

Time bound action plan needed to make India manual scavenging free

New Delhi, 7th September 2013.

Parliament has finally passed the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013. Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) sees the passing of new bill as an effort to rectify the historical injustice and indignity suffered by manual scavengers. It is sad to notice that the government of India has taken 20 long years to bring the new act, although it was fully aware that earlier act passed in 1993 was useless or perhaps rendered useless by all those who were responsible to uphold it. But continuous fight through the corridors of power, in the judiciary and out on the streets by the lakhs of manual scavengers throughout the country forced the government to come up with something new. But a lot is still left to be desired.

SKA has serious concerns with new bill as well because may be good in intentions, it was quite weak in action. SKA had proposed more twenty amendments to the parliamentary standing committee on the aforesaid bill. Out of these only a few were taken. Even during discussion on the bill in parliament, amendments moved by senior members like D. Raja (CPI) in Rajyasabha and Mohan Jena (BJD) and Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD) in Loksabha were not paid heed to by government. Especially detailed amendments moved by D.Raja in Rajyasabha were very relevant to achieve goal of total eradication. It is sad that they were not added.

Issue of manual scavenging is closely related with Indian Railways. Indian government in general and Railways in specific is the biggest employer of manual scavengers in country. Bill does not acknowledge this fully and hence there is no remedy to it. Similarly issue of sewerage workers is also not adequately addressed. There are serious lacunas and loopholes which may lead scavenging to continue. As minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Kumari Selja assured the parliament that these lacunas shall be addressed while framing rules and guidelines of the act, we hope and strongly demand that government keeps its promise.

We demand that there should be a fresh national survey according to the new definition of manual scavengers. Those who are identified in this survey, and even those who left this filthy occupation from 1993 till now, should be made eligible for rehabilitation. By spending whole amount of Rs.570 crore, allotted in the budget for this financial year the, government should prove that they are serious in melting out justice to the most marginalized section of the society. We demand that PM should announce special package of five thousand cores for elimination of manual scavenging from the country. There should be time bound action plan for creating a manual scavenging free India.

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