



UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT IN THE WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF SANITATION WORKERS IN ALLEPPEY TOWN, INDIA

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**BROWN
GOLD**

ABSTRACT

- Sanitation sector witnessed transformative change across the world in past few decades.
- Lack of academic insights in understanding this change, and not addressing newer forms of sanitation work and workforce, especially in off-grid areas, is a challenge to further sanitation management.
- Historical understanding is vital to improve sanitation workers' living and working conditions.
- Sanitation workers globally bridge the gap between service provision and infrastructure, often at the cost of dignity and health.
- Our study focuses on the transition of sanitation work and workers in Alleppey town, India from 1947 to 2021.
- Research specifically explores the change in technologies, worker groups, laws and role of state among others.

BACKGROUND

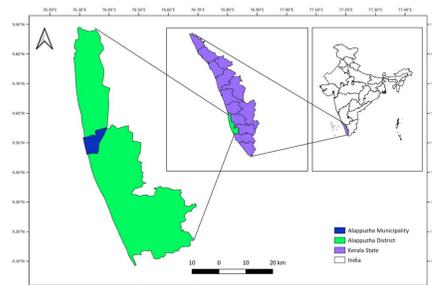
Banning manual scavenging in India: A long, complex passage
 Union government is set to introduce The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020, in ongoing Monsoon Session of Parliament

By Pragna Akhlesh
 Published Friday 18 September 2020



Akhlesh, P (2020). Banning Manual Scavenging in India: A long, complex passage. Down to earth.

STUDY AREA

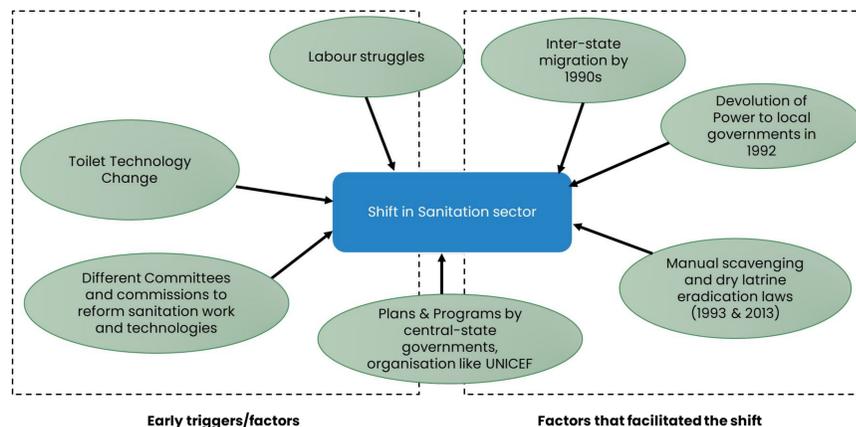


- Location: Alleppey Town, Kerala, India
- Population of 1,77,079
- Generates 17.33 MLD of fecal sludge and treat only 0.23 %
- High water table (up to 0-2 metres, Flood prone region)

METHODOLOGY

- The study adopted a qualitative research approach.
- Open-ended interviews, FGDs, archival and secondary data.
- Interviewees include the government officers, local people and sanitation workers of different age, who worked at different time periods.
- Data was analysed using content analysis method.

FACTORS THAT LED THE CHANGE IN SANITATION SECTOR IN KERALA



RESULTS

- Emergence of new toilet technology, and the subsequent initiatives at government levels have impacted the transition
- Major shift from formal work of scavenging to informal pit-emptying
- Shift in the nature of work - Cleaning human excreta with hands to Mechanised & Manual pit-emptying
- Shift from a group of dalit municipal scavengers to multiple groups of informal pit-emptiers of different caste and religion.
- Till 1990s, the residence of workers were recognizable 'scavenger colonies'
- Social stigma and disgust has reduced, but still exists
- Political history of Alleppey and labour struggles were crucial in the improvement in worker conditions
- No female workers in contemporary pit-emptying service
- Work timings have changed and workers became 'invisible'
- The access to technology has a major role before and after the shift
- The scale, frequency, and the state's role in sanitation work has changed.
- Migrant pit-emptying workers are vulnerable due to poor social and economic capital compared to mechanised workers

SHIFT OF FSM IN ALLEPPEY TOWN

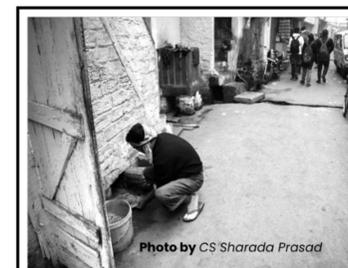


Photo by CS Sharada Prasad

Formal job of manual scavenging
 Under town administration to clean dry toilets, carry and dispose human waste

1894 - 1970s



Informal Scavenging job by migrants (Manual cleaners of septic tank/pits)

Flush toilets emerged and cleaning the filled septic tank/pits using rudimentary tools is the major work

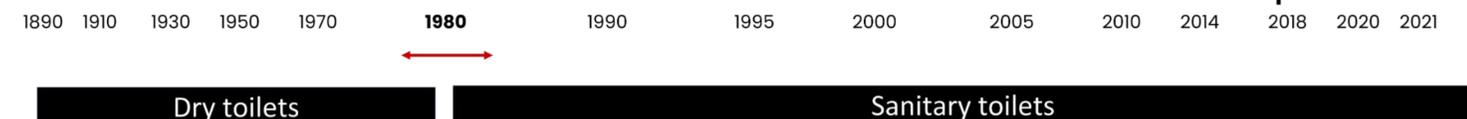
1980s - present



Informal, illegal and invisible FSM service providers (Vacuum-suckers)

Lorries, pipes & vacuum pumps used to clean septic tanks

2008 - present



DISCUSSION

- New toilet technology was instrumental in the shift - mainly in the nature of sanitation work and background of workers.
- Emergence of informal sanitation work in the absence of state intervention in sanitation service provision.
- Challenge of contemporary pit-emptying work - an informal, illegal and invisible work.
- Caste and class dimensions have not changed much even in the contemporary sanitation work
- Primary issues of containment and storage resolved, whereas transportation and treatment challenges remained.
- To enhance working conditions further, focus should be on addressing second-generation issues in off-grid towns

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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