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## Wall on road to Dalit colony demolished

V.S. Palaniappan

— Photo: K. Ananthan



***ELIMINATING DISCRIMINATION: The wall blocking the road to a Dalit colony at Periyar Nagar in Coimbatore being demolished.***

COIMBATORE: Revenue, police and the Coimbatore Corporation authorities demolished a wall that had denied 58 Dalit families of Periyar Nagar direct access to the arterial Kamarajar Road in the city.

The wall was allegedly built by caste Hindus across the 30-ft-wide Jeeva Road that was supposed to link the colony with Kamarajar Road.

The colony is located in Ward No.10 near the Employees' State Insurance Hospital to Kamarajar Road.

“The wall, built in 1990, was evidence of the prevalence of discrimination and untouchability,” said U.K. Sivagnanam, district convenor of the Untouchability Eradication Front. He had petitioned the authorities on Friday, demanding the removal of the wall. According to Periyar Nagar residents, the government acquired land for their colony in 1989 and provided house site pattas to them. Caste Hindus living along the initial stretch of Jeeva Road had installed a Vinayakar idol in a small shed and built the wall behind it, exactly from where the colony began. The temple was used as a pretext for closing the road with a discriminatory attitude to prevent the Dalits from using Jeeva Road to reach Kamarajar Road through the area in which the caste Hindus resided, Mr. Sivagnanam alleged. The Dalits had used other routes to reach the main road for many years. But with more buildings coming up on open sites nearby, they were left with only a narrow street to reach the main road.

On Saturday morning, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi ordered the district administration to inquire into the issue and take immediate action.

Officials verified the records and confirmed that the temple and the wall encroached upon a scheme road. A group of women squatted in front of the earthmover in an attempt to prevent the demolition. As the earthmover began the demolition, the residents broke into a thunderous ovation. When the Corporation workers were removing the debris of the demolished wall, a group of Hindu outfit activists insisted that the temple should not be removed. This resulted in police mobilising more reinforcements.

**‘Not against temple’**

The Dalits pointed out that they were not against the temple but only its location. Speaking to *TheHindu*, State convener of the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front P. Sampath welcomed the action taken by the officials and added that the temple could be relocated with the consent of both sides.

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## Coimbatore admn brings down 'untouchability wall'

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**Chennai** : A wall built twenty years ago by upper caste Hindus allegedly to keep out Dalits, was finally demolished by the authorities in Coimbatore district on Saturday. The 20-feet long wall built across a public road is the second such 'untouchability wall' found in the state, the first being the one at Uthapuram village near Madurai.

According to sources, the wall at Singanellur in Coimbatore was constructed by caste Hindus after 58 Dalit families were housed in a new colony named Thanthai Periyar Nagar under a government scheme in 1989. The structure blocked direct access to the main road in an attempt to prevent the Dalit families from traversing through the areas populated by the caste Hindus. A Vinayak temple was also built near it to impart religious sanctity to the structure.

The Untouchability Eradication Front, a social grouping backed by the CPM that first exposed the existence of the Uthapuram wall, took up the issue with the district administration, arguing that the wall was at once illegal and against integration of society. "We brought this to the attention of the Corporation Commissioner and other senior officials and also provided them enough evidence to prove that the wall was build on encroached land and that it segregated public on caste lines," said a member of the Front. After initial inquiry, the civic administration decided that the wall was illegal and should be demolished, said city Commissioner Anshul Mishra, even as he refused to comment on whether it was indeed an "untouchability wall".

"The local public perceived it as being discriminatory and in our inquiry it was clear that the wall was constructed across a public road without any permission. We also consulted the district administration and finally decided to demolish the wall," said Mishra.

The decision kicked up a row with members from the caste Hindu families protesting against the demolition on Saturday morning. However, a strong posse of police men removed them from the spot immediately.