

Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers: An Analysis of Implementation of Self Employment Scheme.

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Abstract:

Manual Scavenging is the most demeaning profession and the worst enduring symbol of untouchability because it reinforces the social stigma that these castes are untouchable and should be excluded from society. The practice of manual Scavenging is still an existing reality for many Indians. Manual Scavenging entails cleaning out sewers and clearing human excreta from open-pit toilets. It remains the burden of specific poor, disadvantaged communities who invariably discharge their duties without thinking the repercussions of this inhumane practice which has been encouraged by the cruel caste system over the years. Successive Indian government attempts to end caste-based cleaning of excrement have been derailed by discrimination and social stigma in the society. It has been taken granted by the community that this was the work of Dalits and have not found a solution to end this unsociable and evil practice. This paper tries to bring to the light how successive governments over the years have failed in rehabilitating manual scavengers by providing alternative employment.

Introduction

Manual scavenger, who lives every day based on cleaning feces from government and private latrines and dispose of deceased livestock from the village configuration, is the first flag for their intuitive nature. By custom, they were relegated to the bottom of the caste system hierarchy and are allowed to perform jobs that are too dirty for upper castes to perform. The Constitution of India prevents the practice of untouchability, and the 1955 Law on the Protection of Civil Rights prohibits any person from practising manual Scavenging. Specifically designed to end manual Scavenging, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and the Construction of Dry

Latrines Act, 1993 (the 1993 Act) declared the use of manual scavengers and the construction of dry toilets to be punishable by fines and imprisonment. In addition to the 1993 Act, the 2013 Act extends beyond the dry latrine prohibitions and prohibits all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains or pits. And, most importantly, it recognizes the constitutional obligation to correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by manually scavenging communities by providing alternative livelihoods and other assistance.

Manual Scavenging still exists in India despite the fact that it is unacceptable and dangerous as a technique for human waste disposal, despite science and technological progress on multiple fronts which saves manual labour, and despite the availability of easy and cheap alternative ways of eliminating the two-fold problem of manual Scavenging and the secure disposal of human excreta. The culture of recognition that prevails among them also deprives them of their fundamental rights. The amount of humiliation faced by them and their family is inconceivable. Government, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, have made numerous attempts to stop manual Scavenging. There are, however, essential obstacles to attaining enduring change. To overcome them needs a firm commitment from the government to guarantee that appropriate programs are in place and that authorities at all levels are responsible for enforcing legislation and policies directed at stopping manual Scavenging. Legislative exertions to end manual Scavenging were followed by administrative programs and procedures which are aimed to metamorphose India's sanitation system. The legislative efforts should also ensure that the people involved in manual Scavenging pursue alternative livelihoods. Several distinct public agencies are responsible for implementing these systems and policies, which often do not coordinate their attempts.

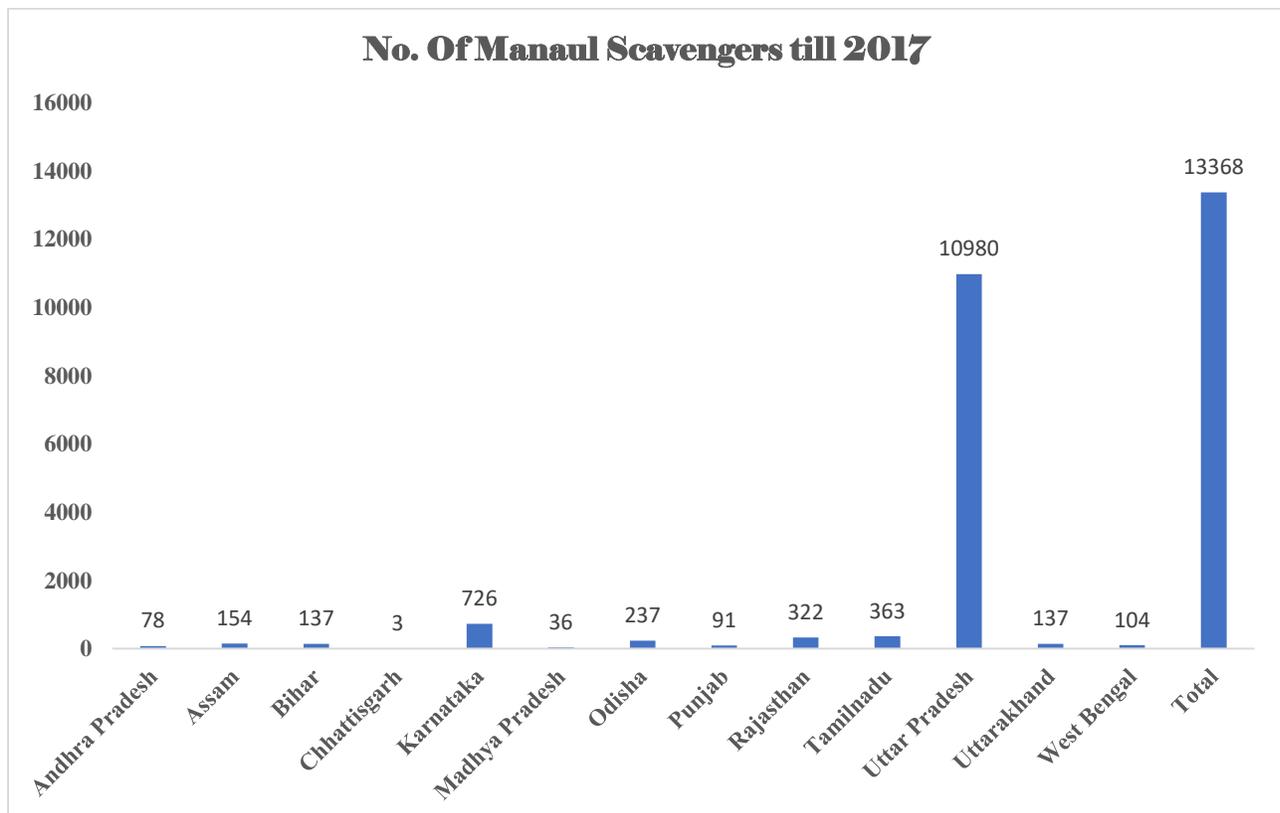
The government employs, in some states, manual scavengers through contractors. This exposes the double standards of the government. On the one hand, they have a law prohibiting Manual Scavenging, which is a cognizable and non-bailable offence, and on the other, they are guilty of engaging manual scavengers. The Government's Swachh Bharat Mission has, in a way, encouraged manual Scavenging by hiring more manual scavengers to meet the requirements of newly constructed toilets. Government at the center and the states did not have exact figure of manual scavengers in the country. There is still ambiguity over the precise number of manual scavengers as some state governments try to suppress the facts, some do not participate in the

conduction of surveys and some claim that manual Scavenging has been wholly eradicated. In the first phase of the study conducted by the central government-appointed task force to get the accurate number of manual scavengers brought to notice that there has been a four-fold increase in the number in 2019 when compared to 2017.

Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers:

The charts below show the total number of reported manual scavengers in India till 2017, number of beneficiaries who have received one-time cash assistance of forty thousand rupees and also who have been sanctioned self-employment projects respectively as part of rehabilitation measures

Fig 1.1



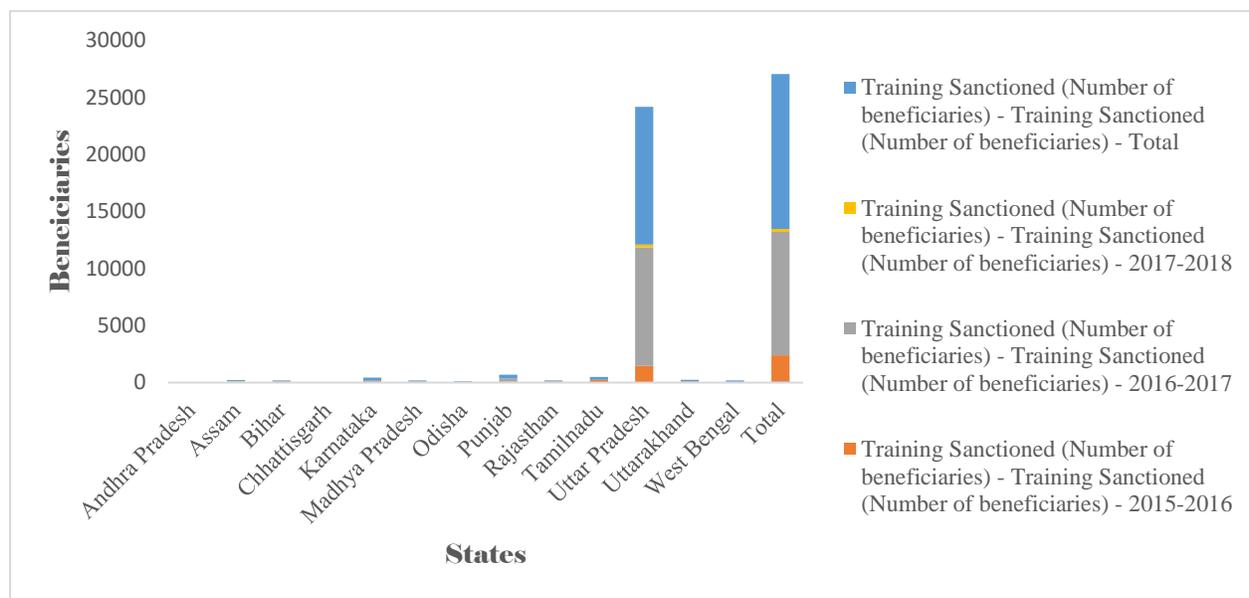
Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Incongruity in data:

Figure 1.1 shows the number of manual scavengers reported in the country according to the ministry of social justice and empowerment until 2017. Out of thirteen states surveyed by the government, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of manual scavengers, followed by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

In contrast to the number of insanitary latrines, the figures given are disproportionately small. According to the data provided by the National Safai Karamchari Finance and Development Corporation (2016-2017), there are 26 lakh insanitary latrines in the country, of which 13.29 lakh in urban spaces and 12.71 lakh in rural areas. The report tells that 13,368 manual scavengers have been identified in 13 states in 2017, which is a disproportionate number. It is unimaginable that there are only 13,000 manual scavengers to clean 26 lakh insanitary latrines in India.

Fig 1.2

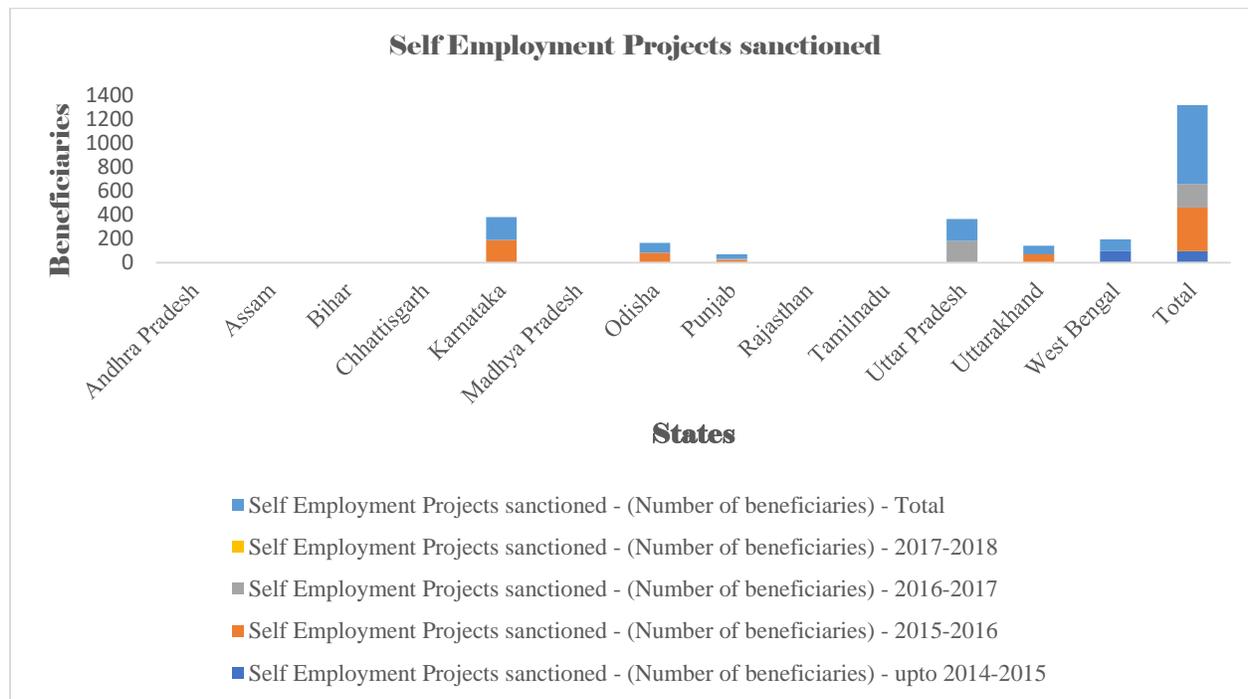


Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Fig 1.2 tells about the number of beneficiaries who have received one-time cash assistance of forty thousand rupees and also who have been sanctioned self-employment projects respectively as part of rehabilitation measures. We can see that the percentage of them who have

been provided one-time cash assistance is very meagre out of the total number of manual scavengers and the governments have failed in accommodating more people.

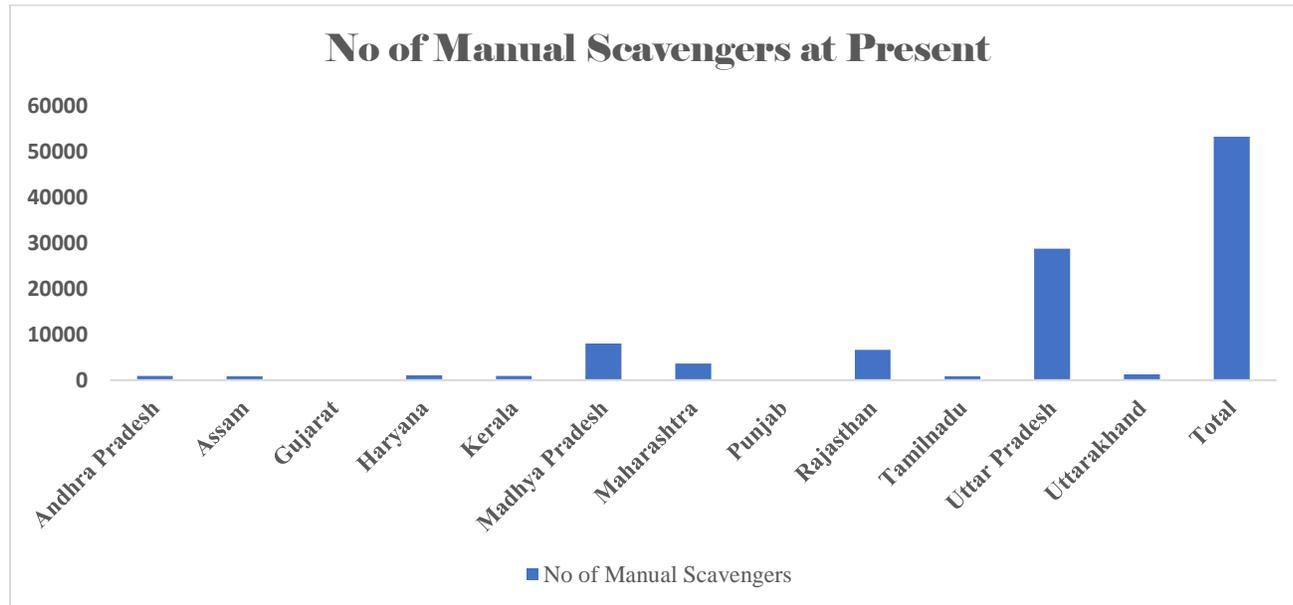
Fig 1.3



Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Fig 1.3 tells about the number of beneficiaries who have been sanctioned self-employment projects respectively as part of rehabilitation measures. Here also one can notice that the percentage of several recipients is very less out of the total number of manual scavengers.

Fig 1.4



Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Fig 1.4 shows the number of manual scavengers in the country at present according to the data given by the task force committee appointed by the central government.

Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers by "JANSAHAS"

Jan Sahas, an NGO which has been working for almost two decades towards liberating and rehabilitating the victims of this cruel practice in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, have rescued many Dalit women who had to take up manual Scavenging because of the pressure from village heads and chiefs. To date, this organization has successfully rehabilitated around thirty-one thousand manual scavengers and protected them from socio-economic discrimination. Jan Sahas has also brought the victims into the mainstream of the society by working in more than two hundred districts in eighteen states and also ensured them financial independence by joining hands with Usha International and made the Usha Silai School accessible for these women.

Technological Innovations:

Manual Scavengers would be liberated from this appalling practice only when we introduce technology for removing excreta which in turn brings dignity to the work and safety to the scavengers. Despite much technological advancement in various sectors, the efforts to introduce technology in manual Scavenging are very minimal. There have been serious efforts by some non- governmental organizations over the years to eradicate this Manual Scavenging. One such initiative is the invention of sewer and utility hole cleaning robot, named as "Bandicoot", by Genrobotics Company founded by young engineers from Thiruvananthapuram. The government should encourage such type of inventions by investing more in research and development to tackle these age-old traditional practices which are specifically linked to a particular caste.

Conclusion:

Firstly, it is very much pertinent to precisely find the areas where the manual Scavenging is most prevalent and identify and rehabilitate scavengers as specified in the Act. The inconsistency in the data regarding the disproportionality between the number of manual scavengers and the number of insanitary latrines, the inefficacy to disclose complete information or the rejection of the presence of manual scavengers indicates that the survey and classification were not carried out correctly. Secondly, more time and determination is required in order to get the exact statistics of the manual scavengers as they migrate to other parts of the country. Moving out of their own place could jeopardize their lives because of the fact that they are identified with their profession and hence face many problems such as getting a house for rent, discrimination of their children in schools and lack of dignity of labor. It is the responsibility of the government to make the public aware that the issue of manual Scavenging is not only about the sanitation but also human dignity. The kind of agony a scavenger undergoes throughout his life is unimaginable. At least now the authorities must wake up from their slumber and act deftly to curb one of modern India's greatest humiliations.

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