

SOCIAL BOYCOTT OF DALITS IN M.P.

UNCIVIL SOCIETY, APATHETIC ADMINISTRATION

**(FACT FINDING REPORT ISSUED BY NAGRIK ADHIKAR MANCH AND YUVA
SAMVAD)**

(The situation in the Gadarwara Sub Division of District.Narsinghpur (MP) has been in a state of constant flux since last 3-4 months. The Dalits living in the villages adjoining Gadarwara have been condemned to a life of fear and intimidation.Their human rights and dignity are being at stake.

Obviously there is a concrete reason behind this sudden spurt in violence against them.They have refused to remain subservient to the interests of the upper/dominant castes and have decided to speak up.

Instead of taking concrete steps to guarantee the human rights of dalits granted to them under constituion, the administration has preferred to remain silent or at best supportive of the interests of the dominant castes only. One can easily see why Madhya Pradesh happens to be the state which tops the list of atrocities on tribals and stands second when it comes to cases of atrocities against dalits.)

Dist : Narsinghpur(Madhya Pradesh)

Tehsil : Gadarwara

Affected Area : Dalits (Ahirwar community) in Gadarwara and adjoining villages

Villages visited by the Fact Finding Team : Nander, Madgula, Devri and Tekapar

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Members of Fact Finding Team

Jai Bhim, Moolchand Ahirwar, Javed, Skand Shukla, Manoj, Satyam, Shivkumar, Nishant Kaushik

Brief Introduction to Narsinghpur District.

District Narsinghpur falls under the Nagpur Commissionerate. It is situated half-way between the capital Bhopal and Jabalpur. The economic mainstay of Narsinghpur is cultivation of sugarcane and pulses(*dals*). The population predominantly consists of Rajputs, Lodhi , Patels, Kirar and Ahirwar. Gadarwara is the main Tehsil of Narsinghpur.

Gadarwara

The Ahirwars make almost half (38,000-40,000) of the total population (70,000-80,000) of Gadarwara. Around 80-85 percent of the people in this tehsil are engaged in agriculture or related work. Agricultural labourers and landless peasants comprise a majority among them. Most of the agricultural labourers belong to the Dalit communities and among them the Ahirwars (*Chamars*) predominate. This caste falls under Scheduled Caste in the Constitution. They(Ahirwars) also form a major portion of the Scheduled Castes in the country and more so in the Hindi speaking area (where *Chamar* is used as a derogatory term). There are over 700 surnames in this caste.

The Ahirwars are spread over Gadarwara and nearly in all the adjoining villages. They play a very prominent role in the socio-economic activities of this area.

The Ahirwars Resolution giving rise to the present oppression

Ahirwar Samaj Mahaparishad had been trying to evolve a general consensus since last one year about abandoning the obnoxious practice of carrying of the carcasses of dead beasts ; to rid them of the centuries old practice of being looked down upon by the *varna* (upper) castes as carriers of the carcasses and consequently untouchables. Ahirwars in many villages actually discontinued this practice from July-August onwards. The *Ahirwar Samaj Mahaparishad* resolved in October 2009 to abandon this practice by the community en masse at the state level.

The social history of the oppression

It becomes clear from the social history of India that a sort of gradation based on discrimination and un-touchability has been established here. This practice has been fed and confirmed by other social constructions.

In spite of the forceful pleading of social justice in the Constitution, social inequality has persisted and is a *sine qua non* of our society This division based on differences rooted in inequalities has insulted the self-respect of people and compounded their human rights.

The roots of the exploitation and oppression of the Dalits in Gadarwara are in this practice. The burden of lifting carcasses of the dead animals had been imposed upon the Ahirwars in the course of the division of social labour. For centuries the inhuman work has been done by them. **The surprise is that despite the imperative necessity of getting this work done a view of looking down on this work as lowly and insulting work has also been simultaneously developed by the society.** This has remained the mainstay of the untouchability and oppression practised vis-a-vis the Ahirwar community. This despite the fact that the Constitutional provision under the 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989', carrying of carasses has been classified as a form of practising untouchability and nobody can be forced to do this work. However, the reality of Gadarwara is quite the opposite. It need be underlined at this juncture the said act which recently completed 20 years of enactment, carries important provisions to prevent atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes, which largely remain unimplemented.

A Detailed Report of the Fact Finding Team and Its observations

Despite repeated complaints against the oppression faced by the dalits at the hands of the dominant castes and demands for action against them the attitude of the administration has remained apathetic. This despite the fact that Dalits in 5-6 villages have filed complaints of physical harassment and oppression.

Even at present the position is that not only had there been no let up in the collective harassment faced by the dalits but it has become more severe. We were receiving reports of the plight of the dalits and their attempts to resist the inhuman treatment meted out to them since last few months. Under the circumstances it was considered necessary that the position may be ascertained and verified by a Fact Finding team.

A detailed report of the visits to four villages in the area is given below :

VILLAGE:DEORI

The Ahirwar Community at Deori is in a serious predicament. The Upper Castes/Non-Dalit castes have resorted to cruel tactics for harassing them. Since the issue of removing carcasses of dead animal has been raised by them they have declared a virtual blockade of the community. Taking advantage of the confused laying of public road No. 128, the dominant castes have created such a situation that the Ahirwars are not able to come out of their houses. The community has been 'imprisoned' in its own native village.

The following facts were revealed before the Fact Finding Team

I- Denial of access to daily utilities

1. There is ban on them on making any purchases from the only provision shop in the village.
2. They are not allowed to get water from a public tap.
3. Ban on travel by public transport
4. Stopping vegetable and food vendors, newspaper boys including *dhobis* (washermen), *nais* (barbers) from entering Dalit localities
5. Stopping access to flour mills for grinding corn
6. Ban on entering the Village Panchayat Bhavan

II Atrocities on children and women.

Bablu, Jagdi and Pappu belonging to Upper castes injured Devaki, an Ahirwar girl, on the head.

Bimla Bai was threatened by non-Dalit Devendra Kumar warning her not to step in their fields failing which they would strip her naked and parade her through the village.

Yogesh Ahirwar studying in the local school told that they are served mid-day meals in separate plates and they had to wash the plates used by them.

III - Intimidation by armed persons and threatening to kill

Hari Singh and Omkar, both Ahirwars told the Fact Finding Team that they are being constantly threatened by Arjun, Nipal and Ghanshyam, all Gurjars (non-Dalit caste) to kill them. They blamed them for always complaint-mongering.

In a meeting organised by the Village head (Sarpanch) in October 2009 to resolve the issue, more than hundred people belonging to non-dalit castes who were carrying different arms, literally pounced upon the Ahirwars and tried to intimidate them. The Ahirwars who had gathered there hoping for a peaceful and respectable solution, literally had to flee the place to save their lives.

IV - Creating obstacles and obstructing schemes meant for the Dalits and other needy rural people.

Attempts are being made to deprive the Ahirwar community from the benefits of the welfare schemes - schemes run jointly by center and state governments - such as NREGS, *Nirashrit Pension Yojana* (Pension for the Shelterless), *Indira Awas Yojna*, labour welfare schemes and distribution of land for the landless.

We learnt that job cards under NREGS of Vanshilal, Prakash, Vinod, Vishal, Malkham (all Ahirwars) and even of some other Ahirwars have been kept by the Sarpanch with him. The pension of Harkishan Singh Ahirwar aged 70 years has not been paid for the last four months. Similarly, Besides this the amount sanctioned under the *Indira Awas Yojna* has not been paid to Vanshilal, Karodi Prasad and other 12 persons.

V-On the brink of starvation

The landless Ahirwar peasants cultivate the land of the upper caste people on lease on expense sharing basis (*batai*). Under it all expenses right from bowing to harvesting is done by the person taking the land on lease and he is given ¼ to 1/10 portion of the harvest by the landlord. However, when the crops bowed in June reached the harvesting stage some influential landlords refused to allot any share to the cultivators and in fact harvested the crop with Harvester Combines and took it away. The Ahirwar community which faced drought last season is on the brink of starvation. If the same state of affairs continues, it is feared that there would be starvation deaths in the area.

VI -Economic sanctions

Almost all the Ahirwar families in Deori are landless. They eke out their living working as sharecroppers or labourers. When their resolve not to lift the carcasses of dead animals was declared, virtual economic sanctions have been imposed on them. The locals told the Fact Finding Team that this time not a single crop-sharer has been given his share. Many others have not been paid even their wages. They told us in details about non-giving the shares of the crop. Some of the names are listed below. In some of these cases the harvest has been cut and in other cases the cultivator has been prohibited from even entering the field.

Details of persons from Deori not receiving their share in the harvest.

S.No.	Sharecropper from	Landlord/non-Dalit	Area of land cultivated	Harvest
Ahirwar Community				
1.	Vanshilal Ahirwar	Purushotam Agrwal	5 acres	Soyabean and corn (<i>dhan</i>)
2.	Vanshilal Ahirwar	Devi Singh Patel	3 acres	Corn
3.	Vishal Ahirwar	Dhansingh Kadkoul	4 acres	Soyabin and corn
4.	Purushottam Ahirwar	Ramkumar Thapar	2 acres	Corn
5.	Purushottam Ahirwar	Aman Patel	2 acres	Corn
6.	Ajaysingh Ahirwar	Ekamsimngh Gujar	6 acres	Soyabin and corn
7.	Prakash Ahirwar	Chander Gurjar	2 acres	Corn
8.	Gopal Ahirwar	Zummak Gurjar	3 acres	Corn

9.	Pancham Ahirwar	Indrapal Gurjar	5 acres	Soyabin,sugarcane,corn
10.	Potai Ahirwar	Potai Karat	10 acres	Soyabin ,Corn
11.	Nepal Ahirwar	Nepal Gurjar	6 acres	Corn
12.	Malkham Ahirwar	Madan Patel	3 acres	Corn

6-Dumping dead cattle in Ahirwar locality

Munna Gurjar forcibly dumped the dead animal in front of the house of Malkham Singh Ahirwar. Similarly dead animals are being dumped in the *pokharee* (small pond) in front of Vishal Ahirwar's the house.

People hailing from influential families even dumped the dead carcass in front of the Community Hall. It is needless to say that othe Public works were affected.

Depriving of the Right to Work under NREGS

The NREGS work has been widely affected by this decision not to lift carcasses .The people from the Ahirwar community have been deprived of the works being done under NREGS. Their work is being got executed by employing other persons.

Action by Administration

People from Deori have complained twice to the Sub-Divisional Officer, (*Anuvibhagiya Dandadhikari*) Gadarwara but the SDM has merely consoled them and has not bothered to take any action against the perpetrators.The matter has been kept hanging till date.

Village-Tekapar

The condition of Tekapar is no different from other villages. Here also the Dalit Ahirwars have to face a virtual boycott and violence at the hands of the dominant castes/non-Dalit castes. Here the Dalit count for more than half the population of the village. Out of them a mere 13 have land in their name-a mere 3 acres in all. The rest all are farm labourers.

In the second week of October some people from the Ahirwars were summoned by the caste people and they were pointblank asked whether they will or will not lift the caracasses of dead animals. The Ahirwars conveyed to them the community decision. The next day a fiat was issued by the caste people warning the Ahirwars that if by any chance the Ahirwars pass through their fields they will have to pay a fine of Rs. 1000/-

The intimidation did not stop here. A strict ban was imposed on availing the village facilities of shop for things of daily use, use of public tap water system, flour mill and other public places. They used to take clay for building from public places but a total ban on such use was imposed. Netram Ahirwar informed us that the work of digging for clay has always been a community effort but now they threaten us if we take clay.

Sahebsingh Ahirwar informed that he is a crop-sharer in the field of a caste man but he has not received his share of the harvest till this date. Swaraj Suria (upper caste) even prohibited Aman Ahirwar to walk on the concrete road and in case he resisted threatened to kill him. When Netram Ahirwar took his farm instruments to the local blacksmith for repairs he was told that there was a ban on extending any service to the Ahirwars. Mohanlal Ahirwar is not receiving funds for a safe delivery under the state scheme meant for the poorer sections of society.

An oppressive condition for crop sharing

Thereafter for fear of violent response in the village and bowing before the pressure of the dominant castes 70 year old Fullu Ahirwar had to accept removing a dead animal. It was only then that he and other members of the Ahirwar community were granted a marginal share in the crops harvested by them.

The Community does not have the *Antyodaya Yojana Card*

There is a big scandal in the distribution of *Antyodaya* cards to the poor. This card intended for farm labourers and poor Dalits in the village has been distributed to upper/dominant caste people. A large number of the Ahirwars have been kept outside the purview of this scheme.

No work in NREGS

There pressure tactics also obtain in the field of the constitutional rights of 100 days employment. The Dalit Ahirwars receive hardly 10 to 15 days of work and that too with difficulty.

The Reaction of the Administration

The people of Tekapar have been kept under threat by the influential castes. They are threatened that should they dare to complain they will have to face the music. In spite of this the Ahirwar people had made representations against the injustice to them in writing to the Sub Divisional Magistrate on 8th October 2009. Despite this the status quo remains and no action has been taken to ameliorate the situation.

Village-Nander

People from the Dalit community of Nander told the Fact Finding Team that we decided to stick to the decision of the Ahirwar Community not to lift dead animals both in letter and spirit. The Ahirwar Community has conveyed this decision to all the villagers. However, the caste people in

the village did not like this. On the 10th October 2009 the villagers carried a carcass of a dead animal in a bullock cart at the center of the Dalit Basti and threw it down in front of the house of Rameshsingh Ahirwar. Mukesh Upadhyay (a Upper caste member) even got some earth sprinkled on the carcass through some people. Ramesh Singh Ahirwar requested them not to do so. On this Mukesh threatened to cut down the hands of anybody who dared to touch his dead animal. Ramesh Ahirwar told that the following day Pralhad Yadav dumped a dead calf at the same place. The caste people deliberately selected this place for dumping the carcasses to teach them a lesson. This was an exhibition of 'dadagiri' to break the minds of the community.

That there would be serious consequences of such dumping of carcasses was a foregone conclusion. A 70 year old woman —Biryai Bai – who lived in an adjoining hut was pushed towards a serious breathing trouble due to the obnoxious malodour of putrifying flesh. She had to be removed to the Gadarwara Hospital. Ramesh Ahirwar's mother Ayudhi Bai (Age 65 years) also suffered on the same count. Evidently this deed was more than sufficient to spread pestilence in the village.

In the second phase, to increase the pressure on the Ahirwar community the non-Dalit caste people imposed a total ban on the Ahirwars. That meant that no member of the Dalit community could use any facility, not even touch, the properties such as the farms and fields belonging to the Upper caste and non-Dalit caste people. Use of ingress and egress paths, farm compounds and even use of land for relieving themselves was totally banned for them.

Pohapsingh Ahirwar told the Team that the caste people are subjecting them to abuse, beatings and social boycott in public places like common water taps, schools, panchayat and flour mills. Lalji Singh says that he is Assistant Teacher in the school but they were forcing even me to lift the carcasses. They threatened me not to divulge this fact to others and allege that I was causing much harassment to the student and they would see him for that.

Seventy five year old Nanhu said that the washermen and barbers have been discriminating against them for years. They have to attend to these works themselves or go to other places.

One more tale of the harassment of the atrocities of the influential castes is Pohapsingh Ahirwar. He had purchased a land from one Takat Singh Gurjar and also paid an advance of fifty thousand rupees but now Vinod Rajauriya is refusing to get this sale deed registered.

From the time the group decision against lifting of carcasses has been implemented the extension of all welfare schemes such as NREGS, *Nirashrit Pension Yojana* (Pension scheme for the Deprived people), Indira Awas Yojna, Labour Safety Scheme etc; have been totally suspended.

NREGS

Job Cards for all the eligible persons have been filled up but very few people get any work. After this incident giving any work to any member of the Ahirwar community has been totally banned.

Administrative Inaction

The villagers have represented to the SDM Gadarwara and demanded immediate cessation of these atrocities and a solution found for these problems. On this the Tehsildar just visited the Village Gram Panchayat and only advised the Sarpanch Vinod Tiwari (A caste man) that nobody could be forced to lift an animal carcass and advised to fix one place for dumping the dead animals. The Sarpanch did issue orders appointing one man from the opposition group for this purpose. However, the formalities of fixing one single place for dumping the carcasses has not been completed as yet. But since then no further action has been taken by the Administration in this regard. This despite the fact that there has been an increase in the atrocities committed against the community since then.

Village –Madgula

After the Ahirwar Community's decision against lifting of animal carcasses and their social boycott by the caste people, the situation has worsened. Here the Dalit basti is situated beside the Main Road outside the village. The caste people have banned their entry to the village or the fields. Here most of the agricultural land is owned by the caste people. There is no community lavatory or public road in the place. This has resulted in a virtual ban on the Ahirwars to relieve themselves. Obviously, under these circumstances the Ahirwars have been forced to use the roadside to relieve themselves. The atrocities of the caste people have forced the people from the Ahirwar community to abandoning the village or even commit suicide.

1.Reduction in wages

On 31st July 2009 it was declared by a public announcement that members of the Ahirwar Community who work as crop sharer on the lands of caste people would have to agree with the wage-structure approved by the landlords or else leave the village. The wages for other works were also reduced to half from the normal rate of Rs. 70-80. This is not even a living wage for the workers and is even against the provisions of law.

2.Ban against necessities of life

There is a stringent ban on the Dalit Community against access to public utilities like common water tap, provision shops, flour mill etc.

3.Maltreatment of women and Threats

As there is no public road in the village the people from Ahirwar Dalit Community are banned even from relieving themselves. Consequently the women from the community are compelled to use the roadsides for this purpose. Anant Ahirwar told that when they do not find men for

harassment the caste people target the women. If they protest they are threatened that if they do not follow their orders some day they will all be hanged by trees on the roadside

Complaints against the Atrocities

Harrassed by such dealings of the caste people lodged complaints against Dileep Rajput, Rajkumar, Narendra, Inder, Gutpal and five others. On this the Police Officer from Saikheda visited the village and advise the people to avoid conflicts.

The Conclusion and The Way Out

MP has always remained at the top in atrocities against the Dalits. Even sixty years after gaining Independence the roots of social atrocities have still remained deep. For centuries the inhuman work of removing carcasses of animals and separating the hides from them has been got done from the Dalit communities. Even after virulent defence of human rights in the Constitution of the Independent India this inhuman and unconstitutional work is being got done forcibly from the Dalit communities. The irony is that this year sees the completion of twenty years from the promulgation of the law (SC and ST [Prevention of Atrocities] Act 1989) against Dalit exploitation.

After meeting hundreds of people from the four villages in MP the Fact Finding Team has observed how the Collective Decision of the Ahirwar Community (Dalit) of not undertaking the inhuman and unconstitutional work has become a question of prestige. The caste people are endeavouring for the reversal of this decision through social, economic sanctions. The caste people desire that the Dalits should abandon their struggle for self-respect and continue to undergo the social and cultural slavery.

The Fact Finding Team observed the following phenomena during their observation of the Gadarwara Region

- This decision of the Ahirwar Community to preserve their self respect is considered by the caste people as a challenge to the communal superiority.
- By displaying their social and economic superiority the caste/non-Dalit castes are trying to keep the Ahirwar under constant pressure.
- The roots of these atrocities lie in an attempt to seek approval of the socio-cultural dogma that this work is the duty of a specific community.
- The Administration instead of standing by the Dalit community in support of their constitutional right is acting as a silent partner of the caste people to maintain the status quo.

On the basis of its observations of the prevailing circumstances the Gadarwara Region the Fact Finding Team feels that the following steps need to be urgently taken

1. Institute an independent and impartial judicial enquiry of the things happening in Gadarwara Tehsil
2. Appropriate action against the people who are forcing the lifting the carcasses by some people
3. Immediate action against the people on the basis of the Fact Finding Report and names mentioned in complaints received by government.
4. Take stringent steps to dispel the fear psychosis prevailing in the minds of the Ahirwars
5. The reestablishment of the participation of the Ahirwar community in the social welfare schemes from which it has been kept away,
6. Restoration of the crop share to the Ahirwar crop-sharers deprived of their legitimate dues and also payment of adequate compensation for the deprivation.
7. Restoration of claims of those falling Below Poverty Line but have been deprived of the benefits .
8. Take abiding steps for an abiding solution of the problems.

(FACT FINDING REPORT ISSUED BY NAGRIK ADHIKAR MANCH AND YUVA SAMVAD, MADHYA PRADESH)

Contact Persons :

- Jay Bhim

Nagrik Adhikar Manch, H.No.900, Durganagar, Near WaterTank No.2, Bhopal, Mobile No. **09301363498**

E-mail id: nambhopal@gmail.com

- Mool Chand

Nagrik Adhikar Manch, Mobile 09303052704

- Javed

Yuva Samvad, 09424401459

E-mail id : yuvasamvadbhopal@gmail.com

-Manoj

Yuva Samvad, Bhopal

Mob : 09754762958

