

# MANUAL SCAVENGING IN INDIA- A REVIEW

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**Abstract:** *As India possess the highest population in the world after China and even after sixty nine years of independence, the development of waste management processes are not up to the mark and still there is practice of manual scavenging at various parts of the country. The people who are called scavengers are economically weak and socially backward. They have highly sophisticated unhealthy lifestyle and highly unhygienic working condition. The lack of government support, poor education, un-developed technologies and religious belief about the scavenger's is highly contradictory. The group of people "Dalits" who perform manual scavenging belongs to a particular community who are assigned for this particular work according to the religious beliefs in India. This paper analyzes the different types of wastes that are handled by the scavengers and also it throws light on the working condition and living standards of the people performing scavenging operations and also it highlights the need of changing the beliefs and laws related to manual scavenging. Interview and questionnaire has been conducted and added in this paper to bring out the darkest part of their lives.*

**Key words:** *E-waste, Manual Scavenging, Scavengers, Dalits*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Equality of status and opportunity, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship is highlighted under the preamble of Indian constitution, adopted on 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1949, since then sixty seven years have passed, India has moved drastically and made its place in the world in terms of democracy, technology, culture and its rich and varied heritage, but it failed to abolish contemporary system of manual scavenging and failed to achieve the "Equality of status" as mentioned in the preamble. The dry latrines are still in practice at various parts of the country leading to the generation of unhygienic and unhealthy environment, which leads to the generation of foul smell, gases and breeding of mosquitoes. It affects the health of individual living in the vicinity of such area, also it affects badly the person "The Scavenger" who collects the dry excreta manually and disposes off to a place which is either away from the collection area or closer to the place of residence of the Scavenger. Manual scavenging is believed to be social practice rather than mere occupation; this belief came from the caste system of Hindu religion of India. India caste system can be categorized in four parts viz. Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The Scavengers fall under the lowest hierarchy of caste system i.e. The Dalits or Shudras which perform all type of unhealthy practices risking their lives to serve the society by cleaning the clogged gutters "the sewer lines", manually handling the human excreta, removal of dead animals on the streets, villages and cities. Even after attaining higher level in education the mentality of the people is same. The scavengers are mostly women. Men also take part in such occupation but women participation is most.

According to Asian human right commission "Manual scavenging in India is officially defined as 'Lifting and removal of human excreta manually', at private homes and toilets maintained by municipal authorities. The practice consists of gathering human excreta from individual or community dry latrines with bare hands, broom or metal scrappers into woven basket or buckets. This scavengers the carry on their heads, shoulder or against their hips, (and in wheels barrows if they can afford it) into dumping sites or water bodies. Apart from this many scavengers are similarly employed to collect, carry and dispose excreta from sewers, septic tanks, drains and railway tracks.

The according to latest act "Prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013" is "A person engaged or employed at the commencement of this act or any time, thereafter by an individual or local authority or an agency or a contractor, for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in open drain or pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed of, or on railway track or in such other space or premises, as central government of a state government may notify, before the excreta fully decompose in such a manner as may be prescribed".

Labour welfare comprises all those measures which promote the psychological, social, physical and general well-being of the workers. It boosts up the morale of the worker and encourages them to work hard and honestly. With respect to labour welfare, "Are all labour working in healthy and safety environment? Are they realizing the sense of belongingness with other employees and society? Are they willingly doing their work? Are they getting their basic rights?" still facing the problem of manual scavenging are forced to continue this task. In order to abolish this inhuman practice, recently, our government has introduced new act, "The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013". By keeping above objectives in view, this study begins with the introduction of labour welfare, meaning and problem of manual scavenging, evaluation of anti-manual efforts of the government and reasons for failures of the government measures and continuance of this practice in the era of globalization and technological advancement. To achieve these objectives various literatures has been reviewed. This study ends with limitations of the study and scope for further research.

## 2. MANUAL SCAVENGERS: MEANING & PROBLEMS:

Despite technological advancement, there are certain labour class, who to perform unhealthy and inhuman practice, facing the problem of untouchability, deprived with their basic rights and living life without dignity. This labour class is known as Manual Scavengers, performing hereditary occupation, unwillingly and forcefully for their empty stomach, sometimes their children also support them to earn livelihood. These

categories of labour class are known as 'Bhangi' in our society. Actually, manual scavengers are the people, who take away the human waste (night soil) from insanitary, "dry" toilets. (Commissions, 2011), defined manual scavenging as the practice to remove human excreta manually with the help of brooms and tin plates from dry latrines. Commission explained that, the excreta are loaded into baskets which scavengers carry on their heads to locations sometimes several kilometers from the latrines. (Pathak, 1995), mentioned that this inhuman practice is said to have started in the year 1214 in Europe when the first public toilets appeared. (Suzuki, 2009), has explained this task to be one of the most disgraced work. This inhuman practice has made the life of scavengers miserable. These people perform this task every day for a handful of money. The percentage of female (95%) engaged in this task is more than male. Sometimes their children also support them. (Masoodi, 2013), has shared in his article about the feelings of 57 year old Saraswati a manual scavenger in Farrukhnagar village Ghaziabad, she agreed to do any low profile work but requesting to take out of this practice. These scavengers hesitate to cook food and even they don't take meal due to recall of dirty work. (Medina, 2000), explained the condition of country to be backward, dirty, uncleanliness and foulness. He also highlighted various problems of scavengers like, suffering from lot of ailments, high infant mortality rate, low life expectancy and holds lowest position in the society. In society these people are known as untouchables. Even, their children's face discrimination in school, college, work place and other social places. (Wilson, 2012), shared experience and informed that people relate their identity to that of 'Bhangi' whether they have not performed that task.

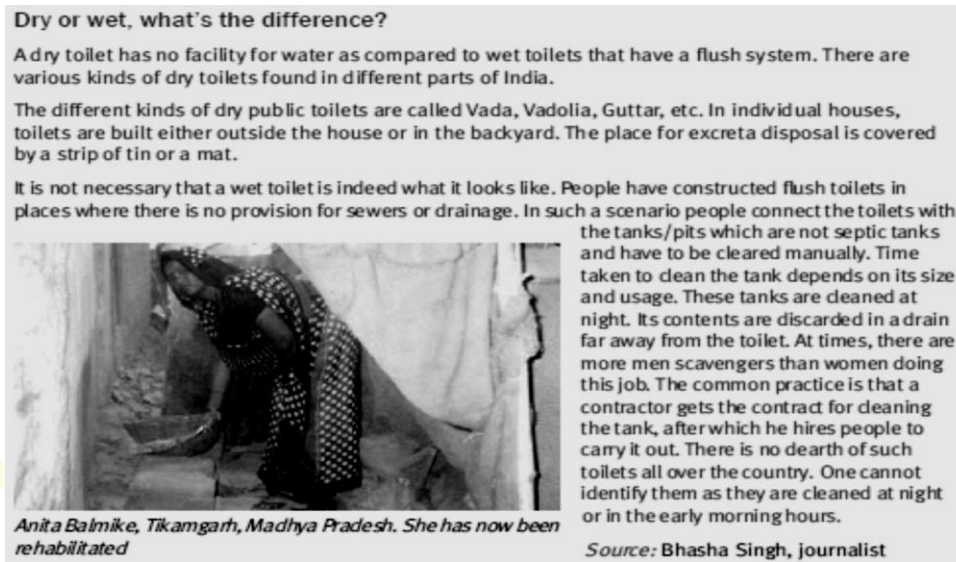


Fig 1.1 Basic difference between dry and wet system (Bhasha Singh, 2012)

Table 1: Status of manual scavenging in India as in 2006

No.	States	Population of Scavengers	Addition (Resurvey)	Total	Total Scavengers Rehabilitated and Ineligible	Remaining Scavengers to be Rehabilitated
1	Andhra Pradesh	30,921	14,901	45,822	45,822	0
2	Assam	40,413		40,413	1,594	38,819
3	Bihar	12,226		12,226	285	11,941
4	Delhi	17,420		17,420	2,941	14,479
5	Gujarat	64,195		64,195	11,653	52,542
6	Haryana	36,362		36,362	15,558	20,804
7	Himachal Pradesh	4,757		4,757	2,023	2,734
8	Jammu & Kashmir	4,150		4,150	211	3,939
9	Karnataka	14,555		14,555	12,597	1,958
10	Kerala	1,339		1,339	141	1,198
11	Madhya Pradesh	80,072	1,235	81,307	77,512	3,795
12	Maharashtra	64,785		64,785	19,086	45,699
13	Meghalaya	607		607	0	607
14	Nagaland	1,800		1,800	0	1,800
15	Orissa	35,049		35,049	10,681	24,368
16	Pondicherry	476		476	129	347
17	Punjab	531	2,457	2,988	2,988	0
18	Rajasthan	57,736		57,736	14,169	43,567
19	Tamil Nadu	35,561		35,561	23,687	11,874
20	Uttar Pradesh	1,49,202	64,773	2,13,975	1,80,719	33,256
21	West Bengal	23,852		23,852	2,338	21,514
22	Chhattisgarh		3,243	3,243	3,243	0
23	Jharkhand		5,750	5,750	0	5,750
24	Uttarakhand		1,970	1,970	493	1,477
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6,76,009</b>	<b>94,329</b>	<b>7,70,338</b>	<b>4,27,870</b>	<b>3,42,468</b>

Source: ministry of social justice and empowerment, 2006, Delhi

### 3. E-WASTE:

The volume of e-wastes is growing very rapidly in India. The top five cities in e-waste generation in 2005 were: Mumbai (11017MTA), Delhi (9730MTA), Bangalore (4648MTA), Chennai (4132MTA) and Kolkata (4025 MTA). In a recent study, Chatterjee estimated that the volume of e-waste will reach nearly 0.7 million metric tons (MT) by 2015 and 2 million MT by 2025. The volume of e-waste in India is also growing because of illegal import of e-waste from developed countries. The e-wastes from the Gulf countries, Europe, Australia, and North America reach Mumbai and Chennai and from these coastal cities they are transported to Delhi for further processing. About 80% of the world's electronic refuse is transferred to Asian countries with India receiving a large portion. According to a report by MAIT-GTZ in 2007, the total share of the informal sector recycling of e-waste in India was about 97% while the formal sector worked under capacity. Another study reported the presence of more than two thousand informal recyclers of e-waste comprising about 270 medium and big scrap dealers in India. In India, people who handle and remove refuse and waste materials (scavengers) also suffer social ostracization or exclusion and low status. Lacking any alternative job opportunity and having a social stigma attached to their traditional jobs in their villages, members of the lower castes are forced to migrate to cities where they work in unskilled and hazardous jobs like rag picking, recycling and cleaning works. In a government report, it was stated that the majority of rag pickers (55.5%) in the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA) region were Scheduled Caste children [25]. Thus, children are exposed to such risks as if they are merely expendable hands: a position tolerated in textile mills in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> C (Pandey and Govind et.al)

### 4. CONCLUSION

Even in this advanced era where people are busy propagating importance on human rights and other socially relevant issues, it is embarrassing to know some of our fellow beings are still treated as untouchables and are forced to clean the excreta of others to earn their daily bread. This reflects a clear-cut image that India is still suffocating with the evils of caste system. In the recent years this issue has generated widespread recognition in both national and international platforms. Even though there came various legislations and judicial proceedings to curb this act, they all went futile due to the lack of bona fide implementation of governmental policies. Given the importance of the informal sector there is an urgent need to make necessary changes in the relevant law to recognize the collection work of informal workers. In addition, the dismantling and recycling of e-wastes should be restricted by law and by the enforcement of law strictly to registered units – not any units in the informal sector. This raises great difficulty of policing, and inspection. It is a matter of political will; but that is a common problem in India. The workers engaged in collection, transporting and recycling of e-waste need to be covered with medical insurance and the money for it could be realized from the original sellers of the equipment as part of their corporate social responsibility.

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