

Speeches

Speech delivered by Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha, Smt. Meira Kumar on Water Conservation and Management in G-074, Parliament Library Building, New Delhi on 13 March, 2013

I welcome you all to this meeting of the Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management. The subject matter for today's meeting is 'Technological Options in Rural Sanitation-Indian Context'. This is a subject very close to my heart.

Indian economy has grown during the last few years placing India in the front ranks of emerging economies, yet, we are lagging behind in the field of sanitation. As per the 2011 census, about 814 million of our 1.2 billion population, do not have access to basic sanitation facilities, resulting in high mortality and morbidity.

Lack of sanitation facilities have an adverse impact on the quality of human life and health, forcing households into the continued indignity of open defecation, which is an acute problem especially for women and young girls. Provision of adequate sanitation is a pressing challenge in rural India. Hence, it is proposed to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation under the Millennium Development Goals.

Manual scavenging is another disturbing practice associated with the lack of sanitation facilities. Our Constitution entitles each one of us, the right to live with dignity. Yet, thousands of our people are engaged in manual scavenging. Although every citizen is guaranteed the fundamental right to equality, it is only the people belonging to a specific caste who are forced into this occupation. This practice, to my mind, is the worst manifestation of the caste system.

Recognizing the intensity of the problem, our Parliament had enacted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act in 1993. Recently, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill 2012, has been introduced in the Parliament and is being examined by the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment.

However, mere legislation is not enough. I firmly believe that while addressing the issue of sanitation, we must adopt an approach in conformity with our thrust for inclusive growth. We must delink profession from caste and change the mindset of the society which expects people of a certain caste to sweep and clean. We must condemn and eradicate this de-humanizing system which perpetrates the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the weakest of the weak. We must focus on rehabilitating and encouraging these social groups to take up alternate means of livelihood. Additionally, we must promote the use of toilet facilities and motivate people to achieve total sanitation.

Technology has played a decisive role in the sanitation movement. Now there are several designs and technologies available for installing a household type sanitary latrine. Sulabh International, a non-profit organization in India, has done commendable work towards providing affordable sanitation facilities. Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, Founder of Sulabh International, is the man behind the success story of rural sanitation. The development of low-cost technology has

also proved successful for the Government of India's programme of 'eradication of scavenging'. Dr. Pathak is today with us and will enlighten us on the subject, 'Technological Options in Rural Sanitation-Indian Context'.

Thank you.