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## Rajasthan town free from manual cleaning of toilets

IANS



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New Delhi, Nov 19 (IANS) Till a few years ago Dalits in Alwar, Rajasthan were employed in inhumane manual scavenging practices. But thanks to social activism and NGO Sulabh International, the town was Thursday declared free from the illegal practice.

Commemorating the birth anniversary of late prime minister Indira Gandhi and in observance of 'World Toilet Day', Sulabh International Thursday marked the end of its six-year long fight against the caste-based tradition in Alwar.

'To eliminate the need for human scavengers, I developed a (easy to maintain) toilet which is very user friendly and fairly cheap. We have managed to install this toilet in all the households of Alwar,' Bindeshwar Pathak, Sulabh International founder said.

'Without this technological innovation, we would have found it difficult to bring the scavengers into the mainstream. The practice in itself is a blot on our society,' he added.

The practice of manual scavenging, which involves cleaning dry latrines and clearing carcasses with hands, is an offence under the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry (non-flush) Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993.

However, the practice is still prevalent in rural areas and small towns. Following an age-old tradition of passing on the practice to others in their lower caste families, it is women who are the worst affected.

Pathak said that in Alwar the scavengers were given vocational training in stitching, making noodles and pickles and basic fashion designing as well as imparting them training in English and Hindi.

'I feel extremely proud when people from all walks of life buy pickles and noodles prepared by me,' said Sushila Chauhan, who left scavenging in 2004.

Another young girl Dolly, who was till recently a manual scavenger, said: 'In spite of societal pressures and financial constraints, I continued my studies and completed my graduation with the active support of Sulabh.'

Over 115 women from scavengers families in Alwar have given up the practice to take up new roles in society.

After Alwar, Pathak says the fight has just begun.

'Our journey has just started and would be complete only when we are able to free the around 115,037 (as per 2001 census) manual scavengers from all parts of the country,' Pathak said.

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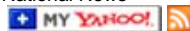
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