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Beginning of the end of manual scavenging

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CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu is all set to do away with manual scavenging, 16 years after the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act (1993) came into force.

Activists working towards the same feel that manual scavengers have finally got their due of rehabilitation this year, after years of their struggle. Many of them are now either working in petty shops or doing their own small businesses.

In a State consultation meeting in which about 60 NGOs participated last week, it was decided that by September next year, the NGOs would work towards the declaration of complete eradication of manual scavenging in the State.

A study conducted earlier this year by NGO Safai Karamchari Aandolan (SKA) identified 174 manual scavengers and 545 dry latrines in Tamil Nadu. Scores of manual scavengers had to

fight for more than six months for the rehabilitation package by the Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation.

Another study did at the end of the year by SKA found that all the dry latrines were demolished.

Most importantly, the 174 manual scavengers had quit the job and were rehabilitated. Of these, 50 have become permanent workers.

SKA State convener Samuel Velankanni said, on November 10, the last straw of manual scavenging came off when three scavengers were found in Virudhnagar district. This was brought to the notice of the district collector with photographic evidence, following which the workers were rehabilitated. Hearing a petition in April and May in this regard, the Supreme Court had decided to hold district collectors accountable for any existence of manual scavenging.

Meanwhile, a senior TADCO official said as per the data available with the department, all the manual scavengers

identified have been rehabilitated in the State.

In States like Punjab, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Orissa and Haryana, the abhorrent practices still present. In Andhra Pradesh, though a full stop has been put to scavenging, they are yet to be rehabilitated.