR & Ms Rubinderjot Shillon of Khalsa College ASR.

I think it deserves the serious attention of the Authorities of the Municipal Corporation Amritsar & to consider the recommendations made for the improvement of their conditions

I suggest that the following steps may kindly be taken immediately:-

1. Ragpickers ^{working} within the limits of the Municipal Corporation may be issued identity cards - free of charge.
2. A n Health Insurance ^{scheme} for them be introduced without them being required to pay any premium. Entire premium should be paid by the Municipal Corporation, ASR.

v. might

It is requested that the matter may be treated as urgent and important. (I may mention that various researches have shown that rag-picking as is being done now (in ASR & many other places) is very dangerous for the health of the ragpickers.

Receipt of the letter may kindly be acknowledged,
Shri Kirpal Singh, Add Commissioner,
M.C. ASR

Faithfully,
Satyapal Dang,