



A higher level of self-reliance



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# Newsletter



## Children Should Be In School, Not At Waste Dumps

“Children collecting waste from homes? Don’t citizens in your city object?” Rekha Khandagle was indignant to hear that this happened in many cities. In Pune, she reported, if a child comes for door-to-door collection, citizens will complain. Rekha was taking part in a Consultation on Child Labour organized by the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) at Bhopal on November 4 and 5, 2011. The consultation was facilitated by Muskaan, a member of AIW that works specifically with waste-picking children in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. 15 organisations from India and 1 from Bangladesh participated in the consultation. 6 Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) and SWaCH members attended the consultation and brought in their own experiences and perspectives from Pune.

In the beginning, organizations shared their experience of working with child waste pickers, and the ground reality in their city. It was seen that a majority of the children who pick waste are children of waste pickers, and get into the work by initially helping their parents.



SWaCH-KKPKP participants during workshop

KKPKP and SWaCH reported that a survey conducted in 1996 showed 616 wastepicking children, while one conducted in 2006 showed 365. Most other cities reported much higher numbers, in thousands or even lakhs in the case of Delhi. It was conjectured that this lower figure for Pune may be due to two factors – the fact of the adult wastepickers in Pune being organized for nearly 20 years, making sure their own children did not enter the sector, and also that waste collection is fairly organized in Pune and waste on the streets is not easily available. The children mostly work on the garbage dumps on the outskirts of the city. Awareness about the issue seems to be higher here.

It was clearly seen that though there are many civil society interventions for helping child waste pickers, mobilization of adults has been the most effective way of affecting the lives of children. KKPKP members, for instance, take annual pledges



Rekha Khandagle, SWaCH member.

to keep their children out of wastepicking. They have also been actively engaged in making school more accessible for their children. In the 90s, they were active in a city based network’s campaign to ensure that children would not be turned away from school for lack of birth certificates.

The consultation brought AIW members to some very firm decisions:

- Children below 18 should not be in wastepicking, but children in the 14-18 age group may continue to work for some years to come, and we may need to be flexible about that.
- Accessible and good quality school education is a must if children are to be weaned away from wastepicking. KKPKP will continue to engage with schools and teachers to ensure this, and also participate in School Management Committees.
- Some children will need residential facilities in order to continue studying in high school and college, and this will be one of the areas to work on
- Children need to be provided vocational training and linkages to higher education so that their earning opportunities are broadened.
- Improving the working conditions of adults in wastepicking and offering cash incentives to keep children in school are among the most effective strategies advocated at the workshop. KKPKP and SWaCH have been using this strategy and will continue to do so.
- Advocacy and awareness raising against child labour must continue, and as a member of Action for the Rights of the Child (ARC), KKPKP will continue to do so

But citizens of Pune should indeed feel proud that the number of children in this hazardous sector is very low, largely due to the efforts of KKPKP and SWaCH!

## What We Do Helps: Pune Wastepickers at Climate Change Conference

At COP 17, the 17th UN Conference on Climate Change, a delegation of wastepickers from three continents brought in a very different perspective. They highlighted the fact that wastepickers, by collecting and processing recyclable waste,

Suman More and Sushile Sabale with South African Wastepickers in Durban, South Africa



reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills, and save precious natural resources. Many wastepickers are also involved in processing of organic waste, thereby preventing the production of the harmful methane gas. In Pune alone, SWaCH wastepickers collectively compost approximately 450 Metric Tonnes of waste each month. The delegates pointed out that the so called “Clean Development Mechanism” gets carbon credits that cannot really be justified, and that incineration of waste is not the best option for the environment in the long term.

Suman More, a long time member of KKKPK and SWaCH spoke about alternatives to incineration. Suman More works in Sahakarnagar and in addition to waste collection work also composts the waste generated in Sujay society.

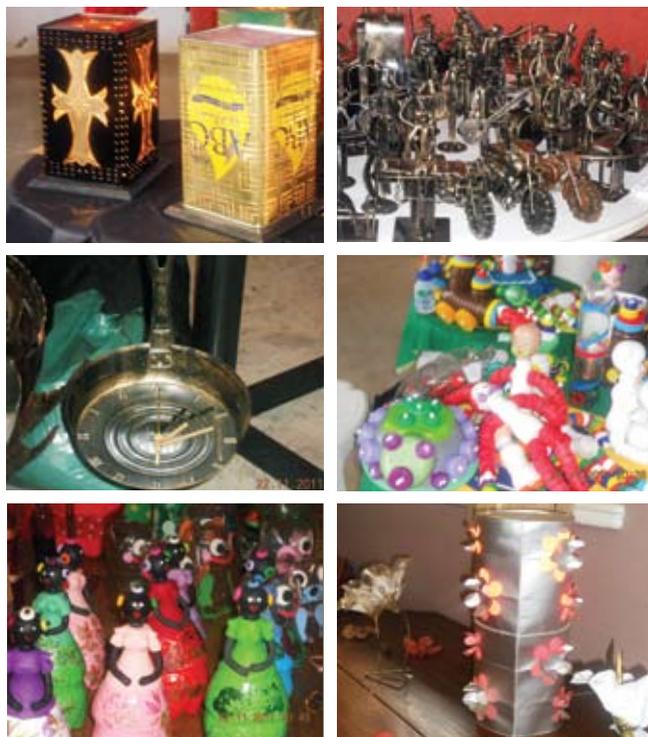
### The demands made by the wastepickers

- Support recycling, not “waste-to-energy” as it burns what would otherwise be accessed and recycled by wastepickers
- End CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) carbon credits for incinerators and operating landfills
- Approve a Green Climate Fund with direct access for recyclers and civil society

### Brazilian Experience

Baby Mohite and Shabana Diler were in Brazil, in November to attend the Waste And Citizenship Festival. They presented their personal experiences and also listened to those of their Brazilian counterparts. They spoke about the experience of organizing wastepickers, first under KKKPK and then the formation of SWaCH.

Baby Mohite found the three hop flight very boring, but once she landed she was quite fascinated by the way waste is handled there. Everyone segregates waste, and the wastepickers only have to handle dry waste. The government has provided them with a huge sorting area where 150 wastepickers can work at one time.



Products made out of waste material

A highlight of the festival was the array of beautiful decorative products, toys, jewellery and even furniture that have been made from waste materials. The delegates from India were fascinated by these and are determined to start such an enterprise in Pune.

Baby also narrated how people in Brazil were curious about her sari and bindi sticker, and she gifted many bindi stickers to the people she met there. Of course language was a major issue, but they did not let it become a barrier to the interactions.

### Best Paper Award for Paper on KKKPK- SWaCH

Anjor Srivastava from KKKPK, presented a paper about the SWaCH model and the role of wastepickers at a conference organized by Indian Society of Labour Economics at Udaipur. He presented a case study of the KKKPK- SWaCH enterprise, placing it in the broader framework of labour economics. The presentation was very well received at the conference, and generated a lot of debate and interest. Many participants expressed an interest in coming to Pune to see the work. The program was also held up by participants as an example of universities becoming centres of knowledge and experimentation to improve the lives of informal sector workers, an idea proposed by renowned economist Richard Freeman, who delivered the inaugural lecture.

One interesting issue raised by participants was that while the work that is being done is good, is it not a case of civil society taking up the responsibility that was actually the government’s role? Anjor responded that in this case, the municipal corporation took responsibility for collecting waste from collection points, but there was a gap between the citizens and the municipal corporation service, that of door-to-door collection, that was filled in by KKKPK and SWaCH.

Anjor received the award for the best paper on behalf of KKKPK and SWaCH, and will give the prize money of Rs.10000 to KKKPK.

## Marching in Solidarity

Representatives from Pune joined 700 wastepickers of Nagpur, under the Kachara Vechak Mazdoor Jan Sanghatana, (KVMJS) in a march to demand recognition of wastepickers' contribution towards a better environment, and more security and better working conditions. Representatives from the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers from Mumbai and Ahmednagar also joined the march, held at the time of the winter session of the Maharashtra Assembly. The wastepickers presented a memorandum of demands to the Minister for Tribal Welfare and Labour, Mr. Rajendra Gavit. Mr. Gavit said that the government is committed to supporting the unorganised sector. He promised to work towards the establishment of a welfare board for wastepickers at the state level.



Wastepickers in Nagpur

While the government has passed many resolutions, circulars and legislations that recognize the contribution of wastepickers and recommend facilities and benefits for them, these have not been translated into action. The main demands of the march were:

- Official recognition and registration by the relevant urban local body, authorizing waste pickers to collect or sell waste
- Provisions for sorting of waste and composting at neighbourhood level
- Capital in infrastructure support for waste collection and processing enterprises by wastepickers
- Ban on waste-to-energy projects as they burn the resources that wastepickers otherwise access and recycle
- Benefits for wastepickers irrespective of BPL status

**SWACHH won an award for the Best Environmental Project at the Vishwa exhibition held in December 2011. The award was received by Saraswati Dilip Nanavre on behalf of the cooperative.**



Saraswati Nanavre talking after receiving the award

## The Butterfly In The Tiger's Stomach



I am Mohan. Let me tell you the story of a little boy called Mhowan.

Mhowan's grandmother was illiterate. She used to go to the Market Yard and buy nearly-rotten vegetables. She would set out her little shop on the roadside in Bhokarwadi, and sell these. The people of Bhokarwadi were all very poor. They were masons, porters, daily wage earners. It was a hand-to-mouth existence, and all they could afford was the stuff Mhowan's grandmother sold. But it did not suffice to make ends meet. So Mhowan's mother used to sweep the pavements and streets outside shops and restaurants. She would sort out the waste worth selling, and make a bit of money. When she got a bit of cash, she would buy Mhowan a toffee.

Both mother and grandmother adored the fatherless little boy. But both were illiterate themselves, and were busy all day slogging to fill their stomachs. Sending Mhowan to school was not something they thought of.

Mhowan was now around eight. He used to trail along behind his mother as she swept the streets. His mother had a cup tied up in her sari. After she swept the street outside a restaurant the owner would pour some tea into the cracked cup. She would call out to Mhowan playing nearby, and share the tea and a biscuit with him.

Many days passed in this manner. But suddenly, one morning, grandma took Mhowan to the Bhokarwadi school. She stood outside and called out to the teacher. "O Master, take this kid into your school. Write his name down. Come on, write! Mhowan is his name." The master looked doubtfully at the boy, his torn clothes, his dirty face and hands, his unwashed body.

"Do you ever bathe the child?" he asked.

"He hates bathing," said grandma, laughing. "Take him into school, he may become smarter." Turning to Mhowan, she told him, "Ok now, don't be naughty and bother the teacher. When you come home, mi chunchuni, chaani dutwaila deel."

The teacher could make nothing of all this. How could he? It was not his language. It was the language of the poor people. Before she came to the city, Mhowan's grandmother lived in a village. They were very poor there too. They tried to fill their stomachs by begging or doing odd jobs. Sometimes, when they were very hungry, her father and brothers used to steal corn or grain from

the fields. It was only to feed a hungry family, but if they were caught they were beaten up like criminals. To communicate with each other without others understanding them, they had developed their own special dialect. And that was the dialect grandma spoke now. What she said was, come home, and I will make you a yummy dish of mutton. Mohan got it, of course, but the teacher did not.

So Mhowan began school. He had come into school much later than the other boys, so he was older and larger than his classmates. The teacher put him on the last bench. The back benches were a rowdy lot, constantly fooling around, teasing each other. But when they were caught, it was Mhowan who got a thrashing, because he looked the biggest. So a beating every day became a regular thing. Gadekar teacher was always angry. She used to rap Mhowan's knuckles every day. Mhowan's homework was never done. There was no place to study in his house. In the vasti where he lived, fights were breaking out all the time, and Mhowan could not bear to miss the fun. And his mother and grandmother could not help him. They could not even understand the pictures in his books, leave alone the text! So homework never got done, and that added to the beatings.

Mhowan's fingers hurt with the knuckle raps. They hurt so much that he could not even break the dry bhakri that his mother left for him in the pan. But Mhowan's world had become wonderful since he joined school. The pictures in his books and on the walls of his room filled his days with colour and his nights with dreams. When Gadekar teacher beat him he used to look at the pictures on the walls – the peacock strutting with his beautiful tail, the giraffe with his long neck, the striped tiger, the colourful butterfly. Every day a beating, and every night a new dream.

Every year on September 5, the school celebrated Teachers' Day. At the morning prayers, the headmaster told them, "Every day the teachers ask you questions. On Teachers' Day, you children will get to ask them questions." Mhowan wanted to do something on that day that would win over Ms. Gadekar, and make her stop beating him. But, what? The answer came from a dream.

He came home after an exhausting day, aching from the beatings, tired and hungry, and fell asleep without eating anything. The tiger from the pictures began to prowl in his dreams. The tiger was hungry. He pushed his face into the empty vessels in the kitchen, and turned them over angrily. All he found was some stale stinking bhakri. Well, how could he eat that? He was a tiger after all, even if in a dream! Finally he saw the picture of the butterfly. In one swift movement he swallowed it.

The butterfly was still alive and began to flutter all over the tiger's empty stomach. The tiger began to giggle. He rolled about laughing and called out, "Stop, stop! You are tickling me to death!"

"Well," said the butterfly, "You better sneeze me out, or I will surely tickle you to death." So the tiger gave a mighty sneeze, and out flew the pesky butterfly.

Mhowan woke up with a sneeze, to find his grandma tickling his nose to wake him up. The dream gave him an idea. How could

he tickle his teacher and make her release him from his daily beatings? A plan began to form.

On Teachers' Day, children asked questions like, "Why did you become a teacher?" or, "How did Shivaji teach the monitor lizard to climb the fort walls?" But Mhowan asked Gadekar bai, "Tumhi karpati dutawli ka?" The other children began to giggle. The teacher looked blank. "Tumhala bailadi nanwat thikti ka?" Mhowan went on. The giggles began to grow louder. The children were mostly from Mhowan's community, and they knew what he was saying, even if the teacher did not.

"Kachra dhundna pudaal ka naanwat?" was Mhowan's next question, and the class grew a little quiet at this. "Teacher, this is the language of my family. My grandfather and even his father spoke this language. I just wanted you to hear it. What I asked you was, did you eat your bhakri? Do you like mutton? And lastly, is collecting waste good or bad?"

Ms. Gadekar was silent for a while. In fact she was shocked. How could she say if collecting waste was good or bad, when Mhowan's mother did it for a living? And now she understood why his homework was always undone. That day on, Mhowan did not get a thrashing. His teacher understood him a little more. She appreciated the fact that he even knew a language that she did not.

The years went by, and Mhowan dropped out of school. He sold vegetables, worked as a doorman, began to buy and sell scrap. Slowly the dreams faded away. He worked hard all day, hoping for a better tomorrow, but dreams don't come when you want them to, and neither do they come true.



Mohan Nanavare, President, KKPKP

I am Mohan. When I think about Mhowan's school days, I think, a butterfly flew into a tiger's stomach, and managed to escape. But what if the butterfly had got plenty of good education? Where would he have been now? He would have lived as Babasaheb Ambedkar exhorted us to – Get Educated, Get Organised, Struggle against oppression." Even today, children in Bhokarwadi are dropping out of school and starting to work to help the family. When I think about them, I feel miserable. Then I tell myself Mhowan's story. That's why I am telling it to you.

- from the Marathi story published in Maus

**Mohan Nanavare, President, KKPKP**

## In Solidarity: Part of a dialogue between members of KKPKP/SWaCH and Karnataka Sex Workers' Union

(The participants agreed that they preferred to be referred to as 'sex workers' (SWs). The following dialogue represents the views of 15 SWs and around 10 wastepickers who interacted with them).



Wastepickers and KSWU members interacting

SW: Our union was started in 2006. We have around 1200 members across five districts in Karnataka, and have as our members, women, men and hijra sex workers. In most of Karnataka, sex work is not organized around brothels or particular localities as in Pune. It is mostly home or street-based. This leads to its own set of problems, like harassment by house owners and neighbours. We have to find work by standing in public places, and here we are harassed by the police and goondas.

Where the union has helped us the most is in getting ration cards, ID cards, and access to government schemes. We also get a lot of help in crisis situations i.e when we are facing violence..

WP: What do you see as the future of your children?

SW: There is no dignity in our work, though we are clear that it is work like any other. We would like our children to get educated and to do some other work.

WP: Why don't you live together in groups of four or five? That way you will be more secure.

SW: The problem is that then it becomes like a brothel. Though it is more secure, it will mark us s you out. We are always marked out for what the work you we do. We have to , you cannot hide it constantly. In any case we face a lot of harassment. People

even accuse us of thieving. The police accuse us of soliciting or as committing a "public nuisance". For hijras any petty theft in the area and they are picked up., and for fear of exposure of our occupation and of violence, makes us we pay them off. Now with the union I-card, things are a bit better.

WP: Oh we face that a lot too! Especially before the union was formed, we were the first ones to be picked up for any petty theft! The union I-card is something everyone respects, though. We even have a case of the police begging us to withdraw our complaint, because one of the members had a union card and that scared them.

SW: The government too is to blame. For instance, they are targeting us for condom distribution to prevent HIV/AIDS. But the fact of a woman carrying so many taking condoms makes it clear what her profession is, and then there is further harassment.

WP: So it's a case of "Khayala pan ghalayche, marayche pan," (feed them and then beat them up!)"

SW: For us the issue of privacy is very important. After one big incident, the police invited the media to cover it, and all our faces were shown in the press and on TV. Can you imagine what that meant to us? Many of our families do not know that we do this work.

WP: What has been your experience with other NGOs and labour groups? Have they supported you? We had trouble initially, with the way they viewed our work.

SW: Well many are they are not willing to take up a position on sex work for various reasons. We would want to continue to dialogue with them. But we have become affiliated to New Trade Union Initiative and have received support from them. Besides this organisations such as PUCL Karnataka, support us so we feel that at least there, sex workers were recognized as human beings with rights. But this is not the case with most others, even politicians.

WP: You are worse off than us, because though you do what you do for lack of options, people look at you very negatively. In fact politicians get their votes from people, so they should be sharing their wealth with you, if they think that what you do is wrong!

SW: Everyone is out to try and take advantage of us. Even auto drivers charge us more, because they see us all dressed up and they think we have a lot of money.

WP: We are lucky there, because our union and the auto drivers' union are both supported by Baba Adhav, and in fact auto drivers often help us. Sometimes citizens try to cheat us of the money they are supposed to pay for garbage collection, or try to get us to collect garbage from six houses for the cost of one.

SW: Our clients sometimes try to cheat us, similarly by not paying up, or trying to get us to have sex with more than one client for the same money.

WP: Do many of you have husbands or life partners?

SW: Many of us have a stable relationship with one man. Some of these partners are good, helpful with housework and children, others are exploitative and violent.

WP: We have all started saving now, through the union, and we can also borrow money from the corpus we have collected. What about you?

SW: Our work involves a lot of expenditure on good clothes and make-up, and there is not much scope for saving. We look after our children and run the house. Sometimes it is necessary to drink in order to do this work. Our lives are so insecure, we tend to think only of the present. But through the union, some of us who get other income as peer educators for the HIV/AIDS projects, have started a saving group, and we hope to inculcate this habit among the rest.

SW: Another thing is that one is constantly looked at as a sex worker, and all sorts of people expect sexual favours – our children’s teachers, doctors, government officials.

WP: Some of us have also faced this. What are your demands?

SW: We want recognition of what we do as work.

WP: We fully agree and will support you in any way we can.

SW: That is very good, that you understand us and support us. We are grateful for that.

WP: We seem to have many similar problems, and we do the work we do because we don’t have any options. One thing that is common is that we are both treated like dirt, and removing us from an area is considered by middle-class people as ‘cleaning up’!

## Sorting Sheds

In Wanowrie Gaon, Hadapsar, Vithabai Narsing Shinde and 5 other SWaCH members are sitting with tears in their eyes and blood boiling. A mixed feeling of immense loss and fury has gripped them as they watch their 3 push carts and 23 sacks of scrap going up in flames. Their 13 buckets have also been stolen. The sacks contained scrap worth nearly Rs. 10,000. These members not only lost scrap which they had collected after several days of hard work, but also lost their push carts and buckets, their only means of livelihood. For a long time, a battle had been going on with PMC officials wanting the members to move their push carts and other belongings. However, wherever they tried, citizens protested. The helpless waste pickers had no option but to leave their belongings in an open space next to a canal.

While burning of waste pickers’ equipment and belongings is a rare occurrence, conflicts between citizens and waste pickers over the use of space for sorting and storing are extremely common. Waste pickers have to sort through scrap in order to pick out recyclable materials. In the absence of alternative spaces, wastepickers across the city sit on the roads to sort, then proceed to hide their sacks under trees, in corners, in alleys as far away from the public and dogs’ eye and as protected from the rain as possible. Yet, citizens blame the waste pickers for spreading filth and call in to complain.

In Sahakarnagar near Gajanan Maharaj Chowk, Hira bai Appa Gazghate and 3 other SWaCH workers have completed their day’s collection, parked their vehicles and are sitting inside their

shed, sorting through the day’s scrap. Two other members will soon join them. Their lunch boxes are with them but they are waiting for their two remaining friends to join them so that they can all sit together and have lunch.



Newly constructed sorting shed

The sorting shed for them is like their second home, and the wastepickers using the shed, are like members of a family. Suneeta Buchde remembers the days, not too long ago, when there was no shed and she would sit at the roadside to sort, inviting the ire of citizens. It was constant bickering with them which prompted the members and the supervisor to demand a sorting shed from the corporation officials. Fortunately, the PMC officials and the corporator of the ward, Shri Harnavat, supported their demands and provided them with space for a shed. SWaCH gathered funds and constructed the shed in consultation with the members, while Shri Harnavat paid for concretization of the floor.

The members today look forward to the time when they sit together in their shed to sort, eat, chat, share their problems, help each other and sell their scrap together. The shed provides them with a space they can proudly call their own. Suneeta bai recalls how, earlier, they had no place to keep their lunch boxes when they came for work. They would thus only be able to eat when they went back home, staying hungry through the long working day. Now, however, at one thirty, they wash their hands with soap and water at a nearby society and eat their lunch merrily. This is certain to have a positive impact on their health and nutrition. The fact that members can sort and store their scrap in the shed allows them to bargain with scrap dealers since they do not depend on them for providing sorting spaces.



Newly constructed sorting shed

The shed also allows them to work longer hours which means they are able to sort a lot more scrap. Further, since they have a space to store the scrap, they take out the low value recyclable

materials such as low value paper and plastics as well which they can sell when enough of it has accumulated. From the waste pickers' perspective, this means greater income. However, from the societal perspective, this means much higher levels of recycling of scrap.

The members, in turn, take pride in keeping the shed clean. They make sure that once they are done with their work, all the sacks are neatly stacked up and covered, the floor is swept and the shed is spic and span. 'When people look at it, they should not even know that there was any waste here', says Suneeta bai.

Today, there are around 39 sorting sheds in the city of Pune. Of approximately 2000 SWaCH members, only about 150, or less than 10% have access to sorting sheds. This, itself, is the result of a lot of advocacy on the part of SWaCH staff, waste pickers and supportive societies and government officials. They have managed to create sorting sheds inside parking lots of societies, inside crematoriums, on footpaths, within empty plots, police stations, academic institutions and other public spaces. However, there is a need of atleast 2 sorting sheds per electoral ward. Sheds that are properly located and constructed, not only improve the lives, incomes and working conditions of waste pickers but also enable them to work more effectively towards a cleaner and greener future for all.

### We Are All Sugandhabai

For the 2000 wastepickers who now form SWaCH, joining the cooperative meant, among other things, agreeing to stringent rules of work - coming to work on time, providing a replacement in case of absence, working in a pair, attending monthly meetings, regularly paying monthly contribution, attending all programs organized by SWaCH, clearing all pending dues, wearing the SWaCH coat and identity card at the work place, and so on. Sugandhabai, the mascot of SWaCH, represents this ideal member, and so it is only fitting that the awards given to members who performed their jobs with professional discipline were felicitated with the Sugandhabai Puraskar.



Newspaper coverage for function

4 felicitations ceremonies were held at different locations, where 45 members were felicitated in all. They were given a sweater, a scarf, and a cash prize. Dr. Baba Adhav, who spoke at the event, stressed the fact that while the wastepickers are becoming more regular and systematic in their work, their work conditions

are still very insecure. They have to collect payments from the households, and do not receive a salary. He also pointed out that as they are more vulnerable to injury and illness, there needs to be a special dispensary where they can get immediate medical aid. Ward officials, as well as Shri Suresh Jagtap, Additional Commissioner, SWM and Shri Molak, Additional Commissioner, UCD were also present at the functions.

### Wastepickers rewarded



Dr. Baba Adhav Felicitates wastepickers

On 11th January, 2012, at Acharya Atre Memorial Hall in Pimri Chinward, SWaCH PCMC held a programme to celebrate the completion of its first year of existence. The programme was also a mechanism to reach out to a large number of people, wastepickers as well as citizens, and explain the inter-linkages and intricacies of waste management by SWaCH PCMC and the human face (wastepickers) behind the whole veneer. This was achieved through plays, screening of a short film and discussions.



Awardees with Dr. Adhav

All SWaCH members who worked on the waste collection vehicles without missing a single day of work, maintained good relationships with the citizens they serviced and received positive feedback for their work were felicitated. In the words of Kalinda Kamble 'SWaCH has taken away the weight of the sacks from our backs and given us vehicles instead. We are proud of our transition from wastepickers to service providers'

Additionally awards were given to those member waste pickers with the highest savings in the Credit Cooperative and those members who have earned the highest bonus at Kashtachi Kamai the cooperative recycling centre run by KKKPK.

All these members received the 'Sugandha Puraskar' (a memento and a shawl), at the hands of senior Activist – Dr. Baba Adhav during the event.

