

BEVARU

Love, Dignity, Struggle

Vol. 1

In collaboration with domestic workers, sex workers, powrakarmikas and garment workers

*A body at work, sweats.
We all sweat.
We feel thirst.
We drink water.
Wind blows, sweat dries.
The body is back at work.
Sweat drips again.*

Bevaru means sweat in Kannada. Bevaru is a place where workers sweat. Against the sun. Amidst the tall buildings and pillars. Between people and traffic. Around construction and demolition. Day and night. Round the clock.

Since the last decade, the city has aspired to get "cleaner," "safer," and "better connected," to keep a marginal population satisfied-investors, land owners and private companies. Buildings, clean streets, fast cars, efficient public transport, fenced parks: markers of a smart city. We vote to see

some change. For whom? To serve whose interests? The state looks at vendors as encroachers, sex workers as a racket, the garment worker as revenue, migrants as thieves. The city hides its labour force to show itself as something it is not.

The city consumes, excretes, discards and litters. Workers clean a million dustbins and the streets everyday with their hands. They smell waste in close proximity. Workers die cleaning septic tanks and sewers: their deaths are reported as "accidents" and forgotten. Their voices protest for better wage, for dignity, for holidays, for payment on time, for sick leave, to vote. This is the city we live in.

It smells when we sweat.

A safe city. For whom? For her? Who is she? If she out late at night, she is characterless. It is always her

fault. Only whores roam around at night. Is the whore not a woman? The police blame prostitution and hawking as the key reason for catcalling and eve teasing. They initiated the Obbava squad to keep people safe. What about her safety? The city thrives on sex, while she is publicly humiliated with lathis. She has to protect herself from her partner, client, police and the customer.

Only you know when you sweat.

A city that is 'better connected'. For whom? "There is no water, forget electricity. Two meals a day are becoming unaffordable. Contractors are the heroes and villains of the system. They offer jobs and extract work without sympathy. Working for low wages, working overtime, working hard, working in fear, we know everything that is working against us. We know to organize. We know to agitate. We will not stay quiet.

We will strike, it is only a matter of time," says a powrakarmika.

Between survival and dignity, sweat drips.

Bevaru is a bi-monthly, bi-lingual newspaper that foregrounds the workers' perspective to understand the city. BEVARU is attentive to the worker who sweats, loves, longs, provides and protests in the city. Bevaru speaks against the indifference of society and double standards of authority. There has been a history of protest and struggle against exploitation and discrimination of workers. Bevaru is an effort to support and contribute to existing movements towards strengthening solidarity between workers in the city. We hope workers will read and contribute to the paper. This paper is an initiative in collaboration with worker associations and unions in the city, supported by India Foundation of the Arts under Project 560.

Gussewali ki Himmat

An Angry Woman's Courage

I was 18 when I left my village in Sasaram (Bihar) for Bangalore to work in a garment factory. It was the first time I was going to a city, I was excited! It was my dream. I joined a garment factory on the outskirts of the city.

We would wake up at 4:00 am. 30 of us shared one room. On one side we lined up our gas stoves, on the other side, our beds. There wasn't enough water to bathe every day. There wasn't enough water to cook. We tried to protest by not turning up for work. How can we work if our stomachs are hungry? In response, they cut our pay.

Pay cuts were their response to

everything! We are paid Rs. 8,000/- a month. Rs. 500/- is our room rent. Rs. 2,000/- is spent on groceries and sending money home. What is left? When they cut pay, they cut Rs. 1000/- straight. That is the cost of raising your voice.

At 9 am, a bell would ring and we would begin work. 700 of us in the same room. Working in lines of 25. There was one supervisor for every six of us. Watching, inspecting, scolding, beating.

"AYE! IDIOT," they would curse us in Kannada. The work pressure was very high. I did odd jobs in the tailoring department, 150 pieces per hour. To meet their production targets, they put pressure on us. If the target was met then they'd buy



Bevaru is dedicated to the voice, view and experiences of workers in Bangalore. The paper will focus on workers from the unorganized sector. This is the first issue of the paper, give us feedback, suggestions and ideas. Please share your writings, poems, songs, ideas around labour. For any information, write to us on bevarupaseena@gmail.com or call/message us on 6361957626.

All articles are written in conversation with workers by Team Maraa.

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a cake for Rs. 100/- to compensate. They sell our work to foreign countries, use our arms and legs like machines and keep the profit. Who wants their cake, we would rather be paid for our overtime labour.

No lunch if the target is not met. No tea if the target is not met. No toilet if the target is not met. It is unfair. Do they have to ask permission to urinate? Does their pay get cut if they take a two-

minute break?

'Gussewaali', 'Tight waali'. Those were the nicknames given to us Hindi-speaking girls because we didn't keep quiet, we protested. The HR department never listened to any of our complaints. So, we joined the union. The management had special treatment for the girls who had joined the union. They would give us faulty machines so we couldn't meet the production target. They'd cut our lunch and tea breaks. They transferred one of us

to another factory. The intention was to force us to resign.

One day the supervisor slapped me. He forced me to resign. I did not get scared. I left.

Now, I work full-time with the union. I have been meeting workers across the city and encourage them to join the union. If we come together, maybe something can change.



The Sex Worker's Everlasting Secret

Karnataka does not have a red light area. A significant population of Bangalore's sex workers prefer it this way because it gives them the agency to negotiate space in the city: housing to education to access to government schemes and services. This piece was written in conversation with women in street and home based prostitution who are associated with Sadhana Mahila Sangha. Their identities are not fixed, but are in a constant state of flux: hence the everlasting secret.

Women have been resisting different forms of violence, trauma and injustice. Some women turn to sex work as the last option to survive.

Abusive marriages. Domestic Violence. Abandonment.

"After 2-3 children, he wasn't enjoying the sex."

"My parents couldn't pay the promised dowry."

"He died. I became a widow."

"I wanted a higher education."

"There were no jobs in the village."

"We have no land."

"My husband's business failed. Coolie work was not fetching

enough money. How could we feed a family of six?"

"My husband's step mother was very violent to me. She was insecure about the property."

"Lovers make false promises and keep us waiting at railway stations and bus stops but they never show up."

That is where we met other women, like us, at the cross roads of life. "We know men better than anyone else in the world. They are like children, lost when they encounter beauty."

The failure of the family structure and the institution of marriage are apparent here. The woman is forced to marry and bear children in order to be accepted in society. She is perennially caught in a web of violence, moral judgments

and social pressure. She has to tolerate, forget and confront whatever comes her way.

The man gets his sex irrespective, as a husband, partner, customer ... "My husband does not work. Whatever I earn from sex work, I have to give it to my husband so that he can use it sleep with other women," says a sex worker. Another sex worker told us how her husband spends all his earnings on sex; he is now addicted to it.

Over time, many women prefer and choose to do sex work because they can negotiate wages and mobility on their own terms. They are capable of playing the different roles that society expects of them, and also retain

their autonomy to make their own choices.

"All kinds of men come to us - from powrakarmikas, auto drivers, workers, government officers, engineers, the police and hi-fi people. Some who are bored, some broken, some aggressive, some scared - rarely someone who is willing to love. Yet the public views us as immoral and indecent. Hypocrites!"

"The city had more space for us 20 years ago. Today, the city is pushing us out. While everything is working against us - development, privatization, sanitization - job opportunities are shrinking. You will soon see no street vendors, flower sellers, small businesses. The poor are becoming poorer. We have all been coolie workers, domestic workers, garment workers and street vendors at some point in our lives. The situation did not allow us to sustain a livelihood any further. And now we are here." As per the survey done in 2017 by Sadhana Mahila Sangha, conducted with 200 women in Bangalore most of whom were migrants from smaller towns in Karnataka: 70% of the women in this profession are from the Dalit community, 15% from the SC/ST community, 10% Gowdas, and

Clock without needles

It is a column dedicated to everyday lives and daily schedules of workers in the city.

Chinmini Cross

All kind of workers meet here with no fear of morality or shame. A place for leisure and fantasy. Here, workers converse, debate and express their views freely. They converse and debate openly. Chinmini Cross is everywhere in every gully and every neighborhood. Look for it, you will find it. It shimmers.

5 % from the Lingayat community. It is evident that it is difficult for Dalit women to find dignified jobs and many times they have to resort to such a profession, even if it is against their will. Sadhana's efforts are towards decriminalization of sex work so that it is viewed as any other labour, with due dignity. They have been fighting to reduce the violence sex workers face from the police, customers, public and their families.

"Our recent fight is with the city police. We have been doing our business without disturbing

anyone in Majestic.[The Obbava Squad, an initiative of Upparpet Police Station City Police] beat us with lathis, put us in jail for long hours, calls us criminals, and take all our earnings as a fine. We travel by city bus, we too have families. It is very insulting when they chase us away from the bus stand in front of the general public. How are we supposed to come back and work here? Cleaning a city cannot be a reason to target transgenders and sex workers. We do not want to work in a separate colony, we will be further marginalized and tortured, by the police and the

public." Our question is simple, why target us, we are not criminals.

"The state should be grateful to us; there is less sexual violence and rape because of us. Imagine, what men would do without us?"

For 20 years in Bangalore, we have tried to see if the woman can live independently. But her moral duty as a wife, daughter and mother is believed to be her sole responsibility, even if it goes against her. Sometimes even their partners leave them; they too are abandoned several times in life.

They too desire to be loved and respected.

"You cannot love everyone you meet. It is a very special feeling, to fall in love. Aren't we all in search of love?"

For any kind of help, legal support, HIV related information; call Sadhana Mahila Sangha on 9448243171.

A Letter to Self

On that rainy night, as I stood looking at the nearly complete building of the metro station, it appeared to me, as strange. I have spent the last few years building this metro station, there is nobody who knows it better than me. I am familiar with each and every corner. Yet that night, standing there, I felt like an outsider. It didn't feel like my space. Nothing inside it was mine. Those years of work felt like a total waste, like something brutally discarded after use. Like a chewed paan that has been violently spat out.

I don't travel by metro. I only use the bus to commute. So it is we who made the metro, and it is us who don't know how to use it- the routes, where to get down, how to buy a ticket. The staff in the station don't speak much Hindi, and my English is weak. I can understand a little Kannada. I picked up a copy of a Hindi-Kannada translation book, so now when people speak, I can understand, at-least. But I don't know enough to read or

hold a proper conversation. So, I feel lost and out of place inside that which I created.

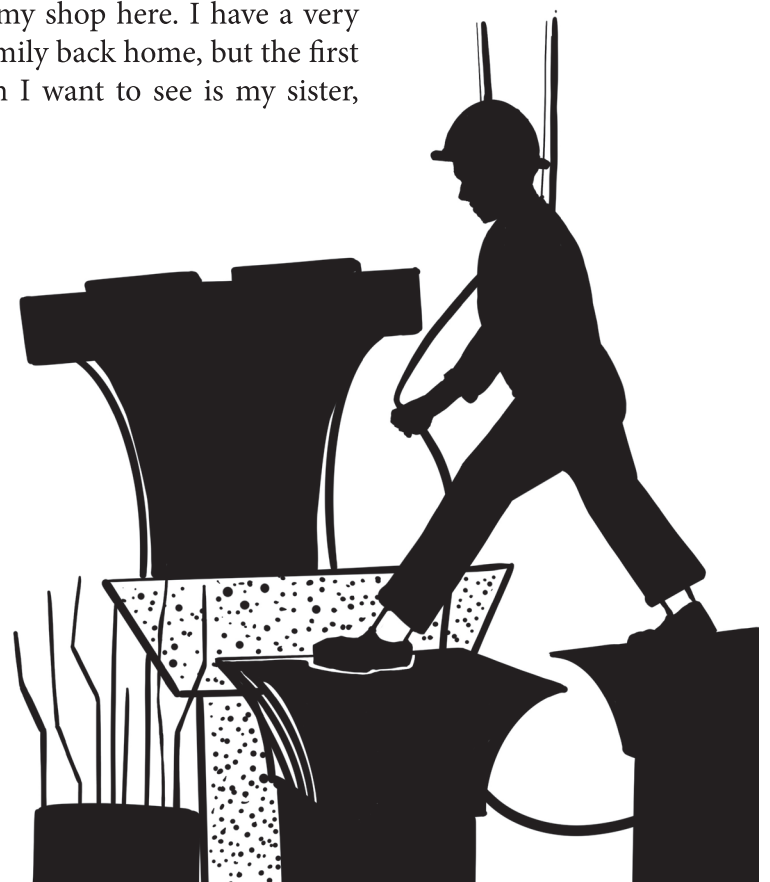
Working for the metro was not satisfying. They never pay on time, the payment is always delayed by 2-3 months. The workers fight alot between themselves. The entire situation is always full of tension. Yet, I prefer this city to my village or even other cities, like Delhi. What will I do back home anyway? The weather is really good here. Earlier, I was less bothered, quite happy in my own world, roaming around the roads at night. Sometimes, picking fights unnecessarily. That was my life. But things have changed, because now I want to do something of my own here. I want to open my own shop.

But I guess, before I do that, I should go home once, just to see how everyone is. It has been ten years since I left my village or since I've spoken to anyone from there. They probably think I am

dead. It's not like when I go home, they won't speak to me. As far as I believe, they will not prevent me from staying there. Whatever I had to make here in the city, I have almost made it. Now I want to focus on my home for a while. It is possible, of course, that some people might still be angry with me. I have been at fault.

Anyway I have decided not to stay there. I will spend a few days back in the village, and come back and open my shop here. I have a very big family back home, but the first person I want to see is my sister,

Ruksana. I know she can never be angry with me. I am scared of my father. I think it is partly because of him that I could not muster courage to go home in all these years. But I will try this time. If anyone says anything, I can always come back. I have friends- there are even a few people here, from my area back home. The city has begun to feel a little like home.



Entry restricted	Obituary	Reminder
Entry Restricted is a column dedicated to places that workers inhabit that the general public does not have access to.	Deaths of workers are not just records, but reminders to reveal the contradictions of city life, exposing structural violence embedded in daily life in the city.	Events, protest, figures and moments from the past, we believe, can inform the present.

Entry Restricted

One quarter of Hercules rum. Neat. I am ready for work.

I am afraid of snakes. You never know when they will show up. The first few minutes of entering a sewer is the most difficult task. Once you're in, it takes a few minutes to get used to the smell of human waste. My father was also in the same profession; I have been doing this for year. But mind you, only we can do this kind of work. Your sight is of no use down here, it is only smell. You can smell sweat, blood, urine, shit, bleak traces of soap and detergent. It's all about getting used to the odour of human disposal. I have felt rats' feet and several unidentifiable creatures of different shapes and sizes on my bare body. You cannot see, you can

only feel. What guides me is my stick. Once I lose sight of light from the top of the manhole, I know my work has begun. You have to keep tapping constantly to check for blockages. It can take a couple of hours to find what is blocking the flow. Tapping, pushing, checking. The fumes make your head spin. I find the blockage and aimlessly keep breaking into it. I check with my leg if it is flowing. I am always scared to suddenly see a snake! When the sewage water starts gushing past, my job is done. I make my way back to the circle of light. My friends pull me up, if I make it back.

Five days ago, two workers died of asphyxiation and suffocation.



OBITUARY

MANU V
March 3rd, 2019
Jai Hind International School
Bengaluru

Manu V died of asphyxiation while cleaning a toilet in Jai Hind International School, Hosur road. Manu was hired by the school to clean a blocked toilet sewer. As students entered and exited class, and faculty ate lunch, he descended into the ground. There was no one to oversee his work and the exact time of his death remains unknown. A staff member spotted his lifeless body, and alerted the school authorities.

Manu appears to have had many identities. Some considered him a daily-wage labourer. His wife, a garment worker, thought he was a plumber. In death, he was

declared a manual scavenger. Only his age stands confirmed. Manu V, was 25 years old at the time of his death.

After his death, Manu's wife and her five year old daughter are left alone, to confront an alien city. They did not know Manu had to do this work to ensure they could survive. They were unaware of rules, regulations and their rights. They did not know manual scavenging was prohibited. They did not know that they are entitled to compensation from the government. The state ignores its responsibilities in some cases, from life to death.

Now it is May and they are still waiting to hear back from the district administration.

REMINDER

MAY DAY: In 1866, the demand for a 8 hour work day was first heard in the United States. This demand spread rapidly across the world. Within 20 years, workers in railways, automobile workers, carpenters, blacksmiths and many other industries organised MAY DAYS, strikes and protests to ensure that their demand became the legal limit for a working day. To work 8 hours a day, all workers deserve 8 hours of sleep and 8 hours of leisure time,

In India, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar played a crucial role for protection of workers. The end goal, for him was not just towards building a strong union. He wanted a government that was in favour of labourers. This is why he started the Independent Labour Party.

Today, legally in India, a worker is supposed to enjoy an 8 hour workday but the majority of the workforce is not organised. Workers are discouraged from collectivizing under the contract labour system. Ola and Uber drivers work up to 12-15 hours with no guarantee of overtime. Sex work is not legalised in India and hence they are not legitimised to set up a union. Workers are not paid overtime in most sectors. Is it possible for workers in different sectors to unite on a single demand - an 8 hour work day? Perhaps it is time to reclaim May Day for what it really meant.