

The background of the journal cover features a top-down view of a desk. On the left, a pair of black leather brogue shoes is partially visible. In the center, an open notebook with lined pages and a silver pen lies on a light-colored wooden surface. To the right, a black leather bag with a zipper and a black leather watch with a silver face are also visible. A large, semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the journal's title and ISSN information.

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ANALYSIS ON INDIA 'S CASTE BASED SEWER CLEANERS (MANUAL SCAVENGING WHICH VIOLATES ARTICLE 21 - RIGHT TO LIVE LIFE WITH DIGNITY)

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ABSTRACT

Manual scavenging remains a profound human rights crisis in India, representing a lethal intersection of **caste-based discrimination** and systemic administrative failure. Despite constitutional protections under **Article 21 (Right to Life with Dignity)** and legislative bans like the **2013 Prohibition Act**, over 1.3 million Dalits remain trapped in this dehumanizing labour, facing constant health hazards and frequent fatalities. This article analyses the legal evolution from infrastructure-focused laws to dignity-centered judicial mandates, highlighting landmark cases such as **Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India**. Through a comparative global lens, it contrasts India's social-justice struggle with the highly mechanized, technical safety standards of nations like **Japan, the UK, and the UAE**. Finally, the study identifies critical implementation gaps—including the "contractor loophole" and incomplete mechanization—and proposes a transition toward a **professionalized sanitation cadre** and hyper-local robotics to finally eradicate this "stain of untouchability".

Keywords: Manual Scavenging, Article 21, Caste Discrimination, Dalit Rights, 2013 Prohibition Act, Sewer Deaths, Rehabilitation, Mechanization, Judicial Accountability, Right to Dignity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Manual scavenging in India represents a stark intersection of caste-based discrimination and systemic human rights abuse, where lower-caste individuals, primarily Dalits, are compelled to perform the perilous task of manually cleaning sewers, septic tanks, and railway tracks without protective gear. Rooted in historical untouchability under the caste system, this practice forces workers into direct contact with human excreta, exposing them to suffocation from toxic gases, skin diseases, and frequent fatalities—over 1,000 deaths reported in the last decade

alone—while denying them fair wages or social mobility. It is estimated that around 1.3 million Dalits in India, mostly women, make their living through manual scavenging – a term used to describe the job of removing human excrement from dry toilets and sewers using basic tools such as thin boards, buckets and baskets, lined with sacking, carried on the head. Manual scavengers earn as little as one rupee a day. Dalit scavengers are rarely able to take up another occupation due to discrimination related to their caste and occupational status, and are thus forced to remain scavengers. They are paid less than minimum wages and are often forced to borrow money from upper-caste neighbours in order to survive and consequently they end up maintaining the relationship of bondage.

This dehumanizing labour directly contravenes Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which enshrines the right to life and personal liberty, interpreted expansively by courts to include "life with dignity." Supreme Court judgments like *Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India* (2014) have ruled manual scavenging as a form of forced labor under Article 17 (abolishing untouchability) and Article 23 (prohibiting traffic in human beings), emphasizing that such caste-driven exploitation strips individuals of their inherent dignity and equality.

Despite legislative bans—starting with the 1993 Employment of Manual Scavengers and Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act and strengthened by the 2013 Prohibition Act—implementation remains abysmal, with inadequate mechanization, rehabilitation schemes, and enforcement allowing the practice to thrive in urban and rural areas alike. This persistence underscores a failure of state machinery, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and stigma that affects generations, demanding urgent judicial, policy, and societal reforms to eradicate it.

Category	Statistic	Period	Details
Identified Manual Scavengers	58,098	2013–2018 surveys	Primarily Dalits (97%); Uttar Pradesh had over half (32,473); many unrehabilitated despite Rs 40,000 aid
Sewer/Septic Tank Deaths	453	Since 2014 (to 2024)	Hazardous cleaning without gear; 732/766 districts claimed "free," but deaths persist
Sanitation Worker Deaths	622	Since 2017 (to 2026)	Govt Lok Sabha data; 116 in 2024, 158 in 2025; only 52 families fully compensated

Category	Statistic	Period	Details
Annual Sewer Deaths Peak	131	2019	Average ~72/year (2014–2025); total 859 deaths
Ongoing Workers	42,303	As of 2019	Survey in 18 states; 2023 survey claimed "zero," contradicting earlier figures

2. CONCEPTUAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Manual scavenging is manual removal of excreta (night soil) from “dry toilets”, i.e., toilets without the modern flush system. Manual scavenging involves the removal of human excreta using brooms and tin plates. The excreta are piled into baskets which scavengers carry on their heads to locations sometimes several kilometers from the latrines. The right to be free from manual scavenging is an economic, social and cultural right and it imposes obligation on the State to abolish manual scavenging system and give relief and rehabilitation to the manual scavengers and their dependents by adopting suitable initiatives.

2.1 FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS VIOLATED

Manual scavenging in India is a direct violation of several fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. It is primarily viewed by the judiciary as a denial of the right to live with dignity. The following articles are the most critically violated:

- **Article 14 (Right to Equality):** The practice disproportionately affects specific castes, reinforcing social hierarchy and denying equal status and opportunity to those forced into the profession.
- **Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination):** This article prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Manual scavenging is historically linked to the caste system, making it a form of systemic discrimination.
- **Article 17 (Abolition of Untouchability):** The Supreme Court has recognized manual scavenging as a modern-day manifestation of "untouchability," which is strictly abolished and punishable by law.
- **Article 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty):** This is the most significant violation. The courts have interpreted this to include the **Right to Dignity** and the **Right**

to a Clean Environment. Forcing individuals to handle human waste manually is considered a denial of a dignified life and a direct threat to their health and safety.

- **Article 23 (Prohibition of Traffic in Human Beings and Forced Labour):** When individuals are compelled to perform this work due to social pressure or economic necessity, it amounts to forced labor ("Begar").

2.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Legislative Enactments:

Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993: The Government enacted the employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 which provides for the prohibition of employment of manual scavengers as well as construction or continuance of dry latrines and for the regulation of construction and maintenance of water sealed latrines and matters connected therewith.

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, notified in the Gazette on 5 June 1993 has become applicable to Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tripura, West Bengal and the Union Territories (UTs) with effect from 26 January 1997.

The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955: Initially the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, had been enacted to abolish the practice of untouchability and social disabilities arising out of it against members of the Scheduled Castes. It was amended in 1977 and is now known as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. Under the revised Act, the practice of untouchability was made both cognizable and non-compoundable offence and stricter punishment was provided for the offenders.

The Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989: To check the commission of atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC & ST), the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, came into force on 31-1-90. The Act, inter alia, specifies some types of offences as atrocities, provides for imposition of stricter penalties for the guilty and setting up of Special Courts for speedy trial of such cases. The main objective of the Act is to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for Special Courts for the trial of such offences and for the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of such offences and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto

The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 was India's first federal attempt to outlaw manual scavenging by focusing on the

elimination of "dry latrines" and banning the hiring of individuals to clean them. While it criminalized the practice with potential imprisonment and fines, the Act was largely ineffective due to a narrow definition that ignored sewer and septic tank cleaning, a lack of robust rehabilitation for displaced workers, and poor enforcement by state governments. Its shortcomings eventually led to its replacement by the more comprehensive 2013 Act, which shifted the legal focus from infrastructure to the protection and socio-economic restoration of the individuals involved.

2.3 CURRENT LEGAL POSITION

As mentioned earlier, the modern society still perceives scavengers as 'untouchables' and treats them indifferently even though the supreme law of the land, i.e. the Constitution of India, has declared that —untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden under Article 17. Manual scavengers are victims of severe human rights violations. The fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 and 15 remain dead letter to the scavenger community as they have been constantly discriminated and downtrodden by the society for generations in addition to denying them to have a dignified life.

It might be all the more interesting to note that manual scavenging, in contrast to its continued practice, is prohibited in our nation by the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. In fact, as the 1993 Act did not have any provision for rehabilitation, the Parliament even came up with a new legislation —the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013— recently to plug the gaps in the earlier enactment. Yet, the practice of manual scavenging persists in India as a caste occupation imposed upon those in the lowest rung of social hierarchy.

Manual scavenging can be perceived as another mode of forced labour wherein the untouchables/Dalits are compelled to pursue their hereditary occupation. While there are other laws also such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of atrocities) Act, 1989, Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, and Bonded Labour System (abolition) Act, 1976 which aims to protect interests of communities like that of manual scavengers, they continue to be victims of inhuman treatment. This is mainly due to the lack of effective implementation of the provisions and necessary action by the administrative authorities despite receiving reports of their constant violation.

PROHIBITION OF EMPLOYMENT AS MANUAL SCAVENGERS AND THEIR REHABILITATION ACT, 2013

While the 1993 Act focused on sanitation requirements, it paid little or no attention to the deep rooted social problem of the degradation of human dignity and thus was unable to come up with long term sustainable measures to eradicate the practice. Hence, after much deliberation and discussion, the Parliament enacted the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 to address the issues which were left untouched by the earlier existing legislation. The 2013 Act reinforces the prohibition imposed upon the practice manual scavenging. The main features of this Act that makes it stand apart from the earlier 1993 Act are that it is wider in scope with broader definition of manual scavengers cover not only dry latrines but other insanitary latrines as well, inclusion of rehabilitation provisions and so on. It is noteworthy that the offences under this Act are not only cognizable and non-bailable but also attract higher penalties. Speaking of the authorities, the Act mentions that there will be a Vigilance/Monitoring Committee at sub-Division, District, State and Central Govt. levels.

Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014)

This is the most authoritative case on the subject.

Recognized **manual scavenging as a violation of fundamental rights**, especially dignity under Article 21. Directed **strict implementation of the 2013 Act**.

Despite being an improvement of the earlier legislation, this 2013 Act is not free from criticisms. There are certain apparent provisions under the 2013 Act which puts its effective implementation under question considering the reality of the situation.

For instance, section 2 (1) (g) which defines the term ‘manual scavenger’, when read in its entirety reveals that the Act which was supposed to prohibit any form of manual scavenging has, on the other hand, legitimized manual scavenging by stating that it can be done by using protective gears and other devices.

Further, section 2 (1) (e) of the Act which defines the term ‘insanitary latrine’ carves out an exception that ‘a water flush latrine in a railway passenger coach, when cleaned by an employee with the help of such devices and using such protective gear, as the Central Government may notify in this behalf, shall not be deemed to be an insanitary latrine’. This irony of this exemption comes into picture when it is brought to light that the Indian railway is one of the major promoter of manual scavenging. Hence, by exempting water flush latrine in railway passenger coaches exempted from the purview of ‘insanitary latrines’, the Act is

silently nodding to continued practice of manual scavenging at Indian railways where someone has to clean manually human excreta which is as prevalent at present. It should also be noted that the Act talks more on insanitary latrines, open drain and pit (e.g. section 4) while wide spread manual scavenging due to open defecation in most of the urban areas due to lack of sufficient sanitation is not addressed effectively. Also, the executing rules of the 2013 Act do not contain any provision to implement the important provisions of the new legislation nor does it speak about actions to be taken on implementing authority for non implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Section 39 (1) poses the most glaring challenge as it empowers the Government to—exempt any area, category of building or class of persons from any provisions of this Act., thereby creating a major gap that can defeat the entire purpose behind passing this piece of legislation.

CHALLENGES

Despite the robust legal framework of the 2013 Act, several "last-mile" challenges hinder its complete eradication. These range from deeply rooted social structures to technical and administrative loopholes.

- **Caste-Based Entrenchment:** Manual scavenging is not just an "occupation"; it is historically tied to specific marginalized castes (primarily Dalit communities). This makes it a hereditary trap where social stigma prevents workers from finding alternative employment, even when they wish to leave the profession.
- **The "Power to Exempt" Loophole:** Section 39 of the 2013 Act allows state governments to exempt certain areas or agencies from the Act's provisions in "emergency" situations. Critics argue this is often misused by local bodies to justify manual entry into sewers.
- **Societal Apathy:** There is a lack of public pressure to mechanize sanitation. Because the work is "invisible" and performed by marginalized groups, the urgency to innovate is often lower compared to other public infrastructure projects.
- **The Contractor Loophole:** Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) often outsource sanitation to private contractors. These contractors frequently hire workers informally, providing no safety gear or insurance. When a death occurs, the government often denies responsibility, and the contractor disappears, leaving the family without legal recourse.
- **Data Under-reporting:** There is a massive discrepancy between official data and reality. To avoid legal and financial liability (like paying the ₹30 lakh compensation),

many states under-report the number of manual scavengers or label sewer deaths as "accidental asphyxiation" rather than violations of the Act.

- **Weak Enforcement:** Despite being a "cognizable and non-bailable" offense, convictions under the 2013 Act remain extremely rare. Police are often reluctant to file FIRs against government officials or influential contractors.
- **Incomplete Mechanization:** While programs like the **NAMASTE** scheme (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) aim for 100% mechanization, many smaller municipalities lack the funds to purchase expensive jetting and suction machines.
- **Narrow Lanes and Infrastructure:** In many older Indian cities and unplanned colonies, sewers are too narrow or deep for current machines to access, leading to a "technical necessity" for human entry.
- **Delhi Jal Board v. National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers (2011) Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India (1984) Balram Singh v. Union of India (2023)**

3. CASE BASED ANALYSIS

A case-based analysis of manual scavenging reveals a judicial shift from treating the issue as a mere labor violation to recognizing it as a profound violation of the **Right to Life and Dignity** under Article 21.

1. **Delhi Jal Board v. National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers (2011)**

The judgment in **Delhi Jal Board v. National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers (2011)** served as a major turning point by highlighting the state's failure to protect the most vulnerable workers. The Supreme Court criticized the government's reliance on private contractors to bypass safety responsibilities, ruling that the fundamental right to life under Article 21 belongs to every worker, regardless of their employment status. This case was instrumental in establishing that the state is vicariously liable for deaths or injuries occurring in sewers, mandating that protective gear and safety protocols are not optional but are constitutional requirements for any hazardous cleaning task.

2. **Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014)**

The landmark ruling in **Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014)** remains the most significant intervention in this field, as it directly addressed the intersection of caste and labor. The Supreme Court declared that manual scavenging is a modern-day manifestation of "untouchability," thereby making its practice a direct violation of Article 17. Beyond just banning the act, the Court issued a series of mandatory directives, including the requirement for the government to provide ₹10 lakhs in compensation to the families of all persons who have died in sewer deaths since 1993. This judgment effectively broadened the legal scope of the issue to include the "hazardous cleaning" of septic tanks and sewers, ensuring that the law protects those working in the shadows of the underground drainage system.

3. **Ram Lakhan Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2015)**

In **Ram Lakhan Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2015)**, the judiciary turned its attention toward the long-term survival and restoration of the affected community. The Court emphasized that prohibition without rehabilitation is incomplete, arguing that the state has a positive obligation to ensure that individuals forced into this practice are given the means to transition into dignified professions. The judgment reinforced the idea that the right to life includes the right to a "meaningful life," which necessitates government-led financial assistance, skill development, and education for the children of manual scavengers to break the intergenerational cycle of caste-based labor.

4. **Narain v. State of Karnataka (2023)**

The recent case of **Narain v. State of Karnataka (2023)** has pushed the boundaries of accountability by focusing on the failure of local administration. The court expressed frustration over the continued persistence of manual scavenging despite decades of legislation and judicial orders. It ruled that the heads of local bodies and municipal corporations can be held personally and legally accountable if manual scavenging or hazardous cleaning occurs within their jurisdiction. By shifting the burden of proof onto the authorities, this case aims to bridge the gap between "law on paper" and "implementation on the ground," ensuring that the 2013 Act is treated as a high-priority mandate rather than a mere guideline.

5. **Dr. Balram Singh v. Union of India (2023)**

In this pivotal ruling, the Supreme Court took a strong stance against the "persistent failure" of the government to eradicate manual scavenging despite the 2013 Act. The court ordered a **nationwide survey** to identify all remaining workers and mandated that the practice be phased out through complete mechanization. Most importantly, it officially recognized that "hazardous cleaning" (cleaning without gear) is a form of **forced labor** prohibited under Article 23. The judgment also ordered the strengthening of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) to ensure better monitoring at the district level.

6. **Supreme Court Ban on Manual Cleaning in Metros (January 2025)**

In a direct move to force administrative action, the Supreme Court issued a specific order banning all manual sewer cleaning in India's six largest metro cities: **Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad**. The Court required the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of these cities to file personal affidavits explaining their implementation strategies. This was a unique "deadline-driven" approach, signaling that the judiciary would no longer accept generic policy statements and instead required proof of on-ground mechanization in major urban centers.

7. **Calcutta High Court: Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (November 2025)**

This recent High Court judgment applied the revised compensation standards to a 2021 incident where four workers died in Kolkata. The court harshly criticized the "serious lacunae and negligence" of the municipal authorities and their contractors. By ordering the immediate payment of **₹30 lakhs** per deceased worker and ₹5 lakhs for each injured survivor, the court reinforced the principle that government departments cannot distance themselves from the actions of private contractors they hire. It also mandated an independent investigation into the local authorities' failure to prevent manual entry into the sewers.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis of manual scavenging laws shows a stark contrast between India's struggle with **caste-based labor** and the **occupational safety** approach of Western nations.

While India has had to pass laws to criminalize the existence of the profession itself, developed nations regulate it as a high-risk technical job.

1. Asian Countries (The South Asian Crisis)

Manual scavenging is primarily a South Asian phenomenon due to shared social structures.

Pakistan and Bangladesh: Like India, these countries struggle with the practice being tied to marginalized religious and caste minorities (e.g., the *Chuhra* community in Pakistan). However, unlike India's **2013 Act**, Pakistan and Bangladesh lack a dedicated federal law that focuses specifically on the **rehabilitation** of workers. Their legal framework often treats it under general "Municipal Acts" or "Labor Laws," which fails to address the systemic discrimination involved.

Singapore and Japan: These countries have achieved **100% mechanization**. In Japan, sanitation workers (*Soji-asobi*) are highly respected public employees with high pay and advanced robotic technology for sewer maintenance. The legal focus here is entirely on **Environmental Engineering Standards** rather than human rights violations.

China: The Infrastructure Powerhouse

China's approach is driven by the **Law on the Prevention and Control of Water Pollution** and its aggressive **14th Five-Year Plan**. Sanitation is managed under environmental protection and water quality laws. The state mandates high sewage treatment rates (aiming for 95% in county-level areas by 2026).

- **Mechanization:** China utilizes massive "Sponge City" initiatives and high-automation blending/injection equipment. Manual entry into sewers is rare in urban centers, replaced by robotic pipeline maintenance and advanced filtration systems like reverse osmosis.
- **Worker Status:** Sanitation workers are generally government-contracted employees. While labor conditions in rural areas can vary, urban workers operate within a framework of carbon emission control and modern sludge treatment targets.

UAE: The Regulatory Excellence Model

The UAE, particularly Dubai and Abu Dhabi, operates under strict **Administrative Decisions** and **Municipal Codes** (like the Dubai Health Authority guidelines).

- **Sanitary Drainage Design:** UAE law dictates that all drainage systems must be designed for "Gravity Drainage" to minimize blockages. Where manual intervention is needed, it falls under the **Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)** standards.
- **Labor Protections:** Recent 2023-2024 regulations mandate high-standard labor accommodations, including specific requirements for ventilation, air-conditioning, and sterilized sanitary facilities for workers.
- **Private Sector Liability:** Because most sanitation work is outsourced, the UAE has strict "Main Contractor" liability. If a worker is injured due to a lack of safety gear (like gas detectors or harnesses), the principal company faces severe fines and potential suspension of their trade license.

2. United Kingdom (UK)

The UK's history with manual scavenging (known as "Gong Farmers" in the Victorian era) ended with the industrial revolution and the invention of the modern sewage system.

- **Legal Focus:** Today, sewer cleaning is governed by the **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** and the **Confined Spaces Regulations 1997**.
- **The Difference:** In the UK, entering a sewer is a strictly regulated technical procedure requiring oxygen sensors, breathing apparatus, and a dedicated surface rescue team. In India, despite the 2013 Act, workers often enter sewers without any gear. The UK law focuses on **preventing accidents**, whereas Indian law focuses on **abolishing a social evil**.

3. United States of America (USA)

The USA treats sanitation work as a specialized trade protected by strong federal safety agencies.

- **OSHA Standards:** The **Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)** sets the "Permit-Required Confined Spaces" standard (29 CFR 1910.146). Any company that sends a human into a sewer without proper atmospheric testing and mechanical ventilation faces massive federal fines and criminal negligence charges.
- **Contractual Liability:** In the USA, the "Principal Employer" (the city or a large corporation) is almost always held liable for contractor safety. In India,

the use of sub-contractors has historically been a loophole to avoid responsibility for deaths, though recent judgments (like *Balram Singh 2023*) are closing this gap by mandating that the State remains responsible.

- **R v Associated Octel Co Ltd (1996)**
- Established that employers must **anticipate risks even in hazardous environments**.
- Supports strict liability in dangerous work like sewer entry.
- **R v Tangerine Confectionery Ltd (2011)**
- Clarified that compliance requires **practical safety measures, not just formal policies**.
- **Edwards v National Coal Board (1949)**
- Introduced the principle of “**reasonably practicable**” safety measures, foundational in UK safety law.

CONCLUSION

The persistence of manual scavenging in the 21st century is not merely a failure of technology, but a profound crisis of the collective conscience. While the legislative journey from the **1993 Act** to the **2013 Act**—and the subsequent judicial mandates increasing compensation to **₹30 lakhs**—demonstrates a clear state intent to criminalize this indignity, the gap between "law on paper" and "life on the ground" remains vast. As we have seen in the comparative analysis of nations like **South Korea** and the **UAE**, the solution lies in transitioning from a social justice struggle to a high-tech industrial standard. For India, this means moving beyond the "abolition" of a practice and toward the "professionalization" of a service.

The shadow of caste-based labor cannot be erased by cash assistance alone; it requires a structural dismantling of the "contractor loophole" and a relentless push for **100% mechanization** in even the narrowest urban corridors. True progress will be measured not by the number of FIRs filed, but by the number of workers successfully rehabilitated into lives of safety and social mobility. As the judiciary continues to tighten the noose of accountability on local authorities, the ultimate goal remains clear: a future where the cleaning of human waste is managed by sensors and robotics, ensuring that no citizen is ever forced to trade their dignity for their survival.

The eradication of manual scavenging is the final frontier in India's quest to fulfill the promise of **Article 21**. It is time we stop viewing sanitation as an invisible chore performed by an

invisible people and start treating it as a critical infrastructure managed with the same technological rigor as our space programs or digital networks. Only then can we truly say that the "stain of untouchability" has been washed away from the fabric of our democracy.

SUGGESTION

To ensure the effective implementation of the **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**, the strategy must shift from passive prohibition to active, tech-driven enforcement.

Here are the key suggestions categorized by administrative, technical, and social interventions:

- **Abolishing the Contractor Loophole:** The "Principal Employer" rule must be strictly enforced. If a worker dies or is injured under a private contractor, the government municipality (ULB) should be held legally and financially liable. This prevents officials from washing their hands of responsibility by blaming third-party agencies.
- **Mandatory Digital Mapping:** Every sewer line and septic tank should be geo-tagged and mapped digitally. Before any cleaning operation, a digital "work permit" should be issued only after verifying that the necessary machines (suction/jetting) are on-site.
- **Creation of a Specialized Sanitation Cadre:** Move away from informal labor by creating a professional, permanent municipal department for sanitation. Workers should be trained "Sanitation Engineers" with fixed salaries, insurance, and retirement benefits, removing the "stigma" of the job
- **Hyper-Local Robotics:** While large machines work for main roads, smaller robotic systems like **Bandicoot** are essential for narrow lanes where manual entry is most common.
- **Sensor-Based Early Warning Systems:** Implementing IoT (Internet of Things) sensors in manholes to monitor toxic gas levels (Hydrogen Sulfide, Methane) and blockage density. This allows for "preventive maintenance" through machines before a total overflow necessitates human intervention.
- **24/7 Monitoring Cells:** Establishing a centralized control room in every district to track the movement of vacuum trucks via GPS, ensuring they are used for every reported blockage instead of manual lab
- **Comprehensive Skill Mapping:** Rehabilitation should not be a "one-time payment." It should involve a **3-year transition plan** including vocational training in high-

demand sectors (like plumbing, electrical work, or driving) and a monthly stipend to prevent the worker from returning to scavenging due to immediate financial pressure.

- **Educational Scholarships:** To break the intergenerational cycle, children of identified manual scavengers should receive full scholarships for higher education and professional courses, ensuring the next generation exits the caste-based labor trap.
- **Community Sensitization:** Public awareness campaigns to discourage the construction of "insanitary latrines" in rural and semi-urban areas. If a household insists on a design that requires manual cleaning, they should face heavy municipal fines.
- Railway should develop a state of art technology of sanitation facilities to minimize manual interventions within a fixed time frame.
- The guidelines for cleaning work/manhole operation by the Supreme Court/high Court (Gujarat) should be implemented by the concerned agencies/employer so that the Safai Karamcharis are protected from health hazards. .
- The employers must provide necessary safeguard equipment, uniform, safeguard measures to the manhole workers/scavengers to avoid fatal accidents. The structure of wages should be same for Safai Karamcharis all over the country.



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