



## Manual Scavenging in India

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According to the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, despite a ban on manual scavenging from 1993, 620 cases of deaths of sanitation workers (while cleaning septic tanks and sewers) have been reported, of which 88 occurred in the past three years.

### Manual scavenging

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- Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers.
- The practise of manual scavenging is linked to India's caste system where so-called lower castes were expected to perform this job.
- Manual scavengers are amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged communities in India.
- Frequent deaths occur as manual scavengers don't even have adequate tools and protective gear to clean the manhole. It often involves using the most basic of tools such as buckets, brooms and baskets.

### Issues Related to Manual Scavenging

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- However, while manual scavenging for many may have ended as a form of employment, the stigma and discrimination associated with it lingers on.
  - This makes it difficult for liberated manual scavengers to secure alternative livelihoods.
  - People could once again return to manual scavenging in the absence of other opportunities to support their families.
- Correctly identifying manual scavengers remains a key challenge.

### Government Intervention

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- In 1993, the Government of India enacted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act.
  - The act prohibited the employment of manual scavengers for manually cleaning dry latrines and also the construction of dry toilets (that do not operate with a flush).
  - It provided for imprisonment of up to a year and a fine.
- In 2013, this was followed by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which is wider in scope and importance, acknowledging the urgency of rehabilitating manual scavengers.
  - The act seeks to reinforce this ban by prohibiting manual scavenging in all forms and ensures the rehabilitation of manual scavengers to be identified through a mandatory survey.
  - Key features of the Act :
    - Prohibits the construction or maintenance of insanitary toilets.
    - Prohibits the engagement or employment of anyone as a manual scavenger violations could result in a years' imprisonment or a fine of INR 50,000 or both.
    - Prohibits a person from being engaged or employed for hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank.
    - Offences under the Act are cognizable and non-bailable.
    - Calls for a survey of manual scavengers in urban and rural areas within a time-bound framework.
- A Supreme Court order in March, 2014, makes it mandatory for the government to identify all those who died in sewerage work since 1993 and provide Rs.10 lakh each as compensation to their families.
- The Government of India has adopted a two-pronged strategy of eliminating insanitary latrines through demolition and conversion into sanitary latrines and developing a comprehensive rehabilitation package for manual scavengers through a survey
  - A comprehensive rehabilitation package has recently been put together that includes livelihoods and skill development, access to education for children of former manual scavengers and alternate livelihoods.