

**SOCIAL INCLUSION OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS: WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO MEHTAR CASTE OF PALIA KALAN KHERI**

ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Manual scavenging is the act of picking up human excrement with one's own hands by another human. It is carried out in private latrines and in communal latrines built by governmental and non- governmental organisations. In general, it is done in two ways: first, cleaning of dry latrines, where the manual scavenger's job is to collect human excrement in a bucket or some vessel and then throw it at a fixed location; second, cleaning of septic tanks (or sewage pits), which serve as waste disposal in some people's homes' toilets or in municipalities.

The work of cleaning tanks full of excrement is done at night and many people are needed to do it. Both men and women clean tanks, whereas the dry latrines in houses and public spaces are generally cleaned by women.

This practise is still practised in various parts of the country, but the methods vary and have evolved in response to local needs or practises. In north India, communal toilets are generally not latrines, whereas in south India such communal latrines are commonly under the aegis of the panchayats or the municipalities.

In some states, a terribly oppressive feudal thinking can be seen, whether in the absence of sewer lines or in the apathy of the policy makers towards flush toilets. Definitely this prevails in the colonies inhabited by people with low incomes, as also Muslim colonies. There are thousands of examples of people who have kept this practice alive due to their feudal mind set. While in Haryana and Punjab, dry latrines have been constructed even in opulent mansions made with lakh of rupees, women in Rajasthan can be seen carting basket upon basket of excrement from princely havelis for just a stale roti and a pittance in wages. One can also see that in old towns like Lucknow (the capital of Uttar Pradesh), Kanpur and Aligarh, women are engaged in manual scavenging in poor households on credit. In all these places, these women are treated with contempt. These women and their families are forced to live their entire lives like this, condemned to remain on the lowest rung of the caste system.

The work of manual scavenging and continuation of dry latrines is a violation of articles 14, 17, 21 and 23 of the constitution and it is also a direct violation of the law passed in 1993.

World Bank defines 'Social Inclusion' as "the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups participate in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those who are disadvantaged because of their identity".

Some groups face barriers in every country that prevent them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. These groups may be excluded not only through legal systems, land, and labour markets, but also through stigmatising or discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions. Disadvantage is frequently based on, among other things, gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). Individuals are deprived of their dignity, security, and the opportunity to live a better life as a result of social exclusion.

United Nations define 'Social inclusion' as "the process of ensuring equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of background, can reach their full potential in life. Policies and actions that promote equal access to public services and allow citizens to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives are examples of such efforts".

In developing countries, other than India, where untouchability and manual scavenging never existed, emptying latrine pits is a job done by people who are poor and down on their luck. But they are not people whose parents were prevented from drawing water from a well. They are not, however, people whose parents were barred from drawing water from a well. They are not the children of people who were forced to eat scraps after public functions. In other countries, emptying latrine pits is an unpleasant task rather than a symbol of oppression and humiliation over generations. The history of untouchability in India – and how it is being renegotiated in villages today – is what distinguishes the job of emptying latrine pits in Indian villages from other parts of the developing world.

This research focuses on achieving a comprehensive explanation of the role of the government, civil society and the opinions of manual scavengers on their social conditions and the pathway for social inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Manual Scavenging is a degrading form of employment in India which influences the life of the people from the lowest rungs of the caste system.

The disturbing scenario of the caste based discrimination and manual scavenging go hand in hand.

This research addresses the problems faced by manual scavengers as well as the opportunities they have regarding employment other than the present one, because coming from the margins of the caste system, they face unemployment as they are not accepted in many jobs. The plight of the manual scavengers coming from the ‘Mehtar’ caste and the role of government and civil society will be taken into account.

Many research articles, documentaries, books, and papers are available studying manual scavenging. The problem of manual scavenging in India have social, legal, political and economic aspect to it. Since every field of study deals with the problem in its own way, be it economics, law or political science. Therefore, the study of this research have a social and human aspect to it by investigating the financial inclusion of the manual scavengers, their views on their emancipation and the role of government and civil society.

Objectives

1. To know the opportunities for social inclusion available for ‘Mehtar’ caste in society with respect to financial inclusion.
 2. To know the opinions of Manual Scavengers on their social inclusion.
 3. To evaluate government policies and the role of civil society for the social inclusion of manual scavengers.
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Research Gap

Big Municipalities with the budget of crores of rupees like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, etc. can spend and eradicate manual scavenging and many research papers and documentaries are available depicting the situation of the conditions of Manual Scavengers. But there are few information available on the working and living conditions of Manual Scavengers coming from the small towns and villages of India.

Therefore, this research will focus on the Tehsil of Palia Kalan Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, as there is no academic research done in the field of Manual Scavenging in this particular geographical area.

Governments and civil society has reached scavengers in big cities and towns whereas small towns like Palia Kalan Kheri are untouched by big government schemes and help from civil society. Also inclusion of the scavenging community in terms of finance and other means have not been broadly covered by sociological academic research, therefore this research takes into account all such aspects including how manual scavengers view their social condition and what views they carry while interacting with the rest of the society and how members of upper caste treat their occupation and see their caste.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

In his book 'Road to Freedom,' **Dr Bindeshwar Pathak** (1991) writes that "according to the contents of sacred scriptures and other literatures, scavenging, especially the disposal of night soil by a certain caste or castes of Indian society, has existed since the beginning of civilization." One of the fifteen responsibilities assigned to slaves in the Naradiya Samhita was to dispose of human excreta. The Chandals and Paulkasa mentioned in the Vajasaneyi Samhita have been called slaves whose work is to dispose the night soil".

How does a higher caste Hindu in a village in north India conceive of cleanliness, dirtiness, purity and pollution? That was the question that **R.S. Khare**, then an anthropology PhD candidate at the University of Lucknow, set out to answer in a paper published in the *Eastern Anthropologist* in the early 1960's. Khare was especially interested in how people perceived the cleanliness and purity of their homes and daily lives. According to the villagers he studied, cleanliness and purity apply to objects, situations, and people, according to Khare. Physical cleanliness and ritual cleanliness are not always synonymous, though they can certainly overlap. Human faeces and used menstrual cloths, for example, are both ritually and physically polluting. Some objects are physically clean but ritually polluted, such as a recently cleaned drain that removes waste water from the house.

Vegetables peels strewn on the floor or rat excreta in flour are both seen as physically dirty but not ritually polluting. Over fifty years later, still there are many people in rural Uttar Pradesh who approach dirtiness and pollution in ways similar to those R.S. Khare documented in the 1960's.

According to anthropologist **Sarah Pinto**, people's thinking about caste and cleanliness is circular: Dalits are dirty because they do dirty jobs, and the jobs are dirty because Dalits do them.

Damaris Luthi, a sociologist, studied hygiene behaviour in Kottar, a small town in Tamil Nadu. She describes how, in a Hindu value system, the cleanliness and purity of the home are very important. Many purity rules focus on the home, which is seen as a reflection of one's character and status. However, Luthi observes, interest in cleanliness stops 'at the doorsteps of private homes, and habits related to the outside define it as an irrelevant rubbish dump'.

Anand Teltumbde, a management professor at IIT Kharagpur and a scholar of Dalit movements, writes in Economic and Political Weekly that the litter problem plaguing Indian cities is caused not only by a lack of concern for what happens in public spaces, but also by caste politics. Indians throw trash on the ground not only out of laziness, but also to demonstrate their superiority over Dalits. After all, it is Dalits who are expected to clean public spaces.

Research Methodology:

Universe of the Study

This study relating to the different aspects of the life of manual scavengers have been conducted in Moholla Rangrejan 1st in the town of Palia Kalan Kheri, a Tehsil of Uttar Pradesh situated near the Indo-Nepal border.

Research Design

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. It explores the problems faced by manual scavengers and is in direction to meet the objectives of the research as well as describes the outcomes that it has achieved.

Descriptive research is a type of research that is used to describe a population's characteristics. It collects data that is used to answer a variety of what, when, and how questions about a specific population or group.

Exploratory research is a methodology approach that investigates previously unstudied research questions. Exploratory research is frequently qualitative. A large-sample exploratory study, on the other hand, can be quantitative as well.

Sampling of the Respondents

This study applied snowball sampling method in order to reach the respondents, and as it is known that the practice of manual scavenging is prohibited by law, only willing participants have been interviewed.

The respondents of the study are manual scavengers from the 'Mehtar' caste of Moholla Rangrejan 1st from the town of Palia Kalan Kheri, Uttar Pradesh. The study has achieved interviewing 25 manual scavengers.

Tools for Data Collection

In order to generate data, non-participant observation and interview schedule have been used. This study aimed to collect the narratives of the manual scavengers.

Along with it, focussed group discussions have been carried out with the manual scavenging community of the 'Mehtar' caste and record their views and opinions and understand their perspective. This research has also used government records, newspaper articles, books and documentaries.

Structure of the DISSERTATION

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces and familiarizes with the research study and emphasises on how the research has been conducted, what tools are used, which methodology is implemented, what are the objectives that are set, following with research design, sampling of the respondents, socio economic profile of the respondents and the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS

This chapter evaluates the role of the government and civil society in the social inclusion of the Manual Scavengers. From different committees formed by the government for the emancipation of manual scavengers to NGO's working for the betterment of the scavenging community, the chapter closely looks into it. This chapter contains both primary and secondary information/data on how and what roles different agencies have played for the upliftment of Manual Scavengers.

Chapter 3: FINANCIAL INCLUSION AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR MANUAL SCAVENGERS

This chapter looks into how Manual Scavengers of 'Mehtar' caste of Palia Kalan Kheri manage their everyday life, financially. The chapter investigates what use a scavenger makes out of a bank account, checks the indebtedness and sees what other work scavengers perform other than manual scavenging. The chapter also looks into the financial stability in manual scavenging in the views of the scavengers. Among many aspects, the chapter also looks into the relation between the financial stability and social stigmas attached to Manual Scavenging.

Chapter 4: VIEWS OF MANUAL SCAVENGERS ON THEIR SOCIAL INCLUSION

This chapter captures the views of manual scavengers on what they think about their occupation, their social conditions and their relationship with the members of the upper caste. The chapter draws attention towards the discrimination faced by the scavenging community at public spaces and their disappointment from their political and social emancipation.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes by objectively describing the findings of the study and recommends solutions to problems found in the field and what can governments and civil society do in order to reach out to manual scavengers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was aimed to find the social conditions of the manual scavengers of the ‘Mehtar’ caste of Palia Kalan Kheri with respect to their financial well-being, role of the government and civil society in their emancipation and to understand their views on the occupation performed by them and what they think on their emancipation respectively.

Major conclusions that can be drawn from the study

Socio-Economic Profile:

- All the responding Manual Scavengers were found illiterate as they and their families do not possess enough resources to get basic education.
- All the scavengers were found married at a very young age except one who was unmarried.
- 52 percent of the manual scavengers were found having very low income i.e. less than 10,000 rupees a month. The income was used to sustain the whole family.
- 68 percent of the manual scavengers were the solo earning member in their family, which made it difficult for them in their daily survival.

Objective:**To evaluate government policies and the role of civil society for the social inclusion of manual scavengers.**

- The scavenging community was completely unaware about the Self- Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS).
- The scavenging community was unaware of the National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation.
- Scavengers were also unaware of the Valmiki Ambedkar Malin Basti Awas Yojana.
- 24 percent of the Manual Scavengers were found as the beneficiaries of the Pradhanmantri Awas Yojana.
- Only 8 percent of the scavengers were found as the beneficiaries of the Pradhanmantri Shauchalay Yojana.
- No manual scavenger and none of their family member have benefitted from reservation in educational institutes as well as government jobs.
- Only 20 percent of the manual scavengers were found aware about the Safai Karamchari Andolan.
- Manual scavengers did not knew about any NGO working in the field of manual scavenging.

Objective:**To know the opportunities for social inclusion available for ‘Mehtar’ caste in society with respect to financial inclusion.**

- Only 4 percent of manual scavengers were found having no bank account.
 - 64 percent of manual scavengers used bank accounts just for the purpose of the withdrawal of their wages, 33 percent of the scavengers used their bank account for both subsidy and withdrawal and only 3 percent of scavengers used the bank account for subsidy allotment.
 - Only 24 percent of the Manual Scavengers opened under the Jan Dhan Yojana.
 - Only 12 percent of the scavengers were found having a debt, they took the loan for reasons like marriage and late payment of wages.
 - 56 percent of the responding scavengers hold a Ration card whereas 44 percent of them had no ration card with them and in their family as well.
 - Among the 56 percent of scavengers holding a ration Card, 14 percent hold Below Poverty Line (BPL) Ration Card and 86 percent hold Above Poverty Line (APL) Ration Card.
 - It was found that 28 percent of manual scavengers have some or the other work in hand other than manual scavenging. Because of low wages, scavengers had to look for other jobs for their survival. It was also found that they had limited options, like they did the work of washing utensils and sweeping at other people’s homes.
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- All the manual scavengers were found have a temporary/contractual job as a manual scavengers.
- Scavengers firmly believed that there is no financial stability in the work of manual scavenging.
- Scavengers also believed that even if there financial condition would have been better, social stigmas attached to their caste and employment would still remain.

Objective:

To know the opinions of Manual Scavengers on their social inclusion.

- All the scavengers firmly believed that political power cannot emancipate them.
- All the scavengers believed that they perform manual scavenging because of their caste.
- Scavengers believed that they have to face discrimination at public places because of their caste.
- Coming from 'Mehtar' caste they are not invited in social functions/gatherings.
- Scavengers recorded that they feel inferior in meeting with people from upper castes.
- Scavengers face resistance in marrying outside their caste and members of upper castes use inappropriate language/slangs to belittle their occupation.
- All the responding manual scavengers do not face discrimination at their place of worship. The reason that they do not face any discrimination at their place of worship is because their community worships Lord Valmiki and in the town of Palia Kalan Kheri, there is a temple of Lord Valmiki and members of the 'Mehtar' caste worship him and also not many members of upper caste visit this temple, therefore they do not face any discrimination.
- All the scavengers were fully aware that the practice of manual scavenging is prohibited by law.
- 92 percent of scavengers cast vote and participate in electoral democracy and only 8 percent of scavengers do not cast vote.
- Among the 92 percent of scavengers who cast their vote, only 13 percent of scavengers cast their vote on the basis of their caste association with the candidate, rest 87 percent vote whoever they like as a candidate.
- 67 percent of scavengers were found who clean private latrines as their job, 30 percent of scavengers clean both private latrines and septic tanks and 3 percent worked at picking up of dead animals.

Recommendations

- Governments should immediately initiate awareness drives regarding their schemes which are for the welfare of the manual scavengers.

- Governments should identify manual scavengers who have not benefitted from its programs and actions.
- Governments should intensely work on the employment alternatives for manual scavengers as the present ones are not effective enough.
- Governments should initiate awareness drives for the annihilation of manual scavenging and take strict actions on officials who allow manual scavenging in their area.
- Governments should allot interest free loans to scavengers to build their own independent businesses.
- Governments should implement technological advancement such as Bandikoot – the robot designed and engineered by Genrobotics for the cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.
- The civil society of India should reach at places like Palia Kalan Kheri where government has failed to emancipate the scavenging community.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

By noting the problems faced by manual scavengers, this study offers recommendations for the social inclusion of manual scavengers. This research studies the financial conditions of manual scavengers and describes the social inclusion for manual scavengers with respect to financial inclusion and evaluates government policies and take into account the perspectives of manual scavengers on their emancipation.

Since the study has used snowball sampling method, which is a non-probability sampling method and also the practice of manual scavenging is prohibited by law, not many manual scavengers were ready to share their views and experiences as they feared of police and other authority administrations, so in that light only willing participants have been interviewed which limited the study to only 25 respondents.