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'Dalit families evicted, houses razed'

Special Correspondent

Seek action against culprits

Also demand land allotment

JAIPUR: Thirteen Dalit families living under an open sky for the past two months at Satpuda village in Chittaurgarh district of Rajasthan after their houses on the government's surplus land were destroyed by the people of dominant castes have demanded action against the culprits and land allotment under the ongoing "Prashasan Gaon Ke Sang" (administration with villages) campaign.

Influential people of Satpuda demolished the houses of Meghwal and Kalbelia Dalits settled for about 20 years on the outskirts of the village on October 7 allegedly at the instance of the administration. No official assistance for rehabilitation or financial relief has been provided to the victims so far.

A fact-finding team of the Centre for Dalit Rights (CDR), which visited the village on Monday, found that the Dalit families were not served with the mandatory notices for eviction under the Land Revenue Act, while each of them possessed ration cards and had their names listed in the electoral rolls.

Dalit families told the six-member team, led by CDR director Satish Kumar, that the Tehsildar and revenue officials visited Satpuda on October 6 and "verbally instructed" the villagers to raze the "illegal houses". "The next day, the dominant people brought huge machines and flattened the entire locality. We lost all of our belongings," victim Mangi Ram told the team.

The landless Dalit families struggling hard to make ends meet had requested the administration to allot land to them in 2004, but no action has been taken as yet in this regard. On the other hand, the administration has not paid any attention to the alleged encroachments by the dominant Rajput community at a nearby surplus land.

Police apathy

Alleging that the higher caste people were "hand in glove" with revenue officials in the village, the Dalit victims told the team that the police had not registered any case against the perpetrators of the crime and the latter were threatening them with dire consequences if they tried to lodge complaint.

Mr. Kumar regretted that the State Government, which was “making tall claims” about allotment of land free of cost to poor Dalits, had remained a mute spectator to the forcible and illegal eviction of Dalits by unauthorised people in Satpuda case.

The CDR team met Chittaurgarh Collector Arushi A. Malik and demanded immediate relief to the Dalit families along with reconstruction of their houses and registration of cases under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, as well disciplinary proceedings against the Tehsildar and revenue officials.

Mr. Kumar said the poor Dalit families deserved the benefit of the Indira Awas Yojana after their inclusion in the below poverty line category, while agricultural and residential land should be allotted to them under the “Prashasan Gaon Ke Sang” campaign.

The CDR, which has also sent a memorandum with these demands to the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, has pointed out that no encroacher on the government's surplus land can be evicted without the due process of law.

Other members of the team were Gopal Ram Verma and Babulal Kiroriwal of CDR, Khemraj Chaudhary of Prayas Sansthan, Bhanwar Meghwanshi of Dalit Adivasi Adhikar Abhiyan and K. C. Sharma of the People's Union for Civil Liberties.

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