



From Discrimination To Rehabilitation

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ABSTRACT *Manual scavenging is one of the most filthiest job that goes against the humanity. Although it's banned in India, the stigma and discrimination associated with it lingers on making it difficult to survive for liberated manual scavengers. The issue of manual scavenging should not only be addressed as a psychosocial but also as an environmental issue. Manual scavenging remains a complicated socio-economic problem, which not only requires adequate funding for its redressal but need a "radical change of mental outlook". It needs very special attention for their liberation and upliftment. It can happen by the provision of alternative livelihoods, abolishment of dry toilets and imparting free education to children. This paper examines from discrimination to rehabilitation of manual scavengers.*

Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture". – Mahatma Gandhi

Manual scavenging, a heinous task, which has prevalent in India since ages can be seen in one form or the other today also. Manual scavenging is one of the most filthiest job that goes against the humanity. In India, this work is done by the people those are termed under the untouchability category.

Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers. It often involves using the most basic of tools such as buckets, brooms and baskets. The practice 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.

In 1993, India banned the employment of people as manual scavengers. In 2013, landmark new legislation in the form of the Manual Scavengers Act was passed which 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.

Despite progress, manual scavenging persists in India. According to the India Census 2011, there are more than 2.6 million dry latrines in the country. There are 13,14,652 toilets where human excreta is flushed in open drains, 7,94,390 dry latrines where the human excreta is cleaned manually. Seventy three percent of these are in rural areas and 27 percent are in urban areas.

According to the House Listing and Housing Census 2011, states such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal account for more than 72 percent of the insanitary latrines in India.

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.

However, while manual scavenging for many may have ended as a form of employment, the stigma and discrimination associated with it lingers on, making it difficult for former or liberated manual scavengers to secure alternate livelihoods and raising the fear that 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. 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.

The latest Socio-Economic Caste Census data released on July 3, 2015 reveals that 1,80,657 households are engaged in this degrading work for a livelihood.

Maharashtra, with 63,713, tops the list with the largest number of manual scavenger households, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura and Karnataka, as per Census data.

Psychosocial impact of manual scavenging

- The children of the manual scavenging communities are usually treated with contempt by their teachers and fellow classmates. Denial of dignity generates fear among children, leading to very high drop-out rates.
- Manual scavenging is one of the most inhuman and degrading forms of work performed by Dalit women. Refusal to perform such tasks leads to physical abuse and social boycott.
- Public latrines are cleaned on a daily basis by female workers using broom and a tin plate. The harassment of these women is also rampant in the form of sexual exploitation when they go to clean up the toilets since they are often teased by the men folk.
- The scavengers carry the excrement piled into baskets, on the head or on the waist to a location that is far away from the latrine. At all times, and especially during the rainy season, the contents of the basket drip onto a scavenger's hair, face, clothes and other body parts. Manual contact with excreta exposes manual scavengers to various Diseases; infection of

skin, rotting of fingers & limbs, tuberculosis and nausea are common. Several complain inability to have food due to exposure to excreta.

- Manual Scavengers belong to the lower most rung in the society and are looked down upon even by the larger society of the Dalits who themselves are subjected to untouchability by the upper castes.
- Low self esteem among manual scavengers
- Fear and feeling of inferiority
- Very high stress due to day to day discrimination
- In addition to handling human excreta, people entrapped by the tradition of manual scavenging are expected to perform several other 'lowly' tasks.
- Manual scavengers suffer from extreme form of discrimination, exclusion and powerlessness. They are made to live in locations that are isolated from the rest of the village community.
- It violates human rights as there is a loss of human dignity and liberty, freedom of occupation is not allowed to them, there are health hazards in both physical and psychological way.
- Further it also violates fundamental rights enshrined under Article 14 (right to equality), 17 (right against untouchability), 21(right to life and personal liberty) 23 (right against exploitation)

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MANUAL SCAVENGING AND SANITATION:

- Periodic comprehensive survey, at least once in three years, should be conducted in collaboration with credible NGOs. It should cover dry latrines, manual scavengers and alternative livelihood options for rehabilitation.
- The presence of too many agencies is often delaying the elimination of the practice of manual scavenging and the rehabilitation work. Therefore, District Magistrates should be made the nodal agency and joint instructions from the three Central Ministries concerned with manual scavenging should be issued to the States/ Union Territories and the District Magistrates to take necessary steps for coordination and convergence of efforts. At State level also, there should be a coordinating body to monitor framing of appropriate rules and regulations, survey as envisaged in recommendation 1, conversion or demolition of dry latrines, rehabilitation of manual scavengers, prosecution of defaulters etc.
- The scholarship to the children of manual scavengers should not be stopped even after their parents have been liberated from manual scavenging and rehabilitated.
- State Governments must issue advertisements in leading newspapers about cases of manual scavengers and dry latrines and also publish the same on the notice boards of the Panchayat/ Municipal bodies.
- The State Human Rights Commissions should start monitoring elimination of manual scavenging and consequent rehabilitation of manual scavengers in the States.
- Sewer workers' liberation will come only when we acquire necessary technological changes, which will then render the occupation humane, dignified and safe in ways which completely avoid any direct human contact with excreta. The liberation of these workers cannot be conceptualised in isolation because they will lose their only source of income without a meticulous road map for meaningful rehabilitation as proposed for manual scavengers. The workers in regular or contract employment must not be terminated; rather they

must all be given regular employment.

- The latest technology should be provided for persons attending sewage disposal and it shall be the responsibility of the union and state governments to provide sufficient funds for the purchase of machines and equipment

To improve the living and working condition of manual scavengers all over India, there is a need to set an agenda for their overall transformation. It can be through provision of alternative livelihoods, abolishment of dry toilets and imparting free education to children. It is possible to provide jobs in agricultural sector. With a little training in maths they can also work as vegetable and fruit sellers. They can produce and sell dairy products, if they are provided with cattle. Also if they would be provided with loans and equipment like spice grinding machines and sewing machines, it would be possible for them to set up a new business in producing and selling spices, clothes and handicrafts. Another possible job opportunity would be in the houses of open-minded families as domestic help or housekeeper. By doing this, the basis for the inhumane and existing system of manual scavenging will be removed. For this, the approach and behaviour of all concerned stake-holders, especially agencies of the state and the dominant castes/classes, have to change in order to serve Constitutional and human rights values. Ensure discrimination-free, secure and alternate livelihoods by providing skill development and livelihoods training to women, linking them to government employment schemes and entitlements as well as ensuring their land rights. Vocational training linked to employment for young people, and support to liberated manual scavengers in building alternate livelihoods could go a long way in ensuring steady, stable livelihoods for the future.

Conclusion

Manual scavengers are at a double disadvantage. They are members of lower castes and as such, face enormous discrimination in society, and second, are disadvantaged because they are manual scavengers who clean human excreta. The challenge of rehabilitation is urgent, and requires a comprehensive approach that moves beyond expanding income generation or providing loans, to focus on various aspects crucial to secure the future of the next generation of liberated manual scavengers.

The issue of manual scavenging should not only be addressed as a psychosocial issue but also as an environmental issue as it is closely related to sanitation. The improper collection and disposal of human excreta may lead to contamination of water bodies, leading to various water borne diseases. Hence a comprehensive approach is essential.

Scavengers remain marginalised in Indian society today despite the constitutional provisions which direct the state to promote their educational and economic interests. They remained marginalised because their communities are still predominantly employed to carry out the country's basic sanitary services. Lacking the necessary literacy skills to take advantage of government reservations in education and employment, scavengers have not been able to participate in the job mobility associated with living in a rapidly growing urban environment. While these economic and social problems are shared by other Scheduled Castes, it is the 'unclean and polluting nature' of their employment causes even other Untouchables to discriminate against them. Scavenging remains a complicated social-economic

problem, which not only requires adequate funding for its redressal, but need a "radical change of mental outlook". This section of society needs very special attention for their liberation and upliftment. It is high time that thing must change. Manual scavengers required fundamental change not cosmetic one. The sense of self respect is to be created among manual scavengers.

A multi dimensional approach is needed to deal with the problem of manual scavenging otherwise the problem keeps hitting back because of the inherent social structure of society and lack of alternate livelihood.

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