

# Launching of Samajik Parivartan Yatra

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(For Eradication of Manual Scavenging in India)

Manual scavenging is the most obnoxious and inhuman practice violating the dignity and human personhood of safai karmacharis. It involves the engagement or employment of sections of people to manually dispose human excreta from dry latrines with bare minimum aids such as scrapers, brooms and baskets.

Manual scavenging is integrally linked with caste system and is imposed on certain dalit sub-caste groups particularly on their women. As a result all persons engaged in manual scavenging are dalits, and of them 82 % are women.

Manual scavenging continues to persist even today after it has been banned 17 years ago through the 'Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993. A major reason for its continuance is the attitude of state local body authorities towards the condition and plight of safai karmacharis. They seem to tacitly agree with the casteist ideology that assigns unclean occupations to dalits and hence have totally ignored the 1993 Act. At the same time they justify their inaction alleging that the safai karmacharis are quite content doing manual scavenging.

## **Safai Karmachari Andolan**

Safai Karmachari Andolan is totally opposed to the casteist ideology. It is a national campaign movement of safai karmacharis committed to liberate all safai karmacharis from manual scavenging and restore their dignity and personhood.

Since 1996, we the safai karmacharis are engaged in a protracted struggle to eradicate manual scavenging and liberate all safai karmacharis. We have been employing different strategies in our campaign - taking surveys to identify dry latrines, users and those forced into manual scavenging, filing petitions and complaints with government officials at different levels, educating and sensitising the civil society and dry latrine users, filing of public interest litigation in the supreme court and networking with individuals, media and civil society organisations to form solidarity and pressure groups. Safai Karmachari Andolan has substantial evidence in 18 states of India of the prevalence of manual scavenging.

We filed the PIL in Supreme Court in 2003 along with 18 other organizations and individuals in which we named the state governments, Central government ministries and departments as respondents. So far there have been 21 hearings. There has been a noticeable pattern to state official responses. First, a total denial of any existence of manual scavenging in their respective jurisdictions, next partial admission, when we produced sample photographic

evidence and finally, claiming complete compliance by dubiously destroying only those places which we presented as samples. In some cases, they even misinterpreted the Act to intimidate and threaten safai karmacharis. The state local body officials have never used the provisions of the Act to take legal action against the owners of dry latrines.

Such responses by state bodies and the Apex Court's order prompted us to undertake an extensive sample survey which is essentially the Government responsibility. We have conducted the survey in 274 districts of 18 states and have documented 7065 cases of persons engaged in manual scavenging.

The survey process has added to the numerical strength of the SKA movement with Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and volunteer enumerators and a host of other community members dedicating themselves and pledging to eliminate manual scavenging in their respective districts and states.

All in all our campaign over the last few years has built up tremendous pressure on the government to implement the 'Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993'. It has opened a vision of a manual scavenging free India. And since 2007 SKA is engaged in an intensive strategic programme called 'Action-2010' to eradicate manual scavenging completely from India by December 2010. Our national bus yatra is part of this intensive effort.

### **'Samajik Parivarthan Yatra: for Eradication of Manual Scavenging**

Today we are flagging off the historical 'Samajik Parivarthan Yatra'. It is a strategic programme of Bus Yatra which starts from five different corners of India, will traverse through several districts in 20 states and finally culminate in New Delhi with a large rally.

The Bus Yatra begins on 30<sup>th</sup> September from the following five points and culminates in Delhi on 29<sup>th</sup> October:

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| 1. <b>Jai Bheem Marg</b>    | J&K,Punjab,HP,Haryana,Rajasthan,Gujarat,MP,UP and Delhi |
| 2. <b>Birsa Munda Marg</b>  | Assam,West Bengal,Jharkhand,Bihar,U P and Delhi         |
| 3. <b>Periyar Marg</b>      | Tamilnadu,Karnataka,AP,Maharashtra,MP,UP and Delhi      |
| 4. <b>Jhalkari Bai Marg</b> | Odisha, Chattisgarh, M P, U P and Delhi                 |
| 5. <b>Savitri Bai Marg</b>  | Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi                    |

The longest route travels for 30 days.

### **Social Actions during the Yatra :**

- Street meetings
- Community meetings
- Public meetings in state Capitals and all prominent locations on the basis of existence
- of manual scavenging

- Rallies
- Dharnas
- Burning the Baskets
- Meetings with local, District and state officials
- Press meets

The historical Samajik Parivartan Yatra would be significant for the following reasons:

The yatra, mainly liberated safai karmacharis will for the first time be linked with one another and journey together.

The yatris will in district after district motivate and inspire others who are still engaged in manual scavenging to free themselves from the obnoxious practise and regain their sense of dignity.

Along the way, the yatris will reach out to the civic body administration and authorities appealing for the last time to fulfil their duties of implementing the provisions of the 1993 Employment of manual scavengers prohibition Act.

At the point of culmination in New Delhi, the yatris will in large numbers raise their voices to demand the government of India to demonstrate its will to liberate and rehabilitate all those engaged in manual scavenging by ordering the administrative structures to do the needful immediately.

### **Our Demands**

- An official apology from the Government of India for violating the human dignity and human rights Safai Karmcharis for over three thousand years.
- Eradicate Manual Scavenging
  - Demolish Dry Latrines
  - Implement the 1993 Act Strictly.
  - Punish Violators of the Act 1993
  - Punish Dry Latrine Owners and all those who forced safai karmacharis for cleaning shit under the SC/ST Atrocity Prohibition Act 1989.
- Rehabilitation Package
  - Release Immediate relief of Rs. 10,000 for safai karmacharis
  - Provide minimum 5 Lac rupees to safai karmacharis to take up dignified occupations.
  - Provide 5 Acre fertile land to safai karmacharis for dignified livelihood
  - Give Antyodaya Card to safai karmacharis
  - Provide houses to safai karmacharis
- Provide special pension for single safai karmachari women.
- Provide special pension for aged safai karmacharis

- Provide free education with monthly scholarship to all safai karmachari children for as many generations as their parents had worked as safai karmacharis.
- Provide job oriented technical education with residential facility and Job placements to the dependent youth of safai karmacharis.
- Provide support for dignified livelihood to safai karmachari women in accordance with their choice of livelihood schemes.
- Register the assets created for safai karmachari women in their name only.

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