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EXPLORING THE PERSISTENCE AND SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF MANUAL SCAVENGING IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite legislative initiatives and societal gains, manual scavenging—an antiquated and demeaning practise with roots in past injustices—remains a poignant concern in modern-day India. This study examines the long-term significance and complex issues surrounding manual scavenging in detail, shedding light on the socioeconomic effects on underprivileged groups. In this regard, the research examines the current legal system, assessing the effectiveness of anti-manual scavenging laws and constitutional clauses. The report delves into the intricate details of this social ailment and examines the ongoing obstacles to its implementation, ranging from discrimination based on caste to the insufficient execution of laws meant to protect people. The study outlines a comprehensive set of treatments that include technical advancements, awareness campaigns, alternative livelihood alternatives, and stringent enforcement. Beyond these modern issues, the study explores the historical foundations of manual scavenging, following its inception through prehistoric customs, colonial influences, and post-independence struggles. The study integrates historical, legal, and socioeconomic viewpoints using an interdisciplinary lens to provide a comprehensive knowledge of manual scavenging in India. In the end, it advocates for a concerted and persistent endeavour that combines social projects with legislative changes to free communities from manual scavenging and open the door to a more just and respectable society.

KEYWORDS: Manual Scavengers, Socio-economic Implications, Legal Framework, Caste-based Discrimination, Legislative Efforts, Historical Roots, Contemporary Challenges, Awareness Campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The repulsive practise of manual scavenging, which is supported by deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms and has its roots in historical injustices, is a clear example of the ongoing struggles marginalised populations in modern-day India confront. Although laws have been passed and public opinion has changed, manual scavenging still occurs, and this necessitates a careful analysis covering legal, historical, and socioeconomic aspects. This study paper takes an exploratory approach to better understand the socio-economic effects of manual scavenging, work through its

complex layers, and assess the effectiveness of current legal frameworks.

The continued practise of manual scavenging is a major failure of the institutional and legal safeguards intended to protect the weak, in addition to being a socioeconomic hardship. Our goal in analysing the historical background is to put the current issues in perspective and show possible directions towards a society that is more just and respectable. This research project is a call to action, not just an academic investigation, asking for a reassessment of existing approaches and the development of comprehensive solutions that are applicable to the legal, social, and economic spheres. By

reading through the pages that follow, we hope to add to the conversation that is now taking place about manual scavenging and provide the foundation for a more compassionate and aware future.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In India, manual scavenging is a deeply embedded social issue with centuries of historical antecedents. Comprehending the historical background is essential to appreciating the continued existence of this dehumanising behaviour and developing practical plans for ending it.

During the Ancient times, there was Caste System Influence, the hierarchical caste system, in which some tribes were assigned dehumanising jobs, such as cleaning out human waste, is where manual scavenging originated. Due to the institutionalisation of this practise, discrimination based on birth was sustained. There was also Social Stratification in which when it came to allocating jobs, the division of society into "upper" and "lower" castes was crucial. This resulted in the systematic marginalisation of particular communities who were compelled to work as manual labourers.

During the period of Colonial Era with the dominating British policies Caste-based discrimination was made worse because British authorities sometimes depended on pre-existing social hierarchies to stay in power. Some populations were forced to perform menial jobs, which made their socioeconomic disadvantage even more pronounced. During this time, the idea of "untouchability" became institutionalised, further marginalising particular castes and legitimising their absence from society at large. Their identity became inextricably linked to manual scavenging.

Looking at the post-Independence period, the Indian Constitution's founders understood the importance of addressing socioeconomic inequities. The specific goals of Articles 17 and 46 were to end untouchability and advance the

economic and educational rights of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Enacted in 1993, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act was a response to the realisation that particular legislation was required to handle manual scavenging. Unfortunately, insufficient enforcement meant that its impact was restricted.

RELEVANCE AND PERSISTENCE OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

Even with the development of technology and society, manual scavenging is still common in many areas of India. Identifying the causes of its persistence is essential to developing workable remedies. Manual scavenging practises are still in use today due to a number of factors, including social stigma, lack of alternative economic possibilities, and prejudice based on caste. The caste system and manual scavenging are strongly related, as people from marginalised and lower caste communities are disproportionately involved in this dehumanising work. Caste-based discrimination is still practised today, which makes it more difficult for impacted communities to move up the socioeconomic ladder.

When there aren't any good substitute jobs available, people have to rely on manual scavenging to make ends meet. The difficulties experienced by those in this dangerous profession are made worse by financial limitations and restricted access to education. Manual scavengers are marginalised and excluded from mainstream society as a result of the extreme social stigma they endure. People who engage in manual scavenging may find it challenging to escape the cycle of discrimination that results from this stigma, which serves to further institutionalise the practise.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

The socioeconomic effects of manual scavenging are extensive, impacting not just

the areas in where it is practised but also the health, education, and general well-being of those who work in it.

Manual scavengers run the danger of contracting infectious infections, having respiratory issues, and developing skin conditions, among other health risks. These health concerns are made worse by inadequate protection gear and sanitation practises, which feeds the cycle of poverty and illness. Since manual scavengers are socially stigmatised for what they do, children of manual scavengers frequently suffer educational disadvantages. These groups are made even more marginalised by their lack of access to education, which also reduces their chances of socioeconomic growth.

Manual scavenging contributes to economic disempowerment by keeping people in low-paying, dangerous jobs with few opportunities for advancement. It needs all-encompassing interventions that address the social and economic aspects to break away from this cycle.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A number of legislative initiatives aiming at ending this dehumanising practise and guaranteeing the rehabilitation of those impacted define India's legal environment with regard to manual scavenging. The "Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013," a comprehensive piece of legislation that outlaws the practise of manual scavenging and requires people who engage in it to undergo rehabilitation, is the cornerstone of the legal system.

Constitutional Provisions

Article 17: Abolition of Untouchability: The Indian Constitution expressly forbids the practise of untouchability in all its forms and denounces it categorically. The basis for eliminating the caste-based prejudice that underpins manual scavenging is laid out in Article 17.

Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests: **Article 46** of the Constitution

mandates that the State advance the economic and educational interests of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and other marginalised groups. Uplifting communities that have historically engaged in manual scavenging is mandated by the constitution.

Legislative Measures

Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993: The purpose of this early ordinance was to forbid building dry latrines and using manual scavengers. However, because of weak enforcement measures and loopholes, its effectiveness was limited.

Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013: The 2013 Act, which expressly forbids manual scavenging in any form, marks a turning point in the legal system. It requires the identification, rehabilitation, and supply of alternative livelihoods for affected individuals and establishes penalties for noncompliance.

The key provisions of the 2013 Act give a thorough definition of manual scavenging that includes all risky methods of cleaning human excrement. It is expressly forbidden to employ people for manual scavenging or to build unhygienic latrines.

Identification and Rehabilitation: A survey is required by law to determine who is involved in manual scavenging. After they are identified, the Act mandates their rehabilitation via skill-building, alternative work opportunities, and financial support.

Monitoring Systems: The Act creates oversight organisations at the federal, state, and local levels to make sure its provisions are carried out as intended. These organisations are essential to maintaining enforcement and accountability.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Even though there are legal provisions, the elimination of manual scavenging is hampered by difficulties in putting laws and policies into practise. Inadequate awareness, slack

enforcement, and the requirement for thorough rehabilitation procedures are major obstacles.

Insufficient Knowledge: The efficient application of anti-manual scavenging regulations is hampered by impacted groups' ignorance of their legal rights and obligations. Closing this awareness gap will enable people to stand up for their rights.

Weak Implementation: Manual scavenging persists in part because of uneven law enforcement at the local level. To eradicate this practise, enforcement mechanisms—such as accountability and monitoring measures—need to be strengthened.

Comprehensive Rehabilitation: Even while rehabilitation is required by law, the efficiency of these programmes is frequently jeopardised by a lack of funding and poor agency coordination. Successful rehabilitation requires a comprehensive strategy that takes into account the psychological, social, and economic aspects of the condition.

MEASURES TO ERADICATE THE PRACTICE OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

India needs to take a holistic approach to address the issue of manual scavenging, which includes social, economic, and legal measures.

By enforcing strict monitoring and accountability procedures, strengthen the application of current regulations, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 2013 and the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers. Strict penalties should be applied for breaking anti-manual scavenging regulations in order to discourage people, companies, and local government agencies from participating in or endorsing such activities.

Initiate comprehensive awareness initiatives aimed at impacted communities and the broader public to eradicate the societal stigma attached to manual scavenging. In order to promote empathy and understanding among law enforcement agencies, local government representatives, and the general public, conduct sensitization programmes that will help

advance the collaborative effort to end the practise.

Provide skill-building courses and vocational instruction to equip people who scavenge by hand with abilities that may be used to generate revenue in other ways. Work together with businesses and the private sector to establish respectable jobs with competitive pay to ensure a long-term shift away from manual scavenging. Invest in the study and creation of tools and technology that can take the place of labour-intensive manual scavenging techniques, improving the effectiveness and humaneness of waste management and sanitation procedures. Encourage municipalities and other relevant bodies to use mechanised cleaning technology by offering subsidies or financial incentives.

Put in place educational initiatives designed to end the cycle of illiteracy and guarantee that kids from impacted areas may get a good education. Provide education and skill development to women from impacted areas in order to empower them, promote gender equality, and lessen the disproportionate load placed on marginalised groups.

Create all-encompassing programmes for the physical, emotional, and social welfare of people moving away from manual scavenging. Encourage social integration through building a supportive community, planning cultural exchange initiatives, and setting up forums for discussion to end prejudice.

Create a strong system of reporting and monitoring to follow the elimination of manual scavenging. Make sure that frequent audits and open reporting hold government entities responsible for the efficient application of laws prohibiting manual scavenging and rehabilitation initiatives.

To take advantage of their knowledge and resources, establish collaborations with civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that focus on human rights, social justice, and community

development. Encourage community involvement in the planning and execution of interventions to guarantee that the final products are suited to the unique requirements of the impacted communities while also being sensitive to cultural differences.

In order to achieve inclusivity and cultural relevance, include members of marginalised communities in the creation of policies and initiatives aimed at eliminating manual scavenging. Create laws that address the underlying issues that lead to manual scavenging, such as economic inequality and caste-based discrimination, in order to foster long-term social reform.

Work together with foreign authorities and organisations to exchange resources, technical advancements, and best practises for the elimination of manual scavenging. Take part in diplomatic initiatives to get support from around the world and spread awareness of the problem on international forums, encouraging a shared commitment to ending this practise.

India can achieve great strides towards ending manual scavenging, advancing social justice, and improving underprivileged neighbourhoods by combining these strategies. The dedication of governmental organisations, civic society, and the general public to cooperating in the pursuit of a more just and compassionate society will determine the success of these initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This study article has attempted to shed light on the complex subject of manual scavenging in India, among the maze of historical injustices and current concerns. Examining the socio-economic ramifications, legal structures, and historical foundations makes it clear that eliminating manual scavenging calls for more than just legislative changes—it also necessitates a cultural revolution, a steadfast dedication to justice, and an all-encompassing strategy that takes into account the complexities of this pervasive issue.

The socioeconomic effects on marginalised groups highlight how urgently we need thorough rehabilitation, alternative livelihood possibilities, and educational empowerment. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 provides a foundation for legal action. This is a big step forward, but its success depends on addressing implementation issues, raising awareness, and closing rehabilitation gaps. Examining the historical background helps us understand that manual scavenging is a product of deeply embedded societal institutions rather than just a modern ailment. Recognising and addressing the historical origins that have allowed this dehumanising practise to continue for millennia is essential if we hope to see a future free from it.

The path forward calls for a concerted and persistent effort that combines social activities with strict legislation. In order to eliminate societal stigma, it is imperative to raise awareness, make sure that current laws are strictly enforced, and strengthen rehabilitation programmes that ensure no one is left behind. This is a collective duty that involves all societal classes as well as a call to action for legislators. A future in which the evil of manual scavenging is consigned to history books and the constitutional ideals of justice and equality become everyday realities for all citizens is one that is envisioned with temperate hope. Significant change could occur, but the challenge is also quite great. Our path towards a future freed from the constraints of manual scavenging is being undertaken with resolute determination and a strong dedication to the ideas of human dignity. Our goal is to create a society in which each person is able to live a life with equality and dignity.