



Manual Scavenging

For Prelims: Initiatives to tackle Menace of Manual Scavenging, Swachh Bharat Mission

For Mains: Menace of Manual Scavenging, Issues related to SC, STs

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment informed that **a total of 971 people lost their lives** while cleaning sewers or septic tanks since 1993.

- Earlier, the Union Cabinet **approved the extension of the tenure of the [National Commission for Safai Karamcharis \(NCSK\)](#)** for three years beyond 31st March, 2022. The major beneficiaries would be the Safai Karamcharis and identified manual scavengers in the country.

What is Manual Scavenging?

- Manual scavenging is defined as **“the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”**.

What are the Reasons for the Prevalence of Manual Scavenging?

- **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.

What are the Steps taken to tackle the Menace of Manual Scavenging?

- **[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.**
- It is still awaiting cabinet approval.
- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:**
 - Superseding the 1993 Act, the 2013 Act **goes beyond prohibitions on dry latrines**, and outlaws all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains, or pits.
- **The Building and Maintenance of Insanitary Latrines Act of 2013:**
 - It outlaws construction or maintenance of unsanitary toilets, and the hiring of anybody for their manual scavenging, as well as of hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.
 - It also provides a constitutional responsibility to provide alternative jobs and other assistance to manual scavenging communities, as reparation for historical injustice and indignity.
- **Prevention of Atrocities Act:**
 - In 1989, the **Prevention of Atrocities Act** became an integrated guard for sanitation workers, more than 90% people employed as manual scavengers belonged to the Scheduled Caste. This became an important landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.
- **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 Judgment:** 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

- **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.
- **State and Society needs to take Interest:** The **state and society needs to take active interest in the issue** and look into all possible options to accurately assess and subsequently eradicate this practice.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. ‘Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan’ is a national campaign to (2016)

- (a) rehabilitate the homeless and destitute persons and provide them with suitable sources of livelihood
- (b) release the sex workers from their practice and provide them with alternative sources of livelihood
- (c) eradicate the practice of manual scavenging and rehabilitate the manual scavengers
- (d) release the bonded labourers from their bondage and rehabilitate them

Ans: (c)

- Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan is a national campaign for dignity and eradication of manual scavenging launched by Jan Sahas in 2001.. Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.

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