

# मध्य भारती

मानविकी एवं समाजविज्ञान की द्विभाषी शोध-पत्रिका

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डॉक्टर हरीसिंह गौर विश्वविद्यालय

सागर (मध्यप्रदेश) - 470003



## Abstract

The manual scavengers work is dangerous, hazardous, unclean, degrading, and above all, even today, the very presence of manual cleaning of the sewage system, septic tanks, and manholes continues in India. Manual scavenger refers to a person who manually cleans, carries, disposes, or handles human excreta from dry toilets and sewers. In our country this work is done under the guise of caste system, the oppressed classes are somehow made to maintain this systematic scourge. This article tries to look into this aspect and tries to highlight on the act that tries to null away with the practice of scavenging in bare oppressed hands.

Keywords: manual scavenging, caste, oppression, act, India

Manual scavenging, a caste-based-forced occupation,[1] has been in practice in several parts of India. It is the manual cleaning of human and animal excreta with the help of brooms and small tin plates and carrying them in baskets for disposal at a designated place, which is far away from the living area. Across India, castes that work as "manual scavengers" collect human excrement on a daily basis, and carry it away in cane baskets for disposal. Women from this caste usually clean dry toilets in homes, while men do the more physically demanding cleaning of sewers and septic tanks. In India we have caste hierarchy, it is ubiquitous and this has resulted in an ideal tolerant of diversity [2].

The international labour organisation (ILO) mentioned [3] the existence of three forms of manual scavenging in all over India, i.e., removal of human excreta from public streets and dry latrine, cleaning septic tanks and cleaning gutters and sewers. The human waste management in India can be classified into four categories [4]: (1) Manual scavenging: A caste-based practice where a sanitation worker scoops waste from dry latrines and dumps it in a gutter or dumping site at some distance from the households; (2) Manual pit emptying: The pits / tanks that latrines are connected to may need to be emptied manually for various reasons; (3) Manual sewer servicing: Only 12-15% of the Indian population is connected to sewers, but sewers become blocked and may need to be manually unblocked; and (4) Mechanical servicing: Mechanization (such as a pump with a hose) is used to unblock sewers and empty pits.

The allocation of labor on the basis of caste is one of the fundamental tenets of the Hindu Caste System [5] and Recommendations on Manual Scavenging. Within this system dalits have been assigned tasks and occupations which are deemed ritually polluting by other caste communities - such as sweeping, disposal of dead animals and leatherwork. By reason of their birth, dalits are considered to be "polluted", and the removal of human and animal waste by members of the "sweeper" community is allocated to them and strictly enforced. Caste is an overbearing [6] identity. It is not simply a tag of identity but dictates a way of life. It continues to reinforce inequality as a basic value and the allocation of labour is one of its prime manifestations.

The caste system assists in believing that all work related to dirt is a lot of the low castes. Because of this not only the upper castes but castes within the smaller castes do not associate with dirt lifting castes. And this has transcended the confines of Hinduism alone to become a way of thinking that pervades all of Indian society. Gandhi would hail manual scavengers [7] as he used to say "I am not ashamed of myself called manual scavenging, and I invoke manual scavengers not to be ashamed of being called one. This society is based on many services, a scavenger is at the base of the service. That being one of the many reasons why Ambedkar was in war of ideas with Gandhiji."