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SC, ST welfare funds diverted, basic demands still unfulfilled

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Over Rs. 35 lakh of reserve funds used for construction of pipeline

Dalit colony residents do not hold title deeds yet

Pipeline not connected to colony, only skirts perimeter



Health Hazard: A file photo of a resident drinking water from a tap by the side of an open drain in Kudkorigudde Dalit colony in Mangalore.

Mangalore: The residents of the 45 houses in the Kudkorigudde Dalit colony have a long list of basic demands. Besides the title deeds, the residents want supply of drinking water, drainage, retaining walls to prevent the area from being flooded during rainfall, repair of houses and development of interior roads.

Dayanand (28), a resident says: “For the past 50 years, we have been demanding ownership rights on the land on which our houses are built.”

While this demand and some others remain unfulfilled, the Mangalore City Corporation is building a Rs. 35 lakh- pipeline in the area, but which is not connected to colony, out of funds specifically reserved for the welfare and development of the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs).

RTI application

According to the response to a Right to Information application filed by Dalit activists, a copy of which is available with *The Hindu*, the proposed sewage pipeline will be from Kankanady

to the Karnataka Urban Development and Coastal Environment Management Project (KUDCEMP) in Pumpwell.

The allocation for SC/ST welfare was made for the financial year, 2008-09, but enquiries with Assistant Executive Engineer Ganeshan R. revealed that the funds had been sanctioned for the project, which is awaiting the completion of the tender process.

Although the project uses SC/ST reserve funds, the only connection between the colony and the pipeline is that the pipeline skirts the perimeter of the colony.

Anil Kumar, another resident, said: "Its construction does not have anything to do with us. Then, why are funds reserved for our development being used to build it?"

History of denial

"This is nothing new for us," he said. According to him, the reserve funds have been misused for several years now. As per the guidelines, the reserve fund, which is 18 per cent of the total fund outlay of the MCC, is supposed to be utilised exclusively for the development of social and physical infrastructure for Dalits and their colonies.

"The funds can be used to start welfare schemes for education and empowerment, create jobs and develop colonies. But the MCC has been using these funds for anything but these purposes," alleged Raju (27), another resident.

An elderly resident of the colony, Lingaiah, said that Kudkorigudda was once a serf colony, and all residents were bound by the Jitha Padatthi, whereby they were sworn to work for the landlord for generations. "We were freed of bondage when Jitha was abolished. But the land still belongs to the landlord," he said.

Title deeds

According to Dalit Sangharsha Samiti president S.P. Ananda, over 80 per cent of the residents in Dalit colonies do not have the title deeds of their land. "Even though they have been freed, they continued to live in the colonies because they have nowhere else to go," he said.

"Our main demand is that this land should be purchased by the administration and transferred to our names. But when we ask, we are told that there are no funds. And then they spend money on things like pipelines and temples," alleged Girisha (30).

Later, Jesintha Boromeo, councillor, said that she did not know anything about the project. When it was pointed out that the fund allocation for such projects is passed only after being tabled for approval in the Council, she said: "I did not pay attention to it."

MCC Commissioner K.N. Vijayprakash said: "I want to be very cautious. I will undertake a thorough verification before commenting on it."

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