

SAFAI KARAMCHARI ANDOLAN

Former manual scavengers to storm Delhi, demand total eradication of manual scavenging and rehabilitation package

‘Government should apologise to us’

New Delhi, 1 November 2010

Around 1,000 safai karamcharis from 20 states, who were until recently engaged in the outlawed practice of manual scavenging, assembled in Delhi today and resolved to return to Delhi on 1 January 2011 if their demands were not met.

“We are giving the government time to announce a special package for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers,” said Bezwada Wilson, national convenor of the Safai Karamchari Andolan, at the meeting held in Mavalankar Hall at the Constitution Club.

As part of the rehabilitation package, he demanded that the government should apologise to the safai karamcharis for the violation of their dignity; demolish all dry latrines in the country; punish those violating the 1993 Act that outlawed manual scavenging; punish dry latrine owners and those forcibly making safai karamcharis do manual scavenging; release Rs 5 lakh per manual scavenger for rehabilitation, excluding Rs 10,000 as immediate relief; 5 acres of land; Antyodaya cards and houses. He also demanded special pension for women safai karamchari who are either single, widowed or aged.

“If the government does not accept our demands within 60 days, we will all come to Delhi and stay put here until our demands are met,” Wilson said.

At the programme, liberated manual scavengers from various parts of the country shared their experiences. Narayanamma from Karnataka, who was the first to quit the practice, reported how the large dry latrine she used to collect 16 buckets of night soil from, every day, was now a school. Anita from Uttar Pradesh spoke how she is trying to make sure her children do not have the same fate as hers. “They would give us rotis

as though we were dogs,” she said, “We could get water only from the river.” Saroj from Ambala in Haryana recalled how she fell from a ladder when and the collected excreta fell over her. The house owners refused to help her get up, only pushing her with a stick, due to untouchability. Each speaker demanded an apology from the government.

Supporting their demands were Harsh Mander and Aruna Roy, members of the National Advisory Council, the Communist Party of India’s D Raja, former secretary to the government of India PS Krishnan and Planning Commission member Bhalchandra Mungekar, amongst others.

The event was a culmination of a month-long bus yatra from five different places in the country. They came from Srinagar in Kashmir (Jai Bheem Marg), Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu (Periyar Marg), Dibrugarh in Assam (Birsa Munda Marg), Khurda in Orissa (Jhalkari Bai Marg) and Dehradun in Uttaranchal (Savitri Bai Marg). Along the way, the bus went to Dalit bastis in 172 districts in 20 states to persuade those still engaged in the practice of manual scavenging to quit.

For further details:

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