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Home > Ahmedabad > Page One

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[Loksatta](#)

[Lokprabha](#)

[North American](#)

[Edition \[Print\]](#)

COLUMNISTS

[The Indian Express](#)

[The Financial Express](#)

PAGE ONE

TISS REPORT SAYS 90 PC USE BARE HANDS TO REMOVE HUMAN WASTE; GOVT SAYS STUDY PARAMETERS WRONG

No manual scavengers in State: Govt; study digs up many, raises a stink

[Express News Service](#)

Gandhinagar, January 23: In Vibrant Gujarat, more than 12,000 people engaged in manual scavenging? The study by the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)**, while negating the State Government's stand in court that there are no manual scavengers, has more shocking revelations. It says 90 per cent of them have not been provided safety equipment like gloves, masks, despite working for municipal bodies, and use their bare hands to remove human waste.

Meanwhile, the Government has refuted the figures and disputed the parameters used, reiterating that manual scavenging is non-existent.

Titled "Study of Practice of Manual Scavenging in Gujarat", the report was submitted to the Government recently. Its scope was to ascertain the prevalence, kind and nature of the practice, as also to find out the demographic, economic and social profile of its practitioners. Carried out by TISS faculty H Beck and Shailesh Darokar at the behest of State-owned Safai Kamdar Vikas Nigam, the survey included only those places with a population of 10,000 plus. To that extent the authors even admit the final figures could be an underestimation.

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Study says a total of 2,456 households with 12,506 individuals in Gujarat are

involved in manual scavenging. Of this, 4,333 (2,755 males, 1,578 females) persons are directly involved in the practice, the rest being children, women, old, unemployed and others.

Regionwise, Saurashtra leads with 928 households, followed by central Gujarat (569), north Gujarat (529), and south Gujarat (430). Over 50 per cent are involved in removing open defecation, mostly with bare hands.

The study says the most prevalent method of manual scavenging is sweeping night soil on the street (dry latrines) followed by cleaning of water borne toilets.

Removal of bodies and dead animals is the third most common practice of manual scavenging, says the report, followed by sewerage sweeping, and carrying night soil by basket/bucket or on head.

Only 2.2 per cent of them have mechanised means to remove the filth, the survey found, with 90 per cent (2,233) scavengers saying they do not get safety equipment, like gloves, masks, boots, brooms, while on job. More than a fifth reported parasitic infections, gastro and skin ailments.

Worse, the employer profile also points to the government's complicity in the situation. Of the total, 2,821 work for municipal bodies, with more than half as contractual labour. Only 811 individuals are employed by the private sector, mostly by housing societies. When cornered on this State Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramanlal Vora disagreed with the definition of manual scavengers.

"The report includes all those involved in cleaning public toilets as manual scavengers. The truth is the heinous practice of lifting human excreta manually from the dabba-jararoos (dry latrines) is just not there anywhere in Gujarat. We are confident of this," Vora said.

On not providing equipment the minister added, "It is the responsibility of employers to provide all needed safety as with industrial workers. The government enters only when rules are flouted."

While the study also showed low penetration of alternative occupations, one-third respondents believed it their duty by birth to clear other people's filth.

While only 60 individuals own a two-wheeler, over half the households are under debt.

A whopping 65 per cent do not even know that manual scavenging is constitutionally illegal.

Understandably, of the 2,456 households, only 21 (4.8%) are aware of various central government schemes, indicating that government's information dissemination system has failed.

The report has already attracted complaints. Dalit activist Martin Mcwan feels the government could misuse the report, as figures are way off the mark: "The report is a step forward in the sense that it nails the lie but it's not comprehensive. 2,456 households are way too low. Government itself admitted to over 55,000 sweepers in the state in response to our RTI query."

The only silver lining: over 80 per cent have caste certificates, 93 per cent ration cards and 88 per cent have election ID cards, documents that help them

avail government benefits.

But while a good 85 per cent households (2,081) have houses of their own, their location and condition comes in for criticism.

The mostly dilapidated quarters are generally located on outskirts removed from mainstream society, with no proper bath facilities, lavatories, or streetlights.

A majority of 2,199 households have electricity connection and 50 per cent (1165 households) said people are generally kinder now than earlier.

“Now we get Rs 50 a day, a broom a month and a shit container a year. The government won’t talk of permanent employment, and our lot remains like it was in 1996,” says Kishore Vaghela, one of the Ranpur petitioners in the PIL (see box).

Meanwhile Arif Sheikh, MD, Safai Kamdar Development Corporation, refused to elaborate “I have nothing to say on this but there is no question of accepting this. We’ll carry out our own survey,” he said.

No manual scavengers in State: Govt, study digs up many, raises a stink

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How TISS study came about

In 1996, a PIL was made by sweepers of Ranpur village of Dhandhuka taluka (Ahmedabad), along with NGO Navsarjan in the Gujarat High Court. The sweepers were denied brooms by the panchayat citing lack of funds, making them collect and carry human excreta manually. In response to this petition, the government pleader had claimed that there was no manual scavenging in Gujarat, and that the NGOs were paying people for photographs. Following an inquiry that found prevalence of the practice in Ranpur, the HC issued instructions to the government for the implementation of 1993 Central Act prohibiting dry latrines in the State that got implemented in urban areas in 2000, and in rural areas in 2001. Subsequently, the State government also formed Safai Kamdar Nigam, a body meant to uplift social and economic condition of the sweepers in the state. It is the same organisation that ordered this **TISS** study.