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‘Caste hostility led to Haryana carnage’

Staff Reporter

Incident a manifestation of acrimony between lower and upper castes: Report

“The attack was selectively carried out against the well-off in the village”

Haryana Government has failed to rehabilitate victims: Fact-finding report

NEW DELHI: The violent attack in Haryana's Mirchpur village that left two persons dead and several homeless on April 21 was ostensibly a fall-out of a dog's bark, but members of an independent fact-finding committee assert that the incident is a manifestation of longstanding and deep-rooted acrimony between the lower and upper castes.

Two non-government organisations, National Dalit Movement for Justice and ANHAD (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy), which sent a fact-finding team to Mirchpur released a report here on Tuesday. It points out that the incident that left a physically challenged girl and her 70-year-old-father dead, 18 houses gutted and the community of Balmikis uprooted has at its centre a longstanding caste bias.

“The attack has been selectively carried out against the well-off in that village, shops have been gutted, houses looted. And we also came to know that the women in the village managed to escape criminal assault,” said Basha Singh, a senior journalist who was part of the team.

Critical of the Administration's and the Government's role, the team alleged that not only has the Government failed to rehabilitate the victims, the relevant sections of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have not been mentioned in the FIR. “This would allow the offenders to be released with minimal punishment or even acquittal in the case,” it says.

It also says the genesis of the problem was a contract that was awarded to Dalits for managing the local temple festival.

“The prosperity and independence of a section of Dalits was begrudged by the Jatsí .the village of Mirchpur has a history of violence against Dalits as evidenced by the 2007 incident where five Dalits belonging to the Dom community were paraded naked and abused,” the report states.

Armed with testimonies from the victims, most of whom have fled the village, the team has called for immediate arrest of the 14 absconding culprits named in the FIR, suspension and initiation of criminal cases against the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Hisar Police for allowing an illegal Khap Panchayat of Jats on April 24 in the village.

They have also recommended that the case be heard in a fast track court apart from appointment of a special public prosecutor, registration of a case against the station house officer and the Tehsildar under section 4 of the PoA Act.

“Since many Dalits are landless in Mirchpur and have sought relocation, in the long term the Government must consider resettling Dalits and give them cultivable land and other resources of employment,” the team's recommendations state.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Mirchpur: Attackers targeted dalit wealth

Nandita Sengupta, TNN, Apr 28, 2010, 04:31am IST

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NEW DELHI: The Mirchpur arson was as much about caste as class. A fact-finding team on a visit last Saturday to Haryana's Mirchpur village, where two dalits were burned to death and 18 houses gutted, reports that the arson wasn't arbitrary.

The attackers, allegedly from the Jat community, identified houses of the more well-off among the Balmiki community and set them on fire. A beauty parlour, kirana stores and a barber-shop were totally gutted, an obvious attempt to cower dalit prosperity, however limited.

"Any semblance of status symbol was attacked," said journalist Bhasha Singh, houses with motorbikes, televisions, fridges. And shops that dalits ran. "The mood in the village was that dalits 'need to be taught a lesson'." The first thing the mob did, a woman reported, "was to break the Sintex water tanks provided by the government, so we had no way of dousing the fire."

The traumatized villagers also complained of flashers among the attackers.

Located in Hissar district, Mirchpur has a handful of dalits: about 100 Balmiki families, 350 'Jatav' families and 50 Doms to the 1700-odd Jat families. The team found that growing economic prosperity among a section of the minority dalits seemed to be the root cause this time around.

The Jats' hate campaign got sharpened two years ago when a dalit won a bid to manage the region's biggest temple festival, the Phoolan Devi fest, and repeated the feat last year as well.

The enterprising Balmiki community youth, Dharamvir, deposited Rs 50,000 this year too with the village panchayat for the same. "We heard comments such as 'how can he get so much money'? 'He has so much money, why call him a dalit?'" says Umakant, an activist in the team. The vitriol was obvious, the lack of remorse stark.

Three days after the attack, the team of activists from NGOs National Campaign on dalit Human Rights and Anhad along with journalists, reached the village to find a mahakhap Jat panchayat meeting on in government premises and scared dalits wanting out. Both police and administration, said Shabnam Hashmi of Anhad, feigned ignorance about the meeting. Most dalit households have packed off women and younger family members to other villages.

Those who remain told chairperson of National Commission for Scheduled Castes, Buta Singh, also present in the village, they wanted to resettle elsewhere "far from the Jats". They called it "a pre-planned attack", the fight and barking-dog story only a pretext, what with a mob of 300 to 400 surrounding the locality on the morning of April 21, while the community's men had been talked into attending a 'compromise meeting' to cool tensions.

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For two days, Hisar Dalits waited for police, then the mob came

Aanchal Bansal Posted online: Friday , Apr 23, 2010 at 0110 hrs

Mirchpur(Hisar) : Rummaging through the charred remains of what used to be their home, Suman's brothers are trying to make sense of what happened on Wednesday morning.

There was tension because of the scuffle that took place on Monday evening, but we had never imagined this... Our sister had polio and could not run out of the house like our mother did, says Suman's brother Deepak Kumar, a first year BA student in Jind.

A mob of 40 Jats set 10 Dalit homes ablaze in this village on the border of Haryana's Jind and Hisar districts - fiery retribution for a drunken brawl between the communities on April 19, in which a few Jat boys were hurt. Seventeen-year-old Suman and her 70-year-old father Tara Chand, locked inside their house by the assailants, were burnt alive.

She was a good student, says Deepak, picking through the half-burnt pages of a political science textbook he had handed down to his sister after he went to college. Determined to study despite being handicapped.

Adds 23-year-old Amar Lal, another brother, She used to walk to school earlier, but for the last couple of years, she had been using a tricycle given to her by the district office.

The trouble that cost Suman her life began late Monday evening, after someone threw a piece of brick at a mongrel in the village deeply divided between Jats and Dalits. The brick landed in a Dalit house, and triggered an argument that led to a scuffle.

Some boys were drunk. There was a fight and some Jats were hurt, said block samiti leader Kanail Singh. The next day, we realized our mistake, and decided to apologise. Three of us went to them (the Jats), but they pelted us with stones. Village chowkidar Gulab Singh was hit, and is now in hospital, he added.

Seeing the Jats' mood, members of the Valmiki community decided to approach the police. We feared a major attack. But Station House Officer (of the Narnaund police station on Jind Road) Vinod Kajal did nothing, Singh said.

According to the Valmikis, the Jats carried out Wednesday's attack with the cooperation of the local police. The situation was brought under control only after a police party arrived from Hisar, said villagers.

The Jats came from the western side of the village, when most Valmiki men were at the chaupal discussing their next steps, said Suman's mother Kamla. They were carrying lathis and cans of kerosene.

Kamla's home was the first to be attacked. They bolted the door from outside and started pouring kerosene around the house. Tara Chand and Suman were inside, said Bhoomar, a neighbour. Bhoomar herself ran to

protect her three children, as did all the other women in the neighbourhood. The tension of the last two days had led to all four schools in the area being closed, and the children were home.

Elders of the Jat community admitted what had happened was ~~%shameful+~~.

~~%They started the fight,+~~said Anoop Singh. ~~%We~~ however admit that what followed was shameful.+

Five years ago, when he was the village sarpanch, something similar had happened, Anoop recalled. ~~%We~~ had to call a khap panchayat to resolve the issue and prevent any damage to property, +he said.

Anoop said it was a disgrace that events of this week should happen in a village that has produced ~~%at~~ least 1,200 schoolteachers+. Anoop's daughter-in-law Sudesh was Suman's teacher in school. ~~%Almost~~ all girls go to school here, +Anoop said. ~~%Suman~~ was determined to study, which is why she was given a tricycle.+

Suman and Tara Chand will be cremated tomorrow. The villagers have demanded action against SHO Kajal, the local tehsildar, and Deputy Superintendent of Police Abhay Singh. ~~%There~~ was a conspiracy, and we demand a CBI probe, +said BSP leader Man Singh Manhera. ~~%The~~ incident happened in the presence of police and district administration officials, +he alleged.

Superintendent of Police Subhash Yadav said their primary concern now was to ensure a peaceful cremation. ~~%We~~ have deployed a force around the village to keep the situation under control. Both communities are agitated, +he said.

Yadav said the police were investigating the allegations against the SHO. About 30 Jat men from the village have been detained. An FIR has been lodged, charging 43 people under the SC/ST Act and Section 302 (murder).



Caste in blood: Hisar can't give up prejudice

Jyoti Kamal
CNN-IBN



Hisar: An argument over a barking dog in the street led to one of the most violent clash that Haryana has seen this year. But was it just a village fight going horribly wrong or was it a clash between upper castes and lower castes in Hisar's Mirchpur village?

On April 21, 15 houses belonging to the village's Dalits were set on fire by the upper caste Jats. The incident of violence witnessed a physically challenged girl and her 70 year-old-father being burnt alive.

"My daughter pleaded that she cannot run. But she was burnt," recounts Kamala Devi, the mother of the dead girl.

It is now being said that it an argument over a dog that started it all. However, in a world far removed from urban dwellings, where caste divisions run deep, a street fight can take an entirely different dimension.

Obviously, there are different sides to this story.

Chander Singh, a Dalit villager says it was a fight among youngsters over a dog.

"Then two representatives from our side went over to say that there should be no fighting and things should be cooled down, but they were also beaten up," claims Singh.

The Dalits say the upper caste feel threatened by the changing status quo as Dalits get educated and financial muscle. The Dalits accuse the administration of also favouring the upper caste. They allege the police did nothing when their houses were torched.

"The police SHO is related to the Jats. He did not take any action. He was standing there with the Jats and drinking water with them," alleges Ajay Kumar, another Dalit villager.

The upper castes on the other hand hold the Dalits responsible for aggravating the incident.

Some Jat youth were returning from the fields when a dog started going for their legs. One of the youth took off his shoe to fling at the dog but it hit a Dalit boy sitting nearby. That Dalit youth got up and caught the Jat youth by the neck and slapped him which led to the clash," Raghbir Singh, a Jat elder.

The government is meanwhile trying to pass it off as a one off incident.

This is something this is a sporadic type of incident. It just got flared up and went on spreading," says OP Sheoran, Deputy Commissioner of Hisar.

Perhaps the clash that Mirchpur has witnessed is the friction of change. When centuries old traditions get overlaid on a village fight, it assumes an entirely new dimension and those are the dimensions that modern Haryana has to manage and cope with.

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STAFF WRITER 20:27 HRS IST

Victims of Haryana violence cremated

Hisar (Haryana), Apr 23 (PTI) Ending a two-day stand off, the two Dalits killed in intercaste violence in a village here were finally cremated by the community today after the administration agreed to their demand of action against officials and announced compensation.

The Haryana government also announced the suspension of an SHO in connection with the incident and promised to punish the guilty.

After a meeting with representatives of Dalits, Deputy Commissioner O P Sheoran accepted their demands following which Suman (18) and her father Tara Chand (70), who died in violence on April 21 in Mirchpur, were cremated.

Both were killed in fire when a group of people belonging to upper caste set the house of dalits on fire on April 21.

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Take note of atrocities against dalits, say MPs

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STAFF WRITER 14:38 HRS IST

New Delhi, Apr 22 (PTI) Issues relating to dalits and scheduled castes were today raised in the Lok Sabha with BJP demanding that the Centre take note of growing cases of atrocities against them, particularly in Haryana.

Virender Kashyap (BJP) referred to a recent incident in Haryana where an entire village of dalits was burnt down and a handicapped girl killed.

He said several such incidents had taken place in the state in the past few years.

"Even the administration does not take any timely action to prevent them," he rued.

"Inaction by the police" in preventing the recent incident reflects the law and order situation in Haryana, he said, adding that similar incidents were taking place in other states also.

Kashyap, who demanded that the Centre should take notice of such cases, got immediate support from different sections of the House, including some Congress members.

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Physically-challenged Dalit girl burnt alive in Haryana

PTI, Apr 21, 2010, 06.47pm IST

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CHANDIGARH: A physically challenged girl was burnt alive and her father received serious burn injuries when some persons set afire houses belonging to dalits in a village in Haryana's Hisar district on Wednesday.

Eighteen-year-old Suman was charred to death while her father Tara Chand, 70, suffered 90 per cent burns, official sources said adding the incident happened in Mirchpur village.

Members of a particular community raided the village and set afire some 12 to 15 dalit houses, they said.

Old enmity between the two communities coupled with flaring up of the tension in the past few days led to today's incident, the sources said.

A few days back, some members of a community allegedly passed some objectionable remarks on dalit women.

This provoked retaliation from the dalits who roughed up some youths of the rival community, villagers said.

A physically challenged girl was burnt alive when some persons set on fire dalit houses, Hisar Deputy Commissioner O P Sheron told PTI by telephone.

Asked how many houses were torched, he said "we are yet to get full details."

He said a case under various sections of the IPC had been registered against some persons and promised strict action against the guilty.

A large posse of policemen were deployed in the village where tension ran high.

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