

Socio-Economic Profile, Health Condition and Major Problems among Manual Scavengers Workers in Malda district of West Bengal, India: A Case Study

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Abstract: Manual scavenging has been practiced in India for several decades. Manual Scavenging works is like a curse in India despite of 76th years of independence. Father of nation Mahatma Gandhi considered this manual scavenging as “shame of the nation”. The main objective this research paper to examine the socio-economic profile, health status and nature of works among the manual scavengers in the study area, to highlighted the major problems and challenges faced by manual scavenger's workers in the study area and to give valuable suggestion for better improvement of working profile and Quality of life among the scavengers workers in Malda district of West Bengal. Malda district of West Bengal has been selected as the study area. The study reveals that there is lack of awareness among the manual scavenging workers about their alternative employment, beneficial government scheme, safety gear and employment benefits in the study area. The researchers suggested that appropriate safety measures, protective gear and tools should be given at the time of cleaning by the local authority in Malda district of West Bengal. Majority of Scavengers (Dom or Methoard) belonging to the lowest rung of the society, less educated, no livelihood assets, abysmal income from manual scavenging works, no alternative employment opportunity because of their caste-affiliation, stigmatized, humiliated and discriminated in every sphere of the life from the others society peoples.

Keywords: Scavengers, Sanitations, Health, Safety, Poor, Untouchability, Casteism

Introduction:

Manual scavenging works has been undoubtedly, one of the greatest evils plaguing our country for several decades. Manual scavenging has been practiced in India for several decades. Manual Scavenging works is like a curse in India despite of 76th years of independence. It has strong origins in India's caste-based occupational structure. A casteism and religioustic view is still in the roots of our society, despite so many years of freedom and government's freedom. Majority of manual scavengers is a person from the *dalit* community who forms the lowest rung of society. Due to this casteism, this work is enforced on them without giving them a choice. Manual scavenging works refers to cleaning and clear of human excreta from septic tanks by manual hand or it is carried by head. Some of the major causes of manual scavenging to continue in India are social deprivation, low self-esteem, continuance of unsanitary latrines, rapid urbanization, poor enforcement of existing laws, unorganized group, lack of empathy, lack of other employment opportunities and rehabilitation etc. Father of nation Mahatma Gandhi

considered this manual scavenging as “**shame of the nation**”. These manual scavengers workers are called different names such as Daabhu-Wali in West Bengal, Balti-Wali in Uttar Pradesh, Tina-wali in Bihar, Tokri-Wali in Punjab and Haryana, Thottikar in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, Paaki or Peeti in Odisha, Vaatal in Jammu and Kashmir.

There are mainly three forms of scavenging as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) i.e., (i) Septic Tanks Cleaning (ii) Removal of Human Excreta from dry latrines and gutters, (iii) sewerage and drain cleaning. Although government and other major private institution even deny the existence of scavenging despite the deaths reported especially in India.

In recent years, Mumbai city several manual scavengers are died to poisonous gas during clearing of septic tanks in road side. Cleaning Staff Association reported that in the years 2016 to 2020 years due to manual scavenging work 472 peoples are died. The main reason for this accidental death due to unaware about their rights and duties, high prices of machines for cleaning septic tanks, availability of scavenger’s workers by the contractor at lower wages, prevalence of strong casteism in the society etc. In our country India, manual scavengers works are prohibited in the year 2013, but still a large number of peoples are engaged this profession and activities. According to The Hindu news report, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, among the total 766 district only 508 districts are declared manual scavenging free district.

Table 1.1: Nick- Name of the Scavengers among Various State of India

Sl. No.	Nick- Name of the Scavengers	State
1.	Bhangis, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mehtar, Mazhabi, Lal Begi, Halalkhor, Harijans, Dalits, Dom, Methord	North Indian States
2.	Har, Hadi, Hel, Dom, Sanei	East Indian States
3.	Mukhiyar, Thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli, Phakis, Sikkaaliars	South Indian States
4.	Mehtar, Bhangias, Halalkjor, Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Barvashia, Metariya, Jamphoda, Mela	West and Central Indian States

Table 1.2: Number of Person Engaged in Manual Scavenging

Sl. No.	Name of State/ UT	Number of Scavengers
1.	Maharashtra	63,713
2.	Madhya Pradesh	23,093
3.	Uttar Pradesh	17,619
4.	Tripura	17,332
5.	Karnataka	15,375
6.	Punjab	11,949
7.	Bihar	5,296
8.	Jharkhand	4,903

9.	West Bengal	2,526
Total All India		180,657

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census

Table 1. 3: Numbers of Manual Scavengers Workers Death since 1993 to 2019 in India

Sl. No.	Name of State / UT	Total Number of Manual Scavengers Workers Death
1.	Andhra Pradesh	18
2.	Chhattisgarh	05
3.	Bihar	12
4.	Delhi	03
5.	Chandigarh	49
6.	Delhi	06
7.	Goa	156
8.	Gujarat	70
9.	Haryana	73
10.	Kerala	03
11.	Maharashtra	25
12.	Madhya Pradesh	07
13.	Punjab	35
14.	Rajasthan	38
15.	Tamil Nadu	206
16.	Telengana	04
17.	Tripura	02
18.	Uttarakhand	06
19.	Uttar Pradesh	78
20.	West Bengal	18
Total		814

Source: National Commission of Safai Karmchari Report, 2020

Review of Literature: The review highlights the distinction areas covered by the many researchers and academicians which may be helpful to understand the issues relating to the present study and it also helps to find out the research gap. The basic sources of literature review of my study areas are- published research papers, articles in the journal of national and international repute, books, Government reports, Research agencies reports etc.

Kalaiyaransan and Suresh Kumar (2014) examine that the socio-economic status and quality of life among scavengers is very pathetic. According to the Hindu religion, scavengers are treated as untouchable, even by other untouchable’s castes. Their study reveals that 38.2 per cent respondents are earn income between IR 4500 to 6500 Per Month and 34.5 per cent respondents are belonged to Scheduled Caste. The researcher suggested that due to low education status,

NGOs, educated person from community and Department of education should take appropriate steps for the uplifting them.

Kusum Chauhan and Lalit Dadwal (2021) insisted that manual scavenging represent some of the worst surviving forms of both caste discrimination, violation of human dignity and dehumanizing forms of work. Their study reveals that manual scavenging communities still suffer due to persistent discrimination, lack of information, improper implementation of laws and lack of alternative way of livelihood.

Statement of Problems:

Manual scavenging works, a caste based forced occupation has been practiced in several parts of the rural areas of Malda district of West Bengal. It is manual cleaning of human and animal excreta with the help of brooms small tin plate and carrying then in a basket for disposal at designated place, which is far away from the residing locality. The peoples in Malda district of West Bengal regard the manual scavengers as untouchable mainly because of their work. Modern society peoples do not accept and include them in community activities. No One offers them a job and also landlords (House Owners) bar deny them from renting their houses. Majority of Scavengers (Dooam or Methoard) belonging to the lowest rung of the society, less educated, no livelihood assets, abysmal income from manual scavenging works, no alternative employment opportunity because of their caste-affiliation, stigmatized, humiliated and discriminated in every sphere of the life from the others society peoples. Thus the working profile, socio-economic condition and health among the manual scavenger's workers are very pathetic. **These combined basic problems and challenges faced by manual scavenger's workers provoked the researcher to undertake this study in particular.** The outcomes or findings from this study will be very helpful for administrators, policymakers, economists, sociologists, Researchers, Academicians, Journalists, NGO workers, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Government of West Bengal as well as the Central Government of India for their various policies making.

Objectives of Research:

Keeping in the view of the socio- economic status, health condition and working profile among the manual scavenger's workers in Malda district of West Bengal in particular, the following objectives have been taken into consideration:

1. To examine the socio-economic profile, health status and nature of works among the manual scavengers in the study area.
2. To highlighted the major problems and challenges faced by manual scavenger's workers in the study area.

3. To give valuable suggestion for better improvement of working profile and Quality of life among the scavengers workers in Malda district of West Bengal.

Database and Research Methodology:

The current research work is analytical, descriptive and empirical type of research work. The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through interview schedule based on well structured questionnaire with regards to objective in mind. For the collection of primary data a near about 110 manual scavengers workers (respondents) has been selected based on purposive random sampling method. The survey was conducted during the month of January 2022 to June 2022.

The secondary data has been collected from Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistic Government of West Bengal, District Statistical Handbook, Malda Collectorate, Books, Research Paper, Journals, Newspaper, Researchgate, Google Scholar etc. After the collection of data for showing the result Simple Percentage Method, SWOT analysis and Computer Cartography has been used.

A Geographical Outline of the study area:

Malda district of West Bengal has been selected as research study area. Malda district is entirely located in North Bengal, it is also known as **“Gateway of North Bengal”**. It lies in North Bengal on lower Indo-Gangetic plain. The latitudinal range of Malda lies between 24°40'20" North and 25°32'08" North, and the longitudinal range is 87°45'50" East and 88°28'10" East. For administrative purpose the district has been divided into 15 Community Development Block and two sub-division namely Malda Sadar and Chanchal Sadar. The district is very much famous for Mango Production, Litchi production, Jute Production and Sericulture activity (Raw Silk production), school educational sectors. This district is also known as **“Valley of Mango”**. Majority of the male population of this district are migrants labour, agricultural labour and Hawkers due none availability of any large scale, medium scale industries, majority of female population in rural are engaged in bidi making household industries. According to 2011 Census of India still 86.14 per cent population are belong to rural area.

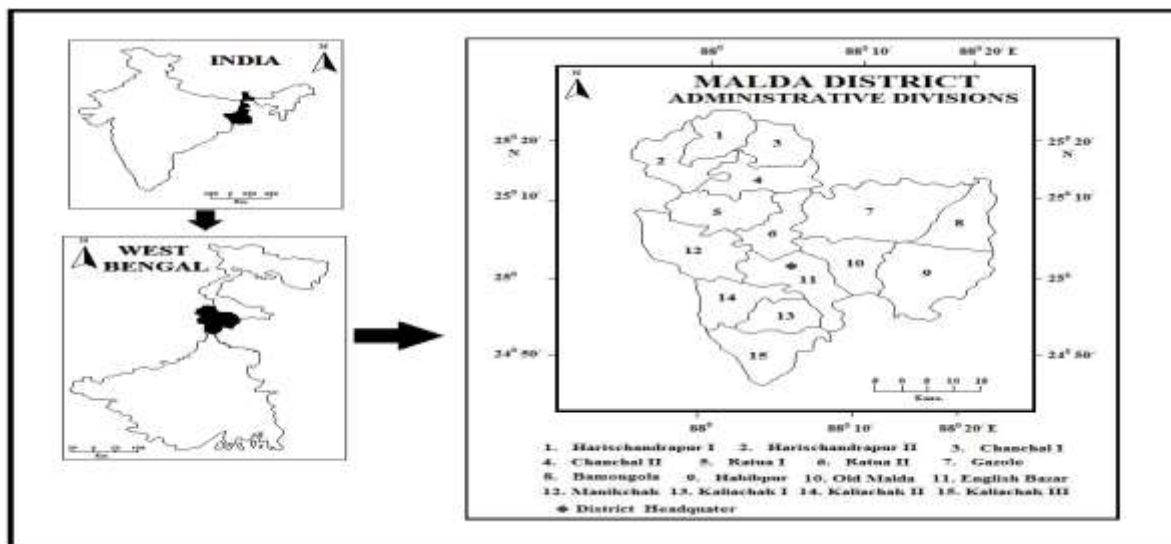


Figure 1: Location map of the Study Area

Result and Analysis:

Table 1. 4: Gender-Wise Manual Scavengers in Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Gender-Wise Manual Scavengers	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Male	76	69.09
2.	Female	34	30.90
Total		110	100.00

Source: Based on Field Survey Data, January-June Month, 2022

Table 1.4 shows that 69.09 per cent of the respondents are male scavenging workers and 30.90 per cent of the respondents are female which lowest percentage in the study area.

Table 1. 5: Income Level among Manual Scavengers in Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Income Level (Monthly)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	INR 1-6000	22	20.00
2.	INR 6001-15000	54	49.09
3.	INR 15001-30000	26	23.64
4.	Above INR 30000	8	7.27
Total		110	100.00

Source: Based on Field Survey Data, January-June Month, 2022

Table 1. 5 depict that 49.09 per cent of the respondents are earning INR 6001-15000 monthly which is highest percentage and only 7.27 per cent of the respondents are earning above INR 30000 monthly in the study area.

Table 1. 6: Major Causes of Manual Scavenging Work in Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Major Causes of Manual Scavenging Work	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Poverty	13	11.81
2.	Lack of Employment Opportunities	28	25.45
3.	Debtiness	10	9.09
4.	Traditional Family Profession	42	38.18
5.	Caste Discrimination	12	10.90
6.	No Agricultural lands	5	4.54
Total		110	100.00

Source: Based on Field Survey Data, January-June Month, 2022

Table 1. 6 show shows that 38.18 respondents are engaged this profession due to traditional family profession and 4. 54 per cent of the respondents are engaged this due to non-available of agricultural lands.

Table 1. 7: Types of Sanitation Works Performs by Scavengers in Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Types of Sanitation Works	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Domestic Work	7	6.36
2.	Individual Insanitary Latrines	18	16.36
3.	School Toilets Cleaning	6	5.45
4.	Public and Community Toilets Cleaning	10	9.09
5.	Railway Station Toilets Cleaning	5	4.54
6.	Open Defection Cleaning	8	7.27
7.	Sewer Cleaning	12	10.90
8.	Train Coach Toilet Cleaning	7	6.36
9.	Sewage Treatment Plants	3	2.72
10.	Septic Tanks Cleaning	5	4.54
11.	Sweeping and Drain Cleaning	10	9.09
12.	Removal of Human and animals dead bodies	6	5.45
13.	Removal of night soil on the street	8	7.27
14.	Entering manholes without safety measures	5	4.54
Total		110	100.00

Source: Based on Field Survey Data, January-June Month, 2022

Table 1. 7 shows that 16. 36 per cent of the respondents are working as individual sanitary latrines tank clearing works which is highest percentage and only 2. 72 per cent of the respondents are working as sewerage treatment plants clearing work which is lowest percentage in the study area.

Table 1. 8: Health Problems by Scavengers in Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Health Problems	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Skin Infection	14	12. 73
2.	Respiratory Problems	12	10. 91
3.	Hepatitis	8	7. 27
4.	Tuberculosis (TB)	10	9. 09
5.	Typhoid	22	20. 00
6.	Rotting of Fingers and Limbs	15	13. 64
7.	Nausea	11	10.00
8.	Not able to eat due to exposure to human excreta	18	16. 36
Total		110	100.00

Source: Based on Field Survey Data, January-June Month, 2022

Table 1. 8 shows that 20.00 per cent of the respondents are affected in typhoid fever and 7.27 per cent of the respondents are affected in Hepatitis diseases.

Major Findings of the Study:

1. It is evident from the study that majority of the scavenging workers are chewing tobacco Gutka, consuming bidi and liquor (alcohol) during working time in the study area.
2. Most of the manual scavengers are unaware about their safety and security.
3. The quality of life and quality of work life is very pathetic among the scavengers in the study area.
4. It is evident from the field survey that scavenging workers are stigmatized, humiliated and discriminated by local people in every sphere of the life.
5. It is evident from the field survey that 90 per cent of the scavenging workers are belongs to Scheduled Caste (SC) category.
6. There is lack of awareness among the manual scavenging workers about their alternative employment, beneficial government scheme, safety gear and employment benefits in the study area.

Suggestion and Policy Implication:

1. Appropriate safety measures, protective gear and tools should be given at the time of cleaning by the local authority in Malda district of West Bengal.
2. There should effective coordination among public and private authorities for eradication of the practice of manual scavenging works in the study area.
3. There should be community initiatives for abolishing manual scavenging works in the study area.
4. For the eradication of manual scavenging works from its deep roots there is a need of surgical strike in the study area.

Major Governmental Schemes for Manual Scavengers Workers:

- ❖ Valmiki Ambedkar Malin Basi Yojna (VAMIBAY, 2001)
- ❖ Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC, 1999)
- ❖ Pre-Matric Scholarship for the Children of those engaged in Unclean Occupation
- ❖ Self –Employment Scheme for rehabilitation of manual scavenging (SRMS, 2007)
- ❖ Nirmal Bharat Abhiyaan (NBA, 2012)
- ❖ Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA, 2014)
- ❖ Nirmal Bangla Abhiyaan
- ❖ Pay and Use Toilet Scheme
- ❖ Mission Garima

Conclusion:

No doubt manual scavenging is the obnoxious and degrading occupation in our society. Indeed it is bitter truth that this shameful manual scavenging practices work provided livelihood opportunities to several thousands of peoples. Majority of manual scavengers are not interested to leave this profession for their family survivability. In a research survey its shows that 98 per cent of the manual scavengers are Women's. Father of nation Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar both are strictly opposed of this manual scavenging work. This manual scavenging works violates article 15, Article 21, Article 38 and Article 42. In spite of Independence of India after seven decades this manual scavenging works are still prevailing which is shameful for our country and Central government should abolished this practice as soon as possible. Last but not least, this manual scavenging works does threaten not only human dignity but also health of our manual scavenging and sanitation Workers.

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