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Title: Need to introduce a scheme to provide financial assistance to the Safai Karamacharis in the country.

SHRIMATI BOTCHA JHANSI LAKSHMI (VIZIANAGARAM): I would like to bring to the notice of the Government regarding the plight of the manual scavengers in Vizianagaram district, Andhra Pradesh.

Even after 63 years of independence, it is really shameful that some people earn their livelihood by cleaning human excreta with their hands. Over the years, books have been written, committees and commissions have been set up, laws have been enacted and crores of rupees have been spent to eradicate manual scavenging. But the practices of manual scavenging still continues in the country.

Several State Governments have denied in court about the existence of manual scavenging despite evidences.

Manual scavengers are prone to skin diseases over a short period of time. In this country out of total number of scavengers, 95 per cent are women scavengers. In Andhra Pradesh which I represent, there are 13 lakh sweeper-scavengers. There is an urgent need to rehabilitate them by providing hand-gloves and masks in absence of which, they are falling prey to diseases like respiratory problem, gastroenteritis, particularly skin diseases.

It is a matter of great sorrow that the community engaged in this job is looked down and isolated from the main society. Though Dry Latrines Act was enacted in 1993, still half of the States are yet to implement it. Now, the manual scavenging job has been outsourced. But the people who are continuing this occupation are not getting any financial help like senior citizen pension. Apart from this, they are overburdened with occupation-related diseases. They are feeling helpless and facing constant health risks and looking forward for financial help from the Government. In spite of introduction of automatic scavenging, their condition has not been improved. Government should take immediate remedial measures in the matter.

A scheme to provide financial assistance to safai karmacharis should be formulated immediately like the schemes for extension of financial assistance to handicapped persons.