

# Sanitation and Unchanging Role of Caste

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## Abstract

*The caste system is a complex social institution which is inextricably linked with sanitation. The Untouchables occupy the lowest strata in Indian society and they ranked lower than the Shudras. The concepts of purity and pollution are closely related to caste hierarchy. Since the occupations of the Untouchables are lowest in the hierarchy, they are considered impure. Most of the Untouchables were involved in sanitary works as cleaning the streets, carrying night soil, carrying dead animals, curing the hides etc. Though the caste system with its various features has changed, sanitary works undertaken by the Untouchables still continue. At present, they are employed by Indian Railways, City Corporations, Town Municipalities and by other agencies. Legislations introduced by the governments and the efforts by social reformers as Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, Wilson Bezwada and Ashif Shaikh have changed the position of the Untouchables slightly and there is a long way to go.*

**Keywords:** Sanitation, Caste Structure, Untouchables, Purity and Pollution, Manual Scavenging

## Introduction

Caste system is of critical importance in the Indian social structure and it is linked with sanitation. In spite of unclean public domains like streets, bazaars, hospitals and railway stations, the social issue of untouchability was never resolved in many decades of India as a democratic nation. From the beginning of the caste system unsanitary tasks are and have been ascribed to certain 'untouchable' castes (Khatarker 2021). As we enter the year 2022, the Indian government and our civil society continue to grapple with the inhuman nature of manual scavenging. The present article tries to understand the complex system of caste with its relationship to occupation and the unchanging role of caste with regard to sanitation.

## The Caste System

The caste system is a unique system of stratification found in India. It is not only the oldest system of social stratification in India; it is also complex, hierarchical

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