

# The Cleaning Brigade- Connects and Disconnects

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## Cleaning Brigade-

**Manual scavengers; Sewer Cleaners**

**Toilet Cleaners**

- manually clean dry latrines used by others.
- Amongst those involved in head-loading 98% are women,
- They are forced to do this work under **social pressure**.
- work is caste based and is considered compulsory for a particular caste within the 'Dalit' community,
- **it has not remained merely an occupation but has continued as a practice and custom.**



# Concern...

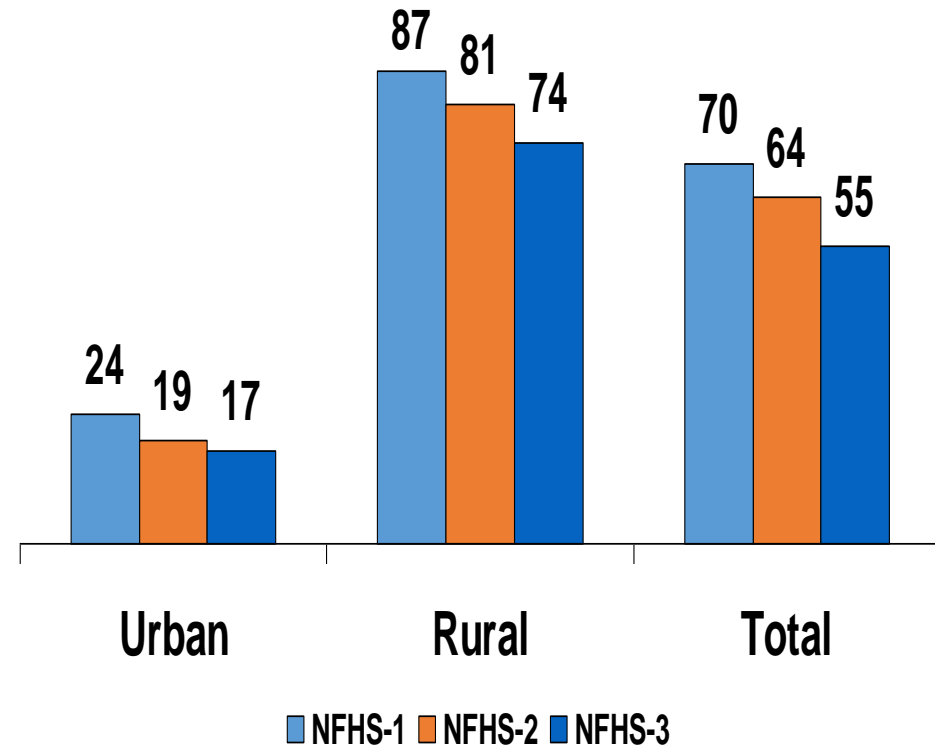
- Caste based social structure of India,
- 'Dalit' community has been excluded from a dignified right to life.
- Have remained backward-
  - in education,
  - livelihoods,
  - access to services, schemes and
  - opportunities to live a life with dignity.
- **Most grievous situation → their forced retention in caste based and hereditary occupation**
- **They are not free to select occupations of their choice.**
- **KR Malkani Committee Report on Customary Rights to Scavenging. Ministry of Home Affairs. Government of India. 1961;**
- **Shyam Lal The Bhangi: A Sweeper Caste, Its Socio-economic Portraits- With Special Reference to Jodhpur City. Bombay Popular Prakashan 1992**

# Rationale

- **Almost all sanitation workers are from the Dalit communities.**
- Their vulnerability is exploited by the people as well as the state.
- While environment and its conservation has caught everyone's attention; and
- there is evident concern for the users of sanitation and allied work by way of
  - provisioning of access to toilets,
  - reduction in open defecation,
  - provisioning of safe drinking water and clean drains;
- Through CLTS, Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), NBA and now SBA along with SDGs
- Concern for sanitation, sewerage and allied service providers is absent in all of them.

# Measures..

- **Manual scavenging still exists in India**
- Increasing urbanization across the country →
- potential to spread
- **close to one-third** of the insanitary toilets are in urban areas (Census 2011)



Percent of HH Having no Toilet Facilities



## Research Methodology

- The study Delhi and Ahmedabad
- Data collection from sanitation and sewerage workers and their family.
- Accessed through the civic bodies like municipal corporation and Jal Board.
- House-listing of all the workers currently engaged done using records of civic and municipal bodies; and snowballing.
- At least 100 workers and their families in each city;
- 20-30 officials of the civic bodies, organizations and campaigns and advocacy groups
- The study has two components-
  - (a) desk review of literature on caste based discrimination and occupational health; and analysis of published data;
  - (b) a field study conducted in selected cities and selected areas of workers engaged in sewerage and allied works.
- ***Tools and techniques- Structured and semi structured questionnaires; check list, interview guides; and in-depth interviews, group discussion, life histories and case studies***

## Research Questions

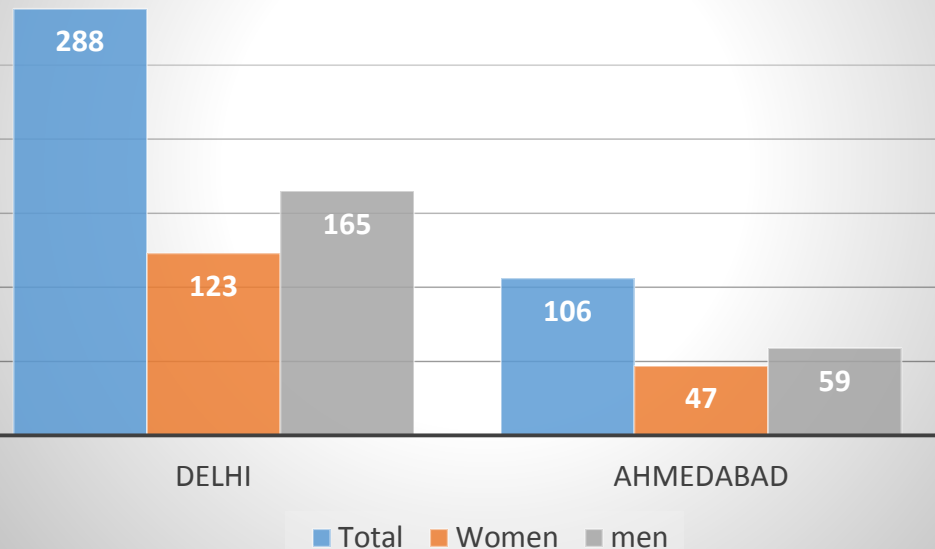
- Who is engaged in sewerage and allied services?
- Why are they engaged?
- What the state guidelines for existence of these services?
- What is the level of mechanization of these services?
- What are the hindrances in mechanizing the services?
- What is the state role in provisioning of alternative work?



# Sanitation workers



**Sex Composition of Sanitation Workers**

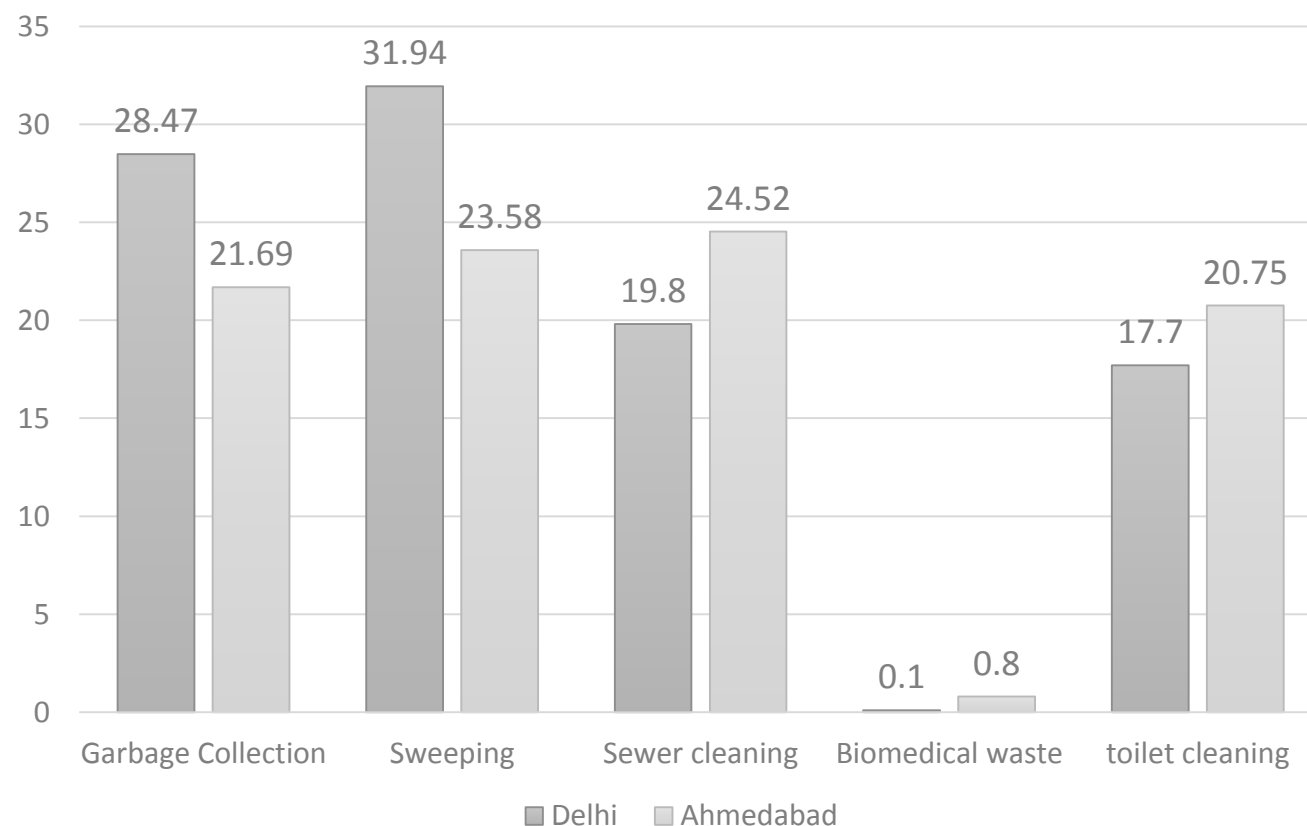


- Sanitation Workers are categorized as -
- Sewerage workers → are all men,
- sweepers → are men and women both.
- They are employed as
  - permanent, temporary, daily wage, and contract workers
  - as sweepers, drain and manhole cleaners, night soil carriers and rag pickers.
- Those who complete 900 days of working are registered as permanent workers.
- Most of them are contractual and temporary workers without any claim to compensation in case of any accident during their work

- **Sanitation workers** dispose waste; collect trash or work in facilities like wastewater treatment plants.
- They engage in garbage collection, cleaning of drains roads etc, cleaning sewers, biomedical waste and personal/public toilets
- Progress of people from the lowest castes and whose jobs do not **officially exist**- is slow.

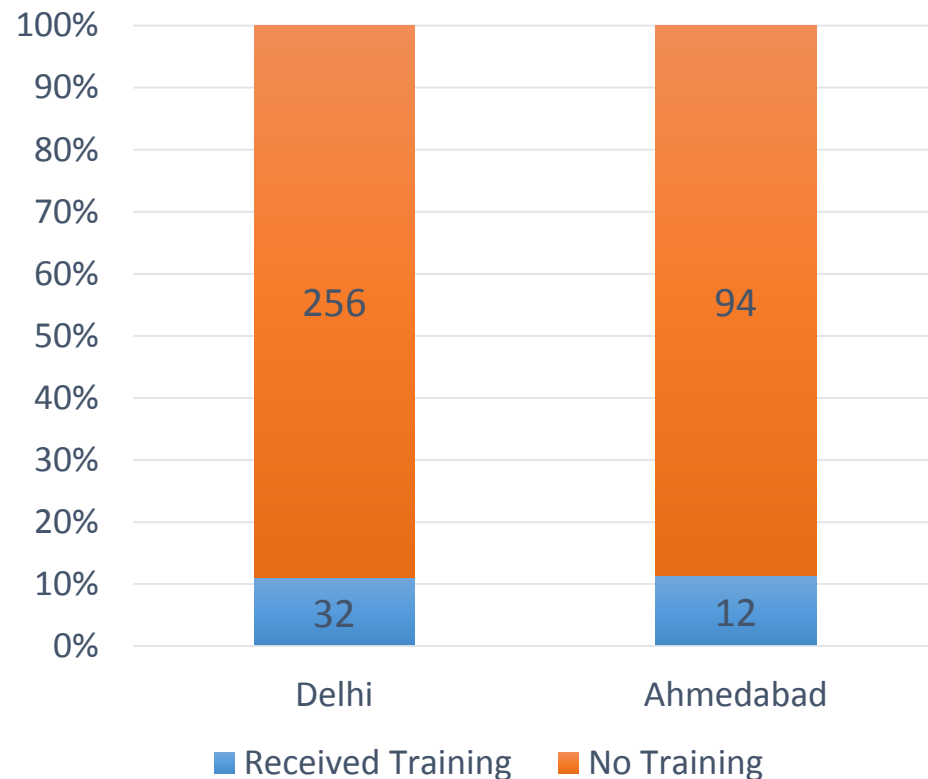
# What do they do?

Nature of Work Done by Sanitation Workers

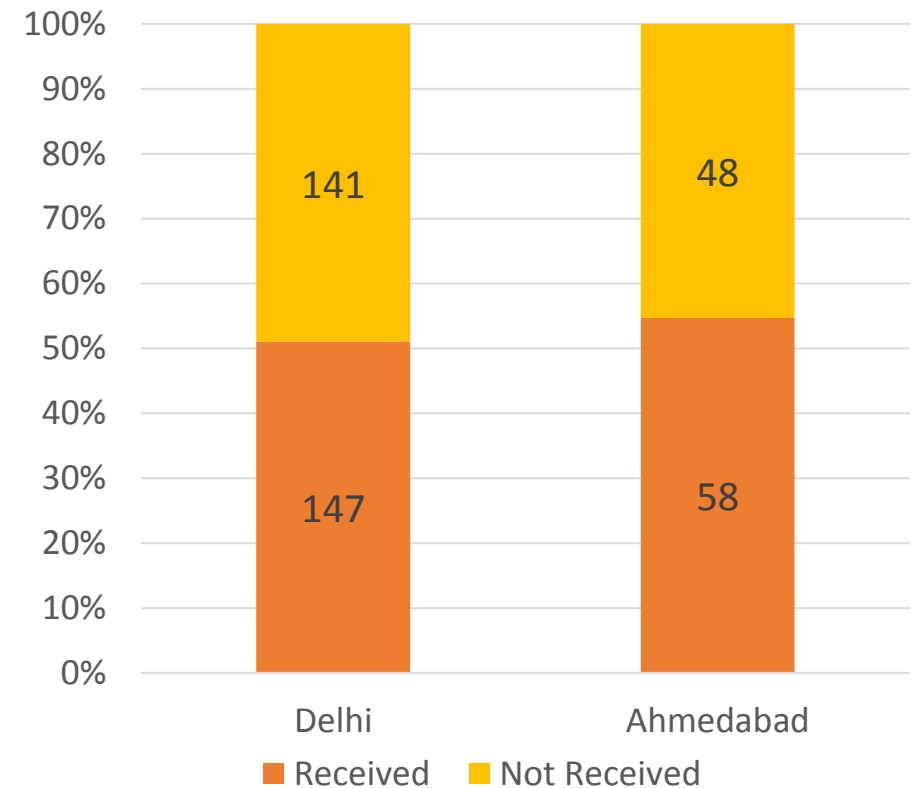


Most of the *sweepers* are employed through contractors, and earn around Rs 200 per day. They get gloves, which are often ill fitting and hinder use. Very few of them are trained in any way. If they do use protective equipment, a new draft law says such workers can then no longer be classified as manual scavengers.

**Lack of Training**



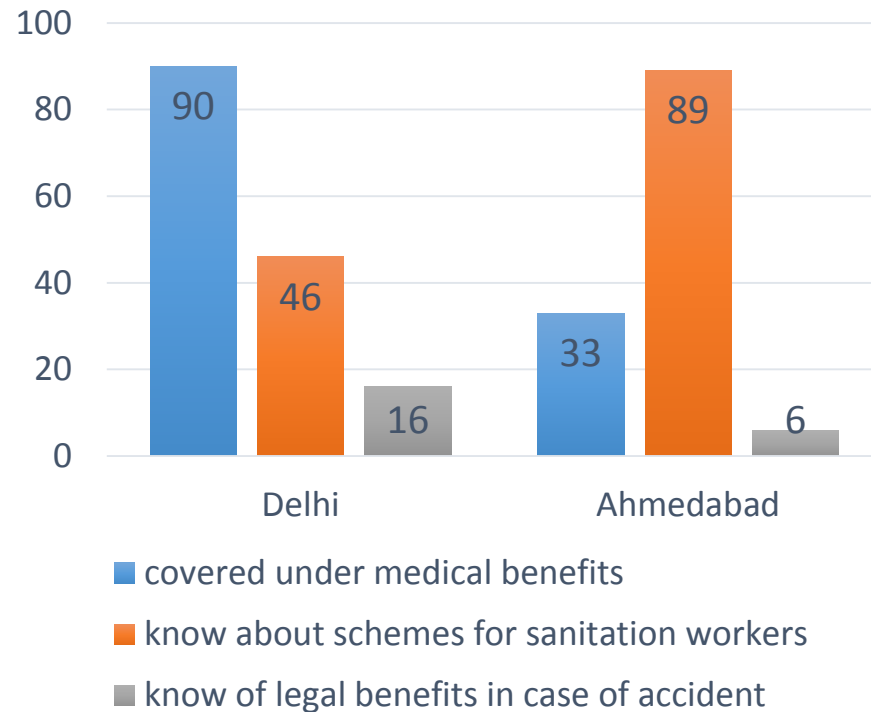
**Protective Gear/Equipment**



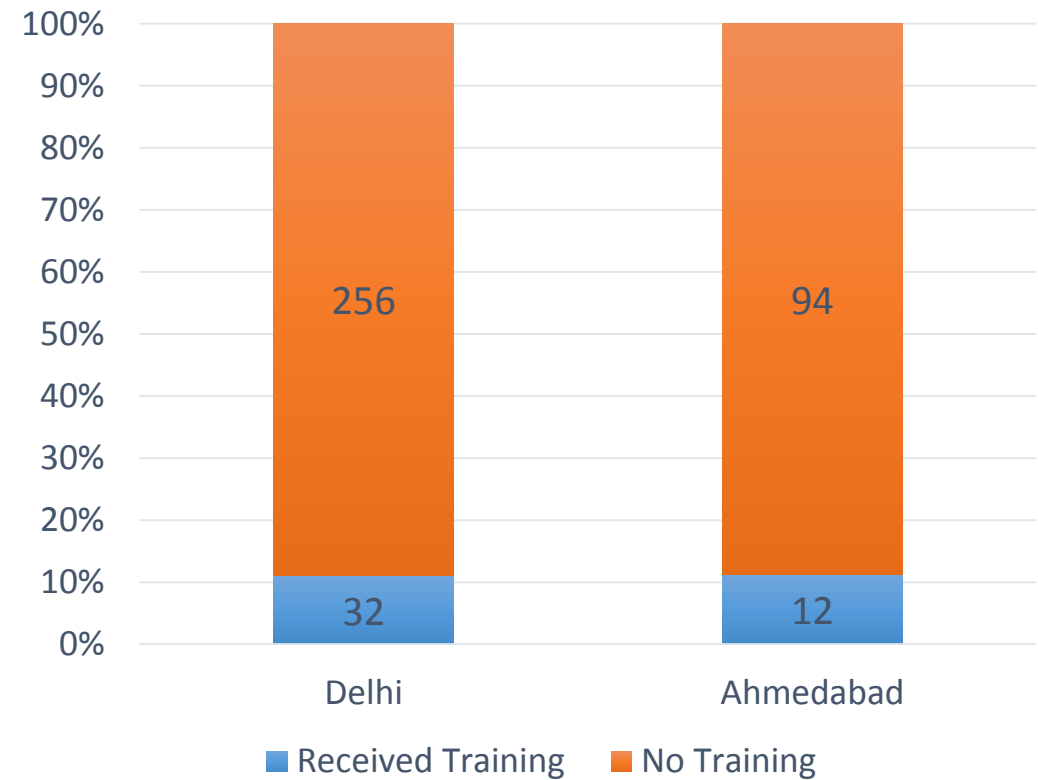


Understanding the elements and processes which create a social divide has been a continuous intellectual pursuit despite the fact that subordination and marginalization of those engaged in scavenging and cleaning is fairly well recognized.

**Awareness and use of Benefit Schemes**

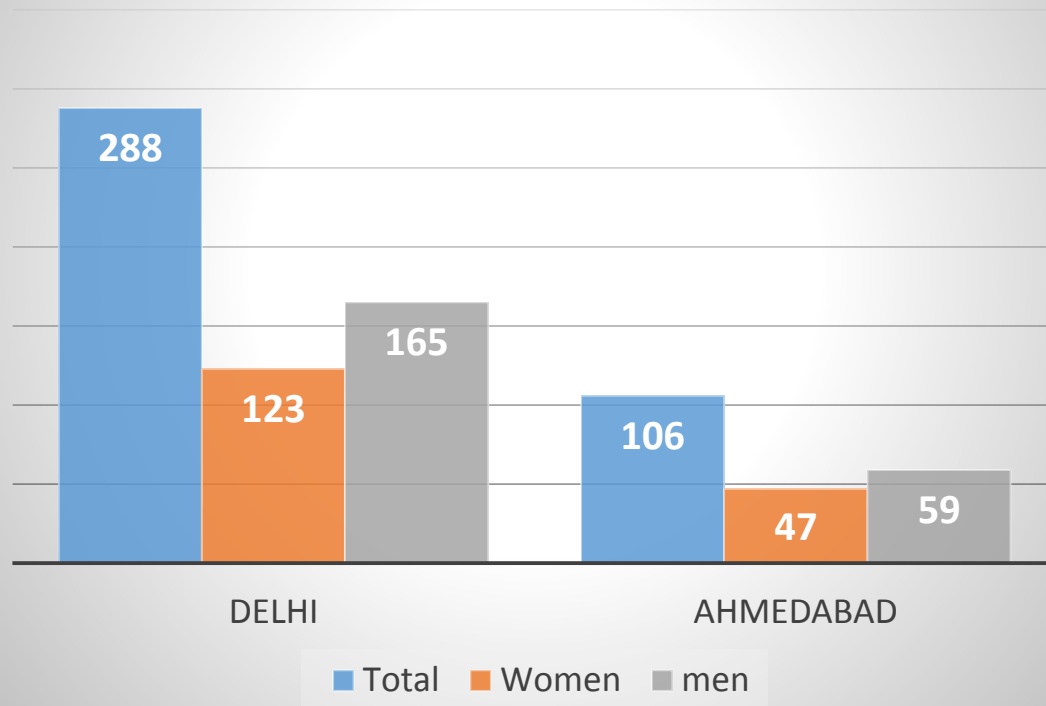


**Lack of Training**

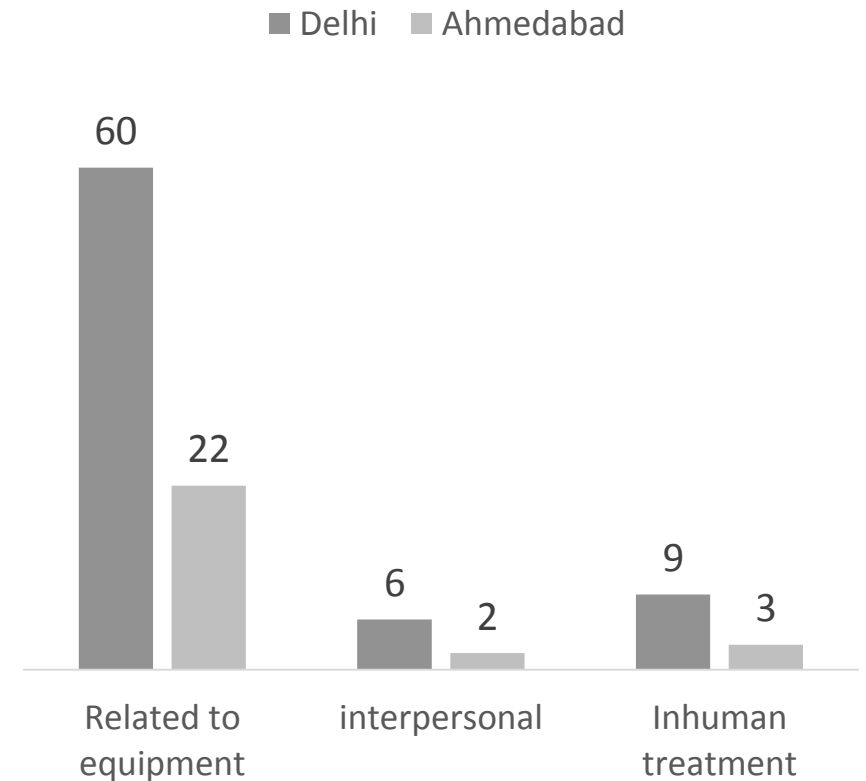


Social inclusion of vulnerable populations who have been historically excluded has been the focus of the governments, sympathizer; and affected communities, groups and individuals.

**Sex Composition of Sanitation Workers**



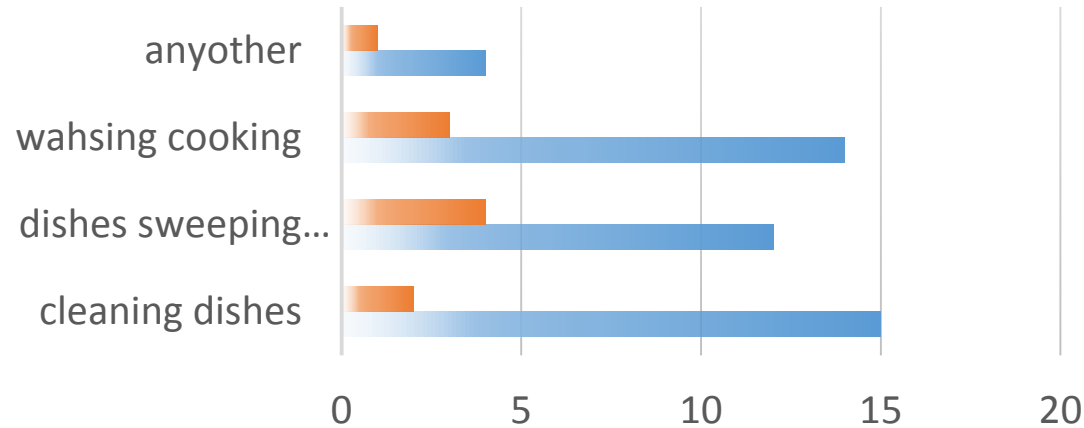
**Experience of Discrimination**



# Salary can vary as much as the tasks themselves.

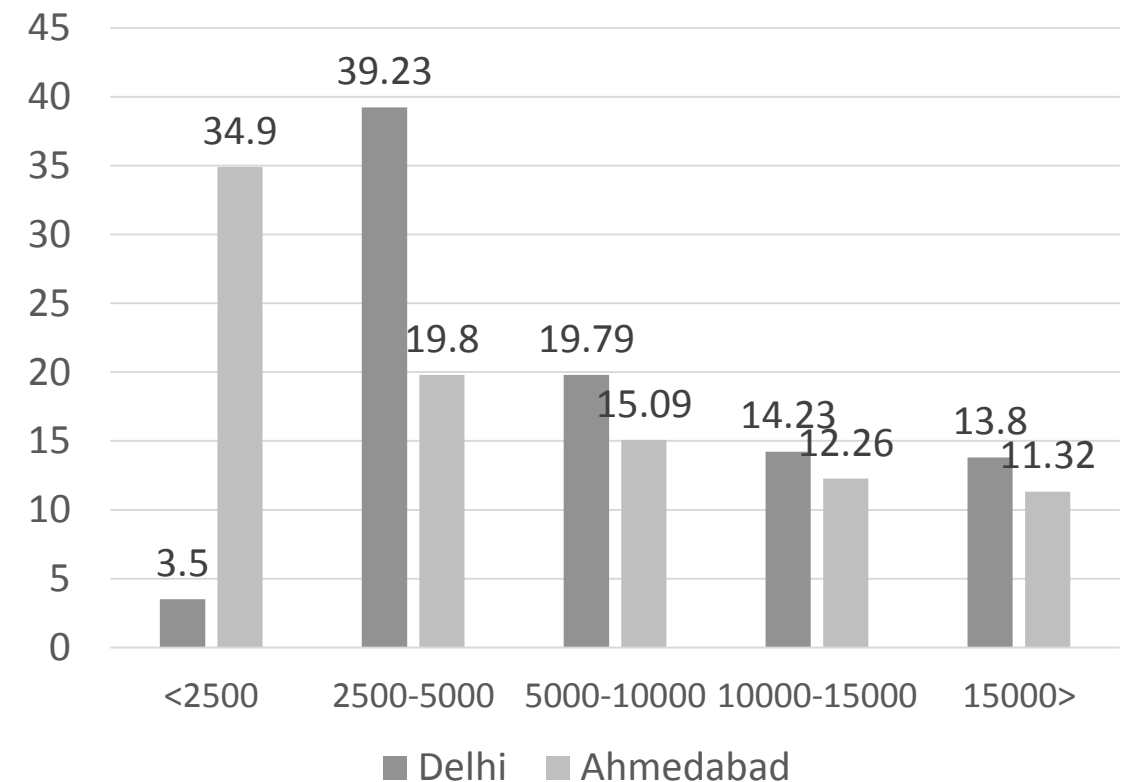
‘Although their “official” income varies from Rs 7,000 to Rs 25,000, what they actually get in hand is only about Rs 5,000 to Rs 15000...’ (Supervisor, AMC)

## SECONDARY OCCUPATION OF SANITATION WORKERS



	cleaning dishes	dishes sweeping mopping	wahsing cooking	anyother
Ahmedabad	2	4	3	1
Delhi	15	12	14	4

## Monthly Income of Sanitation workers



# Earnings...

- Permanent workers get a monthly “risk allowance” of Rs 50. In some states it is Rs 200.
- The entry-level salary of a sanitation worker in New York is \$30,000 per year. In the sixth year, he could earn \$67,141 (Rs 2.18 lakh per month).
- In India, a permanent sanitation worker with 20 years’ experience could make Rs 12,000 a month.



# Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Sanitation Workers

Characteristics	Delhi No (%)	Ahmedabad No (%)
<b>Economic</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>182</b>
Wages-(in rupees) <1000	41	45
1000-2000	51	52
2000>	01	01
No other source of Income	65	79
Possess land holdings	02	03
Possess productive assets	01	02
<b>Social</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>240</b>
Access to education for children	62	54
No Access to health and nutrition	75	67
Ever visited AWC	36	40
No Access to PDS	31	35
Have Bank Account	39	36
Availed entitlements	09	08
<b>Source- Fieldwork (Multiple answers)</b>		



# Voices from the field...

- “There are four to five deaths every month,” a sewer worker in Ahmedabad).
- “Most of us suffer from tuberculosis” (a Sanitation Worker in Ahmedabad)
- ‘They do not have to pay the consultation fees, but they pay for their own medicines... and sometimes have to wait for 4-6 months tests like sonography and x-ray’ (A Chief medical officer in a South Delhi hospital) .
- ‘I am a law graduate... was teaching in a coaching college and earning about Rs.5000... was happy that I was a ‘teacher’. But when I lost my father while he was on work cleaning a sewer a few years ago, I had to leave teaching to get into his shoes... the salary was more than what I was getting...I had to choose better salary over dignified work...’ (Rakesh, Ahmedabad)
- ‘Machines clean the sewers and workers do not descend manholes’ Contractor, Haresh Bhai, Ahmedabad)
- The workers contradicted the contractors in Delhi as well as Ahmedabad as well as Delhi because ‘workers went down manholes almost every night (Ved Prakash, Delhi Jal Board).



# voices...



- Workers take turns entering manholes, lathering bare body with coconut oil to keep away the odours of the sewer.
- 
- Why do they continue doing what they do?
  - Housing,
  - jobs for families
- key reason to continue
- ‘...one of the main reasons why manual scavengers continue to do this work is because they do not have **adequate education** . Working as a sanitation worker, specially as a scavenger means that **they get housing** from the municipal bodies and their **jobs** can be transferred to family members.’ (Mohd Shafi, DJB)





# Findings...

- It is necessary to understand dimensions of Human Development among persons engaging in Sanitation and allied work;
- The occupational health and diseases among persons engaged in sanitation and allied Work for **cure and prevention needs specialized attention**;
- Mechanization of sanitation and allied works require to be understood in the light of **right to traditional occupation and training and skill development pertaining to it**; and means to overcome hindrance encountered for it;
- It is imperative to **provide alternate livelihoods that can be made available based on the educational attainment and relevant training**; and ensure placement opportunities;
- The prospects **self-employment schemes** for rehabilitation, specially in case of desire to leave the traditional occupation; skill building and vocational training need to be located in public as well as private domain;
- It is essential to ensure that the provisions made under the **Constitution and Legal safeguards and Human Rights**; are not only made available, but their utilization, without fear, made possible too.





# Legal safeguards...

- The Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) was introduced by-
  - Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2007,
- Implementation supposedly began in November 2013.
- States like Andhra Pradesh Bihar, Chhattishgarh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have received cash assistance to assist to rehabilitate manual scavengers identified by the government.
- The Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and Rehabilitation Act, 2013, enshrines rehabilitating sanitation workers by giving them one-time cash assistance of Rs 40,000.
- Most workers have not heard of this.



# Legislative measures

- The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 was made for **eliminating the practice**.
- The main objective of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 has been to **effectively prevent and punish perpetrators of atrocities against the members of the 'Dalit' community**.
- Bonded Labour System (abolition) Act, 1976.
- Under section 7(a) of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, anyone forcing another person illegally to engage in **bonded labour, manual scavenging or disposing animal carcasses shall be deemed to be committing a criminal offense** and can be sentenced **to 3 to 6 months of imprisonment or fined up to Rs. 500/-**.
- Various provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which India is a signatory, **hold all human beings equal and the practice of manual scavenging of human feces violates several of its provisions**.
- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 is the recent most addition to the preventive legislations
- **Despite the provision, majority of people involved in this work for livelihood have not been rehabilitated.**

# Legislative safeguards and impediments

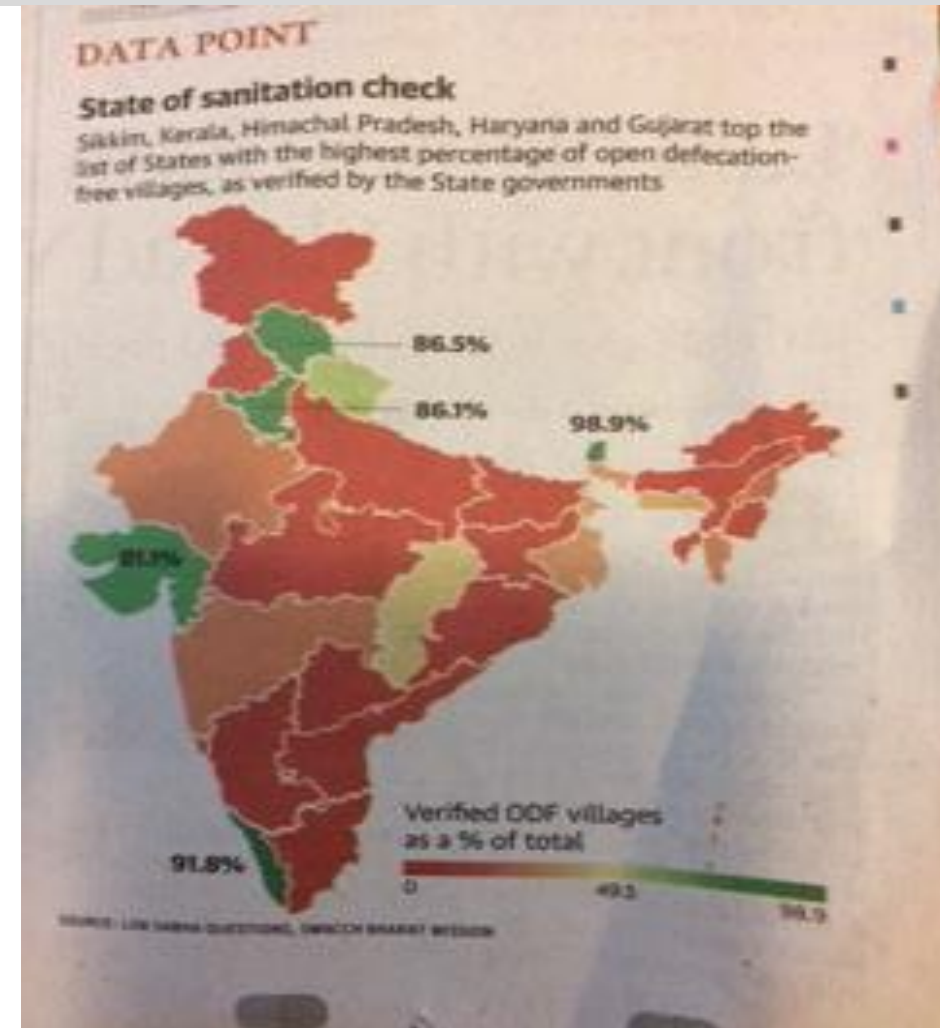
- Scavengers (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and the recently-enacted Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013),
- Manual scavenging still exists because...
  - Inadequate infrastructure,
  - mind set of government officials and society at large,
  - poor implementation of legislations banning manual scavenging,
  - internalization of caste hierarchy and complete acceptance of caste based occupations in the minds of scavenging community
  - as well as lack of political will
- are obstacles for the complete eradication of manual scavenging in India.





# Data...

- The Census 2011 data on insanitary latrines sheds light on the **most archaic form of manual cleaning of 'filth'**,
- dry latrines are cleared of human excreta by fellow humans by hand (or by little metal plates or brooms into baskets or buckets and carried out and disposed).
- This data does not survey who is employed for cleaning these latrines, it counts the number of dry latrines that are cleared by humans (night soil cleared by humans).
- **The data establishes that India still has 7,94,390 dry latrines cleaned by humans!**
- **And 27% of these latrines are in urban areas!**





# State...

- Maharashtra employs 35% of 180, 657 families whose livelihood depend on cleaning the garbage and unblocking the excreta-choked sewers.
- Maharashtra has more than 63,000 households dependent on manual scavenging, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura and Karnataka.

(Based on a question answered by Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Vijay Sampla in the Lok Sabha)



# State...

- The Indian Railways is the largest employer of manual scavengers who are employed as contractual worker and earn around Rs 200/- per day
- Ministry of Railways → manual scavenging cannot be completely eradicated until stations get washable aprons and sealed toilets systems.
- Except for a few trains, the railways does not employ any technology to keep its 80,000 toilets and 115,000 kilometres of tracks clean



# Sanitation...

- "There is no cleanliness in the toilet and there seems to be **no staff** to maintain it. There is water in the toilet but the tap is broken or faulty so the water keeps running because of which it gets over,"
- a resident of a city in Central India.

On the eve of World Toilet Day –Nov 19, 2015, people in smaller cities were still seen defecating in the open....

India has made some progress in providing sanitation by building toilets to dissuade people from defecating in the open, country has a long way to go before it can meet its target of 120 million toilets by 2019



# West and East...

- The West may be generating more garbage than us but they treat their cleaners with dignity.
- Their cleaning brigade does not need to be freed from dehumanizing, obnoxious, abhorrent and disgusting practice of caste-based discrimination.
- By any standards of measurements, there are more accidents and deaths which have occurred in India among Safai Karamcharis while at work than anywhere else in the world.
- Most die before retirement as their average lifespan is about 45 years.



## State of Open defecation...

### **What It Will Take To Give Indians An Alternative To *Open Defecation***

Huffington Post-20-Nov-2015

*India* has made some progress in providing sanitation by building toilets to desist people from *defecating* in the *open*,

### ***India* has longest queues for toilets in world**

WND.com-21-Nov-2015

### [Clean \*India\* Mission Has Made a 'Promising Start': WaterAid](#)

NDTV-22-Nov-2015

### [Our waste, our responsibility](#)

The Hindu-21-Nov-2015

**WHERE INDIA GOES...**

# Living hell...

- *‘I used to throw up all the time because I could not take the smell,’*
  - *Santi Devi, who worked as a manual scavenger in Badaun district*
- *‘I wanted to continue studying... Married me off... I now go cleaning the toilets... Cannot eat my food... Stink and smell follows me...’*
  - *Radhika, Hardoi District*
- *Convinced by others in their community and the law which prohibits manual scavenging, Shanti Devi quit in 2007. BUT RADHIKA CONTINUES*
- *Since then, she and her family have struggled, making ends meet, through odd jobs, working in the fields and cleaning grain’.*
- ([Breaking Free: Life After Manual Scavenging](#) Jan Sahas and UN Solution Exchange Gender Community Practice, New Delhi 2012).
- Alternative Occupations and acceptance??

# Emphasis on coverage not workers....

news: PM Modi and his ministers wielded brooms to clean streets

neta ban ne ke liye ..  
itne papad belne pade..  
aur ban ne ke baad jhadoo  
lagana pad raha  
hai ..

...Media  
coverage...



# State Response

- Indian state does not officially recognise the employment of manual scavengers, almost all of whom are Dalits.
- They are officially hired as 'cleaners' who are contractual labourers.
- However, thousands of such workers earn a livelihood by doing manual scavenging.
- Maharashtra has more than 63,000 households dependent on manual scavenging, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura and Karnataka.

According to a question answered by Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Vijay Sampla in the Lok Sabha.



# Approaches to Manual Scavenging

- **Gandhian Approach**- appeals to conscience of people;
- **Legal Approach**- relies on the legislative advocacy,
- **Rehabilitation Approach**- advocates for policies of rehabilitation and
- **Technocratic Approach**- advocates for replacing dry latrines and constructing flush toilets.
  - These approaches are limited by their focus on abolishing manual scavenging.
  - By treating manual scavenging as a **form of work or employment**—a subset of labour that could be sanitized through technical interventions or economic empowerment schemes
  - These approaches have failed to place the issue of manual scavenging in broader **social, cultural and political context**.



# Sustainable Development Goals

- The SDGs replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- Set the direction for the post-2015 agenda → new development priorities for all countries
- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon → SDGs are based on six essential elements →
  - “dignity, people, prosperity,
  - our planet, justice, and
  - partnership.”

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)-shaped policy agendas including health policy and programs

## Seventeen new goals FOR →

- ✓ tackling poverty,
- ✓ reducing inequality,
- ✓ combating climate change, and protecting ecosystems including oceans, forests and biodiversity.
- ✓ universal agenda.



# Cleaning jobs and caste

- Cleaning jobs are embedded in caste as is caste rooted in Indian psyche.
- Over the years, only euphemistic change from '*bhangi*', '*mehtar*' to '*Safai Mazdoor*'; *Safai Kamdars*, *Safai Karamchari*' has happened.
- We need to revisit our perceptions of these people whose contribution towards the upkeep of the surrounding environment is second to none;
- We need to resolve to give them what is due to them since long- in addition to the symbolic cleanliness **Pledge of 2 October 2014**.
- The least that we can do as an individual is to ensure that when we use a toilet, especially in the public space, we leave it clean for the next user.
- As users we never miss to blame the cleaner if we find the lavatory dirty, but refuse to press flush button or pour water, after easing ourselves.
- This, to my mind, should be the starting point for the Pledge
- Dignity and social inclusion will only then make way for these workers.

‘...nations aspire to live in a world that is peaceful,  
provides equality,  
human rights and dignity of labour  
and is free from discrimination, poverty and hunger,  
the question must be asked how democracy can deliver effectively to promote peace and sustainable development.

**-Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan in her address to the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament on 1 Sept 2015  
(The Economic Times).**