



TO BE TREATED LIKE TRASH

Pooja Poda, (name) 42 is from Chetrapati, Dalko, Kathmandu. Like her mother, she worked as a sweeper for the Municipality of Kathmandu for 9 years. Her husband, an alcoholic, passed away 7 years ago leaving her as the sole breadwinner of the family. Unable to provide for her two daughters and son with her current salary, she had to quit her job.

Since then she has been collecting reusable garbage like plastic, metal, paper, etc. from the waste management site in Teku and selling them. On average her monthly income is around NRs. 22 thousand rupees. But her line of work invites more problems and insults than money. There was an incident where her friend Maya's child was left with a broken foot when accidentally stepped on by a tractor. In another instance, a stranger misbehaved with her friend Sonu while working. When they complained to the police they were told to deal with the issue themselves.

They face discrimination on an almost daily basis. When they go to shops the shopkeepers avoid touching the money they give. "People disrespect us because of our work. We are told to sit separately when we go to government offices. Even the tractor drivers misbehave with us and verbally abuse us. And the police are of no help," confesses Pooja.

She adds, "We aren't stealing or committing a sin. We earn by collecting things that people dispose of. Our work even helps the municipality to some level. But when will our workplace be safe enough to work in? And when will those who discriminate us be held accountable?"