

Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA)

PRESS RELEASE

Pass the bill or we block the parliament: Manual scavengers

New Delhi, 7th August 2013

Parliament needs to pass the new bill prohibiting manual scavenging in the current monsoon session or the safai karmacharis will not let the parliament function in its next session, besides demonstrating against all MPs in their respective constituencies. This was the message given by the hundreds of safai karmacharis from the Jantar-Mantar today who gathered under the banner of Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) to protest against government apathy in abolishing the practice of manual scavenging from the country. The safai karmachari women also burnt the baskets as a symbol of the casteist legacy that they have been bearing for generations. Safai karmacharis, mainly women from eight states, also marched towards the parliament. Many social activists, MPs, intellectuals also joined the demonstration as a mark of solidarity.

One of the demands raised at the demonstration and which was also included in the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister today was to give compensation of Rs. 10 Lakhs to the family of every sewage worker dying while cleaning the sewage pits and also providing a dignified non-cleaning government job to one of its family members. Besides the immediate passage of the bill in the parliament and rehabilitation of all manual scavengers, the memorandum also demanded an apology from the PM on behalf of the nation towards all indignity thrust upon safai karmacharis for centuries.

Addressing the gathering CPI MP D. Raja said that it is a national shame that this practice still continues. He wanted that whatever time in the monsoon session is left for parliamentary business, it should give topmost priority to passing this bill. CPM MP M.B. Rajesh assured the gathering that from roads to the parliament his party will always be part of this fight to eradicate manual scavenging. He also promised to put forth all the amendments proposed by the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) to the new bill to be tabled in parliament.

Noted social activist and ex-NAC member Harsh Mander regretted that even after 66 years of independence the evil practice still continues. Noted international jurist Usha Ramanathan said that it seems as if there are two followings for a law. We need to teach law to lawmakers because every time we have to prove afresh in the courts that manual scavenging still exists in this country. Senior expert on public health Dr. Imrana Kadir manual scavenging only gives filth and death. Unless the rest of the social society doesn't associate with the movement for its eradication, it will keep a question mark on our democratic values. Ex-IAS officer Lalit Mohan Mathur said that this movement has to be continued to keep government pressurized.

National Convener of the SKA Bezwada Wilson said that it is just because of our casteist mindsets that this practice still continues. Otherwise how it can be possible that a country which can create missiles can't create a technology to abolish manual scavenging? He said that they will question all parliamentarians why this practice still exists in their constituencies.

Among others to speak at the occasion included eminent RTI activist Nikhil Dey, Right to food activist Ritika Khera, national secretary of PUCL Kavita Shrivastava, social activist Ram Niwas from Rajasthan SKA board members Dr. Y. Moses, Deepti Sukumar and many more from various organizations. Many scavenger women also shared their experiences and anguish with the people. Among them was a daughter Moni of a sewage worker Ashok from Delhi who died recently alongwith two others while cleaning a sewage pit at Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts and Culture, a stone's throw away from national parliament. She pleaded that no other child should lose his or her father as she did, besides demanding proper compensation for every deceased and mechanization of sewage cleaning processs.

Bezwada Wilson

National Convener

Safai Karmachari Andolan