



## Manual Scavenging in India

**For Prelims:** [Manual-scavenging](#), [Constitution of India](#), [Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013](#), [NAMASTE scheme](#), [Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge](#), [Swachhta Abhiyan App](#)

**For Mains:** Reasons for the Continued Prevalence of Manual Scavenging in India, Government Initiatives to Curb Manual Scavenging.

### Why in News?

Recent revelations by the **Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** highlight that **only 508 out of 766 districts have declared themselves [manual-scavenging free](#)**.

- This discrepancy raises concerns about the **true extent of manual scavenging and the effectiveness of government efforts**.

### What is Manual Scavenging?

- **Manual scavenging** refers to the practice of manually **cleaning, handling, and disposing of human excreta** and other waste materials from dry latrines, open drains, and sewers.
  - In India, manual scavenging has been a long-standing issue, although it has been **officially banned since 1993**.

### What are the Constitutional Safeguards and Legal Provisions for Manual Scavengers?

- **Constitutional Safeguards:** The [Constitution of India](#) guarantees several rights and protections for manual scavengers such as:
  - **Article 14:** Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
  - **Article 17:** Abolition of untouchability and prohibition of its practice in any form.
  - **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty.
  - **Article 23:** Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour.
- **Legal Provisions:** The [Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013](#) **is the main legislation** that aims to prohibit and eliminate manual scavenging in India. It prohibits the employment or engagement of anyone as a manual scavenger and also prohibits anyone from constructing or maintaining insanitary latrines.

### What are the Reasons for the Continued Prevalence of Manual Scavenging in India?

- **Inefficient Sewage Management System:** In India, **most [municipalities](#) do not have the latest machines for cleaning the sewage systems** and thus sewage workers are required to enter the underground sewerage lines through manholes.

- The **unskilled labourers**, meanwhile, are much cheaper to hire and contractors illegally employ them at a daily wage.
- **Caste-based social hierarchy:** Manual scavenging has **historically been associated with the caste system in India**, where certain castes have been marginalised and forced into occupations considered "unclean" or "polluting."
  - The **perpetuation of [caste-based discrimination](#) and social stigma contributes to the continuation of manual scavenging** as a means of employment for these marginalised communities.
- **Lack of Alternative Livelihood Opportunities:** Manual scavenging often persists **due to limited alternative employment opportunities** available to the affected communities.
  - Many manual scavengers are trapped in a cycle of **[poverty and exclusion](#)**, lacking access to education and skill development programs that could provide them with alternative livelihood options.
  - This **lack of economic alternatives forces them to continue engaging in manual scavenging for survival.**

## What are the Effects of Manual Scavenging?

- **Health Hazards:** Manual scavengers face significant health risks due to direct exposure to human waste and hazardous substances.
  - They are at high risk of contracting diseases such as **cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, and various respiratory infections.**
  - The **absence of protective gear and poor sanitation conditions further exacerbate the health hazards**, leading to a higher incidence of illnesses and premature deaths among manual scavengers.
- **Dignity and Human Rights Violations:** Manual scavenging is a clear violation of the **dignity and [human rights](#)** of the individuals involved.
  - They are subjected to degrading and inhumane conditions, handling human waste with their bare hands and lacking access to basic sanitation facilities.
  - This occupation perpetuates **social stigma, discrimination, and the marginalisation of affected communities** reinforcing caste-based oppression.
- **Psychological and Emotional Trauma:** Engaging in manual scavenging can have severe psychological and emotional effects on the individuals involved.
  - The constant **exposure to filth, the indignity of the work, and the discrimination they face take a toll on their [mental well-being](#).** Manual scavengers often experience feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and depression, leading to long-term psychological trauma.

## What are the Government Initiatives and Supreme Court Directions to Curb Manual Scavenging?

- **Supreme Court Directions:**
  - 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.**
- **Rehabilitation Effort:**
  - **Payout and Subsidies:**
    - Approximately **58,000 manual scavengers have been identified and given a one-time cash payout of ₹40,000 each.**
      - Around **22,000 manual scavengers have been connected to skills training programs.**
      - Subsidies and loans are available to support those interested in starting their own businesses. The objective is to eliminate manual scavenging deaths entirely.
  - **Merger with NAMASTE Scheme:**
    - The scheme for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers has been merged with the **[NAMASTE scheme for 100% mechanisation of sewer work.](#)**
    - The **[FY 2023-24 Union Budget](#)** lacks specific allocation for the rehabilitation

scheme but **allocates ₹100 crore to the NAMASTE scheme.**

- The NAMASTE scheme necessitates the **identification and profiling of all septic tank/sewer workers, provision of occupational training and safety equipment,** and enrollment in health insurance under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

▪ **Other Related Initiatives:**

- [Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge](#)
- [Swachhta Abhiyan App](#)
- [Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan](#)
- [National Commission for Safai Karamchari](#)

## Way Forward

- **Technology-Driven Solutions:** There is a need to embrace technology to develop innovative tools and machinery that can replace manual scavenging tasks.
  - For example, **automated sewer cleaning robots** can be deployed to clean sewer lines and septic tanks, reducing the need for human intervention in hazardous environments.
- **Promote Entrepreneurship and Skill Development:** There is a need to encourage the training and skill development of affected individuals, empowering them to explore alternative livelihood opportunities.
  - Government and non-governmental organisations can provide vocational training in areas such as **plumbing, electrical work, computer literacy, and entrepreneurship** to help former manual scavengers transition to safer and more dignified professions.
- **Sanitation Infrastructure Upgrades:** Invest in the development and improvement of sanitation infrastructure, including the **construction of modern toilets, sewage treatment plants, and efficient waste management systems.**
  - These upgrades will **reduce the demand for manual scavenging** and provide safer alternatives for waste disposal.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

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)

[Source: TH](#)