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KIDS ALLEGE DISCRIMINATION BY TEACHERS

Outcaste children lament prejudice in govt-run schools

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■ Dharmistha Harijan, 9, and Hetal Harijan, 10, both sisters from Bharathari village in Kheda are studying in std 4 and 5, respectively, in the village's government primary school. However, they have different class tasks than their counterparts in the same school, as their schools curriculum also includes cleaning the school lavatories!

■ Still others like Rahul Parmar, 11, from Ramgadh village in Surendranagar, a class 5 student is not allowed to take part in the school's cultural program and is forced to sit in the last row in the classroom.

No, they aren't naughty but their fault lies in the fact that they belong to the socially ostracised class - the untouchables. More than 1,000 children like Rahul, Dharmistha and Hetal lamented their fate while in their lamentation opened the Pandora's box at the Gandhi Ashram on Monday with their stories and the pains hidden in them. Many of these children have left their



studies because of the rampant discrimination and the forced practices like cleaning school toilets and manual scavenging.

A public hearing of young boys and girls belonged to the lowest caste social strata, was held by Navsarjan — a non governmental organization active in human rights and issues of discrimination against the Dalits. The public hearing was the result of a study done by the NGO, which found that the Dalit children

and mainly the scavenger community children who are called as Valmikis are forced to do menial work like cleaning class rooms, toilets and urinals in the school where they go to study.

The public hearing was made in front of Panel of eminent citizens of the state like Justice RA Mehta, former acting Chief Justice of Gujarat, Amrut Modi, secretary of Sabarmati Ashram, Ishwarbhai Patel, former member of National Commission for Safai Karmacharies, Martin Macwan, Dalit leader and founder of Navsarjan, Mari Thekakara writer and journalist and Prof Ghanshyam Shah, political scientist.

Manjula Pradeep, executive director of Navsarjan said, "The study has been done in 12 districts of the state and the plight of children comes out right from their mouths. We want to bring this issue to the notice of the state government." Another panel member said that the court should take up the statements of these children as suo motu.

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