



By Nalini Ravichandran
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Teacher forces scavenger's daughter to eat trash

CHENNAI: In a shocking incident smacking of caste discrimination, a Class VII student and daughter of a manual scavenger was forced to eat trash by a school teacher last year and no action has been taken against anyone yet, despite the parents going to the police the next day.

The incident was narrated on Monday in Chennai at the public hearing by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights by the girl's father, Dhanapal, for whom it was not just "corporal punishment" but something that shattered his hope. The manual scavenger from Madurai had hoped that his daughter would be safe in school.

Dhanapal, who broke down while speaking of his daughter's ordeal, said: "I do manual scavenging, a degrading work. I sent my daughter to school with the hope that she will never do anything close to what I am doing. Now I am devastated. I clean rubbish and my daughter was made to eat it," he said.

Along with the girl, Priyanka (12), belonging to the Hindu Kuravar community, two other girls also faced the same humiliation at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Mahaboobpalayam off Madurai on March 19 last year.

The students were called by Latha, a teacher of another class, and asked to clean the classroom. Since Latha was not their class teacher the students initially refused. They were then forced to clean the room and also eat the garbage in the presence of other students. Priyanka said, "We knelt before her and asked for forgiveness. We cleaned the classroom, and pleaded with her to spare us. She did not relent and demanded that she won't let them free till they eat it up. We had exams coming up and were really scared. In fear and disgust, we ate up the trash, a handful, which was given to each of us. It contained mud, dirty paper, food particles like rice and stones.... We felt sick."

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Headmistress justifies barbaric act

CHENNAI: Adding insult to injury suffered by Priyanka, 12 — who was forced to eat garbage by a teacher in her school — was the headmistress's justification that teacher Latha did so to keep the classroom clean.

When Priyanka's father, Dhanapal, a manual scavenger, went to the Government Girls' Higher Secondary School, Mahaboobpalayam, Madurai, to report the humiliation his daughter had suffered in school, headmistress Rajeswari allegedly told him that his daughter was a "mental case".

Narrating the incident on Monday at a public hearing by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in Chennai, Dhanapal said the headmistress did not take any action against the teacher though he filed a complaint against Latha. Priyanka and two other girls, who were forced to first clean the classroom and then made to eat a handful of garbage, developed severe stomach pain after they reached home.

After admitting the children in private clinics, where they were put on intravenous drips, the parents went to the S S Colony police station at night and registered their complaints.

Later, a complaint was lodged with the education department officials. In addition, they filed a writ petition with the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court. Yet, no action had been taken against the offender. Shantha Sinha, chairperson, NCPCR, described the incident as barbaric. The case comes under the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and also the Manual Scavengers Act, 1993. Immediate action should be taken against the CEO and a fresh independent inquiry ordered, she added. This kind of atrocity is purely a case of violation of the above two Acts and that of caste discrimination, she said.

Henry Tiphagne, State representative, NCPCR, pointed out that Dhanapal had been fighting since 2009 for justice with the police and education departments.

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