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Safai karamcharis seek alternative jobs

Staff Correspondent

6.76 lakh people collect night soil manually in the country

In the 11th Plan, it was said that the practice of manual collection of night soil will be eradicated

'State Government is not using the funds released for rehabilitation of safai karamcharis'

Mysore: The Karnataka State Safai Karamchari Nirmoolana Mahasamsthe here on Thursday has urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to direct the State Government to create alternative jobs for safai karamcharis and their dependents as assured by him in the 11th Plan.

Addressing presspersons, Peddanna, State president of the mahasamsthe, said a memorandum detailing the plight of the safai karamcharis, who are engaged in manual collection of night soil, would be submitted shortly to the Prime Minister in New Delhi. Mr. Manmohan Singh declared that the Government was committed to eradicate the obnoxious and inhuman practice of manual collection of night soil. Mr. Manmohan Singh said that safai karamcharis engaged in such work would be provided with alternative employment by 2012. However, the Karnataka State Government was doing nothing to eradicate the practice. Instead the safai karamcharis were continued to be engaged by the State Government in manual collection of night soil.

The number of safai karamcharis who were engaged in collection of night soil was estimated at 6.76 lakh in the country while 2.8 lakh of the karamcharis were in Karnataka. Even after over 60 years after the country became independent, the socio-economic conditions of the safai karamcharis had not improved. This was undoubtedly a blot on the country which was emerging as an important economic power, he added.

Despite passing the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act - 1993 to liberate the safai karamcharis from the obnoxious practice of carrying night soil manually, the State Government had done nothing to liberate them.

Instead the State Government was filing "false" affidavits to the Union Government, Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission on eradication of the practice, he alleged.

Thousands of safai karamcharis, who were engaged in handling the night soil manually, clearing choked drain with minimum equipment, and gathering night soil collected on railway platforms were succumbing to diseases such as tuberculosis and cancer. "The Chairperson of the National Safai Karamchari Commission, Santhosh Choudhry, rightly pointed out that life expectancy of a safai karamchari was only 45 years," he said.

Funds

Although the Centre released Rs. 400 crore in the 10th Plan for the rehabilitation of safai karamcharis, the State Government spent only Rs. 146 crore.

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The State Government exhibited similar apathy while spending Rs. 500 crore released in 2007 for the purpose. Same was the case with the 18 per cent funds earmarked in the civic bodies for the purpose, he regretted.

Mr. Peddanna suggested that members of the Karnataka State Safai Karamchari Nirmoolana Mahasamsthe should be included in the Rehabilitation Committee.

He said the funds released for the rehabilitation of the safai karamcharis should be utilised fully.

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