

SWaCH holds 'Dignity March' to protest against NSCC

National Society for Clean Cities had criticised waste pickers saying they were not reliable and lacked accountability

Bhagyashree Kulthe

Members of SWaCH, a credit society of waste pickers, and Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) took to the streets on Sunday to protest against statements made by a city NGO, the National Society for Clean Cities (NSCC).

The organisation had commented in a section of the media on December 25 that waste pickers were neither reliable nor accountable.

The rally called 'Dignity March' was flagged off by Varrai founder Mohan Dharia and Rickshaw Panchayat president Baba Adhav from the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) building. Around 1,500 waste pickers took part in the march.

"Members of SWaCH are governed by a strict set of reg-



ulations. The organisation has strict checks and balances and its members are completely accountable to it," said KKPKP.

The KKPKP lambasted the NSCC for saying that waste pickers were a security threat.

"By saying this, the NSCC is

marking an entire working community as thieves. The NSCC's allegations are insulting not only to the waste pick-

Sanket Deshpande DNA

Members of SWaCH and KKPKP took out a rally from the PMC building to Mahatma Gandhi's statue at the railway station on Sunday

ers but to the other unorganised labourers such as domestic helps, washermen, newspaper delivery boys and milkmen. Waste pickers have time and again proved their integrity by returning valuables, including cash and gold, which had mistakenly been thrown in garbage. Waste pickers should be rehabilitated under various government schemes," said its members.

They said waste pickers from Pune had participated in a national meet of waste pickers in Ahmedabad, where Union minister for environment Jairam Ramesh assured them to amend laws and bring dignity to them.

Dharia spoke about the dignity of labour and equality. He acknowledged the thankless job done by them every day.

The rally wound through the

streets of Nava Pul, Lal Mahal where the group paid respect to the statue of Jijamata. It proceeded via Daruwala Pul to Zilla Parishad, where they garlanded the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar and ended the march at Gandhi statue at the Pune station. Naresh Dadhich from IUCCA told the waste pickers present at the station that he had come to salute them.

Hausa Sasane, Suman More, Shanta Kadam and Rebecca Kedari, all waste pickers, spoke about their work.

Sharada Wadekar of the Molkari Panchayat expressed solidarity with the cause of the waste pickers. Several students from local colleges like Karve Institute of Social Service, Fergusson College, NGO representatives and citizens from all walks of life attended the rally.