



# Role of the Self Employment Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (SRMS) in the Upliftment of Standard of living of Manual Scavengers in Kerala.

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The practice of manual scavenging has accursed Indian society since time long-established. As the practice is closely connected to the social order, Governments, advocacy groups and academic world together raised the voice to eliminate the practice since the last two decades. Thereby we constituted the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) in 1994, The Self Employment Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (SRMS) in January 2007 with the objective of rehabilitating them and their dependents with alternative livelihood and The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 aims to eliminate insanitary latrines (those not connected to pits/septic tanks/sewage lines) alongside tracking the rehabilitation of manual scavengers in other occupations and conducting periodic surveys. However, as per the reports of National Crime Bureau and the database of National Commission of Safai Karmacharis, it can be clearly reveals that beyond the stringent provisions of act and actions of Government measures severe practice of manual scavenging still existing and it causes workplace death of manual scavengers which has been remained as not reported and properly compensated as per the provisions. In this ground, this research paper tries to find out the role of SRMS in the augmentation of standard of living of scavengers of Kerala with special reference to Kollam District. The paper has been used secondary data analysed through descriptive statistics related to the variables to establish the conclusion of the study and a case study approach by interviewing a few scavengers from Kollam and Alappuzha districts were followed.

**Keywords: Manual Scavenging, SRMS, Standard of Living, Socio-Economic analysis.**

## 1.1 Introduction

From the very initial stage of independent India, several measures has been intended for abolition of manual scavenging, it was first initiated in 1949 by the implementation of the Scavengers' Living Conditions Enquiry Committee to look into the state of scavengers in Bombay. Since then there are various independent bodies, human rights forums and Government departments conducted studies to uplift the life of manual scavengers. Among them the studies of Dalberg Advisors<sup>1</sup> is highly remarkable, as its says, "the average life expectancy of sanitation workers is 40-45 years, people who work in manual scavenging died on the job over the

<sup>1</sup> A global group working to build a more inclusive and sustainable world.

past five years in around 375-475 (study conducted during 2017) and found that there are almost five million people involved in sanitation work across the country; that this work is of nine different types that varies in terms of risk exposure, payments, and policy regulation, however the Government recognises only four types of workers namely latrine cleaners, railway cleaners, sewer cleaners and faecal sludge handlers as manual scavengers.

The official statistics issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the year 2002-2003 puts the figure of identified manual scavengers at 6, 76,009. Of these, over 95% are Dalits (persons belonging to the scheduled castes), who are compelled to undertake this denigrating task under the garb of “traditional occupation”. (Safai Karamchari Andolan & Ors vs. Union of India & Ors., 2003) The sub-Committee of the Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission in 1989 estimated that there were 72.05 lakhs dry latrines in the country. These dry latrines have not only continued to exist till date in several States but have increased to 96 lakhs and are still being cleaned manually by scavengers belonging to the Scheduled Castes. (Safai Karamchari Andolan & Ors vs. Union of India & Ors., 2003).

By convincing the ruthlessness of this cast based discrimination and marginalisation of a community into vulnerable life standards, a series of actions have been implemented by the central ministry under the headings National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation in February, 1989, Low Cost Sanitation for Liberation of Scavengers in 1989-90 for elimination of manual scavenging by converting existing dry latrines into low cost water pour flush latrines and also for construction of new sanitary latrines and a Scheme known as ‘National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents’ was launched in March 1992 for identification, liberation and rehabilitation of scavengers and their dependents by providing alternative employment after giving the requisite training. The scheme was enforced on 1993, but it failed to implement by the state governments upto 1997, in the year it was implemented by 6 states of India. The C&AG<sup>2</sup> conducted an evaluation of the ‘National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents’ in 2003, on its conclusion part, remarked that this Scheme “has failed to achieve its objectives even after 10 years of implementation involving investment of more than Rs. 600 crores”. It further pointed out that although funds were available for implementation of the Scheme, much of it were unspent or underutilized. The Committees set up for monitoring the Scheme were non-functional. A 2019 study by the World Health Organization (WHO) said "weak legal protection and lack of enforcement" of the laws, as well as the poor financial status of sanitation workers, contributes to the practice still prevailing." (Delhi, 2021) To eliminate this practice, the act has provisions for stringent penalties, for direct or indirect employment of any person in hazardous cleaning of sewers or septic tanks by any person, local authority or agency. For example, even the first instance of its contravention is punishable with imprisonment up to two years or fine up to Rs 2 lakh or both. If a worker dies while performing such work, even with safety gear and other precautions, the employer is required to pay compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the family (By Subhomay Saha, 2021). There are about 8,025 railway stations in the country which ferry about 2,30,00,000 passengers every day, here in a total we have 36176 manual scavengers in railway stations. Whenever passengers use train toilets while trains are halted at stations, the excreta directly falls on the railway tracks beside the platforms. The tracks littered with human feces are cleaned by a

<sup>2</sup> Comptroller and Auditor General of India

human work-force. While our country prides itself in sending space crafts to Mars, we still haven't identified a dignified technology for cleaning human shit (<https://www.safaikarmachariandolan.org/>, 2023)

Study conducted by Dalberg associates<sup>3</sup> 2017 revealed that 5 million sanitation workers estimated in urban India. 9 categories of sanitation workers identified along the sanitation value chain including those engaged in cleaning sewers, cleaning latrines, faecal sludge handling, railway cleaning, work in waste treatment plants, community and public toilet cleaning, school toilet cleaning, sweeping and drain cleaning, and domestic work.

**Table.1.1 State-wise Number of Manual Scavengers Identified**

Sl.No	States	No. of Workers
1	Andhra Pradesh	1793
2.	Assam	3921
3.	Bihar	131
4.	Chhattisgarh	3
5.	Gujarat	105
6.	Jharkhand	192
7.	Karnataka	2927
8.	<b>Kerala</b>	<b>518</b>
9.	Madhya Pradesh	510
10.	Maharashtra	6325
11.	Odisha	230
12.	Punjab	231
13.	Rajasthan	2673
14.	Tamilnadu	398
15.	Uttar Pradesh	32473
16.	Uttarakhand	4988
17	West Bengal	680
	<b>Total</b>	<b>58098</b>

Source: Press Information Bureau Govt.of India

There are significant differences in the number of manual scavengers identified by the states and those identified in the Social Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011. States had identified only 8 per cent (13,465) of the manual scavenger households listed in the SECC 2011 till December 2017 (Research, 2023). Significant mismatch in identification and enumeration of manual scavengers, sanitation workers, and number of dry latrines between Government sources and those from independent studies (Wateraid, 2018). In 2021 the National Human Rights Commission stated that claims that there are no manual scavengers in particular states in India are simply untrue (Jai Mala, 2022). In Kerala, there is no workers are named as manual scavengers after 2013, now the workers are named as sweepers, cleaners and tank panni in documents. Therefore it is highly difficult to find out the documents from the official records regarding fund distribution or anything.

**Table1.2 Category-wise break-up of number of manual scavengers in India**

Category	No.of Scavengers
Scheduled Castes	42,594
Scheduled Tribes	421
Other Backwards Classes	431
Others	351

Source: Press Information Bureau of India

<sup>3</sup> Dalberg Associates <https://www.sanitationworkers.org/>

“Wherever there was a shortage of sweepers and scavengers in urban areas, municipal authorities looked to Dalit migrants from rural areas to meet the shortfall. This cemented caste oppression into a waged “occupation”. Today, in municipal sanitation jobs, there is almost an unstated 100 per cent “reservation” for those belonging to scheduled and backward caste groups,” (Ashraf, 2022). The social issue behind the job is that it will create a caste discrimination in the social structure and will remained as a blasphemy in development face of a nation. Furthermore, it also violating the fundamental and constitutional rights of a group of persons only because of their livelihood. According to a report on Deccan Herald on 2022 (Varsha Gowda, 2022) in India in every five days three sanitation workers were killed at workplace. But a justifying compensation asper the supreme court order were not to be received to any of the dependents of the deceased persons. In Kerala, between a period of 2013 to 2019 three sanitation workers were killed on duty.

## 1.2 The Self Employment Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (SRMS)

The Self Employment Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (SRMS) was set up in January 2007 with the objective of rehabilitating them and their dependents with alternative livelihoods. The benefits and entitlements offered under the SRMS are as follows:

- An immediate one-time cash assistance of Rs 40,000 to one member of the family of the identified manual scavenger
- A concessional loan of up to Rs ten lakh for self-employment projects
- A monthly stipend of Rs 3,000 for up to 2 years and access to skill-training programmes for all manual scavengers and the dependents
- A credit-linked back-ended capital subsidy of Rs 3, 25,000 against aforementioned loan

As per the reports of the parliamentary standing committee in 2017-18, the support to the manual scavengers have been terribly inadequate so far. Only 27,268 manual scavengers have been provided with the one-time cash assistance.

During the current financial year 2022-23, under the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), there is an allocation of Rs. 70.00 crore. However, so far no fund has been released during 2022-23 to the National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) (Empowerment, 2023). Budget allocated fund is remained as unutilised in this case, the existing system for identifying the persons depended on manual scavenging is not efficient to fulfil the objectives of policy makers.

**Table.1.3 coverage of manual scavengers and their dependents under the Scheme in India**

Sl.No	Provision	Coverage
1	One Time Cash Assistance of Rs. 40,000	58098
2	Skill Development Training	18,199
3	Capital Subsidy for Self Employment projects	1562

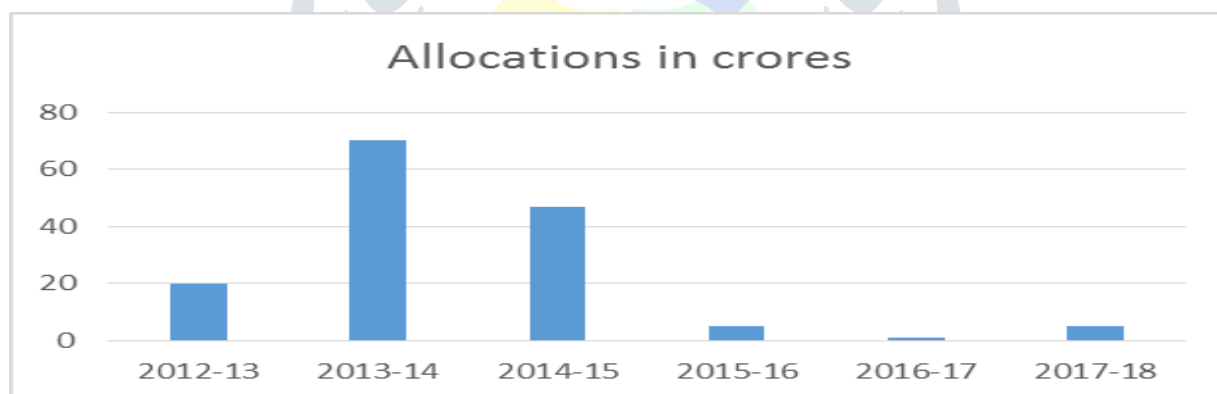
Source: Press Information Bureau of India

**Table1.4 Progress report on implementation of the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers as on 31.12.2022**

Sl. No	State /UT	No. of Manual Scavengers	Amount Paid (Lakh)	No. of MS/Dependents released capital subsidy of general projects	Amount of capital subsidy for general projects	No. of MS/Dependents released capital subsidy of sanitation related projects	Amount of capital subsidy of sanitation related projects	Skill Development training Coverage	SDTP expenditure
1	Karnadaka	2927	1170.80	658	1026.13	0	0	349	50
2	Kerala	518	270.20	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Tamilnadu	398	159.20	78	23.08	0	0	29	2.60

Source: Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Social Justice

The allocations for the scheme have been gradually declining since FY 2013-14. In FY 2013-14, GoI had allocated 70 crore to the scheme. This decreased to 47 crore in FY 2014-15 and further to only 5 crore in FY 2015-16. In FY 2017-18, 5 crore was allocated for SRMS, the same as FY 2015-16 but 5 times more than the 1 crore allocated in FY 2016-17. Minister of State for Social Justice, Ramdas Athawle cited the corpus funds already available with the National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation as the reason behind the reduction in the budget allocation for the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (Sen, 2018).



Source: : India Expenditure Budget, Vol 2, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Available online at: <http://indiabudget.nic.in>. Note: Figures are in crore of rupees and are revised estimates, except for FY 2017-18 which are budget estimates (BE).

**Fig.1.1 Govt. of India Allocations for SRMS (in ₹ crore)**

### 1.3 Manual Scavengers in Kerala

In Kerala manual scavenging was banned from 1982, thereafter the workers were renamed as contingency workers then became sweepers and finally titled as sanitation workers. (Fathima, 2022) There are 630 manual scavengers are there in Kerala as per National Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation. The Times of India reported on 2019 November 21 that in Kerala there are 600 manual scavengers. When we are focusing the rehabilitation measures by the municipal corporations of Kerala, the reports from Kozhikode says that any of the

listed scavengers from Kozhikode never received any one time assistance from government under SRMS (Survey 2018). As per Supreme Court order 2014 a manual scavenger must be rehabilitated in the way that, providing an initial cash assistance, allotment of residential plot and house construction assistance, skill training for self-employment and subsidised loan facility for starting alternative employment. Kozhikode Municipal Corporation allotted five colonies for the rehabilitation of former scavengers in 1980. One and half cents to two cents of land allotted to each worker, other than these nothing is received by the scavengers for rehabilitation. In 2018 Suchitha mission conducted a state level survey to found manual scavenge from Kerala, it was focused mainly on Kollam, Alappuzha, Palakkad and Ernakulam. They invited persons those who engaged in manual scavenging work to register with Safai Karmacharis organisation and they intended to provide the financial assistance to the registered persons. Suchitha Mission included the persons from 9 different activities of manual scavenging as the persons to register with them. Through the survey Suchitha Mission identified the following number of workers from different districts comes under the survey;

**Table 1.5 Number of Registered Manual Scavengers through Survey**

District	Number of Registered Manual Scavengers	Male	Female
Kollam	274		
Ernakulam	155		
Alappuzha	96		
Palakkad	75		
<b>Total</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>125</b>

Source: Compiled from Safai Karmacharis documents and from Suchitha mission survey report kerala

As an outcome of the survey all the registered manual scavengers were received an amount of 40,000 as one time financial assistance and they look forward to banking institutions to provide concessional loan of up to Rs ten lakh for self-employment projects. The mission insisted the bank to not reject the loan application from the manual scavengers in any reason. The mission also takes initiatives to rehabilitate the persons those who are came from different neighbour states by providing shelter facility under the corporation.

#### 1.4 Status of implementation of the Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers in Kerala.

In 2018, Suchitha mission under the guidance of Ministry of social justice and welfare was conducted a survey to identify the persons from Kerala those who are relying on manual scavenging as their livelihood. In this survey Suchitha mission included the cleaning sewers, cleaning latrines, faecal sludge handling, railway cleaning, work in waste treatment plants, community and public toilet cleaning, school toilet cleaning, sweeping and drain cleaning, and domestic work who are listed as manual scavengers under Safai Karmacharis. They are insisted them to register with NSKFDC to receive the financial assistance through SRMS. Following Table no 1.6 shows the status of SRMS in Kerala in 2018.

**Table1.6 status of implementation of SRMS among Manual Scavengers in Kerala**

Schemes Under SRMS	Total No.of Registered MS	No. of MS received the Assistance	Male	Female
OTCA	518	518	393	125
Skill Training	518	141	118	23

Capital Subsidy	518	0	0	0
Loan Assistance	518	0	0	0
Healthcare	518	0	0	0

Source: Compiled from database of Safai Karmacharis

It can be found that One Time Capital Assistance (OTCA) received by all of the registered manual scavengers. Through the analysis, it can be found that a systematic way for upliftment of standard of living of manual scavengers were not placed in Kerala, because the survey was limited to only four districts of Kerala, the other 9 districts were completely out of the framework. Then, there is a strong evidence to belief on the statement quoted by Wateraid survey report that there is a significant mismatch in identification and enumeration of manual scavengers, sanitation workers, and number of dry latrines between Government sources and those from independent studies. Most of the local self-Government institutions are not ready to accept that they have manual scavengers in their jurisdiction, it makes the things highly complicated, and it denies the flow of financial assistance and other scheme benefits to the real beneficiaries. A gradual and sustained upliftment of standard of living is not possible by receiving the one time assistance, it can be fulfilled only by receiving skill training, job training, capital assistance to start a business and also by a non-discriminating approach from the financial institutions. All these assistance under SRMS is completely not achieved in the Kerala Scenario.

Safai Karmacharis Aandolan states that, around 2000 sanitation workers depart their lives every year due to leak of poisonous gases and several injuries. (Salonijain) they are exposed to certain health problems by virtue of their occupation. These health hazards include exposure to harmful gases such as methane and hydrogen sulphide, cardiovascular degeneration, musculoskeletal disorders like osteoarthritic changes and intervertebral disc herniation, infections like hepatitis, leptospirosis and helicobacter, skin problems, respiratory system problems and altered pulmonary function parameters (Abhiyan). Health issues of Manual Scavengers should considered as extremely, rehabilitation and upliftment of persons from this class of job first need to provide proper healthcare, but the data shows a complete absence of measures concerned with healthcare.

Cleaning staffs of Quilon railway station and Kayamkulam Railway Station was being interviewed, they responded that seven years before they were being forced to clean the human excreta from railway track with broom only. No precautionary or personal protection tool kit never been provided there to do the work. Now they are getting some simple tools (like a stick with a picking holder at the end) to clear the track waste. The cleaning staffs are responsible for cleaning and sanitizing the restrooms and wash rooms facilities at the railway station and the trains halt in stations for cleaning. As they are being recruited in railway as contract labours, a fair wage system has not been existing there. They are living under severe financial difficulties. Most of them are single parents and facing difficulty in educating their children. Through the interaction with the cleaners of railway station it can be reveal that they haven't aware of the SRMS schemes, means there is an information gap in between the Government officials and with the real beneficiaries.

### 1.5 Conclusion

The identification and mapping survey of manual scavengers in India is the first step to eradicate this inhumane act, but unfortunately the survey itself is a failure to draw out the real picture of manual scavenging in the country,

most of the state Governments are try to report a reduced number of manual scavengers from their concerned states. Therefore, the budget announced fund is still remained as underutilised by the departments, so there is a gradual decrease in allocated fund by the ministry. It will remains the problems of manual scavengers as unsolved for ever. These oppressed work group actually deserve larger financial assistance to build up a healthy social life by providing a quality education to their children and to get relief from health problems. It is a high time to conduct a sincere identification survey for the manual scavengers. Another important suggestion to reduce the risk and health issues of sanitation work is to introduce technology-centred alternatives. A social security pension scheme has to implement to support the life of old age persons from the class. Other than all these measures the first thing is to develop a social consensus among th citizen regarding the dignity of persons engaged in sewage work. Each person is responsible for the cleanliness of his house and in public place.

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