

# Manual scavenging

March 26, 2019

## Manifest Pedagogy

Swachh Bharat Mission target year is 2019 and also Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated next year who had progressive views on sanitation. Beyond all these the deaths due to Manual Scavenging have been making news. Hence it is a potential topic for this year exam.

## In news

Manual Scavenging menace continues

## Placing it in the syllabus

Indian Society: Poverty, Developmental issues, and Social empowerment

Indian Polity : Social Justice, Health and Sanitation

## Static dimensions

- History of the problem of Manual Scavenging in India
- Acts related to the prohibition of manual scavenging.

## Current dimensions

- Problems/ Challenges related to Manual scavengers.

## Content

### What is it?

Scavenging is the practice of manual cleaning of human excreta from service/ dry latrines. The scavengers crawl into the dry latrines and collect the human excreta with their bare hands,

carry it as head-load in a container to dispose it off.

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.

### **Problems/ challenges associated with it**

- **Caste based: 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.**
  - **Absence of Alternate livelihood: 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.**
1. Correct and timely **identification of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers**
  2. 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.

### **History of safai karmaChari movement**

- **Safai Karmachari Andolan is a movement that aims to completely eradicate manual scavenging from India. The movement began with the efforts of the youth from the community, led by Bezwada Wilson, who was born into a family of manual scavengers, and had seen the injustices meted out to them all his life.**

- Due to his caste he was not given a job, later he decided to go to the people in his region (Kolar) and motivate them to revolt against this caste-imposed occupation.
- While on a cycle yatra in his region, he was introduced to the ideas of Ambedkar – educate, agitate and organise. **SKA was born in this process in 1993.** To begin with, they started collecting data on the number of dry latrines in different regions.
- Armed with this data, they organised protests at the District Magistrate offices and submitted petitions to the collectors. Such protests were carried out all over the country to force the government to implement its own laws to end the practice of manual scavenging.
- **In 2003, SKA filed a PIL in the Supreme Court** – asking it to ensure the eradication of dry latrines and to recognise that manual scavenging violates the fundamental rights of the people doing such work. **In 2014, the apex court gave the final judgement.**
- SKA undertook **Bhim Yatra** to tell the country and the government to ‘STOP KILLING US’ in dry latrines, sewers and septic tanks. It moved across the country, covering 500 districts in 30 states in 125 days. Bhim Yatra simultaneously spread Ambedkar’s ideas of social justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, while giving the war cry ‘Educate, Organise and Agitate’.
- The Safai Karamachari Andolan continues to expand both in its geographical reach and its initiatives. Rehabilitation of liberated manual scavengers, education of their children, building of the Sewerage Workers’ Platform, and women SHGs all across India.

## **12 Crore New Toilets, but Who Will Clean Them?**

Bezwada Wilson talks about manual scavenging, the inhumane practice that it is and how it is forced upon the lower castes. With the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’s new aims of building

more toilets across the country, the already burdened scavengers will be made to take on the additional job of cleaning the new toilets. Wilson remarks on the failure of the government to tackle this problem and the lack of technology advancements in this area, and how it continues to normalise the oppression of this particular class of people.

### **First act in 1993**

In 1993, the Government of India enacted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act which prohibited the employment of manual scavengers for manually cleaning dry latrines and also the construction of dry toilets, that is, toilets that do not operate with a flush. It provided for imprisonment of upto a year and a fine.

### **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013**

#### **Provisions**

This Act intends to, inter alia, **achieve its objectives to:-**

- **Eliminate the insanitary latrines.**
- Prohibit:-
  - a) Employment as Manual Scaven
  - b) Hazardous manual cleaning of sewer and septic tanks.
- Survey of Manual Scavengers and their rehabilitation, within a time bound manner.

#### **Main features of the Act are:-**

- **Definitions** of manual scavengers and insanitary latrines widened to cover not only dry latrines but other insanitary latrines as well.
- Prohibition of person from engagement or employment for

hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank.

- Offences under the Act are cognizable and non-bailable and attract stringent penalties.
- Vigilance/Monitoring Committee at sub-Division, District, State and Central Govt. levels.
- National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) would, inter alia, monitor implementation of the Act and enquire into complaints regarding contravention of the provisions of the Act.
- Provision of construction of adequate number of sanitary community latrines in urban areas, within three years from the date of commencement of this Act to eliminate the practice of open defecation.
- Survey of Manual Scavengers in Urban and rural areas: which should be conducted with a time bound framework
- Comprehensive Rehabilitation of the Manual Scavengers within a time bound framework.