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MANUAL SCAVENGING: A CURSE ON THE INDIAN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Despite rigorous provisions and acts in Law, Manual Scavenging is still strongly prevailing in India. Scavenging or Manual Scavenging can be defined as removal or cleaning of the human excreta from insanitary latrine or an open drain or pit. According to 2011 Census of India, the number of recorded cases of Manual Scavenging in India was 794,000 and Maharashtra possessed the most number of scavenging workers as of 63,713.

The Constitution of India has banned untouchability in the entire territory of India. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, has prohibited forceful and violent methods of employing anyone as a manual scavenger. According to a report in The Indian Express, the number of recorded manual scavengers in India were [53,000](#) and it was estimated that this was four times greater than the last survey conducted in 2017. This rapid increase in the number of scavengers requires immediate attention of the authorities.

ISSUES FACED BY MANUAL SCAVENGERS IN INDIA

There are many health issues faced by laborers as they are exposed to harmful gases which results in severe diseases. Another major issue faced by them is [acceptance in society](#) as they are considered inferior due to their profession and often they are given the tag of “lower caste”. More than 400 people from marginalized communities have [lost their lives](#) cleaning sewers since 2014.

REASON FOR THE PRESENT SITUATION

The sole reason for the act of Scavenging is cost effectiveness because, if mechanized tools are employed, the cost of work will rise and Manual Scavenging provides labor at lower costs.

India has prohibited the manual cleaning of [dry toilets](#) by manual scavengers since 1993. An amendment was made to this same law in the year 2013 to include the prohibition of manual

cleaning of insanitary latrines, ditches and pits. Even after legislation of these laws, [Manual scavenging is still practiced in India](#) and workers have to now even physically enter the septic tanks and sewers to clean them manually.

The Indian Railways majorly [violates](#) this law as even today the toilets in the trains are not equipped with a proper disposal system and the same is disposed in the tracks, then the then manual scavengers are employed to clean them manually.

There are majorly two reasons and one of them is the enforceability of these acts and laws and the other is [caste based discrimination](#) in India. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment states that there has been "no reported conviction" under the [Prohibition of Employment](#) as the said Manual Scavenging ever since the enactment of the act.

GENDER ASPECT ATTACHED TO MANUAL SCAVENGING

According to various surveys, all those engaged in scavenging, [95 percent are women](#). [Women](#) are paid as low as ten and fifteen rupees every month and mostly stale leftover food and worn out clothes are given to them whereas the male workers manage to earn up to Rs 300 to clean the septic tanks and sewers on a daily basis. The prevailing Jajmani System is said to be the reason why the number of women cleaning dry toilets is higher since the ancient times.

MEASURES/ SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

One of the most necessary measures is improving the personal hygiene of workers by using waterproof gloves and wearing rubber boots during the work hours and regular washing of hands. The workers should be provided with personal hygiene training as most of them are uneducated and lack awareness. The government should invest in mechanical machines to clean ditches and septic tanks. [Social upliftment](#) of this class of people is the need of the hour and equal opportunities must be provided to them.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end, the paper suggests measures to reduce the risks of Manual Scavenging. The Government has created certain laws and provisions to eradicate the practice from its roots, but the practice is still prevalent in the nation and one major reason is the loopholes in the

enforceability of these laws. Government should start enforcing present provisions more judiciously and strictly to ensure a [decent life](#) for these people because at the end of the day no country can truly progress until we bring to the forefront the ones who are often unheard and unseen.



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