



# **Unheard Voices -DALIT WOMEN**

An alternative report

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Tamil Nadu Women's Forum is a state level initiative for women's rights and gender justice. Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF) was started in 1991 in order to train women for more leadership, to strengthen women's movement, and to build up strong people's movement.

Tamil Nadu Women's Forum is a member organization of the International Movement against All forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), which has consultative status with UN ECOSOC (Roster).

Even as we are in the 21st millennium, caste discrimination, an age-old practice that dehumanizes and perpetuates a cruel form of discrimination continues to be practiced. India where the practice is rampant despite the existence of a legislation to stop this, 160 million Dalits of which 49.96% are women continue to suffer discrimination. The discrimination that Dalit women are subjected to is similar to racial discrimination, where the former is discriminated and treated as untouchable due to descent, for being born into a particular community, while, the latter face discrimination due to colour. The caste system declares Dalit women as ‘impure’ and therefore untouchable and hence socially excluded. This is a complete negation and violation of women’s human rights. We urge this august body to pay special attention to this issue and come up with recommendations to eradicate the caste system.

Dalit women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. According to the Hindu caste hierarchy, there are four castes namely the Brahmins ( priestly caste), the Kshatriya ( warriors), the Vaishyas ( traders and the Shudras ( menial task workers). Below this four tier caste ladder is another rung, who are called the untouchables( Panchamas). Among the untouchables, the status of women is further eroded and closely linked to the concept of purity. This is what the rigid, fundamentalist Hindu promotes through continuation of caste system, imposing the Brahminical values to maintain the caste system’

The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the *Manusmriti*, *Atharva Vedas*, *Vishnu smriti*, and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmins (upper priestly hindu caste), led to a society in which equality between men and women was far from existent (Agarwal). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution, also makes it very clear in his article titled “The rise and fall of Hindu woman” that the root cause of suffering for women in India are these so called Hindu religious books (Thind; Agarwal). Books like the Manusmriti divide people into a stratified caste system and promotes inequality between men and women (Thind; Agarwal). According to the *Manusmriti*, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth (n.pag). It not only justifies the treatment of dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women as can be seen in the following verses (Agarwal; *Manusmitri*):

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A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him. Or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight years of age. If (the performance of) his duties would otherwise be impeded, he must marry sooner. (*Manusmitri* IX.94)

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.” (*Manusmriti* V.147)

Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (*Manusmriti* IX.3)

Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskaras are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras, they are as unclean as the untruth. (*Manusmriti* IX.18)

A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any shudra woman. (*Manusmriti* IX.25)

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Even the killing of a dalit woman is explicitly justified as a minor offence for the Brahmins: equal to the killing of an animal (*Manusmriti*). If the killing of an untouchable was justified as a minor offence, you can imagine the treatment they received throughout their lives.

In a male dominated society, Dalit women suffered unimaginable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape. The laws in the *Manusmriti* and other Vedic scriptures close all economic, political, social, educational, and personal channels through which Dalit women could be uplifted (Thind n.pag). The horrendous Laws in the *Manusmriti* were incorporated into Hinduism because they were favourable only to the Upper castes, which form the majority of India. Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and exploitation of Dalit women. The Laws of the *Manusmriti* have a devastating effect on the level of education reached by Dalit women.

The caste discrimination inherited by birth results in Dalit women facing multiple oppression that violates their economic, political, social and cultural rights. The most deprived section of the society comprises of dalit women who are the poorest, illiterate and easy targets for sexual harassment. The women face not just caste violence inflicted on them by the dominant castes, but also state violence.

## **ECONOMIC**

Of the total population, Dalit women constitute 16.3% of which 18% women live in rural areas. The women perform hard domestic labour which is unpaid and as agricultural labourers or casual labourers they continue to toil under the burning sun, with no protection or benefits that labour laws should provide, since majority of these women are in the unorganized sector. They do not even get the minimum wages that the state/country has specified, since they are unable to organize and demand for decent wage. Dalit women undertake manual, low paying, tedious, time consuming work. They earn less than one U.S. Dollar.

The women have to walk miles to fetch drinking water and often the water is not safe and potable. Dalit hamlets are usually at the end of the main village or in the village outskirts. They live in small huts and even the few who may have slightly better housing are devoid of basic amenities such as sanitation, light and safe and clean drinking water. The women work on construction sites, carrying heavy loads of construction material. They also work in brick kilns for long hours, as casual labourers to lay roads with hot tar in the burning sun, without sandals and any other protective gear. The women have to walk miles not

just for collecting water but also fuel and fodder for their domestic chores. Dalit women are victims of bonded labour, they are abused, sexually exploited by other caste, humiliated and are easy targets of insult.

A study conducted come up with some shocking facts about the work of dalit women. What is horrifying is that Dalit women work more than bullocks and men. Bullocks and men work in a hectare in a year for 1064 hours and 1202, respectively, while women work for more than 3485 hours. The caste and patriarchal norms legitimise the poor economic conditions of Dalit women. She has to work to survive. She is powerless and has neither access nor control over resources.

Manual scavenging continues as an occupation in India and most of the manual scavengers are Dalit women. The women are subjected to do this humiliating and degrading work, which further results in discrimination and social exclusion.

### **GLOBALISATION**

The process of globalisation has affected Dalit women considerably. With the introduction of new farming techniques such as, mechanization for harvesting and transplanting, women have lost their traditional work in the agricultural sector. Food crops have been replaced by Cash crops. Horticulture has been introduced by, big agro-business corporations for export purposes. This has deprived Dalit women of their land and the common resources in the village. Formerly women used to collect greens, fish, and shells from fields free for their food requirements. This is no longer available to them. The abject poverty condition has driven large numbers of Dalit women into sex trade to earn for their families. The Globalisation process has increased the feminisation of poverty and this has affected Dalit women in every sphere of their lives. There is also large scale migration from rural areas to the urban centres in search of better livelihood options. Women are left behind to bear the responsibility of the family. This further adds to the existing burden that Dalit women are trying to cope with. More and more female headed households emerge and most of them are Dalit women. Such situations push the women into further situations of impoverishment, making them more and more vulnerable to all forms of discriminations and violations.

### **HEALTH**

The health condition of Dalit women is alarming with high incidence of maternal mortality and infant mortality. This is due to the fact that Dalit women are unable to access health care services. Due to denial and sub standard healthcare services the life expectancy of Dalit women is as low as 50 years. The infant mortality rate is 90 / 1.000. The sex ratio of Dalit women is 922 / 1000 compared to 927 / 1000 for rest of the population in India. Due to poverty, Dalit women are malnourished and anemic. Early marriage and multiple child births causes the women to suffer from prolapsed uterus. Continuous bending and working while sowing and harvesting in agricultural causes acute back pain. They also develop skin irritation and allergy due to excessive use of pesticides. As they work barefoot and the soil is damp and wet, the women develop soars

between their toes. Due to lack of awareness and medical care, many of them suffer from reproductive health complications, including STDs and cervical cancer with white discharges.

Dalit women are easy target for the Government Birth Control Schemes. Women face forced sterilization, are tested for the use of new invasive hormonal contraception like guinea pigs. They are forced to use long-acting, hormonally dangerous contraceptives. They do not get basic medical facilities. Pregnant Dalit women receive discriminatory treatment in hospitals and there are instances where doctors have refused to conduct the delivery of Dalit women.

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Sasi, a Dalit woman, committed suicide by burning herself because she was deserted by her man. The doctors at the government hospital refused to treat her because she was a Dalit and she died due to lack of treatment.

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## **EDUCATION**

A large majority of the illiterate population comprise of Dalit women with 76.24% of Dalit women being illiterate. The girl drop out rate among Dalit families is increasing with girl-children are forced to work as child laborers, More and more girl children from Dalit communities are school drop-outs and working as child labourers. Dalit women are illiterate because they have less access to education which is an inherent part of the caste system. There are not enough secure facilities for education, taking care of small children and they join the adults to add to the income of the family. Dalit girl children are involved mostly in hazardous work like Beedi making, working in match factories and in the fire-works industry.

Traditionally dowry, which is not a practice of the Dalits has now become a bane. Due to Sanskritisation by the caste Hindus, the Dalits have begun to emulate the customs and rituals of the hindus. Dowry is one such custom. The Dalit families have succumbed to the societal pressures, added to this the fear of sending the girls to schools which are usually located in distant places deprive them of education.

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Nirma Rani, a Dalit girl student was slapped for saying "Namaste" to a Brahmin teacher and her father was beaten up later for questioning such an act. Caste is practised in schools where Dalit children occupy separate seats given to them. Dhanam lost her eye when she was beaten up by her teacher for taking drinking water by herself without waiting for the other caste fellow to serve her from the pot.

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Girl children are deprived of access to education as belonging to economically weak families, they are unable to pursue their education. They do not get uniforms, school books, special fees, and have to walk long distances to reach their school. This is a limiting factor for dalit children.

## **POLITICAL POWER**

Dalit women are excluded from decision making. They are not in a position to exercise their power. Wherever dalit women have contested, they have faced stiff opposition and even been brutally attacked. The 73rd amendment provides for mandatory reservation for Dalit women to be elected to the local governing bodies. They are elected but not able to exercise their power. Menaka (a Dalit women and a village Panchayat President was killed in broad day light.

Ranganayaki was deposed for solemnising an inter-caste marriage. Banwari was gang raped when she objected and reported to the authorities against child marriage in her village. Gowri was made to parade naked for hoisting a flag on Independence Day. Dalit women are militant and powerful. They are now fighting for political power within this caste system.

There are instances where Dalit women have been elected into local governance and through the reservation policy nominated as the President of the local governing unit called Panchayat. But when these women have endeavoured to exercise their role, it has met with resistance even to the extend of physical violence. A Dalit woman President is not allowed to sit on a chair if the other caste members do not allow this. She is forced to be a mere figure head, while the functioning of the Panchayat is taken over by other upper caste members.

There are several traditional practices and customs that violate human rights. The practice of dedicating girl-children to become Devadasis, Basavis and Mathammas. This practice is a violation of Dalit Women's Rights. Dalit women are discriminated and treated as untouchables. The shoemakers, Arunthathiar, practice Mathamma, dedicating Dalit girl children to their goddess Mathamma.

Superstition coupled with poverty and illiteracy is responsible for such practices. It is also using religion to sanction prostitution through the interpretation of mythology by the upper caste so that they can both economically and sexually exploit dalit women. It also is a form of upper caste manipulation to control the lives of Dalits. Further the lack of medical services, allows for such practices to flourish. There is a strong belief that the goddess has healing powers. So when a Dalit girl is sick. She is taken to the temple and left there till she is cured of her sickness. As already mentioned the economic situation is another reason that Dalits are unable to spend money to buy good health service. Once the child is cured, the child is named after Mathamma and married to the goddess with the "Pottu Thali" (wedlock). After she becomes a dancer she belongs to the temple. During temple festivals she dances and earns her livelihood. She is not treated with respect and publicly humiliated by men who harass her sexually.

The team which plays music with her exploits her by having a share in what she earns.

Once the girl is dedicated to Mathamma, she cannot marry and lead a family life, as she is wedded to the Goddess. Therefore, she is sexually exploited by her partner who leaves

her, to fend for herself and her child. Other men also tend to sexually exploit these Dalit women. Mathammas have no family, no security and left all alone with a child, so she has to struggle life long to maintain herself and the child.

Dalit women who are dedicated to Mathammas end up in the sex trade and become vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Dalits facing Human Rights violations is a legion. A random sampling of headlines in mainstream Indian newspapers tells their story: "Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers"; "Dalit tortured by cops for three days"; "Dalit 'witch' paraded naked in Bihar"; "Dalit killed in lock-up at Kurnool"; "7 Dalits burnt alive in caste clash"; "5 Dalits lynched in Haryana"; "Dalit woman gang-raped, paraded naked"; "Police egged on mob to lynch Dalits".

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"Dalits are not allowed to drink from the common wells meant for all the people, attend the same temples, wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste, or drink from the same cup in tea stalls," said Smita Narula, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch, and author of Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables." Human Rights Watch is a worldwide activist organization based in New York.

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India's Untouchables are relegated to the lowest jobs, and live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity by upper-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place. Merely walking through an upper-caste neighborhood is a life-threatening offense.

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Nearly 90 percent of all the poor Indians and 95 percent of all the illiterate Indians are Dalits, according to figures presented at the International Dalit Conference that took place May 16 to 18 in Vancouver, Canada.

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### **Non-implementation of existing safeguards**

Despite the existence of constitutional, administrative and legal provisions to protect women from all communities, and specific provisions for women in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), women of disadvantaged groups are vulnerable to gender-specific abuses such as rape, stripping and being paraded naked. AI found non-implementation of the provisions set up to protect these very women against such abuses and to enable them to take advantage of the criminal justice system. Impunity for perpetrators remains one of the main obstacles to stopping violence/torture of women both in the community and by employees of the state. This pattern of non-implementation leads AI to believe that the government of India is failing to exercise due diligence in preventing these abuses.( Amnesty International Report)

The Appeal

Caste, class and gender discrimination prevents Dalit women from enjoying their basic human rights, particularly to dignity, equality and development. Atrocities and violence

against Dalit women are both a means of sustaining systemic discrimination, as well as a reaction when particularly untouchability practices and caste norms are challenged or not adhered to. Impunity for this discrimination and violence is then used as a means to preserve the existing caste and gender disparities. Before Dalit women can enjoy their human rights, and before the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved, discrimination, violence and impunity must stop.

### **Cases of Atrocities committed on Dalit Women**

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Asha a seven year old Dalit child who belongs to the Meliruppu village of Cuddalore district was brutally raped by an other caste boy Kuppan from the same village on 23.05.2005. The child fell unconscious and had to be rescued by a team of Dalits who later admitted the child in a hospital. A case was registered after much protest from the villagers. However the police failed to register the case under the SC/ST prevention of Atrocities Act. The perpetrator was arrested and enlarged on bail.

(Global Action for Dalits: Report 2005, Tamil Nadu Women's Forum)

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### **Rajasthan Dalit social worker gangraped –January 24th ,2006**

In a chilling reminder of the Bhanwari Devi case, a Rajasthan anganwadi worker was allegedly gangraped by her supervisors during a state sponsored training session. Instead of helping the 25 year old Dalit woman, the police tried to hush up the incident, declaring her mentally unstable and packing her off to a psychiatric clinic. According to the FIR the woman, an anganwadi sahyogini, was raped by three of her supervisors after her female supervisor took her to a room at the training center in Karauli, some 150 km from Jaipur. The incident took place on the night of December 30th,2005. Her husband was told three days later that she had been admitted to a hospital after a 'mental breakdown'. We brought her back to Karauli but the police refused to file our case. When they finally lodged an FIR on January 20, the SP again sent her with a constable to Jaipur to get her admitted to the SMS Hospital's psychiatric center. Her husband Ram Niwas Meena said that SP B K Pande denied the charge: 'We did not send her to the psychiatric center. We have arrested two accused and are hunting for the other two'. Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria, who visited her in hospital today, said a probe will be held.

### **Dalit women tortured in Jail – Punjab**

Three Dalit women from Muktsar district in Punjab have accused the police of torturing them, including administering electric shock to their "private parts" and confining them illegally. Talking to reporters at the BJP headquarters in Chandigarh on Friday, Amarjit Karur, Virpal Kaur and Rani alleged they were picked up by the police after they rejected the overtures of two drug traffickers to join the flesh trade. Amarjit alleged she and Virpal were detained for five days at the police station. "We were tortured in the presence of the SHO. We were stripped and electric shock administered to our private parts," she said, adding that she suffered a miscarriage due to this. Virpal said their families were silenced with threats. Both claimed they were let off without registration of any complaint or FIR after five days. They alleged the SHO was acting at the behest of the drug traffickers. Rani's claims were similar. The district BJP unit aren't buying the DSP's claim that the women were picket up for trafficking poppy husk and plan to approach the Punjab Human Rights Commission, National Women's Commission and SC/ST Commission.

(Hindustan Times 18.2.06)

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### Dalit women denied passport

Girija Devi, a Dalit woman who was scheduled to attend a UN seminar in the US, failed to get her passport. Opposition parties in the state have threatened to take up the issue in the assembly, Girija Devi, a 59 year old mother of four from the Musahar community, was scheduled to address a seminar on 'Women Environment and Development Organisation' in Bhojpuri. "It was the state government's fault. This was done to stop her from attending the UN convention to present her views" said RJD leader Shayam Rajak. Musahar Vikas Manch leader Amar Kumar Majhi said red-tapism was to blame. "The old Dalit woman was forced to run from one office to another. She would had done Bihar proud by speaking at an international convention" he said. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "I will take action. Let me collect the facts".

(Hindustan Times 28.2.06)

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### Death in police station, probe sought

Jaipur: The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights has demanded a CBI enquiry into the death of a Dalit woman in Chomu police station of Jaipur district on Thursday. The woman, Kamla, who was brought to the police station to meet her son who was in police custody on a charge of murder, had died of mental shock and agony due to police misbehaviour, an enquiry report by NCDHR and Centre for Dalit Rights said. The main opposition in the State, the Congress party had made a similar demand. Pradesh Congress Committee president B.D. Kalla in a statement on Friday demanded a judicial enquiry into the case. The party has alleged that the death had taken place at the police station following the ill treatment of the victim. The Chomu police last week had arrested Kamla's son Sumit on a charge of murdering a history sheeter Sikandar Khan. Kamla, a schoolteacher was taken to the police station on Thursday last by five constables, including two women constables to meet her son in the lock up. The police version is that the woman, apparently depressed over the act of her son had consumed poison at home before leaving for the police station. She gave a dying declaration to this effect but her family members had challenge this. The NCDHR team, which visited the spot, found the role of the police and administration "doubtful".

(The Hindu 5.6.06)

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### Upper castes ill-treated us Dalits

Dalits in Cidiyas village, in Rajasthan's Bhilwara district, say they were ill treated when they worked as labourers engaged in famine relief. "The upper caste Hindus treated us as untouchables when they served drinking water," said Prema Meghwal. The village falls under the constituency of Rajasthan rural development minister Kalular Gujar and has a small Dalit population. The upper caste Hindus employed three upper caste women – Madhu, Chandi and Pushpa Suthar- to serve water to the Dalits at the relief work site Badri Meghwal told this correspondent. Last week, they decided to clean up the temple to Devra, a local deity, and asked the relief workers to volunteer. "They employed Dalit women to clean the premises. When the work was finished, they collected Rs.5 from each worker, barring Dalits, saying their contribution would not be accepted by the deity," claimed Bhanwar Meghwanshi, a Dalit activist in Cidiyas. "It is shocking for us as the deity accepted our voluntary work, but not offerings," said Mr. Meghwanshi, well known among Rajasthan's Dalits as he publishes a magazine title Diamond India from his village Cidiyas. His wife Prema, who feeds her family by working as a relief worker, said there were 50 people employed at a government relief work of which 13 were Dalits. "You can see 23 workers are from a single powerful caste. Their males will not work, but they get a share in the earnings because the payment is task-based," Said Prema, adding, "We were not allowed to touch the pitcher and water served by upper caste women when we requested them," She said. The Dalits raised the issue in the village, but the upper caste Hindus said it was a tradition and no one had the right to oppose it "I have asked the sub-divisional officer to look into the matter and send a report," said Bhilwara additional district magistrate M.L. Yadav Reeling under severe drought conditions, Cidiyas has 300 Dalits and is dominated by caste Hindus. "Many times

we quench our thirst with polluted water served by caste Hindus, "said Mr. Meghwanshi. "It is painful for as it happens during government-run relief work," he added. (Asian Age 21/6/06)

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#### Doctor robs Dalit woman of Kidney

In a bizarre incident, a Dalit woman has been robbed of her kidney by an Uttaranchal-based doctor. The woman has been waging a lone battle to get a case registered against the doctor but the police has, so far, refused to lodge her complaint. The victim has now written to the President of India and the National Human Rights Commission for justice and is also preparing to go to court. According to Phool Singh, a resident of Akbarpur Patti village in Jyotiba Phule Nagar, his wife Maya, 45, had been diagnosed as having stones in the uterus in December 2003. "We are poor and could not afford to bear the expenses of the operation. A relative told us about one Dr. Arun Richharia at Rudrapur in Uttaranchal, who does not charge fees from poor people. I took my wife to Dr. Richharia's clinic, and she was operated upon by the doctor on December 20, 2003. We returned home after the operation, but after some time my wife again complained of pain. I took her back to the doctor for a checkup but he said that it was a minor post-operative problem that would vanish after a few months," says Phool Singh. The couple returned to their village, but Maya continued to suffer from intermittent pangs of pain for almost two years after the operation. Finally, in January this year, the couple went to consult another doctor in the district, who recommended an ultrasound test. "When we got the ultrasound test done, we were shocked to find that Maya's left kidney was missing. The following day we went to Dr. Richharia's clinic and informed the receptionist of our problem. To our dismay, the doctor refused to meet us, and the hospital staff physically assaulted us for 'attempting to malign the reputation of the doctor'," says Phool Singh. The couple went to the local police station, but the police refused to register their complaint. "The police was obviously under the influence of the doctor, and though we showed them all the relevant papers related to the operation, they just refused to entertain our complaint," says Phool Singh. (Asian Age 21/6/06)

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#### Dalit Woman beaten up and paraded naked

A 50-year-old Dalit woman in a Jharkhand village was beaten up and paraded naked for allegedly "selling" a 12 year old boy in Uttar Pradesh two years ago. Balchand has been traceless ever since Sukri took him to UP with the assurance of a job. After the family of Balchand Oraon failed to trace the boy, they approached Sukri, a resident of Saram village. When Balchand's father Mangra Oraon inquired about his son, Sukri said he had run away at Mugalsarai station and she had no clue about his whereabouts. Some people who had accompanied Mangra Oraon started beating up Sukri. Her husband Indru Nayak was also beaten up when he tried to intervene. Sukri was then forcefully taken to Balchand's village and stripped. She was forced to roam around the village and was later tied to a tree. The villagers then started beating her with sticks. The boy's family believes Sukri sold Balchand and that he was still in the captivity of the owner of a brick kiln. After seven hours of trauma, the village elders decided that the Dalit woman should be burnt alive so that no other person would dare to do such a thing. Just when kerosene was being poured on her, some local journalists and the Chanho police reached and rescued her. Mangra has been arrested. (Asian Age 24/6/06)

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#### SC body backs woman sarpanch

The National Commission of Scheduled Castes has asked the Superintendent of Police of Jhajjar district (Haryana) to furnish the details in the alleged implication of a "Dalit woman sarpanch", Sheela Devi, in a murder case. Her family members have approached the National Commission for Scheduled Castes which had earlier sent notice to the SP of Jhajjar that if the reply was not filed within the stipulated time, the commission may exercise the powers of civil courts conferred on it by the Constitution. On February 24, 2006. Youth Congress leader Bachu Pehlwan was shot dead in broad daylight by three men, near local MLA's office in Bahadurgarh. Immediately, the police arrested nine people for his murder including a

Dalit woman sarpanch of Mandothi. Sheela Devi had won the village Panchayat election in 2000 from a reserved seat. Currently Sheela is under police arrest. But her family members are crying foul. According to them the village is notorious for group politics that has resulted in several gang wars. They allege that murder of Bachu Pehlwan is the result of a gang war. To vindicate their stand they sighted the 26 murders that have taken place in the village after the gang war was ensued between the two groups of Jats in 1994. The family members of Sheela Devi also allege that the village Panchayat was about to receive Rs. 4 crores as land compensation and one group was eyeing this amount. The group with the support of local MLA Rajendar Joon has falsely implicated Sheela and her husband. MLA Rajendra Joon was quick to refute the charges. He said, "The matter has not occurred because of the money, instead it is because of the rivalry that Bachu was murdered." "In the war of the two groups, the Dalits are suffering as the poor people have to do what the groups of the goon are saying. They used to ask the sarpanch to use scandalous methods to siphon off the allocated money," he said. Mr. Joon further countered the charges by saying, "It was me who used to stop them and this has made me an eyesore for them." (Asian Age 28/6/06)

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#### Dalit women in UP protection force

In a move that will lead to empowerment of Dalit women in Uttar Pradesh, the Mulayam Singh government has decided to enroll Dalit women in the Prantia Rakshak Dal. The Prantiya Rakshak Dal (PRD) is a state-level protection force that is usually deployed to maintain law and order in villages, in large congregations like the Kumbh Mela and during elections. The strength of the PRD force in UP is 24,000 and PRD jawans are sent for refresher training every three years. This will be the first time that women will get a chance to be a part of the PRD which, till now, is an all male force. The state government has now cleared the way for enrolment of more than 500 Dalit women in the PRD and recruitment will begin shortly from the district to the block level. Talking to this newspaper on Saturday, a senior official of the PRD department said, "This is being done for the first time to empower Dalit women in the age group of 20 to 30. Under the gender budgeting programme, nearly 30 per cent of the PRD force will comprise of women. In the coming assembly elections, people will see Dalit women dressed in khaki PRD uniforms deployed at polling booths". The state government believes that this decision will not only instill confidence in Dalit women but will also take them away from traditional menial jobs. "Once the PRD enrolment begins, we see Dalit women moving away from menial jobs and becoming increasingly aware of the need for education", the official said. According to sources, the state government has decided to encourage women to seek enrolment through a massive publicity campaign next month. "We will convince the women in the SC/ST categorize to step out of their homes and join the PRD which will give them financial independence, dignity and status in society," the official added. (Asian Age 24.9.06)  
(<http://www.isidelhi.org.in/hrnews/dec/0712-2jun.htm>)

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#### Dalit paraded half-naked for 'not toeing' Panchayat line

Bhopal: A women was allegedly beaten up, stripped and paraded by women in Dedgaon village of Harda district because a young girl from the village had been found in her house in a compromising position with an upper-caste boy. Fulvatibai of Korku tribe alleged she was paraded naked in public. Four female relatives of the girl, of Gond tribe, and two upper-caste women allegedly also strung a garland of shoes around her neck. According to Fulvatibai, she was tortured because she refused to give a false statement to the police that she invited had the girl to her house and locked her in. She claimed the girl had an affair with the boy and the two had entered the house in her absence. However, the girl's family in a counter-complaint alleged Fulvatibai of inviting the 17-years-old to her house where Madan was already present and he molested her. SP (SC/ST) M.L. Solanki told. The Indian Express of shoes. Four women have been arrested and the police are looking for Madan, an OBC, who is at large. The police have also booked Fulvatibai for abetment to molestation on a complaint from the girl's father. The girl told the police Fulvatibai had invited her home when she was returning after immersing a Durga idol at night. A team of state women's commissions has left for the village to investigate the matter. The commission said it saw no reason to disbelieve the girl's statement but felt the women should not have taken law into their own hands.

A police official said the village Panchayat met after the incident and wanted Fulvatibai to give a statement to the police that would save the girl's honour. When she refused to toe the majority line, the women decided to teach her a lesson, he said. Ramesh, the girl's brother, has also been identified as an accused. (Indian Express 5/10/06)

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#### Dalit gets Rs. 4.5 lakhs for deaths

Nagpur: Over 12 days after the merciless lynching of four members of the Bhotmange family of village Khairlanji in Bhandara district, the Maharashtra government has woken up and paid compensation of Rs.4.5 lakhs to the victims' kin. The Maharashtra government on Thursday paid compensation of Rs. 4.5 lakhs to Mr. Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange, whose wife Surekha (44), daughter Prinyanka (18), and sons Roshan (23) and Sudhir (21) were killed in mob frenzy on September 29. The cheque was handed over by Maharashtra minister for social justice Chandrakant Handore. Speaking to reporters in Nagpur later, Mr. Handore said the incident was clearly a case of atrocity against Dalits and hence compensation was paid as per the Atrocity Act. Under the provisions of the Act, a compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs is paid for the death of each earning member of a family and Rs. 1 lakh for the death of each non-earning member. The compensation payable to Mr. Bhotmange was Rs. 6 lakhs for the death of two earning members and two non-earning members of the family, Mr. Handore said. However, only 75 per cent of the total amount due is paid to the next of kin pending the disposal of the case, hence the cheque for Rs. 4.5 lakhs, the minister explained. Mr. Handore said Mr. Bhotmange owned five acres of land in the village. The owner of the adjacent field wanted to have a passage through the middle of the field, and would not make do with the passage provided by Mr. Bhotmange along one edge. The dispute was deliberately allowed to aggravate and ultimately assumed the form of mob frenzy against a particular section of society to which the Bhotmange family belonged, Mr. Handore said. The police had arrested 32 persons in this connection, and two or three other suspects were absconding, he said. All the suspects were from the same village, he said. (Asian Age 13/10/06).

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#### Up Govt. orders fresh probe into rape by SDM father

New Delhi: The Uttar Pradesh government has ordered a fresh inquiry into the sensational case of a 25 year old Dalit woman who has accused her SDM (sub-divisional magistrate) father of raping her and unleashing a reign of terror against her husband's family to avenge her escape. Pratima, a science graduate, had approached the National Commission for Woman (NCW) nearly a month ago. Although the authorities in Lucknow are yet to respond to NCW letters, Pratima was called by the Director General of Police Bua Singh and Chief Secretary Navin Chandra Bajpai to Lucknow recently. "They gave me a patient hearing and have promised a fair inquiry into the false cases lodged against my husband's family and also my personal exploitation by my father," She told The Indian Express. An officer of the rank of Senior Superintendent of Police has been given the charge of the inquiry. Pratima has alleged that her father Birendra Kumar, SDM of Derapur in Banda district of Kanpur, had repeatedly raped her for one year and the police authorities did not pay heed to her several complaints. Buckling under SDM's influence, inquiry officers would inform her father about it and eventually she would be made to deny having made such a complaint. Finally, she had escaped and married a distant relative's son. Pratima's petition with the NCW said her "powerful father used his influence to allegedly kill her brother in law and got several false cases lodged against her in-laws." In between, she was allegedly abducted and raped by her father again and only a habeas corpus petition filed by her husband set her free. Pratima, who is seven month pregnant, has been offered a job by the DGP. "They arranged a job for me for Rs.15,000 per month in a sugar mill and assured full security to the family. "Fearing attacks, Pratima and her husband have taken refuge in Delhi. However, maintaining her skepticism, Pratima said: "I want the false legal cases against my husband's family withdrawn to feel secure." The NCW has decided to send a special team to Lucknow to conduct an independent probe. (Indian Express 24/10/06)

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### Village quiet after it ganged up to hack Dalit mother, 3 children

Khairlanji (Bhandara): A day after mobs ran riot in Nagpur, protesting the killing of four of a Dalit family, an eerie silence has descended on Khairlanji, the village in Bhandara district where the family was hacked to death. No one here's willing to talk, not anymore: "We haven't seen anything. So what can we say?" Policemen, who weren't there when they were needed, simply wave you on. In eastern Vidarbha's paddy belt, Khairlanji has never been the same ever since the Bhotmanges, one of the three Mahar families in the village who became Buddhists, objected to people cutting across their field to get to their own. The Bhotmanges, who had land in Khairlanji, had moved in from neighbouring Ambagadh. This simple assertion of their right annoyed others in the village. Cutting across castes, they all ganged up against the Bhotmanges. Surekha Bhotmange, a mother of three, sought the help of Siddharth Gajbhiye, a cousin from neighbouring Dhusala, in the matter and this annoyed the villagers even more because Gajbhiye had already had a fight with one of them over a money transaction. Some villagers chased and beat up Gajbhiye. The Bhotmanges, especially Surekha, stood up for Gajbhiye and testified against the villagers, leading to their arrest. On September 29, Surekha, her sons Sudhir and Roshan and daughter Priyanka were hacked to death and their bodies thrown in a nullah. Priyanka and Roshan were stripped before they were killed. The attackers showed no mercy to even Sudhir who was visually impaired. Bhaiyyalal, Surekha's husband, was the only one to survive. "I was in the field when I heard people shout. When I rushed to my hut, I saw some 50-60 people attacking my family. "Realising he couldn't take on the mob, Bhaiyyalal fled, seeking shelter with relatives in nearby Warthi. "The local police should have gauged the seriousness of the development that led to the incident and acted to prevent it. They are at fault," says a police officer. (Indian Express 8/11/06)

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### Khairlanji protests: Cops look for the invisible hands

Nagpur: Two front activists of ultra-leftist groups taken over the protests against the Khairlanji killings? This is the question nagging the Nagpur police though. In a flare-up in the city yesterday, protests in Dalit-majority areas against the killing of four members of a Dalit family turned violent. The police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the rioting mob. The protests shifted to the satellite town of Kamptee around 11 p.m. The situation became so tense that the police had to call in a State Reserve Police company and impose curfew, which is still in force. Today, similar protests were staged in Yavatmal city leading to imposition of curfew in Patinagar and Ambikanagar. Bhandara district also witnessed minor incidents of violence. "These kinds of protests are generally organized by leaders wanting to take credit for the same. We do not know any such leaders here. So who are the people who instigated the mobs yesterday is what we trying to find out, said commissioner of police SPS Yadav here today. It was an entirely new kind of protest organization. Handbills were distributed first through backdoors and suddenly there was a crowd of some 3000 people in Indora,' Yadav said. The Handbills categorically declared that henceforth the agitation won't be allowed to be led by any politician and it called upon the Dalits to exact justice for themselves. "The Hindus will rape and kill our daughters and sons. Shall we remain mute? it asked. Response to the appeal was instant. Protesters stoned the house of north Nagpur Congress MLA Nitin Raut, himself a Dalit, who was the first one to visit Khairlanji and raise the issue. Throughout the day, protesters allegedly made abusive calls to a Hindi channel correspondent asking him to cover the protests and threatening to kill him he did not do so. When asked if the instigators were non-political, Yadav said, "I can't say everything now. We hope to catch them soon". A lot of misinformation was also being spread. (Indian Express 8.11.06)

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### INDIA: Dalit female village head unable to conduct her public obligations due to manipulative caste discrimination

Name of victim: Mrs. Munia devi

Address of victim: Koirajpur village under Harhua Block, Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh state, India

Alleged perpetrators:

1. Mr. Ravindra singh, the resident of village Koirajpur, Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh, India
  2. Mrs Sushma singh wife of Mr. Ravindra singh, the resident of Koirajpur village, Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh, India
  3. Mr.Lalchand, the secretary of the Koirajpur village
  4. Satendra rai, Food Inspector
  5. Nilesh Uppal, Supply Inspector Pindra
  6. Rameshwar singh, Supply Inspector, Badagaon
  7. Sanjay singh, Nayab Tahasildar Athgaonva
- Duration of the incident: From September 2005 to date

I am writing to you to inquire into the situation of Mrs. Munia devi, the current village head of Koirajpur village, under Harhua Block in Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, India. I have been informed that Munia is from the Chamar community belonging to the Scheduled Caste in India. I understand that Munia was elected as the village head in September 2005, but is still denied to the rights to discharge her duties and has being denied control over the management of the village by the upper caste persons named above. I am surprised to know that the village secretary who was appointed by the government to help the village head in manage affairs has joined hands with the upper caste people and is not aiding Munia in any way. I have also learned that Munia was physically assaulted by Mr. Ravindra singh for voicing her opposition to the corruption within PDS (Public Distribution System) shop. I know that Munia was allegedly verbally abused and intimidated by Mr. Ravindra Singh, the husband of PDS shop keeper.

I am aware that the election of Munia as the village head of Koirajpur village was because the constituency was reserved for a member from the Scheduled Caste or Tribe during the 2005 elections. However, I understand that even though Munia was elected she is not able to discharge her duties as the village head thus far due to the threats and intimidation of the upper caste members named above and also due to the non-cooperation of the village secretary Mr.Lalchand.

I am also aware that the 73rd amendment of the Indian Constitution was to percolate local administration to village level and also to facilitate empowerment of the marginalized communities in India especially the members of the lower caste and those from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and the women. However, from the facts made available to me regarding Munia's case suggest to me that such an attempt is yet to take real shape owing to various tactics played by the upper caste Hindus in rural villages in India. I am aware that while on the one hand this case could be considered as yet another example of caste based discrimination in India, I also see this case as a glaring example of the administrative failure in several parts of India, particularly in rural villages.

It is clear that the acts meted out against Munia are a crime under Section 3(x) and section 4 of the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. However, I am surprised to know why no action has been taken against the perpetrators in this case. I therefore urge you to immediately institute an impartial inquiry into this case and see to it that the complaints of Munia are addressed and also necessary action is taken under the provisions of the above law against the alleged perpetrators. I am also informed that the Asian Human Rights Commission is writing a separate letter to Mr. Doudou Diene the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination to express concern about this case and calling for an intervention.

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#### Safai karmacharis demand alternative livelihood

Manual scavenging, despite an Act banning it during the tenure of late Biju Patnaik, continues to be very much an obnoxious reality in most parts of the State. The disgusting practice is very much a reality even 13 years after the legal ban, even after the Centre asked all States to draw a list of manual scavengers engaged in the shameful practice of lifting human excreta with their hands and carrying it on their heads.

Cleaning of dry latrines and transporting human excreta have been banned since 1993. Under the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry latrines (latrines that are not connected to a drainage system) could result in imprisonment of up to one year and/or a fine of Rs 2,000. Offenders are also liable to prosecution under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Estimates say there are more than 13 lakh manual scavengers in the country while State figure reached at more than one lakh comprising districts of Cuttack, Kendrapara, Phulabani, Nayagarh, Titilagarh, Sonepur, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Rayagada, Balesore and Puri.

Interestingly, in its latest effort to eradicate manual scavenging, the Centre has set up a deadline of 2008 and asked all States to address the issue on a priority basis and prepare a comprehensive list of manual scavengers along with family details and addresses but ground reality is far to match with what the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry is doing in this regard. Scavengers while speaking at a seminar here on Thursday organised by the Safai Karmachari Andolan demanded the State Government should provide alternative livelihood to them and rehabilitate them.

They demanded the Government should finalise new schemes in which identified scavengers would be provided subsidy and loan for undertaking self-employment ventures, besides the scavengers should also be provided training.

"Poverty has compelled us to this profession, if we stop, we should be given proper rehabilitation and alternative livelihood," said Sabita Das, 65-year old Safai worker of Bapuji Nagar. There are many like Sabita who, despite concerted efforts, cannot shake off the curse of being a lower caste and are forced into scavenging. Refusal to perform such tasks leads to physical abuse and social boycott

In yet another case of police excesses which has come to light, a poor Dalit woman allegedly bore the brunt of the Balinga Outpost in-charge's high-handedness on Saturday afternoon.

She was admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH) here only after the intervention of the locals.

The severely injured woman was reportedly denied even first-aid and the DHH staff, instead, sent her back to report the matter to the woman SP S Shyni.

Some residents of the Hospital Chowk area helped her into a rickshaw and took her to the nearby residence of the SP, according to sources.

Since the SP was not available at her office or residence as she was at the police reserve line on the outskirts of the town, the Dalit woman was brought back to the Chowk.

The irate locals phoned a TV channel's Sundargarh correspondent who recorded her complaints in the DHH premises. This compelled the DHH staff to respond to the woman's plight.

As per reports, the Dalit woman Dashmanti Rohidas (40) had been employed for over a decade as a sweeper at Balinga Outpost under Hemgir police limits since the inception of Basundhara Area MCL-owned coalmines at Gopalpur.

When the new in-charge of the Outpost, ASI Kashinath Kujur, took over, he allegedly divested Dashmanti of her job two months back.

When Dashmanti approached Kujur on Saturday at around 3 pm, Kujur allegedly hit her hard, which led to her bleeding.

Kujur, on his part, stated that Dashmanti was habitually drunk and used to hurl abuses at his wife residing in the Outpost premises, following which he had recommended to the local MCL authorities to sack her.

On Saturday afternoon, she once again threw her drunken tantrums, as a result of which he lost his temper and gave her a thorough dressing down.

Dalit Murasu, March 2005

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Raja Nagar, Kancheepuram District:

Dalit women and Dalit community were neglected during the tsunami rehabilitation process. Government and other supporting bodies are only concern with the fisherfolk. They didn't even turn to the Dalit community. Caste is playing a violence even in the disasters. 106 Dalit families are starving in Raja Nagar.

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Chinnamanickampangu, Nagapattinam:

Vanamazhi a Dalit woman, aged 52 years has got few rehabilitation materials. She was directly attacked by the fisher community people and named her that she is taking the materials of fisher communities.

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Untouchability practices in Pudukottai District

A survey was conducted in 104 villages of Pudukottai district. In this area, untouchable practices are in various ways.

Tea Shop: Three tumbler system

Temple: Dalit communities are deprived to the temple worship.

Saloon Shop: Dalit people are neglected to cut their hair in the saloon shops.

Public resources: Village public resources were deprived, no rights to have a bath in the temple ponds, no graveyard for the Dalits.

Marriage: inter-caste marriage was not allowed in the Dalit community. If they get inter caste marriage they will get punishment, they treat as bonded ages.

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Dalit huts were burnt in Soolagiri:

August 15, 2006, 25 Dalit huts were burnt in Mathersanapalli Villlage of Krishnagiri District.

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Dalit women key to land rights fight:

New Delhi: Dalit women have been at the forefront of Dalit land rights movements and whenever they have participated in these campaigns they have been much more successful, advised Mr. Nicholas, the convenor of the National Federation for Dalit Land Rights Movement, at a seminar at the India Social Forum in New Delhi on Friday. He said at the seminar, which discussed " caste and class attacks on Dalit

Land Rights,'that Dalit women must always be involved in land rights movements. Manas Tena, also a convenor of same federation, said there are two areas where the federation is fighting for land rights of Dalit sand these include cases were Dalits hold possession of the land, but do not have right of the land and the other where the land belongs to them on paper, meaning they have rights, but they do not have possession of the land. "We are working at three levels first is the local level, second is the national level and finally at the South Asian level where Dalits from Pakista, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan also face the same problems in their countries." Elaborating on Dalit Land rights movements, Mr. Nicholas said the Dalits are about 162 million strong in India and of these about 70 percent do not own any land. So, we are agitating for land to be given to the Dalits for their upliftment. He said it has been observed that Dalit women retain their land much better than their male counterparts and added that this was also historically true. (Asian Age 11.11.06)

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Dalit girl refused to drop rape charge, burnt:

Sahalwada, November 23: A 15 year old Dalit girl, who refused to drop a rape charge against an upper caste youth, was burnt alive by the alleged rapist when she was sleeping at her home late Tuesday. Asha katiya told the police before she died of her burns at a hospital in Pipariya on Wednesday that Chhote Singh Rajput had threatened to kill her if she did not change her statement in court. "I will burn you set your house afire and cut your father into pieces," her mother. Shashibai, quoted the 22 year old as warning them when she was with her daughter in the field on Tuesday afternoon. Late in the afternoon, riding the only horse in the village, Chhote Singh sped past the girl's house and around 9.00 p.m doused the victim with kerosene from an opening in the roof of a room where she was sleeping and threw a burning matchstick. Anita, the Victim's aunt, told the Indian Express on Thursday. Anita claimed she saw Chhote Singh escape into in the fields. Unlike the Dalit family which is very poor, the Rajput family owns two acres of land. The horse belongs to some one else but Chhote Singh rode it occasionally. Asha had been allegedly raped in July and the court proceedings were on in Hoshangabad, the district headquarters about 90 km away. She was to appear in the court in a month. The family had a tough time arranging for a vehicle to take Asha to the hospital as she lay outside her house. The family members alleged that though there are many vehicles in the upper caste dominated village, no one came to their rescue and they had to call one from Sandia, about 8 km away. "They though if Asha dies the rape case will have no meaning". Asha's grandmother Narbadi alleged. The victim's mother said the family was all prepared to leave the village the next morning but Chhote Singh struck before that. The family, however, did not inform the police or the villagers about the threat to their life. The upper caste villagers deny the charges leveled by the Dalit family. "He was with us when the incident happened, there are many eye witnesses," Chhote Singh's parents Laxaman Singh and Jeerabai claimed. He wanted to douse the fire but returned when he learnt that the girl's father named him, Govind Sharma, a neighbour claimed. "The police are simply not recording our statements, they are going by what the girl said before dying, they should investigate the case properly," Harish Sharma, a villager said, suggesting that the girl committed suicide. "It was a mistake all of us commit in our youth" he said of the rape charge. According to him, the family was getting frustrated because they could not find a match for her. SP Ved Prakash Sharma and DSP JS Jaggi said the police are going by the dying declaration where the victim clearly named Chhote Singh. The alleged killer was arrested on Wednesday afternoon from his home, a proof the villagers say proves his innocence. "He would have fled the village had he committed the crime," sarpanch Govind Singh Rajput said. (Indian Express 24.11.06)

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Amnesty International Report

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