



# WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS

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## **Abstract:**

Work-life balance isn't limited to flexible work arrangements that allow employees to hold out other life programs and practices. It includes factors like income, health, social relationships, and happiness. This paper analyses the parameters which are interlinked with the above-mentioned factors concerning the Manual Scavengers of Tamilnadu. This context examines the work-life balance(WLB) how it's maintained in Manual Scavenger's work life and also the prevailing situation of the applicability of the legal safeguards for these poor dominated peoples. Manual scavengers are exploited and treated as outcasts and untouchables. Manual scavengers are exposed to 2 sorts of violence that are social violence and violence related to caste discrimination. Caste discrimination and therefore the job condition can cause them to be exposed to physical violence and balancing a life with these hardships may be a day to day challenging task in their life. Furthermore, the culture in India on caste is employed to justify violence against them. The evil of manual scavenging is directly associated with the shortage of availability of sanitation facilities.

**Keywords :** Work-life balance, Social violence, Hardships, Scavengers

## **Introduction:**

While examining the scope and challenges of social and occupational mobility of manual scavengers in India, the essential factors that determine the living and dealing conditions of the community can't be overlooked. In this modern society, dignified living is the thing that supports and provides people a respectful position among fellow citizens. It is the sense of being recognized by fellow human beings that provide one with a sense of positive and confident existence. It is the intersubjective social, cultural, political, economic and philosophical relationship and the cultural capital that provides people a body language to walk in different ways of life confidently. Recognition by fellow human beings is vital But, if people are humiliated continuously because of being engaged in an undignified occupation or by being called by caste names because of being born in a particular caste (irrespective of economic status) it results in a great loss of self-respect. Moreover, generation over generation failing to change this loss of self-respect makes people a kind of mental slaves. Therefore, mental slaves with no cultural capital do what they are asked to do without having an agency to think for their betterment. It stops bothering them even if they are asked to do the most heinous work for their daily survival. It stops troubling them even if their life and respect are at stake in doing that work.

Unlike the remainder of the planet, where economic factors play a key role in forcing people to require up such menial and unsafe occupations, the main part in restricting the social mobility of manual scavengers is played by caste in India. Even if one decides to quit the profession and take up other respectable means of livelihood, the specter of caste identity haunts him/her throughout life and thus the person has to face humiliations and social boycotts from the exploiters also as from within the community. This paper attempts to spot the broad factors that determine the living and dealing conditions of manual scavengers in India, most of which also play a big part in the caste system that restricts and checks their social and occupational mobility.

### **Objective:**

This paper specifically deals with the quality of work and also the work-life balance of manual scavengers. manual scavengers are all socially exploited people, they face social discrimination in political and in economic spheres. This study further explores the caste-based discrimination, controlled occupation mobility and the apathy of law which have pushed them to continue the manual scavenging practices.

### **Manual scavenging:**

Manual scavenging is a hereditary and caste-based occupation. It is a term used mainly in India for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling human excreta in an insanitary latrine or an open drain or pit. Manual scavengers usually use hand tools like buckets, brooms and shovels. This work is being regarded as a dehumanizing practice. The workers have to move the excreta and carry to disposal locations sometimes several kilometers away. These sanitation workers called "manual scavengers", rarely have any personal protective equipment. Manual scavenging can be eliminated in India as long as the caste system is firmly entrenched. A Human Rights Watch report said that 95 percent of the workforce engaged in manual scavenging comprises women. Wages earned by women manual scavengers are lower, compared to their male counterparts. For instance, in rural India, women laborers get wages in kind such as food grains while men get cash.

To add to the problem, the flagship program of the Modi government, the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) which aims to make India clean and filth-free does not have any provision to eliminate manual scavenging. While it aims to build toilets and protects the dignity of women by providing them with private spaces to defecate, it also fosters insult on women manual scavengers as they are those who clean human excreta from dry-pit latrines.

The other bane of the SBM is that most of the toilets built under the initiative are single-pit and do not have a continuous supply of water and are not connected to sewers. Every two to three years, they need to be emptied, thus leading to hazardous cleaning

### **Manual scavengers – sanitation workers:**

All of us are aware of the people doing manual scavenging. This situation prevails across the country. Many do it for years as their profession. Most of them are from scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and backward classes. They also inherit this from their family members. They are providing an important service to our society but they need to be been neglected during a greater sense and lots of times we see them as untouchable which is prohibited under Article 17 of the Constitution of India. As India possess the very best population within the world after China and even after sixty-nine years of independence, the event of waste management processes aren't up to the mark and still there's the practice of manual scavenging at various parts of the country. The people who are called scavengers are economically weak and socially backward. They are the people who survive with an unhealthy lifestyle and highly unhygienic working conditions. The lack of state support, poor education, un-developed technologies and non-secular belief about the scavenger's is very contradictory. The group of individuals "Dalits" who perform manual scavenging belong to a specific community that is assigned for this particular work consistent with the religious beliefs in India. This paper analyzes on the working condition and living standards of the people performing scavenging operations and also it highlights the need for changing the beliefs and laws related to manual scavenging

**History of manual scavengers:**

Removal of human excrement from public streets and "dry latrines" Cleaning septic tanks, Cleaning gutters and sewers, cleaning of railway lines of excreta dropped from toilets of trains comes under manual scavenging. The practice of manual scavenging in India dates back to the past. There's evidence of the existence of toilets with a water lock in the civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. These cities had toilets that were connected to an underground system lined with burnt clay bricks. Consistent with the contents of sacred scriptures and other literature, scavenging by some specific castes of India has existed since the start of civilization.

**Health issues faced by manual scavengers:**

The major issue is the lack of machines to clean sewers and septic tanks. Until a mechanized system of cleaning is implemented, more and more manual scavengers will die. For instance, the governments provide for modern technology (mechanized) for cleaning of sewers and septic tanks to eliminate the need for manual handling of excreta during the cleaning process. Indeed, if mechanized cleaning had been put in place and implemented vigorously, the many deaths that take place almost daily would be averted. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2018 reveals that over 1.8 lakh people from rural India are still engaged in manual scavenging. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment while implementing a Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) had identified 13,657 manual scavengers till June 30, 2018. These people suffer from cardiovascular degeneration, musculoskeletal disorders and infection like hepatitis, skin problems and respiratory problems. Consequently, people also suffer from illness such as dysentery, typhoid fever, and diarrhea in their day to day working life.

**Social discrimination:**

Manual scavenging is a caste enforced work, which means manual scavenging is imposed on one particular caste group. In the caste society, people higher in hierarchy get respect from all the castes but people lowered in the hierarchy don't get respect from any of the castes, as a result the lowered caste people do not get respect at all instead they get sympathy. People working as manual scavengers are the most exploited, socially untouchable caste. They don't have a social, cultural and political opinion to make. They are forced to accept that it is their hereditary work to clean human shits throughout their life. As a result, from one generation to another, they keep passing this work within their family and they continue their wretchedness. They have no supporting community and it is their work which has led them to face discrimination and humiliation. The manual scavenger's problem is not just of survival, but a dignified survival. What manual scavengers are made to do is not some occupational hazard, that if its risks and difficulties are removed then they can continue with the same. Being manual scavengers, what they face are not only daily difficulties and risks in cleaning manholes but more importantly, denial of basic human rights and recognition of their being at the hand of fellow human beings and the welfare state itself. The thing they demand is equality and justice, which they are never going to get if they continue getting their living by manual scavenging.

**Work-life balancing:**

These people hardly make 600-1000 per month. Any special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group not at all. These people are poor uneducated who clean shit with their own hands, now a days work-life balance has become an increasingly big concern for all workers but not in the case of manual scavengers, they were unable to find any other work other than manual scavenging. Manual scavengers have to face different kinds of social discrimination and humiliation. If they live in a mixed caste society and more importantly, even if they are engaged in non-sanitation related work, they are not called for social gatherings. Primarily, manual scavengers are stigmatized because of their caste and, because of the horrible working conditions. If working conditions are improved, if people are not cleaning human shit manually, if they are using sucker machines to clean sewer and septic tanks, they will still be stigmatized. This technological innovation does very little to help a manual scavenger in leading a dignified life in his locality. By using machines to clean sewers/septic tanks, the tag of manual scavengers will surely be removed but it won't improve the intersubjective relationship with their fellow human beings. It won't decrease humiliation in their daily life. The houses of those scavengers situated outside the most residential district and that they dwell in very poor and unhygienic conditions. The prevalence of alcoholism and drug addiction is very high among this community. The workers are also paid very less that they are not able to even take care of their own family. Most of these people had gotten

into manual scavenging before they were even 18 years of age and have also been working as one for more than 15 years, some even as long as 40 years. None of these people can support their family or their own life with manual scavenging as their only source of income. But the fascinating thing is that most of their children are being educated. This shows how these people value education. The majority of the people find this work as humiliating and disgusting. And that they started this job only due to social pressure on caste discrimination and force, and others because they were not educated as they were low in caste, and eventually did not get any other job. 90 percent of these people are poorly educated to have no education at all. Only about 60 percent of the society are aware of this "prohibition of employment of manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act, 2013", this shows that this has not reached far into the community. This on its own does not contribute much to the personal development of the manual scavenger in particular nor does it improve the economic or social status of the manual scavenger.

### **Laws for rehabilitation of manual scavengers:**

As per Article 46 of the Indian Constitution, the state has to guard the weaker section of the society but it's did not do so. Central Government enacted a law on Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines Prohibition Act 1993, but they were not properly implemented rather not at all. Looking at this dehumanizing practice of manual scavenging and failure of existing law, Central Government enacted a replacement law called The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 on September 18, 2013, which remains not being implemented. Any person who has been employed to handle under composed human waste from an insanitary latrine, open-drain or pit or railway track is a manual scavenger under this law. The person could have been employed by anyone from their village or by an agency or contractor. It does not matter if she was given regular employment or engaged on a contract basis, she is covered under this law. Only Exception is any person who has been employed to clean human waste and does so with the help of the appropriate protective gear and equipment will not be considered a manual scavenger under this law. The law was extended and clarified to incorporate insanitary latrines, ditches and pits in 2013. Another group of people called 'safai karamcharis' are also sometimes considered as manual scavengers. However, they usually refer to people working as sweepers or cleaning workers in the municipalities, government or private organizations. This law makes it an offense to use people as manual scavengers to wash insanitary latrines, clean sewers and septic tanks without protective gear, Construct insanitary latrines and Not demolish or convert insanitary latrines within a certain period of this Act.

This law provides for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers through training in alternate employment, financial help and help with purchasing the property. Every local authority, cantonment board or railway authority is responsible for surveying its area to identify manual scavengers.

### **Present condition of manual scavengers in India:**

According to official data, Tamil Nadu has reported 144 fatalities of workers engaged in manual scavenging since 1993. The prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (PEMSRA), 2013, was enacted to eliminate manual scavenging in India, but five years down the line, the Act has proved ineffective in preventing deaths of manual scavengers in all parts of the country.

September 16, 2018: Five workers died while cleaning a septic tank in Jaipur district, Chhattisgarh.

September 9, 2018: Five people died due to asphyxiation after they entered a sewage treatment plant in West Delhi's Moti Nagar area. Five days later, another person died in Dabri area in New Delhi while cleaning a septic tank. Though legislation outlawing Manual Scavenging is in place, rampant violations across the country lead to hundreds of deaths every year. The information is based on media reports it collated, mostly from English and Hindi newspapers.

At present, under Section 7 of PEMSRA, a violation is punishable with two years of imprisonment or fine or both, but this has hardly prevented the deaths of manual scavengers. Experts believe that there would be a greater deterrent effect if the punishment of imprisonment/fine is maximized to the extent possible. At the same time, they also believe that the law should be adhered to aggressively to eliminate manual scavenging in its totality.

**Discussion:**

- Manual scavengers are fighting for the right to live with dignity. The mindset of the manual scavengers have not changed and they are still facing problems of social exclusion in the society.
- The reason why they entered into manual scavenging is in stacks. For about 55 percent of the people were caste discrimination and the other 45 percent entered into manual scavenging as they were not qualified enough and had no jobs.
- People who do scavenging as their job chose to answer yes to the question of whether they found manual scavenging as a humiliating and degrading job and made them feel deprived of their basic human rights.
- The main cause of manual scavenging is because of the presence of insanitary latrines and the government is very sincere in its efforts to promote the national cleanliness campaign but these are the people who play a major role in sanitation procedures but are exploited and treated as outcasts and untouchables.
- This has defeated the aim of the "prohibition of employment of manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act,2013" which forbids the utilization of a person for the task of manual scavenging by any individual, as cleaning up untreated human excreta is harmful to one's health and hygiene, the act seeks to completely ban the practice.
- But unfortunately it is often concluded that, there's no significant impact on the socio-economic status of manual scavengers in India after the Implementation of the "prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act, 2013".

**Conclusion:**

This study has concentrated on the work-life of the manual scavengers, they have poor recognition and humiliation by the society. While considering the life balance and quality life of manual scavengers there are few aspects to understand the consequences faced by the manual scavengers. It includes their recognition and rehabilitation. These manual scavengers having an oppressed work-life balance and their daily routines are seriously affected. The government should take initiative in policymaking and improve the overall standard of living for the manual scavengers.

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