

# Manual Scavenging **An Inhuman Occupation**



**BDERM**

Bangladesh Dalit and  
Excluded Rights Movement

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## Introduction:

'Methor' is a term used by mainstream Bangladeshi society to refer to people working as manual scavengers. They clean toilets that were designed during the British period. The toilets are designed in such a way that the effluent flows directly to a pot under the seat. The pot is accessed through an opening at the back of the toilet. The cleaners scoop out the effluent with their bare hands and transfer them into a bucket. The bucket contents are deposited in a mini drum which will be carried to a garbage dumping site. There are about 100 toilets of this type in Ishordi and Saiyoddpur under the District of Pabna and Nilphamari respectively. This is considered as the dirtiest job. Street sweepers are also called 'Methor' sometimes. They all suffer from 'untouchability' wherein nobody would want to be associated with any of them. The 'Methor' are part of the bigger Dalit community in Bangladesh.

In Ishordi and Saiyoddpur, 'Methor' live in sweeper's colony and are easily identified as such.



## Scavenger ('Methor') in Broader Society:

### Untouchability:

'Methor' are more deprived than other subaltern peoples. They have totally no access to public restaurants and some times in haircut salons.

Shri Sankor Bansfor doesn't take tea in a restaurant. He explains that this is the prevailing social rule. He further explains that his son is not engaged in a similar job but he bears the stigma of being the son of a 'Methor' and likewise not allowed to take tea in a restaurant and could not even exchange greetings to the larger society.

A 'Methor' has to order food at the door of a restaurant. He is not allowed to enter. The restaurant boy considered him 'dirty because he cleans our drains and toilets and therefore not worthy to come in'.

That means they are very isolated and untouchable in broader society.

**Housing, Water and Sanitation:**

They are living in isolated railway 'sweeper' colony made by railway authorities during the British period. They have only one room for each family regardless of the number of members. They can not rent a house outside the colony due to their poverty and untouchability.

There is no water supply in these colonies. There is only one tubwell in Ishordi Railway 'Sweeper' colony for about 200 people. There is no separate bathroom for men and women. Every house is completely dirty covered with garbage and other unhygienic substance followed by unbearable bad smell. The entire area is full of mosquito and people of this colony suffer from various types of contagious diseases.

**Economic Life:**

Shri Sankor Bansfor and Shri laxmichan Bansfor, are employees of Bangladesh railway. They work in the Railway Hospital in Ishordi. They are responsible for manually cleaning the toilet of the railway hospital colony. Sankor receives 5,000/- (five thousands taka) per month while Laxmichan receives 4,000/- (four thousand taka) per month as government employees. Sankor needs more than 9,000/- (Nine thousand taka) per month for his family of six. He has no alternative income sources. His elder son, Sumon, (28 year's old) is still jobless due to his identity. He could not get any work, because he is untouchable.

Shri Bindu Bansfor has no permanent job. He goes to the villages around the Ishordi town searching for work. He gets about 200/- (Two hundred taka) for cleaning a toilet irregularly. Komola Rani Bansfor (38) cleans a manual toilet in Saiyoddpur. She gets only 60 (Sixty) taka per month from cleaning the toilet. She has no other work except housework. Her husband, Nikua Bansfor, works in the Railway hospital and he is responsible for cleaning the toilet of Railway hospital colony in Saiyoddpur. His salary is 4,000/- (four thousand taka) only per month. There is no alternative income source of their family of six members. Apart from that they are losing their job due to the gradual decrease in number of manual toilets. They have some indignation for extremely poor mainstream Bangladeshis engaging in their existing profession.

**Education:**

Due to their poverty and untouchability, children of the 'Methor' community do not go to school or leave school. Shri Rana kumar Bansfor, a 12 year old boy, left school. When asked why he left school, he said, 'Madam (Women teacher) called me sweeper's son'. It hurt him so much knowing the stigma that society has placed on a sweeper's son.

Bijoy, Terzan, Manik and Raton also left the school for the same reason. Some times teachers ask the Dalit Student to clean the toilet of the school for the simple reason of descent. This type of behavior of teachers discouraged students from Dalit communities to going to school.

Shri Tiger Bansfor (10), son of Komola Rani Bansfor, in Saiyoddpur said he does not know how his future will be. He lost the dream and has no vision for the future. All of the people he associates with are sweepers and toilet cleaners. None of them have better jobs and no hope for the future

Shri Bindu Bansfor volunteered the information that children are not interested to go to school as they have no hope for better employment opportunities.

**Out of attention:**

This community is not given sufficient development intervention by the government or NGOs.

**Impact of Untouchability:**

- Children of this community are facing several type of discrimination in academic institutions and in general public.
- They are bound to do the same job performed by their ancestors for generations.
- They have no opportunity to choose other professions.
- They are facing tremendous health risks.
- They are discriminated upon in health and other services.

**Hope and aspiration:**

- The people of this community want to be mainstreamed in society.
- They want to lead a dignified life.
- They want equal opportunity in every sphere of life.
- They want freedom to mingle with the common people of the country.
- They want their children to be educated.
- They want to work with other people of the nation.
- They also seek acceptance from others as well as entrance to any public or private institution so that they can get job or involve them as employees with dignity, equality and justice.
- They want to lead their life just like any other Bangladeshi citizen.
- They want hygienic, safe and permanent residence to live with their family.

**Recommendation:**

- To provide alternative livelihood in place of scavenging.
- In terms of Dalit children dropping out of school teachers have to be trained to change their attitude towards untouchability.
- To stop manual scavenging and provide them with alternative livelihood opportunities.
- To solve their housing problem by allocating khas land for every family and provide financial support for housing.
- Enact law by the parliament and proclaim untouchability as a punishable offence.
- To encourage child education and start scholarship schemes with quota system for higher education.
- They should be provided pure drinking water and sanitation.

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