



Eradicating Manual Scavenging

For Prelims: [National Human Rights Commission \(NHRC\)](#), [Manual Scavengers](#), [Hepatitis](#), [Tetanus](#), [Cholera](#), [Asphyxiation](#), [Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013](#), [NAMASTE \(National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem\) Scheme](#), [Urban Local Bodies \(ULBs\)](#), [NALSA](#), [National Safai Karamcharis Finance & Development Corporation \(NSKFDC\)](#), [Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code 2020](#), [Swachh Bharat Mission \(SBM\)](#).

For Mains: Role of technology in eradicating manual scavenging in India. Role of judiciary in eradicating manual scavenging.

Source: [PIB](#)

Why in News?

The [National Human Rights Commission \(NHRC\)](#) organised an open house discussion on **'Dignity and Liberty of the Individuals- Rights of [Manual Scavengers](#)'**.

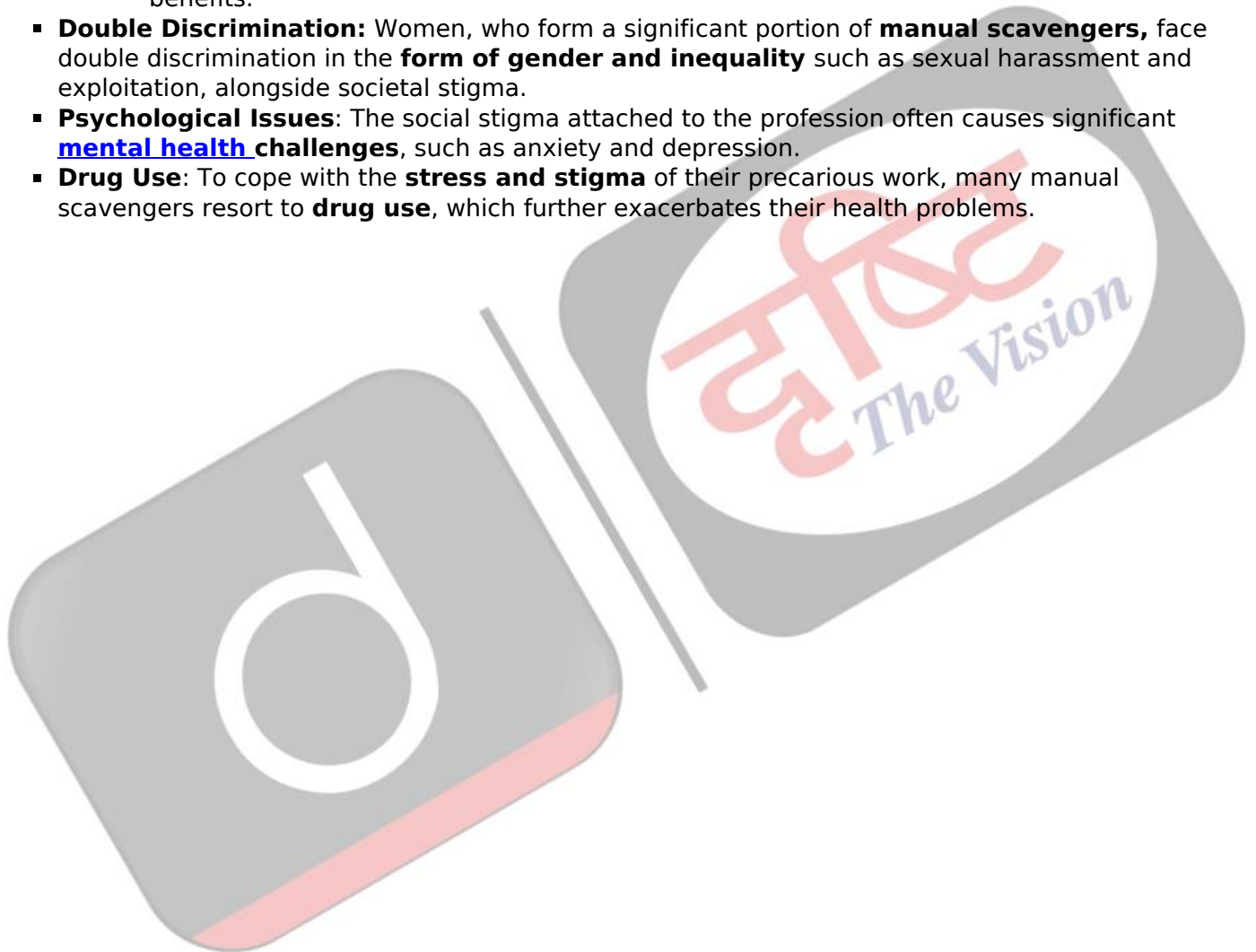
Manual Scavenging

- **About:** Manual scavenging refers to the practice of **physically handling or cleaning human excreta** by individuals.
 - It involves manual cleaning of human excreta from **insanitary toilets, open drains, pits, or railway tracks**.
- **Current Status:** In 2021, India recorded **58,098 manual scavengers**, with **women** comprising **75%** of them.
 - As on **31st July, 2024**, out of **766 districts** in the country, **732 districts** have reported themselves as **manual scavenging-free**.
- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** Manual scavenging violates fundamental rights, especially **article 17** (abolition of untouchability) and **article 21** (Right to life with dignity).
- **Legal Framework Related to Manual Scavenging:**
 - **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:** [Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013](#) prohibits manual scavenging, including the construction of insanitary latrines, and mandates the demolition or conversion of such latrines into sanitary ones.
 - It also provides for the identification and rehabilitation of manual scavengers through **skill development, financial assistance, and alternative employment**.
 - **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** It criminalises the employment of scheduled castes in manual scavenging.

What are the Major Challenges Faced by Manual Scavengers?

- **Health:** Manual scavengers are frequently exposed to human waste, which contains numerous **pathogens**.
 - This exposure makes them highly susceptible to diseases such as **Hepatitis, tetanus, and cholera**.
 - The presence of poisonous gases like **hydrogen sulphide** in septic tanks poses a serious risk of **asphyxiation**, which can lead to sudden death.
 - According to the government data, **377 persons** have died from **2019 to 2023** due to **hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks**.
- **Social Stigma:** Manual scavengers are stigmatized and treated as **untouchables**, reinforcing social exclusion and **perpetuating the caste system**.
- **Economic Challenges:** Manual scavengers are paid meager amounts, often below the **minimum wage**, keeping them trapped in a **cycle of poverty**.
 - They are employed on a **contractual or daily-wage basis**, without job security or benefits.
- **Double Discrimination:** Women, who form a significant portion of **manual scavengers**, face double discrimination in the **form of gender and inequality** such as sexual harassment and exploitation, alongside societal stigma.
- **Psychological Issues:** The social stigma attached to the profession often causes significant **mental health challenges**, such as anxiety and depression.
- **Drug Use:** To cope with the **stress and stigma** of their precarious work, many manual scavengers resort to **drug use**, which further exacerbates their health problems.

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NATIONAL HUMAN *Rights* COMMISSION (NHRC)

According to NHRC, Human Rights are the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India

- Watchdog of Human Rights in India
- **Estd:** 1993 (in conformity with Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- **Act:** Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993

State Human Rights Commissions

- Also constituted under the PHR Act, 1993
- **Appointment of Members:** by Governor
- **Removal of Members:** by President

Human Rights Day: 10 December

Functions

- ↳ Investigates Complaints of human rights violations
- ↳ *Suo Moto* cognizance of cases
- ↳ Reviews and recommends human rights implementation
- ↳ Spreading human rights awareness
- ↳ Conduct studies, publish reports on human rights issues

Powers

- ↳ Summon individuals, examine witnesses, and receive evidences
- ↳ Inspect prisons and other institutions to ensure conditions are humane
- ↳ Intervene in court proceedings relating to human rights

Members of NHRC

Composition

- ↳ 5 full-time members and 7 deemed members
- ↳ **Chairperson:** Retired CJI/Judges of the SC
- ↳ **Administrative Head:** Secretary-General

Tenure

- ↳ 3 years / till age 70 (whichever is earlier)

Appointment

- ↳ All members appointed by **President** on recommendations of a **6-member** committee (PM, Speaker of LS, Deputy Chairman of RS, Union Home Minister and Leaders of Opposition of both Houses of Parliament)

Removal

- ↳ President can remove the chairman or any member
- ↳ **Ground:** Charges of proved misbehaviour or incapacity

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) Status

- NHRC has been accredited 'A' Status since 1999
- Retained 'A' Status: 2006, 2011 and 2017
- Suspension of 'A' Status: 2023 and 2024



Drishiti IAS

What is the Supreme Court Guideline on Manual Scavenging?

- **Dr. Balram Singh Case, 2023:** The SC issued **14 directions to the Union, State and UTs** to completely eradicate manual scavenging ranging from forming guidelines and policies, rehabilitation, compensation, etc. Some of them are:
 - **Eradication of Manual Sewer Cleaning:** Phased measures to **eliminate manual sewer cleaning.**
 - **Rehabilitation of Sewage Workers:** Compensation (**Rs 30 lakhs for death, Rs 10-20 lakhs for disabilities**), **employment** for next of kin, and **education** for dependents.
 - **Accountability for Outsourced Work:** Accountability mechanisms, including **contract cancellations and penalties.**
 - **NALSA Involvement in Compensation:** [NALSA](#) to manage compensation disbursement

and models.

- **Monitoring and Transparency:** A portal to **track deaths, compensation, and rehabilitation**

What are India's Initiatives to Curb Manual Scavenging?

- [Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge](#)
- [Swachhta Abhiyan App](#)
- [Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan](#)
- [National Commission for Safai Karamchari](#)
- [Swachhta Udyami Yojana \(SUY\)](#)
- [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#)
- [NAMASTE \(National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem\)](#)
- **Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs):** To develop a **professional, well-trained, and adequately equipped workforce.**
- **Technological Initiatives:**
 - **Bandicoot Robot:** Autonomously or remotely cleans, inspects, and removes blockages in sewer lines.
 - **Endobot & Swasth AI:** Diagnose pipelines to detect and mitigate water contamination, wastage, and sewer overflows.
 - **Robo-Drain System:** Automated robotic technology for cleaning underground sewers.
 - **Vacuum Trucks:** Use powerful pumps to remove sewage waste without human entry.

Way Forward

- **Mechanization:** The introduction of **automated or semi-automated equipment** offers a safer, more efficient way to manage sanitation work.
 - Robotic arms or vacuum trucks can carry out this work remotely, reducing human exposure to dangerous environments.
- **OHS Standards:** Recognising sanitation work as a [hazardous occupation](#) under the [Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code 2020 \(OSH Code 2020\)](#) could transform safety standards and enforcement.
- **Health Screenings:** Implement **periodic health screenings** for sanitation workers across all ULBs, focusing on respiratory and dermatological conditions, with clear treatment and prevention protocols.
 - Expand the [Swachh Bharat Mission \(SBM\)](#) to include the health and dignity of sanitation workers, focusing on safety and empowerment.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide **capacity-building training** and **safety gear** for workers. Offer **financial assistance** for technological innovations in hazardous waste cleaning.
 - Incentivize **mechanization**, train workers, and empower **women-led SHGs** for sustainable livelihoods

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the challenges faced by sanitation workers in India. Discuss the role of the judiciary in this regard.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. 'Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan' is a national campaign to (2016)

(a) rehabilitate the homeless and destitute persons and provide them with suitable sources of

livelihood

(b) release the sex workers from their practice and provide them with alternative sources of livelihood

(c) eradicate the practice of manual scavenging and rehabilitate the manual scavengers

(d) release the bonded labourers from their bondage and rehabilitate them

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. What are the impediments in disposing of the huge quantities of discarded solid waste which are continuously being generated? How do we safely remove the toxic wastes that have been accumulating in our habitable environment? (2018)

Q. "To ensure effective implementation of policies addressing the water, sanitation and hygiene needs the identification of the beneficiary segments is to be synchronized with anticipated outcomes." Examine the statement in the context of the WASH scheme. (2017)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/eradicating-manual-scavenging>

