

## Census 2011 belies Gujarat's claims, 2,500 households still use manual scavenging

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For Gujarat, that has declared itself as a “manual scavenging free state” since 1992, the data from Census 2011 reveals a presence of over 2,500 households in the state where the night soil is removed physically by humans.

The data gains importance in the backdrop of Union government's plans to introduce a Bill in the Parliament that aims to eradicate the practice — having found over five lakh people engaged in collecting and disposing night soil from homes — in various states.

The housing census data for Gujarat shows there are 7,456 households that have service latrines (defined as places from where human excreta is removed physically by human beings or animals such as pigs, etc).

Of these, 2,566 households have night soil from their latrines removed by humans (1,408 are in rural Gujarat, and 1,158 are in urban centres). In the remaining 4,800 households, night soil is serviced by animals.

“It is no surprise that these figures for Gujarat appeared. Even the Gujarat High Court has noted the existence of manual scavengers in the state,” said Coen Kompier, a senior specialist of International Labour Standards at the International Labour Organisation's (ILO), India office in Delhi.

In the last week of February this year, Kompier had headed a consultation of judges, academics, government officials and foreign and local non-profits in Ahmedabad. In an interview to The Indian Express then, he had dismissed the state government's no manual scavenging claim as “clearly non-factual”.

The following week, the state government responded to Kompier's published comments, and stated: “Gujarat has been declared a scavenging free state since 1992. A statewide survey on safai kamdars/sanitary workers was conducted in 2004 and a total of 47,604 families were identified as sanity workers, but not manual scavengers.”

Interestingly, the state's Social Justice Department too had roped in the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) and Kamdar Swasthya Suraksha Mandal (KSSM), a manual scavengers' union, to organise a similar consultation several weeks earlier to the ILO consultation. The recommendations are expected to help chart a strategy to eradicate the caste-based occupation in Gujarat.

Efforts to eradicate the practice gained traction when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on June 17 last year that manual scavenging should be eradicated across India within six months.

On Monday, during a hearing of a PIL in the Supreme Court, the UPA government informed the SC that it will introduce a Bill in the monsoon session of the Parliament to amend the 19-year-old Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act.

The 2011 census data shows that over 52 lakh households in Gujarat have no latrines within their premises. Of these, 49 lakh defecate in open while two lakh use public latrines.

About 25,000 additional

households dispose their night soil into open drains while over 5.4 lakh houses have pit latrine. Of the total 1.2

crore households in Gujarat, 64 lakh have no drainage facility, while 39 lakh have no bathing facility within the premises.

The census data shows that there are almost eight lakh households in the country where the night soil from the latrines is removed by humans. Chandigarh, Sikkim, Goa and Lakshwadeep are the only regions in the country that do not have a single instance of manual scavenging.