

Launching of Periyar Marg: Kanyakumari to Delhi

The route is named after Erode Venkata Ramasamy (1879-1973), affectionately called by his followers as Periyar. He was an Indian independence and social activist, who started the Self-Respect Movement. Periyar propagated the principles of rationalism, self-respect, women's rights and eradication of caste. He opposed the exploitation and marginalization of the so called "Untouchables".

On 7-10-10 Samajik Parivartan Yatra's second route 'Periyar Marg' started from Kanyakumari - the Southern tip of India beside the beach in the midst of sudden pouring

rain but with unrelenting determination. The environment was festive with the Bus being decked with banners and posters. It became the launching stage for the big gathering comprising liberated safai karmacharis in big numbers, SKA team and many local community activists and members, media representatives along with the following prominent people:

- Karuppuswamy - Arundhatiyar Human Rights Forum
- Poodhlingam - President of Thupparavu Thoalilalar Sangham
- Fr. Arularaj, Ms. Sarabai & Mr. Peter - Manida Urimaikkana Kudimakkal Eyakkam
- Rajamanikam - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Tupparivalagal Sangam
- Murugedam - Advocate
- Murasu Kalai Kalu, Roorthi, Anand - Writers
- Mr. Shanmugam, Mr. Ganesh- Dalit Rights Activists (AHRF)
- Dr. K. Ganesan - TNUF District Convenor
- Mr. Bhootalingam, S. Murugan, Sendil Kumar, Manindar - AITC District Activists
- K. Anuradha - National core team member (SKA)

Rameswari from Theni District, Pushpavalli from Tiruvarur dt, Aachi from Nagapattinam dt, Umaial from Pudukkottai dt garlanded the portrait of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, flagged off the Bus Yatra on Periyar Marg and released colourful posters. Cultural team of AHRF with their drum beats triggered all the local people also. Head bands, pamphlets and demands were also released by other liberated women like Thamilrasi, Sumathi, Mallika in the midst of deafening roar of slogans and pouring rain. Many of them had travelled 16-12 hours to reach Kanyakumari. The atmosphere was electrified with their narration of their horrifyingly humiliating experiences as safai karmacharis and accounts of how they fought back. Samajik Parivartan Yatris - Samuel Velengani, Anuradha, Karuppuswamy, Renuga shared the context & aim of the yatra, demands, route maps of all five routes, details of Periyar Marg and role of liberated safai karmacharis to reach the unreached safai karmacharis still engaged in manual scavenging. All the solidarity groups' representatives expressed their concern on continuance of manual scavenging in the country and gave an inspiring call to all the community for liberation apart from cautioning the users for immediate conversion/ demolition of dry latrines. They also regretted inertia of civil society and Govt's apathy in doing away with manual scavenging, until the safai karmacharis themselves moved onto streets against manual scavenging in one voice across the country. Many media representatives took interviews with yatris and liberated women. Samajik Parivartan yatra proceeded towards Nagarcoil for their next destination.

Around 12.30 Pm, Yatra proceeded further from Kanyakumari. Yatra on Periyar Marg arrives at Periyar Statue in Tirunalveli town: Adi Tamil Peravai team led by Mr. Khadirasen welcomed Periyar marg team at Periyar statue in the bus stand junction. Periyar was garlanded by liberated safai karmacharis and amidst the slogans and curious stares of the general public, the local dalit leaders publicly endorsed the



demands of Samajik Parivartan Yatra. Mr. Sathivelu local dalit leader took special attention to invite and to ensure coverage of issues of safai karmacharis, the most marginalised among dalits. Law college Students felicitate liberated SKs Then law college students organised an event and they were shocked when they heard of manual scavenging. One of the law students related with the experience of manual scavenging which made the group emotional and unanimously expressed their solidarity. These youngsters applauded the courage of liberated SKs for this yatra and felicitated 2 SKs with shawls and flowers. Adi Tamil Peravai hosted a delicious lunch and the Yatra proceeded further.

Tutukudi: Community Meetings in Kavalipatti Area and Satalin Colony Yatra visited the community area in this town. Liberated SKs addressed a big gathering and shared their struggles and successes. They especially talked about the phase of their silent acceptance of discrimination and the later phase -- liberation demonstrations. Community grandly felicitated liberated safai karmacharis with 5 shawls and congratulated all Yatris with flowers. Warm farewell was extended to the team Virudhnagar: When the Yatris reached the fireworks town of Sivakasi, they were given a hearty welcome in Dheru Community area, and Pichhaali area, with fireworks, songs, slogans and posters. Arundhatiyar Human Rights Forum and Ms.Sangili Priya and many more dalit women joined the yatris in a jubilant rally and announced the yatra goals to the people.

AHRF hosted the dinner and yatris stayed that night in Virudnagar.



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Sks holding Yatra posters



Cultural activities before flagging off



Flagging off of Periyar Marg