



“Dignity does not consist in possessing honours, but in the consciousness that we deserve them.”

— Aristotle

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## FROM THE NCAS DESK

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#### Salvage the Dignity of the Scavengers

*10<sup>th</sup> of December is celebrated as World Human Rights Day. In the month of its celebration this year, we observe the blatant ignorance of basic human. Access to education, nutrition, and a life free from exploitation are the basic tenets of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our Constitution.*

***In the very beginning of the month, the state government of Maharashtra decided to shut down Zilla Parishad schools which cater to less than 10 children. There are 1314 such schools which the State government has decided to shut down. While the officials say the existence of less than 10 children implies the poor quality of the schools, it is very much possible that some schools are in remote areas which have very few children enrolled due to demographic reasons. The lack of concern shown by the government to cater to these populations is disrespectful to people who deserve every right to have their children educated. The Right to Education Act provides for this. Cost-cutting in such crucial areas is symptomatic of a government that undervalues the importance of social interventions to develop the population inclusively. This move needs to be opposed widely to ensure that access to education is eased and not made tougher for children from remote areas, invariably belonging to the most marginalized sections of the populations.***

Do write to us with your feedback and suggestions at [interface@ncasindia.org](mailto:interface@ncasindia.org)

In solidarity

Team NCAS

## Salvage the Dignity of the Scavengers

The practice of manual scavenging has been criminalized since the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, more clearly by the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act (1993). Yet the Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011 noted that over 1.8 lakh households reported having a manual scavenger. The 2011 Census found that 7.9 lakh persons reported being manual scavengers. A report tabled in the Rajya Sabha in 2016 that was attempting to verify the 2011 census claim, stated that over 12,000 manual scavengers had been identified in India until then. A U.N report from last month commented that the Swachh Bharat initiative by the government was not sufficiently working towards protecting the human rights of the manual scavengers despite sanitation being the focus of the initiative. In this context it becomes important to explore the laws which serve to protect the human rights of the poorest and most oppressed in India.

Manual scavenging has been traditionally forcefully been made to be practiced by the lowest castes, called the *avarnas* or *dalits*. According to a report tabled in the Rajya Sabha in August 2017, the majority of these *dalit* scavengers are women. There have been over 13,000 deaths of manual scavengers in 13 states. Human activists such as Bezwada Wilson have out rightly stated that the official statistics are inaccurate and that in actuality several more have died. This practice exists in both urban and rural areas. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 improved upon the 1993 act to tackle the dehumanizing practice. The new act expanded the scope of 'manual scavengers' to go beyond dry latrines and to enforce strict punishment of those who protect such practices and perpetuate it. The 2013 Rehabilitation Act also provided for creating alternative sources of income and skilling the scavengers and educating children.

So far, over 10,000 manual scavengers have been given cash assistance according to a reply in the Rajya Sabha from 2016. Currently the government claims to be still identifying all the manual scavengers in India, but the Indian railways clearly points to manual scavengers being present since the latrine system requires someone to pick up the human waste from the tracks. Despite the laws, Safai Karmacharis, the cleaners employed by the Indian railways are manual scavengers but the government denies its existence. The Swachh Bharat initiative simply fails to prioritize the issues of manual scavengers even though it tackles it through financing the reconstruction of insanitary latrines into sanitary latrines. The removal of the latrines needs to be mandatory and not made available on request of the states and UTs. In addition to the removal, definite job alternatives need to be provided. But the structural nature of this problem is harder to resolve. This emerges from the caste system which seeks to ensure that the lower castes remain where they are. To tackle manual scavenging, one needs to challenge the caste system. The government needs to ensure that children of manual scavengers' get access to educational opportunities and jobs.

In the meantime, the government can do the basic minimum by ensuring that all those working in unhygienic environments are provided safety masks, gloves and boots. These persons deserve to know their rights and live a life of dignity, which manual scavenging denies. Its very existence implies the complicity of the government in ensuring that this practice is history.

## Updates and Publications



### Events

- 1) **Understanding Budget Workshop:** NCAS conducted a day-long workshop for students at Government College of Science, Arts and Commerce, Quepem, Goa on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December. The Chairperson of the ST Commission, Goa, Mr. Prakash Velip delivered the inaugural address.
- 2) **Consultative Meeting on “Future of Rights-Based Advocacy Work in India”:** The meeting focussed on key challenges on Rights-based Advocacy. It took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December.

### Publications

1. **Recognize Habitat Rights of PVTGs: Discussion Paper**

## Upcoming Events and Publications

### Events

1. **Advocacy Capacity Building Workshop CLM, Bhubaneswar (26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> December)**

### Publications-

1. **Mind the Gap: SDG 5**
2. **Schemes for the Development and Protection of PVTGS**



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