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Bihar: 16 get death for killing Dalits

Santosh Singh Posted online: Thursday , Apr 08, 2010 at 0841 hrs

Patna : Thirteen years after 58 Dalits were massacred by a private upper caste army, Ranvir Sena, in Laxmanpur-Bathe village of Jehanabad, a Patna court on Wednesday sentenced 16 persons to death and awarded life sentence to 10 others. Sixteen others were acquitted.

The court of Additional District and Sessions Judge-I convicted 26 people, treating it as the rarest of rare case. Most of the accused owed allegiance to the Ranvir Sena.

Laxmanpur-Bathe was the last big assault by Ranvir Sena against Dalits in 1997 after it engaged in a caste war with MCC, now CPI (Maoist). Naxals, who treated Dalits as their sympathisers, avenged Laxmanpur-Bathe massacre by killing 34 upper caste men on March 18, 1999 in Senari village, Jehanabad.

After the pronouncement by Additional District Sessions Judge Vijay Prakash Mishra, one of the seven prosecution lawyers, C K Sinha, said: "As Laxmanpur-Bathe was one of the biggest carnage, the court took strong view of the killing of the Dalits in a brutal manner and sentenced 16 people to death treating it as the rarest of rare case." The court also slapped a fine of Rs 50,000 each on 10 convicts getting life imprisonment. Some convicts were sent to Beur jail on Wednesday. The court cancelled the bail of some convicts with immediate effect.

Families of victims, who awaited the verdict, called it a landmark judgment. Chandan, a relative of a victim, said: "Our families were completely wiped out. The court did the right thing by pronouncing death sentence to 16 people."

Charges were framed against 44 Ranvir Sena men on December 23, 2008 on charges of killing 58 people, including 27 women and 10 children on December 1, 1997. During the hearing, 91 of the 152 witnesses deposed before the court and 47 were made accused in the case. The trial had concluded on April 1 this year. The case was transferred to Patna court from Jehanabad following a Patna High Court order in October 1999.

Those sentenced to death are Girija Singh, Surendra Singh, Ashok Singh, Gopal Sharan Singh, Baleshwar Singh, Dawarka Singh, Vijendra Singh, Nawal Singh, Baliram Singh, Nandu Singh, Sheomohan Sharma, Pramod Singh, Shatrughan Singh, Ramkeval Sharma, Dharma Singh and Nand Singh.

Those sentenced to life are Babloo Sharma, Ashok Singh, Mithilesh Sharma, Dhariksan Choudhary, Navin Kumar, Ravindra Singh, Surendra Singh, Sunil Kumar, Pramod Kumar and Chandreshwar Singh. Two other accused - Bhukhal Singh and Sudarshan Singh - died during the trial.

Several BJP leaders, including former Union minister C P Thakur, had deposed before the Justice Amir Das led-commission, set up by the then RJD government of Lalu Prasad to probe into the case.

With pti inputs



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16 get death for killing 58 Dalits

A Patna court on Wednesday sent 16 persons to the gallows and awarded life imprisonment to 10 others for killing 58 people in 1997.

The court also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 each on those who were sentenced to life imprisonment. Nineteen persons were acquitted for want of evidence.

The sentence came 13 years after the massacre by the Ranvir Sena, a private militia raised by upper-caste landlords of central Bihar, on December 1, 1997 at Laxmanpur Bathe village in Jehanabad district - now part of Arwal - about 105 km southwest from here.

The massacre is considered to be the worst-ever in the state. Among the dead were 21 men, 27 women and 10 children. Four families were completely wiped out.

The dispute was over the ownership of a large piece of unused land belonging to the state.

Announcing the judgment, Additional District and Sessions Judge Vijay Prakash Mishra handed over the copies of the quantum of punishment separately to all the 26 accused.

On December 24, 2008, the police framed charges of unlawful assembly with prohibited weapons, with the sole objective to kill against 44 of the 47 accused - three absconding since.

Of them, three died during the trial period. The rest 41 accused were present in the court to receive the verdict.

All the accused, who were held guilty on March 31, were earlier brought to the court from Beur Central Jail.

And the court premises had been turned into a fortress.

A large number of people, including the relatives of the victims, were also present in the court at the time of pronouncement of the verdict.

Altogether, 14 senior lawyers, nine from the prosecution and four from the defence, appeared before the trial court.

While the prosecution

produced 91 out of 152 witnesses listed, nine witnesses deposed on behalf of the defence.

The case was first lodged with Mehendia police station in Jehanabad district - now part of Arwal district - on the basis of a statement of Binod Paswan, who survived the attack.

Later, the trial of the case was shifted to Patna from Jehanabad on the directive of the Patna High Court.

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Death for 16 Ranvir Sena men

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Patna, April 7: A Bihar court today awarded death sentences to 16 members of an erstwhile army of upper caste landlords and life-terms to 10 others for the massacre of 58 Dalits at Laxmanpur-Bathe village in Jehanabad district 13 years ago.

While pronouncing the verdict, additional district and sessions judge (I), Patna, Vijay Prakash Mishra described the December 1, 1997, killing as a stigma on civil society and rarest of rare cases of brutality.

More than 40 members of the dreaded Ranvir Sena, a militia group of Bhumihar upper castes, used guns and swords to butcher 58 people, including 27 women and 10 children, in Jehanabad.

But, the mastermind of the killing, Ranvir Sena founder Barmeshwar Mihiya, and another person, were never brought to book as they are absconders in police records.

Of the 46 accused, charges were framed against 44. Of the 44, the court acquitted 18 people, for lack of evidence. Those served life-terms were also fined Rs 50,000 each.

Defence lawyer Sunil Kumar said today's lower court order would be challenged in the high court.

Laxmanpur-Bathe village is located on the southern bank of river Sone which the armed Ranvir Sena men had crossed in boats to unleash an orgy of violence that shocked the nation.

The massacre was a result of a series of clashes between upper caste Bhumihars and farm workers, primarily Dalits, enjoying the patronage of the then Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and CPI-ML which later merged to form CPI (Maoist).

In March 1999, the Maoists admittedly avenged the Laxmanpur-Bathe carnage by massacring as many as 34 Bhumihar men, aged 19 to 34 years, at the adjoining Senari village in Gaya district.

The retaliatory attack on Senari, an affluent village of upper caste Bhumihars, virtually led to the dismantling of the Ranvir Sena with the Maoists gaining in strength and fire power.

Prosecution lawyer C.K. Sinha described the court's verdict as an achievement of the Nitish Kumar government which has facilitated speedy trials in pending cases.

The Laxmanpur-Bathe case was pending with no witnesses turning up and the police sitting over it. But it was only in December 2008, that charges were framed against the accused Ranvir Sena men. The government also instructed the police to follow up on the case and ensure the presence of witnesses which has resulted in justice today, said Rajesh Kumar, another prosecution lawyer.

The case was initially registered in a Jehanabad court. It was transferred to the Patna district and sessions court in 1999 on the orders of the Patna High Court.





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16 sentenced to death for 1997 Jehanabad carnage

Press Trust Of India, Wednesday April 7, 2010, Patna

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Sixteen persons were sentenced to death by a Bihar court on Wednesday for their involvement in the Jehanabad carnage in 1997 when 58 unarmed Dalits were killed by the Ranbir Sena, a private militia of landlords. Ten others were sentenced to life terms and also slapped with a fine of Rs 50,000 each by Additional District Judge Vijay Prakash Mishra.

Fifty eight Dalits were gunned down by the Ranvir Sena at Laxmanpur Bathe in Jehanabad on December 1, 1997, sending shockwaves across the country. The Lalu Prasad-led RJD government was then ruling the state.

The victims, landless agricultural workers and their families, were supporters of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity. Among those killed were 27 women and 16 children. The victims were from the backward communities of Paswan, Chamar, Mahto, Mallah, Rajwar and Barbar.

In the well-planned operation, about 100 Ranbir Sena activists carrying firearms had descended on Lakshmanpur Bathe, 125 kilometres from Patna, at around 11 pm.

They forced their way into huts by breaking open the doors and fired indiscriminately at people who were asleep. The entire hamlet located on the banks of the Sone river was virtually decimated in the attack that lasted more than three hours.

The main aim of the killers was to terrorise the sympathisers of the CPI(M)L Party Unity to strengthen the stranglehold of the powerful landlords in central Bihar.

Mishra, on conclusion of trial in the case on April 1, had fixed April 7, 2010, as the date for announcing the verdict. Earlier, the case was transferred to Patna from Jehanabad following a Patna High Court order in October, 1999.

Charges were framed in the case against 46 sena men on December 23, 2008, 11 years after the massacre. Altogether 91 of 152 witnesses in the case deposed before the court.

Those sentenced to death were Girija Singh, Surendra Singh, Ashok Singh, Gopal Sharan Singh, Baleshwar Singh, Dawarka Singh, Vijendra Singh, Nawal Singh, Baliram Singh, Nandu Singh, Sheomohan Sharma, Pramod Singh, Shatrughan Singh, Ramkeval Sharma, Dharma Singh and Nand Singh, all belonging to an upper caste community.

Those sentenced to life imprisonment were Babloo Sharma, Ashok Singh, Mithlesh Sharma, Dharikshan Choudhary, Navin Kumar, Ravindra Singh, Surendra Singh, Sunil Kumar, Pramod Kumar and Chandreshwar Singh.

Two other accused Bhukhal Singh and Sudarshan Singh died in the course of the trial.

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