



Menace of Manual Scavenging

For Prelims: Manual Scavenging, Government Schemes related to Manual Scavenging.

For Mains: Manual Scavenging, its prevalence and efforts to eradicate it.

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment informed the Lok Sabha that 22 people had died while **Manual Scavenging** in 2021 so far.

- According to the **National Convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan**, 472 manual scavenging deaths across the country were recorded between 2016 and 2020.
 - Safai Karmachari Andolan is **a movement for elimination of manual scavenging.**
- **Article 21 of the Constitution** guarantees '**Right to Life**' and that also with dignity. This right is available to **both citizens and non-citizens.**

Key Points

- **Manual Scavenging:**
 - Manual scavenging is defined as “the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”.
- **Reasons for the Prevalence:**
 - **Indifferent Attitude:** A number of independent surveys have talked about the continued reluctance on the part of state governments to admit that the practice prevails under their watch.
 - **Issues due to Outsourcing:** Many times local bodies outsource sewer cleaning tasks to private contractors. However, many of them fly-by-night operators, do not maintain proper rolls of sanitation workers.
 - In case after case of workers being asphyxiated to death, these contractors have denied any association with the deceased.
 - **Social Issue:** The practice is **driven by caste, class and income divides.**
 - It is linked to India's caste system where so-called lower castes are expected to perform this job.
 - In **1993**, India **banned the employment of people as manual scavengers** (The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993), however, the stigma and discrimination associated with it still linger on.
 - This makes it difficult for liberated manual scavengers to secure alternative livelihoods.
- **Steps Taken:**
 - **[The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:](#)**
 - The act seeks to reinforce the prohibition of manual scavenging in all forms and ensures the rehabilitation of manual scavengers.
 - **[Prevention of Atrocities Act:](#)**

- It delineates specific crimes against [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes](#).
- [National Commission of Safai Karamcharis](#):
 - The Commission is acting as a non-statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment whose tenure is extended from time to time through Government Resolutions.
- [Swachh Bharat Mission](#):
 - Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a national campaign launched by the Government on 2nd October, 2014 to clean the streets, roads and build social infrastructure of the country.
- [The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation \(Amendment\) Bill, 2020](#):
 - It proposes to completely mechanise sewer cleaning, introduce ways for 'on-site' protection and provide compensation to manual scavengers in case of sewer deaths.
 - It will be an amendment to **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**.
- [Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge](#):
 - It was launched by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** on [World Toilet Day \(19th November\)](#) in 2020.
 - The Government launched this "challenge" for **all states to make sewer-cleaning mechanised by April 2021** — if any human needs to enter a sewer line in case of unavoidable emergency, proper gear and oxygen tanks, etc., are to be provided.
- **'Swachhta Abhiyan App'**:
 - It has been developed to **identify and geotag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers** so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.
- **SC Judgement**:
 - In 2014, a [Supreme Court](#) order made it **mandatory** for the government to **identify all those who died in sewage work** since 1993 and provide **Rs. 10 lakh each** as compensation to their families.

Way Forward

- **Proper Identification:** States need to accurately enumerate the workers engaged in cleaning toxic sludge.
- **Empowering Local Administration:** With [Swachh Bharat Mission](#) identified as a top priority area by the [15th Finance Commission](#) and funds available for smart cities and urban development providing for a strong case to address the problem of manual scavenging.
- **Social Sensitisation:** To address the social sanction behind manual scavenging, it is required first to acknowledge and then understand how and why manual scavenging continues to be embedded in the caste system.
- **Need For a Stringent Law:** If a law creates a statutory obligation to provide sanitation services on the part of state agencies, it will create a situation in which the rights of these workers will not hang in the air.

[Source: TH](#)